

# INSTITUTE FOR BIBLICAL TEXTUAL STUDIES

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## Conference Report

### THE ENCHIRIDION

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*And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;*  
2 Timothy 2:24-25

### The Quest for the Historical Text

For far too long the popular approach (as opposed to the academic approach) to the demanding discipline of New Testament text criticism has been dominated by obscurantism on the right; and dilettantism on the left. This conference has one goal: To place in their proper context two industrious authorities in this field, from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively, whose lives were dedicated to resisting both tendencies; whose work was more informed by interacting with the evidence, than in popularizing the hard work of others. As a backdrop to this project I shall, as a historian of the discipline, provide a suitable intellectual-historical survey of the praxis and cultural influences of New Testament text criticism that will be decisive in understanding the careers of these two academic specialists highlighted on this occasion. This will be accomplished by means of an opening lecture that will span the early-modern period through to our contemporary situation. Following this, two workshops, one each dedicated to our two subjects, will be provided. The final purpose will be to allow participants to understand both the technical data, as well as the religious implications of the post-Reformation “quest for the historical text.”

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An important Bible Text Conference was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan on Friday, May 16 and Saturday, May 17, 2003. The conference theme was “The Quest for the Historical Text.” Theodore P. Letis, Ph.D. was the featured lecturer. All who attended enjoyed interesting venues, and certainly stimulating lectures.

The conference week kicked off with several unofficial engagements for Dr. Letis in addition to very well attended audiences for the three conference events. Dr. Letis addressed well over 660 who attended one or more of the week’s events. Dr. Letis addressed students at Eastside Christian School of Grand Rapids and the student body and faculty of Covenant Christian High School on Wednesday, May 14. On Thursday evening, May 15, Dr. Letis also made a presentation to well over 100 attendees of the Promoter’s lecture for Eastside Christian School held at First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Dr. Letis presented an historical survey of the development of the Reformation Bible text in his stirring video titled, “**How Did We Get the Bible?**.” The video showing was followed by vigorous question and answer sessions.

One of the key developments for the conference was a re-print of Jakob van Bruggen’s important book, “The Future of the Bible” long out of print. Professor van Bruggen graciously gave permission for a limited reprint of his book especially for this conference. His book was the first major critique of the so-called Dynamic Equivalence approach to translation as used first by the Good News Bible and then by the New International Version. It was also a major critique of the damage caused by the rise of non-confessional Bible societies.

Conference attendees came into Grand Rapids from near and far. Numerous friends from as far away as Canada, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Georgia came for the lecture as well as a strong cross section of local friends. Churches and denominations represented included those from the Protestant Reformed Church, Netherlands Heritage Reformed, Christian Reformed, Zion Baptist, Regular and Independent Baptist churches,

Reformed Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Bible churches. Conference attendees were also a good cross section of seminary professors, seminarians, pastors, Bible translators, teachers, and church men and women. We were especially thankful for promotional support from Professor David Engelsma and from the Trinitarian Bible Society-USA.

The Friday, May 16 event was held at the Van Andel Public Museum of Grand Rapids in the luxurious Meijer Theater. Our guests were first treated to the exceptional Dead Sea Scroll exhibit at the museum. The Grand Rapids Museum did an outstanding job hosting this important collection. Though our faith in Divine Scripture rests not on archeological or empirical evidence, still, one could not leave the exhibit without a profound appreciation for the antiquity of our Bible texts.

***The lecture demonstrated in a well documented fashion the inextricable connection between textual criticism and higher criticism***

Following the tour of the exhibit Dr. Letis lectured on the topic, "The Quest for the Historical Text, the ESV, and the Jesus Seminar." The lecture demonstrated in a well documented fashion the inextricable connection between textual criticism and higher criticism, how the one, contrary to popular evangelical opinion, invariably invites the other. Dr. Letis covered a large amount of significant material. He provided vital insight as to the development and break away from orthodoxy in a new and critical era that has greatly changed the approach to Bible translation both then and today. Contemporary Christians simply must understand the underlying processes leading to our present day retreat from biblical authority. Dr. Letis provided ample and documented material for us to study.

On Saturday morning, May 17, the conference moved to The Prince Conference Center at Calvin College where back to back workshops were presented. The first, titled "John W. Burgon: Rescued, Resuscitated, and Reconsidered" was presented at 9:00 a.m. Letis

demonstrated how certain organizations actually misrepresent Burgon and his actual views, as do the so-called Majority Text advocates. A survey of Burgon's life, background, struggles and genius were a fascinating backdrop for seeing how God provided a devout and unique mind at a crucial time in church history.

The second workshop titled, "Edward Freer Hills: The Life and Legacy of a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Burgonian" was a synopsis of Dr. Letis' Emory University masters thesis. This provided an intimate look at the intellect and the believing heart of a true giant of the faith in Edward F. Hills. Our workshop enjoyed bonus material when Mrs. Edward F. Hills, widow of Dr. Hills, added personal insight to go along with Dr. Letis' presentation. Again, Letis demonstrated how as a protégé of Professor J. Gresham Machen, founder of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Westminster Theological Seminary, Hills was the rare conservative Calvinist in his day to take the pains to first become an authority in the field of text criticism before he attempted to enter the debate in reviving the theories of John Burgon. Unfortunately few contemporary advocates of the received text and the AV have followed Hills's good example. Again, God's Providence in providing a believing textual critic at a pivotal phase in church history was clearly seen in Hills' life as presented by Dr. Letis. A healthy question and answer session followed each workshop.

This was a well attended and significant conference. It provided path-breaking direction on how the public defense of the Ecclesiastical Text and the AV should be conducted, by true authorities in the field, and not simply as an exercise in sectarian diatribe. It is our prayer that the Lord will lead to make this an annual conference. We thank Dr. Letis for coming to Grand Rapids. Donations to Dr. Letis' organization, The Institute for Reformation and Biblical Studies (IRRBS) are tax deductible (P. O. Box 870525, Stone Mountain, GA 30087).

The Promoters lecture, complete with the audio of "Where Did We Get the New Testament?" and the question and answer period, is available on audio cassette. A complete DVD production of the two day conference event is available. We also have a limited supply of Jakob van Bruggen's, "The Future of the Bible." Owning these will provide you with quality apologetics in

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favor of the traditional texts of Holy Scripture and the Reformation tenet of *Sola Scriptura* by qualified contemporary scholars. This conference has provided important lectures featuring new material. We invite you to add this DVD and reprint to your library.

Promoters's Lecture – Audio cassette	\$ 4.00
Van Bruggen's book "Future of the Bible"	14.95
Conference DVD (3 lectures)	21.00
(Plus \$3.00 shipping)	