

MacArthur, John, *et.al.* *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*. Word, 1992. (410 pp.)

Introduction and Purpose

Rediscovering Expository Preaching (REP) is a compilation of essays/chapters on expository preaching written by the faculty of The Master's Seminary to summarize the Seminary's philosophy and objectives regarding training men in the effective proclamation of the Scriptures (preface, ix). More specifically, the editors articulate four aims they intend to accomplish. First, the contributors to *REP* seeks to clarify the nature of expository preaching and make a biblical case for the need of such preaching by answering the question, "What is expository preaching?" Second, they attempt to justify expository preaching from a theological as well as a historical perspective in order to answer the question, "Why insist on expository preaching?" Third, the editors aim to specify the essential elements and steps in preparing expository messages in an attempt to answer the question, "How does one go about expository preaching?" Finally, they seek to exemplify and identify key practitioners of this method of preaching in order to answer the question, "Who have been the promoters and practitioners of expository preaching?" (pp. ix-x)

Structure and Organization

REP is organized along two related structures. The underlying flow of the book is arranged to follow the actual progression of the preaching task starting with the necessity of godly character in the life of the expositor. Next, the book addresses the ability of the expositor to exegete the text properly. Much of the material in this section relates to hermeneutics. In the following section, the authors address the skill required to take the exegetical product and shape it into an effective expository message. The final segment speaks to homiletics and the skills necessary for effectively delivering the message.

The second and more visible organizational structure is detailed for the reader in the table of contents which neatly divides the book into five sections. Part One consists of three articles designed to prove the priority of expository preaching. Richard Mayhue opens with a chapter entitled "Rediscovering Expository Preaching" followed by a chapter by John MacArthur Jr. entitled, "The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching." The section ends with a chapter giving a historical overview of expository preaching by James Stitzinger. Part Two is dedicated to the preparation of the expositor. James Rosscup dedicates a chapter to the priority of prayer in expository preaching. Then the character and calling of the preacher himself is powerfully presented by John MacArthur. He closes this section with a chapter on the Holy Spirit's role in expository preaching. Part Three consists of five chapters dedicated to the process and principles that are key to the preparation of the text (hermeneutics). James Rosscup deals with hermeneutics proper in his chapter, and Robert Thomas addresses exegesis and expository preaching in the next. Following them, George Zamek has a complex but helpful chapter on grammatical analysis. James Stitzinger and John MacArthur finish the section with chapters on study tools and study methods respectively. Part Four deals with the actual process of constructing the expository message itself. Donald McDougall contributes a chapter on theme, outline, and title and Richard Mayhue deals with

introductions, conclusions, and illustrations in his. Irvin Busenitz has a fine chapter on thematic, theological, historical, and biographical expository messages. Preaching from Old Testament narrative is handled by David Deuel. John MacArthur closes this section with a helpful chapter on moving from exegesis to exposition. The final section, Part Five, consists of three chapters designed to help the expositor preach the exposition. Robert Thomas speaks to the important issue of choosing a worthy translation. John MacArthur contributes the final two chapters on delivery and frequent questions on preaching respectively. The editors end the book with two extremely helpful segments: an epilogue entitled, “The Listener’s Responsibility” and an appendix containing a photo-static copy of handwritten sermon notes from an actual sermon prepared and delivered by John MacArthur.

Content and Description

Introduction

Unlike many introductions that preface the actual content of books such as this one, John MacArthur sets the direction and charts the course with a brief but powerful reminder that since God has spoken, His message must be delivered accurately and powerfully by called and qualified men. Fittingly, he arranges and emphasizes his material by means of a convicting yet inspiring exposition of 2 Timothy 4:1-4. The most powerful segment may well be his forceful description defending the value of expository preaching in fulfilling the stewardship entrusted to the preacher by God. It is worth hearing it in its entirety.

Expository preaching – expressing exactly the will of the glorious Sovereign—allows God to speak, not man. Expository preaching—retaining the thoughts of the Spirit—brings the preacher into direct and continual contact with the mind of the Holy Spirit who authored Scripture. Expository preaching frees the preacher to proclaim all the revelation of God, producing a ministry of wholeness and integrity. Expository preaching promotes biblical literacy, yielding rich knowledge of redemptive truths. Expository preaching carries ultimate divine authority, rendering the very voice of God. Expository preaching transforms the preacher, leading to transformed congregations. (p. xv).

Part I: Proving the Priority of Expository Preaching

In many ways, the heart of the book is contained in the three chapters that comprise this segment. Essentially, the argument advanced is that the primary need in the modern church is for biblically sound expository preaching. Furthermore, this has always been the primary focus of a biblically sound and spiritually strong Church throughout her history. Sadly, modern trends indicate that preaching has fallen on hard times in Evangelical churches. This is due to a number of reasons but primarily because of the move away from theology to pragmatism and a change in emphasis in the training of men preparing for ministry resulting in an appalling lack of ability and desire on the part of preachers to meet the rigorous demands of expository preaching.

Richard Mayhue opens with a resounding counter in his chapter entitled “Rediscovering Expository Preaching.” The heart of his chapter is the thesis that “Scripture unmistakably requires a proclamation focused on God’s will and mankind’s obligation to obey.” (p. 3). He contends that expository preaching by qualified and committed preachers is the way God has designed for this proclamation to go forth. He cites a number of authorities from several different centuries in Church history to make the case that godly preachers have always been concerned to see expository preaching remain central in the Church, and have sounded alarms when such preaching was in decline. One well known citation by G. Campbell Morgan should illustrate Mayhue’s pattern. “The supreme work of the Christian minister is the work of preaching. This is a day in which one of our greatest perils is that of doing a thousand little things to the neglect of the one thing, which is preaching.” (p. 4) Mayhue dedicates a good amount of material to setting forth the biblical mandate from specific texts in the New Testament. His discussion of the different terms used by the New Testament writers to describe the manner of preaching is of particular value to the reader. His overview of the definitions of expository preaching held by famous expositors of the past is invaluable to all who teach homiletics. Perhaps the most powerful statement is his closing quotation from R. L. Dabney who urged,

That the expository method . . . be restored to that equal place which it held in the primitive and Reformed Churches, for, this is obviously the only natural and efficient way to do that which is the sole legitimate end of preaching, convey the whole message to the people. (p. 21)

The next chapter by John MacArthur demonstrates that expository preaching is in fact the mandate that results from a commitment to biblical inerrancy. The following statement to this end is profound and compelling:

Should not our preaching be biblical exposition, reflecting our conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God? If we believe that ‘all Scripture is inspired by God’ and inerrant, must we not be equally committed to the reality that it is ‘profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work’ (2 Tim. 3:16-17)? Should not that magnificent truth determine how we preach? (p. 23)

Tragically, even the most casual evaluation of the state of contemporary evangelicalism in 2004 confirms MacArthur’s earlier concern in 1982 that evangelicalism as a whole (then) was moving away from expository preaching to a more pragmatic approach to preaching. Several things make this chapter worth the price of the book. First, he thoroughly establishes the link between inerrancy and expository preaching on theological, exegetical, and historical grounds. Second, he reviews the failed legacy of liberalism and rightly reminds us that it was their abandonment of expository preaching in pursuit of relevancy that brought down their house upon their heads.

One of the most helpful chapters in the entire book is the historical overview of expository preaching throughout the history of the Church. Other than the mandate of Scripture, nothing lends more weight and authority and nothing inspires the modern expositor more than the realization that his commitment to expository preaching has been the bedrock of preaching from its inception. There are several volumes available that treat the history of preaching but one of the best concise overviews is this chapter by James Stitzinger. He traces the history of expository preaching from Old Testament times up through the modern era. The reader is treated to a wonderful review of famous preachers from the past who are brought again into the present by the power of their preserved words. For example, the reader meets preachers like John Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed preacher of the early church, as well as William Tyndale who preached centuries later at the end of the medieval period along with Huss and Savanrola. The Reformation preachers, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and a host of other lesser voices, are introduced. The reader is reminded of the rich preaching heritage of the Puritan age through the ministries of Manton, Bunyan, Baxter, and others. Stitzinger reminds the reader of the more recent expository ministries of men on both sides of the Atlantic such as Alexander MacLaren, William Robertson Nicoll, G. Campbell Morgan, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Martin Lloyd-Jones, John Stott, James Montgomery Boice, and John MacArthur. His closing paragraphs present what he calls “an inescapable conclusion.”

A study of the history of expository preaching makes it clear that such preaching is deeply rooted in the soil of Scripture. Thus, it is the only kind of preaching that perpetuates biblical preaching in the church. Throughout history, a few well-known men in each generation representative of a larger body of faithful expositors have committed themselves to this ministry of biblical exposition.

Their voices from the past should both encourage the contemporary expositor and challenge him to align his preaching with the biblical standard. Scripture demands nothing less than God-enabled exposition as demonstrated by those worthy saints who have dedicated their lives to this noble task. (p. 60)

Part II: Preparing the Expositor

Comprised of three chapters, this segment in *REP* deals with heart and life issues in the expositor that are prerequisite for effective preaching. James Rosscup addresses the priority of prayer in every aspect of the preparation and preaching process. He argues for the necessity of prayer in any genuine spirituality and observes this element is largely ignored in most of the literature related to preaching. Prayer has always been partner to preaching in the biblical examples of preachers and preaching in both testaments. This partnership is also evident throughout the history of preaching – powerful pulpits go hand in hand with praying preachers. His chapter is filled with helpful observations and direct statements designed to force the reader to see the need for and the connection between prayer and the expository process. His citation of David Larsen’s emphasis on prayer is representative of the rest of the chapter.

Strange it is that any discussion of preaching should take place outside the context of believing prayer. We have not prepared until we have prayed We cannot represent God if we have not stood before God. It is more important for me therefore to teach a student to pray than to preach. (pp. 74-75)

The priority of prayer serves as a springboard for the next chapter where John MacArthur expounds on what it means to be a “Man of God.” Of all the material read by this writer related to preaching and preachers in the course of almost twenty years of teaching homiletics, this chapter ranks foremost in material related to the character and role of the preacher. It should be required reading for any man considering the pulpit ministry. The chapter is a simple but powerful exposition of 1 Timothy 6:11-14 arranged in four divisions, each identifying a distinct mark of the Man of God. “A man of God must be identified by what he flees from, what he follows after, what he fights for, and what he is faithful to.” (p. 86)

MacArthur closes this segment of *REP* with a chapter on the role of the Holy Spirit in the expository preaching process. The opening segments of the chapter provide a helpful overview of the Holy Spirit’s role in revelation, inspiration, and illumination and discuss some necessary clarifications related to illumination. He also has an important discussion on the difference illumination makes when a believer comes to the text versus a non-believer. The rest of the chapter is an exegetical discourse on 1 Corinthians 2:6-11. This material would be useful to a broader group than just pastors – any student of theology would find great help here.

Part III: Processing and Principilizing the Biblical Text

The five chapters comprising this section all deal with issues related to hermeneutics and the exposition of the text. James Rosscup’s chapter reviews basic hermeneutical principles and provides simple reminders that the expositor properly approach context, grammar, word studies, and figurative language. Additionally, the cultural, historical, and geographical background of the text should be carefully considered. Most of the material in this chapter is very elementary and should be familiar to the targeted readership of *REP*. More helpful is the postscript where he mentions the need to establish the habit of constant checking of all sources that touch on the text in question, the need to verify conclusions reached, and the commitment to regulate doctrine by Scripture rather than convenience or experience.

Robert Thomas has an important chapter explaining the difference between exegesis and exposition. He rightly stresses the importance of ability in and use of the original languages as well as the importance of selecting a worthy translation. His chart (p. 146) diagramming the relationship of different fields of theological study to biblical exposition is indispensable. He concludes with sixteen practical observations/suggestions that the expositor will find helpful in the process of preparing a message.

The next two chapters by George Zemek and James Stitzinger respectively deal with the explanation and development of a method of grammatical analysis useful in breaking down a passage as well as a list of study tools and reference works to aid the process. Zemek’s chapter on grammatical analysis lays out the need as well as a proposed method. He also includes several examples of text outlines from both

Testaments. Stitzinger deals with the expositor's need for a good library. He has a helpful section dealing with practical helps in building a library followed by a listing of the first 750 books that should make up the core of a good expository preacher's library.

John MacArthur concludes with an excellent presentation of a suggested study method useful in doing the exegesis of a passage. The method consists of the diligent and careful application of three basic principles: observation (what does the passage say), interpretation (what does the passage mean), and application (how does the passage relate to me?). Additionally, there are some wonderful examples stressing the importance of each principle. His section on interpretation is particularly helpful in dealing with the "gaps" (linguistic, cultural, geographical, and historical) that exist between the text and the expositor. At the end of the chapter he offers some brief suggestions for organizing the material gleaned from the exegesis.

Part IV: Pulling the Expository Message Together

The five chapters in this section help the expositor move from the hermeneutic/exegesis stage of sermon preparation to the first part of the homiletic process: the organization of the sermon itself. Donald McDougall addresses the issue of structuring the sermon around a central theme that the expositor draws out from the text itself rather than importing it into the text. He then discusses different ways to arrange the material to reflect and communicate this central theme effectively. His examples from specific bible passages are helpful. He ends with a brief discussion on the value and importance of selecting a fitting title for the sermon.

The next chapter by Richard Mayhue deals with the introduction, conclusion, and illustrative material in the sermon itself. He gives concise definitions for both introductions and conclusions and then lays out some brief but helpful principles designed to aid the expositor in this area. His material on illustrations is particularly helpful. Particularly helpful are the source materials and suggestions he includes for introductions/conclusions as well as illustrations.

The next two chapters treat the different style and format the expository sermon can take. Irvin Busenitz deals with thematic, theological, historical, and biographical messages and David Deuel devotes a chapter to the discussion of a particular genre of biblical literature that is notoriously abused by preachers. His chapter contains many helpful suggestions on preparing an expository message from historical narrative portions of the Scripture. His three general principles for preparing these kinds of messages are contextual analysis, historical analysis, and literary analysis. His observations regarding theological preaching (topical messages done properly) are particularly helpful as are the resources for this style listed on pages 267-68. Deuel's chapter on historical narrative is one of the best short treatments of the topic in print. His extensive footnoting introduces the reader to the larger body of material related to this genre.

The final chapter in this segment by John MacArthur provides help to the expositor in moving from exegesis to the actual exposition. He observes that true preaching is expository in purpose to explain the text. It is also logical in flow to persuade the mind. It is doctrinal in content obligating the will. It is pastoral in concern feeding the soul. It is imaginative in pattern exciting the emotion. It is relevant in application touching the life. (p. 289) He concludes his chapter with seven important

“Be’s of expository preaching: Be prepared; Be interesting; Be biblical; Be prayerful; Be enthusiastic; Be authoritative; Be relevant. (pp. 297-300)

Part V: Preaching the Exposition

The final section of *REP* consists of three chapters dealing with homiletics proper and the actual preaching event. Robert Thomas has an informative and practical treatment on the selection and use of a good translation. Originally presented at an annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, this essay provides a great deal of material suitable for the classroom as well as for individual preachers reading *REP*. His explanation of philosophical approaches toward translation and his demonstration of how one measures the difference between “free” and “literal” translations is very helpful to a pastor seeking to choose which translation will become his preaching bible. He concludes with an sober reminder that the translation utilized in preaching does matter. He wisely observes,

It is far more advantageous to use and encourage the audience to follow in a more literal translation, one the translator has transmitted from the original language in such a way as to give the church an accurate translation on which to do its own exegesis, and not one that subjects the church to limitations in the translator’s understanding of what the text means. It is the job of the expositor, not the translator, to explain the meaning of the passage under consideration. When a servant of the Lord imposes on the people of God his personal interpretation, he is morally obligated to clarify his role, that it is one of an expositor, not a translator. (p. 319)

The chapter on delivery by MacArthur is a fitting conclusion to the book. He sets the stage for the reader by observing the old adage, “a good sermon poorly preached is not better than a poor sermon properly preached. One has light but no heat; the other heat with no light.” (p. 321) He includes helpful suggestions for the preacher to consider during the time after he has completed the preparation process but before the actual preaching event occurs. Passion is essential to good preaching and he devotes several pages to this topic. He wraps things up with some practical help on improving the delivery itself.

Analysis and Evaluation

Strengths

The editors and contributors of *REP* have done a great service to the Evangelical church by providing her preachers with an invaluable aid to expository preaching. The strengths of the book are numerous and obvious to even the most casual of readers. First, the breadth of material addressed in the book is more comprehensive than that addressed by many other books on preaching. Second, *REP* strikes a good balance between hermeneutics and homiletics as opposed to focusing on one at the expense of the other. Third, the arrangement of the book is reflective of the editors’ view that preaching is

fundamentally a spiritual task to be performed by spiritually committed men. Consequently, they address heart issues in the expositor up front and only then proceed to the more technical issues. This is something that is rarely addressed in other text-books on preaching to the degree that the editors do so in *REP*. This is, in this reviewer's opinion, one of the greatest strengths and distinctives of the book. Fourth, the flow of the book follows the practical flow of the actual process. In other words, in preparing an expository message from start to finish, there is a logical flow that starts with the expositor himself, then moves to understanding the text, then to the shaping of the exposition, and finally to the deliver of the message. *REP* carries the reader through the book following this flow and forces the reader again and again to follow this sequence in his personal ministry. Fifth, the diversity of authors adds a flavor to the material that keeps the reader alert and on board as he reads through the material. Each man is demonstrably an expert in his field and many of them give ample evidence in their chapters of being familiar with the pressures of the pastorate. They do not write as mere academicians but as committed practitioners who understand the burden and difficulty of what they are proposing. The average pastor reading *REP* will find many helpful suggestions and practical ideas in every chapter. Sixth, the citation and footnotes in the book not only demonstrate the depth of research but are a gold-mine of information to the reader who desires to deepen his knowledge beyond what is written. Seventh, the historical overview of expository preaching provided by James Stitzinger is something every preacher should read. It demonstrates the rich heritage and long biblical tradition in which every true expositor stands. In times like ours when expository preaching is deprecated on every hand as something that will actually hinder the growth of the church, this chapter stands as a strong antidote and encouragement. One final strength worthy of mention in this review is the value and inspiration provided in the three chapters comprising the section entitled "Preparing the Expositor." As one who teaches expository preaching and homiletics to men training for ministry, the importance of the matters addressed in these chapters can not be overstated.

Weaknesses

The strengths of *REP* are so numerous that one almost has to hunt for perceived weaknesses. It should be noted at the outset that few books attempting so ambitious a task have done so as well as has been accomplished by the editors of *REP*. For this they are to be commended. Having said this, the reader will find that there is a certain amount of repetitiveness in the material. This is largely due to the nature of the book itself. Understandably, when an author is asked to contribute a chapter on a topic he will often say some of the same things in slightly different ways as another author writing on a similar and closely related topic. Second, there has been much development in the fields touched upon by *REP* since the editors wrote in 1982. This is especially true in the area of hermeneutics. Consequently the informed reader will do well to keep in mind that much of what is mentioned in passing or in seed form by the contributors has developed beyond their treatment in *REP*. This weakness is not due to any lack of scholarship or to uninformed writers but rather to the passing of time. Until such time as the editors feel a revision is warranted, Robert Thomas' *Evangelical Hermeneutics* makes a fine companion volume addressing this need. Finally, any attempt to provide a method of

grammatical analysis is going to meet with mixed reviews. This is in part due to the nature of the topic as well as to the individualized way different people analyze and use tools and methods related to handling grammar and context. The chapter on grammatical analysis makes a valiant attempt to deal with this issue and yet remain brief. However, its brevity and complexity make it the weakest and least helpful segment in the book. Its inclusion is understandable and necessary and all in all it does not detract from the overall helpfulness of the book (apologies in advance to Dr. Zemek).

Evaluation

REP is a valuable resource for any man aspiring to preach the Word of God accurately and attractively. Men who are currently pasturing churches will find much help in the book and consequently, their churches will be greatly blessed. Additionally, the book is written in such a way that it makes a fine textbook for preaching classes on the undergraduate level. This reviewer has utilized this book in preaching and homiletics classes for over a decade with great profit. Finally, this book would serve as a great tool for those engaged in organizing and hosting conferences on preaching. In the confines of a three to five day conference, it is impossible to do more than address issues related to preaching. This book serves as a valuable aid in such settings since it touches on all the major areas of concern to conservative evangelical preaching. It should be required reading for every man preparing for the preaching ministry, and it should be regular review reading for those of us who are currently engaged in a preaching ministry.