**“Why Has the Chicago Statement Had Such Wide Influence? Reflections by a Participant”**

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**ETS Annual Meeting, Nov. 17, 2021: Fort Worth, Texas**

Background:

ICBI Summit Conference #1: October 26-28, 1978

Location: Hyatt Regency O’Hare hotel

279 participants, 3 days

A. Influence of Chicago Statement

1. Bethel College and Seminary: immediate rush to publicly align with Chicago Statement

2. Personally: I was rejoicing b/c of the Chicago statement

a. Had been a student at Fuller 1970-71

- various faculty claiming factual errors in Scripture

- Bible had diminished importance and practical classes (preaching, evangelism, counseling)

- transferred Westminster for second and third years of M.Div. (1971-73)

b. During PhD work in Cambridge 1973-76 - confidence in the truthfulness of Scripture was strengthened.

c. Bethel College: - concerned about the diminishing esteem given to Scripture by departments outside the Bible and theology department

d. My Introduction to Theology class (required)

-- I added the Chicago Statement to required readings and devoted lecture time to it.

e. Moved to TEDS in 1981.

Systematic Theology (published 1994)-I included Chicago Statement among other historic confessions

3. Wider acceptance of Chicago Statement in the evangelical world

(thanks to Jesse Slebodnik for much of this info)

a. ETS 2004

b. Other parachurch organizations:

Gospel Coalition, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, several others (CHA)

c. Denominations with clear affirmation of inerrancy

Southern Baptist Convention, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (using their own wording), Evangelical Free Church, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church in America (their own wording), Assemblies of God (using their own wording), many independent Bible churches and other nondenominational churches,

d. Educational institutions

Moody Bible Institute, all 6 Southern Baptist seminaries, Westminster Seminary California, the Master’s Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary (using their own wording), Trinity International University (using their own wording) Including Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (using their own wording), Liberty University (using their own wording), Wheaton College (using their own wording)

e. My experience with faculty interviews – agreement with Chicago Statement a regular question in interviews

B. Broader results

1. A reclaiming of the word “inerrancy” as the primary term to be used in debates over the authority of Scripture

2. A clear, thoughtful, responsible definition of “inerrancy” became the standard against which all other claims about the authority of Scripture could be evaluated. Supporters of inerrancy could now defend one position rather than dozens of varieties.

3. A noticeable shift in the atmosphere of evangelical scholarship

- at last, after several years of vigorous debate, defenders of inerrancy held the high ground, and opponents of inerrancy sensed they were in the minority (note subsequent controversies over Robert Gundry’s Matthew commentary; over Clark Pinnock, Greg Boyd, and John Sanders’s view of open theism; also the Peter Enns controversy at Westminster Seminary)

- the controversy was no longer whether to accept inerrancy, but whether certain positions are consistent with inerrancy

by January 1, 1979: a significant number of additional signers who were not at the Chicago conference:

Hudson Armerding

D. A. Carson

Robert Coleman

John Frame

Jack Hayford

Hal Lindsay

J Robertson McQuilkin

Stephen Olford

Luis Palau

Eckhard Schnabel

Luder Whitlock

John Woodbridge

C. Reasons for this wide influence

1. God’s favor and guidance on the entire project

times of worship and prayer at all 6 plenary sessions scattered over three days

The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD. (Prov. 21:31)

Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. (Ps. 127:1)

2. The right timing: 1978 – the right time for this statement: In 1976, *The Battle for the Bible* by Harold Lindsell had exploded on the evangelical world

- revealed to laypersons in major denominations what was really being taught in their seminaries. - Lindsell had shockingly exposed deviations from biblical truth at Fuller Seminary, North Park Seminary, and also at the denominational seminaries of the Southern Baptists and Missouri Synod Lutherans.

- the controversy over inerrancy was at a boiling point

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. (Gal. 5:25)

3. High-level academic leadership: by widely respected evangelical scholars from diverse denominations

6 plenary session speakers:

Anglican: J I Packer

Lutheran: Robert Preus (president of Concordia Seminary-Ft. Wayne)

Baptist: W. A. Criswell

Presbyterian: Edmund Clowney, James Montgomery Boice, RC Sproul

14 position papers presented at workshops

by respected evangelical scholars

4. The right goal: not to convince people who opposed inerrancy but to define inerrancy clearly for those who supported it, and to unify them behind a cause

So- only inerrancy supporters were invited:

A conference that brought together both sides was tried before: in 1966, under the leadership of Harold Ockenga, the Wenham conference on Scripture

- tried to resolve this controversy with all sides represented

- brought together 51 scholars for 10 days (!) and produced no consensus

🡪 Christian leaders who teach harmful doctrines seldom repent from their hardened positions

in Chicago: no one from Fuller Seminary was invited (from the moment the conference began, I felt their absence was strikingly evident, and it spoke volumes)

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him (Tit. 3:10)

5. The right participants: remarkably widespread evangelical participation:

- representatives of the entire range of evangelical groups and denominations (similar to ETS)

- included Missouri Synod Lutherans and Assembly of God Pentecostals, Calvinists and Wesleyans, Presbyterians and Baptists (I met Hardy Steinberg)

– but not Roman Catholics, who held a different view of Scripture

-- and not anyone who denied inerrancy

“in abundance of counselors there is victory” (Prov. 24:6)

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| **ICBI Summit 1: Summary of Participants by Occupation** | | | | | | | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | |
|  | Totl | % of whole |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Faculty: Full professor (38sem 34c) | 96 | 34% |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Parachurch staff (38 org) | 64 | 23% |  |  |  |  |  | |
| President or exec. dir., etc. | 60 | 22% |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Pastor | 47 | 17% |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Faculty: asst. or assoc. prof. | 33 | 12% |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Missionary or international rep | 14 | 5% |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Layperson: business | 12 | 4% |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Student (in seminary) | 10 | 4% |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Layperson: lawyer or judge | 4 | 1% |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Layperson: Medical doctor | 2 | 1% |  |  |  |  |  | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | |
| Total no. of participants | 279 | 100% |  |  |  |  |  | |
| (note: some are counted in |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | |
| more than one category) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | |

- A brief glance at a list of some participants (see last page)

🡪 If 279 respected evangelical leaders of this much influence unite behind a single cause, it will very likely gain widespread support.

(other statements have not always had this component)

6. A sound process: the process provided a limited but genuine opportunity for the participation of every attendee (as a young professor in my second year of teaching, with my PhD still 5 months away, I felt a valued part of the process)

Thursday: draft of statement handed out

Friday: 8:00 AM: individual suggestions to be handed in to central committee

Friday 12 o’clock noon: small group discussions of different portions of revised document

Friday 3:00 PM: large group discussion of revised document

Saturday 8:00 AM: final document handed out; then singing & signing

🡪 I think everyone felt a valued part of the process

[Lutherans: 66 books of Bible]

[me: the word “normative” – Article 5]

“But all things should be done decently and in order.” (1 Cor. 14:40)

7. Wise leadership: Leadership by a group of mature, well-informed, and wise evangelical scholars

- initial draft of Chicago Statement by R.C. Sproul

- wise revisions by a strong central steering committee

James Montgomery Boice, RC Sproul, JI Packer, Roger Nicole, Edmund Clowney, Robert Preuss, Earl Radmacher, Norman Geisler, Moishe Rosen (unsure of exact membership – t.y. to Vern P)

for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.

(Prov. 24:6)

8. Younger scholars: Inclusion of several (43) mostly-unknown young scholars

students: J.P. Moreland

younger faculty: Vern Poythress, John Feinberg, Robert Godfrey, John Hughes, Alan Coppedge, Wayne Grudem

“what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim. 2:2)

9. Enough money: Adequate funding to pay for travel and lodging for participants who requested it

I think we had to buy our own breakfasts and lunches

BGEA: gave $10,000 (= $42,000 in 2021)

total cost for 279 participants: very substantial

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:19)

10. Immediate publication (I think) in *Christianity Today* (Harold Lindsell was on the participant list but did he attend?) and *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Editor Ron Youngblood was a participant)

11. The quality of the final statement: It immediately commended itself as a faithful representation of the Bible’s teaching about itself.

a. Tone: It contained a tone of humility and graciousness (see preface)

We offer this Statement in a spirit, not of contention, but of humility and love, which we purpose by God's grace to maintain in any future dialogue arising out of what we have said. We gladly acknowledge that many who deny the inerrancy of Scripture do not display the consequences of this denial in the rest of their belief and behavior, and we are conscious that we who confess this doctrine often deny it in life by failing to bring our thoughts and deeds, our traditions and habits, into true subjection to the divine Word.

b. Scope: Its affirmations and denials effectively affirmed everything essential to inerrancy and denied all the common evasions of inerrancy

Contents:

1. Source of authority: God

2. Scripture is our supreme authority

3. Scripture *is* revelation

4. Human language is adequate.

5. Progressive revelation is not contradictory

6. Plenary inspiration includes the very words of Scripture

7. Mode of inspiration

8. Role of human personalities

9. Finite content but still entirely true on all subjects

10. Inspiration and inerrancy apply to the autographs

11. Both infallible and inerrant

12. Truthful on all topics including history, science, and creation

13. Inerrancy a useful term. Qualifications regarding the nature of ordinary language.

14. Scripture is noncontradictory. Alleged errors do not disprove inerrancy.

15. Inerrancy taught in Bible and affirmed by Jesus

16. Church history affirms inerrancy

17. Witness of the Holy Spirit

18. Grammatico-historical exegesis. Internal claims of authorship are true.

19. Inerrancy important but not necessary for salvation.

12. My personal conclusion: The Chicago Statement Biblical Inerrancy deserves a place alongside other historic confessions of faith.

For that reason - included the appendix to my Systematic Theology in 1994 along with

apostles Creed

Nicene Creed

Chalcedonian confession

39 Articles of the Church of England

Westminster Confession of Faith

Formula of Concord

Baptist Faith and Message

In the past 27 years, no one has questioned why I included there with these other great confessions of faith.

In the second edition of my Systematic Theology (2020), I kept it there with those of the great confessions of faith. And I think that is where it belongs.

