

THE L'ABRI STATEMENTS

When the Swiss L'Abri began in 1955 the Schaeffers produced a short 2-page document called variously, the Consensus of Faith, or the Basic Principles of Operation. (Appendix II, pg 22) In some respects it remains, even to the present, one of the most important documents to come out of L'Abri even though never published. Its use was principally internal, clarifying and controlling the direction of the work as it developed thereafter.

Approximately 40 years later we have decided to produce a further document having the same objective in mind, yet without displacing the original. Hence the following statements. They are not meant to be exhaustive nor are they designed to be published (though we are happy to have them freely copied and distributed). We intend to use them actively within the Fellowship as a guide to those working or studying with us, but we hope they will also be helpful to others whatever their individual or organizational contexts may be.

As the opening paragraph of the section dealing with 'Boundaries' says, "We see the following statements as guidelines to lead us into truth together, not as creedal formulations that would preclude further growth, correction and discussion." And again, "Faithfulness to God must take shape and have certain parameters in specific, historical and cultural settings. Therefore we have outlined some of the areas where we feel accommodation (i.e. compromise) is a particular danger today."

We take this opportunity very deliberately to thank God for his faithfulness to L'Abri, particularly in the continuity both of ideas and life which have constituted our heritage.

The Members of L'Abri

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L'ABRI STATEMENTS OF FAITH, PURPOSE, AND THE BOUNDARIES OF BELIEF

(Approved in April 1996. Statement #3 added in March 2005)

We affirm that each member of L'Abri is committed to stand together in the stream of the Protestant Evangelical heritage. We affirm that every member is committed to the body, teaching and work of the L'Abri heritage as reflected in the writings and work of Francis and Edith Schaeffer and those who have worked with them over the past forty years.

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

1) Devotion to Christ and a reality of prayer as we live in daily dependence upon the Lord.

Francis Schaeffer would often say that the heart of Christianity is the relationship between the Bridegroom and the Bride: the love that Christ has shown us in giving Himself up to death on the cross as the substitute for our sins, and the love we ought to show to Him as our hearts are overwhelmed by gratitude for all He has done and continues to do for us. Without the centrality of this love Christianity can and will degenerate into a form of godliness without its power.

We are called to live with the love of Christ as the motivating force of our inner being, and actively to depend on the power of God as we seek to serve and obey Him. Prayer, moment by moment prayer, is to characterize the people of God, for we are living in a supernatural universe, one open at all times to God's intervention in our lives and in this world. It was this conviction that led the Schaeffers to believe that L'Abri should be a demonstration of God's existence and of the truth of Christianity as those in the work depended on Him day by day and as He graciously answered their prayers.

2) Confidence in Biblical Truth.

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments describe themselves as revelation, communication in language, from the infinite personal God to us, His creatures. The Bible claims divine inspiration for all that it affirms, and therefore also claims to be infallible or inerrant in its teaching. This is true whether it is addressing matters of faith and practice or matters of history and the created order.

The Bible was, of course, written by human authors and should be read, as with any other book, according to the rules of historical grammatical exegesis. Yet, this book is the living Word of God, able to make us wise to salvation and sufficient to teach us all we need to know for life and godliness.

3) The Fall.

The disobedience of Adam and Eve, their rebellion against God at an early stage of human history, brought the whole race as their descendants into a state of sin and judgment. The reality of this fall expresses itself in seven separations:

a) God in his perfect righteousness can have nothing to do with evil and is, therefore, justly angry with us his creatures. This wrath of God is daily experienced by us and our fellows for we were created for loving fellowship with our Maker, and yet we sense his just indignation against us, an indignation which will last eternally for those not reconciled to him through Christ.

b) We are those whose hearts are filled with pride and self-worship rather than humble devotion to the Lord. There is a deep reluctance within us to love and serve our Creator, for we are alienated from him.

c) We are also alienated from ourselves: that is, within each one of us we find the disintegrating power of sin. We do not faithfully express God's holiness and so we experience guilt and shame. We are not what we should be, we are unable to do what we wish, nor do we even accurately know what is deep in our own hearts. This inner brokenness demonstrates itself in the extremes of inordinate self-love and self-hatred and in psychological disorder.

d) This separation within our own persons is also expressed in our bodies. Pain, sickness and debility that come with advancing age demonstrate this physical corruption. Death, our final enemy, manifests this reality most fully as it tears apart body and spirit and brings our bodies down to the grave.

e) We are alienated from each other. Even in our most cherished relationships: marriage, family and friendship, we discover ugly passions in our hearts: pride, envy, resentment, bitterness and hatred. These passions are at work in every facet of human society: in hostility between individuals, social groups, classes, races and nations. This inner enmity may break out in discrimination, violence, warfare and even genocide.

f) There is separation between us and creation around us. Instead of our dominion being made known in faithful stewardship of the earth we pollute and damage our environment and recklessly destroy our fellow creatures.

g) Even creation itself suffers separation as it has been subjected to the curse. The earth resists our attempts at dominion so that our daily work can be burdensome and even unproductive, and the natural order experiences disintegration and violence.

Christ, through his triumph on the cross and in his resurrection, has overcome, is overcoming and will overcome fully all of these separations.

4) Commitment to genuine humanness expressed in servanthood and love, and displayed in supernaturally restored relationships.

Within the Trinity there has been love and personal communication through all eternity. We have been created in the likeness of this personal God though our humanness has in every aspect of our nature been desperately flawed by sin and its effects. Christ, God's Son, came into this world, lived as a perfect human being, died and rose again in order to restore us to fellowship with God and to overcome all the consequences of the Fall in our lives.

Christ is at work restoring us to true humanness as we become conformed to His likeness by the power of the Spirit. This will mean that wherever there is true faith in Christ there will be a life which begins to imitate the love of Christ. The Apostle Paul calls us to have the mind of Christ as we think more highly of one another than of ourselves and as we give ourselves to a life of service, loving one another as Christ has loved us.

Christ is the peace between us and God and between us and one another; therefore the divisions which so often exist between people, whether personal, cultural, racial or economic, ought to be overcome by those who have come to know Christ. Though it will not in this age be perfect, yet, in our homes and families, in our friendships and our churches, in our workplaces and neighborhoods this supernatural restoration of relationships ought to be realized wherever there is true Christianity.

5) Commitment to apply God's truth to the whole of life and to encourage Christians to make a contribution to the wider culture.

Scripture makes no distinction between the sacred and the secular, that is, it does not encourage us to think that some activities, such as prayer or evangelism, are more spiritual than other activities, such as caring for children or manual labor. Rather we are taught that Christ is the Lord of all of life and that our calling is to honor Him in all that we do. We are to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ and to seek to serve Him in every human activity.

Often Christians retreat from the wider culture, believing it to be completely dominated by ideas and practices which are contrary to God's commandments. Developing our own sub-culture will provide protection from the world for ourselves and our children, many Christians feel, and so society is abandoned to go its wicked way. Yet, God has not abandoned the human race, humans all still bear the divine image, and therefore His Glory can still be perceived in all human cultures despite the terrible corruptions of sin. As Christians we are called by the Lord not to withdraw from the world but to be in it, living as salt and light in it, rejoicing in all that is good in human society, and committing ourselves to make a difference in our own small way in whatever calling we are placed by the Lord.

The Christian's call is to seek God's kingdom in all of life and to work at limiting the effects of the fall. This is true not only in our own human relationships but also in our relationship with the environment. We receive this earth and all its creatures as good gifts from God and as a responsibility of stewardship. Christians above all others ought to care for the creation. Our calling is both to exercise dominion over the earth for the benefit of humanity and also to pass our world on the next generation in as good or better order than we received it.

6) The appreciation of God's gifts in all of life.

God is the maker and giver of every good gift. The universe displays His delight in creating what is good, beautiful and true. As those made in his image, we are called to enjoy God's creation and to delight in using body, mind and imagination to express our own creativity and to enrich the lives of others as we do. For example, whether it is the appreciation of great art in all the varied disciplines, or whether it is the "hidden art" of serving a well prepared meal, or digging a ditch, we should honor, and be thankful for the depth and richness which art brings to our lives.

Likewise, through the sciences we can understand and appreciate the beauty and wonder of God's order in creation and through our productive and creative work we can take delight in the shaping of our environment and the expression of our uniqueness and humanity.

7) The need to understand the culture we live in and our responsibility to communicate to it.

Christ became incarnate in a particular culture at a particular time in history. He knew his contemporaries, for He was one with them, raised and educated as they were, shaped by the same ideas and customs, and yet He lived in obedience to His Father's will in all that He did and said. On every page of the gospels we see His deep knowledge and understanding of the times in which He lived and of the people to whom He sought to make known the good news of the kingdom.

To resist the ideas and practices of the culture in which we live we have to understand them and bring them before the bar of Scripture. Reflection on the Word and on the world are necessary, both for holy living and also for wise communication of the gospel to those around us. Paul spoke the same truth, but he presented it in different ways depending on whether he was in a synagogue with Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, or whether he was on Mars Hill with pagans. To communicate faithfully we have to work at understanding the intellectual climate of the times in which we live, and we need to give ourselves to people in love if we want to know what idols captivate the hearts of our contemporaries.

8) The preparedness to give honest answers to honest questions in such a way that the unbeliever may be faced with the truth claims of Christianity.

God has made truth known in His Word and so we may urge the unbeliever and the believer to come to Scripture with his or her questions. Because Christianity is the truth, people should not be afraid to ask the questions which trouble them. Paul reminds us that the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of this world, and that therefore they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

There will always be good and sufficient answers available for those who seek with an open heart and mind. This is so, whether we desire to show that a Biblical world view makes sense of life in a way that no other world view does, or whether we wish to defend the historical truth of the Biblical revelation.

All people are rebels against God in their hearts and minds, so we recognize that evangelism is not simply a matter of persuading people of the truth of the Christian message. We present the truth and the reasons for believing it, and at the same time we pray for the Holy Spirit to humble the mind and heart of the hearer in order that they might be open to the truth and be convinced by it.

II. STATEMENT OF BOUNDARIES OF BELIEF:

This statement is a recognition that, within the breadth of Evangelical Christianity, there are specific ideas and priorities which L'Abri must affirm in order to maintain its own distinctive calling from God. Faithfulness to God must take shape and have certain parameters in specific historical and cultural settings. Therefore, we have outlined some of the areas where we feel accommodation is a particular danger today.

We see the following statements as guidelines to lead us into truth together, not as creedal formulations that would preclude further growth, correction and discussion. They are not intended to substitute for a living continuity of our tradition through direct relationship with God and each other, but rather to serve those very ends by building and safeguarding mutual trust and working with a common mind. We therefore expect the convictions of all L'Abri workers and members to be within the parameters delineated.

1. Biblical Authority:

God has graciously revealed himself to us in human language in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. When we call the Bible "propositionally true", we mean that what it affirms can be stated in true propositions, in contrast to the view that its statements merely evoke a human response irrespective of their correspondence to what is true.

God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We seek to cultivate a love for God's word, to listen to it and to live humbly and obediently under it. Above all, we confess that it is through the written word that we come to know Jesus Christ, the one who is the living word. Therefore we want to resist any diminishing of the Bible's authority or any loss of confidence in its truthfulness. L'Abri subscribes to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) (pg 25) and on Hermeneutics (1982) (pg 30), and highlights the following affirmations as especially important:

- a) We affirm the divine inspiration and infallibility of Holy Scripture as originally given, and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
- b) Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in its statements about God's acts in creation, the natural world, ethics, world history, and its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
- c) We affirm that God in his work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom he chose and prepared. We deny that God thereby overrode their personalities or that their finiteness or fallenness introduced distortion or falsehood into God's word.

2. The Nature of Truth:

For our contemporaries, the loss of any final foundation for truth with the loss of belief in a personal God who has spoken in his written word, has led to a sense that all knowledge is only opinion, and that truth, consequently, is unobtainable. We affirm, against that consensus of our society, that there is truth, truth that can be known by finite, fallible human beings. Ultimately, of course, this truth resides in God himself, who alone knows all truth comprehensively and perfectly.

God has made this physical universe according to patterns and laws so that it has a form which can be examined and understood. We have been created in the image of God to understand, name, and have dominion over the world in which we live. There is a correlation, therefore, between our created being and our physical environment, and this correlation makes true knowledge possible.

We affirm that true knowledge is possible where there is true humility. As Francis Schaeffer said, truth may be known when we bow ontologically, epistemologically, morally. First, we have to bow as creatures and acknowledge our dependence on God for life itself. Secondly, we have to bow in our minds, acknowledging that we cannot find truth by reason alone, and are dependent on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God – the Word, that is, both of general and of special revelation. Thirdly, we have to bow as sinners knowing that all we think is distorted by personal pride and cultural prejudice. Nevertheless, we maintain that for believer and unbeliever alike, true knowledge is possible.

We recognize that, neither in this world nor in the world to come can human beings ever arrive at exhaustive knowledge either of God himself, or of other persons, or of any part even of the physical universe. At the same time, however, we affirm that true knowledge is attainable and that all people live with the constant blessing of this reality.

The truth that we know is truth in opposition to falsehood, that is, truth which accords with the way things are, as opposed to the way things are not. This makes science possible, both the physical and the human sciences. This truth is also truth rooted in history, a history which can be examined and from which adequate proof can be ascertained. This truth is related also to the way we have been created to live, so that it may be experienced in our daily lives as we walk in the ways God has designed for us. Much of this truth includes propositions which can be expressed verbally.

We affirm that anything we discern through our study of the world or of ourselves should be subjected to God's revealed word in the Scriptures.

3. Providence:

Two themes are clear in the Biblical teaching about the providence of God. God is sovereign in sustaining and controlling what takes place in the world, and human beings as images of God are agents who make responsible choices. The Bible states both very forcefully but does not seem to tell us how they are easily reconciled.

a) The two themes: The Bible teaches that God is in ultimate control of everything that happens in his creation. This includes foreknowledge of what will happen, but also foreordination (predestination), actually causing things to happen according to his plan. The scope of this control encompasses the natural world, political events and individual subjectivity. There is no fate, fortune or human determination that can veto or overpower his purposes:

This is the plan that is planned concerning the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has planned and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? (Is. 14:26-7)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. (Eph. 2:8)

The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. (re Lydia, Acts 16:14)

On the other hand, the reality of human choice is assumed both by the hundreds of imperatives directed to people in the Bible by God the Father, Jesus, prophets and apostles and also by the obvious framework of moral accountability which is the context of human life on earth. The Biblical covenants themselves are promises and also conditions; the conditions presuppose choice. The Bible also states this explicitly:

*Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve... (Josh. 24:15)
For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live. (Ezek. 18:32)*

Believing that God is in control of all things does not mean that we believe that God is the creator of evil. As Dr. Schaeffer put it: “When God created the universe ex nihilo, he made everything good (Gen.1:31). There was no inherent need for sin/evil to enter the universe. Everything was made perfect and free. If God had created it otherwise, he would be responsible for evil in the world, which would directly contradict scripture (Ps 5:4; James 1:13, 14). Therefore there is no evil in God. “*God is good and in him there is no darkness at all*”. (I John 1:5)

b) Simplistic solutions which we reject: In trying to reconcile the two themes, Christians have sometimes sacrificed one to the other. Sovereignty and responsibility have become parts of a zero-sum interaction (i.e. an interaction of competing or mutually exclusive interests in which what is gained by one side is lost by the other, e.g. as God is more sovereign, people are less responsible, or vice versa). We reject this approach.

Some claim that the theme of greatest importance and Biblical clarity is that God is sovereign, and that therefore references to human choice are to the *sensation* we have of making choices, not to the reality of that sensation. References to God “repenting” are only metaphorical and not substantive. Intercessory prayer gives the one who prays growth in faith and peace of mind, but does not “change anything”. All human events have been fixed, much as the story of a feature film is electrically imprinted on a video tape, and is not open to change as you watch it.

On the other side, there are many variations on limiting or eliminating the sovereignty of God in order to make room for human choice. God “repenting” is a prominent theme; he doesn’t know the future. Some admit foreknowledge but not foreordination, others deny both, saying that God is like a good manager in a meeting, leading people to make choices that he wants, but with no influence on their volition. Foreordination and even foreknowledge are said to make a divine-human love relationship impossible. You cannot have a relationship of love with some one who knows what you are going to say before you have said it.

We reject both of these directions for three reasons: 1) Despite sometimes having a high view of scripture at a creedal level, both disrespect scripture as they interpret it in practice. Each uses a hermeneutic which enables them to use one of the themes to eclipse the other. 2) Although they end up in very different positions, they both follow the same non-Biblical rationalism. Both allow their own idea of the function of human reason to stand over the richness of Biblical truth, forcing a zero-sum relationship between the two themes. 3) The Bible itself never tries to reconcile or systematize the two themes into an intellectually comfortable framework. In fact, whenever it is raised as a problem, the Bible seems to discourage our attempts at resolving it. *We are never led to even think that we will be able to grasp the nature of the causal interface between the infinite Creator God and his finite and human creation.* (Job 38-41; Rom. 9:14-26)

c) The Bible teaches both themes as complementary truths: Biblical references to God's providence are not the voice of one who has relinquished control of his world or his creatures (Is. 14:26-7). Biblical references to human choice do not refer to the mere sensation or experience of freedom. The Biblical idea of covenant embraces both. In a number of places the two themes are held together in the same passage without hint of conflict.

For example, Paul tells the Philippians to "*work out your own salvation in fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure*". (Phil. 2:12-13) They were to work, *because* God was at work within them at the level not only of their actions but of being able to *will* the right actions. This passage suggests not a zero-sum, mutual exclusion of sovereignty and responsibility, but a complementary interdependence. (see also Gen. 50:19-20; Lev.20:7-8; Mt.11:27-28)

d) Three practical implications:

i) Prayer: Although every aspect of the Christian life is at stake here, we take prayer as an example. Only by maintaining the complementarity of sovereignty and responsibility is Biblical prayer upheld. The most timid and tentative intercessory prayer depends on the compatibility of these two truths –that God can grant a request if he wants to, and that he takes us seriously enough to be listening and responding. If by intrinsic limitation or by the choice of self-limitation, God can do nothing about weather, politics, health or especially about human attitudes and decisions – why bother asking him to change these things? On the other hand, if people are not responsible, choosing, agents -- again why bother? If that was so, prayer would be God talking to himself like a ventriloquist talking through his dummy. In the Bible, prayer is not only for our own growth, but God changes things in response to it. James wrote, "*You do not have, because you do not ask.*" (James 4:2) Had they prayed, things could have been different.

ii) Reading Providence: Because God is in providential control of what goes on in his creation, that does not mean that we can necessarily "read" or interpret events to determine what God's intention was or is. Paul wrote that God's judgments are "unsearchable" and his ways "inscrutable" (Rom. 11:33). In the case of Job, faith in God required him to relinquish the demand for an interpretation of why things happened as they had. In the matter of Philemon's escape, conversion and return, Paul wrote, "*Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while...*" (Philemon 15) It was "perhaps". Paul made no claim to know for sure. While discernment is especially appropriate in matters of guidance, interpreting providence must be done with great caution and humility, and we must admit that it is sometimes impossible altogether. (cf. Mordecai's words to Esther, Esther 4:14)

iii) Trusting God: We can trust God for his goodness toward us. See Romans 1:28: "*...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*" God works for the good of those who love him in all things, not just the good things that he brings us, but also in the evil things that come from Satan, like Paul's thorn in the flesh (II Cor. 12:7-9). Although God's providence is over the whole world, his relationship to good and evil is asymmetrical. That is, he stands behind, or is more directly involved in causing blessing in this fallen world than in causing suffering, except where he is explicitly bringing judgment or discipline. Jesus taught us to pray that God's will would be done "on earth as it is in heaven", because it is *not* now being done on earth *in the same sense* as it is in heaven. If I sin, that is not outside of God's providence, but it is my responsibility for having done it, not his. Dr. Schaeffer refused to say, "God gave me cancer", though he believed that it had taken place within God's ultimate providential oversight.

If sovereignty and responsibility are complementary, then we can trust God to be able to fulfill his promises to protect us in a dangerous world. It is a mistake to limit God's sovereignty in order to emphasize human responsibility for evil. What peace can we have if providence is so limited that God is not capable of restraining evil people -- others or ourselves? In fact the Bible teaches that God can and does restrain evil people. He "foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples" (Ps. 33:10). He warns in the N.T. that he can withdraw his restraint, as he gives them over to the lusts of their own hearts, showing that his normal providence includes restraint of human sin (Rom. 1:24,26; also cf Is. 14:26-7).

e) Embracing mystery: We must not be threatened or embarrassed by acknowledging the reality of mystery. Mystery is not a Christian escape route reserved for times when we suddenly find ourselves trapped in a discussion. It is a sensible, faithful and rational recognition, made by finite creatures who are standing before an infinite God. *God must be allowed to be God – that is, great enough to create a world in which he is in ultimate control and in which there are creatures who have significant choice.*

This is not equivalent to saying that God is great enough to make a four-sided triangle, that is, great enough to contradict himself, and so to assert that this mystery is intrinsically irrational. Nor is it like saying that "God is sovereign, God is not sovereign", which is a flat contradiction. God's sovereignty and human responsibility contradict each other only if we assume that God's ways of causation are at the same level of simplicity as our own notions of mechanical causation, e.g. such as the interaction of the balls on a billiard table. The Bible suggests that this is totally inadequate. *To claim that God's sovereignty and human responsibility are mutually exclusive one would need to assume a far deeper and more comprehensive understanding of both God and humanity than our finitude allows.*

Despite their doubts, laments and questions, the response of Biblical writers to the mystery of God is ultimately the same as their response to providence in general -- wonder and gratitude. "...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28) "*O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*" (Rom. 11:33). Habakkuk, who began with a lament about the nation that he loved, "*How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you would not listen? Or cry out to you 'Violence!' but you do not save?*" (Hab. 1:2), ends with a different perspective:

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights." (Hab. 3:17-19)

4. Hermeneutics:

a) Scripture is the Word of God, divinely inspired through human authors. Scripture is not merely the product of human authors nor is it only a confession of the faith of various peoples or their experience of God.

b) Scripture interprets Scripture. The Bible is God's revelation and is a unified and coherent whole. Neither the OT nor the NT should be studied on its own. The OT is necessary more fully to understand the NT and the New more fully to understand the Old. At the same time, it is essential not to minimize the fact that each text has a historical, literary, and theological context and needs to be interpreted in this light.

c) Scripture is made up of diverse literary forms. An identification of the genre or type of literature is relevant to its interpretation. Scripture is literature, but it is more than this as it affirms itself to be the very Word of God.

d) There is great value in studying ancient cultures and literary texts outside the Scripture as they may help us better to understand the uniqueness of the Bible both in its own original context and in our own as well. However, such study should not be considered as a necessary pre-requisite for understanding the Word of God.

e) As we are called to be salt and light in our present moment of history it is important to examine contemporary issues in the light of Scripture. Such issues, however, should not control our reading and interpretation of the Biblical text -- e.g. liberation theology, homosexuality, gender questions, etc.

f) The task of the interpreter, in conscious dependence on the help of the Holy Spirit and with the best tools available, is to seek to find the original meaning intended by the author. God is ultimately the author of all Scripture. Nevertheless, care must be taken not to minimize the human side of God's revelation. Discovering the human author's intent, in other words, is important for our understanding of Scripture.

g) While there are definite and clear doctrines taught in Scripture (e.g. God as the Creator, the divinity of Christ, the resurrection, the final judgment, etc.) not all Scripture is equally clear (e.g. six literal 24 hour days or long periods of time in Genesis 1?).

h) The use of "lower critical" scholarly tools (original language exegesis, textual criticism, study of historical background, etc.) is essential for interpreting Scripture at an advanced level. "Higher critical" theories and methods (source, form, redaction, rhetorical criticism; literary critical theories; philosophical hermeneutics; socio-critical hermeneutics like liberation or feminist theology, etc.) may illumine, but also may obscure, the Bible's message. They should therefore be employed with discretion and only by those solidly grounded in both the Christian faith and the philosophical framework informing "higher criticism".

Merits of higher critical expertise for those so grounded and active in gospel ministry include: possible new insights into the Bible's meaning; rapport with persons and society misled by modern and post-modern theories; credibility in diagnosing higher criticism's ills when this becomes necessary; potential for a salt-and-light presence among academicians who use higher criticism with no practical recognition of Christ's authority through revealed Scripture.

Liabilities of higher critical involvement may include: more attention to critical theory than to the text's content; intellectual pride vis-à-vis believers without such technical skills; distortion of the Bible's message via theories unsuited to it; unwitting affirmation of flawed premises that may inhere in higher critical theories.

The answer to higher critical dangers is discerning interaction by qualified persons, not unqualified dismissal. Yet if those without higher critical expertise need to respect the insights of those who possess it, those who possess it must humbly acknowledge that when higher criticism in its current forms controls (rather than merely informs) the meaning of Biblical text, a de facto denial of Christ's authority through the Scripture, and even the gospel message itself, can result.

5. Language:

a. Language itself:

We affirm that, by his words God created the universe (Gen. 1). Linguistic communication is deeply rooted in God's own nature. Even before creation, God the Son is identified as "the Word" (Jn.1:1). In the diversity of creation, God created human beings in his image, endowing them with the gift of symbolic language and enabling them to communicate -- with Him, with each other and with themselves -- with meaning and power about God and his creation.

We affirm that the Fall has corrupted human languages and our use of them. Languages, by the meaning-systems beneath their vocabularies, may obscure or obstruct the clear communication of God's truth. The gift of language may also be used to mislead, through ignorance or malice. Because of our finiteness and sinfulness, our word communication is never exhaustive and not always exact. Nonetheless, effective communication does take place when we use language. The linguistic conventions in a culture ensure that words have a substantially common meaning which adequately corresponds to reality, whether of God or the created order. Even in the context of obstacles to communication -- for example, animosity or vast differences in time and culture -- real and meaningful communication can take place. But this requires us to be humble, creative, patient and loving toward each other.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21). Some of the most profound expressions of rebellion against God are expressed in language, "With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is our master?" (Ps. 12:4) But God's purpose in redemption is to redeem our use of language, that we might be a reflection of God in this aspect of our lives. We are told by the apostle Paul, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly..." (Col. 3:16). Therefore we affirm that, even within the limitations of our sin and finiteness, our language is able to communicate truth, bring healing, build up the church of Christ and give honor to God.

We deny that language is inherently indeterminate or incapable of conveying meaning and truth. Yet we also deny that there is an automatic or fixed correspondence between the words that we use and the things to which they refer.

Finally, while recognizing the enormous power of language in shaping human understanding and culture, we deny that it is constitutive of reality. Despite contemporary critical theory, language has to function within the givenness of creation.

b. Language about God:

Although we do not have exhaustive knowledge of God in any area, because God has revealed himself to us in words, we can have knowledge about him that is true for him as well as for us. He has revealed himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are not at liberty to change these names.

We deny that human language is incapable of making true, propositional assertions about God.

We deny that language about God is fundamentally language about human experience.

6. Apologetics:

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander." (I Peter 3:15-16)

In keeping with the Biblical and historical tradition which begins with the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles, we affirm that Apologetics has always been a vital aspect of the church's life. Clearly it has been a major aspect of our own calling as L'Abri. Therefore we commit ourselves to its continuance not only within L'Abri but also within the church universal.

We believe that Apologetics seeks to demonstrate the truth of Christianity in four areas. First, that Christianity is an intellectually reasonable world-view: that it fits the total 'landscape' of reality as a map fits its physical terrain; that as a system of thought it is internally coherent while corresponding at the same time with the totality of life and the world as it is. Second, that Christianity is historically reliable: that the veracity of the Old and New Testaments has been consistently confirmed by the responsible study of the historical facts. Third, that Christianity is true in the sense that those who believe in Christ are brought into a real relationship with the living God, which results in an internal and not merely an external confirmation of the truth. The objective revelation of God provides a sufficient basis for the knowledge of God and salvation and this is made efficient to the believer subjectively by faith. Fourth, that Christianity is relevant to the world: Christian values, world view and life lead to a substantial transformation of individuals and cultural structures which adequately reflects the truth of Christianity over and against all non-Christian ideologies and systems of thought.

Therefore the application of Apologetics includes amongst other things a careful explanation of Christian doctrine, a defense of the Christian faith against intellectual attack, an individual and corporate testimony to its complete trustworthiness, and a demonstration of the inadequacy and foolishness of all non-Christian world views. It also provides a point of contact with the surrounding culture and the basis for a creative, compassionate and persuasive communication of Christian truth, which demonstrates its relevance and reality.

The starting point for all Apologetics is the fact that Christianity is true to what is and to all of life.

Hence, we affirm, first, the unity and exclusiveness of truth as the basis for Apologetics -- (a) The unity of truth rests upon the existence of the one and only God and the correspondence of his revealed word with the given order of his creation. (b) The exclusiveness of truth rests upon the distinctiveness of God, his character and his creation. Together these provide a principle of antithesis which excludes the possibility of propositions which are true also being false. Hence we repudiate all systems of thought such as Neo-Orthodoxy, the New Age and certain kinds of "complementarity" teaching which involve a divided view of truth.

Second, just as the apostle Paul could assert that his teaching was "*true and rational*" (Acts 26), so we affirm that Christianity is able to be proven true. By this we mean that there are good and sufficient reasons to believe that Christianity is true and that one can come to know that truth with certainty.

Third, we affirm that Christian truth can be understood through rational means and propositional communication and that individual Christian faith and knowledge should properly be based upon rational understanding and intellectual certainty -- not merely upon subjective assurance, important as that is.

Fourth, we affirm the priority of God in both Epistemology and Apologetics. Ontologically, God has priority as the sole ultimate reality -- Creator, Sustainer, Savior and Judge. Epistemologically he has priority in his revelatory self-disclosure -- within the creation, within the Scriptures and supremely in Jesus Christ.

Fifth, we affirm that knowledge of God is not only possible but unavoidable for the whole human race, since human beings are made in the image of God, nevertheless, at the same time, knowledge of salvation is possible only on the basis of the Scriptures and their revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sixth, we affirm that the content of Christian truth should never be modified for apologetic purposes even when its proclamation is resisted by the surrounding culture or where it may appear counter-productive.

We deny that the fall has so deformed the image of God in humanity that truth cannot be known by the non-Christian. We deny the Barthian and Post-Kantian rejection of the knowledge of God in creation. We deny the Thomistic claim to be able to argue from the natural order independently of an epistemology rooted in God's special revelation. We deny the claim of naturalistic philosophy and science to be a sufficient basis for knowledge. We deny that the propositional content of the Christian faith can be replaced by internal testimony, mystical experience or emotional encounter.

However, despite the importance of Apologetics within the task of evangelism, we freely acknowledge the limitations of apologetics. For example:

1) that the most basic human problem is spiritual and moral, and that sin distorts the mind and corrupts human thought -- through claims to autonomy, the rationalization of sin and falsehood, and the justification of improper desires.

2) that no saving conversion is possible without prevenient grace; the work of God remains sovereign even within our individual freedom to think and decide.

3) that for apologetics to be effective there must be a recognition of the Holy Spirit's essential though invisible work and therefore of our dependence upon prayer.

4) that proof can never be exhaustive because of human finiteness, nor convincing to all because of fallenness. (Although this is a limitation which of course applies to all areas of human knowledge and truth).

5) that whilst God's truth can and should be expressed systematically, Apologetics is based in reality and in living relationships and therefore ought not to be reduced to a technique or method.

6) that the systematic formulations of the Christian world-view do not exhaust the fullness of reality, nor the personal, relational nature of an individual's life before God.

7) that confidence about the objective truth of Christianity should never be confused with pride over our ability to know truth.

8) that there are also significant non-intellectual barriers to faith, which require wise and sensitive consideration in the apologetic task.

In conclusion, we affirm what Francis Schaeffer described as "the final apologetic", namely the witness of love, honesty and unity which our Lord gave expression to in John 17:20-23:

"I pray... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me... May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

7. The Image of God:

In contrast to Western Civilization's crippling uncertainty about the meaning and purpose of human life, we affirm that Scripture provides a simple definition of humanity within its opening sentences. *"So God created man in his image... male and female he created them."* (Gen. 1:27).

This means, using the alternative description within the same verse, that all human beings are made "like God", reflecting God, both in what they are and in what they do. They are images of God ontologically (by their very nature as human beings) and they are images of God functionally (given special status within the created order as his representatives on earth -- made to *"rule over ... all the creatures that move along the ground"...* and *"over all the earth"* (Gen. 1:26)).

They are thus differentiated both upward and downward: upwardly they are not confused with God; downwardly they are not confused with non-human creation. In their creatureliness they belong with the latter; in their imageness with the former. Since they are like God, the characteristics of God's person-ness are found in them, though finitely, and since the Fall, in a distorted way. God creates, they create; God loves, they love; he is moral, rational, aesthetic, social, so are they; he communicates in language, so do they.

Hence, the image includes, though it is not limited to, such characteristics as self-awareness, moral awareness, significant choice, and rationality. In fact it comprises all aspects of human experience -- mental, emotional, volitional and even physical; every aspect being part of an essential whole both physical and spiritual. So precious, indeed, is the image of God to God himself, that his purpose is revealed in Christ in terms of its complete restoration, culminating eventually in the resurrection of the body.

The number of Biblical texts dealing explicitly with the concept of the image is small, e.g. Gen. 9:6, Jas. 3:9, Col. 3:9, II Cor. 3:18. Nevertheless, the implicit references appear throughout both Old and New Testaments for the simple reason that all texts relevant to our humanness presuppose and clarify it.

Furthermore, Gen. 9:6 and Jas. 3:9 confirm explicitly that the image of God has not been lost at the Fall (Gen. 3). It has been distorted but not destroyed. Even fallen human beings, therefore, continue to be God's image simply by who they are. Their lives have infinite value. They are sacrosanct in their very being from conception on. Hence it is wrong to take any human life in a way contrary to God's law: it is wrong not merely to kill a good person, a creative person, or one who is helpful or useful. It is wrong to even demean any human being by thought, word or deed.

Our Lord's teaching on this theme in Mt. 5:21-22 illustrates further how broadly the original definition of humanity as the image of God is expressed and elucidated throughout Scripture.

In conclusion, since it is a fundamental teaching throughout Scripture, and therefore has been a prominent feature of L'Abri's teaching, we affirm the interdependence of both aspects of the image of God (ontological and functional) and deny any attempt to eliminate either aspect, or to reduce one to the other.

8. Sexuality and Sexual Ethics:

We affirm that:

Male and female were created equally in the image of God. They are the same in value, dignity and responsibility before God, and are equally accountable to exercise caring rule over creation (Gen. 1:27-8; 2:15).

Within the basic unity of the human race, God has established the sex difference of male and female, which is good. We must neither deny the sex difference (the tendency of liberal feminists*) nor make more of it than the Bible does (the tendency of both radical feminists and some traditionalists*).

Men and women need and complement each other and are called to live in unity and peace in all areas of life and work. Whether single or married, Scripture teaches that it is not good for man or woman to be alone. Neither the division of labor nor leadership responsibilities (e.g. those normally associated with the 'traditional view' of marriage) need be exploitive if established by mutual consent and practiced in a wise and godly manner.

However, while men and women do need and complement one another, sexual experience should never be considered central to human experience. Human fulfillment whether in marriage or in singleness is not chiefly related to sexual fulfillment, but rather, to a proper relationship with God and a conformity to his word.

Therefore singleness need not necessarily be viewed negatively even when it arises, as is often the case, not by choice (as with celibacy) but by default (when those who desire marriage remain unmarried). Those who are unmarried have particular struggles and deserve the sensitive support of the church; but those who are married also have particular struggles. In both cases human fulfillment arises from 'true spirituality' not from the presence or absence of sexual experience. Single men and women have a unique vocational freedom to serve Christ unhindered by responsibilities to husband, wife or children -- and Scripture makes it clear that for some, celibacy is a calling and gift of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 7:17-40).

At the same time, however, marriage is a creational norm for the whole human race. It is a gift of God in which a man and a woman can experience a profound unity in diversity as a reflection of the glory of Christ's union with the Church. For this reason, although divorce is sometimes permissible, it is always a tragic falling short of God's intention.

Marriage is a lifelong, covenantal relationship of mutual submission where the two become one, sharing a joint life before God. Within this, the wife is to submit to the husband and the husband is to follow Christ's example of loving, self-sacrificing headship toward the goal of the wife's growth toward glory or "*radiance, without spot or wrinkle*" (Eph. 5:27).

Sex is a good and pleasurable gift from God. It gives physical expression to the union of a husband and wife, and brings forth the gift of children. Faithful, monogamous, heterosexual marriage is the only legitimate context for sexual intercourse.

We agree that God calls both men and women to minister in his church. L'Abri has traditionally taken the view that the office of elder in the church is limited by the Bible to men alone, but we have now agreed to allow differences among ourselves in our teaching on this subject, and those who differ from the traditional view are required to note the personal nature of their stance. This change is in no way to be construed as arising out of, or leading to, changes in L'Abri's traditional stance on the issues of hermeneutics, the husband's headship in marriage, inclusive language about God, or homosexuality.

We deny:

Any ideology that would undermine the relationship between male and female that God established at creation and redeemed by the work of Christ which results in:

- Pitting the sexes against each other in class antagonism or separatist social structures.
- Maintaining that the sexes are identical or that one sex has superiority or dominion over the other.
- Undermining heterosexual marriage and family as if repressive institutions.
- Advocating sexual activity outside marriage whether homosexual or heterosexual.
- Devaluing sexual experience as if it were unspiritual.

Regarding God Language:

Christianity is a religion of revelation. We know about the character and attributes of God from His self-revelation in creation and in His Word. Scripture is rich with a great variety of figurative language about God, including both masculine and feminine metaphors, similes and images, to help us know God truly and worship him rightly. At the same time, He has revealed Himself as the eternal Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- one God in three persons, and told us to address Him as "Abba, Father". We are not at liberty to change this Trinitarian formulation to suit the linguistic sensibilities of our time, feminist or other. Scripture is also clear that male language about God is not intended to communicate that God is a sexual being. He created and transcends human sexuality. Moses warned against making images of God "either male or female" (Deut. 4:16); and as male and female are created equally in his image, men do not image or reflect God more accurately than women, nor vice versa. Scriptural language teaches us that the God of the Bible is a personal being, who is our Father.

- * "Liberal feminism", in the interest of its goal of equality for women may minimize the sex difference.
- "Radical feminism", by contrast, sees men and women as ontologically and morally different.

9. Charismatic Teaching:

L'Abri has always rejected the distinctive theology of the Charismatic movement which advocates that all believers, in addition to believing in Christ for salvation, need to be "baptized in/by the Holy Spirit". This normally involves an externally visible or audible manifestation of the Holy Spirit's presence. Without this, it is claimed, the Christian is incomplete and unable to live the Christian life with the appropriate power God intends.

In contrast to this teaching, we affirm that each Christian from the time he or she first believes (whether that can be identified or not) is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This indwelling, according to Romans 8:9, is that which identifies a believer. In this sense we are already "*blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus*" (Eph. 1). At the same time, however, the need to grow, to be "*changed from one degree of glory to another*" (2 Cor. 3), remains the believer's abiding goal. Such change becomes possible only through the Holy Spirit who makes his power available through our conscious appropriation of Christ's gift of salvation. We are called to "*abide in Christ*" (Jn. 15), to "*hold fast to the Head*" (Col. 2). The Spirit's work, in other words, can be described as self-effacing: He points us to Christ. We are called to "*know the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ*" and so to "*be filled with all the fullness of God*" (Eph. 3).

We do not have to await a specific experience of the Spirit, a "second blessing" or "baptism of the Spirit". This teaching is the area of our major disagreement with the Charismatic movement.

At the same time, however, we identify with many charismatics in their commitment to living in the supernatural since this is the objective environment, not merely of religious experience but of all human existence. We live in a supernatural universe. As part of this, supernatural gifts (charisma) are available to the church continuously until Christ's return in glory. These gifts are many and various, some evidently miraculous because they are extra-ordinary (e.g. tongues, interpretation, healing), others equally supernatural even in their ordinariness (e.g. administration, service). We are to live within this framework consciously and existentially. Reaction to the distinctive theology of the Charismatic movement should not erode this emphasis of Scripture. The principal aspect of this is prayer -- direct access to Christ and his throne of grace.

Our objection to the Charismatic overemphasis on extraordinary experience and phenomena arises not from any anti-supernaturalism, but rather from a concern that such a preoccupation tends to displace the priority both of a personal relationship with Christ and an intellectual grasp of Truth (Rom. 12:2).

III. PROVISION FOR REFORM:

We are not beyond having to rethink or reform our positions. We see this not as a question of academic freedom, but as a necessity for those who are committed to truth-seeking as well as truth-telling. "Honest answers to honest questions" will require that we remain open to the possibility that we could be wrong.

The following are criteria that would be used by the membership to discern the acceptability within L'Abri of any proposed change in teaching:

1) To what extent is any new teaching a change from previously expressed L'Abri viewpoints?

a) Does it undercut L'Abri teaching that is central and well-developed by the Schaeffers or others in the fellowship, or is it more marginal?

b) Even if it is not central to L'Abri teaching, does it move that position so far that it affects the central teaching?

2) How significant is the proposed change theologically? Does it deal with the central themes of Biblical truth or is it on the periphery?

3) How clear is the issue Biblically? Does the proposed change require high-handed or careless use of the Scripture, or does it rest on a plausible interpretation of the Bible?

When a change is suggested, the membership must prayerfully come to a decision (having allowed sufficient time) whether or not to allow a change of belief or teaching. Such a change might include a decision about the status to be accorded the new teaching (e.g., to allow it in private belief but not in public teaching, or in public teaching with certain qualifications, or not at all, or still some other arrangement.)

A two thirds majority of the membership would be required for a change to be made either in the allowed convictions of an individual worker or in making an addition to the list of affirmations and boundaries. A four fifths majority of the members would be required to change any of the affirmations and boundaries already described above.

We commit ourselves to bring to the awareness of the trustees any significant difference from the beliefs stated above.

APPENDIX I:

STATEMENT OF FAITH.

(From the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF) in the UK)

We affirm:

1. The unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead.
2. The sovereignty of God in creation, revelation, redemption and final judgment.
3. The Divine inspiration and infallibility of the Holy Scripture as originally given, and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
4. The universal sinfulness and guilt of human nature since the fall, rendering all human beings subject to God's wrath and condemnation.
5. The full deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God; his virgin birth and his real and sinless humanity; his death on the cross, his bodily resurrection and his present reign in heaven and earth.
6. Redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin only through the sacrificial death once and for all time of our representative and substitute, Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and humanity.
7. Justification as God's act of undeserved mercy, in which the sinner is pardoned all his or her sins, and accepted as righteous in God's sight, only because of the imputed righteousness of Christ, this justification being received by faith alone.
8. The need for the Holy Spirit to make the work of Christ effective to the individual, granting the sinner repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ.
9. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all those thus regenerated, producing in them an increasing likeness to Christ in character and behavior, and empowering them for their witness in the world.
10. The one holy universal Church, which is the Body of Christ, and to which all true believers belong.
11. The future personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge all people, executing God's just condemnation on the impenitent and receiving the redeemed to eternal glory.

APPENDIX II:

THE CONSENSUS OF FAITH / BASIC PRINCIPLES OF OPERATION.

At the very beginning of L'Abri, the Schaeffer's drew up the following short document, which was to guide L'Abri for some 40 years until the L'Abri Statements were added. Sometimes referred to as the "The Consensus of Faith" or "The Basic Principles of Operation", it is included here in its original and unchanged form, not simply as an historical record but because it continues to govern L'Abri at its most basic level. An appendix on Scripture, also included here, was added to it in 1983. (pg25)

L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP

The Members, Workers, and the Praying Family of L'Abri labor together for the Lord, as He leads, on the following basis:

NAME:

L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP . . . "L'Abri" is French for "The Shelter." L'ABRI is a shelter for anyone with need.

PURPOSE:

L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP is committed to the practical reality of Acts 1:8 : *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP stands in the stream of historic Christianity: that which is generally known today as "Bible-believing"; which was known in the Reformation; and especially which was known in the primitive church. Our view of Scripture is adequately described in the Appendix attached to the consensus.

L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP believes that Christianity involves:

1. Through faith assenting that the doctrines of supernatural Christianity are true.
2. Through faith acting upon the reality of these supernatural facts in this present life.

PRINCIPLE OF OPERATION:

L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP's basic principle of practical operation is that of operating in all matters so as to exhibit:

1. The reality of the existence of God.
2. The character of God – His love and His holiness.
3. The reality of the supernaturally restored relationship among those who, through faith in Christ, are brothers and sisters.

In its practical operation the Fellowship will attempt by the grace of God, to so conduct itself as to develop loving loyalty to the Person of the living Christ, and as to develop a moment-by-moment relationship with Him which will be such that He will be pleased to actively build His Church through the Fellowship as a unit and through its individual Members, Workers and Praying Family. A distinction between people (even converted people) building Christ's Church, and Christ building His Church through converted and consecrated people, is considered important by the Fellowship.

In its practical operation the Fellowship will attempt by the grace of God, to so conduct itself as to develop the reality of a life of faith and prayer in the Fellowship as a unit and through its individual Members, Workers and Praying Family.

In thus operating the Fellowship will attempt by the grace of God, to depend upon the practical, present reality of the Fatherliness of God the Father, our individual union with God the Son who is the only Head of His Church, and the communion of the Holy Spirit who indwells each individual Christian. We further in practice will attempt by the grace of God to depend on the present practical reality of the priesthood of all believers.

By the grace of God, there is to be no attempt to achieve these principles except on the sole basis of the blood of Christ, through faith, and in the power of the Holy Spirit; and an attempt will be made never to set up organizational machinery which will keep the Fellowship in existence if its spiritual existence comes to an end.

STRUCTURE:

Believing in the priesthood of all true believers; in the supernaturally restored relationship among those who, through faith in Christ, are brothers and sisters; and in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each individual Christian:

1. The structure shall be kept as simple as possible with additional detail added only after the need of it arises because of the Lord's blessing.
2. The control of L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP shall (under the Headship of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit) rest in the Members of the Fellowship.
3. While legal control will rest in a majority vote of the Members, every attempt shall always be made, no matter how pressing the matter seems, to tarry for each other until all are of one heart and mind.

THE PRAYING FAMILY:

Christians who feel led by the Holy Spirit to covenant with God to assume special and regular prayer responsibility for L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP, shall be considered as part of THE PRAYING FAMILY. THE PRAYING FAMILY of L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP is to be understood as active in the work, and is to be considered an important and essential part of the structure of L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP.

WORKERS:

Christians who feel led to do so may offer themselves to become Workers in the Fellowship. But the final invitation to become a Worker must then come, after prayerful consideration, from the Fellowship. As each Worker offers himself or herself, and as he or she is accepted by the Fellowship as a Worker, it is understood that both the Worker and the Fellowship have sought the Lord's leading in the matter; and it is equally understood that both the Worker and the Fellowship shall later continue to search to know the Lord's will concerning the continuance of the relationship.

One aspect of the leading of the Lord about the Worker beginning his work with the Fellowship is the financial enablement by the Lord to the Worker himself or herself to arrive at his or her active field of labor with the Fellowship. The Worker for this purpose shall follow the Fellowship practice and therefore shall not solicit funds but look directly to the Lord in prayer and faith.

After a Worker serves for three full years as a Worker, the Members of the Fellowship may then invite the Worker to become a Member of the Fellowship. Workers must agree when they become Workers that the decision as to whether they should be invited to become Members rests (under the leadership of the Holy Spirit) in the hands of the Members. Workers must understand that if they are not invited to be a Member it is not to be construed as a reason for a feeling of failure, nor to be construed as a reflection on their service as a Worker. Workers are to be invited to become Members when the Members of the Fellowship come to a prayerful decision that the gifts and geographical location of the Worker are such that his or her becoming a member would be of special help to the entire Fellowship.

MEMBERS:

The Members of L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP are always to be those who are actively working in the Fellowship. The majority of the Members shall always be on, or from, the "active field" of L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP.

Membership in L'ABRI FELLOWSHIP is not to take the place of association in some true church or communion; however, to become a Member, the prospective Member's church or communion must be acceptable to the Fellowship.

When the need arises the Fellowship may choose individuals from among the Members to serve in places of special responsibility. Individuals chosen to fill such special places of responsibility must always be those who have served as Members of the Fellowship for a protracted period.

NATIONALITY AND LIVELIHOOD:

Among Workers and Members there is to be no distinction in theory or practice because of nationality.

Neither the term "Worker" nor the term "Member" is to bear any connotation as to whether the individual known as a Worker or a Member does or does not receive his or her livelihood from God through the Fellowship.

APPENDIX to THE CONSENSUS OF FAITH

(Added 1983)

We have wrestled for a long time with questions concerning the authority of the Scriptures. We have observed that this is a central issue in the theological battle today. We confess the Bible as the Word of God and, at the same time, certainly written by man. The fact that God used man to communicate truth to us should not lead to a depreciation of the Scriptures. We stress both: God and man are both 100% involved in the formation of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, what came out of this process is the Word of God exactly as God has wanted it to be, unambiguously true and trustworthy. On the 'how' we only marveled. We did not want to go into answering that question, but just confessed our conviction in 'the fact that'. At this moment, we declare that the following adequately describes our view of the Bible:

(The following is extracted verbatim from the 'Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy' – International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) Copyright 1978)

Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy

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, Scripture's 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.

Articles of Affirmation and Denial

Article I.

WE AFFIRM that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God.

WE DENY that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition, or any other human source.

Article II.

WE AFFIRM that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience, and that the authority of the Church is subordinate to that of Scripture.

WE DENY that Church creeds, councils, or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible.

Article III.

WE AFFIRM that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God.

WE DENY that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.

Article IV.

WE AFFIRM that God who made mankind in His image has used language as a means of revelation.

WE DENY that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration.

Article V.

WE AFFIRM that God's revelation within the Holy Scriptures was progressive.

WE DENY that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings.

Article VI.

WE AFFIRM that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration.

WE DENY that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

Article VII.

WE AFFIRM that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us.

WE DENY that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

Article VIII.

WE AFFIRM that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared.

WE DENY that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

Article IX.

WE AFFIRM that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write.

WE DENY that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

Article X.

WE AFFIRM that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.

WE DENY that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.

Article XI.

WE AFFIRM that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

WE DENY that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

Article XII.

WE AFFIRM that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

WE DENY that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.

Article XIII.

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 lack 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.

Article XIV.

WE AFFIRM the unity and internal consistency of Scripture.

WE DENY that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.

Article XV.

WE AFFIRM that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration.

WE DENY that Jesus' teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.

Article XVI.

WE AFFIRM that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history.

WE DENY that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.

Article XVII.

WE AFFIRM that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God's written Word.

WE DENY that this witness of the Holy Spirit operates in isolation from or against Scripture.

Article XVIII.

WE AFFIRM that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

WE DENY the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

Article XIX.

WE AFFIRM that a confession of the full authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture is vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith. We further affirm that such confession should lead to increasing conformity to the image of Christ.

WE DENY that such confession is necessary for salvation. However, we further deny that inerrancy can be rejected without grave consequences, both to the individual and to the Church.

(The following is extracted verbatim from the 'Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics' – International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) Copyright 1982 – and was added later to further clarify the statement on Inerrancy)

Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics

Articles of Affirmation and Denial

Article I.

WE AFFIRM that the normative authority of Holy Scripture is the authority of God Himself, and is attested by Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church.

WE DENY the legitimacy of separating the authority of Christ from the authority of Scripture, or of opposing the one to the other.

Article II.

WE AFFIRM that as Christ is God and Man in One Person, so Scripture is, indivisibly, God's Word in human language.

WE DENY that the humble, human form of Scripture entails errancy any more than the humanity of Christ, even in His humiliation, entails sin.

Article III.

WE AFFIRM that the Person and work of Jesus Christ are the central focus of the entire Bible.

WE DENY that any method of interpretation which rejects or obscures the Christ-centeredness of Scripture is correct.

Article IV.

WE AFFIRM that the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture acts through it today to work faith in its message.

WE DENY that the Holy Spirit ever teaches to any one anything which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

Article V.

WE AFFIRM that the Holy Spirit enables believers to appropriate and apply Scripture to their lives.

WE DENY that the natural man is able to discern spiritually the biblical message apart from the Holy Spirit.

Article VI.

WE AFFIRM that the Bible expresses God's truth in propositional statements, and we declare that biblical truth is both objective and absolute. We further affirm that a statement is true if it represents matters as they actually are, but is an error if it misrepresents the facts.

WE DENY that, while Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation, biblical truth should be defined in terms of this function. We further deny that error should be defined as that which willfully deceives.

Article VII.

WE AFFIRM that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite and fixed.

WE DENY that the recognition of this single meaning eliminates the variety of its application.

Article VIII.

WE AFFIRM that the Bible contains teachings and mandates which apply to all cultural and situational contexts and other mandates which the Bible itself shows apply only to particular situations.

WE DENY that the distinctions between the universal and particular mandates of Scripture can be determined by cultural and situational factors. We further deny that universal mandates may ever be treated as culturally or situationally relative.

Article IX.

WE AFFIRM that the term hermeneutics, which historically signified the rules of exegesis, may properly be extended to cover all that is involved in the process of perceiving what the biblical revelation means and how it bears on our lives.

WE DENY that the message of Scripture derives from, or is dictated by, the interpreter's understanding. Thus we deny that the "horizons" of the biblical writer and the interpreter may rightly "fuse" in such a way that what the text communicates to the interpreter is not ultimately controlled by the expressed meaning of the Scripture.

Article X.

WE AFFIRM that Scripture communicates God's truth to us verbally through a wide variety of literary forms.

WE DENY that any of the limits of human language render Scripture inadequate to convey God's message.

Article XI.

WE AFFIRM that translations of the text of Scripture can communicate knowledge of God across all temporal and cultural boundaries.

WE DENY that the meaning of biblical texts is so tied to the culture out of which they came that understanding of the same meaning in other cultures is impossible.

Article XII.

WE AFFIRM that in the task of translating the Bible and teaching it in the context of each culture, only those functional equivalents which are faithful to the content of biblical teaching should be employed.

WE DENY the legitimacy of methods which either are insensitive to the demands of cross-cultural communication or distort biblical meaning in the process.

Article XIII.

WE AFFIRM that awareness of the literary categories, formal and stylistic, of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis, and hence we value genre criticism as one of the many disciplines of biblical study.

WE DENY that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual.

Article XIV.

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 XV.

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 XVI.

WE AFFIRM that legitimate critical techniques should be used in determining the canonical text and its meaning.

WE DENY the legitimacy of allowing any method of biblical criticism to question the truth or integrity of the writer's expressed meaning, or of any other scriptural teaching.

Article XVII.

WE AFFIRM the unity, harmony and consistency of Scripture and declare that it is its own best interpreter.

WE DENY that Scripture may be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that one passage corrects or militates against another. We deny that later writers of Scripture misinterpreted earlier passages of Scripture when quoting from or referring to them.

Article XVIII.

WE AFFIRM that the Bible's own interpretation of itself is always correct, never deviating from, but rather elucidating, the single meaning of the inspired text. The single meaning of a prophet's words includes, but is not restricted to, the understanding of those words by the prophet and necessarily involves the intention of God evidenced in the fulfillment of those words.

WE DENY that the writers of Scripture always understood the full implications of their own words.

Article XIX.

WE AFFIRM that any preunderstandings which the interpreter brings to Scripture should be in harmony with scriptural teaching and subject to correction by it.

WE DENY that Scripture should be required to fit alien preunderstandings, inconsistent with itself, such as naturalism, evolutionism, scientism, secular humanism, and relativism.

Article XX.

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 extra-biblical data have value for clarifying what Scripture teaches, and for prompting correction of faulty interpretations.

WE DENY that extrabiblical views ever disprove the teaching of Scripture or hold priority over it.

Article XXI.

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 XXII.

WE AFFIRM that Genesis 1-11 is factual, as is the rest of the book.

WE DENY that the teachings of Genesis 1-11 are mythical and that scientific hypotheses about earth history or the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation.

Article XXIII.

WE AFFIRM the clarity of Scripture and specifically of its message about salvation from sin.

WE DENY that all passages of Scripture are equally clear or have equal bearing on the message of redemption.

Article XXIV.

WE AFFIRM that a person is not dependent for understanding of Scripture on the expertise of biblical scholars.

WE DENY that a person should ignore the fruits of the technical study of Scripture by biblical scholars.

Article XXV.

WE AFFIRM that the only type of preaching which sufficiently conveys the divine revelation and its proper application to life is that which faithfully expounds the text of Scripture as the Word of God.

WE DENY that the preacher has any message from God apart from the text of Scripture.

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