

Posted 19 January 2006

## Moises Silva's Postscript

The *Westminster Theological Journal* makes it its policy to accept a Response to a Review, if the reviewed author considers that he / she has been misrepresented, and then allows the reviewer a Rejoinder, to which the reviewed author *may not* reply. This explains the present Note.

Moises Silva 'reviewed' my book, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 167), Tübingen: Mohr, 2004. The *WTJ* accepted my Response, to which Silva has written a Rejoinder or Postscript (*WTJ* 67 (2005, 2) pp. 417 f.).

The Postscript itself is extremely lame, which shows that Silva was nonplussed by my Response. My Response, which takes up each one of the main points of Silva's 'review' and shows that his criticism was uninformed and unfair, ought to have led Silva to retract his 'review' which had misrepresented me so grossly. This would have been the honest thing to do. Unwilling, however, to face up to this duty of the serious scientist, he now tries to muddle the waters in order to come off the hook.

His Postscript can be summarized under the following points:

1. He makes a reluctant admission that I was right. It is interesting, however, to see how he excuses himself. Trying to gain points even out of his mistake, he says "I acknowledge that my assessment sounds hypercritical" (*Webster*: hypercritical = "meticulously or excessively critical, overnice in judgement"). What he probably should have written, instead, is that his assessment was off the mark!

2. The point he cavils at with regard to Blaiklock is totally immaterial. However, the careful reader will see that I did not claim that Silva *dated* Blaiklock to the nineteenth century, but that he treated him as though he were a nineteenth-century romantic.

3. As for the charge that he has misrepresented me grossly throughout his ‘review’, Silva feigns to accept as a gentleman my ‘complaint’, but this is only a sham concession, cf. “I urge the readers, however, to examine the relevant sections of his book before determining whether my interpretations were unreasonable”. It is interesting that he now hopes that his interpretations will be found reasonable, since he can no longer hope for correctness! Surely, in the light of his many howlers which I pointed out in my Response he ought to know whether he has misrepresented me or not. If he is of the opinion that he has not misrepresented me, he ought to stand firm on his ground and reject my ‘complaint’.

5. As to his quibbling about modern linguistics, with respect to which, he was too quick to infer ignorance on my part, I only need to cite P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, 1989, who, on p. 223, write: “So far we are aware only of one book written in English that has made any detailed attempt to use semantic structure analysis as part of the task of New Testament exegesis — C. C. Caragounis, *The Ephesian Mysterion* [1977]— and even this was written before the technique was brought out of its infancy. Nevertheless, Caragounis was able to relate lexical and conceptual analysis ...” As Dionysios Halikarnaseus and the Author of *The Sublime* — two great Masters of Greek style and literary criticism— teach, a mature author does not pedantically follow rules and guides as though he were a pupil, but soars freely over the various disciplines and brings what is germane and appropriate in each one of them to bear on his theme.

6. Finally, Silva's evasiveness is nowhere clearer in this brief Postscript than in the last point he mentions, namely, my example of the old Greek lady, who had understood Aspect correctly with reference to 1 Jn 2:1 and 3:9. Following the explanation I gave in my Response, a well-meaning opponent would have admitted to having criticized me unjustifiably. But not Silva. Releasing a new jet of 'ink' he tries to escape capture. He writes: "With regard to the use of *prattô* (as the rendering of ancient *poieô*) in the Neohellenic version of 1 John 3 quoted by Caragounis, interested readers will want to examine carefully the divergent ways in which the version in question (Vamvas) renders *poieô* (e.g. the aorist subjunctive in Mark 3:35 or Luke 13:9 versus the present subjunctive in Gal 5:17 or Col 3:17) and to contrast this approach with, for example, the Vellas version, which uses common Neohellenic verb *kanô* more consistently". In astonishment we may ask: What has all this to do with the point I discussed in my book? The discussion there related to Aspect, which an uneducated Greek woman was able to distinguish with regard to the aorist and the present. Instead of admitting to his mistaken criticism, Silva tries to divert the attention of the reader to something else, that is totally unrelated. He tells us that Vamvas translates original aorist subjunctive of ποιῶ, i.e. ποιήσῃ, at Mk 3:35 and Lk 13:9 with κάμῃ and present subjunctive ποιῇτε in Gal 5:17 and Col. 3:17 with present subjunctive πράττειτε. So what? First, no translations (including English trans.) are consistent in their use of the same word. Second, the semantic field of a term in an ancient context is not always exactly identical with the semantic field of the same word or of a synonymous term in a modern context and hence a tr. cannot use the same word. Third, we have to think of the variation in style and composition utilized by an author (or tr.), and Greek, being very rich, prefers variation. Thus, the fact that the original can use ποιῶ at Mk 3:35, Lk 13:9, Gal 5:17, Col 3:17 and 1 Jn 3:9 does not mean

that a modern translation must use one and the same word in all these cases. For example, πράττω could not have been used in Modern Greek in Lk 13:9 of “bearing fruit”, whereas ποιῶ could. But Silva’s enigmatic statement probably implies that aorist subjunctive is expressed by κάμῃ, while present subjunctive by πράττητε. If this is what he drives at, then he is thoroughly mistaken. The verb πράττω has its own aorist subjunctive, πράξῃτε. This, however, could not have been used in Lk 13:9, since in Neohellenic it is impossible to say: πράττω καρπὸν. The reason for the use of another verb, then, was not Aspect, as Silva thinks, but what verb is appropriate in a given context.

As I have pointed out, Vamvas writes in *Katharevousa*. In the *Demotic* form of Neohellenic the verb κάνω (< classical κάμνω) can be used of “doing the will of God”, of “bearing fruit” and of “committing sin” (i.e. κάνω ἁμαρτία(ν), quite frequent!). Moreover, classical κάμνω had Imperfect ἔκαμνον and Aorist ἔκαμα. Mediaeval and Neohellenic Demotic κάνω has Imperfect ἔκανα and 2 Aorist ἔκανα (! correct, see the Triandafyllidis *Lexicon*, s.v.). This verb has an extremely wide range of uses (comparable to English *take* or *turn*), which explains why it could be used in all five texts, above. Thus, there is no contradiction at all in the behavior of these translators. As a matter of fact, the most recent tr. (1997) uses in Mk 3:35 neither πράττω nor κάνω, but a third word, ἐφαρμόζει. (to apply, to fulfill, to perform, etc.) and yet another word at 1 Jn 3:9. Thus, Silva’s attempt to prove that πράττει in 1 Jn 3:9 “already prejudices the issue” is simply the result of his deficient knowledge of Greek.

At any rate, this question has absolutely no bearing whatsoever on what I have written about Modern Greeks understanding Aspect.

Now, to return to the problem with which we are concerned, at Jn 2:1 Vamvas used the aorist subjunctive form ἁμαρτήσητε to render the original aorist subjunctive form ἁμάρτητε, because

in this case the original form sounded too archaic (NB! not all NT forms sound archaic to a Modern Greek!). At 3:9 he uses the present indicative πράττει (which I repeat, is, in spite of Silva, just as classical as ποιῶ! but more usable at the time of the tr.) to render the original present indicative ποιεῖ. The two words correspond in meaning.

As I end this note, I would like to repeat and underscore, that Silva, who claimed that my use of the example with πράττει “already prejudices the issue”, never replied to the challenge I put to him: “Would Silva, please, oblige us by telling us in what way the Neohellenic equivalent of the original wording ‘already prejudices’ the issue?” (Response, p. 409).

With this I consider the matter closed. I regret to have to say that through his ‘review’ and Postscript Silva has only revealed that he is not quite at home in Greek. As I have said before, Modern linguistic theory and jargon and pure knowledge of the Greek language are two quite different things.