Erasmus’ Alleged Error in the Apologia de loco  
“Omnes quidem resurgemus”  

by Denis L. Drysdall

In 1522 Erasmus published an *Apologia de loco* . . . “Omnes quidem resurge-
mus.” It was a response to a challenge by Nicolaas Baechcm, director of the 
Carmelite house at Louvain, whose hostility seems to have been aroused as 
soon as the *Novum instrumentum* was published in 1516. As assistant inquisi-
tor in the Netherlands from 1520, when he helped to publish the bull *Exsurge 
Domine*, he may have posed a more serious threat than the portrait of him 
found in Erasmus’ letters might suggest.1 This *Apologia*, Erasmus’ response to 
the particular attack on his comments on 1 Cor. 15:51, was published in Feb-
ruary 1522. In translating it for the forthcoming volume 73 of CWE, I have 
based myself on the very useful text of 1522 published by Dr. Cecilia Asso, 
and have confronted the problem she raises concerning an alleged confusion 
committed by Erasmus in his reading of Jerome’s Epistle 119.2

In order to make the argument clearer, I shall insert references to the three 
readings in question, following Asso, as A, B, and C:

A. *Omnès quidem dormiemus, non autem omnes immutabimur* (“We shall 
all indeed sleep, but we shall not all be changed.” Greek reading, cited 
by Jerome, but known to Erasmus only in Latin codices; known also to 
Augustine and Aquinas).

B. *Non omnes dormiemus, omnes autem immutabimur* (“We shall not all 
sleep but we shall all be changed.” Greek reading known to Jerome and 
Aquinas and adopted by Erasmus).

C. *Omnès quidem resurgemus, non autem omnes immutabimur* (“We shall 
all indeed rise again, but we shall not all be changed.” The Vulgate read-
ing; according to Jerome not found in Greek sources, but known to Jerome and Ambrose).

1See especially Ep. 1162, November [? ] 1520. See also Epp. 1153 and 1173.
2“Erasmus’ Apologia de loco ‘Omnes quidem resurgemus,’ ” Archivio Italiano per la Storia della 
Pietà 15 (2003): 165–201, at 171 and 176–79. I wish to express my thanks to Professor Alec 
Dalzell for providing the central idea on which my suggestion is based. I have merely worked out 
the detail of the argument.
In her introduction Asso asserts that Erasmus is guilty of "several basic inconsistencies that undermine the validity of the argument." In her opinion "the source of this inconsistency is a mistaken interpretation of the principal text discussed, Jerome's 119th Epistle . . . concerning the interpretation of 1 Cor 15:51." Specifically she alleges: "Erasmus states that at the present time Greek codices have only B and Latin ones A, but he does not specify what the two ancient Greek readings were, and makes A and C coincide. In this way he confuses the antithesis Vulgate/Greek codices (that is his main problem here) with the ancient discussion reported by Jerome, who had set the supporters of the two different Greek readings against each other and did not consider the Latin one."

Two things need to be said by way of preliminaries. Firstly, the evidence must be taken in chronological order; only this will allow for a valid judgment of the evolution of the matter. Secondly, neither Jerome nor Erasmus is interested primarily in "readings," that is, with textual variants, though they start from that point. Both are concerned mainly with meanings, that is with the doctrinal implications of the readings. Erasmus is concerned particularly with the need to ward off an accusation of heresy. A solution to the problem may be found in allowing that, if at first sight he seems to speak of "readings," he really has in mind "meanings," and that these do not have a one-to-one correspondence with each other. In fact he—and Bauchem—appear to treat omnes dormiemus (A) and omnes resurgemus (C) as virtually synonymous. Subsequently Erasmus shows further that omnes non dormiemus (B) does not constitute a doctrinal contradiction of these.

The error, if that is what it is, appears first in the earliest Annotationes; that is in 1516 and 1519, and therefore before the confrontation with Bauchem. The annotation begins:

Greek sources have the following: πάντες μὲν οὐ κομηθησόμεθα, πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγησόμεθα; that is, We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed [B]. But Saint Jerome [in his letter] to Minervius . . . shows that there are two ways of reading this passage in the Greeks, both the way I have indicated here [B] and the way which is found in the published edition.4