

REVIEW ARTICLE

*The Greek New Testament According
to the Majority Text*

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The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, edited by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982. Pp. xlvi + 810. \$13.95.

A. T. Robertson, that superb grammarian of a generation now past, once wrote that "The Greek New Testament is still the Torchbearer of Light and Progress for the world" (*The Minister and His Greek New Testament* [Nashville: Broadman, 1924] 116). If this be true, then any light we can gain on the text of the Greek NT will certainly help us to gain light *from* it. The conservative student of Scripture should be especially eager to get his hands on anything which helps to recover the very words of the autographs.

With this perspective in mind, Zane Hodges, professor of NT Literature and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary, and Arthur Farstad, executive New Testament editor of the New KJV, have edited a Greek NT which is based on the majority of extant MSS. According to the jacket of the book, "Their carefully edited text marks the *first time in this century* that the Greek New Testament has been produced using the vast bulk of extant manuscripts rather than the small body of Egyptian manuscripts that form the basis of the currently popular 3rd edition of the United Bible Societies text and the 26th edition of the Nestle-Aland text." Regardless of which text-critical theory one holds to, it is difficult not to be impressed by this volume. If it is gratuitous to claim that the reading of the autographs will always be found in the Byzantine minuscules (a claim which the editors never *explicitly* make), at least, the printing of the *Majority Text* will certainly make dialogue with the Hodges-Farstad view easier. The most casual reader will be struck immediately with the fact that this is not another reprint of the *Textus Receptus* (disarming to some extent those who have charged Hodges with this view. As recently as 1978 Hodges' view has been misunderstood by no less a scholar than Gordon Fee who asked, "If they [i.e., Hodges et al.] really mean majority rule, are they ready to give up the TR at such non-superficial variants as Acts 8:37 and I John 5:7-8 (where a weak minority of Greek MSS supports the TR)?" ("Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the

Textus Receptus," *JETS* 21 [1978] 23). A glance at the Majority Text will reveal that these TR readings are indeed rejected because they are not found in the majority of MSS).

The book has a thirty-eight page introduction, most of which is consumed with explaining the apparatus. The text itself has been type-set very handsomely. The printing is fairly large (about the same size as found in UBS3) and easy to read. There are English subtitles for major paragraphs, designed to "trigger the brain to expect the vocabulary one is likely to encounter in such a paragraph" (p. xli). Each page of text has at least one apparatus and normally two. The apparatus immediately below the text contrasts the majority of MSS with the TR (otherwise agreement is assumed). The bottom apparatus contrasts the majority of MSS with the principal Alexandrian witnesses and with UBS3 and Nestle²⁶. The text of two editions (TR and Nestle²⁶ [UBS3]) and two text-types (Alexandrian, Byzantine [= majority text roughly]) are thus effectively presented for the entire NT. The book concludes with a select bibliography on NT textual criticism (pp. 803-10).

This "new" edition of the Greek NT is commendable for several reasons. First and foremost it has ably achieved its primary goal of providing a critical text of the majority of extant MSS. The evidence is presented so clearly that previous judgments about the alleged character of the Byzantine text-type can now be easily tested. A perusal of almost any page of text will reveal that (a) the majority of the MSS do not always have a text which is identical to the TR (thus softening considerably the guilt-by-association tactics which have been used against advocates of this text form), and (b) the alleged "conflations" of the Byzantine text-type do not always hold up: quite frequently these MSS have a shorter reading than that found in Egypt!

Second, for the student who believes that the voice of the Byzantine MSS should at least be heard when textual decisions are being made, this edition of the Greek NT will prove invaluable. The fact that UBS³ does not list very many Byzantine readings should not be surprising: it is primarily a text for translators, not exegetes (p. v of UBS³). This is not to say that it is faultless, however, because there are hundreds of Byzantine readings not listed in the UBS apparatus which alter the translation of the text. The Nestle²⁶ text, by contrast is designed primarily for exegetes and has many more times the textual variants of the UBS³ text. I was rather surprised therefore to find several majority text readings which were not listed in the Nestle apparatus. For example, on p. 115 of the *Majority Text* the text of Mark 3:25-32 is found. Sixteen variants are listed in the second apparatus (which contrasts the majority text with the Egyptian and critical texts). By comparing this text with Nestle²⁶, it is seen that the Nestle apparatus does not cite four of these variants. Although it might be argued that these four variants are not significant, would it not be wiser to allow the exegete to make that decision in each instance? In Eph 6:17, for example, where Nestle²⁶ has **δεεασqe**, the *Majority Text* (as well as Alexandrinus) reads **decasqai**--a reading not cited in the Nestle apparatus. A good case could be made that the structure and argument of the paragraph (vv 10-20, especially vv 14-17) rests on whether Paul wrote the imperative or infinitive in this verse. Further, even when the Nestle apparatus does cite the reading of the majority text, occasionally this

reading is somewhat obscured by the brevity of the citation. For example, in Rev 4:8 the Nestle text reads **agioj agioj agioj**. In its apparatus the bulk of the Byzantine MSS are said to read *novies ag*. Most students today would not realize that *novies* was Latin for "nine times." But the *Majority Text* makes this explicit for non-Latin readers with its nine-fold ascription of holiness to Almighty God--a *triple* trisagion! (Incidentally, the first hand of Sinaiticus is cited as having *octies ag*. [**agioj**; eight times] in the Nestle apparatus, which certainly indicates that its exemplar had **agioj** nine times rather than three.)

Third, the editors as advocates of the genealogical method ("this method remains the only logical one" [p. xii]) provide a rather provocative family tree, or stemma, for John 7:53-8:11 and the Apocalypse. Almost half of the introduction (pp. xxiii-xli) is devoted to a discussion of these texts, their stemmas, and their apparatuses (which are slightly different than the apparatus for the rest of the NT). Although it is beyond the scope of this review to interact with this evidence, it should be pointed out here that this part of the introduction and the apparatuses on these two texts will probably be seen as the most stimulating and significant portions of this volume by textual critics. The criteria the editors lay down for a valid stemma (p. xxv), if followed for the NT as a whole (although the question of feasibility is still present), could possibly play a major role in determining the text of the autographs. (One cannot resist noting that the editors' employment of stemmatics actually *proves false*, in a number of places, the first premise of their textual theory ["(1) Any reading overwhelmingly attested by the manuscript tradition is more likely to be original than its rival(s)" (p. xi)]. Cf., e.g., **baqewj** in John 8:2 which is supported by a *minority* of MSS within the Byzantine text!) Until such work is done for the rest of the NT, however, Hodges and Farstad must admit, as they do, that the *Majority Text* "is both preliminary and provisional" (p. x).

Finally, several stylistic considerations enhance the value of this Greek text (see pp. xli-xliiii). In particular, the use of English subtitles and the particular subtitles selected are most helpful. It is rather evident that these subtitles were *not* an afterthought: some of them touch a poetic chord (e.g., "Filial Honor and Fatherly Nurture" for Eph 6:1-4; "The Untamable Tongue" for Jas 3:1-12; "The Chosen Stone and His Chosen People" for I Pet 2:1-9); some give an excellent synthesis of a chapter which is well adapted to a homiletical outline (e.g., 2 Peter 2 has four points: "Destructive Doctrines of the False Teachers, Doom of the False Teachers, Depravity of the False Teachers, Deceptions of the False Teachers"; cf. also Ephesians 3; Col 2:4-3:11; 1 Peter 4); occasionally, even the classic Latin titles are used (e.g., "*Magnum Mysterium*" for 1 Tim 3:14-16; cf. also Luke 1, 2). The editors are to be applauded for departing from the all-too-frequent anemic subtitles used in most modern Bibles. The 'zing' of these titles was a bit surprising since the editors stated that their goal here was merely "to make the titles objective and factual rather than interpretive" (p. xli). They have not entirely succeeded in not being interpretive, as we shall soon see, but they have succeeded in not being bland!

The *Majority Text* is not without its faults, however. Chief among these is the fact that its text and apparatus are based entirely on evidence supplied in other *editions* of the Greek NT rather than on a first-hand acquaintance

with the MSS. Von Soden's edition was the primary source of information employed by the editors. They quickly add, however, that "this has been extensively checked with the Eighth Edition of Constantine Tischendorf, with the apparatus of S. C. E. Legg for Matthew and Mark, and with the apparatuses of UBS³ and Nestle-Aland²⁶. . . ." (p. xv). In order for the *Majority Text* to be considered completely reliable in its presentation of evidence, three assumptions must be made: (1) for those Byzantine readings not listed in Nestle²⁶, from Luke to Jude (since Legg supplements von Soden in Matthew-Mark and Hoskier supplants him in Revelation), the many MSS discovered and collated *since* 1913 (the publication date of von Soden's text) have not altered the picture of the Byzantine text-type that von Soden paints for us and that von Soden was reliable in his collation and presentation of the Byzantine text; (2) for those Byzantine readings which are listed in Nestle²⁶ and agree with von Soden, the Nestle editors cited the evidence correctly; and (3) the *Majority Text* editors made no errors in the process of transmitting the evidence from other apparatuses to their own. The first of these assumptions seems to be the most serious. The editors recognize this weakness, however:

As all who are familiar with von Soden's materials will know, his presentation of the data leaves much to be desired. Particularly problematic to the editors of this edition was the extent to which his examination of the K materials appeared to lack consistency. . . . That such procedures jeopardize the accuracy of any independently constructed apparatus is self-evident. But the generalized data of the other sources (such as Tischendorf or Legg) were of little value in correcting this deficiency. In the final analysis, if the present edition was to be produced at all, the statements of von Soden usually had to be accepted (pp. xxii-xxiii).

Nevertheless, the sum of all three assumptions does not destroy the credibility of this text; for the most part, it points out the need for further work for advocates of the majority text, as the editors well know:

What is urgently needed is a new apparatus for the gospels, Acts, and epistles, covering the entire manuscript tradition. It should include complete collations of a very high percentage of the surviving Majority Text manuscripts. Such an apparatus could then be used to determine the actual distribution of rival variants within the majority tradition. Beyond this, it could provide the indispensable base from which definitive stemmatic work could be done (p. xxiii).

Second, only four pages of the introduction are devoted to a defense of the majority text view. In the space of six paragraphs the editors dismiss the Westcott-Hort theory as one which "has failed to advance convincing objections to the authenticity of the Majority Text" (p. xi). In this section they are clearly giving the summation of their view rather than the evidence for it. They cite no sources here, but speak of the modern trend of scholars and scholarship as tending to reject the bases on which the Westcott-Hort theory was founded. In future editions of this text one could wish for some documentation of these statements, however, especially since (a) the neophyte in lower criticism is not usually willing to wade through the whole select

bibliography to determine the truth of such assertions and (b) although the editors are certainly only giving a summation of their view, the jacket of the book claims that they have accomplished something far greater: "Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad build a substantial--and convincing--argument for the Majority Text in their Introduction [*italics added*] . . ." and "They effectively refute the W-H argument. . ." It is suggested that these assertions on the dust cover be deleted from future editions or, the introduction be expanded, with documentation and evidence, to fit this proleptic statement. Nevertheless, since one should not judge a book by its cover, it is presumed that the somewhat gratuitous claims on the jacket were not what the editors themselves believed the introduction to accomplish.

Third, although the English subtitles are excellent overall, they do not always succeed in being "objective and factual rather than interpretive" (p. xli). For example, in Eph 4:7-16 the title reads, "Each Believer Has a Spiritual Gift." Although this is certainly true and may be implied in this text (though only in v 7), the *thrust* of the passage does not at all seem to be on the gifts of all believers, but rather on the purpose of the functional unity of the body accomplished first (though not exclusively) through its gifted leadership. Thus, the subtitle here seems too narrow, though it is not entirely incorrect. In Eph 4:17-24, however, the subtitle has clearly transgressed the boundaries of objectivity. It reads, "Put on the New Man," interpreting the infinitives of vv 22-24 as going back to imperatives in the direct discourse. Although this is certainly a *possible* interpretation, an excellent case could be made that these infinitives refer back to indicatives in the direct discourse. The ambiguous title "Putting on the New Man" would seem to fit their objectives better. Admittedly, and to the credit of the editors, this kind of interpretive title is extremely rare, causing only a minor annoyance.

Fourth, for future editions it is suggested that the editors expand on the textual evidence they list in the apparatus. Especially the Western witnesses (D, G, Itala, *et al.*) should be included. For those of us who do not accept the Byzantine text when it stands alone as containing the reading of the original, but who do not relegate it to a tertiary, non-voting role among the text-types, such information would be most illuminating. If the editors put students of the NT in the awkward position of deciding between Byzantine and Alexandrian witnesses, as though no other evidence counted, their text might tend to be counterproductive for their theory. There may be some who disagree with their premises, but who would agree with the resultant text in many places if the evidence which could persuade them were added to the apparatus.

Finally, the *Majority Text* shares a weakness with the text of UBS³. neither one marks out in a special way the *allusions* to the OT in the NT. Nestle²⁶ does this to some degree (though Nestle²⁵ was far more extensive), but the *Majority Text* and UBS³ only highlight (by bold type in UBS³, by *guillemets* in the *Majority Text*) quotations. Although it is true that there are many problems in determining whether a NT author is quoting or alluding to the OT, this writer would prefer that all the *possible* allusions be specially marked out so that he can evaluate the evidence for himself. In order to avoid the danger of assuming a positive identification in every instance, is it not possible for some edition of the Greek NT to give a rating system as to the

certainty of the identification, similar to the textual rating system found in UBS³?

To sum up both the positive and negative aspects of the *Majority Text*, the positive elements far outweigh the negative so much that I strongly recommend the *Majority Text* for every student of the Greek NT, regardless of his text-critical views. The negative elements of the work all seem to be capable of correction in subsequent editions. Most of the drawbacks were acknowledged by the editors as due to limitations of time and resources. Overall, I am sympathetic toward the editors in this regard, for I would much rather have the *Majority Text* in its present form than wait an interminable number of years before these bugs get worked out.

Certainly a review of this sort could end here. But I am unable to resist pursuing one last item. The editors of the *Majority Text*, although ostensibly basing their theory on the priority of external evidence (ultimately, however, even this textual theory must pay some attention to matters of internal criticism, or else stemmatics would be impossible), offer a most intriguing challenge: "excellent reasons almost always can be given for the superiority of the majority readings over their rivals" (p. xi). Since I cannot attempt anything like an exhaustive demonstration/refutation of this statement, a few suggestive examples will have to suffice. To an open mind, which has not already made an *a priori* rejection of the Byzantine text, the following four examples may tend to illustrate (though hardly prove!) the editors' thesis.

In Eph 5:9 we read **o[gar karpōj tou?f wtoj** in Nestle²⁶, **o[gar karpōj tou?pneumatoj** in the *Majority Text*. Metzger writes, in defense of the UBS³/Nestle²⁶ reading, "Although it can be argued that **f wtoj** has come in from the influence of the same word in the preceding line, it is much more likely that recollection of Paul's reference in Ga 5.22 to **o[dekarpoj tou?pneumatoj** has led to the introduction of the word here" (*Textual Commentary*, p. 607). This view seems to presuppose that Gal 5:22 was as well known and oft-quoted a verse in the first century as it is today. Further, it is quite possible that **f wtoj** happened by dittography (especially since in both P49 and **Ⲡ** the **f wtoj** in v 8 is directly above the one in v 9). The likelihood of this is increased when it is realized that **pneumatoj** was a *nomina sacra*, abbreviated as **PNC** (as in P46), rendering it more easily confused with **f wtoj**.

In I Thess 1:10 we read that the Lord Jesus is the one who will deliver us "from the wrath" which is coming (**ek thj o[ghj** in Nestle²⁶, **apo>thj o[ghj** in the *Majority Text*). Metzger makes no comment on the variant because it is not found in the UBS³ apparatus. On a transcriptional level it is quite easy to see why a scribe would alter **apo>to ek**: this verse speaks of our Lord as coming from heaven (**ek twñ ou[ranwn**), as being raised from the dead (**ek twñ nekrown**), and as delivering us from the wrath (**ek/apo>thj o[ghj**). Either stylistic considerations or unintentional dittography could explain why a scribe would change **apo>to ek**, though there are few, if any, transcriptional reasons for the reverse. If one wants to argue intrinsically, claiming that Paul could have intended a literary effect by a thrice-mentioned **ek**, why did the apostle not avail himself of such an opportunity for style elsewhere in this epistle (note in particular 2:6 where both **ek** and **apo>** are again used)?

In John 3:13 the Byzantine MSS read **o[wn e[t&?ou[ran&?** after **o[uihj tou?**

αἰὲν ὡς ἔστιν, making explicit the omnipresence of the Second Person of the Trinity while he appeared on the earth. Metzger writes,

On the one hand, a minority of the Committee preferred the reading **αἰὲν ὡς ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ**? arguing that (1) if the short reading, supported almost exclusively by Egyptian witnesses, were original, there is no discernible motive which would have prompted copyists to add the words **ὡς ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ**? resulting in a most difficult saying (the statement in 1.18, not being parallel, would scarcely have prompted the addition); and (2) the diversity of readings implies that the expression **ὡς ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ αἰὲν ὡς ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ**? having been found objectionable or superfluous in the context, was modified either by omitting the participial clause, or by altering it so as to avoid suggesting that the Son of man was at that moment in heaven.

On the other hand, the majority of the Committee, impressed by the quality of the external attestation supporting the shorter reading, regarded the words **ὡς ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ**? as an interpretive gloss, reflecting later Christological development (pp. 203-4).

It is significant that the majority of the Committee based their rejection of this longer reading primarily on the *external* evidence and secondarily on the assumption that the reading reflects a higher Christology than is elsewhere detected in John. Certainly there is no case here internally, for we are not in a position to tell John how well developed his Christology could be! The Byzantine reading stands vindicated.

Finally, in Matt 24:36 the *Majority Text* does *not* make explicit the fact that the Son of Man, at the time of this utterance, did not know the day or hour of the Second Advent. Now it is clear that our Lord did declare his own ignorance on this occasion (cf. Mark 13:32). Metzger states that "The omission of the words because of the doctrinal difficulty they present is more probable than their addition by assimilation to Mk 13.32" (p. 62). The problem with this view is that the scribes would be expected to strike **οὐδεὶς γινώσκει** from Mark 13:32 if they perceived a doctrinal problem with the phrase--regardless of which Gospel it appeared in. It is entirely possible, however, that theological reasons did cause the omission--but on the part of the author, not on the part of later scribes. Although this possibility cannot be fully developed here, it is significant that (1) Matthew certainly could not be charged with perverting or misrepresenting the words of Christ, for he makes implicit our Lord's ignorance by making explicit the Father's exclusive knowledge (**εἰς ἡμᾶς πατὴρ [μου] μόνος**; Mark leaves out **μόνος**); and (2) Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as Messiah (who *will* establish his kingdom on earth, in spite of the fact that he did not do so in his first coming) dictates to a large degree his *selectivity* of material (cf., e.g., Matthew's use of Isa 42:1-4 in 12:18-21). Although I am undecided about this last text, there seem to be no *internal* reasons for rejecting the shorter reading.

Examples such as these have convinced me that at least sometimes, if not usually, the Byzantine MSS bear a reading which can certainly be defended on internal grounds, thus vindicating to some extent the *Majority Text* editors' assertion.

In conclusion, I would like to extend my deep appreciation to Hodges and Farstad for producing a volume which is borne out of the noblest of all

human motives. And although I do not agree with the theory which lies behind this text, I am aware of the interlude between two great acts (as Eldon J. Epp put it) that the science of NT textual criticism finds itself in today. If we are to move on to the next act, we must take inventory of our presuppositions and of all the evidence. And the *Majority Text* both challenges our presuppositions and provides clear and substantial evidence with which every serious student of the Greek NT must wrestle in his search for the *ipsissima verba* of Holy Writ.

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