

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics

Article 14: 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 event, discourse or saying reported in Scripture was invented by the biblical writers or by the traditions they incorporated.

Article 15: 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 20: 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 extra biblical views ever disprove the teaching of Scripture or hold priority over it.

Article 21: 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 22: We affirm that Genesis 1-11 is factual, as is the rest of the book. We deny that the teaching of Genesis 1-11 are mythical and that scientific hypothesis about earth history or the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation.

A Commentary on The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics

by Norman L. Geisler

Commentary on Article 20: Although only the Bible is the normative 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 texts 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.

Commentary on Article 21: 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 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.

Commentary on Article 22: 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 15) 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 14). 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.