

GUEST EDITORIAL

It is not given to many to serve as the president of the Evangelical Theological Society. To do so is an honor among the peers of the Society. I have appreciated deeply this high privilege for 1983.

The year 1983 stands as a high-water mark for the direction of the Society. Already in the national meeting in December 1982 Robert Gundry, in his paper entitled "A Response to Some Criticisms of *Matthew: A Commentary*," sent shock waves reverberating among us as we were asked to consider his views and use of redaction criticism in his book. During 1983 I received over a hundred letters regarding Gundry's claims, ranging from "The Society needs to recognize that there is a variety of understandings of inerrancy within its ranks" to "The implications of this view are wide-ranging and irreconcilable with Biblical inerrancy"—and every shade of opinion between.

In the business session of the annual meeting of 1983 I had stayed neutral and served only to moderate the session, allowing others to speak their convictions. As I look back on that meeting, however, I would like to now share my feelings and convictions.

I stated in my presidential address that I have no objections to the use of historical criticism and, in particular, redaction criticism as it is applied to the problems posed by the synoptic gospels. Every effort should be welcome if there is a genuine attempt to reconcile the supposed differences between the gospels. But we must ever remember that the use of redaction criticism needs to be guarded because there can be no meaning of Biblical events without the events. The inspired record, by virtue of its own intrinsic testimony, insists on the factuality of the events included therein.

A good many of us have wrestled with the claims Robert Gundry has made. However, as much as we carefully listened to and later read intently the defense of what is claimed for Matthew, many of us felt keenly that the issue of inerrancy was at stake.

Now it is certainly legitimate to consider what were the theological reasons for a gospel writer as he selected his materials from the gospel traditions so as to interpret for and proclaim to his audiences in the first century. Each gospel writer had his own peculiar message. After all, the gospel writers did not merely transmit traditions but also interpreted traditions, even as a modern expository preacher also explains the Biblical text, applying it to the needs of his audience. But selection of material and the preaching of it must always keep in mind that the gospel writers reflected what Jesus said and that the text is inerrant in the autographs.

I, for one, sensed the pain in connection with the debate and decisions of the business meeting. But this will always be the case as we struggle to both articulate what we think is correct doctrine and as we seek to share with and understand each other. It is a paradox indeed for believers that in these frail human bodies lives the sovereign Holy Spirit, and as long as we are on this earth there

will always be a struggle as we reach for ultimate truth. For that reason I have repeatedly called for fairness to members of the Society as well as to those who are outside that we respect the integrity and dignity of the human being. Our Society should be spiritually and intellectually mature enough to enable each of us to listen to one another in an atmosphere of respect, giving opposing viewpoints a fair hearing, and then make decisions that are honest before the Lord and intellectually compatible within the framework of evangelical scholarship. Strident propaganda on behalf of one position or another should never be the tactic to ascertain the truth that all of us seek.

We are created in the image of God, and inasmuch as he has spoken to us we have the basis by which to both understand him and to speak to one another in truth. If the Word of God is not reliable, not inerrant, then it seems to me that we enter questionable areas of how we can truly understand ourselves and the world around us. Without an infallible and inerrant Word we face a world of philosophical speculation where man wonders if anything is real or knowable.

That is why I feel that our Society is unique in that our doctrinal basis clearly declares: "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs." I sign this statement without any reservation as to its truth because the implications of the statement relate directly to the God I seek to serve, the world to which I minister, and my eternal destiny.

I feel that after a number of years of debating the issue of inerrancy, and while we still have our difficulties applying this truth when interpreting and explaining some of the problem areas of Scripture, we did take the correct step in the deliberations in our business session without any unfair or irregular action. Our statement of inerrancy does mean that as we consider the sayings of Jesus they were truly and inerrantly spoken by him, and that Matthew or any other gospel writer did not depart from the actuality of events or deliberately alter or embellish historical tradition.

I feel also that it is our task as scholars and teachers to have a deep and abiding concern that, no matter what our field of investigation, we need to honor and serve Jesus as Messiah, the Lord, and his Word, the Biblical text. Those who sit under us in our classrooms should never catch the slightest hint that we falter in any way concerning the truth of the inerrancy of his Word.

Louis Goldberg