

## GUEST EDITORIAL

In the *Evangelical Quarterly* of January-March, 1969, pp. 19-29, Professor George I. Mavrodes of the University of Michigan launches an attack against the fundamental, the "formal" principle of Protestantism, *viz. Sola Scriptura*. He claims that the evangelical view of inspiration "appears to engender a number of perplexing *internal* problems, i.e. problems concerned with the meaning or consistency of the doctrine itself, or if its coherence with the theological system in which it is embedded." In his closing paragraph the author concludes "The restriction of inspiration to the autographs, then, appears to involve one in a dilemma." In spite of the polite use of the word "appears," it "appears" that Professor Mavrodes thinks there is an internal, logical inconsistency at the foundation of evangelical Christianity."

To justify this logical accusation it is necessary to find in the evangelical system two propositions that cannot both be true. The two propositions must of course be necessary parts of the theological system. If they are not parts of the system at all, the latter is not convicted of inconsistency.

I wish now to show that Professor Mavrodes has not found two such propositions. To produce his inconsistency or dilemma he has imported into the system a proposition no evangelical in the past has held. It is only with the help of his importation that he can produce his desired inconsistency. Let us see how he does so.

In opposition to the statement of the Evangelical Theological Society restricting inspiration to the *autographs*, Professor Mavrodes commences by asserting that some biblical books do not have autographs, "books as they came from the pen of the sacred writers," as J. Gresham Machen put it. Probably the professor has in mind such epistles as Philippians, supposedly written from Rome by Epaphroditus, and Colossians, supposedly written by Tychicus and Onesimus. Since Paul dictated his letter to secretaries, there is no autograph. Hence the evangelical view of the Bible cannot be maintained.

One is immediately tempted to dismiss this as trivial fogging. But Professor Mavrodes is skillful enough to make something out of this toe-hold.

First he insists that since the Bible does not explicitly deny the use of secretaries, the evangelical cannot proceed as if there were none. The actual inference is questionable, however, because the evangelical need not admit secretaries unless the Bible definitely asserts their presence. To pro-

duce an inconsistency in the evangelical position, Professor Mavrodes must not be permitted to introduce into the Bible a statement it does not contain. Section I C of the article therefore is at least an irrelevant distortion of the evangelical position. At the same time, although the inference itself is questionable, the matter is unimportant, for the use of a secretary does no damage to the doctrine of inspiration.

Professor Mavrodes then suggests that *the first written copy, even if written by a secretary, can be called the inspired autograph*. This, he says, has "a peculiar difficulty of its own (because) it requires that. . . the inspiration of the author is not sufficient. The amanuensis himself must also be inspired!"

This is the unbiblical and illogical addition that Professor Mavrodes tries to put into the mouth of the evangelical in order to make him contradict himself. The addition is illogical because the proposition that Paul was inspired does not imply that Tychicus was inspired. The evangelical must emphasize the fallacy in the author's argument. If the "autograph" is the first written copy, one cannot logically infer that the apostle's inspiration is insufficient nor that the amanuensis himself must also be inspired.

This illogical inference is also unbiblical, not only because the Bible does not assert Tychicus' inspiration, but chiefly because the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration has to do with the written text and not with the secretaries or even the apostles themselves. It is no doubt true that the apostles were inspired in the sense that the Holy Spirit prevented them from including mistakes in their books. But the important point for evangelical religion is that the books themselves, the words on the manuscript were "breathed out" by God.

Naturally it occurs to Professor Mavrodes' keen mind that the evangelical who does not wish to assert the inspiration of Tychicus may suggest that the apostle proof-read the manuscript after the dictation. If the apostle did so, then proof-read copy obviously bears his imprimatur. To undermine this defense of the Reformation doctrine, Professor Mavrodes strongly suggests and his argument assumes that the apostles could not have proof-read their letters with any care. He outlines a type of proof-reading that would allow error to stand uncorrected.

Note how he proceeds: "The author must do the proof-reading without aid, so as to eliminate all possibility of errors being introduced or passed over by uninspired helpers. . . . The decisive point, however, is that such opinions, even if they should happen to be correct, cannot be relevant here, for within this theological context no doctrine should depend upon such an opinion. . . . So far as I know, there is no Biblical teaching to the effect that Biblical authors always did proof-read manuscripts in the special way required."

Here it is quite clear that Professor Mavrodes misrepresents the evangelical position for the purpose of making it appear impossible. In the first

place, the *doctrine* of the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture is based solely on the teaching of Scripture itself. It is no part of this doctrine that the apostles proof-read the manuscripts. No evangelical theologian has ever tried to list verses teaching that the apostles used the exact method of proof-reading recommended by Professor Mavrodes. What this attack on inspiration assumes is that the apostles could not possibly have used a satisfactory method of proof-reading. But until he proves that they did not, his argument consists of unsupported assertions. So long as it is merely possible that the apotles used some method to insure this correctness of the manuscript, the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration cannot be so attacked.

The last few pages of the article contain other unsupported suppositions. They do not, however, touch the central issue. And the central argument, as well as these later paragraphs, founders on the fact that Professor Mavrodes produces his dilemma or inconsistency only by inserting into the evangelical position as a necessary part of that position one or more propositions that were never a part of orthodox theology. Take evangelical doctrine as it stands, and there is no dilemma or inconsistency.

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