

# Hills Revisited

By

Jon Whitmer

[Jon Whitmer is an extraordinarily able young man. After reading Kutilek's "anger venting fest" I found the task of replying to his rage a thoroughly disagreeable task. I asked Jon if he would take up the duty and he complied in a wonderful fashion. Just a sidelight on what is the otherwise inexplicable carelessness and sophomoric content found in Kutilek's remarks. The reader would do well to remember that Edward Freer Hills had an earned doctorate in N.T. text criticism from Harvard University and that his dissertation was approved by one of the most highly celebrated N.T. text critics in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kirsopp Lake. Moreover, three essays from this dissertation appeared in the Journal of Biblical Literature. Kutilek has never had anything published in the JBL. He has never had anything published in any peer-reviewed journal that I know of. Also he has no higher degree from any accredited institution of higher learning that I know of, much less a degree in text criticism. Finally, the real cause for this animus of his is found in the fact that he was fired from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri because he did not see eye to eye with the administration in their choice to hold to the textus receptus and the Authorized Version. **Solventur risu tabulae, Horace.** Theodore P. Letis, Ph.D.]

This is an analysis of "Notes and Criticisms on Theodore P. Letis' Book, Edward Freer Hill's Contribution to the Revival of the Ecclesiastical Text" found at [http://www.kjvonly.org/doug/notes\\_theodore\\_letis\\_book.html](http://www.kjvonly.org/doug/notes_theodore_letis_book.html). A few comments must be made before beginning our analysis. 1) The pagination of the edition of Dr. Letis' book which Mr. Kutilek cites differs significantly from the current edition of the book<sup>1</sup>. 2) The purpose of this article is to illustrate, through an analysis of Mr. Kutilek's article, the truth of Dr. Letis' own words: "Edward F. Hills's story begs to be told. The neglect of its telling has not been for the lack of attempts, rather it reflects *the unwillingness of scholars to get at the heart of his concerns and methods.*"<sup>2</sup> [Italics mine] It is not my desire to "reinvent the wheel"—interested readers are encouraged to further study these matters on their own in order to make their own judgments. I have sought to track down the current paginations of texts in Dr. Letis' book. 3) I will address portions of Mr. Kutilek's article in topical order rather than in the order of their occurrence in the article.

1. A significant undercurrent in Mr. Kutilek's article is a disdain for Edward F. Hills resulting in some rather brazen statements against Dr. Hills. Following are some excerpts from the article regarding two specific aspects of Hills, discussed in Letis' book:

a. Hills was not allowed to complete his program of study at the University of Chicago, as the faculty would not allow him to complete a dissertation. Kutilek states:

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore P. Letis, *Edward Freer Hill's Contribution to the Revival of the Ecclesiastical Text* (Philadelphia: the Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies, 1987). The Institute can be contacted at PO Box 870525 Stone Mountain, GA 30087- email: [LetisT@aol.com](mailto:LetisT@aol.com).

<sup>2</sup> Letis: 9

Letis succeeded in exposing Hill's *incompetence* as a specialist in the field of textual criticism of the New Testament. The incident of Hill's involuntary termination of his studies by the faculty at the University of Chicago was especially telling. He clearly *deserved the boot*.

It seems clearly evident that Hills was an *incompetent* scholar in his days at Chicago, and *his dismissal was fully justified*.

Hills revealed as a real “*turkey*”: unsociable in demeanor and lacking good sense.

[Italics mine]

Did Hills “deserve the boot” from the University of Chicago? Was he an “incompetent scholar...[whose] dismissal was clearly justified?” Dr. Letis quotes Dr. Bruce M. Metzger thus:

I got acquainted with Edward Hills when both he and I were at the same campus, the University of Chicago campus in the summertime. They allowed him to go two years there for a Ph.D. and *then they told him that we don't think that your mind is sufficiently liberal for us to grant the Ph.D. degree so he had to find another school*. That was a terrible thing for the University of Chicago to do it seems to me. If they did not think that he was the kind of person that they wanted to give a Ph.D. to they should have found that out much earlier instead of having him...waste two years there, paying their tuition and so on...<sup>3</sup>

[Italics mine]

Bruce Metzger says nothing about Hills' supposed “incompetence” but rather confirms that his dismissal was *not* justified. Mr. Kutilek appears to be begging the question. On pages 109-112 Letis briefly discusses Hills' post-Chicago pursuits, including earning a Th.D. from the Harvard Divinity School on June 6, 1946, under the supervision of Henry J. Cadbury, with “the famous New Testament text critic, Kirsopp Lake” as one of his readers. It is difficult to read of Hills' academic accomplishments after Chicago and imagine that Hills was an “incompetent scholar,” whether one agrees with his interpretations or not.

b. Hills linked the modern approach to textual criticism (popularized by Westcott and Hort, and further promulgated through the enthusiastic acceptance of it by Warfield and other evangelical scholars) to an inevitable digression into modernism. Kutilek states:

160 Hills' declaration that use and defense of the ASV (over KJV) leads to downright modernism, exposes Hills (in my thinking) as a down-right *ignoramus*. Somehow, the ASV was used and recommended by all the following over the KJV, and they never fell into modernism: R. A. Torrey, A. T. Robertson, John Broadus, B. H. Carroll, G. Campbell Morgan, W. B. Riley, Noel Smith, etc.

[italics mine]

While Kutilek is certainly entitled to disagree with Hills, calling him an “ignoramus” displays a harsh and vindictive spirit on the part of Mr. Kutilek. Such invective discourages rational discussion of the intricacies of text critical theory and practice. Hills

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<sup>3</sup> On page 106 of *Edward Freer Hills' Contribution* (from an interview Dr. Letis had with Bruce Metzger in July 1986).

regarded the underlying text of the ASV (i.e. the non-Byzantine critical text) as the product of post-Enlightenment naturalistic-critical thinking extending its influence into the realm of lower criticism. As such, it would be illogical for Hills *not* to contend that the post-Enlightenment-influenced approach to textual criticism—being in his mind inextricably linked with *higher* criticism—“leads to downright modernism.” It would be useful to provide the full quote of Hills given in Letis’ book:

The *use* of the American Standard Version involves the *defense* of the American Standard Version, and the *defense* of the American Standard Version leads eventually to down-right modernism.<sup>4</sup>

Kutilek misrepresents Hills’ reasoning through over simplification. The progression is thus: USE (of a version based on modernistic scholarship)→ DEFENSE (of a post-Enlightenment-based, modernistic translation)→ ACCOMMODATION (post-Enlightenment-based, modernistic theology resulting from the use of a modernistic translation). Hills felt that conservatives needed to return to the text critical paradigm of the Reformers and the Westminster Confession and to the texts and Bibles resulting from that paradigm in order to “protect biblical authority from naturalistic text critics.”<sup>5</sup> In essence, Kutilek regards Hills as an “ignoramus” because Hills questioned the *status quo* of both liberal and evangelical academics. Because Hills sought to defend the King James Bible and the Traditional Text Kutilek views Hills as an obscurantist. He seems to stop at nothing to distance himself from Hills, though Hills does an excellent job of stating his case in a credible fashion. Moreover, rather than objectively interacting with Hills’ ideas, Kutilek attacks the man.

2. Kutilek contends that Hills defends the *Johannine Comma* as “unquestionably original.”

... The fact that even Letis backs away from Hill's defense of the possible genuineness of I John 5:7 shows that Letis had questions at times as to Hills' ability to credibly reason with regard to variant readings and manuscript evidence.... The words can be traced to an allegorical application of v. 8 by Cyprian in the 3rd century. Yet in spite of all this evidence, Hills defended the words as possibly, even probably genuine!!!!

[On page] 96 The list of passages Dabney objects to changing in the t.r. is clear evidence of his ignorance of the facts in the case--the evidence against the genuineness of I John 5:7 is overwhelming...

Also, I John 5:7 is absent from around 350 Greek manuscripts, and present in only four in the text and another four in the margin, with all 8 of these being late and suspect of deliberate scribal corruption.

Hills’ approach is to argue for its *potential* originality by way of external evidence. There is a large difference between Hills’ actual discussion of the *johannine comma* and Kutilek’s negative reference to it. Letis’ disagreement with Hills regarding the *Johannine comma* (and Kutilek does not even cite a place in the book where Letis actually “backs away” from Hills’ defense of the *Johannine comma*) by no means even implies “that Letis

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<sup>4</sup> Letis: 117.

<sup>5</sup> Letis: 117.

had questions at times as to Hills' ability to credibly reason with regard to variant readings and manuscript evidence.” Letis’ own words are particularly informative:

Bruce Metzger, who was a student at the University of Chicago at the same time as Hills, takes note of Hills’s work, but mentions only that Hills argues “even for the genuineness of the *comma johanneum* of 1 John v.7-8.” Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.136, n.1. As a matter of fact, Hills never argued for more than the *possibility* of the genuineness of 1 Jn 5:7-8, something no more extraordinary than the rigorous eclectic method of arguing for a variant with little or no manuscript evidence.<sup>6</sup>

It is useful here to note that Hills provides a well thought-out discussion of both internal and external evidence regarding the *Johannine comma*.<sup>7</sup> While it is typical to speculate that the Orthodox *added* it to provide further Scriptural support for the doctrine of the Trinity, Hills notes that it was not Arianism that was the primary concern of the Church in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries (the time period of Cyprian, as Kutilek mentions) but Sabellianism, which was a heresy that posited that the three persons of the Trinity were *identical* rather than co-equal. Thus Hills argues that “it is possible...that the Sabellian heresy brought the *Johannine Comma* into disfavor with orthodox Christians”<sup>8</sup> because its language would have supported this heresy. He further explains that since the *comma* may have already been elided from some manuscripts *via* homoioteleuton, the Orthodox may have been content to perpetuate that scribal error so as not to aid the Sabellians. And since the Sabellian heresy was especially extensive among the Greek-speaking Church, this theory explains why the *Johannine Comma* might not have continued in the Greek NT, while being “preserved in the Latin texts of Africa and Spain, where the influence of Sabellianism was probably not so great.”<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, Mr. Kutilek has a “pre-packaged” argument against the *Johannine Comma* that hinders his objective interaction with Hills’ arguments and research.

3. Hills’ argued that Warfield’s paradigm was a departure from historic Christian orthodoxy as seen in the Westminster Confession, and other confessions of Protestant confessional orthodoxy. An analysis of the Westminster Confession and of the stance of the Reformers toward Biblical authority (see these as displayed in Letis’s essays in both the *Majority Text* as well as the *Ecclesiastical Text*), is much more informative than the presumption that Warfield’s paradigm *is* the historic, orthodox position of Christianity. Kutilek states:

If Burgon's remarks are accurately presented by Warfield, then Burgon's remarks could be torn to shreds (e.g., which is the “Church” recognized text? Byzantine? or Vulgate-type? The latter was far more common in manuscripts and usage in the West.

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<sup>6</sup> Letis: 13, n. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (Des Moines, Iowa: Christian Research Press, 1984), pp. 209-213.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

Burgon clearly saw the Providential Preservation of Scripture in the Byzantine Church, in as much as it alone preserved the *original language* text of the New Testament. Burgon's stance, then, would agree with The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Section VIII:

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto, and interest in, the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the language of every people unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

A major difference between Hills and Warfield was that Warfield sought to restore the *autographa* based on the textual criticism of the whole body of manuscripts. However, Hills argued for the limitation of such work primarily to the Byzantine Text-Type<sup>10</sup>, as the repository of the providential preservation of Scripture. Kutilek states that:

The declaration that Machen, by virtue of his adherence to Warfield's textual views, would have been no help to Hills, is a cheap shot. An a priori and prejudicial remark.

Rather, realizing that Machen held to the very paradigm that Hills opposed, Hills naturally did not seek help for his research from Machen. It seems odd that Kutilek does not see the obvious—that Hills and Machen, while in agreement on so many doctrinal issues, were still in different “camps” in their textual views.

4. Mr. Kutilek is confident that most textual alterations were done by the Orthodox (a common presupposition of the German text-critical methods imported by Warfield and developed in the context of the higher critical speculation of German modernists). He says that:

[Letis] seems to ignore or be ignorant of the fact that theologically motivated changes in NT manuscripts can be shown in many (perhaps most) cases to have been made to strengthen or support orthodox doctrine, not undermine it.

But how could Letis be ignorant of this when he publicly endorsed Prof. Bart Erhman's definitive work on this topic, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* in his own work, *The Ecclesiastical Text* (pp. 224-225)? Furthermore, Mr. Kutilek seems “to ignore or be ignorant of” Hills' discussion of this very issue in Chapter Seven of *The King James Version Defended*<sup>11</sup> as well as Sturz' more recent work, *The Byzantine Text-Type*<sup>12</sup>. A

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<sup>10</sup> Hills prefers the phrase, “the Traditional Text.”

<sup>11</sup> Hills: 169-190.

<sup>12</sup> Sturz' work argues merely for the Byzantine Text-Type as an independent witness rather than as a *superior* text. Thus Sturz is critical of both the mathematical reductionism of the Majority Text theory and the theological orientation of Hills' work—i.e. Hills' presupposition that biblical criticism should be seen as subservient to theology rather than independent from it. Nevertheless, Sturz covers much of the same ground as Hills' on this point, but in far more detail. A significant asset of Sturz' work is an actual

thorough reading of Sturz' work and comparison with Hills' material is quite helpful on this point. Finally, Burgon himself admitted that the Orthodox did at times alter the text.

5. A major concern of Kutilek's is Hills' assertions that lower criticism intrinsically leads into higher criticism.

Pages 5, 6 That Collins (a deist) and Buckminster (Unitarian) tried to make theological hay out of textual variants is irrelevant (Letis is trying to make textual criticism a theological bogeyman). They were fully answered in the 1700s by Richard Bentley of Cambridge.

[Pages] 83 "Inextricable relationship of the higher criticism to the lower." Pure nonsense. The two are plainly distinct disciplines.

[Pages] 93 Dabney's remarks aimed at German methodology clearly relate to "higher" criticism, and are irrelevant in "lower"/textual criticism.

[Pages] 103 Blaming Warfield's views of lower (textual) criticism for the inroads of higher criticism before and especially after his death is the height of absurdity. The disciplines are unconnected and unrelated.

[Pages] 106 Boer's quote on the basic oneness of lower and higher criticism is devoid of any truth.

On the contrary, the Unitarian strategy of using textual criticism to undermine biblical authority is a well-known practice. Joseph Priestley and Isaac Newton both made textual criticism the foundation of their higher critical attacks on aspects of the authority of Scripture and the deity of Christ (on this see Letis's forthcoming published Ph.D. dissertation, *From Sacred Text to Religious Text: How the Erasmian Quest for the Historical Text Became the German Quest for the Historical Jesus*). In introducing the book, *The Jefferson Bible*, Unitarian scholar Forrest Church compares Jefferson's radical project to reduce the Gospels to the non-miraculous "essence" of Jesus' life and teachings, to the view Priestley held of the Gospels and provides telling insights into Priestley's thinking:

To Priestley, the Evangelists *were inspired, accurate and trustworthy*. The *culprits were...later writers*, who somehow managed to graft their own speculations onto the Scriptures. Accounts of the virgin birth, for instance, clearly cut against Priestley's sense of the historical grain, *but given that the story was missing from Mark, he simply concluded that the first chapters of Matthew and Luke could accordingly be dismissed as interpolations.*<sup>13</sup> [Italics mine]

Whereas Jefferson's work was purely suggestive higher criticism<sup>14</sup>, Priestley clearly saw the value of textual criticism in pointing the way to higher critical speculations. That

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presentation of his textual data, taking up a substantial part of the book in the appendices. But unfortunately, Sturz never properly acknowledged how Hills anticipated much of his own evidence on the papyri that, at times, witness to the Byzantine text type (on this see Letis's review of Sturz in the *Ecclesiastical Text*, pp. 205-207),

<sup>13</sup> Jefferson, Thomas, Church, Forrest, ed. *The Jefferson Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 14,15.

<sup>14</sup> That is, Jefferson's emendations were based strictly on his feelings about various texts, rather than the rational text critical approach used by Priestley, even though many of their emendations may have been similar. For instance, Jefferson removes the accounts of the virgin birth (regardless of textual evidence to

scholars today refuse to see the connection only shows that conservatives, in following Warfield's method, have willfully chosen *not* to see a connection that is very real, indeed. "After Warfield endorsed Westcott and Hort in the *Presbyterian Review*, Briggs himself noted that all Robinson Smith,<sup>15</sup> himself, and others were doing was 'working in the O.T. as Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort [are doing] in the N.T. and I can see no difference of spirit or methods between your article and that of Professor Smith.'<sup>16</sup> Thus the higher critical Briggs, affirms the relationship between the lower and higher criticism in that he equates the "spirit [and] method" of Warfield's text critical work with that of his own and Smith, in the Old Testament. Liberals like Briggs had no problem acknowledging the connection between lower criticism and higher criticism; but Warfield, along with C.W. Hodge, held that the "German method" was free from theological bias and was a distinct discipline from higher criticism. So whether Bentley adequately answered Buckminster, *et. al.*, or not is beside the point (as a matter of fact, Bentley's plea did not even hold any ground in his own era as Letis's dissertation makes clear).<sup>17</sup> Rather, the fact that the Unitarians and German modernists routinely used lower criticism as an entry-way to their higher critical work demonstrates that the two disciplines are hardly as "unconnected and unrelated," as Mr. Kutilek suggests.<sup>18</sup>

#### 6. Synonymous use of "Textus Receptus" and "Majority Text."

[Letis] Falsely assumes "textus receptus" is the same as "majority text," when in fact they differ in over 1,800 places, a number of times involving whole verses.

The passage Kutilek refers to in Letis' book begins with a quote from E.C. Colwell:

"The debate over Hort versus the *Textus Receptus* was over..." and "no objective method can take us back through successive reconstructions to the original."<sup>19</sup> Yet less than ten years later, his former student would publish a monograph deploring this impasse and proposing a return to the *Textus Receptus* as an alternative. Today, a "critical" printing of this text [from n. 19 on page 17: *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, eds. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985) has just entered its second edition. An ironical development in light of Marvin Vincent's declaration that "the Textus Receptus has been remanded to its proper place as a historical monument and has been summarily rejected as a basis for a correct text."<sup>20</sup>

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the contrary) while retaining the *Pericope Adulterae* (usually removed by those who do not have a preference for the Traditional Text).

<sup>15</sup> A Scottish Old Testament scholar who had been charged with heresy for some theological articles he had written.

<sup>16</sup> Letis, *Ecclesiastical Text*, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> Incidentally, Hills himself addresses Bentley on pages 63, 108, and 191 of *The King James Version Defended*.

<sup>18</sup> Under the term, "biblical criticism," the *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* [Grenz, Stanley, Guretzki, David and Nordling, Cherith. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990] defines the various methods of biblical criticism as "textual criticism, redaction criticism, form criticism, historical criticism, genre criticism, literary criticism and grammatical criticism." Thus lower and higher criticism, while distinct *methods* are hardly "unconnected and unrelated."

<sup>19</sup> Incidentally, Colwell here debunks the "myth" that textual criticism can restore, with certainty, the original autographs. Where does that leave Kutilek?

<sup>20</sup> Letis, p.11

While the terms “Textus Receptus” and “Majority Text” may both *specifically* refer to the respective *printed* editions bearing their names, these terms are also *commonly* used in a general sense to refer to the Byzantine text-type *in general*, whether manuscripts or printed editions. In a discussion of the Byzantine text-type, then, some may opt for the term “Textus Receptus,” while others refer to it as the “Majority Text,” more out of convenience and depending on their particular views regarding the Byzantine text-type. Thus, unless a specific printed edition is cited (e.g. “the Majority Text of Farstad and Hodges...”), these terms are often used in a general sense.

7. A refusal to objectively interact with Hills’ work.

10 To suggest that Hills’ work was rejected because of neo-evangelical influence, and a heavily-financed promotion of the NIV is absurd. It was rejected because his views did not coincide with the facts.

It should be evident to Kutilek that, because Hills’ views were not readily accepted ideas in the broader Evangelical world, he would face opposition in trying to publish the book through any of the major Christian publishers. The title Hills chose for the printed edition, as Letis argued, invariably raised a “red flag” in the minds of these publishing companies—why would Zondervan, Nelson, IVP, Eerdmans, Baker, etc., want to publish a book diametrically opposed to their stance on the issues of text criticism and the multiplicity of Bible versions based on the non-Byzantine Text-Type? That inevitability does not reduce the value of Hills’ research, but rather is an inevitable fact in the world of publishing. It would be economically foolish for Zondervan, for instance, to print a book attacking the NIV while also investing so much in the marketing of the NIV. Hills challenged two presuppositions that lie at the core of contemporary evangelical Biblical textual studies: 1) that the positive promotion of textual criticism as a means to restore the *autographa* is compatible with and equivalent to the historic, Protestant orthodox stance on Biblical authority; and 2) that the Byzantine Text-Type was a thoroughly unreliable text-type in the quest to restore the *autographa*, due to the alleged extensive textual emendations by the theologically orthodox. On the first point Hills challenges us to reconsider the relation of preservation to inspiration and to consider the theological inadequacy of the approach promoted by Bentley and later by Warfield. The second point—in as much as Hills argued for the primacy of the Byzantine Text-Type rather than just the validity of it as an independent witness (*a la* Harry Sturz)—was at least an evidence that he was ahead of his times<sup>21</sup>. Today, the Byzantine Text-Type does seem to be regaining respect as a valid witness, even though the idea of it as superior is still generally rejected.

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<sup>21</sup> A final note on Sturz—while he repeatedly states that he does not present his arguments and data to suggest that the Byzantine Text-Type is *superior*, the evidence he brings to the discussion certainly begs for just such an interpretation. Sturz, like Kutilek, most likely shudders at going *that far* in support of the Byzantine Text-Type largely because of the negative stereotypes associated with a definite pro-Byzantine Text-Type approach. Unlike Kutilek, he at least seems more ready to acknowledge the facts regarding the validity of the Byzantine Text-Type.