

## **1987 Resolution on "Inerrancy" GCMBCNA Yearbook**

### **Resolution on Inerrancy (1987 Yearbook pp. 44-46)**

#### **Preamble:**

In 1978, at the General Conference convention in Buhler, an extensive statement on the inspiration, interpretation and authority of the Scriptures was adopted. Since then questions have been asked repeatedly about how this statement relates to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. At the 1984 conference in Reedley, the Chicago Statement (without its preamble) was circulated, but no consensus was reached on what to do with it. The Board of Reference and Counsel was then asked to take the question under advisement and to come to the next conference with a resolution on this matter. The following resolution attempts to re-affirm the high view of biblical inspiration and authority, which is part of our Mennonite Brethren heritage. However, it also cautions us against making human definitions of inspiration the test of orthodoxy.

#### **Resolution:**

The Preface to our Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith states unequivocally that we hold to the "Holy Scriptures as the infallible guide for faith (i.e. doctrine) and practice (i.e. ethics)" (p.7). "The Mennonite Brethren Church has throughout its history emphasized biblical authority in all matters of faith and practice" (p.9). For 127 years the Mennonite Brethren Church has held firmly to the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and authoritative Word of God. Although our lives have not always conformed to the teachings of the Bible, we have always confessed that the Bible is the ultimate authority of what we believe and what we do. We have not always agreed in our interpretation of some of the passages in the Bible, but we have been united on the cardinal doctrines of the Bible, as these are set out in our Confession of Faith. We should, therefore, be profoundly and humbly grateful that God has kept our churches and our conference from divisions over the question of biblical authority. It would be a great pity if we should now, in an attempt to define more precisely what "inspiration" means, sow discord in our churches.

We recognize that the efforts that are made from time to time, to describe the interplay of the human and divine factors in the revelation of God, given to us in the Scriptures, arise out of a genuine concern for the spiritual welfare of the church. Such definitions, however, are human attempts to describe what will always remain, partially at least, a mystery.

The rallying cry of the Fundamentalists of a generation ago was “verbal inspiration.” In the literature of the twenties, when the conflict between fundamentalism and liberalism was sharp, one does not find the word “inerrancy,” nor does one find it in the Confessions of faith or in the doctrinal statements of Christian schools.

Today the language is “inerrancy,” and the expression “verbal inspiration” or “plenary inspiration” is seldom heard. Whereas, for most evangelicals these expressions—plenary inspiration, verbal inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy—are synonymous, we should remind ourselves that the catchword of one generation is not necessarily that of the next. The crucial test of orthodoxy should not be sought in current slogans, but rather in a constant concern to bring our life and our teaching into conformity with the Word of God.

How, then, shall we respond to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy? First of all, we should take seriously what the framers of this statement say in the Preface: (1) “The authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age.” (2) “We acknowledge the limitations of a document prepared in a brief intensive conference and do not propose that this statement be given creedal weight.” (3) “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, as 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.” (4) “We claim no personal infallibility for the witness we bear, and for any help which enables us to strengthen this testimony to God’s Word we shall be grateful.” Also, it should be pointed out that the scholars who formulated the Chicago Statement acknowledge (Article VII) that the mode of inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

The Board of Reference and Counsel therefore, recommends to our conference (1) that we reaffirm our statement on Scripture in our Confession of Faith: “We believe that all Scripture is inspired by God as men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit. We accept the Old and New Testament as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative Guide for the faith and life of Christian discipleship” (p.11ff.). (2) That we identify with those who confess the inerrancy of the original documents of the biblical books. (3) That we accept the 19 articles of the Chicago Statement as a serious and valuable attempt to describe what it means to confess that the Bible is our ultimate

authority in faith and life. (4) That we recognize that the Chicago Statement is one of many attempts that have been made in the past to define what it means to confess that the Bible is the Word of God, with the strengths and weaknesses that always characterize such statements. (5) That we do not, however, make the Chicago Statement a part of our Confession of Faith. (6) That we recognize that the precision of any person's definition of revelation and inspiration (including our own) is not necessarily an index of his or her spiritual depth or faithfulness to God and his Word. (7) That our entire denomination commit itself anew to humble obedience to the Word of God and to the faithful proclamation of "the whole counsel of God."