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## REVIEW SECTION.

### I.—RATIONALISM'S CLAIM TO EXCLUSIVE SCHOLARSHIP.

BY HOWARD OSGOOD, D.D., LL.D., PROFESSOR IN ROCHESTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, LATE MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN OLD-TESTAMENT REVISION COMPANY, ETC.

AFTER all the discussion, the whole Bible is still before us. It was given to each man to whom it comes for his decision. He is responsible for that decision. He can not put it off on the decision of any other man. When great schools, proud and pretentious of their learning, were found in Palestine, Egypt, Asia Minor, and Europe, the Savior constantly asked those whom He addressed, whether peasant, fisherman, priest, or scribe, "Have ye not read?" "Did ye never read?" "Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" and, as this same Savior is the final and universal Judge of men, these questions take on the awful solemnity of the last dread decision. Each one of us must decide for ourselves what is and shall be our relation to the Bible, when we stand before the Lamb in the midst of the throne to render our final account.

For some years past a criticism of the Bible has been brought in to our land from Germany and Holland, that tells us the Bible is a purely human book, filled with contradictions, and of value only as a record of the evolution of human thought. Those who champion it among us tell us that this criticism has received the suffrages of all the scholars; that if any voice is raised against it, that voice betrays ignorance and want of true scholarship.

When we ask, Who are all the scholars? we are told, All the professors in Protestant universities in Germany, very many in England, Scotland, and the United States. And how many of these scholars are there? Some fifty or sixty. Are they all scholars of the first rank? No. A few are men of great natural abilities, supplemented by large learning; but the majority are men of very moderate ability, who follow the leaders, and make up in sound what is wanting in

this type of it, I am sure their sermons would not suffer, and they would be found more strenuously than ever resisting the modern depreciation of the classics.

It will be found useful also to read such books as "Mackail's Latin Literature," Perry's "Greek Literature," and Myers's "Classical Essays." Histories of literature are generally, and I fear justly, regarded as dry. But these books are not liable to this reproach. The college student does not always gain from his curriculum a complete view of the ancient literature, read by him piece-meal in college. The preacher should supplement the deficiency by some acquaintance with the literature as a whole, gained in this method. He will find also valuable suggestions as to which authors he should read and what parts of their writing. He will find also in such authors as Mackail and Myers suggestive criticism and often stimulating views.

I have prepared this paper under the conviction that THE HOMILETIC REVIEW proposed a valuable service in projecting it. For one, I can say, had some such suggestions fallen under my eye in the earlier part of my ministry they would have been gladly taken. Perhaps some fruit in this direction may add to the wide service THE REVIEW is rendering the American ministry.

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#### IV.—THE RELATIVE VALUE OF TOPICAL AND EXPOSITORY PREACHING.

BY T. D. WITHERSPOON, D.D., LL.D., PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, LOUISVILLE, KY.

IT is necessary to begin with definition. The terms *topical* and *expository*, as applied to preaching, are used with considerable latitude of meaning. With a certain class of writers they serve to distinguish sermons founded respectively on short and long passages of Scripture, without particular regard to the method of treatment. With another class they have reference rather to the principle upon which the selection of the text proceeds,—the topical sermon being that in which a theme is first chosen, and then a text sought in which the theme is imbedded, and which will give Scriptural foundation and guidance in its treatment; whilst the expository sermon is that in which the theme of the sermon enters the mind of the hearer as the immediate result of the study of the passage of Scripture upon which it is based. In the first case the theme suggests the text; in the second, the text suggests the theme. A third class of writers, with more propriety, found their distinction between topical and textual on the method of treatment of the text after it is selected, rather than its length or the principle of its selection. With them the topical method is that in which the central truth of a text having been brought out by proper exegesis, this

truth is taken and viewed in its logical relations and spiritual significance without further reference to the phraseology of the text. The expository method is that in which the whole staple of the sermon is evolved from the text by the exegetical treatment of its various parts, and by deducing the practical lessons which its separate clauses suggest.

With such confusion in the use of the two words we need not be surprised at the different estimate put by leading writers upon the comparative value of these two kinds of preaching. We may, to some extent at least, understand how Dr. Shedd, in his "Homiletics," gives the preference so decidedly to topical preaching, intimating ("Homiletics," pp. 156-7) that the usual method of preaching should be topical with an occasional expository discourse; whilst, on the other hand, Dr. Dabney, another of our greatest masters of Homiletics, in his "Sacred Rhetoric," inveighs with all his might against the neglect of expository preaching, and insists that the prominence should always be given to sermons of this character.

A few moments' consideration will serve, we think, to show that each of these great teachers occupies a somewhat extreme position. Dr. Shedd's admiration for the topical as compared with the expository sermon arises out of a supposed element of unity to be found in the former and not in the latter. Thus he says of the topical sermon that it is "occupied with one definite subject which can be accurately and fully stated in a brief title"; and again, "It is occupied with a single definite theme that can be completely enunciated in a brief statement." Now who that has ever read one of the masterly expository discourses of Dr. W. M. Taylor does not recall the unity of theme, formulating itself in a brief, significant title, expressing itself in divisions at once textual and logical, and appearing all the more conspicuous, as the speaker brings out the relation of every subordinate clause in the long paragraph to his central and cardinal theme? This is the very perfection of unity, its highest and most consummate form. It distinguishes (a distinction overlooked by Dr. Shedd) the expository sermon from the expository lecture. It vindicates the right of the expository sermon to its place in true oratory.

On the other hand, Dr. Dabney, in his enthusiasm for expository preaching, seems to overlook the fact that a sermon, whilst not expository of the particular passage which forms its basis, because the passage may require no exposition, or may not invite it, may, tho technically in the topical form, be by its Scripturalness in the very best and truest sense expository,—expository, not of any one connected passage of Scripture, but of the utterances of the Holy Spirit speaking in divers and widely separated passages of the word.

To speak, then, of the relative importance of topical and expository preaching is precisely like discussing the relative value of systematic and Biblical theology in a theological course. It will be admitted

without hesitation that any course of theological training which does not give great prominence to systematic theology is radically defective. And the same thing is true of Biblical theology. No one of the two, however admirably taught, can take the place of the other. Each one is indispensable by virtue of its relations to the other. Each, properly pursued, increases the interest in the other, and enhances the value of the knowledge gained by the other. They are complementary one to the other, and neither can be neglected without seriously impairing the usefulness and marring the completeness of the other.

Now just as systematic theology, apart from Biblical theology, tends too much to speculation, and Biblical theology, apart from systematic, tends to incompleteness and disproportion in faith, so the method of topical preaching, exclusively followed, tends almost inevitably to draw the preacher away from his true position as an expounder of God's word; and the method of expository preaching, pursued in the same exclusive way, tends to prevent that broad and systematic view of truth in its relations to all other truth which enables the preacher to hold and present each doctrine according to the due proportion of faith.

Whilst, therefore, neither method can claim in any absolute sense preeminence, there are advantages peculiar to each of the two which it may be well to consider.

First, then, as to the topical method, it must be conceded that it is more favorable to unity. The unity found in expository discourse is of a higher character, but it is much more difficult to attain, and therefore much more liable to be violated in the construction of the discourse. Any mind that acts logically will, in a topical discourse, where the heads are not determined by the phraseology of the text, arrange the main divisions so as to secure unity of discussion. For the same reason, also, the topical method will tend to greater logical completeness, as the central truth of the text may be traced through all its broad and general relations, and not alone in those particular relations in which it is presented in the text. For you will notice that the Scriptures do not undertake to present the great truths of revelation in their logical order and relation, any more than nature grows its plants and herbs in segregated groups according to genera and species. Very few passages of Scripture, short enough to make the basis of a truly expository sermon, will present any one truth in its complete logical relations. And yet it is important to the full understanding of a truth that it shall at times be thus presented; and here comes in the sphere, the indispensable mission of the topical discourse. It seizes upon a passage of Scripture, deduces from it by an exposition that is candid, reverential, and conclusive, an important spiritual truth. It then takes that truth, and in the light, not of this particular passage alone, but of the whole word of God, analyzes, explains, illustrates, enforces, so that all the powers of logical analysis and association are brought

in subservience to the higher authority of God's word in impressing the truth upon the mind and conscience of the hearer.

Nor can the fact be ignored, in this connection, that for a very large class of minds there is a delight in this logical method of presenting the truth that it is very difficult to awaken in the expository method. As the eye rests with delight in nature upon an object, whether tree, or flower, or architectural structure, in which there is the symmetry of due proportion in all the parts, so in a sermon perfect symmetry of structure—symmetry that is apparent without an effort to trace or discover it—is peculiarly pleasing to cultivated minds, and to the topical sermon must be accorded the preeminence for a symmetry of structure that is readily apprehended, and, indeed, that can not be overlooked. As a discipline, therefore, to the mind of the preacher in rigid and thorough logical analysis of Scriptural truth, as a means of securing unity and completeness in the presentation of truth, and as a means of engaging and holding that interest which comes from the rounded and symmetrical treatment of a theme, the preacher should make large use of topical preaching.

When we turn, however, to expository preaching, we shall find equally great advantages in its favor. First of all, as Dr. Dabney has so clearly shown, since the great work of the pulpit is that of exposition; since the preacher is by his very office the authorized expounder of the written word, there must be a great advantage in that method by which large consecutive portions of the Scripture are taken up and systematically expounded. It is only in this way that one can be sure of declaring the whole counsel of God. In exclusively topical preaching one is in danger of confining himself to a class of texts in which certain favorite doctrines or ethical principles are set forth or illustrated. He who follows conscientiously the expository method must sooner or later present to his hearers the whole circle of revealed truth. Then, too, by the expository method truth is presented in its Scriptural connections. Whilst, as we have seen, the flora of the earth is not grouped in nature according to principles of scientific classification, and there is need of the work of the scientific botanist, yet he would be a poor student of nature who confined himself to the study of plants in herbariums or botanical gardens. It is in their relations to soil and climate, in their natural relations to one another, as nature has distributed them, that they are most interesting and their study most profitable. And so, tho the truths of the Bible are not arranged in strict logical sequence, there is an order of relation which the Holy Spirit has chosen. These truths maintain connections between themselves upon the page of revelation which it is most important to study, and which can be brought out only in expository preaching.

This method of preaching familiarizes the people with, and, if well done, interests the people in, that kind of Biblical study which it should be the aim of every pastor to encourage. We can not hope to

enlist our people to any great extent in the study of systematic theology. We should aim to make them close expository students of the word; and the expository method in preaching both shows them how to make expository study, and gives them a relish for it.

The only other advantage to which allusion need be made is that which appertains especially to expository preaching in which there is continuous exposition of a whole Book or other connected portion of Scripture. There are many practical themes which it is important to discuss, and yet which, by reason of their delicacy, or of circumstances in the congregation which would make the discussion of them appear personal, the minister would hardly feel it proper to select as texts for special discourses; but if they should lie in the path of continuous exposition, he could, with the utmost propriety, make them the basis of the wholesome instruction he feels it his duty to impart.

From this necessarily brief and imperfect discussion it must be apparent that the preaching of the pulpit should alternate between the topical and expository methods. Most preachers have a propensity for the one or the other. Every pastor should be careful to cultivate that method which is least natural to him. Certain topics can be best presented by the one method, and others by the other. No fixed rule can be laid down. Common sense and prayerful study of the needs of the field will best guide. There should be no sermon that is not in the truest and highest sense both topical and expository. Every sermon should be topical in the sense that it has one distinct and regnant theme which gives shape and tone to the whole discourse. Every discourse should be expository in the sense that under every division and in every paragraph there is sincere and conscious effort to make the hearers acquainted with both the language and the meaning of the word of God.

The preacher who puts forth his very best efforts occasionally on a strictly topical sermon, and then occasionally on a strictly expository sermon or series of sermons, and who in the main staple of his preaching pursues what Dr. Shedd and others denominate the textual method, deducing from his text a proposition which will give the unity of the topical discourse, and treating it in the exegetical light of the text and other kindred passages so as to give to some extent the direct Scripturalness of the regular expository sermon, has doubtless found the golden mean in preaching, and the key to that variety in methods of presenting truth which is one of the chief elements of success in the pulpit.

In the light of the advantages just enumerated, expository preaching would seem to be of special value in such times as the present, when the Bible is being attacked so persistently and from so many quarters. The best defense against all the assaults of its adversaries is to let the Word of God speak for itself. If we mistake not, the people are just now peculiarly anxious to hear the Word.