

Why I Became a Majority Text Advocate

Unpublished paper by Arthur L. Farstad when he was at Dallas Seminary

I. Introduction

Why would a young teacher with an earned doctorate in NT language and literature endanger his credibility with the scholarly Aestablishment@ by espousing what Texans might call a Amaverick@ view of NT textual criticism? Please allow me to give a personal testimonial to my Aconversion@ to such a conservative viewpoint.

II. My Background

Wordsworth wrote that Athe child is father of the man.@ This was certainly true of me in my very early interest in manuscripts. Being raised in a devout Scandinavian-American family, I early became very interested in Holy Scripture, reading the entire Bible through at the age of eleven (including the genealogies B every one of them!).

My brother Arnie and I would often drop in on the Smithsonian on our way home from Sunday school in Georgetown, Washington, D.C. Two displays stand out in my mind even yet: a beautiful Hebrew Torah scroll with a silver case, and a temporary exhibit of manuscripts. This latter included a single page B in Greek B of John chapter 2 with Eastern Orthodox artwork showing Jesus and Mary at the wedding of Cana in Galilee.

My first brush with ms. problems took place at Anacostia High School in Washington. Not that they actually *taught* textual criticism there, of course, but we *did* read the Bible and say the Lord=s Prayer in those Afabulous fifties.@ (This was before the Supreme Court outlawed God in the public schools.) Two or three fellows transferred to our school from the parochial schools. They were used to saying their APater Nosters@ in the Douay Version (very close to King James in language). When they came to the words, Adeliver us from evil,@ these fellows would say a loud AAmen,@while the Protestants, and most Catholics, too, went on with the famous ascription of praise, AFor Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.@ Why didn=t the new students say these words? It surely wasn=t a doctrinal difference: all of Christendom believes these words to be true and similar words occur in Chronicles.

Well, it was a matter of the Greek texts lying behind the KJV and Douay Version. The KJV used the Textus Receptus, which was edited during the Reformation period (by both Catholics and Protestants B from Greek mss.!). The Douay was translated from the Latin Vulgate, the official version of the Church of Rome. St. Jerome used Greek mss. that *lacked* the ending to the prayer.

III. Greek Studies

My first Greek learning was self-taught. My brother=s Sunday school teacher gave him, as a prize, a book by Harry Rimmer that included the complete Greek text and an English translation of the *Didache*. This is the so-called ATeaching of the Twelve Apostles@ (an early Christian manual, probably of the 2d century).

By learning the alphabet from Webster=s dictionary and making comparisons, I picked up some basics of Greek. Since the languages I knew B English, French, and Norwegian B didn=t have too many inflections and no case endings on nouns, adjectives, or participles, I had trouble figuring out such changes in Greek.

My brother Dick (now a radio missionary to the Quichua-speaking population of South America) encouraged me to go to Bible School just as he had. I tried to learn the language on my own, but found the rules for accenting in Machen=s Grammar a real Abear. @

At Emmaus Bible School (now a college) I took all the Greek I could, in small, intimate classes with the late Mr. John Harper and the late Dr. H. Chester Woodring. Both teachers were very conservative in theology and lifestyle, but supported the critical text and quite literally laughed at Dean Burgon, the 19th century supporter of the ATR@ (Textus Receptus).

When I decided that I wanted to go to seminary, I needed a B.A. degree to be admitted. So I transferred all my Emmaus credits (I graduated!) to Washington Bible College in my hometown. There I took largely liberal arts subjects to augment my Bible, theology, and so forth.

Fortunately, each of my two years there I was allowed to take courses at Capital Bible Seminary for credit at WBC. Dr. Eldon Koch, a local Baptist minister with a strong scholarly bent, especially for textual criticism, taught a number of interesting courses in NT textual criticism B again from the critical text perspective.

When I got to Dallas Seminary, I validated the first two years of Greek and went right into electives. My first Greek elective was with Professor Zane C. Hodges, in the Pastoral Epistles. I can remember showing him a chart on textual criticism, naively unaware that he would be less than thrilled with the critical slant of the information. My best friend filtered some of Mr. Hodges=s defense of the TR to me B complete with laughter. He liked the teacher and the class, but thought such an old-fashioned view highly amusing.

I remember one textual variant that impressed me from what would later be called the AMajority Text@ viewpoint. In 1 Tim 3:16 a handful of mss. read Awho [or some which] was manifested in the flesh@ instead of the familiar AGod was manifested@ found in the KJV. When I learned that well over 90% of the manuscripts read AGod,@ I wondered why any conservative Christian would opt for one of the two slightly-supported readings (though I knew the arguments that Aolder is better,@ etc.).

Professor Hodges was a very good teacher, as well as being both scholarly and spiritual. These traits had influenced me at least to look into his Amaverick@ viewpoint.

I remember one Greek professor saying, AGentlemen, if Codex Aleph and Codex B [Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, F.J.A. Hort=s favorite mss.] agree, you can be pretty sure you have the autographs.@ We all put it down in our notes. Few today would be that simplistic.

The head of the NT Department at that time, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, was fair to both sides. We had debates in textual criticism, and my best friend and I alternately each took both sides before the class.

In my second semester of graduate school where I was working on a doctorate in NT, I was asked to join the faculty as an instructor in second year Greek and to teach an elective or two. I had to make a decision then: Which Greek NT would I use?

With financial backing from his late brother David, Professor Hodges had had the Oxford 1825 TR reprinted for his students. This compact little black-cloth-bound volume was easy to read, but had absolutely no apparatus (footnotes with variant readings). Probably out of respect for Zane more than anything, I used his text for the first two or three semesters of teaching. But the lack of any footnotes finally drove me to the critical text. We used to have a debate in class over ATR@ readings vs. critical readings in Thessalonians, the books I taught first semester of second year Greek.

I could not help noticing that those who tended to support the traditional text seemed to be devout students, judging from various observable factors. Of course, there were exceptions,

but it did influence me somewhat toward the TR.

IV. Searching for Truth

When I got my doctorate (1972), I felt it was time for me to study the issue of textual criticism on my own and make a commitment on the text. A fellow NT doctoral student had (I now believe providentially) talked me into getting a photocopy of Burgon's volume, *The Revision Revised*, a late nineteenth-century defense of the traditional text. I had not touched it yet.

I started my private textual studies in a large blue hardback copy of Nestle's Greek NT. Always believing in going from the easy to the difficult, the short to the long, I read in Jude my first night, carefully weighing every textual variant. I remember I was surprised to find readings where the text was supported by only two mss. (Aleph and B) against all others. Had the Church been wrong from (at least) A.D. 500 to 190 in following the traditional readings? My second night I found a reading that Nestle presented as the original one that had only *one* ms. supporting it, and that one manuscript was unknown to the Christians of most centuries. How did this fit in with our Lord's promise of His Word not passing away? This was the beginning of my *grave* doubts regarding the critical text. In my studies I had noticed how often the traditional text was more reverent, orthodox, and smooth than the critical (to Hort, of course, this proved it couldn't be original!). But couldn't Peter and Paul have been orthodox and smooth in the autographs?

Next came the reading of Burgon's book. To my surprise he proved to be very scholarly and interesting to read (not always true of textual critics), albeit a bit caustic towards his opponents!

The more I studied, the more I was convinced I had been sold a bad bill of goods by Hort and his modern counterparts.

I taught Greek for five and a half years with a break in the early 70's when I took care of my elderly dad before his death (1973).

V. Working on the NKJV

In 1975 I received a call from Thomas Nelson Publishers of Nashville, the world's largest publisher of Bibles, asking me to work on the New King James Bible. Zane Hodges had recommended me as having the necessary credentials, a literary bent, and also a strong penchant towards what was by now being called *The Majority Text*.@ This is basically the TR corrected in those places where it did *not* represent the bulk of mss. (For example, 1 John 5:7,8, where only four Greek mss. support the reading in the KJV, has been corrected in the Majority Text edition of the NT.)

Originally it was planned to use the Majority Text for the NKJV, not the TR used in the KJV. This was changed near the end of the project. Strangely enough, the one who talked Thomas Nelson into *not* using the Majority Text was Zane Hodges himself. (He was not, however, on the translation team.) Zane argued that a version should not be based on a Greek text that had not been on the market for a few years to allow time for scholarly appraisal. Also, many felt that this updating of the classic KJV should not introduce another Greek text, like the English Revised had done in 1881 before the Westcott-Hort text (also 1881) had a chance to be evaluated.

In 1979 the NKJV NT appeared B with only two textual footnotes, at 1 John 5:7,8, and Rev. 22:19.

When the complete Bible came out it included the first English NT to give Majority Text

readings in the footnotes (as well as critical text readings) where these differed from the TR on which the KJV was based.

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VI. Scholarly Reinforcement

In 1977 a book entitled *The Identity of the New Testament Text* appeared, written by Wilbur N. Pickering (Th.M., Dallas Seminary, Ph.D., University of Toronto). D.A. Carson has called the book "the most formidable defense of the priority of the Byzantine Text yet published in our day" (*The King James Version Debate*). John Wenham of England wrote that this book had changed his "whole approach to [this] subject" (*The Evangelical Quarterly*).

This book strengthened my own resolve to be active in promoting the Majority Text. A revised edition appeared in 1980 which interacted with certain criticisms of the earlier edition.

VII. The Majority Text Greek NT

I knew that Prof. Hodges had done some preliminary work on variant readings in the NT books that he taught at seminary, and that he was contemplating producing a Greek NT according to what was now widely (and more accurately) called the Majority Text.

I went downtown to his apartment in a Dallas highrise to offer my services in any way I could. By now I was convinced of the Majority Text's superiority not as a mere theory, but as practically a religious conviction. All my studies confirmed my conviction. Zane's apartment was #1610, and I teased him that it was only one number off, knowing his fondness for the 1611 version (a feeling I shared). He said he'd pray about my offer. The answer proved to be "yes."

Working for Thomas Nelson as Executive Editor of the NKJV proved to be a great boon at this time. There was no way that Zane and I could have afforded to spend all the needed time and effort on this text without financial backing. President Sam Moore, who had read some pro-traditional text literature, agreed to help us. My estimate (a guess) was \$11,000. It came closer to \$100,000 in the end! This was largely due to the need to hire many collators of the data collected from the major critical apparatuses, microfilms, etc. Other help was also needed. Sam said, "Art, you're not a businessman, but you love the Lord, so it's all right!"

In fairness to me, please note that my small figure was based on planning to have only *one apparatus* showing the variations within the Majority Text tradition. Editors at Nelson had been convinced (by one who disapproved of our project, quite frankly) that our NT would be more salable if we had a *second apparatus* showing where the M-text differed from the critical readings found translated in the RSV, NASB, and NIV. (They were right by another providence.)

The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text appeared in 1982, the same year as the complete NKJV Bible. The second edition, with corrections and a few changes of readings, appeared in 1985.

VIII. The Majority Text Society

A Majority Text Society seemed like a natural outcome of all this activity. Dr. Wilbur Pickering, author of *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, mentioned earlier, Zane Hodges, long a "ring leader" of this viewpoint, Frank Carmical, a young evangelist and supporter of the Majority Text, and I met in February of 1988 at the IHOP restaurant on Abrams Road in Dallas and afterwards at my home on Prospect Avenue to found the Majority Text Society. We all felt it was high time that an effort be mounted to get our message out to more people.

Wilbur was elected President, myself Vice President, Zane Treasurer, and Frank Secretary of the fledgling society.

Our main object was to mail out papers on subjects related to the majority text. An initial gift from a Christian lady got us going financially.

Towards the end of his term as President, Dr. Pickering gave several talks at seminaries, schools, and other places and won several adherents before his recent return to Brazil, where is a missionary.

Now I am President, Zane is Vice President, and Richard Michael Duffy (a seminary graduate) is Secretary-Treasurer. (Frank's evangelistic trips necessitated his leaving the board, though he still helps with the mailing labels).

IX. Majority Text Translation

Since 1984 I have been working in my Aspare@ time on a rather literal but idiomatic translation of the Majority Text. I have Ahired@ a few scholars to help me as well as my nephew, Mark Farstad, as computer operator.

Now we are sending out samples of this work for evaluation by our Society=s constituency. There is still much work to do, as only six or seven books are well along, and none is quite complete.

X. Other Majority Text Projects

Meanwhile, Thomas Nelson Publishers is producing a Greek Interlinear of the Majority Text with the NKJV in the margin. Hodges, Drs. Robert E. Picirilli and Michael Moss of Nashville, and I are the chief editors and translators, working with Ain house@ scholar, Dr. Robert Lintzenich.

In 1991 Dr. Maurice Robinson and Mr. William Pierpont published *The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Byzantine/Majority Textform*. It has a long Introduction and a helpful Appendix. It contains no punctuation, accentuation, capitalization, paragraphing, or apparatus. It does, however, indicate the traditional chapter and verse divisions clearly. Their text, which differs from the Hodges-Farstad text chiefly in John 7:53 B 8:11 and Revelation (not radically there either) is also available on computer disk.

XI. The Future of the Majority Text

From the early days of only tiny support, the Majority Text is coming of age (again, really). With much added personnel and financial backing we could produce Majority Text translations and subsidized Greek NT=s for students who can=t afford expensive scholarly books. Interestingly, work has progressed in two or three languages overseas before even English has an edition of its own.

Until fairly recently many critical-text advocates said that no AByzantine@ (=Majority) readings could be found in our oldest mss. Well, the papyri have disproved that. We believe that the best mss. were usually worn out from constant use, and thus those that were less used survive from the earliest days.

The Gk. mss. found not too long ago on Mt. Sinai at St. Catherine=s monastery, but not yet released to the public, may prove to be largely Alexandrian (due to their Egyptian provenance). But we are hoping that some early mss. from other parts of the Roman Empire will surface eventually to further augment our studies and our position. We would be thrilled if the St. Catherine=s cache should prove to include at least a few manuscripts that are decidedly AMajority@ in text, and also very old. (The antiquity of a ms. seems to be the main criterion for many).

Let us pray that those responsible to release these mss. will do so B and let the Achips@
(and readings) fall where they may. *Deus vult.*