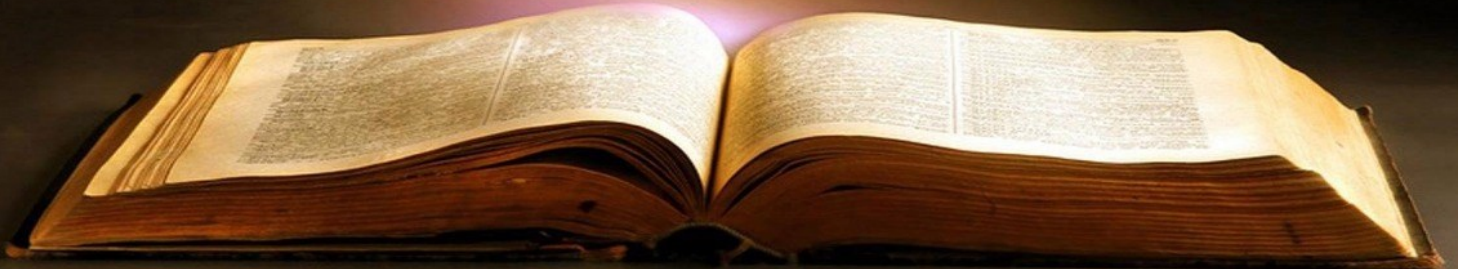


EXPLAINING BIBLICAL INERRANCY

OFFICIAL COMMENTARY ON THE
ICBI STATEMENTS

EXPLAINING INERRANCY: A COMMENTARY ON
THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY
BY DR. R.C. SPROUL (1980)

EXPLAINING HERMENEUTICS: A COMMENTARY ON
THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS
BY DR. NORMAN L. GEISLER (1983)



SPROUL | GEISLER

Explaining Biblical Inerrancy:
Official Commentary on the ICBI Statements
2013

Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary on the Chicago Statement
on Biblical Inerrancy

By Dr. R.C. Sproul

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Explaining Hermeneutics: A Commentary on the Chicago
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INTRODUCTION

It is a fact of human experience that when the living eye-witnesses to events die off, the process of developing myths about these events is often accelerated.¹ So, as one of the three living framers of the Chicago statements on inerrancy and hermeneutics, it seemed good to put the first two statements and their official commentaries in one inexpensive and universally accessible source.

Four Fundamental ICBI Documents

There were four ICBI documents on the meaning of inerrancy: (1) The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (by the ICBI drafting committee, 1978); (2) The Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, by Dr. Sproul; (3) The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (by the ICBI drafting committee, 1982); (4) The Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics, by Dr. Geisler. These four documents are reproduced here.²

Dr. R. C. Sproul was not just a signer of the three ICBI statements. He was also the original framer of the affirmations and denials of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, the president of the ICBI during its tenure, and the author of the official commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. This booklet was titled *Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary* (International Council on Biblical Inerrancy: 1980). It has been reproduced here with the gracious permission of Ligonier Ministries and Dr. Sproul.

Dr. Norman Geisler, was a signer of the ICBI statements, a member of the ICBI drafting committee, the general editor of all the books published by ICBI, and the author of the official booklet explaining the second Chicago Statement. That booklet was titled *Explaining*

¹ See: Norman L. Geisler and William C Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).

² This book only contains the heart of the first and second Chicago statements, the articles of affirmation and denial. The summary statements and the excellent short expositions that are normally included in those statements have not been included here. The full statements can be viewed at <http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI.shtml>.

Hermeneutics: A Commentary on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (International Council on Biblical Inerrancy: 1983). It has also been reproduced here in this book.

Other Important ICBI Books

In addition, official ICBI books were produced on these two Statements. On the first Statement (1978), the book titled *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Zondervan, 1979) was produced, consisting of chapters by ICBI conference scholars. Also, there was *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (Zondervan, 1984) edited by Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus, consisting of papers from the ICBI hermeneutics summit in 1982. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest put together, *Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response* (Moody Press, 1984). Another ICBI book on the meaning of inerrancy was produced titled *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of Its Philosophical Roots*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Zondervan, 1981). The final book of the ICBI series was on the application of inerrancy. It was edited by Kenneth S. Kantzer and titled *Applying the Scriptures* (Zondervan, 1987).

Why the ICBI View on Inerrancy is So Important

As evangelicals we recognize that no extra-biblical statements or creeds are infallible. Only the Bible is infallible. Nonetheless, some doctrinal statements are very important. The ICBI statements fall into this category for many reasons. First, it stands in continuity with the historic orthodox view on Scripture (see John Hannah, *Inerrancy and the Church*, Moody, 1984). Second, it was put together by an international group of some 300 evangelical scholars, not by an individual or mere handful of persons. Third, it has been adopted (in 2003) as a guide in understanding inerrancy by the largest group of evangelical scholars in the world, The Evangelical Theological Society. Fourth, its views were adopted by one of the largest protestant denomination in the world (The Southern Baptist Convention) in a landmark turn-around which saved them from drifting into liberalism. Finally, it has become the standard view of evangelicalism in America on this topic, having been officially or unofficially widely adopted as the guideline on the meaning of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible in numerous schools, churches, and Christian organizations.

The Purposes of this Book

As general editor of the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) books, a member of the ICBI drafting committee, and the author of the ICBI official commentary on the ICBI hermeneutics statement, my purpose in this book is twofold. First, my desire is to make all four foundational ICBI documents available in one volume for this and future generations to study. Second, I hope this will help dispel some contemporary misinterpretations of what the ICBI framers meant by inerrancy. There are several issues to which we wish to draw attention.

Misunderstanding about the Meaning of the Concept of “Truth” in the ICBI Statement

One of the most important misunderstandings of the ICBI statements occurs on what the framers meant by the biblical view of truth mentioned in Article XIII of *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978). It reads: “We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose.” Some mistakenly took this to justify an intentionalist view of truth and inerrancy which states that the Bible is only true in what it *intends* to affirm, not necessary in all that it *actually* affirms. But this is contrary to what the ICBI framers meant by inerrancy, as is revealed in its official commentary on those very articles. ICBI declared explicitly “When we say that the truthfulness of Scripture ought to be evaluated according to its own standards that means that . . . **all the claims of the Bible must correspond with reality**, whether that reality is historical, factual or spiritual” (Sproul, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 48). It adds, “**By biblical standards of truth and error is meant the view used both in the Bible and in everyday life, viz., a correspondence view of truth**. This part of the article is directed toward those who would redefine truth to relate merely to redemptive intent, the purely personal, or the like, rather than to mean that which corresponds with reality.”

Misunderstanding about the Function of Genre in Scripture

The second major misinterpretation of the ICBI statements centers on the use of genre in the interpretation of Scripture. Article XVIII of *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978) reads: “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, **taking account of its literary forms and devices**, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture” (emphasis added). Likewise, Article XIII asserts, “We affirm that awareness of the

literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence **we value genre criticism** as one of the many disciplines of biblical study” (emphasis added). Article XV adds, “We affirm the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal sense.... Interpretation according to the literal sense **will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text**” (emphasis added).³

From these statements some evangelical scholars have claimed ICBI blessing on the view that one can determine the meaning of a biblical text by first making a list of the kinds of genre from external sources and then applying what they believe is the appropriate genre to the Scriptures. However, the view that genre determines meaning is not only contrary to what the ICBI framers meant, but it also suffers from a logical mistake. In order to discover the genre of a particular text, one must already have developed a genre theory. But a genre theory comes from studying and comparing individual texts of the Bible by means of the “grammatico-historical” method of interpretation which the ICBI framers were committed to from the beginning (see Article XVIII) of the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy. But if externally determined genre governs the meaning of the biblical text, then this scenario is impossible. The interpreter must know the genre before he knows the text. But this is tantamount to imposing genre expectations upon the text. In hermeneutics, this is labeled *eisegesis* (reading meaning into the text), rather an *exegesis* (reading meaning out of the text)! So, this widely used method of genre determination is contrary to the ICBI understanding of inerrancy.

Misunderstanding of the Historical Nature of Biblical Narratives

From the beginning, ICBI spelled out its commitment to the historicity of the biblical narratives. Article XVIII of The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) reads: “We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, **dehistoricising**, or counting its teaching, or rejecting its claim to authorship” (emphasis added). The ICBI position became even more explicit in its Chicago Statement of Biblical Hermeneutics (1982). Article XIII declares: “**We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives** which present themselves as

³ Also see “Genre Criticism,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and The Bible*. Eds. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 165-216.

factual.” Article XIV goes on to say, **“We deny that any event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated”** (emphasis added).

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is clear on this issue. “We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference **to the complete truthfulness of Scripture**” (ARTICLE XIII). “We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, **guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write**” (ARTICLE IX). **“We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.** We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in **the fields of history and science**” (ARTICLE XII). “We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to **the complete truthfulness of Scripture**” (ARTICLE XII).

The ICBI commentary adds, “Though the Bible is indeed *redemptive* history, it is also redemptive *history*, and this means that the acts of salvation wrought by God actually occurred in the space-time world” (Article XII). With regard to the historicity of the Bible, Article XIII in the commentary points out that we should not “take Adam to be a myth, whereas in Scripture he is presented as a real person.” Likewise, it affirms that we should not “take Jonah to be an allegory when he is presented as a historical person and [is] so referred to by Christ.” It adds, “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 XII of the “Chicago Statement”). In short, the ICBI framers believed that using genre to deny any part of the historicity of the biblical record was a denial of inerrancy.

Misunderstanding about the Relation of Hermeneutics and Inerrancy

Another misunderstanding is the claim that ICBI view is that inerrancy is hermeneutic and inerrancy are to be totally separated. In short, they claim that inerrancy simply affirms that whatever the Bible affirms is true, but only hermeneutics can inform us as to what the Bible is actually affirming. That is to say, it is just a matter of interpretation of the text and not a question of inerrancy. It is wrongly thought by some that ICBI made no specific claims on what the biblical text means or on whether the biblical narrative is historical as long as they believe

that the text is inerrant—whatever it may mean. However, this is clearly not the case for many reasons:

The total separation of hermeneutics and inerrancy is not logically necessary

The ICBI framers foresaw this issue and spoke to it clearly. In brief, the ICBI response is that hermeneutics and inerrancy are *formally distinct*, but when it comes to the inerrancy of the Bible they are *actually inseparable*. For example, Siamese twins with two heads and only one heart are inseparable but not identical. Apart from death, our soul and body are inseparable, but they are not identical. Hence, the charge that inerrancy and hermeneutics are identical does not necessarily follow logically.

A bifurcation of hermeneutics from inerrancy is empty, vacuous, and meaningless. This innovative view of the ICBI statements on inerrancy amounts to saying that the Bible is not teaching that anything is actually true. However, the ICBI statements repeatedly affirm that everything the Bible affirms is completely true. The “Chicago Statement” makes **“reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture”** (ARTICLE XIII). It insists that it is **“trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write”** (ARTICLE IX). But these would be senseless claims, if the Bible was not really making any claims about reality. So, the claim to inerrancy entails a certain kind of understanding of what the Bible means, namely, a historical-grammatical understanding of the text. This, along with the correspondence view of truth (see above) negate the claim that inerrancy as such is merely a vacuous claim that amounts to saying, “If the Bible is claiming that anything is true, then it is actually true, but inerrancy is not really claiming anything is actually true. Only hermeneutics can fill in this void.” On the contrary, both the correspondence view of truth and the historical-grammatical view of interpretation demand that the doctrine of inerrancy as embraced by ICBI is claiming that the belief in biblical inerrancy entails actual truths about reality.

The ICBI Chicago Statement on inerrancy includes a statement on the literal historical-grammatical hermeneutics. As noted above, Article XVIII reads: “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis....” There are very good reasons for including this statement on hermeneutics in an evangelical inerrancy statement. For one thing, there would be no doctrine of inerrancy were it not for the historical-grammatical

hermeneutic by which we derive inerrancy from Scripture. For another, the term “evangelical” implies a certain doctrinal stand on essential doctrines, including the inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, His atoning death, and His bodily resurrection. These doctrines expressed in the early Creeds of Christendom are derived from Scripture by the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. Without it there would be no “evangelical” or “orthodox” creeds or orthodox beliefs in accord with them. Thus, the ICBI evangelical view of inerrancy is wedded with a literal method of interpretation that affirms truth about the real world.

ICBI claim to inerrancy involved a claim to objective truth about reality

Since ICBI embraced a correspondence view of truth which affirms that truth corresponds with reality, then when we say the Bible is completely true the statement cannot be empty. It must refer to some reality beyond itself. This is why ICBI included a statement about the literal historical-grammatical interpretation of the Bible as part of its articles about the meaning of inerrancy. Article XVIII says: “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis....” In short, there is an overlap between inerrancy and hermeneutics because inerrancy is not an empty (vacuous) claim. It is a claim that involves the assertion that an inerrant Bible is actually true in all that it affirms. And this truth corresponds literally to the reality about which it speaks.

This is not to say that Bible does not use figures of speech for Article XVIII clearly allows “taking account of literary forms and devices.” It means that there is some literal referent for these figures of speech. Thus, inerrancy is not claiming that “If the Bible is making a truth claim, then that truth claim must be true.” Rather, inerrancy claims that that “The Bible is making truth claims, and they are all true.” Since truth is what corresponds to reality, to say the Bible is inerrant is to say that all of its claims correspond to reality. In this way there is a marriage, not a divorce, between inerrancy and the literal method of interpreting the Bible.

This disjunction between hermeneutics and inerrancy is an example of “methodological unorthodoxy.”⁴ If it were true, then one could completely allegorize the Bible—denying the literal Virgin Birth, physical resurrection of Christ, and everything else—and still claim that they

⁴ We first addressed this issue in The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS) in 1983. See: <http://normangeisler.net/articles/Bible/Inspiration-Inerrancy/methodological-unorthodoxy.htm>

held to the inerrancy of the Bible. This would mean that someone like Mary Baker Eddy (the founder of the Christian Science cult) could, even with a totally allegorical method, affirm that the ETS of ICBI statements on inerrancy are true, even though she does not believe in any evangelical doctrine, including the Inspiration of Scripture. It would also mean that someone could use a so-called Averroian method of “double truth” and still hold to an ICBI view of inerrancy. But it makes no sense to claim that the Bible is completely true in all that it affirms and yet deny that it affirms certain specific doctrines. In addition to unorthodox doctrines, there are also unorthodox methods. The historical-grammatical hermeneutics is an orthodox method accepted by ICBI. And an allegorical method is an unorthodox method. Likewise, New Testament scholars who deny the historicity of sections of the Gospel narratives are acting contrary to the meaning of the ICBI framers.

The separation is explicitly contrary in spirit and in letter to the ICBI

The preface to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics made it clear that the ICBI framers saw hermeneutics as being inseparably connected to inerrancy. It says:

*The work of Summit I had hardly been completed when it became evident that there was yet another major task to be tackled. While we recognize that belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is basic to maintaining its authority, **the values of that commitment are only as real as one's understanding of the meaning of Scripture.** Thus, the need for Summit II. For two years plans were laid and papers were written on themes relating to hermeneutical principles and practices.⁵*

The very fact that there was a second ICBI summit is a clear indication of how the ICBI framers and signers judged this matter. The second ICBI summit is an expansion and elaboration of ARTICLE XVIII from the statement produced by the first ICBI Summit.

Concluding Comments

It is hoped that providing the primary sources for the ICBI view on inerrancy will help clarify these and other issue at state in the current inerrancy debates. While every scholar is free to mean by inerrancy whatever he or she desires it to mean, no one is free to dictate to the ICBI

⁵ See http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_2.pdf, paragraph 2. Emphasis added.

framers what they meant by inerrancy. This is particularly true of those who subscribe to the grammatico-historical method of interpretation, as the ICI framers did. For if a document should be interpreted in accord with the expressed intentions of an author, then there are stated limits (as shown above) on what inerrancy covers or does not cover.

Failing to follow this path, gave rise to an acute problem in Evangelical Theological Society (ETS). The issue surfaced in 1976 when the ETS Executive Committee confessed that “Some of the members of the Society have expressed the feeling that a measure of **intellectual dishonesty prevails among members who do not take the signing of the doctrinal statement seriously.**” Other “members of the Society have come to the realization that they are not in agreement with the creedal statement and have voluntarily withdrawn. That is, **in good conscience** they could not sign the statement” (1976 ETS Minutes, emphasis added). Later, (in 1983 ETS minutes) an ETS Ad Hoc Committee recognized this problem when it posed the proper question: “**Is it acceptable for a member of the society to hold a view of biblical author’s intent which disagrees with the Founding Fathers and even the majority of the society, and still remain a member in good standing?**” Failing to say “No” is not only contrary to the expressed “intention of the author” view, but it opens the door for a deconstructionists and reconstructionists view of doctrinal statements like those of the ICBI. It is hoped that these primary ICBI sources contained in this book can help avoid this problem among those who claim to subscribe to biblical inerrancy. Since the three living framers of the ICBI statements (Sproul, Packer, and I) concur on these matters, it would be as presumptuous to reject this official understanding of the ICBI statement on these matter as it would be for a liberal judge to reject the meaning of Madison, Washington and Adams on the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Dr. Norman L. Geisler,
General Editor of the ICBI books
January 28th, 2013
Matthews, North Carolina

THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY: ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL (1978)

- 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 supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the church is subordinate to that 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 the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God. We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.*
- ARTICLE IV **We affirm** *that God who made mankind in his image has used language as a means of revelation. We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.*
- ARTICLE V **We affirm** *that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive. We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament 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 the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.*
- ARTICLE VII **We affirm** *that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.*

We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

- ARTICLE VIII **We affirm** that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. **We deny** that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.
- ARTICLE IX **We affirm** that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the biblical authors were moved to speak and write. **We deny** that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.
- ARTICLE X **We affirm** that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. **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 any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. **We further deny** that this absence renders the assertion of biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.
- ARTICLE XI **We affirm** that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading 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 errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.
- ARTICLE XII **We affirm** that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud or deceit. **We deny** that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. **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** the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture. **We deny** that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error

*that are alien to its usage or purpose. **We further deny** that inerrancy is negated 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 hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.*

ARTICLE
XIV **We affirm** *the unity and internal consistency of Scripture. **We deny** that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate 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 by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.*

ARTICLE
XVI **We affirm** *that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history. **We deny** that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.*

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.*

ARTICLE
XVIII **We affirm** *that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. **We deny** the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to 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 increasing conformity to the image of Christ. **We deny** that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, **we further deny** that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the church.*

THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS: ARTICLES OF AFFIRMATION AND DENIAL (1982)

- ARTICLE I **WE AFFIRM** *that the normative authority of Holy Scripture is the authority of God Himself, and is attested by Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. **WE DENY** the legitimacy of separating the authority of Christ from the authority of Scripture, or of opposing the one to the other.*
- ARTICLE II **WE AFFIRM** *that as Christ is God and Man in one Person, so Scripture is, indivisibly, God's Word in human language. **WE DENY** that the humble, human form of Scripture entails errancy any more than the humanity of Christ, even in His humiliation, entails sin.*
- ARTICLE III **WE AFFIRM** *that the person and work of Jesus Christ are the central focus of the entire Bible. **WE DENY** that any method of interpretation which rejects or obscures the Christ-centeredness of Scripture is correct.*
- ARTICLE IV **WE AFFIRM** *that the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture acts through it today to work faith in its message. **WE DENY** that the Holy Spirit ever teaches to any one anything which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.*
- ARTICLE V **WE AFFIRM** *that the Holy Spirit enables believers to appropriate and apply Scripture to their lives. **WE DENY** that the natural man is able to discern spiritually the biblical message apart from the Holy Spirit.*
- ARTICLE VI **WE AFFIRM** *that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute. We further affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts. **WE DENY** that, while Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation, biblical truth should be defined in terms of this function. We further deny that error should be defined as that which willfully deceives.*
- ARTICLE VII **WE AFFIRM** *that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite, and fixed. **WE DENY** that the recognition of this single meaning eliminates the variety of its application.*

- ARTICLE VIII **WE AFFIRM** *that the Bible contains teachings and mandates which apply to all cultural and situational contexts and other mandates which the Bible itself shows apply only to particular situations. WE DENY that the distinction between the universal and particular mandates of Scripture can be determined by cultural and situational factors. We further deny that universal mandates may ever be treated as culturally or situationally relative.*
- ARTICLE IX **WE AFFIRM** *that the term hermeneutics, which historically signified the rules of exegesis, may properly be extended to cover all that is involved in the process of perceiving what the biblical revelation means and how it bears on our lives. WE DENY that the message of Scripture derives from, or is dictated by, the interpreter's understanding. Thus we deny that the "horizons" of the biblical writer and the interpreter may rightly "fuse" in such a way that what the text communicates to the interpreter is not ultimately controlled by the expressed meaning of the Scripture.*
- ARTICLE X **WE AFFIRM** *that Scripture communicates God's truth to us verbally through a wide variety of literary forms. WE DENY that any of the limits of human language render Scripture inadequate to convey God's message.*
- ARTICLE XI **WE AFFIRM** *that translations of the text of Scripture can communicate knowledge of God across all temporal and cultural boundaries. WE DENY that the meaning of biblical texts is so tied to the culture out of which they came that understanding of the same meaning in other cultures is impossible.*
- ARTICLE XII **WE AFFIRM** *that in the task of translating the Bible and teaching it in the context of each culture, only those functional equivalents that are faithful to the content of biblical teaching should be employed. WE DENY the legitimacy of methods which either are insensitive to the demands of cross-cultural communication or distort biblical meaning in the process.*
- ARTICLE XIII **WE AFFIRM** *that awareness of the literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence we value genre criticism as one of the many disciplines of biblical study. WE DENY that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual.*

- ARTICLE XIV **WE AFFIRM** *that the biblical record of events, discourses and sayings, though presented in a variety of appropriate literary forms, corresponds to historical fact. WE DENY that any such event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated.*
- ARTICLE XV **WE AFFIRM** *the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal, sense. The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning which the writer expressed. Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text. WE DENY the legitimacy of any approach to Scripture that attributes to it meaning which the literal sense does not support.*
- ARTICLE XVI **WE AFFIRM** *that legitimate critical techniques should be used in determining the canonical text and its meaning. WE DENY the legitimacy of allowing any method of biblical criticism to question the truth or integrity of the writer's expressed meaning, or of any other scriptural teaching.*
- ARTICLE XVII **WE AFFIRM** *the unity, harmony, and consistency of Scripture and declare that it is its own best interpreter. WE DENY that Scripture may be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that one passage corrects or militates against another. We deny that later writers of Scripture misinterpreted earlier passages of Scripture when quoting from or referring to them.*
- ARTICLE XVIII **WE AFFIRM** *that the Bible's own interpretation of itself is always correct, never deviating from, but rather elucidating, the single meaning of the inspired text. The single meaning of a prophet's words includes, but is not restricted to, the understanding of those words by the prophet and necessarily involves the intention of God evidenced in the fulfillment of those words. WE DENY that the writers of Scripture always understood the full implications of their own words.*
- ARTICLE XIX **WE AFFIRM** *that any preunderstandings which the interpreter brings to Scripture should be in harmony with scriptural teaching and subject to correction by it. WE DENY that Scripture should be required to fit alien preunderstandings, inconsistent with itself, such as naturalism, evolutionism, scientism, secular humanism, and relativism.*

- ARTICLE XX **WE AFFIRM** *that since God is the author of all truth, all truths, biblical and extrabiblical, are consistent and cohere, and that the Bible speaks truth when it touches on matters pertaining to nature, history, or anything else. We further affirm that in some cases extrabiblical data have value for clarifying what Scripture teaches, and for prompting correction of faulty interpretations. WE DENY that extrabiblical views ever disprove the teaching of Scripture or hold priority over it.*
- ARTICLE XXI **WE AFFIRM** *the harmony of special with general revelation and therefore of biblical teaching with the facts of nature. WE DENY that any genuine scientific facts are inconsistent with the true meaning of any passage of Scripture.*
- ARTICLE XXII **WE AFFIRM** *that Genesis 1-11 is factual, as is the rest of the book. WE DENY that the teachings of Genesis 1-11 are mythical and that scientific hypotheses about earth history or the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation.*
- ARTICLE XXIII **WE AFFIRM** *the clarity of Scripture and specifically of its message about salvation from sin. WE DENY that all passages of Scripture are equally clear or have equal bearing on the message of redemption.*
- ARTICLE XXIV **WE AFFIRM** *that a person is not dependent for understanding of Scripture on the expertise of biblical scholars. WE DENY that a person should ignore the fruits of the technical study of Scripture by biblical scholars.*
- ARTICLE XXV **WE AFFIRM** *that the only type of preaching which sufficiently conveys the divine revelation and its proper application to life is that which faithfully expounds the text of Scripture as the Word of God. WE DENY that the preacher has any message from God apart from the text of Scripture.*

EXPLAINING INERRANCY: A COMMENTARY ON THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL INERRANCY

by Dr. R. C. Sproul

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FOREWORD BY ROGER R. NICOLE

The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy is a California based organization founded in 1977. It has as its purpose the defense and application of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy as an essential element for the authority of Scripture and a necessity for the health of the church. It was created to counter the drift from this important doctrinal foundation by significant segments of evangelicalism and the outright denial of it by other church movements.

On October 26-28, 1978, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy held a summit meeting near the Chicago airport. At that time it issued a statement on biblical inerrancy which included a Preamble, a Short Statement, Nineteen Articles of Affirmation and Denial and a more ample Exposition. Materials to be submitted to the meeting had been prepared by Drs. Edmond P. Clowney, J.I. Packer and R. C. Sproul. These were discussed in a number of ways by groups of delegates from the Advisory Board and by various partial and plenary sessions at the summit. Furthermore, written comments were solicited and received in considerable numbers. A Draft Committee composed of Drs. Edmund P. Clowney, Norman L. Geisler, Harold W. Hoehner, Donald E. Hoke, Roger R. Nicole, James I. Packer, Earl D. Radmacher, and R. C. Sproul labored very hard and literally around the clock to prepare a statement that might receive the approval of a great majority of the participants. Very special attention was devoted to the Nineteen Articles

⁶ This was first published in 1980 by the ICBI with the title *Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary*. It was republished as *Explaining Inerrancy* in 1996 by Ligonier Ministries and as *Can I Trust the Bible?* in 2009 by Reformation Trust (www.ReformationTrust.com), a division of Ligonier Ministries (www.Ligonier.org). It is reproduced here with the permission of Ligonier Ministries and Dr. Sproul.

of Affirmation and Denial. (The preamble and the short statement were also subjected to editorial revisions. The exposition was left largely as received.) After considerable discussion what was submitted received a very substantial endorsement by the participants: 240 (out of a total of 268) actually affixed their signatures to the Nineteen Articles.

It was indicated that the Draft Committee would meet within the year to review and, if necessary, revise the statement. Their meeting took place in the fall of 1979 with Drs. Norman L. Geisler, Harold W. Hoehner, Roger R. Nicole and Earl D. Radmacher in attendance. It was the consensus of those present that we should not undertake to modify a statement that so many people had signed, both at the summit meeting and afterwards. But in order to ward off misunderstandings, and to provide an exposition of the position advocated by the ICBI, it was thought desirable to provide a commentary on each of the Articles. A draft was prepared to this effect by Dr. R. C. Sproul, and this was submitted to the members of the Draft Committee. A number of editorial changes were made, and it is this which is now offered to the public.

Dr. Sproul is well qualified to write such a commentary. He had prepared the first draft of the Nineteen Articles, and although this underwent considerable change in the editing process, Dr. Sproul was closely related to all discussions conducted by the Draft Committee. The present, more extensive text will make clear even to those who are not fully abreast of current discussions on inspiration exactly what is meant to be affirmed and denied. Obviously, those who have signed the Articles will not necessarily concur in every interpretation advocated by the commentary. Not even the members of the Draft Committee are bound by this, and perhaps not even Dr. Sproul, since his text underwent certain editorial revisions. However, this commentary does represent an effort at making clear the precise position of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy as a whole.

In the editing process we strove to take account of the comments that were forwarded to us. In some cases we could not concur with those who made comments, and therefore the changes solicited could not be made. In other cases, matters were brought to our notice which in our judgment deserved consideration. We trust that the commentary will remove ambiguities and deal effectively with possible misunderstandings.

There is a remarkable unity of views among the members of the Council and the Board, and this should be reflected not only in the Articles in their original form but also in the present pamphlet. It has not been the aim of those who were gathered at Chicago to break relations with those who do not share our convictions concerning the doctrine of Scripture. Rather, the aim has been and continues to be to bear witness to what we are convinced is the biblical doctrine on the great subject of the inspiration of Scripture. We hope in making this confession and presenting this commentary to dispel misunderstandings with which the doctrine of inerrancy has so frequently been burdened and to present with winsomeness and clarity this great tenet in witness to which we are gladly uniting.

- Roger R. Nicole

THE WORD OF GOD AND AUTHORITY

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, adopted at a meeting of more than two hundred evangelical leaders in October 1978, rightly affirms that “the authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian church in this and every age.” But authority cannot stand in isolation, as the Statement shows. The authority of the Bible is based on its being the written Word of God, and because the Bible is the Word of God and the God of the Bible is Truth and speaks truthfully, authority is linked to inerrancy. If the Bible is the Word of God and if God is a God of truth, then the Bible must be inerrant—not merely in some of its parts, as some modern theologians are saying, but totally, as the church for the most part has said down through the ages of its history.

Some of the terms used in the debate about the authority and inerrancy of the Bible are technical ones. Some show up in the Chicago Statement, but they are not difficult to come to understand. They can be mastered (and the doctrine of inerrancy more fully understood) by a little reading and study. This commentary on the Chicago Statement attempts to provide such material in reference to the Nineteen Articles of Affirmation and Denial, which form the heart of the document. The full text of the Statement appears as an Appendix.

ARTICLE I: AUTHORITY

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.*

The initial article of the Chicago Statement is designed to establish the degree of authority that is to be attributed to the Bible. This article, as well as Article II, makes the statement clearly a Protestant one. Though it is true that the Roman Catholic Church has consistently and historically maintained a high view of the inspiration of Holy Scripture, there remains the unresolved problem of the uniqueness and sufficiency of biblical authority for the church.

Rome has placed alongside of Scripture the traditions of the church as a supplement to Scripture and, consequently, a second source of special revelation beyond the scope of Scripture. It has been a continuous assertion of the Roman Catholic Church that since the church established the extent and scope of the New Testament and Old Testament canon there is a certain sense in which the authority of the Bible is subordinate to and dependent upon the church's approval. It is particularly these issues of the relationship of church and canon and of the question of multiple sources of special revelation that are in view with both Article I and Article II.

In earlier drafts of Article I the extent of this canon was spelled out to include the 66 canonical books that are found and embraced within the context of most Protestant-sanctioned editions of the Bible. In discussions among the participants of the Summit and because of requests to the drafting committee, there was considerable sentiment for striking the words "66 canonical books" from the earlier drafts. This was due to some variance within Christendom as to the exact number of books that are to be recognized within the canon. For example, the Ethiopic Church has more books included in their canon than 66. The final draft affirms simply that the *Holy Scriptures* are to be received as the authoritative Word of God. For the vast majority of Protestants the designation "Holy Scripture" has clear reference to the 66 canonical

books, but it leaves room for those who differ on the canon question to participate in the confession of the nature of Scripture. The specific question of the number of books contained in that canon is left open in this Statement.

The whole question of the scope of canon or the list of books that make up our Bible may be one that confuses many people, particularly those who are accustomed to a clearly defined number of books by their particular church confessions. Some have argued that if one questions a particular book's canonicity this carries with it the implication that one does not believe in a divinely inspired Bible. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this in history is the fact that Martin Luther at one point in his ministry had strong reservations about including the book of James in the New Testament canon. Though it is abundantly clear that Luther believed in an inspired Bible, he still had questions about whether or not a particular book should be included in that inspired Bible. Several scholars have tried to deny that Luther ever believed in inspiration because of his questioning of the book of James. Here it is very important to see the difference between the question of the scope of the canon and the question of the inspiration of the books which are recognized as included in the canon. In other words, the nature of Scripture and the question of the extent of Scripture are two different questions which must not be confused.

A key word in the affirmation section of Article I is the word "received." The initial draft mentioned that the Scriptures are to be received by the church. The phrase "by the church" has been deleted because it is clear that the Word of God in Holy Scripture is to be received not only by the church, but by everyone. The word "received" has historical significance. In the church councils that considered the canon question the Latin word *recipimus* was used, meaning "we receive" the following books to be included in the canon. In that usage of the word "receive," it is clear that the church was not declaring certain books to be authoritative by virtue of the church's prior authority, but that the church was simply acknowledging the Word of God to be the Word of God. By the word "receive" they displayed their willingness to submit to what they regarded to be already the Word of God. Consequently, any notion that the church creates the Bible or is superior to the Bible is eliminated.

If any ambiguity about the relationship of Scripture to the church remains in the affirmation, it is removed in the subsequent denial: the Scriptures receive their authority from God, not from the church nor from any other human source.

ARTICLE II: SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

We affirm *that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the church is subordinate to that of Scripture.*

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

Article II of the Chicago Statement reinforces Article I and goes into more detail concerning the matters involved with it. Article II has in view the classical Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* which speaks of the unique authority of the Bible with respect to binding the consciences of men. The affirmation of Article II speaks of the Scriptures as “the supreme written norm.” Discussion concerning the word “supreme” was lengthy; alternate words were suggested and subsequently eliminated from the text. Words like “ultimate” and “only” were discarded in favor of “supreme.” The question at this point dealt with the fact that other written documents are important to the life of the church. For example, church creeds and confessions form the basis of subscription and unity of faith in many different Christian denominations and communities. Such creeds and confessions have a kind of normative authority within a given Christian body and have the effect of binding consciences within that particular context. However, it is a classic tenet of Protestants to recognize that all such creeds and confessions are fallible and cannot fully and finally bind the conscience of an individual believer. Only the Word of God has the kind of authority that can bind the conscience of men forever. So, though the articles acknowledge that there are other written norms recognized by different bodies of Christians, insofar as they are true, those written norms are derived from and are subordinate to the supreme written norm which is the Holy Scripture.

In the denial it is clearly spelled out that no church creed, council or declaration has authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible. Again, any idea of an equal authority level of tradition or church officers is repudiated by this statement. The whole question of a Christian’s obedience to authority structures apart from the Scripture was a matter of great discussion with regard to this article. For example, the Bible itself exhorts us to obey the civil

magistrates. We are certainly willing to subject ourselves to our own church confessions and to the authority structure of our ecclesiastical bodies. But the thrust of this article is to indicate that whatever lesser authorities there are, they never carry with them the authority of God Himself. There is a sense in which all authority in this world is derived and dependent upon the authority of God. God and God alone has intrinsic authority. That intrinsic authority is the authority given to the Bible since it is God's Word. Various Christian bodies have defined the extent of civil authority and ecclesiastical authority in different ways. For example, in Reformed churches the authority of the church is viewed as ministerial and declarative rather than ultimate and intrinsic. God and God alone has the absolute right to bind the consciences of men. Our consciences are justly bound to lesser authorities only when and if they are in conformity to the Word of God.

THE WORD OF GOD AND REVELATION

The next three articles deal with revelation. Article III defines what we mean when we say that the Bible is revelation and not merely a witness to revelation, as is affirmed by the neo-orthodox theologians. Article IV considers the use of human language as a vehicle for divine revelation. Article V notes the way in which the revelation of God unfolds progressively throughout Scripture so that later texts more fully expound the earlier ones. In these articles the framers of the Statement guard against any view which would lessen the unique nature of the Bible as God's written revelation or negate the teaching of some parts of it by appeal to other parts.

ARTICLE III: REVELATION

We affirm *that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.*

We deny *that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.*

Both the affirmation and denial of Article III have in view the controversial question of the objective character of divine revelation in Scripture. There has been considerable debate in the twentieth century on this issue, particularly with the rise of so-called dialectical or “Neo-Orthodox” theology. This approach sought to promote a “dynamic” view of Scripture which sees the authority of Scripture functioning in a dynamic relationship of Word and hearing of the Word. Several theologians have denied that the Bible in and of itself, objectively, is revelation. They maintain that revelation does not occur until or unless there is an inward, subjective human response to that Word. Scholars like Emil Brunner, for example, have insisted that the Bible is not itself revelation, but is merely a witness to that revelation which is found in Christ. It has been fashionable in certain quarters to maintain that special revelation is embodied in Christ and in Christ alone, and that to consider the Bible as objective revelation would be to detract from the uniqueness of the person of Jesus Christ who is the Word made flesh.

The spirit of these articles is to oppose a disjunction between the revelation that is given to us in the person of Christ objectively and the revelation that comes to us in equally objective terms in the Word of God inscripturated. Here the Bible is seen not merely as a catalyst for revelation, but as revelation itself. If the Bible is God’s Word and its content proceeds from Him, then its content is to be seen as revelation. Here revelation is viewed as “propositional.” It is propositional not because the Bible is written in the style of logical equations or analytical formulas. It is propositional because it communicates a content which may be understood as propositions.

In the affirmation of Article III the words “in its entirety” are also significant. There are those who have claimed that the Bible contains here and there, in specified places, revelation

from God, but that it is the task of the believer individually or the church corporately to separate the parts of Scripture which are revelatory from those which are not. This article by implication repudiates such an approach to Scripture inasmuch as the whole of Scripture, its entire contents, is to be seen as being divine revelation.

The denial stated in Article III reinforces the objectivity of revelation in Scripture and maintains that the validity of that revelation does not depend upon human responses. The Bible's truth does not depend in any way on whether or not a person believes the truth.

The central thrust of Article III is to declare with confidence that the content of Scripture is not the result of human imagination or cleverly devised philosophical opinions, but that it reflects God's sovereign disclosure about himself and all matters which are touched upon by Scripture. The Bible, then, embodies truth that comes to us from beyond the scope of our own abilities. It comes from God himself.

ARTICLE IV: HUMAN LANGUAGE

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

We deny *that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.*

One of the most significant attacks on biblical inerrancy that has come to light in the twentieth century is that based on the limitations of human language. Since the Bible was not written by God himself, but by human writers, the question has emerged again and again whether such human involvement by virtue of the limitations built in human creatureliness would, of necessity, render the Bible less than infallible. Since men are not infallible in and of themselves, and are prone to error in all that they do, would it not follow logically that anything coming from the pen

of man must be errant? To this we reply, erroneousness is not an inevitable concomitant of human nature. Adam, before the fall, may well have been free from proneness to error, and Christ, though fully human, never erred. Since the fall it is a common tendency of men to err. We deny, however, that it is necessary for men to err always and everywhere in what they say or write, even apart from inspiration.

However, with the aid of divine inspiration and the superintendence of the Holy Spirit in the giving of sacred Scripture, the writings of the Bible are free from the normal tendencies and propensities of fallen men to distort the truth. Though our language, and especially our language about God, is never comprehensive and exhaustive in its ability to capture eternal truths, nevertheless it is adequate to give us truth without falsehood. For example, if we made a statement that Chicago is a city in the state of Illinois, the truth communicated by that statement would in no way be exhaustive. That is, all that could possibly be understood of the nature and scope of the city of Chicago would not be known by any human being who made such a statement, nor would all the complexities that go into and comprise the state of Illinois be understood totally by the speaker. Certainly if God made the statement, “Chicago is a city in the state of Illinois,” within his mind there would be total comprehension of all that is involved in Chicago and Illinois. Nevertheless, the fact that God makes the statement “Chicago is a city in the state of Illinois” would not in itself make the statement more or less true than if a human being made the statement. Though we recognize that human language is limited by creatureliness, we do not allow the inference that therefore human language must necessarily be distortive of truth.

If human language were to be judged intrinsically inadequate to convey revelation, there would be no possible means by which God could reveal anything about himself to us in verbal form. Since, however, the Bible teaches that man is created in the image of God and that there is some point of likeness between man and God, communication between God and man is possible. Such possibility of communication is built into creation by God himself.

With respect to the denial that human language is so limited that it is rendered inadequate, particularly in view of the effects of sin on our human culture and language, we must say that though man’s fall renders us guilty before the divine judgment and, though “all men are liars,” it does not follow necessarily that therefore “all men lie all the time.” Though all of us lie

at one time or another, this does not mean that we lie every time we speak. Again, that tendency toward corruption, distortion and falsehood is precisely that which we believe to be overcome by the divine inspiration and involvement in the preparation of Holy Scripture. Thus, we think that skepticism about biblical integrity based on inferences drawn from the adequacy or inadequacy of human speech is unwarranted.

ARTICLE V: PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

We affirm *that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive.*

We deny *that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.*

The issues in view in Article V are of profound importance to the life of the church and are very complicated at times. What is simply stated in the affirmation is a recognition that within the Bible itself there is a progressive revelation. All that has been revealed of God in the totality of Scripture is not found, for example, in the book of Genesis. Much of the content of God's redemptive activity in Christ is hinted at in part and given in shadowy ways in the earlier portions of the Old Testament. But throughout sacred Scripture the content of divine revelation is expanded, ultimately to the fullness reached in the New Testament. That is what is meant by progressive revelation in this context, that the revelation within Scripture unfolds in an ever-deepening and broadening way.

Having made that recognition, the article of denial makes clear that such progress and expansion of revelation does not deny or contradict what has been given earlier. Though certain precepts which were obligatory to people in the Old Testament period are no longer so in the New Testament, this does not mean that they were discontinued because they were wicked in the past and now God has corrected what he formerly endorsed, but rather that certain practices have

become superseded by newer practices that are consistent with fulfillment of Old Testament activities. This in no way suggests that the Old Testament is irrelevant to the New Testament believer or that earlier revelation may be dismissed out of hand in light of newer revelation. The Bible is still to be regarded as a holistic book where the Old Testament helps us understand the New Testament and the New Testament sheds significant light on the Old Testament. Although progressive revelation is recognized, this progressiveness is not to be viewed as a license to play loosely with portions of Scripture, setting one dimension of revelation against another within the Bible itself. The Bible's coherency and consistency is not, vitiated by progressive revelation within it.

It is also added by way of denial that no normative revelation has been given to the church since the close of the New Testament canon. The denial does not mean that God the Holy Spirit has stopped working, or that the Holy Spirit in no way leads his people today. Part of the difficulty is that theological words are used in different ways within different Christian communities. For example, what one group may call "revelation" another group may define as "illumination." Thus the qualifying word "normative" is important to understanding the last part of the denial. What is meant here is that no revelation has been given since the first century that merits or warrants inclusion in the canon of Holy Scripture. Private leadings or guidance or "revelations," as some may term them, may not be seen as having the force or authority of Holy Scripture.

THE WORD OF GOD AND INSPIRATION

Inspiration is the way in which God gave his Word to us through human authors, but how he did is a matter not fully understood. In this section of the Articles of Affirmation and Denial the framers of the document explicitly deny understanding the mode of inspiration. But they affirm, as Scripture itself also does (2 Tim. 3:16), that the Bible is the product of divine inspiration and that this work extended through the human writers to each section and even each word of the original documents. The process of inspiration did not make the biblical writers automatons, for their books reveal differences of vocabulary, style and other matters of variation between one

human author and another. But inspiration did overcome any tendency they may have had to error, with the result that the words they wrote were precisely what God, the divine author, intended us to have.

ARTICLE VI: VERBAL PLENARY INSPIRATION

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 the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.*

What is in view in Article VI is the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration. Plenary inspiration means that the whole of Scripture is given by divine inspiration. Because some have maintained that the whole has been given by inspiration but some parts of that whole are not of divine inspiration we are speaking of the origin of Scripture, which does not begin with the insights of men, but comes from God himself.

In the affirmative section of Article VI we read the phrase “down to the very words of the original.” The clause “down to the very words” refers to the extent of inspiration, and the words “of the original” indicate that it is the autographs that were inspired. The limiting of inspiration to the autographs is covered more fully later in Article X, though it is plain in this article that the verbal inspiration of the Bible refers to the original manuscripts.

The fact that Article VI speaks of divine inspiration down to the very words of the original may conjure up in some people’s minds a notion of dictation of the words of Scripture by God. The doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration has often been charged with carrying with it the implication of a dictation theory of inspiration. No such theory is spelled out in this article, nor is it implied. In fact, in Article VII the framers of the statement deny the dictation theory.

The issue of dictation has raised problems in church history. In the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century the Roman Catholic Church did use the word *dictante*, meaning “dictating,” with respect to the Spirit’s work in the giving of the ancient texts. In the Protestant camp, John Calvin spoke of the biblical writers as being *amanuenses* or secretaries. Added to this is the complex fact that there are portions of Scripture which seem to be given by some form of dictation, such as the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses. However, in the modern era dictation as a method carries with it the canceling out of human literary styles, vocabulary choices, and the like. This article does not mean to imply such a view of inspiration that would negate or vitiate the literary styles of the individual authors of the biblical documents. The sense in which Calvin, for example, spoke of secretaries and even in which Trent spoke of dictating could hardly be construed to conform to modern methods of dictating using sophisticated equipment such as dictaphones and secretarial transcriptions. The historical context in which these words have been used in the past has specific reference to the fact that inspiration shows some analogy to a man issuing a message that is put together by a secretary. The analogy points to the question of origin of the message. In the doctrine of inspiration what is at stake is the origin of the message from God rather than from human initiation.

The mode of inspiration is left as a mystery by these articles (cf Article VII). Inspiration, as used here, involves a divine superintendence which preserved the writers in their word choices from using words that would falsify or distort the message of Scripture. Thus, on the one hand, the Statement affirms that God’s superintendence and inspiration of the Bible applied down to the very words and, on the other hand, denies that he canceled out the exercise of the writers’ personalities in the choices of words used to express the truth revealed.

Evangelical Christians have wanted to avoid the notion that biblical writers were passive instruments like pens in the hands of God, yet at the same time they affirm that the net result of the process of inspiration would be the same. Calvin, for example, says that we should treat the Bible as if we have heard God audibly speaking its message. That is, it carries the same weight of authority as if God himself were heard to be giving utterance to the words of Scripture. (*Institutes*, I, vii, 1; *Sermons on Gospel Harmony* XLVI, p. 164 and *passim*). That does not mean that Calvin believed or taught that God did in fact utter the words audibly. We do not know the process by which inspired Scripture was given. But we are saying that inspiration, however God

brought it about, results in the net effect that every word of Scripture carries with it the weight of God's authority.

ARTICLE VII: INSPIRATION

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

We deny *that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.*

Article VII spells out in more detail what is implied in Article VI. Here clear reference is given to the human writers of the text. The human writers become the human instruments by which God's Word comes to us. Classically the Holy Scriptures have been called the *Verbum Dei*, the Word of God, or even the *vox Dei*, the voice of God. Yet, at the same time, Holy Scripture comes to us as the words of men. In other words, there is an agency of humanity through which God's divine Word is communicated; yet the origin of Scripture is divine.

What the framers of the document have in view here is the primary meaning of the word *theopneustos* in 2 Timothy 3:16, the word translated "inspired by God." The word *theopneustos* means literally "God breathed" and has primary reference to God's breathing out his word rather than breathing in some kind of effect upon human writers. So expiration is a more accurate term than inspiration with respect to the origin of Scripture. But we use the term inspiration to cover the concept of the whole process by which the Word comes to us. Initially it comes from the mouth of God (speaking, of course, metaphorically). From its origin in God it is then transmitted through the agency of human writers under divine supervision and superintendence. The next step in the process of communication is the apprehension of the divine message by human beings. It is explicitly stated in this article that the precise mode by which God accomplishes

inspiration remains a mystery. The document makes no attempt to define the “how” of divine inspiration or even to suggest that the method is known to us.

The word inspiration can be used and has been used in our language to refer to moments of genius-level insight, of intensified states of consciousness or of heightened acts of human achievement. We speak of inspired poetry, meaning that the author achieved levels of insight and brilliance that are extraordinary. However, in this dimension of “inspiration” no suggestion is at hand that the source of inspiration is divine power. There are human levels of inspiration reflected in heroic acts, brilliant insights, and intensified states of consciousness. But that is not what is meant by the theological use of the term inspiration. Here the statement is making clear that by divine inspiration something transcending all human states of inspiration is in view, something in which the power and supervision of God are at work. Thus, the articles are saying that the Bible, though it is a human book insofar as it is written by human writers, has its humanity transcended by virtue of its divine origin and inspiration.

ARTICLE VIII: HUMAN AUTHORS

We affirm *that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.*

We deny *that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.*

Article VIII reiterates that God’s work of inspiration does not cancel out the humanity of the human writers he uses to accomplish his purpose. The writers of Scripture were chosen and prepared by God for their sacred task. However, whatever the process of inspiration may have been, it does not include the canceling of the personality of the writers as they wrote. Though the word is not used in the article, what is clearly in view is a denial of any kind of mechanistic or mechanical inspiration. Mechanical inspiration would reduce the human authors to the level of

automatons, robot-like machines. An analysis of Scripture makes clear that the distinctive personalities and writing styles vary from one human writer to another. The style, for example, of St. Luke is obviously different from that of Matthew. The literary structures found in the writing of Daniel differ greatly from those found, for example, in the writing of James. Men of Hebrew origin tended to write in Hebraic styles, and those of the Greek cultural background tended to write in a Greek style. However, through divine inspiration God made it possible for his truth to be communicated in an inspired way making use of the backgrounds, personalities and literary styles of these various writers. The human writers were not machines and ought not to be conceived of as being without personality. What is overcome or overridden by inspiration is not human personality, style or literary structure, but human tendencies to distortion, falsehood and error.

THE WORD OF GOD AND INERRANCY

Articles IX through XII deal with the matter of greatest present concern: inerrancy. They seek to define terms and answer the chief questions that have been raised: If the Bible has come to us through human authors, which the earlier articles acknowledge, and if it is natural for human beings to err, which all confess, isn't the Bible necessarily errant? Doesn't it cease to be authentically human if it does not have errors? Again, if inerrancy applies properly only to the original manuscript, called autographs, and if we do not possess these, as we do not, isn't the argument for inerrancy meaningless? Or doesn't it stand only by appealing to documents that do not exist and whose inerrant state cannot be verified? Why can't inerrancy be applied to those parts of the Bible that deal with salvation and not to those parts that deal with history, science and other "unimportant" and "non-essential" matters?

ARTICLE IX: INERRANCY

We affirm *that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the biblical authors were moved to speak and write.*

We deny *that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.*

The affirmation of Article IX indicates that inspiration guarantees that the writings of Scripture are true and trustworthy. That is, they are not false, deceptive, or fraudulent in what they communicate.

As we dealt with the problem of the limitations of human language in Article IV, so we face now the difficulty of the speaking of truth by creatures who are not omniscient. It is one thing for God to confer infallibility to the writings and quite another to confer omniscience to the writers. Omniscience and infallibility must be carefully distinguished. Although in God they are cojoined, for man it is different. Omniscience refers to the scope of one's knowledge and infallibility, not to the reliability of his pronouncements. One who knows better can make a false statement if his intentions are to deceive. And, vice versa, a person with limited knowledge can make infallible statements if they can be guaranteed to be completely reliable. Thus we say that though the biblical writings are inspired, this does not imply thereby that the writers knew everything there was to be known or that they were infallible of themselves. The knowledge that they communicate is not comprehensive, but it is true and trustworthy as far as it goes.

The denial of Article IX has to do with man's propensity as a finite and fallen creature to introduce distortion or falsehood into God's Word. This was covered from another angle in Article IV. But what is in view here is the recurring charge that verbal inspiration or a confession of the inerrancy of Scripture carries with it a docetic view of Scripture. Docetism applies to a particular distortion of the biblical view of Jesus. In the earliest days of the Christian church there were those, usually associated with the school of gnosticism, who believed that Jesus did

not really have a human nature or a human body. They argued that he only seemed or appeared to have a human body. This heresy was called docetism from the Greek word *dokeo* which means to seem, to think or to appear. Those who denied the reality of the incarnation and maintained that Jesus had but a phantom body were accused of this heresy. In a more refined and sophisticated sense docetism has come to apply to any failure to take seriously the real limitations of the human nature of Jesus.

The charge of biblical docetism has been leveled against advocates of inerrancy, most notably by Karl Barth. He accuses us of holding a view of inspiration in which the true humanity of the biblical writers is canceled out by the intrusion of the divine characteristics of infallibility. For Barth it is fundamental to our humanity that we are liable to error. If the classic statement is *errare est humanum*, to err is human, we reply that though it is true that a common characteristic of mankind is to err, it does not follow that men always err or that error is necessary for humanity. If such were to be the case, then it would be necessary for us to assert that Adam, before he fell, had to err or that he was not human. And we must also assert that in heaven, in a state of glorification and perfected sanctification, we must continue to err if we are to continue to be human. Not only must we ascribe such error to Adam before the fall and to glorified Christians, we would also have to apply it to the incarnate Christ. Error would be intrinsic to his humanity, and it would have been necessary for Jesus to distort the truth in order to be fully human. Let us never engage in such blasphemy even though we confess the depth to which we have fallen and the high degree of the propensity that we do have to err. Even apart from inspiration, it is not necessary for a human being to err in order to be human. So if it is possible for an uninspired person to speak the truth without error, how much more will it be the case for one who is under the influence of inspiration?

Finitude implies a necessary limitation of knowledge but not necessarily a distortion of knowledge. The trustworthy character of the biblical text should not be denied on the ground of man's finitude.

ARTICLE X: THE AUTOGRAPHS

We affirm *that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy.*

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 any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs.*

We further deny *that this absence renders the assertion of biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.*

Article X deals directly with the perennial issue of the relationship of the text of Scripture that we presently have to the original documents which have not been preserved except through the means of copies. In the first instance, inspiration applies strictly to the original autographs of Scripture, to the original works of the inspired authors. What this does indicate is that the infallible control of God in the production of the original Scripture has not been miraculously perpetuated through the ages in the copying and translating process. It is plainly apparent that there are some minute variations between the manuscript copies that we possess and that the translating process will inject additional variants for those who read the Scripture in a language other than Hebrew or Greek. So the framers of the document are not arguing for a perpetually inspired transmission of the text.

Since we do not have the original manuscripts, some have urged that an appeal to the lost originals renders the whole case for the inspiration of the Scripture irrelevant. To reason in this manner is to denigrate the very serious work that has been done in the field of textual criticism. Textual criticism is the science which seeks to reconstruct an original text by a careful analysis and evaluation of the manuscripts we presently possess. This task has to be accomplished with respect to all documents from antiquity that have reached us through manuscript copies. The Old

and New Testament Scriptures are probably the texts which have reached us with the most extensive and reliable attestation. For more than ninety-nine percent of the cases the original text can be reconstructed to a practical certainty. Even in the few cases where some perplexity remains, this does not impinge on the meaning of Scripture to the point of clouding a tenet of the faith or a mandate of life. Thus, in the Bible as we have it (and as it is conveyed to us through faithful translations) we do have for practical purposes the very word of God, inasmuch as the manuscripts do convey to us the complete vital truth of the originals.

The further affirmation of Article X is that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. Though we do not actually possess the originals, we have such well reconstructed translations and copies that to the extent to which they do correspond to the original documents they may be said to be the Word of God. But because of the evident presence of copy errors and errors of translation the distinction must be made between the original work of inspiration in the autographs and the human labor of translating and copying those autographs.

The denial has in view the important point that in those minuscule segments of existing manuscripts where textual criticism has not been able to ascertain with absolute certainty what the original reading was, no essential article of the Christian faith is affected.

To limit inerrancy or inspiration to the original manuscripts does not make the whole contention irrelevant. It does make a difference. If the original text were errant, the church would have the option of rejecting the teachings of that errant text. If the original text is inerrant (and the science of textual criticism must be depended upon to reconstruct that inerrant text), we have no legitimate basis for disobeying a mandate of Scripture where the text is not in doubt. For example, if two theologians agreed that the original text were inerrant and if both agreed as to what the present copy taught and further agreed that the present copy was an accurate representation of the original, then it would follow irresistibly that the two men would be under divine obligation to obey that text. If, on the other hand, we asserted that the original manuscripts were possibly errant and the two theologians then agreed as to what the Bible taught and also agreed that the present translation or copy faithfully represented the original, neither would be under moral obligation to submit to the teachings of that possibly errant original. Therein lies the important issue of the relevancy of the character of the original manuscript.

ARTICLE XI: INFALLIBILITY

We affirm *that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading 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 errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.*

The central affirmation of Article XI is the infallibility of Scripture. Infallibility is defined in this context in positive terms as implying the truthfulness and reliability of all matters that Scripture addresses. Negatively, infallibility is defined as the quality of that which does not mislead.

The denial of Article XI touches a very important point of controversy, particularly in the modern era. There are those who maintain that the Bible is infallible but not inerrant. Thus, infallibility is separated from inerrancy. The denial argues that it is not possible to maintain with consistency that something is at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. To maintain such a disjunction between infallibility and inerrancy would involve a glaring contradiction.

Though the words infallible and inerrant have often been used interchangeably and virtually as synonyms in our language, nevertheless there remains a historic, technical distinction between the two words. Infallibility has to do with the question of ability or potential. That which is infallible is said to be unable to make mistakes or to err. The distinction here between that definition of infallible and the definition of inerrant is the distinction between the potential and the actual, the hypothetical and the real. That which is inerrant is that which in fact does not err. Again, theoretically, something may be fallible and at the same time inerrant. That is, it would be possible for someone to err who in fact does not err. However, the reverse is not true. If someone is infallible, that means he cannot err and if he cannot err, then he does not err. To assert that something is infallible yet at the same time errant is either to distort the meaning of “infallible” and/or “errant,” or else to be in a state of confusion. Thus, infallibility and inerrancy in this sense cannot be separated though they may indeed be distinguished in terms of meaning.

But anything that is infallible, that is, is incapable of erring, cannot at the same time err. For if it errs, it proves that it is capable of erring and therefore is not infallible.

In situations where infallibility has been substituted for inerrancy it has usually been designed to articulate a lower view of Scripture than that indicated by the word inerrant. In fact, however, the term infallibility in its original and technical meaning is a higher term than the term inerrant. Again, it is important to see that something which is fallible could theoretically be inerrant. But that which is infallible could not theoretically be at the same time errant.

ARTICLE XII: INERRANCY OF THE WHOLE

We affirm *that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud or deceit.*

We deny *that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science.*

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 XII affirms clearly and unambiguously the inerrancy of sacred Scripture. In the affirmation the meaning of inerrancy is given in negative terms: that which is inerrant is “free from falsehood, fraud or deceit.” Here inerrancy is defined by the way of negation, by establishing parameters beyond which we may not move, boundaries we may not transgress. An inerrant Scripture cannot contain falsehood, fraud or deceit in its teachings or assertions.

The denial explicitly rejects the tendency of some to limit infallibility and inerrancy to specific segments of the biblical message, such as spiritual, religious or redemptive themes, excluding assertions from the fields of history or science. It has been fashionable in certain quarters to maintain that the Bible is not normal history, but is redemptive history with the accent

on redemption. Theories are then established that would limit inspiration to the redemptive theme of redemptive history allowing the historical dimension of redemptive history to be errant. However, the fact that the Bible is not written like other forms of history does not negate the historical dimension with which it is intimately involved. Though the Bible is indeed *redemptive* history, it is also redemptive *history*, and this means that the acts of salvation wrought by God actually occurred in the space-time world.

With respect to matters of science, the further denial that scientific hypotheses about earth history may be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on such matters as creation and the flood again rejects the idea that the Bible speaks merely in areas of spiritual value or concerning redemptive themes. The Bible does have something to say about the origin of the earth, about the advent of man, about creation, and about such matters that have scientific import, such as the question of the flood. It is important to note that the second denial, “that scientific hypotheses about earth history may not be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on matters such as the creation and the flood,” does not carry with it the implication that scientific hypotheses or scientific research are useless to the student of the Bible or that science never has anything to contribute to an understanding of biblical material. It merely denies that the actual teaching of Scripture can be overturned by teachings from external sources.

To illustrate the intention of the second denial of Article XII, recall the classic example of the church’s debate with the scientific community in the Middle Ages over the question of geocentricity and heliocentricity. The church had adopted the ancient Ptolemaic view that the earth was the center of the universe. Hence, the concept of geocentricity. Scientific inquiry and studies, particularly attending the advent of the telescope, led many scholars to believe that the sun, not the earth, was the center at least of our solar system, for the evidence from the scientific community for the centrality of the sun rather than the earth was seen to be compelling and overwhelming. We remember with embarrassment that Galileo was condemned as a heretic for asserting heliocentricity against what the church believed to be the teaching of Scripture. However, the scientific discoveries made it necessary for the church to re-examine the teaching on Scripture to see whether or not Scripture actually taught geocentricity or if this was an inference read into the Scripture on the basis of an earlier world view. Upon re-examining what Scripture really taught, the church came to the conclusion that there was no real conflict with

science on this question of geocentricity because the Bible did not in fact in any place explicitly teach or assert that the earth was the center of either the solar system or the universe. Here the advances of science helped the church to correct an earlier misinterpretation of Scripture. To say that science cannot overturn the teaching of Scripture is not to say that science cannot aid the church in understanding Scripture, or even correct false inferences drawn from Scripture or actual misinterpretations of the Scripture. On the other hand, this does not give one license arbitrarily to reinterpret Scripture to force it into conformity to secular theories of origins or the like. For example, if the secular community asserts that the origin of humanity is the result of a cosmic accident or the product of blind, impersonal forces, such a view cannot possibly be reconciled with the biblical view of the purposive act of God's creation of mankind without doing radical violence to the Bible itself.

Questions of the extent of the flood or the literary genre of the earlier chapters of Genesis are not answered by this Statement. Questions of biblical interpretation that touch on the field of hermeneutics remain for further investigation and discussion. What the Scriptures actually teach about creation and the flood is not spelled out by this article; but it does spell out that whatever the Bible teaches about creation and the flood cannot be negated by secular theories.

THE WORD OF GOD AND TRUTH

The meaning of "truth" should be self-evident, but this has not been the case where discussions of the truthfulness of the Bible are concerned. What is truth? Some have argued that the Bible is not truthful unless it conforms to modern standards of scientific precision - no round numbers, precise grammar, scientific descriptions of natural phenomena, and so forth. Others have taken an entirely opposite view, arguing that the Bible is truthful so long as it attains its general spiritual ends, regardless of whether it actually makes false statements. Articles XIII through XV thread their way between these extremes. They maintain that the Bible is to be evaluated by its own principles of truth, which do not necessarily include modern forms of scientific expression, but argue at the same time that the statements of Scripture are always

without error and, therefore, do not mislead the reader in any way. Article XIV deals with the way apparent discrepancies involving problems not yet resolved should be handled.

ARTICLE XIII: TRUTH

We affirm *the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.*

We deny *that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose.*

We further deny *that inerrancy is negated 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 hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.*

With the combination of the affirmation and denial of Article XIII regarding the term inerrancy, it may seem to some that, in view of all the qualifications that are listed in the denial, this word is no longer a useful or appropriate term to use with respect to the Bible. Some have said that it has “suffered the death of a thousand qualifications.” The same, of course, could be said about the word “God.” Because of the complexity of our concept of God, it has become necessary to qualify in great detail the differences in what is being affirmed and what is being denied when we use the term God. Such qualifications do not negate the value of the word, but only serve to sharpen its precision and usefulness.

It is important to note that the word inerrancy is called a theological term by Article XIII. It is an appropriate theological term to refer to the complete truthfulness of Scripture. That is basically what is being asserted with the term inerrancy: that the Bible is completely true, that all its affirmations and denials correspond with reality. Theological terms other than inerrancy are

frequently in need of qualification and cannot be taken in a crass, literal sense. For example, the term omnipotence, when used to refer to God, does not literally mean what it may seem to. That is, omnipotence does not mean that God can do anything. The omnipotence of God does not mean that God can lie or that God could die or that God could be God and not God at the same time and in the same relationship. Nevertheless, as a term that has reference to God's complete sovereign control and authority over the created world, omnipotence is a perfectly useful and appropriate term in our theological vocabulary.

Because the term inerrancy must be qualified, some have thought that it would be better to exclude it from the church's vocabulary. However, the qualifications of the term are not new nor are they particularly cumbersome, and the word serves as an appropriate safeguard from those who would attack the truthfulness of Scripture in subtle ways. When we speak of inerrancy, then, we are speaking of the fact that the Bible does not violate its own principles of truth. This does not mean that the Bible is free from grammatical irregularities or the like, but that it does not contain assertions which are in conflict with objective reality.

The first denial that "the Bible ought not to be evaluated according to standards of truth and error alien to its own use or purpose" indicates that it would be inappropriate to evaluate the Bible's internal consistency with its own truth claims by standards foreign to the Bible's own view of truth. When we say that the truthfulness of Scripture ought to be evaluated according to its own standards that means that for the Scripture to be true to its claim it must have an internal consistency compatible with the biblical concept of truth and that all the claims of the Bible must correspond with reality, whether that reality is historical, factual or spiritual.

The second denial gives us a list of qualifications that is not intended to be exhaustive but rather illustrative of the type of considerations which must be kept in mind when one seeks to define the word inerrancy.

Modern technical precision. Inerrancy is not vitiated by the fact, for example, that the Bible occasionally uses round numbers. To say that truth has been distorted when, for example, the size of a crowd or the size of an army is estimated in round numbers would be to impose a criterion of truth that is foreign to the literature under examination. When a newspaper even in modern times says that 50,000 people assembled for a football game they are not considered to

be engaging in falsehood, fraud or deceit because they have rounded off a number of 49,878, for example, to 50,000. It is an appropriate use of quantitative measurement in historical reporting that does not involve falsehood.

Irregularities of grammar or spelling. Though it is more beautiful and attractive to speak the truth with a fluent style and proper grammar, grammatical correctness is not necessary for the expression of truth. For example, if a man were on trial for murder and was asked if he killed his wife on February 13, and replied “I ain’t killed nobody never,” the crudity of his grammar would have nothing to do with the truth or falsehood of his statement. He can hardly be convicted of murder because his plea of innocence was couched within the context of rough and “errant” grammar. Inerrancy is not related to the grammatical propriety or impropriety of the language of Scripture.

Observational descriptions of nature. With respect to natural phenomena it is clear that the Bible speaks from the perspective of the observer on many occasions. The Bible speaks of the sun rising and setting and of the sun moving across the heavens. From the perspective of common observation it is perfectly appropriate to describe things as they appear to the human eye. To accuse the Bible of denying planetary motion would again be to impose a foreign perspective and criterion on the Scriptures. No one is offended when the weatherman speaks of sunrises and sunsets. No one accuses the weather bureau of seeking to revert to a medieval perspective of geocentricity or of falsifying the weather forecast by speaking of sunsets and sunrises. Those terms are perfectly appropriate to describe things as they appear to the observer.

The reporting of falsehoods. Some have maintained that the Bible is not inerrant because it reports falsehoods such as the lies of Satan and the fraudulent teachings of false prophets. However, though the Bible does in fact contain false statements, they are reported as being lies and falsehoods. So this in no way vitiates the truth value of the biblical record, but only enhances it.

The use of hyperbole. The use of hyperbole has been appealed to as a technical reason for rejecting inerrancy. However, hyperbole is a perfectly legitimate literary device. Hyperbole involves the intentional exaggeration of a statement to make a point. It provides the weight of intensity and emphasis that would otherwise be lacking. That the Bible uses hyperbole is without

doubt. That hyperbole vitiates inerrancy is denied. The framers of the document maintain that the use of hyperbole is perfectly consistent with the Bible's own view of truth.

Other matters, such as the topical arrangement of material, the use of free citations (for example, from the Old Testament by the New Testament writers) and various selections of material and parallel accounts, where different writers include some information that other writers do not have and delete some information that others include, in no way destroys the truthfulness of what is being reported. Though biblical writers may have arranged their material differently, they do not affirm that Jesus said on one occasion what he never said on that occasion. Neither are they claiming that another parallel account is wrong for not including what they themselves include. As an itinerant preacher Jesus no doubt said many similar things on different occasions.

By biblical standards of truth and error is meant the view used both in the Bible and in everyday life, viz., a correspondence view of truth. This part of the article is directed toward those who would redefine truth to relate merely to redemptive intent, the purely personal or the like, rather than to mean that which corresponds with reality. For example, when Jesus affirmed that Jonah was in "the belly of the great fish" this statement is true, not simply because of the redemptive significance the story of Jonah has, but also because it is literally and historically true. The same may be said of the New Testament assertions about Adam, Moses, David and other Old Testament persons as well as about Old Testament events.

ARTICLE XIV: CONSISTENCY

We affirm *the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.*

We deny *that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.*

Because the Bible is the Word of God and reflects his truthful character, it is important to affirm that it is one. Though it contains much information of a wide diversity of scope and interest, nevertheless there is an internal unity and consistency to the Word of God that flows from the nature of God's truth. God's truthfulness brings unity out of diversity. God is not an author of incoherency or of contradiction. His Word is consistent as well as coherent.

The denial in Article XIV deals with the particular problems of harmonization between texts that appear to be contradictory and of a number of other alleged errors and discrepancies pointed out repeatedly by critics. It must be acknowledged that there are some as yet unresolved apparent discrepancies in Scripture. A great deal of careful scrutiny has been applied to the investigation of these, and that effort has yielded very positive results. A great many alleged contradictions have been resolved, some in the early church and others more recently. The trend has been in the direction of reducing problems rather than increasing them. New knowledge acquired about the ancient texts and the meaning of language in the biblical age as well as new discoveries coming from manuscripts and parchments uncovered by archaeology have given substantial help in resolving problems and have provided a solid basis for optimism with respect to future resolution of remaining difficulties. Difficulties that have not been resolved may yet be resolved under further scrutiny. This approach to the question of the resolution of difficulties may seem at first glance to be an exercise in "special pleading." However, if any work deserves special consideration it is sacred Scripture. Before we jump to the conclusion that we are faced with an ultimately unresolvable contradiction we must exhaust all possible illuminating research. A spirit of humility demands that we give careful attention to the resolutions that have already been made, and that we acknowledge that we have not as yet left every stone unturned in our efforts to give a fair and judicious hearing to the text of the Bible. Some of the greatest

discoveries that have helped us to understand the Bible have come about because we have been forced to dig more deeply in our efforts to reconcile difficulties within the text. It should not be deemed strange that a volume that included sixty-six different books written over 1400 hundred years would have some difficulties of harmonization within it.

It has often been charged that the Bible is full of contradictions. Such statements are unwarranted by the evidence. The amount of seriously difficult passages compared to the total quantity of material found there is very small indeed. It would be injudicious and even foolhardy for us to ignore the truth claims of the Bible simply because of presently unresolved difficulties. We have a parallel here with the presence of anomalies in the scientific world. Anomalies may indeed be so significant that they make it necessary for scientists to rethink their theories about the nature of geology, biology or the like. For the most part, however, when an overwhelming weight of evidence points to the viability of a theory and some anomalies remain that do not seem to fit the theory, it is not the accepted practice in the scientific world to “scrap” the whole well-attested theory because of a few difficulties that have not yet been resolved. With this analogy in science we may be bold to say that when we approach Scripture as we do, we do nothing more or less than apply the scientific method to our research of Scripture Itself.

Every student of Scripture must face squarely and with honesty the difficulties that are still unresolved. To do this demands our deepest intellectual endeavors. We should seek to learn from Scripture as we examine the text again and again. The unresolved difficulties, in the process of being resolved, often yield light to us as we gain a deeper understanding of the Word of God.

ARTICLE XV: ACCOMMODATION

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 by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.*

In the affirmation of Article XV inerrancy as a doctrine is viewed as being inseparably related to the biblical teaching on inspiration. Though the Bible nowhere uses the word “inerrancy” the concept is found in the Scriptures. The Scriptures have their own claim to being the Word of God. The words of the prophets are prefaced by the statement, “Thus sayeth the Lord.” Jesus speaks of the Scriptures of the Old Testament as being incapable of being broken (John 10:35). He says that not a jot or tittle of the law will pass away until all be fulfilled (Matt. 5:18). Paul tells us that all is given by inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16). Inerrancy is a corollary of inspiration inasmuch as it is unthinkable that God should inspire that which is fraudulent, false or deceitful. Thus, though the word “inerrancy” is not explicitly used in the Scriptures, the word “inspired” is, and the concept of inerrancy is designed to do justice to the concept of inspiration.

It should not be thought that because the Bible does not contain the terms “inerrant” or “inerrancy,” there is therefore no biblical basis for the doctrine of inerrancy. The Bible nowhere uses the term “trinity,” and yet the doctrine of the trinity is clearly taught throughout the New Testament. When the Church affirms a doctrine it finds no necessity to discover a verbal parallel between the doctrine and the words of the Bible itself. What is implied by the affirmation of this article is that the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture is a doctrine ultimately based upon the teaching of Jesus himself. The framers of this confession wish to express no higher nor lower view of Scripture than that held and taught by Jesus. That becomes explicit in the denial. The denial expresses that Jesus’ teaching about Scripture may not be easily dismissed. It has been fashionable in recent Protestantism to grant that Jesus did indeed hold and teach a doctrine of inspiration that would comport with the concept of inerrancy but then to argue at the same time that Jesus’ view is deficient in light of limitations tied to his human nature. The fact that Jesus

held a view of inspiration such as he did is “excused” on the basis that, touching his human nature, Jesus was a product of his times. Jesus, it is urged, could not possibly have known all of the problems that have since been raised by higher criticism. As a result, Jesus like the rest of his contemporaries accepted uncritically the prevailing notion of Scripture of his own day. For example, when Jesus mentions that Moses wrote of him, he was unaware of the documentary hypothesis which would apparently demolish any serious case for Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Old Testament.

From a Protestant perspective, such ignorance by Jesus concerning the truth about Scripture is excused on the basis that the only way he could have known the truth would be for him in his human nature to be omniscient. Now for Jesus in his human nature to be omniscient, that is to know all things, would involve a confusion of the divine and the human natures. Omniscience is an attribute of deity not of humanity. Since ordinarily Protestants do not believe that Jesus’ human nature was deified with such attributes as omniscience, it appears perfectly understandable and excusable that in his lack of knowledge he made mistakes about the Scripture. This is the line of reasoning which the denial part of the article disallows.

The problems raised by these explanations are too numerous and too profound for a detailed treatment here. But the point is this. Even though we admit that Jesus in his human nature was not omniscient, we do urge that his claims to teach nothing by his own authority but by the authority of the Father (John 8:28) and to be the very incarnation of truth (John 14:6) would be fraudulent claims if anything that he taught were in error. Even if his error arose out of his ignorance, he would be guilty of sin for claiming to know truth that he in fact did not know. At stake here is our very redemption. For if Jesus taught falsely while claiming to be speaking the truth, he would be guilty of sin. If he were guilty of sin, then obviously his atonement could not atone for himself, let alone for his people. Ultimately the doctrine of Scripture is bound up with the doctrine of Jesus Christ. It is because of Jesus’ high view of Scripture that the framers of this confession so strenuously maintain the high view of Scripture today.

Again, it is fashionable in many circles to believe Jesus when he speaks of heavenly matters, matters of redemption and salvation, but to correct Jesus when he speaks of historical matters such as the writing of the Pentateuch and other matters relating to the doctrine of Scripture. At this point those who accept Jesus when he speaks redemptively but reject him when

he speaks historically violate a teaching principle that Jesus himself espoused. Jesus raised the rhetorical question, “How can you believe me concerning heavenly things when you cannot believe me concerning earthly things?” (John 3:12). It seems that we have a generation of scholars who are willing to believe Jesus concerning heavenly matters while rejecting those things which he taught about the earth. (What Jesus says concerning history may be falsified by critical methods, but what he says concerning heavenly matters is beyond the reach of verification or falsification.) The framers of this confession believe that Jesus’ principle of the trustworthiness of his teaching as affecting both heavenly matters and earthly matters must be maintained even to this day.

THE WORD OF GOD AND YOU

Discussion of inerrancy is merely an academic exercise unless it concerns the individual Christian on the level of his growth in God. But this is precisely what it does. Confession of the full authority and inerrancy of Scripture should lead us to increasing conformity to the image of Christ, which is the God-ordained goal of every Christian. The final Articles of Affirmation and Denial deal with this matter, including the work of the Holy Spirit in helping the believer to understand and apply the Scriptures to his or her life.

ARTICLE XVI: CHURCH HISTORY

We affirm *that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.*

We deny *that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.*

This affirmation again speaks of the doctrine of inerrancy, not the word inerrancy. It is readily acknowledged that the word inerrancy was not used with any degree of frequency and perhaps not even at all before the seventeenth century. For example, Martin Luther nowhere uses the term inerrancy as a noun with respect to Scripture. Because of this some have said that Luther did not believe in inerrancy, but Luther argued that the Scriptures never “err.” To say that the Scriptures never err is to say nothing more nor less than that the Bible is inerrant. So though the word inerrancy is of relatively modern invention, the concept is rooted not only in the biblical witness to Scripture itself but also in the acceptance of the vast majority of God’s people throughout the history of the Christian church. We find the doctrine taught, embraced and espoused by men such as St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and a host of Christian scholars and teachers throughout the history of the church. While the language of inerrancy does not appear in Protestant confessions of faith until the modern ages, the concept of inerrancy is surely not foreign or strange to the confessions of east or west, Catholic or Protestant.

The denial follows the thinking of the affirmation closely. The denial is simply that inerrancy as a concept is not the product of a rigid, sterile, rationalistic approach to Scripture born of the scholastic movement of seventeenth century Protestantism. Nor is it proper to understand the doctrine as a twentieth century reaction to liberal theology or “modernism.”

It is not the affirmation of inerrancy that is of recent vintage; it is its denial. It is not the reaction to higher criticism that is new, but its uncritically accepted philosophical assumptions of negative criticism that is a new phenomenon in mainline Christianity. Such criticism is not new

in the sense that no one ever questioned the integrity or authenticity of Scripture in past ages, but the newness of the phenomenon is its widespread and easy acceptance within churches and by leaders who would claim allegiance to mainline Christianity.

ARTICLE XVII: WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

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.*

Article XVII attests to the doctrine of the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. That is to say, our personal conviction of the truth of Scripture rests not on the external evidences to the Scriptures truthfulness in and of themselves, but those evidences are confirmed in our hearts by the special work of God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit himself bears witness to our human spirit that the Scriptures are indeed the Word of God. Here God himself confirms the truthfulness of his own Word.

The denial guards against substituting a reliance upon the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit for the content of Scripture itself. The thought behind the denial is that the Holy Spirit normally works in conjunction with the Scripture and speaks to us through the Scripture, not against the Scripture or apart from the Scripture. Word and Spirit are to be viewed together, Word bearing witness to the Spirit and being the means by which we test the spirits to see if they be of God (1 John 4:1) and the Spirit working within our hearts to confirm the Word of God to ourselves. Thus, there is reciprocity between Word and Spirit, and they are never to be set over against each other.

ARTICLE XVIII: INTERPRETATION

We affirm *that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.*

We deny *the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.*

Article XVIII touches on some of the most basic principles of biblical interpretation. Though this article does not spell out in detail a vast comprehensive system of hermeneutics, it nevertheless gives basic guidelines on which the framers of the confession were able to agree. The first is that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis. Grammatico-historical is a technical term that refers to the process by which we take the structures and time periods of the written texts seriously as we interpret them. Biblical interpreters are not given the license to spiritualize or allegorize texts against the grammatical structure and form of the text itself. The Bible is not to be reinterpreted to be brought into conformity with contemporary philosophies but is to be understood in its intended meaning and word usage as it was written at the time it was composed. To hold to grammatico-historical exegesis is to disallow the turning of the Bible into a wax nose that can be shaped and reshaped according to modern conventions of thought. The Bible is to be interpreted as it was written, not reinterpreted as we would like it to have been written according to the prejudices of our own era.

The second principle of the affirmation is that we are to take account of the literary forms and devices that are found within the Scriptures themselves. This goes back to principles of interpretation espoused by Luther and the Reformers. A verb is to be interpreted as a verb; a noun as a noun, a parable as a parable, didactic literature as didactic literature, narrative history as narrative history, poetry as poetry, and the like. To turn narrative history into poetry, or poetry into narrative history would be to violate the intended meaning of the text. Thus, it is important for all biblical interpreters to be aware of the literary forms and grammatical structures that are

found within the Scripture. An analysis of these forms is proper and appropriate for any correct interpretation of the text.

The third principle in the affirmation is that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. Historically, this principle is called the “analogy of faith.” It rests on the previous affirmation that the Bible represents a unified, consistent and coherent Word from God. Any interpretation of a passage that yields a meaning in direct contradiction to another portion of Scripture is disallowed. It is when Scripture interprets Scripture that the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, the supreme interpreter of the Bible, is duly acknowledged. Arbitrarily setting one part of Scripture against another would violate this principle. Scripture is to be interpreted therefore in terms not only of its immediate context but also of the whole context of the Word of God.

The denial part of Article XVIII decries the propriety of critical analyses of the text that produce a relativization of the Bible. This does not prohibit an appropriate quest for literary sources or even oral sources that may be discerned through source criticism but draws a line as to the extent to which such critical analysis can go. When the quest for sources produces a dehistoricizing of the Bible, a rejection of its teaching or a rejection of the Bible’s own claims of authorship it has trespassed beyond its proper limits. This does not prohibit the external examination of evidence to discover the authorship of books that go unnamed in sacred Scriptures such as the epistle to the Hebrews. A search is even allowable for literary traditions that may have been brought together by a final editor whose name is mentioned in Scripture. It is never legitimate, however, to run counter to express biblical affirmations.

ARTICLE XIX: HEALTH OF THE CHURCH

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 increasing conformity to the image of Christ.*

We deny *that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the church.*

Article XIX's affirmation speaks to the relevance of the doctrine of inerrancy to the life of the Christian. Here the functional character of biblical authority is in view. The article is affirming that the confession is not limited to doctrinal concern for theological purity but originates in a profound concern that the Bible remain the authority for the living out of the Christian life. It also recognizes that it is possible for people to believe in the inerrancy or infallibility of Scripture and lead godless lives. It recognizes that a confession of a doctrine of Scripture is not enough to bring us to sanctification but that it is a very important part of the growth process of the Christian that he should rest his confidence in the truthful revelation of the Word of God and thereby should be moved inwardly to conform to the image of Christ. A strong doctrine of the authority of Scripture should, when properly implemented, lead a person to a greater degree of conformity to that Word he espouses as true.

The denial in Article XIX is very important. The framers of the confession are saying unambiguously that confession of belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is not an essential of the Christian faith necessary for salvation. We gladly acknowledge that people who do not hold to this doctrine may be earnest and genuine, zealous and in many ways dedicated Christians. We do not regard acceptance of inerrancy to be a test for salvation. However, we urge as a committee and as an assembly that people consider the severe consequences that may befall the individual or church which casually and easily rejects inerrancy. We believe that history has demonstrated again and again that there is all too often a close relationship between rejection of inerrancy and subsequent defections from matters of the Christian faith that are essential to salvation. When the

church loses its confidence in the authority of sacred Scripture the church inevitably looks to human opinion as its guiding light. When that happens, the purity of the church is direly threatened. Thus, we urge upon our Christian brothers and sisters of all professions and denominations to join with us in a reaffirmation of the full authority, integrity, infallibility and inerrancy of sacred Scripture to the end that our lives may be brought under the authority of God's Word, that we may glorify Christ in our lives, individually and corporately as the church.

EXPLAINING HERMENEUTICS: A COMMENTARY ON THE CHICAGO STATEMENT ON BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

by Dr. Norman L. Geisler

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ARTICLE I: AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES⁷

WE AFFIRM *that the normative authority of Holy Scripture is the authority of God Himself, and is attested by Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church.*

WE DENY *the legitimacy of separating the authority of Christ from the authority of Scripture, or of opposing the one to the other.*

This first article affirms that the authority of Scripture cannot be separated from the authority of God. Whatever the Bible affirms, God affirms. And what the Bible affirms (or denies), it affirms (or denies) with the very authority of God. Such authority is normative for all believers; it is the canon or rule of God.

This divine authority of Old Testament Scripture was confirmed by Christ Himself on numerous occasions (cf. Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:44; John 10:34-35). And what our Lord confirmed as to the divine authority of the Old Testament, He promised also for the New Testament (John 14:16; 16:13).

⁷ These article titles were added in 2013 to improve the convenience of referencing and searching the e-book. They were not part of the original booklet by Dr. Geisler and are not intended to alter the meaning of any of the original commentary or articles.

The Denial points out that one cannot reject the divine authority of Scripture without thereby impugning the authority of Christ, who attested Scripture's divine authority. Thus it is wrong to claim one can accept the full authority of Christ without acknowledging the complete authority of Scripture.

ARTICLE II: THE WRITTEN WORD AND THE INCARNATED WORD

WE AFFIRM that as Christ is God and Man in one Person, so Scripture is, indivisibly, God's Word in human language.

WE DENY that the humble, human form of Scripture entails errancy any more than the humanity of Christ, even in His humiliation, entails sin.

Here an analogy is drawn between Christ and Scripture. Both Christ and Scripture have dual aspects of divinity and humanity, indivisibly united in one expression. Both Christ and Scripture were conceived by an act of the Holy Spirit. Both involve the use of fallible human agents. But both produced a theanthropic result; one a sinless person and the other an errorless book. However, like all analogies, there is a difference. Christ is one person uniting two natures whereas Scripture is one written expression uniting two authors (God and man). This difference notwithstanding, the strength of the likeness in the analogy points to the inseparable unity between divine and human dimensions of Scripture so that one aspect cannot be in error while the other is not.

The Denial is directed at a contemporary tendency to separate the human aspects of Scripture from the divine and allow for error in the former. By contrast the framers of this article believe that the human form of Scripture can no more be found in error than Christ could be found in sin. That is to say, the Word of God (i.e., the Bible) is as necessarily perfect in its human manifestation as was the Son of God in His human form.

ARTICLE III: THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

WE AFFIRM *that the person and work of Jesus Christ are the central focus of the entire Bible.*

WE DENY *that any method of interpretation which rejects or obscures the Christ-centeredness of Scripture is correct.*

This Affirmation follows the teaching of Christ that He is the central theme of Scripture (Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Heb. 10:7). This is to say that focus on the person and work of Christ runs throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. To be sure there are other and tangential topics, but the person and work of Jesus Christ are central.

In view of the focus of Scripture on Christ, the Denial stresses a hermeneutical obligation to make this Christocentric message clear in the expounding of Scripture. As other articles (cf. Article XV) emphasize the “literal” interpretation of Scripture, this article is no license for allegorization and unwarranted typology which see Christ portrayed in every detail of Old Testament proclamation. The article simply points to the centrality of Christ’s mission in the unfolding of God’s revelation to man.

Neither is there any thought in this article of making the role of Christ more ultimate than that of the Father. What is in view here is the focus of Scripture and not the ultimate source or object of the whole plan of redemption.

ARTICLE IV: THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN REVELATION

WE AFFIRM *that the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture acts through it today to work faith in its message.*

WE DENY *that the Holy Spirit ever teaches to any one anything which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.*

Here stress is laid on the fact that the Holy Spirit not only is the source of Scripture, but also works to produce faith in Scripture He has inspired. Without this ministry of the Holy Spirit, belief in the truth of Scripture would not occur.

The Denial is directed at those alleged “revelations” which some claim to have but which are contrary to Scripture. No matter how sincere or genuinely felt, no dream, vision, or supposed revelation which contradicts Scripture ever comes from the Holy Spirit. For the utterances of the Holy Spirit are all harmonious and noncontradictory (see Article XX).

ARTICLE V: THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN APPLICATION

WE AFFIRM *that the Holy Spirit enables believers to appropriate and apply Scripture to their lives.*

WE DENY *that the natural man is able to discern spiritually the biblical message apart from the Holy Spirit.*

The design of this article is to indicate that the ministry of the Holy Spirit extends beyond the inspiration of Scripture to its very application to the lives of the believer. Just as no one calls

Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:3), so no one can appropriate the message of Scripture to his life apart from the gracious work of the Holy Spirit.

The Denial stresses the truth that the natural man does not receive the spiritual message of Scripture. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit there is no welcome for its truth in an unregenerate heart.

This does not imply that a non-Christian is unable to understand the meaning of any Scripture. It means that whatever he may perceive of the message of Scripture, that without the Holy Spirit's work he will not welcome the message in his heart.

ARTICLE VI: PROPOSITIONAL TRUTH CORRESPONDS TO REALTY

WE AFFIRM *that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute. We further affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts.*

WE DENY *that, while Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation, biblical truth should be defined in terms of this function. We further deny that error should be defined as that which willfully deceives.*

Since hermeneutics is concerned with understanding the truth of Scripture, attention is directed here to the nature of truth. Several significant affirmations are made about the nature of truth.

First, in contrast to contemporary relativism it is declared that truth is absolute. Second, as opposed to subjectivism it is acknowledged that truth is objective. Finally, in opposition to existential and pragmatic views of truth, this article affirms that truth is what corresponds to reality. This same point was made in the "Chicago Statement on Inerrancy" (1978) in Article XIII and the commentary on it.

The Denial makes it evident that views which redefine an error to mean what “misleads,” rather than what is a mistake, must be rejected. This redefinition of the word “error” is both contrary to Scripture and to common sense. In Scripture the word error is used of unintentional acts (Lev. 4:2) as well as intentional ones. Also, in common parlance a statement is in error if it is a factual mistake, even if there was no intention to mislead anyone by it. So to suggest that the Bible contains mistakes, but that these are not errors so long as they do not mislead, is contrary to both Scripture and ordinary usage.

By this subtle redefinition of error to mean only what misleads but not what misrepresents, some have tried to maintain that the Bible is wholly true (in that it never misleads) and yet that it may have some mistakes in it. This position is emphatically rejected by the confessors of this document.

ARTICLE VII: ONE MEANING, MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS

WE AFFIRM *that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite, and fixed.*

WE DENY *that the recognition of this single meaning eliminates the variety of its application.*

The Affirmation here is directed at those who claim a “double” or “deeper” meaning to Scripture than that expressed by the authors. It stresses the unity and fixity of meaning as opposed to those who find multiple and pliable meanings. What a passage means is fixed by the author and is not subject to change by readers. This does not imply that further revelation on the subject cannot help one come to a fuller understanding, but simply that the meaning given in a text is not changed because additional truth is revealed subsequently.

Meaning is also definite in that there are defined limits by virtue of the author's expressed meaning in the given linguistic form and cultural context. Meaning is determined by an author; it is discovered by the readers.

The Denial adds the clarification that simply because Scripture has one meaning does not imply that its messages cannot be applied to a variety of individuals or situations. While the interpretation is one, the applications can be many.

ARTICLE VIII: CULTURAL UNIVERSALITY

WE AFFIRM *that the Bible contains teachings and mandates which apply to all cultural and situational contexts and other mandates which the Bible itself shows apply only to particular situations.*

WE DENY *that the distinction between the universal and particular mandates of Scripture can be determined by cultural and situational factors. We further deny that universal mandates may ever be treated as culturally or situationally relative.*

In view of the tendency of many to relativize the message of the Bible by accommodating it to changing cultural situations, this Affirmation proclaims the universality of biblical teachings. There are commands which transcend all cultural barriers and are binding on all men everywhere. To be sure, some biblical injunctions are directed to specific situations, but even these are normative to the particular situation(s) to which they speak. However, there are commands in Scripture which speak universally to the human situation and are not bound to particular cultures or situations.

The Denial addresses the basis of the distinction between universal and particular situations. It denies that the grounds of this distinction are relative or purely cultural. It further denies the legitimacy of relativizing biblical absolutes by reducing them to purely cultural mandates.

The meaning of this article is that whatever the biblical text means is binding. And what is meant to be universally binding should not be relegated to particular situations any more than what is meant to apply only to particular circumstances should be promulgated as universally applicable.

There is an attempt here to strike a balance between command and culture by recognizing that a command transcends culture, even though it speaks to and is expressed in a particular culture. Thus while the situation (or circumstances) may help us to discover the right course of action, the situation never determines what is right. God's laws are not situationally determined.

ARTICLE IX: HERMENEUTICS AND MEANING

WE AFFIRM *that the term hermeneutics, which historically signified the rules of exegesis, may properly be extended to cover all that is involved in the process of perceiving what the biblical revelation means and how it bears on our lives.*

WE DENY *that the message of Scripture derives from, or is dictated by, the interpreter's understanding. Thus we deny that the "horizons" of the biblical writer and the interpreter may rightly "fuse" in such a way that what the text communicates to the interpreter is not ultimately controlled by the expressed meaning of the Scripture.*

The primary thrust of this Affirmation is definitional. It desires to clarify the meaning of the term hermeneutics by indicating that it includes not only perception of the declared meaning of a text but also an understanding of the implications that text has for one's life. Thus, hermeneutics is more than biblical exegesis. It is not only the science that leads forth the meaning of a passage but also that which enables one (by the Holy Spirit) to understand the spiritual implications the truth(s) of this passage has for Christian living.

The Denial notes that the meaning of a passage is not derived from or dictated by the interpreter. Rather, meaning comes from the author who wrote it. Thus the reader's

understanding has no hermeneutically definitive role. Readers must listen to the meaning of a text and not attempt to legislate it. Of course, the meaning listened to should be applied to the reader's life. But the need or desire for specific application should not color the interpretation of a passage.

ARTICLE X: ADEQUACY OF VARIETY OF LITERARY FORMS

WE AFFIRM *that Scripture communicates God's truth to us verbally through a wide variety of literary forms.*

WE DENY *that any of the limits of human language render Scripture inadequate to convey God's message.*

This Affirmation is a logical literary extension of Article II which acknowledges the humanity of Scripture. The Bible is God's Word, but it is written in human words; thus, revelation is "verbal." Revelation is "propositional" (Article II) because it expresses certain propositional truth. Some prefer to call it "sentential" because the truth is expressed in sentences. Whatever the term--verbal, propositional, or sentential--the Bible is a human book which uses normal literary forms. These include parables, satire, irony, hyperbole, metaphor, simile, poetry, and even allegory (e.g., Ezek. 16-17).

As an expression in finite, human language, the Bible has certain limitations in a similar way that Christ as a man had certain limitations. This means that God adapted Himself through human language so that His eternal truth could be understood by man in a temporal world.

Despite the obvious fact of the limitations of any finite linguistic expression, the Denial is quick to point out that these limits do not render Scripture an inadequate means of communicating God's truth. For while there is a divine adaptation (via language) to human finitude there is no accommodation to human error. Error is not essential to human nature. Christ was human and yet He did not err. Adam was human before he erred. So simply because the

Bible is written in human language does not mean it must err. In fact, when God uses human language there is a supernatural guarantee that it will not be in error.

ARTICLE XI: ADEQUACY OF TRANSLATION

WE AFFIRM *that translations of the text of Scripture can communicate knowledge of God across all temporal and cultural boundaries.*

WE DENY *that the meaning of biblical texts is so tied to the culture out of which they came that understanding of the same meaning in other cultures is impossible.*

Simply because the truth of Scripture was conveyed by God in the original writings does not mean that it cannot be translated into another language. This article affirms the translatability of God's truth into other cultures. It affirms that since truth is transcendent (see Article XX) it is not culture-bound. Hence the truth of God expressed in a first-century culture is not limited to that culture. For the nature of truth is not limited to any particular medium through which it is expressed.

The Denial notes that since meaning is not inextricably tied to a given culture it can be adequately expressed in another culture. Thus the message of Scripture need not be relativized by translation. What is expressed can be the same even though how it is expressed differs.

ARTICLE XII: LIMITS FOR FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE TRANSLATION

WE AFFIRM *that in the task of translating the Bible and teaching it in the context of each culture, only those functional equivalents that are faithful to the content of biblical teaching should be employed.*

WE DENY *the legitimacy of methods which either are insensitive to the demands of cross-cultural communication or distort biblical meaning in the process.*

Whereas the previous article treated the matter of the translatability of divine truth, this article speaks to the adequacy of translations. Obviously not every expression in another language will appropriately convey the meaning of Scripture. In view of this, caution is urged that the translators remain faithful to the truth of the Scripture being translated by the proper choice of the words used to translate it.

This article treats the matter of “functional” equivalence. Often there is no actual or literal equivalence between expressions in one language and a word-for-word translation into another language. What is expressed (meaning) is the same but how it is expressed (the words) is different. Hence a different construction can be used to convey the same meaning.

The Denial urges sensitivity to cultural matters so that the same truth may be conveyed, even though different terms are being used. Without this awareness missionary activity can be severely hampered.

ARTICLE XIII: THE VALUE AND LIMITS OF GENRE CRITICISM

WE AFFIRM *that awareness of the literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence we value genre criticism as one of the many disciplines of biblical study.*

WE DENY *that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual.*

The awareness of what kind of literature one is interpreting is essential to a correct understanding of the text. A correct genre judgment should be made to ensure correct understanding. A parable, for example, should not be treated like a chronicle, nor should poetry be interpreted as though it were a straightforward narrative. Each passage has its own genre, and the interpreter should be cognizant of the specific kind of literature it is as he attempts to interpret it. Without genre recognition an interpreter can be misled in his understanding of the passage. For example, when the prophet speaks of “trees clapping their hands” (Isa. 55:12) one could assume a kind of animism unless he recognized that this is poetry and not prose.

The Denial is directed at an illegitimate use of genre criticism by some who deny the truth of passages which are presented as factual. Some, for instance, take Adam to be a myth, whereas in Scripture he is presented as a real person. Others take Jonah to be an allegory when he is presented as a historical person and so referred to by Christ (Matt. 12:40-42). This Denial is an appropriate and timely warning not to use genre criticism as a cloak for rejecting the truth of Scripture.

ARTICLE XIV: LITERARY FORMS AND FACTUAL HISTORY

WE AFFIRM *that the biblical record of events, discourses and sayings, though presented in a variety of appropriate literary forms, corresponds to historical fact.*

WE DENY *that any such event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated.*

This article combines the emphases of Articles VI and XIII. While acknowledging the legitimacy of literary forms, this article insists that any record of events presented in Scripture must correspond to historical fact. That is, no reported event, discourse, or saying should be considered imaginary.

The Denial is even clearer than the Affirmation. It stresses that any discourse, saying, or event reported in Scripture must actually have occurred. This means that any hermeneutic or form of biblical criticism which claims that something was invented by the author must be rejected. This does not mean that a parable must be understood to represent historical facts, since a parable does not (by its very genre) purport to report an event or saying but simply to illustrate a point.

ARTICLE XV: THE GRAMMATICAL-HISTORICAL SENSE

WE AFFIRM *the necessity of interpreting the Bible according to its literal, or normal, sense. The literal sense is the grammatical-historical sense, that is, the meaning which the writer expressed. Interpretation according to the literal sense will take account of all figures of speech and literary forms found in the text.*

WE DENY *the legitimacy of any approach to Scripture that attributes to it meaning which the literal sense does not support.*

The literal sense of Scripture is strongly affirmed here. To be sure the English word literal carries some problematic connotations with it. Hence the words normal and grammatical-historical are used to explain what is meant. The literal sense is also designated by the more descriptive title grammatical-historical sense. This means the correct interpretation is the one which discovers the meaning of the text in its grammatical forms and in the historical, cultural context in which the text is expressed.

The Denial warns against attributing to Scripture any meaning not based in a literal understanding, such as mythological or allegorical interpretations. This should not be understood as eliminating typology or designated allegory or other literary forms which include figures of speech (see Articles X, XIII, and XIV).

ARTICLE XVI: ROLES AND VARIETIES OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM

WE AFFIRM that legitimate critical techniques should be used in determining the canonical text and its meaning.

WE DENY the legitimacy of allowing any method of biblical criticism to question the truth or integrity of the writer's expressed meaning, or of any other scriptural teaching.

Implied here is an approval of legitimate techniques of “lower criticism” or “textual criticism.” It is proper to use critical techniques in order to discover the true text of Scripture, that is, the one which represents the original one given by the biblical authors.

Whereas critical methodology can be used to establish which of the texts are copies of the inspired original, it is illegitimate to use critical methods to call into question whether something in the original text is true. In other words, proper “lower criticism” is valid but negative “higher criticism” which rejects truths of Scripture is invalid.

ARTICLE XVII: SCRIPTURE IS SELF-INTERPRETING

WE AFFIRM the unity, harmony, and consistency of Scripture and declare that it is its own best interpreter.

WE DENY that Scripture may be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that one passage corrects or militates against another. We deny that later writers of Scripture misinterpreted earlier passages of Scripture when quoting from or referring to them.

Two points are made in the Affirmation, the unity of Scripture and its self-interpreting ability. Since the former is treated elsewhere (Article XXI), we will comment on the latter here. Not only is the Bible always correct in interpreting itself (see Article XVIII), but it is the “best interpreter” of itself.

Another point made here is that comparing Scripture with Scripture is an excellent help to an interpreter. For one passage sheds light on another. Hence the first commentary the interpreter should consult on a passage is what the rest of Scripture may say on that text.

The Denial warns against the assumption that an understanding of one passage can lead the interpreter to reject the teaching of another passage. One passage may help him better comprehend another but it will never contradict another.

This last part of the Denial is particularly directed to those who believe the New Testament writers misinterpret the Old Testament, or that they attribute meaning to an Old Testament text not expressed by the author of that text. While it is acknowledged that there is sometimes a wide range of application for a text, this article affirms that the interpretation of a biblical text by another biblical writer is always within the confines of the meaning of the first text.

ARTICLE XVIII: MEANING MAY TRANSCEND HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

WE AFFIRM *that the Bible's own interpretation of itself is always correct, never deviating from, but rather elucidating, the single meaning of the inspired text. The single meaning of a prophet's words includes, but is not restricted to, the understanding of those words by the prophet and necessarily involves the intention of God evidenced in the fulfillment of those words.*

WE DENY *that the writers of Scripture always understood the full implications of their own words.*

This Affirmation was perhaps the most difficult to word. The first part of the Affirmation builds on Article VII which declared that Scripture has only one meaning, and simply adds that whenever the Bible comments on another passage of Scripture it does so correctly. That is, the Bible never misinterprets itself. It always correctly understands the meaning of the passage it comments on (see Article XVII). For example, that Paul misinterprets Moses is to say that Paul erred. This view is emphatically rejected in favor of the inerrancy of all Scripture.

The problem in the second statement of the Affirmation revolves around whether God intended more by a passage of Scripture than the human author did. Put in this way, evangelical scholars are divided on the issue, even though there is unity on the question of “single meaning.” Some believe that this single meaning may be fuller than the purview of the human author, since God had far more in view than did the prophet when he wrote it. The wording here is an attempt to include reference to the fulfillment of a prophecy (of which God was obviously aware when He inspired it) as part of the single meaning which God and the prophet shared. However, the prophet may not have been conscious of the full implications of this meaning when he wrote it.

The way around the difficulty was to note that there is only one meaning to a passage which both God and the prophet affirmed, but that this meaning may not always be fully “evidenced” until the prophecy is fulfilled. Furthermore, God, and not necessarily the prophets,

was fully aware of the fuller implications that would be manifested in the fulfillment of this single meaning.

It is important to preserve single meaning without denying that God had more in mind than the prophet did. A distinction needs to be made, then, between what God was conscious of concerning an affirmation (which, in view of His foreknowledge and omniscience, was far more) and what He and the prophet actually expressed in the passage. The Denial makes this point clear by noting that biblical authors were not always fully aware of the implications of their own affirmations.

ARTICLE XIX: DANGER IN PREUNDERSTANDINGS

WE AFFIRM *that any preunderstandings which the interpreter brings to Scripture should be in harmony with scriptural teaching and subject to correction by it.*

WE DENY *that Scripture should be required to fit alien preunderstandings, inconsistent with itself, such as naturalism, evolutionism, scientism, secular humanism, and relativism.*

The question of preunderstanding is a crucial one in contemporary hermeneutics. The careful wording of the Affirmation does not discuss the issue of whether one should approach Scripture with a particular preunderstanding, but simply which kinds of preunderstanding one has are legitimate. This question is answered by affirming that only those preunderstandings which are compatible with the teaching of Scripture are legitimate. In fact, the statement goes further and demands that all preunderstanding be subject to “correction” by the teaching of Scripture.

The point of this article is to avoid interpreting Scripture through an alien grid or filter which obscures or negates its true message. For it acknowledges that one’s preunderstanding will affect his understanding of a text. Hence to avoid misinterpreting Scripture one must be careful to examine his own presuppositions in the light of Scripture.

ARTICLE XX: EXTRABIBLICAL SOURCES

WE AFFIRM *that since God is the author of all truth, all truths, biblical and extrabiblical, are consistent and cohere, and that the Bible speaks truth when it touches on matters pertaining to nature, history, or anything else. We further affirm that in some cases extrabiblical data have value for clarifying what Scripture teaches, and for prompting correction of faulty interpretations.*

WE DENY *that extrabiblical views ever disprove the teaching of Scripture or hold priority over it.*

What is in view here is not so much the nature of truth (which is treated in Article VI), but the consistency and coherence of truth.

This is directed at those views which consider truth paradoxical or contradictory. This article declares that a proper hermeneutics avoids contradictions, since God never affirms as true two propositions, one of which is logically the opposite of the other.

Further, this Affirmation recognizes that not all truth is in the Bible (though all that is affirmed in the Bible is true). God has revealed Himself in nature and history as well as in Scripture. However, since God is the ultimate Author of all truth, there can be no contradiction between truths of Scripture and the true teachings of science and history.

Although only the Bible is the nonnative and infallible rule for doctrine and practice, nevertheless what one learns from sources outside Scripture can occasion a reexamination and reinterpretation of Scripture. For example, some have taught the world to be square because the Bible refers to “the four corners of the earth” (Isa. 11:12). But scientific knowledge of the spherical nature of the globe leads to a correction of this faulty interpretation. Other clarifications of our understanding of the biblical text are possible through the study of the social sciences.

However, whatever prompting and clarifying of Scripture that extrabiblical studies may provide, the final authority for what the Bible teaches rests in the text of Scripture itself and not

in anything outside it (except in God Himself). The Denial makes clear this priority of the teaching of God's scriptural revelation over anything outside it.

ARTICLE XXI: HARMONY OF GENERAL AND SPECIAL REVELATIONS

WE AFFIRM *the harmony of special with general revelation and therefore of biblical teaching with the facts of nature.*

WE DENY *that any genuine scientific facts are inconsistent with the true meaning of any passage of Scripture.*

This article continues the discussion of the previous article by noting the harmony of God's general revelation (outside Scripture) and His special revelation in Scripture. It is acknowledged by all that certain interpretations of Scripture and some opinions of scientists will contradict each other. However, it is insisted here that the truth of Scripture and the facts of science never contradict each other.

"Genuine" science will always be in accord with Scripture. Science, however, based on naturalistic presuppositions will inevitably come in conflict with the supernatural truths of Scripture. Far from denying a healthy interchange between scientific theory and biblical interpretation, the framers of this statement welcome such. Indeed, it is acknowledged (in article XX) that the exegete can learn from the scientist. What is denied is that we should accept scientific views that contradict Scripture or that they should be given an authority above Scripture.

ARTICLE XXII: GENESIS 1-11 AS FACTUAL

WE AFFIRM *that Genesis 1-11 is factual, as is the rest of the book.*

WE DENY *that the teachings of Genesis 1-11 are mythical and that scientific hypotheses about earth history or the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation.*

Since the historicity and the scientific accuracy of the early chapters of the Bible have come under severe attack it is important to apply the “literal” hermeneutic espoused (Article XV) to this question. The result was a recognition of the factual nature of the account of the creation of the universe, all living things, the special creation of man, the Fall, and the Flood. These accounts are all factual, that is, they are about space-time events which actually happened as reported in the book of Genesis (see Article XIV).

The article left open the question of the age of the earth on which there is no unanimity among evangelicals and which was beyond the purview of this conference. There was, however, complete agreement on denying that Genesis is mythological or unhistorical. Likewise, the use of the term “creation” was meant to exclude the belief in macro-evolution, whether of the atheistic or theistic varieties.

ARTICLE XXIII: PERSPICACITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

WE AFFIRM *the clarity of Scripture and specifically of its message about salvation from sin.*

WE DENY *that all passages of Scripture are equally clear or have equal bearing on the message of redemption.*

Traditionally this teaching is called the “perspicuity” of Scripture. By this is meant that the central message of Scripture is clear, especially what the Bible says about salvation from sin.

The Denial disassociates this claim from the belief that every-thing in Scripture is clear or that all teachings are equally clear or equally relevant to the Bible’s central saving message. It is obvious to any honest interpreter that the meaning of some passages of Scripture is obscure. It is equally evident that the truth of some passages is not directly relevant to the overall plan of salvation.

ARTICLE XXIV: THE VALUE OF BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

WE AFFIRM *that a person is not dependent for understanding of Scripture on the expertise of biblical scholars.*

WE DENY *that a person should ignore the fruits of the technical study of Scripture by biblical scholars.*

This article attempts to avoid two extremes. First, it affirms that one is not dependent on biblical “experts” for his understanding of the basic truths of Scripture. Were this not true, then a significant aspect of the priesthood of all believers would be destroyed. For if the understanding

of the laity is contingent on the teaching of experts, then Protestant interpretive experts will have replaced the teaching magisterium of Catholic priests with a kind of teaching magisterium of Protestant scholars.

On the other hand, biblical scholars do play a significant role in the lay understanding of Scripture. Even the very tools (Bible, dictionaries, concordances, etc.) used by laypersons to interpret Scripture were produced by scholars. And when it comes to more technical and precise understanding of specific Scripture the work of experts is more than helpful. Hence the implied exhortation in the denial to avail oneself of the fruit of scholarship is well taken.

ARTICLE XXV: PREACHING AS EXPOSITION OF SCRIPTURAL TEXTS

WE AFFIRM that the only type of preaching which sufficiently conveys the divine revelation and its proper application to life is that which faithfully expounds the text of Scripture as the Word of God.

WE DENY that the preacher has any message from God apart from the text of Scripture.

This final article declares that good preaching should be based in good hermeneutics. The exposition of Scripture is not to be treated in isolation from the proclamation of Scripture. In preaching the preacher should faithfully expound the Word of God. Anything short of a correct exposition of God's written Word is pronounced insufficient.

Indeed, the Denial declares that there is no message from God apart from Scripture. This was understood not to contradict the fact that there is a general revelation (affirmed in Article XXI) but simply to note that the only inspired and infallible writing from which the preacher can and must preach is the Bible.