

## The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Translated

*Do attempt first to read the original Statement. If it makes sense to you, well and good. If you feel that you can't make heads or tails of all or part of the Statement, perhaps this "translation" will be helpful. I have not paraphrased the introductory paragraphs here or the longer exposition that follows the Articles. All of these ideas belong to the original writers; I have tried merely to express them more simply. - Paige Britton, 2009*

### A SHORT STATEMENT, TRANSLATED

1. God is Truth, and only speaks truth. He has inspired Holy Scripture in order to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ. God intends people to recognize that he (God) is the Creator, Lord, Redeemer, and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's way of pointing to himself and explaining himself to us.
2. Holy Scripture is God's own Word. It was written by men who were prepared and guided by God's Spirit. It is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches. (In other words, it reveals what God wants us to know in a wholly reliable way.) It is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches. Its marching orders are to be obeyed as if God himself were giving the commands. Its promises are to be embraced as coming directly from God.
3. The Holy Spirit is Scripture's divine Author. He helps us in our interaction with the Word in two ways: First, he confirms in our hearts that the Bible is telling the truth. Second, he opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. Scripture is entirely God-given, down to the words the authors chose. It is without error or fault in all its teaching. This is so regarding God's acts in creation, the events of world history, and its own origins, just as much as it is so regarding God's saving grace in individual lives.
5. If we decide that Scripture must *sometimes* be in error, or if we disregard its divine origins, or if we judge its teachings according to any view of truth that contradicts the Bible's own, we are in trouble. If we do these things, we are thumbing our noses at Scripture's authority to call the shots. This kind of Bible reading will only bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

## ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL, TRANSLATED

### Article I

**We affirm** that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.

**We deny** that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

### Article II

**We affirm** that the Scriptures are the highest written standard that God calls us to accept and obey. All Creeds, Confessions, and other teachings of the Church must be judged in light of Scripture.

**We deny** that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

### Article III

**We affirm** that ALL of the written Word is revelation given by God.

**We deny** any belief about revelation that weakens the Scriptures' status as God's revealed Word, or makes this status depend on human interactions with Scripture. (For example, some have taught that the Scriptures merely *tell about* God's revelation, instead of actually *being* revelation straight from God. Others have taught that the text of the Bible can only be said to have the status of revelation when it is activated by an individual reading it or resonating with its teaching.)

### Article IV

**We affirm** that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

**We deny** that just because we're finite creatures and use language clumsily, language is inadequate to convey what God wants us to know about himself. Further, we deny that just because language and culture are corrupted by sin, God's attempts to reveal himself in writing are thwarted.

### Article V

**We affirm** that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive (that is, it unfolded over time as history went along).

**We deny** that the new things that were revealed to God's people as time went along ever correct or contradict the old things that had been revealed previously (even if the new

revelations fulfill earlier revelations). We further deny that any new revelation possessing the same status as Scripture has been given since the completion of the NT writings.

#### **Article VI**

**We affirm** that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

**We deny** that it is correct to say, “I think the Bible as a whole is God’s revelation, but certain parts here and there are probably merely man-made” – or, “I think some sections or phrases came from God, but the church invented the rest.”

#### **Article VII**

**We affirm** that the inspiration of Scripture was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. We affirm that the origin of Scripture is divine. Exactly how the divine inspiration happened remains largely a mystery to us.

**We deny** that “inspiration” simply describes human insight or any kind of heightened states of consciousness.

#### **Article VIII**

**We affirm** that God in his Work of inspiration made use of the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

**We deny** that God overrode the personalities of these writers, even though he caused them to use the very words that He chose.

#### **Article IX**

**We affirm** that inspiration guaranteed that what the biblical writers wrote was true and trustworthy. However, we recognize that inspiration did not make a writer omniscient (knowing everything).

**We deny** that just because the human writers were finite and sinful, they surely must have tainted or distorted God’s Word.

#### **Article X**

**We affirm** that in the strictest sense, only the autographs (that is, the original copies of the texts) can be said to be entirely inspired. However, in the providence of God there are enough reliable manuscripts (ancient copies) available for scholars to tell with great accuracy what had been written in the originals. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

**We deny** that just because those originals are lost, any truly important element of the Christian faith is affected. We further deny that this absence of originals makes it invalid or irrelevant to claim biblical inerrancy for the copies and translations that are available to us. (I.e., there is enough evidence for the accuracy of these copies and translations for us to keep speaking about the Bible's inerrancy and authority.)

#### **Article XI**

**We affirm** that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible. It will not mislead us. It is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

**We deny** that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and mistaken or wrong in what it teaches. One cannot say, for example, "The Bible is reliable when it talks about God, but when it attempts to describe scientific things it makes mistakes." It's true that *infallibility* means that Scripture is a reliable guide, and that *inerrancy* means that it makes no mistakes in the details. These are two distinct things; but they always go together.

#### **Article XII**

**We affirm** that ALL of Scripture is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

**We deny** that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy only have to do with the spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes of Scripture. What about its assertions regarding the fields of history and science? We believe these are infallible and inerrant as well. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

#### **Article XIII**

**We affirm** that it is fine to use the theological term "inerrancy" to refer to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

**We deny** that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to human standards of truth and error, such as those used to evaluate uninspired, human-created works of literature. Such standards disregard what the Scriptures claim to be, and what their claimed purpose is. We further deny that inerrancy is cancelled out by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of exaggeration and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, different presentations of the same material (such as parallel accounts in two different gospels), or the use of free citations. (*The last one means that sometimes a NT writer "quotes" an OT verse, but the quote is really a paraphrase or a new rendering of the original verse that preserves the connection with the OT but introduces some new idea to the mix.*)

#### Article XIV

**We affirm** that Scripture is a unified whole, from Genesis to Revelation, and that it is consistent with itself in all it teaches.

**We deny** that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved by scholars who study the manuscripts cancel out the truth claims of the Bible.

#### Article XV

**We affirm** that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

**We deny** that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed (as some liberal scholars do) by claiming that he adjusted his language to better fit with the errors and prejudices of his Jewish contemporaries – or that he was limited in his knowledge because of his humanity. (*I.e., Jesus had a high view of Scripture. Was he a)correct about this, b) just making people feel good by pretending to affirm their high view of Scripture, or c) just as ignorant as every other naïve believer?*)

#### Article XVI

**We affirm** that the doctrine of inerrancy has been deeply important and closely connected to the Church's faith throughout its history.

**We deny** that the doctrine of inerrancy was just invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a new doctrine proposed in reaction to liberal theology's "higher criticism" view of Scripture. (*Proponents of higher criticism do everything they can to debunk the view that Scripture was divinely inspired.*)

#### Article XVII

**We affirm** that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.

**We deny** that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture. (*For example, some folks in charismatic circles place so much emphasis on current revelations from and signs of the Holy Spirit that the third person of the Trinity seems to have little to do with the Scriptures.*)

#### Article XVIII

**We affirm** that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by "grammatico-historical exegesis" – that is, by paying attention to the type of literature represented in a book or passage (narrative? Poetry? Etc.), as well as to the details of vocabulary and grammar used

in the text in question; always keeping in mind that the Scriptures tell one unified story of God's plan of redemption. We also affirm that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

**We deny** the legitimacy of any interpretation of the text (or any quest for outside sources for the text) if these approaches lead to a low view of Scripture's authority, historical accuracy, worthiness to teach, or authorship.

### **Article XIX**

**We affirm** that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasingly to our reflecting the image of Christ.

**We deny** that such confession is necessary for salvation. (I.e., someone may have a low view of Scripture and yet may be saved.) However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences both to the individual and to the Church.