

The request I submitted to the ombudsman requesting clarification on the doctrine of Inerrancy. The response I received simply said that a faculty member has to affirm the MBI statement, not the Chicago Statement. This completely missed the point of the request. Rich Weber

Moody Global Ministries believes strongly in the factual, verbal, historical inerrancy of the Bible. That is, the Bible, in its original documents, is free from error in what it says about geography, history and science as well as in what it says about God. Its authority extends to all matters about which the Bible speaks.

On its surface, this statement seems to affirm the “Old Princeton” view of Hodge and Warfield that would assert that what the human writers of Scripture said, God said, such that every assertion of Scripture is infallible in its verbal expression. Likewise, it would seem that Moody Bible Institute holds a theologically “conservative” position on the Inerrancy of Scripture that would be in keeping with the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy that was produced by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI).

Postmodernism has brought a new set of challenges to the table (although not altogether new, as some of the challenges regarding the sufficiency of finite human language to speak of an infinite God were raised previously by Neo-Orthodoxy and addressed by many of the framers of the ICBI statement). Among these challenges are debates about whether the ICBI Chicago Statement is sufficient to define “Inerrancy,” and whether or not “truth” is to be understood as “that which corresponds with reality.”

These two issues – Inerrancy and Truth – are inseparable. The ICBI Chicago Statement on Inerrancy is rooted in a recognition of “truth” as being “that which corresponds with reality” (i.e., a “correspondence view” of truth). The official commentary written to accompany the statement states, “all the claims of the Bible must correspond with reality, whether that reality is historical, factual or spiritual” (R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy*, 41). It goes on to state, “By biblical standards truth and error is meant the view used both in the Bible and in everyday life, viz., a correspondence view of truth.” Norman Geisler notes that he and the other framers of the ICBI statement understood the correspondence view of truth to be that which is expressed in Scripture. He notes that the Exodus 20:16 prohibition of bearing “false witness” means, in essence, “Don’t misrepresent the facts.” He notes that the biblical writers employ the correspondence view of truth when they speak of examining evidence in order to verify facts (Acts 24:8, 11), examining evidence in order to determine the truthfulness of a statement (Gen 42:16), and examining the events in order to test the false prophets whose prophecy “does not come to pass or come true” (Deut 18:22) (Norman Geisler, *Defending Inerrancy*, 163). Furthermore, he notes that Satan is called “a liar” in John 8:44 because his claim, “You will not surely die” (Gen 3:4) did not correspond with what God really said in Genesis 2:17. Annanias and Sapphira “lied” to the apostles because their account of their finances misrepresented reality (Acts 5:1-4). The prophecies of Micaiah were considered “true” while the false prophets’ words were deemed “false” because Micaiah’s words corresponded with the facts of reality (1 Kings 22:16-22). Psalm 119:163 contrasts “falsehood” with that which corresponds to God’s law. Paul commands believers to “put away falsehood” and “speak the truth” (Eph 4:25). The biblical concept of truth maintained by the ICBI statement rests firmly in a correspondence view of truth.¹

¹ Geisler notes that this is not to suggest that *term* “truth” is limited to correspondence in Scripture. Indeed, he states, “truth” often implies *trustworthiness*. However, “a statement is trustworthy only if it corresponds to reality. And correspondence is the basis of trustworthiness.” (Geisler, *Defending Inerrancy*, 240).

Article 13 of the ICBI's Chicago Statement states:

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 slack 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.

In offering further explanation, the ICBI commentary states that by the term "inerrancy," the statement is asserting that "the Bible is completely true, that all its affirmations and denials correspond to reality" (*Explaining Inerrancy*, 40-41). The commentary adds that the framers of the statement understood biblical "standards of truth and error" to mean "the view used both in the Bible and in everyday life, via., a correspondence view of truth." It notes, for example, that "when Jesus affirms that Jonah was in 'the belly of the great fish,' this statement is true ... because it is literally and historically true."

Clearly, when the framers of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy drafted the document – and when nearly 300 Evangelical scholars signed it – the concept of "Inerrancy" itself was rooted in a correspondence view of truth. It is this statement, then, that went on to aid in the reversal of the drift away from conservative Evangelicalism in the Southern Baptist Convention, as well influencing a change of course in schools such as Bethel Seminary and Gordon Conwell Seminary. It was also this understanding of "Inerrancy" that was adopted by the Evangelical Theological Society in 2003 as the official explanation of "the intent and meaning of the reference to biblical inerrancy in the ETS Doctrinal Basis" (see Bylaw 12 of the Evangelical Theological Society, <http://www.etsjets.org/about/bylaws>). Likewise, the Chicago Statement became the basis for the view of Inerrancy upheld by the International Society for Christian Apologetics (<http://www.isca-apologetics.org/explaining-biblical-inerrancy>).

In the present Postmodern environment, many continue to use the term "Inerrancy," yet they reject the ICBI definition and a correspondence view of truth. For example, Clark Pinnock was comfortable speaking of "inerrancy" merely as it related to the *intention* of the text, rather than the actual facts or propositions themselves. Peter Enns holds an "incarnational model" of inerrancy by which he asserts that the primitive, non-Christian worldview of the biblical authors requires that the modern reader of Scripture "relativize" the text to the culture of its day and, consequently, reject the notion that the Bible is accurate in all details. And a friend of Postmodernism like Stanley Grenz was able to emphasize the "functional" approach of recognizing the role of Scripture within various Christian communities" while rejecting the traditional orthodox notion of propositional revelation in favor of a "dynamic" view that is not fixated on "correct doctrine."

The question that is the concern of this letter is, specifically, what does Moody Global Ministries mean when it affirms "the factual, verbal, historical inerrancy of the Bible"? In a recent meeting of the Bible/Theology Division, one faculty member asked if Moody Global Ministries affirms the ICBI Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. The response offered from one in administration was that the Chicago Statement is *a* definition of Inerrancy, but it is not *the* definition of Inerrancy. Another faculty member has said that this sort of comment is precisely the way Theological Liberalism would respond.

This letter is being sent to request clarification on Moody Global Ministries' position regarding the Doctrine of Inerrancy. Given the current fracturing of Evangelicalism, the mounting gap between those who hold to conservative orthodoxy and those who adhere to a theologically progressive position, and

the increasingly diverse way in which the term “Inerrancy” is used (along with the theological consequences of each view), I believe it is critical to state clearly what Moody affirms in regard to the written Word of God. Additionally, I believe the fallout of failing to clarify a position on Inerrancy would be devastating to the reputation and ministry of Moody Global Ministries. Although, amazingly, the Southern Baptist Convention was able to reverse its doctrinal drift over the course of time, it would seem more likely that Moody Bible Institute would face a crisis along the lines of that experienced by Fuller Seminary in the 1960s – and given the present climate, it seems unlikely that any school would be granted the opportunity to recover a reputation for conservative orthodoxy once it has been abandoned.

My fear is that if Moody Global Ministries attempts to follow a broad path in regard to the doctrine of Inerrancy, affirming positions that deny the total, factual truthfulness of all that the Bible affirms and the correspondence of those propositions to reality, other doctrinal commitments would quickly fall. A complementarian view of gender roles and gender specificity in regard to the office of elder/pastor would be illogical if the words upon which these positions are based do not themselves express truth that corresponds to reality. The position recently affirmed regarding the historicity of Adam and Eve could prove to be inconsistent with a denial of a correspondence view of truth. To the extent that it depends upon specific texts of Scripture to make its point, the white paper expressing a specific position on human sexuality would be indefensible if the words of Scripture are subjected to the relativizing influence of Postmodernism. Even an affirmation of the bodily resurrection of Christ becomes uncertain if the assertion “He is not here, He has risen, just as He said” does not express an objective truth that transcends one’s own personal experience or socio-cultural background.

I would not be writing this letter if I did not believe a great deal was at stake in this discussion. For almost four decades, conservative Evangelicalism has affirmed the ICBI’s Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, and I believe it is vital to the ministry moving forward that we clarify whether or not Moody affirms this statement or has opted for something else. It is for this reason I am asking the President of Moody Global Ministries to provide a statement regarding the doctrine of Inerrancy that will clarify what is held and taught by the faculty and administration of Moody Bible Institute.