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The Unity of the Greek Language and Its Significance for Understanding the New Testament

1. Introductory

As is well-known, the New Testament was written in Greek. From the very first days of Christianity the NT has been translated into other languages, for the benefit of people not acquainted with the Hellenic language. This work of translation continues till this day. Today the overwhelming majority of people on our earth have the NT in their own language. Thus, the saving message of the Gospel can be readily understood by almost anyone.

We are very grateful to the men and women who have dedicated their lives to learning the languages of our planet in order to translate the Bible. However, the fact that these translators have done their best to achieve as good a translation as they could, does not mean that their translations are perfect. In fact, translations vary in quality. And many Christians buy more than one translation, in order to compare and thus to better understand the meaning of the original, which they cannot read.

Because we want to know exactly what John or Matthew or Paul wrote, in Bible colleges, seminaries, and universities we study the language of the original writings of the NT. In fact, a seminary or university education in theology without Greek is unthinkable. And since this conference is organized under the eegis of the Baekseok University, the concerns of my lecture must be deemed to be very pertinent to our teaching as professors, to our work as pastors, and to our study as theological students.

Even though a part of my lecture is concerned with a very simple and brief historical presentation of the Hellenic language, it must not be thought irrelevant to our interests in this conference. This historical survey is necessary in order to understand the nature of the language of the NT. I hope, therefore, that you will be patient with me during the first part of my lecture, the relevance of which will become obvious in the second part.

2. The Problem

I am pretty sure that in Korea, like in most other countries, in teaching Greek you are following a tradition that goes back to the year 1528. An event, that took place in that year, has determined the way in which Greek has been pronounced and taught since then in schools and universities around the world.

What happened? In that year great Humanist Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, published a little book on what he thought was the correct pronunciation of Greek (and Latin).¹ Erasmus had learned his Greek from Greek scholars active in Italy and other European countries, who pronounced Greek in the *Historical Greek Pronunciation* (=HGP), i.e. the pronunciation of the Greek Nation². But in 1528, while at Leuven, Belgium, Erasmus was visited by Henricus Glareanus, who came from Paris. Glareanus related to Erasmus that lately some Greek scholars of extraordinary erudition had arrived from Byzantium. What was remarkable about them, was that they pronounced Greek differently to the HGP, which was the received pronunciation in Europe, and went on to explain the new sounds.

On hearing this news, the credulous Erasmus believed it, and not wishing to be anticipated, at once wrote his book with the new pronunciation, which took the name *Erasmian Pronunciation*. A little later, Erasmus discovered that Glareanus had played a trick on him, so he himself never used the pronunciation he had created, and told his friends to abstain from using it. However, the book spread like wild fire, and the *Erasmian Pronunciation*, which was closer to Latin—the language of the European intelligentsia,—gradually established itself as the received pronunciation. Ever since the establishment of the *Erasmian Pronunciation*, European and American scholars have been pronouncing Greek in this un-Greek way³.

However, the introduction of the *Erasmian Pronunciation* in the West, had another even more far-reaching consequence, a consequence of great importance for the interpretation of the NT. By pronouncing Greek in the

¹ Erasmus, *De recta Latini Graecique sermonis pronuntiatione dialogus*, Basiliae 1528.

² For a list of such scholars, see my *The Error of Erasmus and Un-Greek pronunciations of Greek*, *Filologia Neotestamentaria*, no. 16, Vol. VIII, (1995), 151-85”, p. 154-5.

³ For the story of Glareanus’ deceiving of Erasmus, related in the ardent Erasmian, Gerardus Ioannis Vossius’ *Aristarchus, sive de arte Grammatica libri septem*, etc. Amstelædami: I Blaev 1635, see Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (WUNT 167), Tübingen: Mohr 2004; American corr. pb. ed. Baker Academic 2007, p. 342

artificial *Erasmian Pronunciation*, all living contact with the Greek language was lost. Later Greek, especially Neohellenic, appeared as a different language. The result was that Greek was divided into two halves, ancient and modern, and classical and NT Greek was henceforth approached as a dead language. This development coincided with certain historical events which further helped consolidate the new pronunciation. The fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 was understood to imply the end of Hellenic history and existence. Having preached their funeral sermon over Hellas, the various nations of Western Europe, not implausibly, considered themselves to be the legitimate heirs to the legacy of Hellas, since they had already been the beneficiaries of her cultural heritage twice: the first time through Rome and the second time during the Renaissance, through the revival of Greek letters by Hellenic scholars active in the West.⁴

Henceforth European scholars concentrated their research interests on the classical literature, while the NT (and the LXX) was left to theologians, who extended the scope of their purview as far as early Christian times. The rest of the history of the Hellenic language and its literature were considered unimportant, and were relegated to the dustbin⁵.

This attitude to Hellas and its language basically continues till today!

George Hatzidakis, considered one of the greatest linguists of all time, who had at his fingertips the entire history of Greek, writes:

On account of their great ignorance of the linguistic development from post-classical times to the present as well as of the laws according to which this was accomplished, philologists are usually content to treat modern Greek as a sickly

⁴ For a list of such scholars, see my *The Error of Erasmus and Un-Greek pronunciations of Greek*”, *Filol. Neot.*, no. 16, Vol. VIII, (1995), 151-85”, p. 154-5.

⁵ Horrocks, too, speaks of the neglect of all post-classical Greek in his *Greek. A History of the Language and Its Speakers*, London-New York, 1997, Preface, xvi. Brown-ing, has the following to say: “The study of Greek in England, as in most other countries, has traditionally been concentrated upon the classical language. The New Testament was left to theologians, and a nineteenth-century schoolboy who attempted to imitate it in his prose composition would have got short shrift from his teacher. The medi-aeval and modern stages of the language were largely ignored. Today the situation has changed. There is widespread interest in Modern Greek....Classical scholars no longer regard it beneath their dignity to concern themselves with the Greek of the middle ages and modern times” (*Medieval and Modern Greek*, Cambridge: CUP, 1969, Preface vii.). This interest in Neohellenic is even clearer in F. A. Adrados, *Geschichte der griechischen Sprache. Von den Anfängen bis heute*, Tübingen-Basel: A. Francke, 2001. Adrados not only gives about equal space to the various periods of the Greek language, but he also emphasizes the influence of the entire history of Greek on the European languages. In spite of certain inexactitudes about the modern period, his book shows clearly that he is aware of the unity of the Greek language from the beginning to the present.

offshoot of ancient Greek or as corrupt and barbarous Greek, whose careful investigation and knowledge, it is claimed, is not worth the trouble.⁶

Thus, the Hellenic language was atomized, and—what is of special importance for us—NT scholars, in so far as they advanced beyond the essentials of NT Greek, they concerned themselves with classical Greek, though during the past century or so that interest was directed to the Egyptian papyri and some Hellenistic writings.

Consequently, although I am not oblivious of the great contributions to the study of the Hellenic language, by German and British scholars, for example, Erasmus' error in propagating an un-Greek pronunciation of Greek has damaged NT studies. Not only has it obscured many facts and hindered us from interesting insights into the NT text⁷ and its text-critical problems,⁸ but more significantly, it has deprived us from important light that is shed on the morphology and especially the syntax of the NT by later literature⁹; and finally, by depriving scholarship of the proper parameters for its linguistic research.

This last point can be exemplified by the industrious work of Stanley Porter. Porter wrote an impressive book of 492 pages to teach us something that is simply not true. Porter applied certain insights from modern linguistics to his analysis of the Greek verb, and came to the strange conclusion that the Greek verb does not express Time—but only Aspect. He is of the opinion that not only the “Grammarians” but also that “the Greeks themselves were fooled” about the meaning of the Greek verb!¹⁰ Porter's denial

⁶ Χατζιδάκις, *Μεσαιωνικά και Νέα Ἑλληνικά* (= *MNE*) Vol. I, 360.

⁷ Thus, in Mt 21:41: *κακοὺς κακῶς ἀπολέσει* “he will destroy those *wretches wretchedly*” the wordplay is missed by the *NRSV*, which translates: “He will put those *wretches* to a *miserable* death”.

⁸ For example, Rm 5:1 can be translated either as a statement of fact: “Having being justified by faith *we have* peace with God”, or as an exhortation: “Having being justified by faith, *let us have* peace with God”. The difference between “we have” (indicative *ἔχομεν*) and “let us have” (subjunctive *ἔχωμεν*) lies in a single letter in the Greek text. Yet this one-letter difference makes two different words with two different meanings. The problem arose in the manuscript tradition, because in the *Historical Greek Pronunciation* both words were pronounced identically!

⁹ With regards to the Greek pronunciation in ancient times and Erasmus's error and its consequences, see Chrys C. Caragounis, “The Error of Erasmus”, *Filol. Neot.*, no. 16, Vol. VIII, (1995), 151-85, and the more detailed discussion in my *The Development of Greek and the New Testament. Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission*, corr. pb. ed. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids 2007, pp. 339-96.

¹⁰ PORTER, *Verbal Aspect* 81. One may rightly wonder – if PORTER's position were correct, namely, that the Greeks, too, mistakenly thought that they expressed time through their verbs – do not their texts, therefore, express the time they intended whether they were right or wrong? Moreover, what other final court of appeal than the

of one half of the meaning of the Greek verb is the result of separating the ancient phase from the modern phase of the language, treating Greek as a dead language, misconstruing ancient authors who are unable to protest, and claiming that “there are no native speakers to give opinions about the use of their language”! Porter’s claim is, however, flatly contradicted *i.a.* by *Neohellenic*, which has the same verb system as the ancient phase of the language, and shows that from the time of Homeros to the present, there has not been a day when Greeks have not used their verbs to express Time (as well as Aspect), and that both of these elements are equally accentuated¹¹. Porter’s work, therefore, is an excellent example of how far a scholar may stray who does not take seriously the unity of the Hellenic language and how its later stages can elucidate its earlier stages.

3. The Phases of the Greek Language

The Greek language is the oldest continuously spoken and written language in Europe. Its written documentation takes us back to c. 1500 B.C., while its spoken form is much older. Unlike Latin, which today lives only through its daughter languages,¹² Greek is still the same language, having sustained the changes imposed by time, culture, religion, science and world-view. If we were to indicate the various phases of the Greek language, we might do it by means of the following table:

I. Ancient Greek (1500 B.C. - A.D. 600)

Linear B = Mycenaean (XV-XII B.C. Linear B tablets)

E = Epic (800-500 B.C.: Homeros, Hesiodos, etc.)

A = Classical (mainly Attic) 500 - 300 B.C.)

P = Post-classical (300 B.C. - A.D. 600)

H = Hellenistic (300 B.C. - A.D. 300)

EH = Early Hellenistic (300 B.C.-1 B.C.)¹³

LH = Late Hellenistic (A.D. 1-300)

PB = Proto-Byzantine (A.D. 300 - 600)

II. Modern Greek (A.D. 600 - Present)

B = Byzantine (A.D. 600 - 1000) (Early Neohellenic)

LB = Late Byzantine (A.D. 1000 - 1500) (Middle Neohellenic)

N = Neohellenic (A.D. 1500 - 2000) (Late Neohellenic)

K = *Katharevousa* (official till 1976: puristic, atticistic or literary MGr)

natural speakers of a language is there to settle an issue such as this? Can a modern theory falsify the witness of the natural users of a language?

¹¹ I have given a detailed critique of this viewpoint in *The Development of the Greek and the New Testament*. pp. 316-336.

¹² E.g. French, Italian, Romanian, Spanish, Portugese.

¹³ The division of Hellenistic into *early* and *late* is made in order to facilitate the registration of changes in regard to the NT.

D = *Demotike* (following the popular oral tradition)

NK = Neohellenic Koine (official since 1976: blending *K* and *D*)

To exemplify the lexical continuity, I might perhaps mention that such NT words as ἄγγελος (‘angel’), ἀγρός (‘field’), σῖτος (‘wheat’), τέκτων (‘carpenter’), and τόσος (‘so much’) are found in the oldest written form of Greek, i.e. Mycenaean Greek (the Linear B tablets, XV-XII B.C.), and are still used today in Greece, after 3,500 years unchanged!

4. Why is the Diachronic Approach to NT Greek Important?

As was mentioned above, the written tradition of the Greek language stretches over a period of 3,500 years. During this period the language has been constantly subjected to slow change, though, at the same time, it has been able to retain its basic structure intact. The NT makes its appearance somewhere in the middle of this long period. Beginning with Alexander’s Empire, which brought almost all the Greeks under its umbrella, Attic, the dialect of Athens—which had previously become the official language of Makedonia—began to receive elements from the other dialects. It entered a course of simplification: austere Attic elements began to fall away and to be replaced by equivalents from the other dialects; irregular Attic forms gave way to more regular ones; complex Attic constructions were substituted for by simpler compositional patterns; the vocabulary was expanded and neologisms were created.¹⁴ In other words, this was a time of momentous changes in vocabulary, morphology and syntax. *This process went on for 900 years, from Alexander (335 B.C.) to Justinian (A.D. 565), which may thus be called “the period of transition” from ancient to modern*

¹⁴ For the time being I content myself with presenting a few indications: for example, Attic (=A) γλῶττα, θάλαττα, λεώς, νεώς, τήμερον gave way to γλῶσσα, θάλασσα, λαός, ναός, σήμεραν (all in NT and Neohellenic [= N]). Irregular forms such as μαθητρίς gave place to the more regular form μαθήτρια (Acts 9:36, so N). A certain regularization took place with regards to personal endings. Thus, the 1st Aorist endings -α, -ας, -ε, -αμεν, -ατε, -αν and the 2nd Aorist endings -ον, -ες, -ε, -ομεν, -ετε, -ον were combined to give the endings -α, -ες, -ε, -αμεν, -ετε, -αν (e.g. εἶπα, εἶπες, εἶπε, εἶπαμεν, εἶπατε, εἶπαν, ἦλθα, ἦλθες, ἦλθε, ἦλθαμεν, ἦλθατε, ἦλθαν [later Gr and N]). Circumlocutionary expressions, such as A φύλαξ τοῦ δεσμοτηρίου becomes δεσμοφύλαξ (NT: 3 x, also N), A καλὸς κάγαθός becomes καλοκάγαθος (N), A νοῦν ἔχων becomes νουνεχής (N), A νοῦν ἐχόντως becomes νουνεχῶς (Mk 12:34, also N), A αἰχμάλωτον λαμβάνω/ἄγω becomes αἰχμαλωτεύω (Eph 4:8) and αἰχμαλωτίζω (NT 4 x; so N), A αἰχμάλωτον γίνεσθαι becomes αἰχμαλωτίζομαι (Lk 21:24; so N), A οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς becomes (οἱ) Στοῖκοί (Act 17:18, so N). New formations include: προκοπιη (NT 3 x, so N) (< προκόπτω), not in A; ζυμω' (NT 4 x [N: ζυμώνω]) for A φύρω / φυρῶ; ἔστακα / ἔστηκα (intrans., NT) (< ἵστημι) instead of A στήσας ἔχω,

Greek. It was during this period that the foundations of *Neohellenic* were laid, and it was during this period that the New Testament was composed. This implies that the new formations, neologisms and constructions of the NT cannot be explained by reference to Attic or classical Greek. This is so, because the new data either appears for the first time or become more frequent during the period of transition, while occasionally the NT presents the first instance of a word or construction.¹⁵ For example, in the Lord's prayer, the word ἐπιούσιος occurs for the first time in Greek literature. Only later Greek can help us understand its significance. Translators who are not acquainted with later Greek do not know what to make of it. Thus, the latest Swedish translation renders it with "Give us this day our bread for tomorrow"! All such forms and syntax can be understood by reference to the later material (late Hellenistic, Byzantine, Mediaeval and *Neohellenic*), in which the form or the construction has become common, and multiple examples of it can elucidate the meaning.¹⁶

Moreover, inasmuch as *Neohellenic* preserves intact a large part of the linguistic treasure not only of post-classical, but also of classical times, how a NT linguistic phenomenon (term, construction or expression) is felt or perceived in Neohellenic ought to be of significance. Yet this resource has, to my knowledge, never been really exploited for the NT., apart from a few, second-hand references to *MGr* mainly in *MM's Lexicon*.

Thus, since Erasmus' time European and American scholars have been treating Greek atomistically. They have cut it up into several periods and each scholar takes the chunk he chooses, disregarding the other periods.

It must be emphasized here that the unity of the Greek language is of such a nature that it is methodologically pernicious to isolate a particular period and to investigate it without reference to its other periods. The reasons for this have been lucidly presented by Hatzidakis in his *Linguistic Researches*:

"Because the characteristics of Neohellenic go back to ancient times, and the main characteristics of ancient Greek are preserved to this day, it is scientifically impossible to put an exact boundary between them. [Hatzidakis' s emphasis]. In this way, on the one hand, very many elements of ancient Greek have come down through Mediaeval Greek to Neohellenic, and on the other hand, the main characteristics of Neohellenic go back to ancient times. On account of

¹⁵ See e.g. such neologisms as ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος, ἀνεξίκακος, ἀνθρωπαρεσκέω, ἀπαύγασμα, ἐλαχιστότερος, ἐπιούσιος, συμμιμητής, σύσσωμος, σύμμορφος, ὑπερευτυγχάνω, ὑπερεκπερισσῶς, ὑπερλίαν. See also e.g. Jn 8:25 τὴν ἀρχήν, treated in my *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, 146 and esp. "What Did Jesus Mean by τὴν ἀρχήν in John 8:25?" *NovT* 49 2 (2007), pp. 129-47.

¹⁶ An instance of this is Jn 21:5; see Caragounis, *Development of Greek*, 291-93.

this, ancient Greek is in many ways supplemented and better comprehended by Neohellenic, and Neohellenic is clarified and better understood by means of ancient Greek. Thus, any distancing of the one from the other, any separate treatment of either of them from the other, not only of necessity leads to error, but is actually impossible.¹⁷

5. The Relation of *Neohellenic* to the New Testament

In 1908-09 Hatzidakis undertook an examination of the vocabulary of i.a. the New Testament.¹⁸ His object was to discover how many of its words are still spoken today, how many are understood when read or heard, and how many have become obsolete.

Hatzidakis found that of the NT's total vocabulary of 4,906 words, 2,300 words are still spoken today, 2,226 are well understood when read or heard, and only 380 words are not understood. This means that 92.25 % of the vocabulary of the NT is either spoken or understood in Neohellenic¹⁹.

6. Two New Testament Cruces Illustrated by Later Greek

The relevance of later Greek for the exegesis of the NT has been discussed in detail in my investigation, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission*. Here I will illustrate with two examples:

A. John 15:1 has universally been translated by versions and commentators as "I am the Vine you are the branches". The word "vine" represents Gr. ἄμπελος while "branches" represents Gr. κλήματα. This translation is in total agreement with the meaning of these words in classical Greek times. However, Neohellenic makes us aware of a shift of meaning: ἄμπελος is no longer the plant *vitis vinifera*, the "vine" but the "vineyard" and κλήματα means no longer "branches" but "vines". In other words what in classical times was called "branches" has become "vines" and what was called "vine" has become "vineyard".

Now, if this were merely a Neohellenic meaning shift, it would be of no consequence for how John uses these words. But this is not the case. In a

¹⁷ Γ. Χατζιδάκις, *Γλωσσολογικαὶ Ἔρευναι*, τόμ. 1, "Ἐν Ἀθήναις, 1934, σελ. 488 [my tr.].

¹⁸ Χατζιδάκις, "Περὶ τῆς ἐνότητος τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσης" in *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς*, Ἐθνικὸν Πανεπιστήμιον, τόμ. Ε', ἐν Ἀθήναις, 1910, 47-151.

¹⁹ On the above numbers, see Caragounis, *The Development of Greek*, pp. 83-86.

study published in 2000²⁰ as well as in a section in my book, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*²¹, I have supplied abundant literary evidence especially from the papyri, which shows that the shift in meaning had taken place several centuries before Christ and is witnessed throughout history and even in the New Testament (cf. Rev 14:18). Thus, the new meanings were in place at the time of Jesus.

But even the fact that ἄμπελος and κλήμα at the time of Jesus had come to signify “vineyard” and “vine” does not prove that also John uses these terms in their new meanings. The meaning that John ascribes to these terms ultimately can only be determined by a detailed exegesis of his text. This I have done in considerable detail in my previous studies. Here I shall briefly take up a few salient points.

1. The lightly polemical tone in “I am the *true* vine/vineyard”, hints at the *false* vine/vineyard, sc. Israel as well as at the fact that our text is inspired by the OT. In the OT Israel is presented both as a “vine” (e.g. Ps 80) and as a “vineyard” (e.g. Isa 5). So, which picture does John apply to Jesus? Is Jesus the “Vine” or the “Vineyard”?

2. The saying “I am the true ἄμπελος” in itself makes good sense both as vine and as vineyard.

3. However, vs. 2 πᾶν κλήμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μὴ φέρον καρπὸν αἶρει αὐτό, καὶ πᾶν τὸ καρπὸν φέρον καθαίρει αὐτό makes sense only if it is understood of a vine: “He takes away every vine in me that does not bear fruit and ‘prunes’ every vine that does bear fruit”. The use of the Gr verb αἶρω is natural for “uprooting” a vine from the vineyard but unnatural for “cutting” off a branch.

4. The idea of “pruning” is natural if applied to a Vine, but inappropriate if applied to a branch. As with all trees, in viticulture, it is not the branches but the vine that is pruned. The vine is pruned by cutting off weak, sickly or superfluous branches. Now, if Jesus were the vine, then the pruning would be done to Him. But this is an absurd idea! Jesus needs no pruning. Moreover, if the disciples were the branches, then the disciples would be pruned away, i.e. cut off, which is again nonsense. But if Jesus is the vineyard and the disciples are the vines in the vineyard, then we understand that the pruning is done on the disciples, by cutting off whatever is inappropriate in their life and will not bring fruit to the glory of God.

5. It is interesting that when John says “he ‘prunes’ every vine that does bear fruit”, he uses the verb καθαίρω “to cleanse”, which is not the ordinary

²⁰ Caragounis, C. C., “Vine, Vineyard, Israel, and Jesus”, *SEA* 65 (2000), 201-14.

²¹ Caragounis, C. C., *The Development of Greek*, pp. 247-261.

word for “pruning”. This is because he speaks not of ordinary vines, but of the disciples, who are in need of cleansing.

6. In vs 4, Jesus exhorts his disciples to abide in him: καθὼς τὸ κλῆμα οὐ δύναται καρπὸν φέρειν ἄφ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐὰν μὴ μένει ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλῳ, οὕτως οὐδὲ ὑμεῖς ἐὰν μὴ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένητε. The exhortation “abide in me” would be unnatural and unnecessary if addressed to a “branch”, since the branch is an integral part of the vine, but it makes good sense if it is directed to a vine, which is not a natural part of the vineyard, i.e. the soil.

7. Vs 6 ἐὰν μὴ τις μένη ἐν ἐμοί, ἐβλήθη ἔξω ὡς τὸ κλῆμα καὶ ἐξηράνθη καὶ συνάγουσιν αὐτὰ καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλουσιν καὶ καίεται “if anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out (ἐβλήθη ἔξω) as a κλῆμα, dries up and is thrown into the fire” would be inappropriate if the κλῆμα means a branch. A branch cannot be said to be cast out of the vine. A branch is cut off from a vine! Nor can a branch be said to be cast out of the vineyard. Only a vine can be uprooted and thrown out of the vineyard! Had the author by κλῆμα intended a branch, then he would have used some other verb, more appropriate, like κόπτω or τέμνω or one of their compounds: ἐκκόπτω, ἀποκόπτω, ἀποτέμνω, etc.²²

8. Finally, if Jesus is the vineyard and the disciples are the vines, we also have the important idea of protection. As in the OT, the vineyards had walls and hedges to protect them from the beast of the field (see Ps 80:12-13; Isa 5:5 and Mk 12:1). Single vines did not have walls or hedges. If Jesus is portrayed as a vineyard, then we understand that Jesus offers not only spiritual nourishment, but also his protection. We as believers are protected by the spiritual walls of our Vineyard, Jesus! This is made clear in his prayer to the Father in Jn 17:9-15, where he shows his concern that his disciples be protected from the evil one.

9. This result agrees with Mk 14:25, where Jesus speaks of not drinking again from the fruit of the ἀμπέλου until he drinks it new in the kingdom of God. Everyone of the English translations that I have checked, has rendered ἀμπέλου with “vine”. This is obviously wrong. Since Jesus is speaking of wine, ἀμπέλου must be understood of a vineyard not a single vine! Only vineyards could produce wine, not single vines²³.

10. Thus, what Jesus means in Jn 15:1 is: “I am the true vineyard and you are the vines”.

²² Barrett’s discussion (*John*, 474 f.) on these verbs being timeless aorists—obvious but irrelevant for the meaning of the verb—has missed the whole point of the significance and use of the verb ἐξεβλήθη.

²³ The Neohellenic translation has understood it correctly of a “vineyard”.

B. Mt 12:28. This is one of the most important sayings of Jesus about the Kingdom of God: “But if I drive out the demons through the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God ἔφθασεν upon you”. Bible translations have usually rendered ἔφθασεν with “has come”: “the KG has come upon you”. Prof C.H. Dodd of Cambridge, who used this text as one of the pillars for his doctrine of Realized Eschatology —a major position in international New Testament research,—understands the aorist ἔφθασεν in the ordinary way of a past action. But such an understanding faces insurmountable problems. It immediately raises the questions:

1. “What is the essence of the KG?”
2. “How is the KG related to Jesus’ person and ministry?” and
3. “When does the KG come?”

Dodd’s realized eschatology, which is widely accepted today, cannot answer the above questions convincingly.

According to Dodd, the KG was present in Jesus and it consisted in his driving out of demons. This is a most inadequate understanding of the KG in the teaching of Jesus. The KG is much more than Jesus’ miracles.

Thus, if the KG had come already at the time when Jesus uttered these words, how are we understand the rest of Jesus’ life and ministry?

Secondly, what about the cross? — the Son of Man’s duty to give his life a ransom for many? Is there any significance in Jesus’ death? Does it have any role to play in the coming of the KG or is it an unnecessary event? and

Thirdly, how does it come about that long after this saying was uttered, during the Last Supper, Jesus speaks of the KG as something still future?

I say to you, from now on I shall not drink of this fruit of the vineyard until that day when I drink it with you new in the Kingdom of my Father?

From this text it becomes obvious that at the end of Jesus’ public ministry the KG had still not come!

But if the aorist ἔφθασα has been misunderstood by versions and commentators, what is its meaning and how should it be translated?

I have treated the literary evidence on this whole problem in great detail in earlier studies.²⁴ Here I will indicate very briefly the gist of the matter.

Not only in *Neohellenic*, but already from the time of Euripides, Aristophanes and Platon, the aorist tense has been used in a peculiar way, especially in conditional sentences, of an action that is properly future. When

²⁴ Caragounis, C.C., “Kingdom of God, Son of Man, and Jesus’ Self-Understanding”, *Tyndale Bulletin* 40-40.2 (1989) 3-23 and 223-38 and Caragounis, C.C., *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, 261-78.

this happens, the author wishes to emphasize one and/or two things: *certainty* and *imminence*. I shall illustrate this with just two examples.

In Euripides' tragedy, *Alkestis* line 386, when Admetos becomes conscious of the impending death of his wife, he cries out: ἀπωλόμην ἄρ', εἰ μὲ δὴ λείψεις, γῦναι "Oh my wife, I am lost—if you leave me". It is important to realize that the woman is still alive, but is expected to die soon. Admetos should, therefore, have used the future tense: "I shall be lost— if you leave me". That would be more correct in the circumstances. Instead, he uses the aorist which presents his state of lostness already as a fact, although it has not yet occurred! The reason why he uses the aorist is that he wishes to give expression to the *certainty* and *imminence* of his state of lostness consequent on his wife's approaching death. Such certainty and imminence is expressed in Greek by the aorist in place of the future.

The second example comes from *Neohellenic*. Prof Dodd says:

"If you call a waiter, I am told, he will say as he bustles up, ἔφθασα, κύριε",
"Here, I am, Sir!"

From this Dodd surmises that Mt 12:28 "expresses in the most vivid and forcible way the fact that the kingdom of God has actually arrived"²⁵. Dodd has actually misunderstood what the Greek waiter means by ἔφθασα, κύριε! First, when the waiter says ἔφθασα, κύριε, he may be on his way to another table. Moreover, he may have to serve one or more customers, who called him before you did, or he may have to take their payment, go into the counter and go back to them with the change, etc. before he can come to "you". So, the phrase does not mean "Here I am, Sir", as Dodd surmised. Now if the waiter had used the future "I shall come, Sir", he might lose his customer. Therefore, he uses the aorist: ἔφθασα, κύριε! to reassure his customer that he will be there at once, even though we all know by experience that waiters often take an awfully long time to come! In this context the phrase means "you can consider me as being virtually there". This is his way of trying to assure his customer that he will *certainly* come and that he will do so as soon as circumstances permit it. Thus, the meaning of the aorist is future, nevertheless, a *certain* and an *imminent* future, which Dodd, who did not know Neohellenic, misunderstood for realization.

For our text, this implies that the coming of the KG is now both *certain* and *imminent*, but it has not yet come! The KG cannot come before and apart from the cross. Thus, what Jesus is saying in Mt 12:28 is in effect the following, I paraphrase:

²⁵ Dodd, C. H., *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 1935, rev. rp. 1961, p. 36.

“If it is by the Spirit of God (rather than by Bellezebul, as you claim) that I drive out the demons (i.e., preparing for the coming of the KG by defeating the forces of evil), then the KG *is about to break in* upon you (and overtake you in your obstinate and unrepentant state)”.

This means that the force of this saying is not merely informative, in which case the force of ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ‘upon you’ would have been lost. No, its force is one of warning, almost a threat. The warning force of ‘upon you’ shows clearly that the KG has not yet arrived, otherwise there would be no point in warning them! But it is *imminent* and its coming is *certain*. Thus, instead of speaking of “realized eschatology”, the more correct way to speak is that the KG is “potentially present” in Jesus during his earthly ministry, inasmuch as it is bound up with His person and work and it is through Him that it will finally come.

I hope that the above discussion has shown that the Greek language is one from the beginning to the present and that the nature of the language of the NT is such that it needs both the pre-NT and post-NT evidence to elucidate its problems. Abandoning the error of Erasmus and approaching the Greek language as a unity, receiving the beneficial insights of later Greek, will, undoubtedly, open up exhilarating prospects in understanding the text of the NT, which, after all, is the basic presupposition of all research into the New Testament and into all Christian theology.