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REVIEW ARTICLE

*The Greek New Testament According*

*to the Majority Text*

DANIEL B. WALLACE

*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

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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 con-

sumed 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 δέξασθε, the

*Majority Text* (as well as Alexandrinus) reads δέξασθαι--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

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reading is somewhat obscured by the brevity of the citation. For example, in

Rev 4:8 the Nestle text reads ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος. 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! (Incidently, the first hand of Sinaiticus is

cited as having o*cties αγ*. [ἅγιος eight times] in the Nestle apparatus, which

certainly indicates that its exemplar had ἅγιος 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 appa-

ratus 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., βαθέως 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 provi-

sional" (p. x).

Finally, several stylistic considerations enhance the value of this Greek

text (see pp. xli-xliii). 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

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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 assump-

tions 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 presen-

tation 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 objec-

tions 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

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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 Alex-

andrian 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

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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 ὁ γὰρ καρπὸς τοῦ φωτός in Nestle26, ὁ γὰρ καρπὸς  
τοῦ πνεύματος in the *Majority Text*. Metzger writes, in defense of the UBS3/

Nestle26 reading, "Although it can be argued that φωτός 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 ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματος 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 φωτός

happened by dittography (especially since in both P49 and א the φωτός in v 8

is directly above the one in v 9). The likelihood of this is increased when it is

realized that πνεύματος was a *nomina sacra*, abbreviated as PNC (as in P46),

rendering it more easily confused with φωτός.

In I Thess 1:10 we read that the Lord Jesus is the one who will deliver us

"from the wrath" which is coming (ἐκ τῆς ὀργῆς in Nestle26, ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς

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 ἀπό to ἐκ: this verse speaks of our Lord as

coming from heaven (ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν), as being raised from the dead (ἐκ τῶν  
νεκρῶν), and as delivering us from the wrath (ἐκ / ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς). Either

stylistic considerations or unintentional dittography could explain why a

scribe would change ἀπό to ἐκ, 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 ἐκ, why did the

apostle not avail himself of such an opportunity for style elsewhere in this

epistle (note in particular 2:6 where both ἐκ and ἀπό are again used)?

In John 3:13 the Byzantine MSS read ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ after ὁ υἰὸς τοῦ

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ἀνθρώπου, making explicit the omnipresence of the Second Person of theTrinity while he appeared on the earth. Metzger writes,

On the one hand, a minority of the Committee preferred the reading

ἀνθρώπου ὁ ὢν ''εν τω ούρανῷ, 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 ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ

οὐρανῷ, 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 ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ ὣν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ 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

ὁὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ 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 οὐδὲ ὁ  
υἱός 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 (εἰ μὴ ὁ 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

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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 presup-

positions 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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Grace Theological Seminary

200 Seminary Dr.

Winona Lake, IN 46590

www.grace.edu

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