

The
Institute
for
Renaissance and Reformation
Biblical Studies

Recent Advances

17 March 2002

Friends,

Just a quick word about advantageous developments. I have had two essays from my dissertation accepted for publication by two journals: the first, "[The Vulgata Latina as Sacred Text: What Did the Council of Trent Mean When it Claimed Jerome's Bible was 'Authentica?'](#)" This has been accepted for publication by the journal [Reformation](#), the official academic organ of the Tyndale Society out of Oxford University. What follows is an abstract of this essay:

Abstract

The crisis caused for the Roman Catholic Church by what has been termed by historians, the Northern Renaissance, can hardly be over estimated. The popular notion that the formal breakaway of the Protestant Reformation, and the activity of Luther and Calvin, were the decisive factors in Rome's fall, does not fully capture the truth. It was Erasmus who had inspired both branches of the Reformation movement (and that third flank known as the "radical Reformation"), and so it is Erasmus who received the most severe disapprobation in the Tridentine Index. It was, after all, Erasmus's impudence in producing a rival Greek text (from manuscripts produced by that schismatic Greek Church in the East), as superior to the ancient Vulgata Latina, that lit the original conflagration that would become the Protestant revolution. Hence, one of the primary tasks appointed to the Council of Trent (1544-1563), was to reaffirm in the clearest way possible, the dominical sanction of the Latin Bible over either the Greek or Hebrew Bibles. It was, after all, these newly published Greek and Hebrew editions of the Bible that were seen to be the cause of all the folly that had fallen on the 16th century Church. Just what did the Council mean, however, when it was claimed that only the Vulgata Latina could be considered "authentica?" The authorial intend of the Council was uniformly clear enough to its contemporaries and to all who followed. As of the mid-twentieth century, however, a modern Papal Encyclical altered the original meaning of the Council. This essay surveys the history of the Council on this point and attempts to provide the reader with enough data to recognize the historical revisionism that has taken place since the original pronouncements of the Council.

The other essay is, "[From Lower Criticism to Higher Criticism: Joseph Priestley and the Use of Conjectural Emendation in an Early Quest for the Historical Jesus.](#)" This will appear in the [Journal for Higher Criticism](#). It clearly demonstrates that the Lower, or "textual criticism," gave birth to the Higher Criticism, something denied by Evangelicals who advocate the "critical text" while claiming to believe in the "inerrancy" of the original autographs.

Also, I have been invited to give a lecture before the International Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, to be held in Berlin, Germany later this year. The title and abstract of these are as follows:

**Teaching New Testament Text Criticism:
The Necessary Backdrop of an Intellectual History of the Discipline**

A Lecture to be delivered at
The Annual International Meeting of
The Society of Biblical Literature
Berlin, Germany, 2002

Eldon J. Epp observed in 1989 that, "History, theory, and practice are interwoven in most realms of human

knowledge, yet students approaching a field often care little about its history; they are concerned with its application and how the discipline is practiced." He then went on to stress that this is particularly so within the discipline of New Testament text criticism. This presentation addresses the value of a comprehensive grasp of the intellectual history and development of the discipline for understanding the evolution of contemporary canons of criticism. Moreover, it will treat in historical survey various historically conditioned ideologies that have informed the development of the discipline. This will be accomplished by citing concrete examples of incomplete, or inaccurate historical treatments as found in the various handbooks. In short, an historical consciousness about the various stages of the discipline will be shown to be indispensable for understanding all aspects of the contemporary praxis. On the other hand, the absence of such historical awareness presents students with the sole and necessary option of a near unquestioning dogmatic application of canons without a sense of their historical genesis, and therefore, their ultimate significance.

On the down side, it is with much pain and regret that I must relate to you that I have lost my sole source of income within the last few months. This will necessitate many changes in my life and in the life of my family. May I take this opportunity to say that though our Institute was formed as a academic organization back in 1987 and became a non-profit organization about two years ago; and even though I have spoken in hundreds of churches over that period of time; and even though with my up-coming lecture I will have given at least 32 academic lectures before learned societies, universities on three continents, and on seminary campuses across America, to date, we have not one regular financial supporter for the Institute, or for me personally. There is little more that I could have done these past 20 years or so since I began publicly addressing the crisis produced by the discipline of text criticism and the plague that is the modern translation industry; but it is hard to come away from all this activity at this stage without believing that one is doing little more than shadow-boxing with one's self. The Anabaptists on the right seem to rule the roost with misinformation and defective publications at the grassroots level. The status quo on the left feel no threat from those quarters. We, on the otherhand, seem to languish in the middle, in a no man's land. Thank you for reflecting on these developments with me and do send me your suggestions if you have any. What follows are the lectures I referred to above.

Academic Lectures

Presented a paper as a Guest Lecturer before the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, titled: "B.B. Warfield's Common-Sense Philosophy and New Testament Text Criticism," Boston, December 1987 [the author is not a member of this society]

Presented a paper at the first annual Scottish Universities Ecclesiastical History Conference, titled: "From Sacred Text to Religious Text: Erasmus and the Revival of the Academy," Perth, Scotland, February, 1989

Presented a paper at the Theologische Universiteit van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland te Kampen, titled: "B.B. Warfield's Common-Sense Philosophy, New Testament Text Criticism and Inerrancy," Kampen, The Netherlands, 8 June 1989

Presented a paper at the Rutherford House Dogmatics Conference, titled: "The Protestant Dogmatists and the Late Princeton School on the Status of the Sacred Apographa," Edinburgh, Scotland, 30 August 1989

Presented a paper at the second annual Scottish Universities Ecclesiastical History Conference, titled: "What Did the Council of Trent Mean When it Claimed the Vulgata Latina Was Authentica?," Perth, Scotland, 20 January, 1990

Presented a paper before the Summer meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society, titled: "The Vulgata Latina and the Council of Trent: The Latin Bible as Verbal Icon," Chichester, England, 19 July 1990

Presented a paper before the Rutherford House Scripture and Theology Group, titled: "Brevard Childs and the Seventeenth Century Dogmatists: A Window to a New Paradigm," London, England, 24 October 1990

Presented a paper at the third annual Scottish Universities Ecclesiastical History Conference, titled: "The Godly Mr. Priestley: A Unitarian Apologia of the Christian Faith," Perth, Scotland, January, 1991

Presented a lecture at the Protestant Reformed Seminary, titled: "The Postmodern Crisis of Biblical Authority and the Church: Reassessing the Prerogatives of the Ecclesiastical Text," Grand Rapids, Michigan, 25 September,

1991

Presented a lecture at the Mid-America Reformed Seminary, titled: "The Postmodern Crisis of Biblical Authority and the Church: Reassessing the Prerogatives of the Ecclesiastical Text," Orange City, Iowa, 26, September 1991

Presented two lectures at the Mid-America Southern Baptist Seminary, titled: "Desiderius Erasmus and the Rebirth of the Greek New Testament in the West," and "The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible Within Classic Protestantism," Memphis, Tennessee, 24, October 1991

Presented a lecture at the Southeastern Southern Baptist Seminary, titled: "Autographs or Apographs Reassessing the Classical Protestant View of Biblical Authority," Wake Forest, North Carolina, 1 November 1991

Presented a lecture at the Columbia Bible College and Seminary, titled: "Autographs or Apographs: Reassessing the Classical Protestant View of Biblical Authority," Columbia, South Carolina, 5 November 1991

Presented a lecture at the fourth annual Scottish Universities Ecclesiastical History Conference, titled: "From Irish Calvinism to German Higher Criticism: Samuel Davidson and the Thomas Horne Affair," 19 January 1992

Presented a lecture to a departmental history seminar, "Joseph Priestley and the Historical Method: From Lower to Higher Criticism in an Eighteenth Century Quest for the Historical Jesus," University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, 4 November 1992

Presented a lecture to the History Society, "Reading the Bible in History: Erasmus and the Process of Desacralization," University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, 5 November 1992

Presented a lecture at the History of Exegesis Section of the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, "Joseph Priestley and the Historical Method: From Lower to Higher Criticism in an Eighteenth Century Quest for the Historical Jesus," San Francisco, California, 22 November 1992

Presented a paper at the fifth annual Scottish Universities Ecclesiastical History Conference, "Communicating Textual Variants Ad Populum: Erasmus and the English Paraphrases and Annotations," Perth, Scotland, 5-7 March 1993

Presented the Presidential Address before the University of Edinburgh Theological Society, "Erasmus and the Antitrinitarians," New College, the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, 16 March 1993

Presented a paper at the Westfield House, Cambridge University, "Orthodox Lutheran Dogmatics and the Language of Biblical Authority in Light of Anglo-American Modernist Developments," Cambridge, England, 22 June 1993

Presented a paper at the Westfield House, Cambridge University, "Brevard Childs and the Catholic Moment: An Occasion for Re-Appropriating Classic Lutheran Orthodoxy in the Postmodern Milieu," Cambridge, England, 24 June 1993

Presented a paper at the History of Exegesis Section of the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, "Communicating Textual Variants Ad Populum: Erasmus, Newton and the English Paraphrases," Washington, D.C., 22 November 1993

Presented a paper at the History of Exegesis Section of the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, "The Arianism of the Geneva Bible: Bishop Howson and the Puritan Glossators," Chicago, November 21, 1994

Presented a paper at the annual Meeting of the Tyndale House Fellowship, Tyndale House, Cambridge University, titled: "The Canonical Approach and the Praxis of Lower Criticism: John 1:18 in the Egyptian Manuscripts," 4 July 1996, Cambridge, England

Presented a paper at the Symposium on Exegetical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, titled: "New Testament Text Criticism and the Language of Biblical Authority: From Catholic Orthodoxy to Evangelical Equivocation," 20 January, 1998

Presented a paper at the Dogmatics Symposium at Concordia Theological Seminary in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, titled: "Contemporary Bible Translations: Anabaptist Victories in the New World," 20 January, 1999

Presented a paper at the American Academy of Religion's Seminar: Modern Historical Consciousness and the Christian Churches, titled: "Erasmus and the Birth of Historical Consciousness," Boston, 20 November, 1999

Presented a lecture to a postgraduate seminar, English Department, Trinity College, Dublin, titled: "Brevard Childs's Canonical Hermeneutic: A Postmodern Option for Confessing Communities," Dublin, Ireland, April 3, 2001

Presented a lecture at the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, titled: "The Renaissance Bible, Anglo-American Revisionism and the Jesus Seminar," Dublin, Ireland, April 4, 2001

Presented a lecture to the Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts, the University of Glasgow, Scotland, titled: "The Pericope de Adultera: The History of Interpretation, Canon and Authority," Glasgow, Scotland, October 31, 2001

Presented a lecture at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, New Testament Section, titled: "John 1:18 and the Canonical Approach," Denver, Colorado, Nov. 19, 2001

To Present a Lecture before the Annual International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, "Teaching New Testament Text Criticism: The Necessary Backdrop of an Intellectual History of the Discipline," Berlin, Germany, 2002

Finally, my master's thesis, "Edward Freer Hills's Contribution to the Revival of the Ecclesiastical Text" is now in print. It lists for \$14.95 and the Introduction follows as an attached document. Also, my audio tapes (now up to six) are also available (\$25.00). If you desire these please make the check out to me, Theodore P. Letis, and send to: IRRBS, P.O. Box 870525, Stone Mountain, GA 30087.

Theodore P. Letis, Ph.D.

Director

The Institute for

Renaissance and Reformation

Biblical Studies

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