

The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy

How nearly 300 evangelical scholars gathered at O'Hare in October 1978 to define what "the Bible is the Word of God" means — and who they were • 1976–1986

By Shane Gunn • Primary-source study

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Where this fits: Lesson 28 of the Pleasant Springs *Church History* series — a supplementary lesson that belongs alongside [Edinburgh 1910 \(Lesson 27\)](#) and ahead of Vatican II. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) is the most widely cited evangelical doctrinal statement of the 20th century, and the men who drafted it shaped American evangelicalism for a generation. See the full [Series Timeline](#).

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

On 25–28 October 1978, nearly 300 evangelical scholars, theologians, pastors, and educators met at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare Hotel outside Chicago. After four days of intensive work on a draft that R. C. Sproul, Norman Geisler, and James Montgomery Boice had prepared, they produced a 19-article statement on the nature of biblical authority. It has come to be known as **The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy** — sometimes simply called “the Chicago Statement” or “ICBI I.” Over the next eight years the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) produced two companion statements — one on hermeneutics (1982) and one on application (1986) — completing the trilogy.

The Chicago Statement did not invent the doctrine of inerrancy; the conviction that Scripture teaches nothing false in any of its assertions is a view held, in various forms, through two thousand years of Christian theology. What the Statement did do was produce a carefully worded, broadly endorsed evangelical consensus document at a moment when the doctrine of Scripture was under sustained challenge — from liberal Protestantism, from higher criticism, and (most pointedly) from within evangelical institutions themselves. Today the Chicago Statement is the confessional standard of the Evangelical Theological Society, the doctrinal basis of Dallas Theological Seminary, the Master’s Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, the Southern Baptist Convention’s seminaries after the “conservative resurgence” (which was partly sparked by the Statement), and many other evangelical institutions. It is probably the most-cited evangelical doctrinal document of the late 20th century.

This lesson tells how the Statement was produced, reproduces its core affirmations, and profiles the most important men (the original drafters were overwhelmingly men; we note the limitation) who signed it.

Greek NT (2 Tim 3:16): πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν, πρὸς ἐλεγμὸν, πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν, πρὸς παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ.

2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV): “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

PART 1 — BACKGROUND: THE BATTLE OVER THE BIBLE

By the 1970s, American evangelicalism had been quietly debating the doctrine of Scripture for decades. Three backgrounds fed the 1978 Chicago summit:

1. Nineteenth-century higher criticism and the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. German higher-critical scholarship (Graf, Wellhausen, Harnack) had challenged the historicity, unity, and authorship of biblical books. American Protestants split in the 1910s and 1920s into “Fundamentalists” (who defended biblical inerrancy, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection, and miracles) and

“Modernists” (who adjusted the traditional doctrines to accommodate critical scholarship). J. Gresham Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) argued the two were actually different religions.

2. Mid-century evangelical renewal. After WWII a new generation of evangelicals — Carl F. H. Henry, Billy Graham, Harold Ockenga, E. J. Carnell — founded institutions (Fuller Seminary 1947, National Association of Evangelicals 1942, *Christianity Today* 1956) that distanced themselves from hard-line fundamentalism while maintaining traditional doctrine. The **International Council on Biblical Inerrancy** (ICBI, founded 1977) was intellectually a grandchild of this movement.

3. Fuller Seminary’s drift and Harold Lindsell’s alarm. In 1962 Fuller Seminary’s faculty revised its statement of faith, dropping language that Scripture is “free from all error in the whole and in the part.” To many conservative evangelicals, this signaled that even flagship evangelical institutions were drifting. In 1976 former Fuller professor **Harold Lindsell** published *The Battle for the Bible*, naming names (including colleagues and denominations) and arguing that evangelicalism was in a crisis. The book sold over 250,000 copies, provoked replies and counter-replies, and directly catalyzed the ICBI’s founding the following year.

PART 2 — THE FOUNDING OF ICBI (1977)

In the wake of *The Battle for the Bible*, a small group of scholars and pastors began discussing a more organized response. The prime mover was **Jay Grimstead** (1935–2020), a Presbyterian pastor in California who had been writing letters to evangelical leaders about inerrancy since the early 1970s. Grimstead and R. C. Sproul met in early 1977 and agreed that a council — not a single book or journal, but a formal organization — was needed to produce a definitive consensus document.

The **International Council on Biblical Inerrancy** was incorporated in early 1977 with a deliberately limited ten-year life span (1977–1987), the three-council strategy outlined above, and a board that aimed for geographical and denominational breadth. The original Executive Council included James Boice (chairman), Norman Geisler, and Edmund Clowney, with R. C. Sproul as the primary theological architect.

The ICBI's first major gathering was a "Summit I" at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare Hotel in suburban Chicago, 25–28 October 1978. Approximately 300 evangelical scholars, theologians, pastors, and educators attended. After four days of drafting, revision, discussion, and voting, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy emerged with overwhelming support.

PART 3 — THE STATEMENT ITSELF (1978)

The Chicago Statement consists of three parts: a brief **Preface**, a five-point **Short Statement**, and a 19-article section of **Articles of Affirmation and Denial**. R. C. Sproul drafted the initial version; J. I. Packer wrote the substantial Exposition (a 6,000-word theological commentary) later published as the Statement's authoritative interpretation.

The Short Statement's five affirmations:

THE CHICAGO STATEMENT • SHORT STATEMENT (1978)

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
3. The Holy Spirit, its divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

The 19 Articles of Affirmation and Denial follow the standard confessional pattern — each article affirms a positive proposition about Scripture and denies specific errors. A few representative articles:

• **Article I.** Affirms: Scripture is to be received as the authoritative Word of God. Denies: Scripture receives its authority from the Church, tradition, or any human source.

• **Article IV.** Affirms: human languages are sufficient vehicles for divine revelation. Denies: humanness of the biblical languages renders them inadequate.

• **Article VI.** Affirms: the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration. Denies: inspiration can be rightly defined in terms of revelation as a whole without inspired words.

• **Article X.** Affirms: inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture (i.e., the original manuscripts). Denies: any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs.

• **Article XI.** Affirms: Scripture is infallible in all it affirms. Denies: there is any “dual truth” by which Scripture might teach religious truth but err in historical or scientific matters.

- **Article XII.** Affirms: Scripture is inerrant. Denies: inerrancy is limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science (i.e., denies “limited inerrancy”).

- **Article XIII.** Affirms: biblical inerrancy must be judged in accord with Scripture’s own usage — acknowledging round numbers, phenomenological language, hyperbole, figures of speech, and so on. Denies: evaluating Scripture according to standards of truth foreign to its own usage or purpose.

PART 4 — THE ARCHITECTS — PRINCIPAL FRAMERS AND THEIR STORIES

About three hundred people signed the Chicago Statement. We profile here the dozen most significant framers — the men whose stories, institutions, and books define the evangelical inerrancy movement of the late 20th century.

James Montgomery Boice (1938–2000) — Chairman

HARVARD UNDERGRAD • PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (MDIV) • UNIVERSITY OF BASEL (PHD, UNDER OSCAR CULLMANN) • PASTOR, TENTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA, 1968–2000

ICBI Chairman

Philadelphia Presbyterian

Boice was a Pennsylvania native who returned home in 1968 after European graduate studies to pastor the historic Tenth Presbyterian Church (founded 1829) for 32 years. A serial preacher of expositional sermons through entire books of the Bible, he produced over fifty books and a massive body of radio broadcasts through “The Bible Study Hour.” As ICBI’s first and most persistent chairman, Boice managed the 1977–1987 life of the Council and drove it to produce all three Chicago Statements (Inerrancy, Hermeneutics, Application). After ICBI wound down, Boice founded the **Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals** in 1994, which still runs major conferences and the Philadelphia-based *Tabletalk*-style resource infrastructure. Boice died of aggressive liver cancer on 15 June

2000, eight weeks after preaching his last sermon. His final public words to his congregation, delivered with visible physical weakness, were a testimony that God's providence covers even terminal cancer: "If God does something in your life, would you change it? If you'd change it, you'd make it worse."

R. C. Sproul (1939–2017) — Primary Drafter

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE (BA) • PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (BD) • VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM (DRS) • FOUNDED LIGONIER VALLEY STUDY CENTER 1971, LATER LIGONIER MINISTRIES

Chicago Statement drafter

Ligonier Ministries

Robert Charles Sproul was the Chicago Statement's primary drafter and its most influential popular teacher. Converted as a Westminster College student in 1957 after reading Ecclesiastes 11:3 ("if a tree falls south or north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie"), he eventually came to Reformed theology through study under John Gerstner. Sproul founded Ligonier Valley Study Center in rural Pennsylvania in 1971, eventually moving the operation to Orlando, Florida (1984). His 1985 book *The Holiness of God* became one of the most widely read evangelical books of the late 20th century; his *Renewing Your Mind* radio broadcast went global. Sproul's signature contribution at the 1978 summit was drafting the original text of the articles and persistently shepherding the document's precision. He died in December 2017 at age 78. His last sermon at Saint Andrew's Chapel (Sanford, Florida) was on the resurrection.

Norman L. Geisler (1932–2019) — Philosophical Architect

DETROIT BIBLE COLLEGE • WHEATON COLLEGE (MA, THEOLOGY) • LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO (PHD, PHILOSOPHY) • CO-FOUNDER ICBI • CO-FOUNDER EVANGELICAL PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY • CO-FOUNDER SOUTHERN EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

Philosopher-theologian

ICBI co-founder

Geisler was the philosophical architect of the Statement, pressing for rigorous propositional language and clear denials. He taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (1969–1979) and Dallas Theological Seminary (1979–1988) before co-founding

Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina (1992). His prolific writing — 130+ books including *When Skeptics Ask*, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, and a massive four-volume *Systematic Theology* — made him one of the 20th century's most visible evangelical apologists. Geisler was uncompromising; in 2012 he publicly resigned from the Evangelical Theological Society and Evangelical Philosophical Society over what he considered its failure to apply the Chicago Statement to a member's views. He died in 2019 at 86.

J. I. Packer (1926–2020) — Expositor

OXFORD (MA, DPHIL) • TUTOR, TYNDALE HALL, BRISTOL • LATIMER HOUSE, OXFORD • REGENT COLLEGE, VANCOUVER 1979–2014 • ANGLICAN EVANGELICAL

British evangelical

Knowing God

James Innell Packer was the English Anglican evangelical whose massive *Knowing God* (1973) sold over 1.5 million copies and shaped a generation of pastors and thoughtful lay Christians. At the Chicago summit, Packer wrote the Statement's official *Exposition* — a 6,000-word theological commentary that became the authoritative interpretation of the 19 articles. (Sproul drafted the articles; Packer expounded them.) Packer had moved from England to Vancouver in 1979 to teach at Regent College, where he served until he was 88. Widely considered the most important English-speaking Reformed theologian of the late 20th century, Packer was also known for his conciliation; his 1994 participation in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* alienated some of his fellow signers of the Chicago Statement but reflected his lifelong concern for visible Christian unity within classical orthodoxy. He died on 17 July 2020 at 93.

Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003) — Senior Statesman

WHEATON COLLEGE (BA, MA) • NORTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (BD, THD) • BOSTON UNIVERSITY (PHD, PHILOSOPHY) • FOUNDING EDITOR *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* 1956–1968 • PROFESSOR AT FULLER SEMINARY, EASTERN BAPTIST

Christianity Today founder

GRA volumes

If anyone was the dean of 20th-century American evangelical theology, it was Carl Henry. A one-time newspaper journalist converted as a young man, he served as founding editor of *Christianity Today* under Billy Graham and Harold Ockenga (1956–1968) and wrote the most ambitious American evangelical systematic theology of the century — the six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority* (1976–1983). Henry’s presence at Chicago 1978 gave the Statement institutional weight; he had been arguing for biblical inerrancy in print for two decades by then. Henry’s earlier *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947) had pressed evangelicals to engage social issues; his legacy includes both the doctrinal seriousness of the Chicago Statement and the broader vision of evangelical public witness. He died in 2003 at 90.

Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984) — Cultural Voice

HAMPDEN-SYDNEY COLLEGE • WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, FAITH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY • L’ABRI FELLOWSHIP, SWITZERLAND, FROM 1955

L’Abri

Cultural apologetics

Francis Schaeffer and his wife Edith founded **L’Abri Fellowship** in the Swiss Alps in 1955 as a refuge for seekers, skeptics, and the theologically curious. Over the next three decades L’Abri hosted thousands of young adults, many of them counter-cultural Westerners in spiritual crisis, and produced through Schaeffer a stream of influential books on the intellectual and cultural challenges facing Christianity: *The God Who Is There* (1968), *Escape from Reason* (1968), *How Should We Then Live?* (1976), and others. Schaeffer attended the 1978 Chicago summit by special invitation; his advocacy of biblical inerrancy was grounded in his cultural-apologetic argument that without a true, propositional, authoritative Word of God, the whole modern Christian witness collapses. Schaeffer died of cancer in 1984; his son Frank Schaeffer has written extensively and controversially about his father since.

Harold Lindsell (1913–1998) — Provocateur

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, HARVARD DIVINITY • NYU (PHD) • PROFESSOR AND DEAN, FULLER SEMINARY • EDITOR *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* 1968–1978 • AUTHOR, *THE BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE* (1976)

The Battle for the Bible

CT editor

Lindsell was the man whose 1976 book pushed inerrancy to a public crisis and forced the organized response that produced the Chicago Statement. *The Battle for the Bible* was not a measured academic work; it was an angry polemic, naming names and denominations (including his own former Fuller Seminary and the Southern Baptist Convention) where he considered inerrancy to be eroding. The book sold enormously, generated fierce replies (and a raft of rebuttal books), and made Lindsell either hero or villain depending on one's circle. Without his book, the ICBI summit might not have been convened with the urgency it had. Lindsell continued at *Christianity Today* until 1978, retiring the same year the Statement was produced. He died in 1998 at 84.

Edmund P. Clowney (1917–2005) — Westminster President

WHEATON COLLEGE • WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (THM) • YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL • PRESIDENT, WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, 1966–1984 • FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE PCA

Westminster Seminary

PCA founder

Clowney served as Westminster Seminary's president during the decade leading up to the Chicago summit and was one of the original ICBI Executive Council members. A gentle, literary Presbyterian theologian whose *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (1961) shaped a generation of expository preachers, Clowney was a founding member of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1973 when conservative Southern Presbyterians left the mainline PCUS. At Chicago 1978 he was the voice of the Old School Reformed tradition, arguing that the Statement should make explicit what the Westminster Confession had always implied. He died in 2005 at 87.

Roger Nicole (1915–2010) — Franco-American Baptist

GYMNASE CLASSIQUE, LAUSANNE • GORDON DIVINITY SCHOOL (BD, STM) • HARVARD UNIVERSITY (PHD, HISTORY) • PROFESSOR, GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY 1945–1986 • REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, ORLANDO 1989–2010

Reformed Baptist

ETS co-founder

Roger Nicole was the Swiss-born Reformed Baptist theologian who served for 41 years at Gordon-Conwell and co-founded the **Evangelical Theological Society** in 1949. A bibliophile whose personal library of 25,000 volumes he donated to RTS Orlando, Nicole was the gentlest ferocious scholar of his generation — a careful defender of limited atonement, biblical inerrancy, and women’s ordination (a position at odds with many of his Chicago Statement co-signers). At Chicago he was instrumental in crafting language that conservative Arminians as well as Calvinists could sign. He died in 2010 at 95.

Kenneth S. Kantzer (1917–2002) — Trinity Dean

ASHLAND COLLEGE • DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY • HARVARD DIVINITY, FACULTY OF THEOLOGY BASEL • HARVARD PHD • DEAN, TRINITY EVANGELICAL DIVINITY SCHOOL 1963–1978 • EDITOR *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* 1978–1982

TEDS dean

CT editor

Kantzer was the dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School during its rise to become the largest evangelical seminary in the world, and then editor of *Christianity Today* in succession to Lindsell. A meticulous moderate, Kantzer held the centre of American evangelicalism through the Chicago Statement decade. Under his Trinity deanship, Trinity was perhaps the single most important seminary in American evangelicalism (D. A. Carson, Walter Kaiser, Wayne Grudem, Don Carson all taught there). He died in 2002 at 85.

Gleason L. Archer Jr. (1916–2004) — Old Testament Specialist

HARVARD UNIVERSITY (BA, BD, PHD IN CLASSICS) • SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL • PROFESSOR OF OT AND SEMITIC LANGUAGES, TRINITY EVANGELICAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

Trinity OT

Bible Difficulties

Archer was the philological heavyweight of the Chicago signers — a Harvard-trained classicist who was also a qualified lawyer, fluent in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Syriac, and most of the cognate Semitic languages. His *Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (1964) was the standard evangelical OT textbook for thirty years; his *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (1982) became a go-to reference for defending specific

passages against critical attack. At Chicago, Archer’s philological precision helped draft articles on textual transmission and the autographic text. He died in 2004 at 87.

John H. Gerstner (1914–1996) — Sproul’s Mentor

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE • WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY • HARVARD DIVINITY (PHD) • PROFESSOR, PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY 1950–1980

Classical Reformed

R. C. Sproul’s teacher

John Gerstner was R. C. Sproul’s doctoral mentor and the classical Reformed voice at the Chicago summit. A Jonathan Edwards scholar (*The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 vols.) who taught church history at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary for thirty years, Gerstner formed a remarkable number of influential American Reformed pastors and teachers in his home study, among them Sproul, Charles Colson (after the Watergate scandal), and Bryan Chapell. Gerstner served on the ICBI’s Advisory Board and wrote an influential monograph explaining the Chicago Statement to laypersons. He died in 1996 at 81.

Other notable signers include: John MacArthur (The Master’s Seminary/Grace Community Church); W. A. Criswell (First Baptist Dallas); Adrian Rogers (Bellevue Baptist, Memphis); Paige Patterson (later SBC president and architect of the Southern Baptist “Conservative Resurgence”); Greg Bahnsen (Reformed philosopher and apologist, d. 1995); Robert Preus (Concordia Seminary, Lutheran); Harold O. J. Brown (Trinity); Earl D. Radmacher (Western Seminary); John Warwick Montgomery (Lutheran apologist and lawyer); Gordon R. Lewis (Denver Seminary); John H. Frame (Reformed Theological Seminary); Charles Colson (Prison Fellowship founder, *Born Again*); Joel R. Beeke (Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, signed later statements).

The ICBI's original plan was a three-summit strategy covering the doctrine of Scripture from conviction to interpretation to application.

Summit I — The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (October 1978). The foundational document. 300 signers. 19 articles.

Summit II — The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (10–13 November 1982). Held at the Wyndham O'Hare Hotel. 25 articles addressing how inerrant Scripture is to be interpreted: the single intended meaning of the biblical author, the importance of grammatical-historical exegesis, the unity of Scripture, the Christocentric reading of the OT, and the limits of allegorical, typological, and subjective interpretation. R. C. Sproul, James Boice, and Norman Geisler again led; J. I. Packer drafted much of the final text.

Summit III — The Chicago Statement on Biblical Application (December 1986). Held in Chicago. The widest-ranging of the three statements, addressing how Scripture applies to marriage, family, sexuality, divorce, homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia, civil government, war, economics, work, stewardship, arts, culture, and ecology. Less widely known and cited than the first two, the Application statement took positions that some later signers of the earlier statements would come to question, especially on specific economic and political applications.

The ICBI dissolved at the end of 1987 on schedule. Jay Grimstead founded the Coalition on Revival to carry forward the Application Statement's work; R. C. Sproul's Ligonier Ministries, Boice's Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, and the Evangelical Theological Society continued to carry the Inerrancy and Hermeneutics statements.

PART 6 — THE LEGACY

1. The ETS standard. In 2006 the Evangelical Theological Society officially adopted the Chicago Statement as the authoritative interpretation of its own doctrinal basis (“The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs”). Every voting ETS member is expected to affirm the Chicago Statement.

2. The Southern Baptist Convention's Conservative Resurgence (1979–1990s). The Chicago Statement's publication came one year before the start of the Southern Baptist conservative movement that, over a decade and a half, transformed every SBC seminary and institution toward explicit inerrancy. Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler (both Chicago signatories) were the political architects; the Chicago Statement provided the theological platform.

3. The standard doctrinal statement of conservative evangelical institutions. Today the Chicago Statement is the doctrinal basis of the Master's Seminary (John MacArthur's), Dallas Theological Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, Southern Evangelical Seminary, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, and many Reformed, Baptist, Lutheran, and independent evangelical seminaries and parachurch groups worldwide.

4. Continuing debates. Five post-Chicago debates keep the conversation alive: (i) how to read Genesis 1–11 in light of Article XIII's acknowledgment of phenomenological language; (ii) how the Chicago Statement applies to textual criticism and modern translation; (iii) whether "limited inerrancy" (Article XII's explicit target) can ever be a legitimate evangelical position; (iv) how inerrancy relates to biblical theology and narrative readings; (v) whether the original Chicago framers' intent on specific questions (the historical Adam, for instance) is binding on later evangelicals or only normative as a general approach.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR US

• **The text is still available in public evangelical life.** The Chicago Statement is freely posted online at the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals and elsewhere. Any congregation that wants to think carefully about biblical authority has a ready reference document —

written by careful scholars, vetted by a cross-denominational group, widely endorsed, and (by design) brief enough to be studied in a Sunday-evening series.

- **Inerrancy is not naivete.** The Statement carefully distinguishes inerrancy from woodenly literal interpretation (Article XIII). It allows for phenomenological description (“the sun rose”), round numbers, hyperbole, literary genre, and the use of non-standard grammar. It is a more sophisticated doctrine than its caricatures. An honest study of the 19 articles clears up a great deal of confusion.

- **It was a moment of consensus that is now harder to assemble.** The 1978 Chicago summit gathered Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Anglicans, and independents in a single room to agree on 19 articles on Scripture. That kind of evangelical cross-denominational doctrinal consensus has been harder to achieve since, and ever since the Chicago Statement its framers have been commemorated partly for the convention itself. Unity on first-order doctrine across denominational lines is a real good the modern church should remember how to seek.

- **Doctrinal statements don’t save; God’s Word does.** A church that signs every statement and fails to read Scripture every day has missed the whole point of the Chicago work. The Statement’s framers would have said that first. The doctrinal precision is in service of the living reading of the living Word.

Greek NT (1 Pet 1:23–25): ἀναγεγεννημένοι οὐκ ἐκ σπορᾶς φθαρτῆς ἀλλὰ ἀφθάρτου, διὰ λόγου ζῶντος θεοῦ καὶ μένοντος... τὸ δὲ ῥῆμα κυρίου μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

1 Peter 1:23–25 (ESV): “You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Article XIII of the Chicago Statement (which allows for phenomenological language, round numbers, hyperbole, etc.). Does the article’s nuance match or challenge what you thought “inerrancy” meant?

2. Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible* was angry and named names. Was that good prophetic work or divisive partisanship? How do we tell the difference in our own moment?

3. The Chicago framers worked at a moment of crisis to produce a consensus document quickly. Are there present-day evangelical issues that need a similar cross-denominational statement? What would its subject be?

4. The original drafting committee was almost entirely male. How would the conversation be enriched if a similar gathering were convened today with serious evangelical female scholars (Karen Jobes, Karen Swallow Prior, Sandra Richter, Carmen Joy Imes, Aimee Byrd, et al.) at the table?

5. The Statement applies only to the “autographs” — the original manuscripts we no longer have. Critics say this makes inerrancy unfalsifiable. Defenders say it honors textual reality. Where do you land, and why?

6. Boice, Sproul, Packer, Henry, and Schaeffer have all now died. Who are the Chicago Statement’s natural successors in our moment — and what should their work look like?

Father of the Word made flesh, we thank you for Boice at his writing desk, for Sproul drafting article after article at O'Hare, for Packer expounding the final text, for Henry at *Christianity Today*, for Schaeffer at L'Abri, for Archer in his many-volumed languages, for Lindsell writing what no one wanted to read, for Nicole in his 25,000-volume library. Thank you that they cared enough about your Word to labor over its doctrine for our sake. Forgive us where we have signed statements and never opened the Book. Make us faithful readers and doers of your Word. Your word is truth, and your word abides forever. Amen.

FURTHER READING

Primary sources:

- **The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy** (1978) — freely available at the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Bible Research, and many evangelical seminary websites.
- **The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics** (1982).
- **The Chicago Statement on Biblical Application** (1986).
- J. I. Packer, *Truth & Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (1996) — containing the expanded version of his Chicago Exposition.
- Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (1976); *The Bible in the Balance* (1979).
- Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (1976–1983).
- R. C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine* (2005) — his own mature reflection on the Chicago work.
- Norman Geisler (ed.), *Inerrancy* (1980) — the ICBI's major defense volume immediately following the Chicago Statement.

Modern studies:

- Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (2001) — a thoughtful post-Chicago engagement.

- D. A. Carson (ed.), *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (2016) — a major collaborative defense of the Chicago tradition in the 21st century.
- Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (2005) and *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (1998) — sophisticated developments from within the Chicago framework.
- J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (eds.), *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Zondervan Counterpoints, 2013) — the five views include Al Mohler’s “When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks” (representing classical Chicago) alongside more nuanced and some dissenting positions.
- Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (2013) — secular historical account of the Chicago moment and its aftermath.

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