

Sunday, March 10, 2019—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 80 Do Variant Readings Impact Doctrine: I John 5:7 & the Three Heavenly Witnesses?

Introduction

- Last week in [Lesson 79](#) we began a consideration of the often-repeated claim by Evangelical text critics that no textual variants impact any “fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith.” This was accomplished by using Mark 16:9-20 as a case study.
- Today in Lesson 80 we want to look at historical examples of those who’s faith was altered drastically by the issue of textual variants. In this Lesson we will use I John 5:7 as a case study.

Do Variant Readings Impact Doctrine: I John 5:7 & the Three Heavenly Witnesses?

- The unpublished doctoral thesis of Theodore P. Letis titled [*From Sacred Text to Religious Text: An Intellectual History of the Impact of Erasmian Lower Criticism on Dogma as a Contribution to the English Enlightenment and the Victorian Crisis of Faith*](#) is an absolute must read for anyone interested in this topic.
- Letis maintains that the omission of *comma Johanneum* (I John 5:7) by Erasmus in his “*Novum Instrumentum* (1516) signals the beginning of the process of desacralization [to divest of sacred qualities or status] for the Judeo-Christian Bible.” (Letis, 11) The verse is found in the Latin Vulgate and had been received as canonical by users of the Vulgate. Given that Erasmus’ 1516 edition was a Greek/Latin interlinear edition, the omission stood out and caused the orthodoxy of Erasmus on trinitarian grounds to be called into question.
 - “When Erasmus did not add the *comma Johanneum* to the First Epistle of John it opened the way for theologians to accuse him of contributing to a revival of Arianism. Of course, Erasmus's Christology probably had nothing to do with his judgement to omit this passage (although its omission from all the Greek codices he had surveyed probably reinforced his conviction that the Trinity was a late dogmatic reflection of the Church rather than a Biblical teaching).” (Letis, 74)
- Erasmus’ decision to omit the verse was based upon the fact that the verse was “simply missing from all the Greek witnesses he consulted.” (Letis, 74) That being said,
 - “Erasmus was, however, certain it was a corruption, added to the text by the Western Church, a witness to him of yet one more form of dogmatic corruption influencing the Latin Bible. . . The *comma Johanneum* takes on great significance from this time forward in the history of text criticism because it remains as proof positive to future Erasmians that the Church has expanded the New Testament message at places to accommodate emerging dogmatic concerns.” (Letis, 75)
- In his third edition, published in 1522, Erasmus added the *comma Johanneum* to his Greek New Testament along with an annotation questioning its authenticity.

- “Erasmus omitted the Johannine comma from the first edition (1516) of his printed Greek New Testament on the ground that it occurred only in the Latin version and not in any Greek manuscript. To quiet the outcry that arose, he agreed to restore it if but one Greek manuscript could be found which contained it. When one such manuscript was discovered soon afterwards, bound by his promise, he included the disputed reading in his third edition (1522), and thus it gained a permanent place in the Textus Receptus. The manuscript which forced Erasmus to reverse his stand seems to have been 61, a 15th or 16th century manuscript now kept at Trinity College, Dublin. Many critics believe that this manuscript was written at Oxford about 1520 for the special purpose of refuting Erasmus, and this is what Erasmus himself suggested in his notes.” (Hills, 209)
- More than a century and a half later, Sir Isaac Newton read Erasmus’ *Annotations* regarding the textual variant at I John 5:7 and consequently questioned the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. It is unclear to me at this time whether Newton was already questioning the doctrine of the trinity when he read Erasmus’ annotations. What is crystal clear, however, is that Erasmus’ notes on this textual variant impacted Newton’s thinking on the matter. Please note that some of the parentheses found within the following quotations were placed there by Letis as part of his documentation process for his dissertation. I have elected to retain them in my quotes from Letis as a means of further documentation.
 - “. . . Newton has traditionally been invoked by the faithful as perhaps the greatest luminary ever to grace the Christian Religion with his allegiance. It was a surprise to learn, therefore, some years after his death, that "privately he denied the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ as both unintelligible and unscriptural" (McLachlan 1951: 330). This was revealed when an unpublished MS by Newton was discovered. It was a treatise devoted specifically to proving the spuriousness of the *comma Johanneum* and the orthodox variant at I Tim. 3:16 . . . titled: *An Historical Account of the Two Notable Corruptions of the Scriptures, in a Letter to a Friend* (c.1687-c.1690). Not discovered and published until 1754, almost thirty years after Newton's death (d. 1727), one biographer calls this Newton's "most important theological tract" (More 1934: 632).” (Letis, 170)
- Holding a teaching post in Trinity College at Cambridge University would have obviously been a problem for a professor who denied the doctrine of the Trinity.
 - “While he was alive there were always rumors about Newton's unorthodoxy. Even in his day, to be found denying the Trinity, while not as dangerous as in Erasmus's day, could still mean one would be deprived of a teaching post at the University. At worse, one might face imprisonment (More 1934: 630). This explains why it was Newton's original purpose to have this work published anonymously, in the French language. Then, if all went well, he would also have it published in English.” (Letis, 170)
- Newton’s arguments for the spurious nature of Trinitarian doctrine took shape around a discussion of textual variants in I John 5:7 and I Timothy 3:16 (“God was manifest in the flesh” vs. “who was manifest in the flesh”).

- “Newton's thorough refutation of the authenticity of these two proof texts [I John 5:7 and I Timothy 3:16], "the two on which the doctrine of the Trinity is principally based" (More: 632), coming from the very father of the new science, was nothing short of devastating to the cause of orthodoxy:

His knowledge of the Greek and Latin Fathers, the theologians of the middle ages, and the history of sacred learning, as displayed in this work, impresses the reader with amazement at the universality of his powers and attainments (Sparks 1823: 230).” (Letis, 170-171)

- One cannot overestimate the devastating nature of Newton’s argumentation upon the cause of Protestant Orthodoxy. Letis highlights the reasons why in the following citation:
 - “This work represents the capstone to the now two-hundred-year-long attempt on the part of the Antitrinitarians to shake loose from the influence of catholic tradition, by revealing the faulty textual evidence at its base. They now had the most important advocate, perhaps since Erasmus, arguing their side.

Erasmus had disrupted confidence in the *Vulgata Latina* by discovering its textual corruptions, thus precipitating the Protestant tradition. Analogously, the Protestant theological tradition was now shown to be based on a faulty text as well. If one could no longer have confidence in the sacred text of the *Church*, one must now look for certainty elsewhere. Newton held out the promise of *scientia*. Deism was one ultimate result. If the God of *revealed* religion could no longer be trusted, surely the God of *natural* religion could.” (Letis, 171)

- Newtonian science coupled with an increase in critical editions of the Greek New Testament gave rise to popular Deism in 18th century Britain.
 - “At first, Newtonianism seemed to suggest a wonderful harmony between the new science and the traditional Faith. In time, it ate away at the miraculous. It soon came to provide those disillusioned with religious conflict and debate—both genuine critics and those looking for an easy route to celebrity by denouncing traditional belief—with a desire to search for a new horizon of certainty. The popular Biblical paraphrases of the Socinians and Arians, and the fresh textual data flowing from the new critical editions of the Greek New Testament—England was now the European center for New Testament textual studies—were the components that played an important role in the equation resulting in popular Deism.” (Letis, 172)
- Anthony Collins, a late 17th and early 18th century British intellectual used the increasing awareness of variant readings to argue against the authenticity of “revealed religion.”
 - “Anthony Collins was one of the earliest to hold up the issue of textual variants in general, as one justification for abandoning the project of revealed religion altogether. Of independent means, Collins collected a vast library. At his death it numbered six-thousand, nine hundred and six volumes, including every major work published in the area of Biblical criticism since the Reformation.

This provided Collins with a great advantage: sitting atop of such scholarship, with the leisure to thoroughly engage it, he had a devastating array of data to bring to his cause of dismantling revealed religion (Drury 1989: 21).” (Letis, 173)

- In 1707, British text critic John Mill published *Novum Testamentum graecum, cum Lectionibus Variatibus* MSS. Using the 1550 text of Robert Stephanous as his base (Textus Receptus), Mill noted over 30,000 variants between some 100 extant New Testament MSS in the critical apparatus underneath the base text. The variant readings catalogued by Mill in his Greek New Testament served as the argumentative basis for Collins to assert that the Bible was not inspired.
 - “Now Collins demanded to know, based on the collection of variants by the text critic John Mill (1645-1707), how thirty-thousand variants could exist in a document divinely inspired by the verbal dictation of God?

Certainly, Collins's was a sensationalistic challenge, but the evidence was not contrived by him, or another Deist; it was provided by a churchman, John Mill. Collins also discovered in Mill's research, an account that claimed the four Gospels were subject to an official, ecclesiastical recension in the sixth century, whence our current copies were derived (Collins: 72-73). This is significant because by the nineteenth century, textual critics would claim just such an official revision had taken place, though much earlier, in the fourth century, thus giving the medieval Greek text its particular orthodox flavor.

Collins's final master stroke was to highlight the remarks of another churchman (who, it seems, later became an Antitrinitarian), who was still laboring under the traditional, Protestant view of Scripture, and who drew similar conclusions from Mill's thirty-thousand textual variants as did Collins himself. Collins quoted Dr. Daniel Whitby as follows:

- “The vast quantity of various readings collected by the Doctor [Mill] must of course make the mind doubtful or suspicious that nothing certain can be expected from books, where there are various readings in every verse, and almost in every part of every verse.... How will the papists triumph over the text of Scripture, when they see those readings... moreover, it does not a little hurt our cause of Protestantism, that the Doctor confidently affirms, that not a few corruptions and interpolations have happened almost from the beginning of Christianity, and in the Apostolic Age (Collins: 71-72).” (Letis, 175-176)
- Richard Bentley, one of the leading textual critics of early 18th century Britain, responded to Collins “under the pseudonym, Pibileutberus Lipsiensis, intending to leave the impression that the tract was written by a Lutheran in Germany.” (Letis, 177) Before answering Collins, Bentley ridicules Dr. Daniel Whitby for his belief in “the providential preservation of the Scripture.” (Letis, 177)
 - “Bentley, no friend of the old Protestant confessionism, but a close friend of Newton, begins by castigating the churchman, Whitby, for causing all the trouble in the first place. Whitby has given expression to the old notion of the providential preservation of the

Scripture. It is this doctrine Whitby sees under threat from Mill's collection of variants. This doctrine has produced a panic and alarm in Whitby, and he has, in turn, revealed this weakness to Collins (Bentley 1725: 63)." (Letis, 177)

- In his response to Collins, Bentley issued a challenge that has echoed throughout the halls of history:
 - "This response has echoed down the corridors of time and has been invoked on every occasion in the last two hundred years, when either the integrity of the text, or the practice of text criticism are maligned. With a reckless confidence in the role of brute science to now replace the Church as the final guarantor of the Biblical text Bentley offered Coffins the following challenge:
 - "Make your 30,000 [textual variants] as many more, if numbers of copies can ever reach that sum: all the better to a knowing and serious reader, who is thereby more richly furnished to select what he sees genuine. But even put them into the hands of a knave or a fool: and yet with the most sinister and absurd choice, he shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter, nor so disguise Christianity, but that *every feature of it will still be the same* [emphasis mine] (Bentley: 76)."

. . . Perhaps a knave might not be able to choose a textual variant that challenges the traditional understanding of the Christian Faith, but we already know that a genius like Newton was certainly able to do just that. Nevertheless, Bentley certainly drew popular sentiment in his favor. His response saw eight editions and was republished as late as 1825 (Fox: 115). The Bishop of Chichester published a thank-you tribute to Bentley's answer, which probably spoke for most of the bewildered Anglican clergy, in his *The Clergyman's Thanks to Pibileutberus For His Remarks on the Late Discourse of Free-Thinking*:

- "You have pulled up this panic by the very roots; and a man must be afraid of his own shadow, who can hereafter be in pain about a variant reading, or think the number of them any prejudice to the integrity or authority of the sacred books (Hulbirt-Powefl 1937: 305)."" (Letis, 177-179)
- It is in Bentley that we see the origin of the false notion that no textual variant impacts any "fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith." Dr. Letis summarizes the implications of Bentley's comments as follows:
 - "Bentley had, nevertheless, with his promise, for the moment anaesthetized the clergy of the Anglican Church from the pangs presented by textual criticism with his articulation of the ideology of harmless engagement. The dark side of this science, however, had now been glimpsed, by both the faithful, as well as by the advocates of an alternative natural religion." (Letis, 180)
- Later in the 18th century, Unitarian Joseph Priestley would use the logic presented by Newton with respect to the *comma Johanneum* to question the virgin birth of Christ. In his *An History of*

Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ, Compiled from Original Writers (3 Volumes) from 1789, Priestley states the following in regard to the virgin birth:

- “There is one particular subject on which I have much enlarged in this treatise, and about which I had no intention to write at all, when I began to collect materials for it. It is the *miraculous conception* of Jesus, concerning which I had not at that time entertained any doubt; though I well knew that several very eminent and learned Christians, of ancient and modern times, had disbelieved it. The case was that, in perusing the early Christian writers, with a view to collect all opinions concerning Christ, I found so much on this subject, that I could not help giving particular attention to it; and it being impossible not to be struck with the absurdity of their reasoning about it, I was by degrees led to think whether anything better could be said in proof of the fact; and at length my collections and speculations, grew to the size that is now before the reader (Priestley 1786 Vol LXVII-XVIII).” (Letis, 285-286)
- Later in the work, Priestley explicitly makes the connection between the textual variant found in I John 5:7 and the virgin birth of Christ found in Matthew and Luke.
 - “The famous verse, [1] John, v-7., concerning the three that bear record in heaven, has been sufficiently proved to have come into the epistle in this unauthorized manner; and had it been done in an early period, there would have appeared no more reason to have suspected the genuineness of it, than there now does that of the introductions to the gospels of Matthew and Luke (Priestley 1786 Vol. 111:105).” (Letis, 286)
- Interested parties are encouraged to read Bart D. Ehrman’s discussion of textual variants as they pertain to the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ in his *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (See Chapter 2: Anti-Adoptionistic Corruptions of Scripture). In this section, Ehrman states the following regarding an important textual variant found in Luke 2:33:
 - “Thus, Luke 2:33 states that Jesus’ “father and mother began to marvel” . . . at the things being said about him. The majority of Greek manuscripts, however, along with a number of Old Latin, Syriac, and Coptic witnesses, have changed the text to read “Joseph and his mother began to marvel.” The change makes perfect sense, given the orthodox view that Joseph was in fact not Jesus’ father. There can be little doubt that in this case the majority text represents a corruption rather than the original reading: a wide range of early and superior manuscripts consistently give the reading that is also more difficult. The wide attestation of the variant reading and the confluence of ancient versions in its support, however, do show that the text had been changed relatively early in the history of its transmission, at least in the third century and more likely the second—precisely during the time of the adaptationist controversies.” (Ehrman, 65)
- Textual variants such as the one found in Luke 2:33 are what led Priestly to doubt the “miraculous conception of Jesus” in the 18th century. In the 20th century, feminist author Jane Schaberg, using the same textual variants noted by Priestly and Ehrman, argued that Jesus was illegitimately conceived probably as the result of rape. Note how the quest for the historical (original) text has stripped Christ of his divinity. But, we are assured by textual critics, that none of the textual variants impact “fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith.”

- The net impact of these textual controversies within British academia from the 18th century, on popular Biblical discourse, was not seen until the 19th century with the publication of the *Revised Version* in 1881.
 - That the ecclesiastical world did, in fact, take notice of the textual decisions made by the Unitarians and eventually took in hand to "improve" the established Church's Bible in 1881, with a Unitarian sitting on the revision committee, was surely the most significant indication possible that the Antitrinitarians' long campaign had not been in vain. In this Revised Version edition, both I Tim. 3:16 and the *comma Johanneum* were treated precisely as Erasmus had hinted they ought to be: . . . was expunged from the text and the comma was now removed without so much as a note to signal that it was ever there." (Letis, 356)
- Published in the Spring of 1881, the Revised Version was quickly critiqued in the British press. It was praised by Unitarians and theological liberals while it was mourned by the theologically conservative. Both parties could plainly see that its readings impacted the "fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith."
- The May 26, 1881 issue of *The Free Religious Index* ran a piece titled "The New-New Testament" which stated the following about the newly released Revised Version:
 - "And we think one of the certain effects of this acceptance of the revised version will be the increase of more rational views about the Bible. A book that can be amended cannot be infallible. Yet thousands of readers of the King James Version have read it in the firm belief that they were reading an infallible book. They will now begin to see that that belief, at least, was a mistake. But, since no claim is made that the new revising committee have been inspired, and their process of working with the instrumentalities of human scholarship is even frankly described, have these readers an infallible book now? Have all mistakes been corrected? And these "manuscripts" that are talked about,—on what authority do they rest? **And so, the question of infallibility having once been started among readers who never raised it before, it may not rest until it reach the question of original authorship, and the popular theories of the Bible be reconstructed on a more rational basis. From this point of view, therefore, the revised New Testament has a special interest for Liberals. That the revision, on points where any doctrinal change is involved, favors liberal Christian rather than orthodox interpretation is also apparent.** But this is a matter of much less moment than setting the Bible-reader's wits to work on the question whether the Bible he is reading is an infallible book. **Let that question once fairly get started among the plain-thinking people of Christendom in the nineteenth century, and the twentieth century will answer it by placing the Bible on the library shelves alongside of other historical religious books, classified as one of the human literatures of the world's religions.**" (Potter, 570)

- *The Dublin Review* from July-October 1881 contains an essay titled “The Revision of the New Testament” that is pregnant with pertinent quotations. We only have space in this Lesson to cite but a few of the more important sections. According to Lord Panmure “the prospect of a new version is fraught with the utmost danger to the Protestant liberties of this country, if not the Protestant religion itself.” (132-133)
 - "Now, it must be remembered that since the year 1611, a new science has been born into the world, called Textual Criticism--a science which professes to enable men of sufficient self-confidence to determine with absolute certainty, by the aid of a small number of MSS., hardly legible, what the text of the Scripture really is. This science, at least in the opinion of its professors, quite compensates for the loss of the inspired autographs, and by its aid the textual critic has no difficulty in telling amidst thousands of various readings, what the sacred writer really wrote. This would be an unmixed blessing to the religious world, if textual critics could but agree one with another, that each critic should have his own theory of recension, and his own view of the age and genealogy of different MSS, is not to be wondered at. But that no two critics can agree upon a plain matter of fact is certainly surprising . . .

What, then, has textual criticism done for the New Testament? It has destroyed the old *textus receptus*, . . .

Here, then, lay the chief difficulty of the revision of the New Testament. King James's Revisers had an easy task--simply to translate the text that Pope Stephens, as Bently calls him, had fixed for them. But the Revisers of 1881 had first to find the text and then make the translation. Like Nebuchadnezzar's wise men, they were required first to find the dream and then make the interpretation. If they have failed, the blame must rest not upon them, for they could hardly be expected to be all Daniels but upon the Church which put them to such a task. To anyone who knows what textual criticism is, how dubious in its methods, how revolutionary in its results, it is amazing that any Church calling itself Christian should hand over the Sacred Scriptures, the very title-deeds of its existence, to the change voting of critics, who are scholars first, and Christians afterwards, and some not Christians at all. That it should give to these men power over the Word of God, to bind and lose, to revise and excise, to put in and leave out, to form the text as well as to give the interpretation. Yet this has been done by that Church, which made it an article of its creed that other Churches had erred and that nothing was to be believed but was found in Scripture and could be proved thereby!

. . . **Now textual criticism is a tool belonging to the rationalism. The revisers have borrowed it to help them revise their bible.** They have used the tool sparingly, but they have taught others to use it, who are less gentle. With a Variorum Bible [having notes by various editors or commentators including variant readings from manuscripts or earlier editions] and good eyesight, **even an ignorant man can revise his bible for himself; and soon there will be no Bible to revise.** In the first days of Protestantism private judgement fixed what the Scripture meant; **now textual criticism settles what scripture says; and shortly ‘higher criticism’ will reject text and meaning alike. What has happened in Germany will happen in England.**

. . . Lastly, we come to the most serious of all--viz., the passages the Revisers have thought proper to leave out altogether. So far it has been a question of translation and of names, but **here the vital integrity of sacred scripture is affected. By the sole authority of textual criticism these men have dared to vote away some forty verses of the inspired word.** The Eunuch's Baptismal Profession of Faith is gone; the Angel of the Pool of Bethesda has vanished; but the Angel of Agony remains--till the next Revision. The Heavenly Witnesses [I John 5:7] have departed, and no marginal note mourns their loss. **The last twelve verses of St. Mark are detached from the rest of the gospel, as if ready for removal as soon as Dean Burgon dies.** The account of the woman taken in adultery is placed in brackets, awaiting excision. Many other passages have a mark set against them in the margin to show that, like forest trees, they are shortly destined for the critic's axe. Who can tell when the destruction will cease? **What have the offending verses done that textual critics should tear them from their home of centuries in the shire of God's temple? The sole offence of many is that the careless copyist of some old uncial ms. skipped over them.** . . The Angel of Bethesda may have cured "the sick, the blind, the halt and the withered," but **modern science** has no need of his services, for it has proved, without identifying the site, that the spring was intermittent and the water chalybeate. But our intelligent critics forgot to get rid of the paralytic, whom the Lord cured, and as long as he remains in the text his words will convict them of folly.

. . . We have spoken of the admissions, the peculiarities, and the **omissions of the newly Revised Version.** It only remains to express our **deep anxiety as to its effect** upon the religious mind of England and Scotland. It cannot but give a severe shock to those who have been brought up in the strictest sect of Protestantism. **Their fundamental doctrine of verbal inspiration is undermined.** The land of John Knox will mourn its dying Calvinism. The prophets of Bible religion will find no sure word from the Lord in the new Gospel. But assuredly the Broad Church will widen their tents yet more, **and rejoice in the liberty wherewith textual criticism has made them free.** Already one of their great oracles, himself a Reviser, has declared that Inspiration "**It is not in a part but in the whole, not in a particular passage but in the general tendency and drift of the complete words.**" And he teaches a new way to convert the working-classes from their unbelief. "The real way," he says, "**To reclaim them is for the church frankly to admit that the documents on which they base their claims to attention are not to be accepted in blind obedience, but are to be tested and sifted and tried by all the methods that patience and learning can bring to bear.**" Then Heaven help the poor working man if his sole hope of salvation lies in the new Gospel of Textual Criticism! But what will those think who, outside the Catholic Church, still retain the old Catholic ideas about Church and Scripture? How bitter to them must be the sight of their Anglican Bishops sitting with Methodists, Baptists, and Unitarians to improve the English Bible according to modern ideas of Progressive Biblical Criticism! Who gave these men authority over the written Word of God? It was not Parliament, or Privy Council, but the Church of England acting through Convocation. To whom do they look for the necessary sanction and approval of their work, but to public opinion? One thing at least is certain,

The Catholic Church will gain by the new revision, both directly and indirectly. Directly, because old errors are removed from the translation; indirectly, because the “BIBLE-ONLY” principle is proved to be false. It is not now at length too evident that scripture is powerless without the church as the witness to its inspiration, the safeguard of its integrity, and the exponent of its meaning.” And it will now be clear to all men which is the true church, the real Mother to whom the Bible of right belongs. Nor will it need Solomon’s wisdom to see that the so-called church which heartlessly gives up the helpless child to be cut in pieces by textual critics cannot be the true mother.” (133-144)

- In his 1892 publication *The Bible: What It Is and Is Not*, Joseph Wood stated the following:
 - **“The Revised Version is of great doctrinal significance. It tends to break down the rigidity of orthodoxy, and it justifies that Liberal Christianity which we, in this place, hold and teach.”** (Wood, 46)

Conclusion

- Given the history presented in this Lesson how can anyone take the following assertion from the pen of James R. White seriously:
 - “The simple fact of the matter is that **no textual variants** in either the Old or New Testaments in any way, shape, or form materially disrupt or destroy any essential doctrine of the Christian faith. That is a fact that any semi-impartial review will substantiate.” (White, 40)
- In a different work (*The Ecclesiastical Text*), after quoting a lengthy section from the conclusion of the first edition (1993) of Dr. Bart Ehrman’s book *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, Theodore Letis states the following regarding White’s quotation above:
 - “This [Ehrman’s *Orthodox Corruption*] puts White’s confident assertion that no doctrine is ever affected by text criticism in a very dim light indeed.” (Letis--*The Ecclesiastical Text*, 225)
- Letis goes a step further in arguing that lower criticism which White and company are trying to sanitize inevitably leads to higher criticism and the so-called search for the historical Jesus. (Letis--*The Ecclesiastical Text*, 225) In short, the quest for the historical text (lower criticism) was the seedbed for the quest for the historical Jesus (higher criticism).
 - “A religious belief in verbal inspiration gave the Christian Bible its sacred text status within the matrix of the Church. The lower, or textual criticism, first practiced outside the sanction of the Church by Erasmus and developed further by non-Trinitarians initially, offered the first significant direct challenge to this belief in the early modern period. This,

the dissertation argues, was the proper beginning, phenomenologically speaking, of the process of desacralization.

Moreover, it is argued that the desacralizing role of the lower criticism was further manifested when it was discovered that certain theologically significant passages, perceived by those in the Erasmian school to have resulted from later interpolation into the text of Scripture, illegitimately lent support to dogmas such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ and the virgin birth. The practice of lower criticism set in motion, well before the arrival of the higher criticism, a rather significant awakening of a historical consciousness about the developmental stages of the N. T. text, which in later recensions reflected a more full-blown orthodox expression of Christological themes. The role that the lower criticism played in introducing this historical consciousness has not been readily acknowledged by either historians or practitioners of the discipline of lower criticism.

The dissertation argues that this is because of an ideological framing of the historical details of the discipline in development. This ideological component and the historical circumstances prompting it are brought into relief revealing why two schools arose during the English Enlightenment and carried on into the Victorian era, responding to the data of text criticism in two directions: one interpreting the data as affecting dogma, the other interpreting the data as not affecting dogma. In answering why this came about the dissertation helps to explain how the quest for the historical text culminated in the quest for the historical Jesus.” (Letis, unnumbered pages of dissertation)

- Textual variants do impact doctrine and everyone but leading Evangelical scholars and textual critics seem willing and able to acknowledge it. Therefore, one’s approach to Biblical text (See Lessons [71](#) and [72](#)) is absolutely critical, when discussing the issue of transmission.
 - Preservationist Approach = Maximum Certainty
 - Reconstructionist Approach = Maximum Uncertainty
- Uncertainty towards the historical text leads to uncertainty about the historical Jesus. A low view of the Biblical text logically leads to a low view of the Savior.
- Only the preservationist approach secures the transmission of the Biblical text through history in a substantivity pure manner (Psalm 12:6-7) despite not existing with *verbatim identity*.

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