

The Historical Greek Pronunciation Makes Advances in the USA

It may be owing to the extreme pluralism of the country, it may be owing to the spirit of freedom or “rebellion”—the idea of “doing it my way”;—but whatever it is, it is a welcome development that American students of the Bible are not afraid to question old doctrines, to test all things, to try something new. All this is to their credit.

O, I know there are also those “hazy guys” (a pun an evangelist once had made on Elisha’s servants’ name, Gehazi), who stick to their tradition at all costs, not so much because they are convinced of the rightness of their position, but more by way of defending themselves and their error. Think what it entails for a professor of Greek, who has spend, say 10 or 20 or 30 years, teaching Greek with the wrong pronunciation, who suddenly discovers that he has been wrong. It is not only a spontaneous reflex, but also psychologically explicable, that his first reaction will be to defend his Erasmian pronunciation. But there is more to that. To disown his Erasmiansim is nothing short of admitting his mistake. Now how many New Testament scholars do you think there are who have plenty of that virtue? And the consequences? He, the Teacher, will have to sit at the desk to relearn his stuff from the beginning! A student again after having been a professor for 20 or 30 years!? Sokrates might have said γηράσκω ἀεὶ διδασκόμενος (“I grow older ever learning”), but how many are there today who have the moral courage of Sokrates? Sokrates was a true philosopher? Have there been many since his time? O, I know all about Descartes and Kant and Hume and the rest? But I am talking of true philosophers, not just clever people. Of this last sort, there have been plenty.

Bleak, isn’t it? Not really. There is every reason to feel optimistic. From all corners of the USA as well as from other countries around the world, I am getting letters of appreciation for having opened their eyes with respect to the unity of the Hellenic language, the importance of the holistic approach to Greek for interpreting the New Testament, and for the CD on *The Historical Greek Pronunciation*. Some of them are professors of Greek, who are defecting from Erasmian doctrine, trying to straighten things up and give to their students what they failed to give them earlier. Others are doctoral students, who want the very best, the right approach for their research and the proper results in their commerce with Greek texts. They are turning away from Erasmian dogmatism. Others, again, are students, some beginners, a sweet group of young people: fervent, open, interested to learn, desiring true progress. They tell me of their dissatisfaction with the Erasmian pronunciation that has been forced on them. They want to be freed from it. They want to pronounce the Greek language properly, like all other languages are pronounced—according to the custom of their natural speakers. And sometimes

they are forbidden by their instructors!—believe it or not. Erasmianism seems to lord it over them as a dictator. (see some of the letters of my correspondents in my web site under “Reviews”. See also “Erasmianism in New Garb: The Chimera of the ‘Reconstructed’ Pronunciation of Greek”). What a contrast to what I did. When I had written my study on the Greek pronunciation in classical times, I announced to my students, that since scientific integrity required following assured scientific results, I could not, with good conscience, continue to teach the NT with the Erasmian pronunciation (which I had done for 24,5 years!). Instead, I was changing over to the *Historical Greek Pronunciation*. However, I made it clear to them, that they were NOT required to follow my example! Only if they so desired. Because, as a convinced Democrat (I mean, in the original Athenian way), I do not believe in coercing or manipulating people. People, created in God’s image as free agents, must have a choice, and the choice is their moral decision only if there are not going to be adverse consequences depending on their choice. I was more than surprised to discover that all of my students, of their own accord, wanted to learn the proper pronunciation. They testified that it freed them and they began to acquire another relation to the text as they read it. Reading became more fluent, more spontaneous, more genuine, more pleasant to listen to.

That is why I said that there is every reason to be optimistic. Many are requesting the CD on the *Historical Greek Pronunciation*, because they want to free themselves from the error of Erasmus that has reigned for the past 500 years.

Another welcome situation is the following. From time to time I take a look at the “B-Greek” blog. In this blog all kinds of Biblical (but even classical) Greek questions come up. Most of the persons “chatting” are at the absolute bottom of the ladder of knowledge of Biblical Greek, but they often ask sensible questions. True, some times one may be put off by questions raised, as for example, when one asked (I give the gist) “If Paul came from Tarsus, then his mother tongue would be Turkish. Shouldn’t we learn Turkish?” There are quite a few other questions and remarks of similar level of brilliance. But we should not be put off by these. “Bear the infirmities of the weak”. And I am glad to say that their mentors, Profs W. Conrad and Randall Buth, with good paedagogical instinct take the time to instruct them with the appropriate soberness and grace. Now in this blog the question of the pronunciation of Greek comes up all the time. It is, indeed, encouraging to read that many of them are wondering about how to pronounce Greek correctly. Some are asking for guidance. Others inform that they stand between the Erasmian and the Greek pronunciation, trying to make up their mind. And others, again, inform that through various means they have learned the Greek pronunciation and they use only that. So, from this blog as well as from my correspondents—and there may be others, beside—it appears that the *Historical Greek Pronunciation* is spreading in the USA. And that is to the credit of Americans.

On a sadder note, now, it is a pity that neither Prof Conrad nor Prof Randall Buth are helping their inquirers as they should. Conrad is betwixt and between the Erasmian pronunciation, which he knows to be wrong, and the *Historical Greek Pronunciation*. He has made some advances towards reconciling himself with the facts of the holistic approach, advocated in my *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, but he cannot free himself yet from the bonds of tradition. As for Prof Buth, he is after the Moon. He thinks he can pinpoint exactly at what stage each change from what he would call the Erasmian pronunciation of classical times towards Neohellenic occurred. This is, of course, an impossibility. I have examined thousands of inscriptions and papyri, and can testify that while we know when each change is evidenced for the first time, we cannot tell when the change was generally accepted in the vast Greek-speaking world (stretching from Spain to India and from the Crimea to Aswan) or accepted at a particular place. But we know that almost all of the changes had taken place already in classical times and all of them had been introduced by the fourth century B.C. Perhaps Buth, who comes close to my position, is still unwilling to scrap his deeply-seated Erasmianism, and tries to salvage as much as possible by hanging on to the Chimera of stages of development in pronunciation. In this way, both Conrad and Buth are doing a disservice to the enquirers of B-Greek. This is a pity. They could have been of great help.

From the mistakes in the NT manuscripts we know that the early Christians pronounced Greek in the *Historical Greek Pronunciation*. The so-called 'Reconstructed' Greek Pronunciation is an arbitrary construct without historical basis (see the article "Erasmianism in New Garb: The Chimera of the 'Reconstructed' Pronunciation of Greek" in the present folder of my web site.