

11-25-2002

The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, V 3: the Medieval Church

Mike Rattee

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Rattee, Mike (2002) "The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, V 3: the Medieval Church," *Consensus*: Vol. 28 : Iss. 2 , Article 22.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol28/iss2/22>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 4 - The Age of the Reformation

Hughes Oliphant Old

Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002

560 pages, \$73 Softcover

“The farther we look behind, the farther we may see ahead.” If this famous dictum is true, then Hughes Oliphant Old has given the church a great resource for its future preaching by laying out its history so well. This fourth of seven planned volumes on the history of preaching excels in breadth and depth.

For breadth, readers are introduced to approximately fifty significant preachers from six different European countries between 1480 and 1740 AD. Most of these preachers are unfamiliar names today, yet the more famous ones are also here: Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Hugh Latimer, John Donne, Jacques Bossuet, and Jean-Baptiste Massillon. Chapter 1 covers the Reformation in Germany, Switzerland, and England. Chapter 2 studies the Counter-Reformation (Catholic) in Spain, Mexico, Italy, and France. Readers stay in England to meet the Puritans (chapter 3) and the Anglicans (chapter 4). Chapters 5, 6, and 7 describe the rise of Protestant Orthodoxy in Germany, France, and the Netherlands, respectively. The eighth and final chapter deals with the French court preachers under Louis XIV.

For depth, Old lingers with each preacher, analysing, in some cases, 5-10 of their sermons. Whereas in some histories of preaching, a figure like Heinrich Muller (17th century Germany) might receive a few summary paragraphs, here he receives fifteen pages of in-depth analysis. Since Old walks us through their sermons section-by-section, often letting them speak in their own words, readers walk away with a sense of having “heard” these. For those who read more than English, Old sometimes includes their original wording in footnotes. Impressively, he has done his homework with original sources, allowing multilingual readers to evaluate his English translations for themselves.

Some histories of preaching are biographical, focusing on the life story and personal qualities of the preacher. While this volume has limited the amount of biography to family, schooling, and ecclesiastical or professional details, its forte is sermon analysis, tracing what each preached and why it was or was not effective in that era. However, those who do not enjoy sermon analysis may find it a tedious read. Due to the author’s repetitive style and the subject matter, this reader

recommends that smaller sections be digested over a longer time so the material can be better appreciated.

Old maintains ecclesiastical balance by including the Catholic Counter-Reformation, which some Protestants tend to ignore in Reformation studies. The many able Catholic preachers who sought to convert Protestants through their preaching informed this reader. Unfortunately, this book is not balanced in terms of gender. Not only are women excluded in this study, the author gives no explanation or apology for this omission. Many older histories of preaching include only men, but one would think that such a thorough work published in 2002 would be gender inclusive.

A thorough index and bibliography make this a helpful textbook. Like an encyclopaedia, it doesn't need to be read from cover to cover. Individual chapters and sections within the chapters stand well alone. While a brief summary concludes each chapter, there is no concluding chapter to tie the major themes together. Instead, the book ends rather abruptly and anticlimactically.

What are the benefits for today's preacher? The reminder that homiletically, there really is "nothing new under the sun". The issues preachers faced then are still relevant now. This volume also provides devotional and doctrinal inspiration along the way. Many of these sermons are Gospel-filled with pointed applications for living as faithful Christians. Old points out why some sermons were so effective rhetorically and linguistically. These insights might prove helpful for strengthening our own sermons. Above all, his refrain reminds us that regardless of denomination, country, or historical era, preaching is to be an act of worship that expounds the Scriptures faithfully so that God's people are led to worship God.

Mike Rattee

Emmanuel Bible College

Kitchener, Ontario