

Sunday, December 15, 2019—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 102 Erasmus and the Greek New Testament, Part 3

Introduction

- This morning will be our third Lesson on Erasmus and the Greek New Testament. Given that it has been three weeks since our last Lesson, I would like to briefly review what we have seen thus far.
- Lesson 100 was devoted to a consideration:
 - The Life & Career of Erasmus
 - Erasmus and the Greek New Testament
- More recently, in Lesson 101 we considered the following points:
 - Erasmus in the Critics Den
 - The Rushed to Press Argument
 - The Number of Manuscripts Argument
 - The Age of the Manuscripts & Awareness of Variant Readings Argument
- Today's Lesson will cover the following:
 - Reception & Editions
 - The Greek Text After Erasmus

Reception & Editions

- Regarding the reception/reaction to the 1516 publication of *Novum Instrumentum* Dr. Combs states the following:
 - “The criticism that Erasmus received for this work was primarily directed toward his Latin translation and his *Annotiones*, not his Greek text directly, which few people could read. The translation was criticized because the Vulgate, which Erasmus was correcting by examining Greek manuscripts was considered to be inspired. Even before the *Novum Instrumentum* was published, Maarten van Dorp, a friend of Erasmus from the theology faculty at Louvain, wrote in a 1514 letter:

Now I differ from you on this question of truth and integrity and claim that these are qualities of the Vulgate edition that we have in common use. For it is not reasonable that the whole church, which has always used this edition and still both approves and uses it, should for these centuries have been wrong.

Dorp goes on to say if anything in the Vulgate “varies in point of truth from the Greek manuscript, at that point I bid the Greek goodbye and cleave to the Latin.” Another critic of Erasmus, Petrus Sutor, a theologian at the University of Paris, said of the Vulgate:

If in one point the Vulgate were in error the entire authority of the Holy Scripture would collapse, love and faith would be extinguished, heresies, and schisms would abound, blasphemy would be committed against the Holy Spirit, the authority of theologians would be shaken, and indeed the Catholic Church would collapse from the foundations.

Besides failure to include the Comma Johanneum in his first two editions, Erasmus’ Latin translation was the object of numerous attacks where it departed from the “inspired” Latin Vulgate. . .

Erasmus was also attacked for some of his interpretive comments in the *Annotationes*. He was justly criticized because of his view of inspiration. He believed correctly that it extended only to the original authors, but incorrectly held that it protected them only in matter of faith. In a note on Acts 10 he stated that the apostles’ Greek was in error. Divine inspiration extended only to their thoughts, not their words. . . Because of this criticism Erasmus added a statement to the Apologia of his fourth edition (1527) in which he affirmed the authors of Scripture had made no mistakes but “that errors crept into Scripture only through inattentiveness of copyists and translators.” (Combs, 17-18)

- In terms of the various editions of Erasmus’ Greek New Testament, Dr. Edward F. Hills states the following:
 - “Between the years 1516 and 1535 Erasmus published five editions of the Greek New Testament. In the first edition (1516) the text was preceded by a dedication to Pope Leo X, an exhortation to the reader, a discussion of the method used, and a defense of this method. Then came the Greek New Testament text accompanied by Erasmus’ own Latin Translation, and then this was followed by Erasmus’ notes, giving his comments on the text. In the second edition (1519) Erasmus revised both the Greek text and his own Latin translation . . . The 3rd edition (1522) is chiefly remarkable for the inclusion of I John 5:7, which had been omitted in the previous editions. The 4th edition (1527) contained the Greek text, the Latin Vulgate, and Erasmus’ Latin translation in three parallel columns. The 5th edition (1535) omitted the Vulgate, thus resuming the practice of printing the Greek text and the version of Erasmus side by side.” (Hills, 197-198)
- Dr. Combs fills in the above outline provided by Dr. Hills by adding the following details:
 - “A second edition of Erasmus’ Latin-Greek NT was published in 1519 in which the title was changed from *Novum Instrumentum* to *Novum Testamentum*. In addition, his *Annotationes* almost doubled in size, and a new piece was added: *Capita arguentorum contra morosos quosdam ac indoctos*, “Summary arguments against certain contentious and boorish people.” Erasmus also had access to other manuscripts, chiefly Codex 3^{cap}, a minuscule containing the entire NT except Revelation, dated to the 12th century. The Greek text differs from the first edition in hundreds of places, chiefly in the correction of misprints. John Mill estimated these changes to number 400. However, the real character of the text changed little, since the manuscripts that Erasmus consulted were primarily of the Byzantine family. . .

A third edition was published in 1522. Erasmus had been criticized because his first and second editions did not contain the famous “heavenly witnesses” passage of I John 5:7b-8a (*Comma Johanneum*), which was in manuscripts of the Vulgate. . . One of Erasmus’ critics was Diego Lopez Zuniga (better known by his Latin name, Stunica), who was one of the editors of the Complutensian NT. The Complutensian NT had included I John 5:7, though they translated it from Latin into Greek. Stunica could never cite any Greek manuscript which included the text, but only argued that Latin manuscripts were more reliable than Greek. Another critic was Edward Lee, who was later to become Archbishop of York. Lee accused Erasmus of encouraging Arianism. “Latin Christians since the early Middle Ages had considered this passage the clearest scriptural proof of the doctrine of the Trinity.” But Erasmus had excluded it from his first two editions because he found it in “no Greek manuscript, few Latin manuscripts of antique vintage, and only rarely in patristic works. He cited with approval the opinion of St. Jerome, that Latin copyists had introduced the passage on their own in order to refute the Arians and provide scriptural support for Trinitarian doctrine.

. . . When Erasmus was informed that the passage had been found in Codex 61, a 16th century manuscript then in England, he included it, though he notes in his *Annotiones* that he did not believe the *Comma* was genuine. . .

A fourth edition was published in 1527. Erasmus made use of the Complutensian Polyglot, especially in the book of Revelation. The text of the Vulgate was added in a third column. A fifth and final edition was published in 1535, one year before Erasmus death. The Vulgate was no longer included.” (Combs, 14-16)

- In his unpublished doctoral thesis 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*](#) Dr. Theodore P. 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)
- Letis goes a step further in arguing that lower criticism which James 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), a discipline first popularized by Erasmus, 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)

The Greek Text After Erasmus

- Erasmus published his fifth and final edition of the *Novum Testamentum* in 1535, the year before his death in 1536. After his death, his Greek New Testament was reprinted with various changes by subsequent editors.
 - “Robert Estienne (Latin, Stephanus) produced four editions (1546, 1549, 1550, 1551). His third edition of 1550 was the first to have a critical apparatus [to note variant readings], with references to the Complutensian Polyglot and fifteen manuscripts. It was republished many times and became the accepted form of the TR, especially in England. It influenced all future editions of the TR. According to Mill, the first and second editions differ in 67 places, and the third in 284 places. The fourth edition had the same text as the third but is noteworthy because the text is divided into numbered verses for the first time. It was the source text for the NT of the Geneva Bible (1557).

Theodore Beza, the successor of John Calvin at Geneva, produced nine editions between 1565 and 1604. Only four are independent editions, the other being smaller-sized reprints. His text was essentially a reprint of Stephanus with minor changes. A study of the KJV NT by F.H.A. Scrivener concluded that Beza’s edition of 1598 was the main source for the translators.

As was noted at the beginning of this article, Bonaventura and Abraham Elzevir produced seven editions between 1624 and 1678. And it was from their second and definitive edition of 1633 that the term *Textus Receptus* originated. In Europe the third edition of Stephanous (1550) became the standard form of the text in England and that of the Elzevirs (1633) on the continent. Scrivener suggests that they differ in 287 places.” (Combs, 18-19)

- Earlier in his essay Combs had stated the following about the 2nd Edition of the Elzevir brothers from 1633:
 - “Their second edition (1633) has this sentence in the preface: “Textum ergo habes, nune ab omnibus receptum, in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum dams” (Therefore you [dear reader] have the text now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted). From this statement (Textum. . . receptum) comes the term Textus Receptus or TR, which today is commonly applied to all editions of the Greek NT before the Elzevirs’, beginning with Erasmus’ in 1516.” (Combs, 1)
- The website titled [Textus Receptus Bibles](http://www.textusreceptusbibles.com) is an invaluable repository of information on the *Textus Receptus* as well as translations thereof. In addition to the editions noted above, this website also lists the edition of F. H. A. Scrivener from 1894 along with the following note:
 - “In the latter part of the 19th century, F. H. A. Scrivener produced an edition of the Greek New Testament which reflects the Textus Receptus underlying the English Authorized Version.

F. H. A. Scrivener (1813-1891) attempted to reproduce as exactly as possible the Greek text which underlies the Authorized Version of 1611. However, the AV was not translated from any one printed edition of the Greek text. The AV translators relied heavily upon the work of William Tyndale and other editions of the English Bible. Thus there were places in which it is unclear what the Greek basis of the New Testament was. Scrivener in his reconstructed and edited text used as his starting point the Beza edition of 1598, identifying the places where the English text had different readings from the Greek. He examined eighteen editions of the Textus Receptus to find the correct Greek rendering and made the changes to his Greek text. When he finished, he had produced an edition of the Greek New Testament which more closely underlies the text of the AV than any one edition of the Textus Receptus.”

<http://www.textusreceptusbibles.com/Editorial/Scrivener>
- It is the Scrivener edition of the Textus Receptus that one can purchase today from the Trinitarian Bible Society.
- Some King James Only advocates have criticized the Scrivener text because it is not an *exact* Greek match for the English readings found in the King James Bible. Peter Heisey, missionary to the ethnic Roma (Gypsies) in Romania, stands out as a prime advocate of this position. Heisey is the author of a document noting all the places where the Scrivener’s text needs to be corrected in order to cohere *exactly* with the KJB.
 - “This article is a list of some of F. H. A. Scrivener’s textual departures from the exact text underlying the King James Bible. . . In any case, what is clear is that in the following places, Scrivener’s text/reading is NOT the exact reading which underlies the KJB.” (Heisey, 1)
- Heisley’s work is predicated on the assumption of *verbatim identity* of wording.

- “One of the oft met with accusations in the whole Bible text and version debate is, “Which TR is all the exact preserved words of God?” Generally, Scrivener’s 1881/1894 published Greek text is held up as that standard. On the main, that is true. However, as will be shown in this article, Scrivener’s text differs from the exact words and readings which underlie our King James Bible in a number of places, and it will be shown in this article where Scrivener’s words do not match exactly the precise words underlying the King James Bible [KJB].

. . . The real problem with Scrivener’s text is that in certain instances he did not get his text to match exactly the precise readings underlying the KJB, in spite of the fact that it was seemingly his intent and/or responsibility to do so. The evidence for his failure to do this will follow below. And part of the reason for his failure was his decision to limit his search for the readings underlying the KJB text to only 7 or 8 printed editions (Greek language only).

It must be remembered that at issue is the fact that in these places what Scrivener has is NOT the Greek reading followed by the KJB translators. They evidently believed that the evidence for the reading they followed was better attested, was the superior reading, and best represented the text or reading (wording) of the “Original” [the term employed by the KJB translators]. Consequently, Scrivener’s text should be corrected to match all the exact readings underlying the KJB, i.e., his text should be corrected in those places where he departed from the reading chosen by the 54+ learned men. Otherwise, the claim to “being the exact Greek textus receptus that underlies the King James Bible” and/or the claim to be the Greek text “according to the text followed in the Authorized Version” is a lie.” (Heisey, 1-2)

- It seems like it should go without saying, but it is important to note that no two editions of the TR are *identical* in terms of their readings. Despite these facts, King James Only advocate Dr. D.A. Waite states the following regarding the TR:
 - “It is my own personal conviction and belief, after studying this subject since 1971, that the words of the Received Greek and Masoretic Hebrew texts that underlie the King James Bible are the very words which God has preserved down through the centuries, being the exact words of the originals themselves.” (Waite, 48-49)
- Given Dr. Waite’s stated position it would not be out of bounds to ask him which edition of the TR possesses the “exact words of the originals” on account of the well-known fact that no two editions of the TR are exactly the same.
- I believe that the TR is the correct Greek text but not because of the false assumption of *verbatim identity* of wording. Recall that in Lessons [74](#), [75](#), and [76](#) we studied False Assumptions Regarding Transmission.
- The TR represents, in printed form, the *multiplicity of copies* that are in substantive doctrinal agreement with each other demanded by the doctrine of preservation as found in the MSS of the Byzantine majority. The TR is emblematic of the form of the text that was *available* and *in use* by the Eastern Greek speaking church for over a millennium. Due to the nature of Erasmus’

work, the TR included several readings that were *available* and *in use* in the Latin speaking West through the Vulgate. Defenders of the TR need to face the facts regarding their position. While mostly reliant upon the textual witness of the Byzantine majority, the TR position also requires the authenticity of certain readings supplied by the Latin Vulgate (See [Lesson 89](#) for a list and discussion of these readings.). The “two streams of Bibles” model of transmission hides from view that the Latin Vulgate has more in common with the TR in terms of major variants than it does with the Greek text of Westcott and Hort. No member of the body of Christ had ever seen, much less used, a text like the one produced by Westcott and Hort in 1881.

Conclusion

- William W. Combs concludes his essay on “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus” with the following statements:
 - “Upon receiving a copy of Erasmus’ Latin Greek NT, John Colet responded: “The name of Erasmus shall never perish.” His “prophecy” has proved to be true for nearly 500 years. His “Textus Receptus” was the standard form of the Greek Text until challenged in the nineteenth century but, as has been noted, still has many defenders.” (Combs, 19)
- The Greek text of Erasmus was the driving force behind the Reformation. Martin Luther based his translation into German on the 1519 second edition of the TR. (Brake, 235) In the next Lesson we will spend some time looking at Martin Luther’s German Translation.

Works Cited

- Brake, Donald L. *A Visual History of the English Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.
- Combs, William W. “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus” in *Biblical and Theological Essays: Selections from the Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal: 1996-2000*. Winona Lake, IN: BHM Books, 2010.
- Heisey, Peter. FULL LIST TO DATE (AUGUST 26, 2018) OF NECESSARY CORRECTIONS TO F. H. A. SCRIVENER’S TEXT. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/ikvxt1gavcqaed/Heisey--SCRIVENER-FULL-LIST-of-CORRECTIONS-Non-italics-issues.docx?dl=0>.
- Hills, Edward F. *The King James Version Defended*. Des Moines, IO: The Christian Research Press, 1956.
- Letis, Theodore P. [*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*](#). University of Edinburgh, 1995.
- Textus Receptus Bibles. “Textus Receptus - Scrivener 1894.” <http://www.textusreceptusbibles.com/Editorial/Scrivener>.
- Waite, D.A. *Defending the King James Bible*. Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today Publishers, 1992.