

A Defense of the Johannine Comma

Setting the Record Straight on I John 5:7-8

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Introduction - The Charges Made Against the Johannine Comma

Throughout the history of man's dealings with God's Word, the Holy Bible, few portions of Scripture have suffered from more vigorous assaults than the passage I John 5:7-8, otherwise known as the Johannine Comma. Because this verse is one of the most direct statements of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, it has borne the brunt of attack by those who are in opposition to trinitarian beliefs, these most often being unitarians such as Muslims and certain of the various pseudo-Christian cult groups (Jehovah's Witnesses, some Churches of God, etc.). Likewise, this verse is rejected by theological liberals who tend to view the Bible from an entirely naturalistic perspective, and who therefore also reject the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture (Psalm 12:6-7, Matt. 5:18, Luke 16:17, I Pet. 1:25, etc.).

The attacks upon this verse have come from all angles. The personal experience of this author has mostly been in dealing with Muslims, whose ideas about the Trinity generally hold to the very simplistic and erroneous picture presented in the Qur'an (to see a typical Muslim argument against the Trinity, and this argument dealt with, click [here](#)). For the most part, Muslim apologetics on the subject of this verse are simply the plagiarism of large parts of a "foundational" [article](#) dealing with this passage found at the *Answering Christianity* website. Interestingly, most Islamic attacks on this verse find their basis in the work of liberal and atheistic scholars who have an ideological predisposition to oppose the verse. Commonly relied upon as "proof" that the Comma is a corruption of God's Word is the statement below,

"The famous interpolation after 'three witnesses' is not printed even in RSVn, and rightly. It cites the heavenly testimony of the Father, the logos, and the Holy Spirit, but is never used in the early Trinitarian controversies. No respectable Greek MS contains it. Appearing first in a late 4th-cent. Latin text, it entered the Vulgate and finally the NT of Erasmus."¹

Other statements along this line abound in liberal and even Neo-Evangelical literature,

"The text about the three heavenly witnesses (I John 5:7 KJV) is not an authentic part of the NT."²

"1 John 5:7 in the KJV reads: 'There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one' but this is an interpolation of which there is no trace before the late fourth century."³

"1 John 5:7 in the Textus Receptus (represented in the KJV) makes it appear that John had arrived at the doctrine of the trinity in explicit form ('the Father, the

¹ *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, Eds. M. Black, H.H. Rowley, A.S. Peake, p. 1038

² *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Eds. K.R. Crim, G.A. Buttrick, Vol. IV, p. 711

³ *Ibid.*, p. 871

Word, and the Holy Ghost'), but this text is clearly an interpolation since no genuine Greek manuscript contains it."⁴

Each of these statements, naturally, find much use among Muslim apologists and other anti-trinitarians who would probably have little use for anything else contained within these works.

Even conservative Evangelical commentators have jumped onto the anti-Comma bandwagon, parroting the same general claims concerning the paucity of Greek manuscript evidence for the trinitarian rendering of these verses. In his commentary on I John, Hiebert refers to the "famous interpolated passage for which there is no valid textual evidence,"

"The external evidence is overwhelmingly against the authenticity of these words, commonly known today as "the Johannine Comma." They are found in no Greek uncial manuscripts; no Greek cursive manuscript before the fifteenth century contains them. Only two known Greek cursives (cursive 629 of the fourteenth century and 61 of the sixteenth century) have the addition in their text; cursive 635 of the eleventh century has it in the margin in a seventeenth century hand, and 88 of the twelfth century has it in the margin by a modern hand. In these cursives the words are a manifest translation from a late recension of the Latin Vulgate. No ancient version of the first four centuries gives them; nor is it found in the oldest Vulgate manuscripts. None of the Greek Church Fathers quoted the words contained in this interpolation. As Feuillet points out, their failure to cite it is 'an inexplicable omission if they knew it: in fact, how could they not have used it in the Trinitarian controversies?'"⁵

Hiebert then continues on into a discussion of the much-heralded (and much-misrepresented) inclusion of the Comma by Erasmus into the third edition of his Greek text. A similar charge is leveled in many of the more popular Evangelical study Bibles. For example, Ryrie states,

"Verse 7 should end with the word *record*. The rest of verse 7 and all of verse 8 are not in any ancient Greek mss."⁶

Unfortunately for the critics, these claims are either outright falsehoods, or else rest upon incomplete information. Worse, they continue to be propagated uncritically by naturalistic textual scholars like Bruce Metzger and Kurt and Barbara Aland, whose written works routinely perpetuate false information based upon a partial coverage of the evidence available. It is somewhat understandable that those who rely upon information given to them by others (Hiebert, Ryrie, etc.) would repeat the assertions made by textual

⁴ *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, Ed. A.C. Myers, p. 1020

⁵ D.E. Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*, p. 27

⁶ C.C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible: King James Version*, Expanded Edition (1994), note on I John 5:7-8. We should note that Ryrie is in fact in error on this point, as "the spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one" appear in all manuscripts containing this passage.

scholars. It is less understandable that scholars like Metzger and the Alands, who ought very well to have access to the full body of information on this subject, would continue to propagate claims that are verifiably false concerning this passage of Scripture. The disinformation that continues to be perpetuated by liberal textual critics results in confusion among the ranks of God's people concerning the Scriptures, which can only serve to divide and weaken the churches of Christ, the local assemblies who are charged with keeping and guarding the Word of God (I Timothy 3:15).

The primary arguments employed against the authenticity of the Johannine Comma can be roughly summarized into the four following topical areas:

- The paucity and lateness of the Greek manuscript witness
- The lateness of its appearance in the Latin
- Its lacking from all other ancient versions
- The lack of use by patristic writers, especially during the "Trinitarian controversies"

These charges will be addressed individually, in turn, and in detail below. As we will see, each of these charges, when examined, turns out to be either outright false, or else presented in a misleading manner. The intention of this essay is to demonstrate to the reader the authenticity of the Johannine Comma through textual, historical, grammatical, and logical means.

The Evidence from the Greek Manuscripts

In the minds of the modernistic textual critics, the Greek manuscript evidence is **THE** center of debate, to the seeming exclusion of nearly everything else. This allows them to focus the discussion surrounding this verse around the one portion of the evidence which would, on its face, seem to support their contentions about the Comma. However, the treatment which the Greek evidence is given suffers from being only partially presented, and often misrepresented, by the Critical Text side of the debate.

The most common statements made by Critical Text supporters about the paucity of evidence for the Comma in the Greek manuscripts sound similar to Metzger's below, who says it,

"...is absent from every known Greek manuscript except eight."⁷

Metzger then proceeds to list seven of these manuscripts (#61, #88m, #221m, #429, #636m, #918, #2318), excluding the eighth manuscript, Ottobonianus (#629), a 14th-century manuscript which is listed in the United Bible Society's 4th edition of the Greek New Testament.⁸ Now, there are over 5300 extant Greek New Testament

⁷ B. Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 647

⁸ *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Edition, Eds. K. Aland, B. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, and C. Martini

manuscripts, so this would on its face seem to be an overwhelming argument against the authenticity of the Johannine Comma.

However, the numbers game is reduced somewhat when we note that only 501 of these manuscripts contain the book of I John, chapter 5. Further, we see that Metzger and the UBS have slighted the actual number of Greek manuscripts which contain the verse. In addition to the ones listed above, D.A. Waite is reported to have identified manuscripts #634 and Omega 110 as containing the Comma, and Holland notes that the Comma appears in the margin of #635.⁹ Recently, Daniel Wallace reported that the Comma appears in the margin of #177, though he observes that the addition was made very late, at least after 1551. Finally, there are at least two Greek lectionaries (early didactic texts usually containing copious scriptural citations) in which the Comma appears (Lectionaries #60, dated to 1021 AD, and #173, dated to the 10th century).

ὅτι· ἡρῶν ἡσὼν οἱ μαρτυ-

ροῦντ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι, πῦρ, λόγος, καὶ πᾶν ἄγιον·

καὶ οὗτοι οἱ ἴσθι, ἐν ἧσιν· καὶ ἡρῶν ἡσὼν οἱ μαρτυ-

ροῦντ ἐν τῇ γῆ, πᾶν ὕδωρ, καὶ αἷμα, ἢ τὴν

μαρτυρίαν τῶν ἁγίων λαμβανόμεν, ἢ μαρτυρία τοῦ

θεοῦ ἡρῶν ἡσὼν, ὅτι αἷμα ἐστὶν ἢ μαρτυρία τὸν θεοῦ, ὅτι·

μεμαρτύρηκε περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.

Facsimile of a portion of I John containing the Comma, as it appears in Codex Montfortianus, a 13th century miniscule (reproduced from T.H. Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 241, Robert Carter and Bros.:NY, 1854).

Much is made of the appearance of the Comma in the margins of several of these manuscripts (specifically, #88, #221, #635, and #636), and the standard interpretation of this occurrence is that later scribes emended the texts with the Comma in the margin. From there, it is said, the emendation made its way into the actual text of manuscripts which were subsequently copied. While this is indeed a plausible contention, it is not conclusive by any means. Equally plausible is the suggestion that the verse appears in the margin as a response by scribes who had seen the verse in other texts, noted its lacking in the manuscript before them, and corrected the text according to what they had previously seen. Other historical and textual evidences which will be discussed below lend credit to this idea, as they demonstrate in a concrete manner that Comma-containing Greek manuscripts existed much further back than the present Greek manuscript evidence would seem to indicate, and thus the later manuscripts containing the Comma in their margins cannot automatically be attributed to emendation from the Latin Vulgate.

Further, it ought to be evident that the weight of numbers on the side of Comma-deleted manuscripts at least partially nullifies the "oldest-is-best" arguments which the Critical Text crowd loves to advance in favor of the Alexandrian texts. While it is true that only around 8-10 of the Greek texts contain the Comma, and most of these are late,

⁹ T. Holland, *Crowned With Glory*, p. 164

the vast bulk of those without the Comma are also late, by the standards of the United Bible Society. Around 95% of these Comma-deleted texts are "late" by these standards (post-9th century). Further, at least three other marginal references date to a relatively early period, these being #221m (10th century), #635m (11th century), and #88m (12th century). This could suggest that during that 10th-12th century period, there were still other Comma-bearing manuscripts floating around which provided a source for the addition of this verse to these Greek texts. At any rate, the oldest of these marginal references predates all but eight of the non-Comma bearing texts, and is roughly contemporaneous with another one (#1739). Hence, we see that the "oldest-is-best" argument, which really does not have the merit which its proponents suggest anyway, is less than decisive here, since we see that both types have the bulk of their witness in the late manuscripts, and each has a much smaller portion of its witness from the early texts, though admittedly, the Comma-deleted tradition (in the Greek tradition) has older extant witness by several centuries. As we will see below, when the evidence of the Latin witness is taken into account, this gap shrinks significantly, and when the witness of early Christian writers and other historical evidences is considered, the gap disappears entirely.

Another objection to the Johannine Comma which is brought up in the realm of the Greek manuscript evidence is that the various manuscripts containing the fully trinitarian reading for I John 5:7-8 differ among themselves in their rendering of the verse. However, this should in no wise denigrate the authenticity of the Comma for these readings. After all, the Critical Text supporters swear to the superiority of the Alexandrian texts such as Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, because of their antiquity (from the 4th century). Yet, as Pickering reports, these two manuscripts (from the "oldest-and-best" set, mind you) differ from each other in reading, with many very major divergences, over 3000 times in the four Gospels alone.¹⁰ Thus, if one wants to ignore the witness of certain manuscripts because they vary to some degree within themselves on the reading of a verse, then one would be forced to throw the very basis of the Critical Text set out the window.

In addition, the very fact that there **are** variant readings for this verse among the Greek manuscripts which contain the Comma lends an air of authenticity to the presence of the Comma in these texts. The Comma in these texts underwent the same sort of natural process of scribal errors that we see in many other verses in multiple transmission of texts, which yielded slightly different wordings. It would seem less authentic if the verse appeared exactly the same, both in marginal and intratextual witnesses, as this would lend credence to the notion of emendation to bring these texts into conformity with the recension of the medieval Roman Catholic Vulgate.

Concerning the Alexandrian manuscripts, the hypocrisy of the Critical Text's standard-bearers can be seen when their treatment of I John 5:7 is contrasted with their dealings with other passages which find scant textual support. Using the relative paucity of manuscripts containing the Comma as an excuse (and ignoring the vast amount of external evidences to be discussed below), they will confidently claim that this renders

¹⁰ W. N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, p. 51; citing H.C. Hoskier, *Codex B and it's Allies*, Vol. 2, p. 1

the Comma "illegitimate", "inauthentic", or just a plain "fraud". But yet, we see that the Critical Text supporters include minority readings into the new versions of the Bible, whereas the King James' *Textus Receptus* reading is in the (often large) majority of the pertinent manuscripts. Holland points out that in I John 1:7, the Critical Texts change the *Iesou Christou* of the Received Text to *Iesou*, yet this change is supported in only 24 out of 501 manuscripts of I John which contain this passage. Likewise, I John 2:20, the *panta* of the Received Text is changed to *pantes*, on the strength of just 12 out of 501 manuscripts containing this verse.¹¹ The manuscripts involved do not give a clear "old versus new" breakdown either, and the deciding factor usually breaks down to whether or not the hopelessly corrupt Alexandrian codices contain them.

Many other passages are accepted into the Critical Texts on even less authority than those above. In Matthew 11:19, the phrase "wisdom is justified of her children" is altered to "wisdom is justified of her works" on the emendation of a mere three Greek mss., versus an overwhelming host of both Greek and external evidences for the *Textus Receptus* reading. Likewise, the word "for" is removed from James 4:14 on the basis of four Greek mss. and scant external evidence, versus (again) an overwhelming testimony of both Greek and external witness. Similarly, the final clause of Romans 8:24 is changed from "for why does anyone hope for what he sees" to "for who hopes for what he sees", all on the basis of **two** Greek manuscripts, versus the almost unified witness of the Greek mss. body along with the witness of practically all other ancient versions except the Syriac (which gives several differing readings, many of which don't agree with the Critical Text). In each of these examples, the basis for the emendation is upon the nearly (or sometimes completely) sole witness of some of the favored Alexandrian texts, as opposed to the much larger and nearly as antique witness of the majority texts, which are almost always supported by the great body of external witness from other ancient versions.

The point to mentioning this is not to cry foul over the inclusion of readings with minority Greek support into a textual edition. Rather, just the opposite is intended. These examples demonstrate that even modernistic textual critics recognize that there are other weighting factors besides mere number of manuscripts that should be used to determine whether a reading belongs in the text. They recognize this, though their particular weighting factors are based upon the spurious premise that "oldest always means best" - a premise which is difficult to agree with when the oldest texts are demonstrably inconsistent both within their manuscript body and with the bulk of extant Greek manuscript tradition at large.¹² Yes, the weight of antiquity for a reading should be accounted of, but at the same time, this must be balanced with evidence that presents itself from other quarters.

Further, there is evidence from patristic testimony concerning the alteration of manuscripts of the book of I John by some scribes, even specifically mentioning the

¹¹ Holland, *loc. cit.*

¹² See Burgon, where he states, "The impurity of the Texts exhibited by Codices B and Aleph is not a matter of opinion, but a matter of fact", in J. Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, p. 315; see also Pickering, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-9

removal of this very verse. Beginning with a general example of this sort of purposeful corruption of copies of the book of I John, around 485 AD Socrates Scholasticus wrote,

"The fact is, the cause-less alarm he manifested on this subject just exposed his extreme ignorance: for being a man of natural fluency as a speaker, he was considered well educated, but in reality he was disgracefully illiterate. In fact he contemned the drudgery of an accurate examination of the ancient expositors: and, puffed up with his readiness of expression, he did not give his attention to the ancients, but thought himself the greatest of all. Now he was evidently unacquainted with the fact that in the First Catholic epistle of John it was written in the ancient copies, 'Every spirit that separates Jesus, is not of God.' The mutilation of this passage is attributable to those who desired to separate the Divine nature from the human economy: or to use the very language of the early interpreters, some persons have corrupted this epistle, aiming at 'separating the manhood of Christ from his Deity.' But the humanity is united to the Divinity in the Saviour, so as to constitute not two persons but one only."¹³

In the passage above, Socrates is expounding upon the error of the bishop Nestorus, who was accused of teaching that the divinity and humanity of Christ were separated by the economy of His incarnation. The text which he refers to as having been present in "the ancient copies" is I John 4:2-3, and he clearly notes that there were those who initiated textual corruption in this very epistle so as to weaken or eliminate the witness to the deity of Christ. Much the same sort of heretical theology would approve of the removal of a trinitarian reading of I John 5:7-8, a passage which specifically links the Father, the Word, and the Spirit as being in unity.

Even more to the point is the testimony of Jerome on this matter. Jerome was commissioned by Damasus, the bishop of Rome, to prepare a standard Latin translation of the Holy Scriptures to replace the former Latin translations which had grown in multiplicity by the late 4th century. Jerome did this, utilizing the Greek as his source for revision of the Latin New Testament for his Vulgate¹⁴. At one point in his work, Jerome noted that the trinitarian reading of I John 5:7 was being removed from Greek manuscripts which he had come across, a point which he specifically mentions. Speaking of the testimony of these verses he writes,

"Just as these are properly understood and so translated faithfully by interpreters into Latin without leaving ambiguity for the readers nor [allowing] the variety of genres to conflict, especially in that text where we read the unity of the trinity is placed in the first letter of John, where much error has occurred at the hands of unfaithful translators contrary to the truth of faith, who have kept just the three

¹³ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Bk. 7, Ch. 32

¹⁴ Jerome's original commissioning by Damasus took place around 380 AD, but Jerome did not finish his revision of the general epistles until around 395-400 AD. Some try to claim that the revision of these epistles was not the work of Jerome, but instead of some other unnamed reviser, but there is no real evidence that this is the case, and that position is rejected in this article, as well as by the majority of the relevant scholarship.

words water, blood and spirit in this edition omitting mention of Father, Word and Spirit in which especially the catholic faith is strengthened and the unity of substance of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is attested."¹⁵

Thus, we see that Jerome specifically mentioned that this verse was being removed from Greek manuscripts in his day. Logically, we can suppose that for him to recognize the absence of this verse as an omission from the Greek texts, he must have been aware of Greek manuscripts which contained the Comma in the time of his preparation of the Vulgate for the general epistles (395-400 AD), a time much earlier than is suggested by the dating of currently known Comma-containing Greek mss.

When we really sit down and think about it, it becomes logically apparent that as far as antiquity is concerned, **within** the body of Greek manuscript evidence, age is not really that important of a factor. The oldest witness (Sinaiticus) is still almost 300 years after the fact. Further, the oldest witnesses (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, Bezae Cantabrigensis, Ephraemi Rescriptus) are all widely variant from each other and not as trustworthy as they are claimed to be. These texts are in the small minority, and are also grossly variant from the dominant majority of the Greek manuscripts, the Byzantine tradition. The Alexandrian texts are accorded a special status by most textual critics which they do not deserve. Their readings, though often variant and out of step with each other, as well as with the older papyri, are looked upon subjectively as the "best" manuscripts without any qualification being given other than that they are "older". This is in spite of their localized nature (Egypt and Palestine) and evidence of Gnostic and Docetic corruptions. However, the very antiquity of the Alexandrian texts combined with their excellent condition suggest that they were not used by early Christians, likely because of their errors, and thus did not suffer the effects of constant use and reuse, followed by the destruction of ragged manuscripts which was routinely carried out by early Christians as a way of honoring the texts. Further, despite the Alexandrians' antiquity, the texts available which are often older (though in far worse shape), in the form of the various papyri, often show as much if not more affinity for the Byzantine textual type as they do the Alexandrian type exemplified by Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. This again suggests that the Alexandrian textual type, represented by a small minority of the total Greek witness, cannot claim precedence over the Byzantine type, as is generally held.

But what of the lack of this verse in the Byzantine text-type which forms the vast majority of the Greek texts? We must understand that, in the very least, conditions were favorable for the Greek witness to have been altered by Arian heretics in the 4th century who sought to expunge the overt Trinitarian witness of the Comma. The paucity of the witness to the Comma in the eastern Greek witness, in fact, can be at least partially explained on this basis. For much of the 4th century, the eastern portion of the Empire (specifically Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt, where the most prominent Greek manuscripts used in textual criticism were copied and kept) were heavily influenced by Arianism. After his condemnation, Arius fled to Syria-Palestine and succeeded in converting a large

¹⁵ Jerome, *Prologue to the Canonical Epistles*, from the text of the prologue appended to Codex Fuldensis, Trans. T. Caldwell

number of both the common masses and influential church leaders to Arianism (such as Eusebius of Nicomedia, who had previously sheltered Arius during his trials, and Eusebius of Caesarea). This region was also under the control of the Emperor Constantius II (r. 317-361, r. solely 337-361), who was also an Arian. It was during this time that several orthodox bishops such as Eustathius of Antioch, as well as the noted defender of trinitarianism, Athanasius, were banished, and the eastern churches handed over to Arian leadership (for instance, Arius' old protector, Eusebius of Nicomedia, was given the patriarchate of Alexandria, in Egypt). Hence, for nearly half a century - including the time period in which Eusebius of Caesarea was performing his textual critical work on the Greek New Testament which was eventually affirmed and "codified" in the textual line leading to manuscripts such as Sinaiticus - the major Greek-speaking regions of the Empire were under Arian control.

Eusebius of Caesarea was the man chosen by Constantine to prepare the "official" copies of the Scriptures that were to be circulated throughout the Empire. Eusebius was likely responsible for the removal of the Comma from the Greek manuscripts which he promulgated for Constantine (Eusebius was in the very least sympathetic to Arianism)¹⁶, which formed the basis for such texts as Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. It is very well possible that even the Byzantine tradition was corrupted by the Arian heretics of the East in the 4th-5th centuries, and that the Eastern Emperors such as Constantius who came under the Arian heresy consciously sought to remove the Comma from the witness of the Greek scriptures of the East. This could answer the question why the Comma is missing from the bulk of the Greek manuscript tradition, but yet is evidenced in other traditions such as those of the Old Latin and the Syriac. Likewise, the systematic process of expunging this verse from new copies of this epistle is suggested by Jerome's complaint, mentioned above. This is especially suggestive when we note that Jerome resided in Bethlehem during the period in which he revised the general epistles for his Vulgate. Bethlehem, of course, is in the region where the Arian domination occurred, and Jerome revised the epistles not very long after orthodox control of the churches was re-established. It is not surprising, then, that he reports the textual corruption represented by the removal of the Comma.

Scott observes this possibility when he states,

"...somewhat more likely that the Arians or Anti-Trinitarians [in the early church] should silently omit in their copies a testimony which was so decisive against them, or that it should be left out by the mistake of some ancient transcriber, than that the Trinitarians should directly forge and insert it. The Trinitarian, in fact, would be deprived only of one argument out of very many, with which he might attempt the conviction of his opponent, if this text were wholly regarded as spurious; for his doctrine is supported by other Scriptures: but if this testimony were admitted as the unerring word of GOD; all the ingenuity and diligence of

¹⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea drafted a creed for the Arian party at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, in "which every term of honor and dignity, except the oneness of substance, was attributed to Our Lord" - <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01707c.htm>

opponents, would scarcely suffice to explain it away, or to avoid the inference, which must naturally be drawn from it."¹⁷

We should note that, in general, it is much easier for scribes to simply make omissions from a text being transcribed than it is to add new readings in. Pickering makes this point in a general reference to the Byzantine, or "Traditional," text, where he summarizes the results of a study of scribal tendencies in several of the early Alexandrian papyri,

"The tables have been turned. Here is a clear statistical demonstration that interpolations are *not* 'many times more numerous' than omissions. Omission is more common as an unintentional error than addition, and P⁴⁵ shows that with some scribes omissions were *deliberate* and extensive. Is it mere coincidence that Aleph and B were probably made in the same area as P⁴⁵ and exhibit similar characteristics? In any case, the 'fullness' of the Traditional Text, rather than a proof of inferiority, emerges as a point in its favor."¹⁸

Hence, it is much more likely, in the case at hand, that scribes would have omitted the Comma, rather than that they added it. This is especially the case when we note, as Colwell did, that many omissions were deliberate, and that the historical circumstances in the East during the time of Arian supremacy would have facilitated such a deliberate corruption of the text of I John. Even in the case of accidental deletions, these can become "deliberate" if the omission is preferred, and therefore perpetuated, by the powers that be.

Essentially, the point to this brief history lesson is that we can understand that for nearly half a century, the large bulk of Christianity in the Greek-speaking eastern portion of the Empire - including two of the most prominent and prestigious patriarchates - were firmly in the hands of Arianism. A man of Arian sympathies was charged with preparing the "official" version of the Greek New Testament, by order of Emperor Constantine (the father of Constantius II, and who himself also had Arian leanings), which was finished during the Arian son's reign. It is perfectly reasonable to suggest that, given these circumstances, the strongly trinitarian witness of the Comma would have been removed from the "official" and subsequent copies of the Greek New Testament. Likewise, given the endemic Arian domination of the region for so long, it is quite appropriate to ask whether the influence of Arianism might have encouraged copyists to omit the overtly trinitarian comma from their subsequent copies of the New Testament - copies which would form the body of "parent" manuscripts from which most subsequent daughter manuscripts would come.

In light of this, it is interesting to note that the official Greek New Testament used by the Greek-speaking Eastern Orthodox churches, the edition authorized by the

¹⁷ T. Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (1812), note on I John 5:7-8

¹⁸ Pickering, *op. cit.*, p. 83; the scribal study he references is E.C. Colwell, "Scribal Habits in Early Papyri: A Study in the Corruption of the Text," *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, Ed. J.P. Hyatt, pp. 370-89, spec. 367-7.

Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1904, yet contains the Comma as it appears in the *Textus Receptus*. This edition was prepared via the collation of around 20 Byzantine-type New Testament manuscripts at the monastery on Mt. Athos, and represented a textual set firmly in line with the Byzantine tradition. This suggests that the Byzantine text-type Greek witness, while missing the Comma in the texts originating or copied in the Arian-influenced regions of the East, may not have been as similarly corrupted in the non-Arian parts of the East, such as Greece and the area around Constantinople.

All in all, it is patently illegitimate to consider inconsistent Greek codices from the 4th-5th centuries to be of greater weight than the clear and explicit testimony to the verse from patristics such as Tertullian and Cyprian, who quite **clearly** were referring to this verse in their writings from two centuries before (as will be seen below), as well as other versions based off of the early Greek witness. While the internal Greek testimony of antiquity may not be all that important for reasons given above, the antiquity of ALL the evidence which we have is, including the text of these patristics and the other early versions. Preservation of scripture does not demand that every reading be preserved in the original language of inspiration - only that the reading be preserved, such as the Comma was in the Old Latin/Vulgate Latin and Waldensian vernaculars which were based off the Old Latin.

What about Erasmus' Promise?

It is not uncommon to find opponents of the Johannine Comma who will uncritically bandy about the claim that Erasmus, a 16th century textual scholar whose Greek New Testament editions were included among the sources of the Received Text and hence the King James, added the Comma to his third edition of 1522 based upon the criticism of certain colleagues. It is said that he was criticized for omitting the Comma from his first two editions, and responded to accusations of heresy by stating that he would include the Comma if even one Greek manuscript could be found which contained the verse. Then, according to legend, the powers that be dashed off a copy of the Greek New Testament, complete with Comma, and brought it to Erasmus with the ink still wet and dripping. He thus included the Comma on this "evidence".

However popular this bedtime story may be with opponents of the Received Text, it has little support in fact. The story has been firmly dismissed by two of the top Erastian scholars in the world. Dr. H.J. de Jong, Dean of Theology at Leiden University, has this to say,

"It has no foundation in Erasmus' work. Consequently it is highly improbable that he included the difficult passage because he considered himself bound by any such promise."¹⁹

Dr. Roland Bainton, of Yale University, has also demonstrated that Erasmus did not include the Comma because of any such promise, but instead he concluded "...the

¹⁹ From M. Maynard, *A History of the Debate Over 1 John 5:7-8*, p. 265

verse was in the Vulgate and must therefore have been in the Greek text used by Jerome."²⁰ As it turns out, Erasmus was almost assuredly correct in this belief, as will be shown below. Further, this story is even admitted as apocryphal by the standard-bearer of contemporary textual criticism, Bruce Metzger.²¹

One piece of disinformation which has served to bolster the belief that Erasmus relied on little to no Greek manuscript support is the continued misrepresentation of the Greek witness which Erasmus himself said that he used. Modern scholars will claim that Erasmus included the Comma on the basis of the Codex Montfortianus, said to be the hastily prepared Greek codex which was produced to give him the pretext for including the verse. Erasmus states that he included the Comma into his third edition based upon the witness of the Codex Britannicus, a separate Greek codex. Scholars will attempt to equate Britannicus with Montfortianus, but this is not legitimate, as the rendering of I John 5:7-8 in Erasmus' edition is different from that found in Montfortianus.²² Further, Montfortianus itself is not likely to be the supposed ringer which the Erasmus' Promise myth suggests, as it is dated by scholars such as Adam Clarke to the middle of the 13th century.²³



Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), a man about whom Critical Texters love to tell fabulous stories.

Ultimately, Erasmus himself had access to at least five Greek manuscripts upon which he based his later editions of the Greek New Testament, one of them dating back to the 11th century.²⁴ His successor in this work, Robert Estienne (aka Stephanus), ultimately had access to 19 Greek manuscripts with which to edit his volumes, and the edition of 1550 became the major source of the King James New Testament translation. Theodore Beza added yet more ancient manuscripts to those used by Stephens, and prepared five editions based upon these added collations. Finally, the Elzevirs in 1624 produced a Greek codex which they called the *Textus Receptus* and which, despite its more extensive editing and use of more ancient manuscripts than Stephens had access to,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 252

²¹ B. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 291

²² C. Forster, *A New Plea for the Authenticity of the Text of the Three Heavenly Witnesses*, p. 126

²³ A. Clark, *The New Testament: A Commentary and Critical Notes*, Vol. 6, pp. 928-9

²⁴ E.F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 198

was almost completely the same as the text of Stephens, differing only in a few spellings, word order, accent marks, and other minor changes.

The Evidence from Other Versions

Whereas the evidence for the existence of the Johannine Comma in the Greek tradition is weak and the evidence often circumstantial, the same can not be said for the verse in other ancient versions. The trinitarian rendering of I John 5:7-8 finds much firmer attestation in other versions tracing clear back to the middle of the 2nd century.

To begin, we must note the presence of this verse in the Old Latin version. The Old Latin (called such because it predates the Vulgate of Jerome) dates to around the middle of the 2nd century.²⁵ As such, the Old Latin version is an important foundation for examination of evidence concerning the Comma. This is recognized because, due to its antiquity, it must necessarily have been translated from "young" Greek manuscripts, i.e. those which had not undergone much transmission, possibly even first generation copies. When speaking of the "Old Latin", it must be understood that the version falls into two broad families, the *African* and *European*. Both give evidence of the Comma, but the European is of greater weight due to its greater endurance, which yields more evidence for examination.

The African Old Latin textual tradition exists for us today as little more than quotations in the works of early Latin patristic writers, having been displaced by later Latin editions, primarily the Vulgate. However, this was the Latin version which we find used by such men as Tertullian and Cyprian, both of whom were North African authors who either quote or strongly allude to the Johannine Comma in certain of their writings, as will be examined below in greater detail.

The European branch of the Old Latin yields much more interesting information. We note that, in antiquity, it was viewed by Augustine as being a much purer text than the multiplicity of other Latin texts which abounded and which had necessitated the codification of the Vulgate version. Augustine says of the European, or more specifically, the Italic, texts,

"Now among translations themselves the Italian is to be preferred to the others, for it keeps closer to the words without prejudice to clearness of expression."²⁶

There are not many extant Old Latin manuscripts which contain I John 5. The few that do, however, contain the Comma. Other textual witnesses to this chapter in the Old Latin (both African and European) also support the presence of the Comma. Codex Legionensis, dating to the mid-7th century, has the Comma. The *Speculum*, attributed to Augustine, but more likely assignable to the second quarter of the 5th century, which is a collection of Scripture citations containing primarily Old Latin readings, also contains the

²⁵ See F.H.A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to New Testament Criticism*, Vol. 2, pp. 42-3; H.S. Miller, *General Biblical Introduction*, p. 236

²⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Bk. 2, Ch. 15

Comma. Likewise, the Freisingensia fragmenta (aka Fragmenta Monacensia), another fragment of Old Latin readings dated to around 500 AD, contains the comma, located after v. 8. Around the middle of the 4th century, the Spanish bishop Idacius Clarus cites the verse, this being prior to the supposed insertion of the verse by Priscillian (which will be dealt with in detail below). Maynard cites Codex Perpinianus, which has Old Latin readings in Acts and the Catholic Epistles, as more early evidence for the Comma in the Old Latin tradition. This manuscript, itself dating to around 1250 AD, is thought to have been copied from an earlier manuscript dating to the 6th century.²⁷ Perpinianus contains several Old Latin readings not found in the Greek Majority or Critical texts, but which are found in the Latin traditions.

Although not directly and fully quoted, the *Treatise on Rebaptism*, an anonymous Latin work attributed to a 4th century monk named Ursinus, but which likely dates earlier to the third century when the re-baptism controversy was in full bloom in the North African churches, includes language which both alludes to the verse, and suggests the Comma's existence in the earlier Greek. The passage in question appears at the end of the treatise,

"Moreover, I think also that we have not unsuitably set in order the teaching of the Apostle John, who says that "three bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three are one."²⁸

Coxe says regarding this odd juxtaposition of the language from verses 7 and 8,

"It is noteworthy that he quotes the Latin formula, and not that (*ei to en eisin*) of the Greek. Now, the Latin, repeating (in verse 8) the formula (*hi tres unum sunt*) which belongs to the dubious protasis, is so far evidence that such a verse existed in the old Greek. It is important that the Latin is not conformed to the received formula of the apodosis, 'the three agree in one.'"²⁹

Essentially, because this Latin treatise repeats in verse 8 the language of verse 7, Coxe is saying that this provides evidence for "these three are one", the signal statement of verse 7, as appearing in the Greek from whence the Latin used it (whether from a Latin manuscript or by *in situ* translation from Greek to Latin). Basically, we see the anonymous author of this treatise telescoping verses 7 and 8 together, but he must have known of verse 7 to have obtained the unique language "these three are one".

It is also known that in his revision of the Latin to produce the Vulgate, while making much use of the Alexandrian type of Greek manuscripts, Jerome concurrently tried to remain true to the readings of the Old Latin texts.³⁰ One would expect from this information, combined with Jerome's explicit statement of corruption concerning the

²⁷ M. Maynard, in a presentation to the 13th annual meeting of the Dean Burgon Society in 1991, as cited in "In Defense of the Johannine Comma", *The Burning Bush*, Vol. 3, no. 1, Jan. 1997

²⁸ *Treatise on Re-Baptism*, para. 19

²⁹ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5, Ed. A.C. Coxe, *Anonymous Treatise on Re-Baptism*, note #61

³⁰ F. Kenyon, *The Story of the Bible*, p.110

Greek manuscripts of his day due to the removal of the Comma, that it was the Old Latin reading which led to the inclusion of the full I John 5:7 into his Vulgate. Even though we possess no actual copies of the Vulgate from within a century after its production, we can easily surmise both from the aforementioned statement of Jerome (indicating his support for the verse), as well as the secondary witness of several works which cite I John 5:7-8 and which likely used the Vulgate Latin from during that "missing" century³¹, that the Comma appeared in his original Vulgate edition. Among the appearances that the Comma makes in Latin writers during this period are citations by Vigilius Tapensis in his anti-Arian work *Contra Varimadum* (450 AD), Victor Vitensis (485 AD), the Council of Carthage in its condemnation of the Arian heresy (485 AD), and Fulgentius (527 AD).³² The Comma continued to be used by later Latin writers who would have been working with the Vulgate before it was rescinded by Alcuin around 800 AD, such as Cassiodorus (570 AD) and Pseudo-Athanasius (6th century). The Comma was also included the *Ordo Romanus*, an ancient order of ritual established in the Roman churches around the first half of the 8th century. By this point, the Vulgate was universally accepted as the official version of the Catholic religion, and clearly witnesses to the presence of the Comma in the Vulgate of Jerome as it existed prior to the revisions of Alcuin.

Modernistic textual critics will argue that the verse was not found in Jerome's original Vulgate, but was inserted at a later date by early medieval scribes from other Latin versions. The basis for this claim rests primarily upon the fact that the earliest existing Vulgate manuscript (Codex Fuldensis, 546 AD) does not contain the verse. From this, it is extrapolated that it did not exist in Jerome's original revision. This sort of reasoning is utterly astounding. From one manuscript which does not contain the verse, a conclusion is drawn about the possible content of the dozens, hundreds, maybe even thousands of other Vulgate manuscripts which might have existed contemporaneously with Fuldensis. And this conclusion is that the verse was not in the Vulgate, even though Jerome himself speaks of the verse being omitted by "unfaithful translators" (indicating that he himself thought the verse was genuine, as well as in the Greek). As for Fuldensis itself, it is a manuscript of "official" style that follows very closely to the form of Jerome's revision. Fuldensis also contains the previously mentioned prologue in which Jerome complained of scribes removing the Comma. Hence, we see the odd case in which the text itself omits the Comma, while being prefaced by a prologue in which the omission of the Comma is considered a textual corruption by its author. This lends weight to the view that Fuldensis, far from being an accurate, "oldest is best" manuscript, in fact represents a corrupted textual line from which the Comma was removed. Again,

³¹ While there was initial resistance to the introduction of the Vulgate in the Latin West, by the latter part of the 5th century, the Vulgate had become generally accepted (see, e.g., H. Lusseau and M. Collomb, *Manuel d'Etudes Bibliques*, Vol. 1, p. 456). Even Augustine (d. 430) grew to become sympathetic to the revision towards the end of his life, though he did not use it publicly (see F. Stummer, *Einführung in die Lateinische Bibel: Ein Handbuch für Vorlesungen und Selbstunterricht*, p. 126). Hence, while we cannot be absolutely certain that any citation from this period is taken from Jerome's Vulgate, its original commissioning by Damasus, and its increasing popularity toward the end of the 5th and into the 6th centuries increases the likelihood that the Vulgate was the Latin version used by these early Catholic sources.

³² The UBS-3 textual apparatus listed John Cassian (435 AD) as a writer who cited the Comma. I have not been able to confirm this citation, and UBS-4 has since removed Cassian from its listing.

we should note that several sources likely used the Vulgate – and *definitely* cited the Comma – prior to Fuldensis.

We should also note that even after its suppression in the East near the end of the 4th century, Arianism remained an important factor in the Latin West, the region in which the bulk of early Vulgate manuscripts would have been copied. It would, again, not be surprising if this Arian influence resulted in the removal of the Comma from the Vulgate textual line that produced the Codices Fuldensis and Amiatinus.

As an aside, the claim was made by early textual critics in the 17th century that Jerome's Prologue was a forgery dating to the Middle Ages, added so as to give a "credible" witness to the Comma based upon Jerome's reputation. The discovery in the 1880s that the Prologue existed as part of Codex Fuldensis (546 AD) removed much of the credibility upon which this argument was based. Nevertheless, less knowledgeable Critical Text supporters will still try to advance the "forgery argument." Jerome's comments in the Prologue most likely represent the older testimony, and Fuldensis is merely another Comma-deleted Arian corruption, one in which the transcriber failed to "correct" Jerome's comments in the Prologue, thereby introducing the discord between prologue and text. Further, we should note that Latin writers such as Cassiodorus and Fulgentius (both of whom inarguably witness to the Comma in the early-to-mid 6th century), testify to the authenticity of the Prologue in a roundabout fashion because they quite clearly were using Vulgate Bibles that had the Comma in them, at almost exactly the same time that Codex Fuldensis - with the Prologue - was copied.

Continuing on, we should further ask, what of all the Latin sources using the Vulgate who cite the verse between Jerome and the copying of Fuldensis, such as Victor Vitensis and Fulgentius? Where did they get the verse from? Indeed, where did the Council of Carthage, an official church council which would likely have been using Jerome's Latin translation, get the verse to cite as evidence against the Arians? Further, if the Comma was a spurious addition to the text, why didn't the Arian opponents of the Carthaginian council jump all over the council's use of a verse that was known to be spuriously or recently added? If the verse had only recently appeared as a gloss in the margins of a copy of the Scripture owned by a heretic (Priscillian), do we really think it is very likely that the verse would suddenly become accepted as scripture to the point that it is cited by several authors and a council of the churches, all within just a couple of generations of its supposed insertion? The lack of logic of the textual critic's suppositions is mind-boggling.

Indeed, out of the 8000+ extant Vulgate manuscripts, including many of not much lesser antiquity than Fuldensis, only a handful do not contain the Comma. Even naturalistic textual critics admit that 49 out of 50 Vulgate manuscripts have the verse. We should note that verse does appear in the text of Codex Wizanburgensis, a Vulgate manuscript dating to the mid-8th century.³³ This is important because this manuscript is

³³ Dabney cites this manuscript as a very early *Greek* witness to the Comma - see *Discussions of Robert Lewis Dabney*, "The Doctrinal Various Readings of the New Testament Greek," *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, Vol. 1 (1891), p. 381. It first appeared in the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, April 1871.

not much younger than Fuldensis, and is roughly contemporaneous with Codex Amiatinus, another early Vulgate manuscript that lacks the Comma, and is used by textual critics to attack the presence of the Comma in the Vulgate tradition at an early date. Clearly, the presence of the Comma finds nearly as old of a witness in the Vulgate as does its lack.

Another body of evidence which testifies to the existence of the Comma in the Old Latin is found in the textual tradition passed down through the Waldensians.

The origin of the Waldensians, also known as *Vallenses* or *Vaudois* (names meaning "of the valleys"), is a topic which has been the subject of much investigation and dispute. The Waldenses themselves claimed very ancient, even Apostolic, descent. Mitchell relates the belief that the Waldenses originated among the Christians of Rome who were driven out of the city and into the hills by the persecutions of Nero.³⁴ Gilly notes the claim made among some of them to descent from the original missionary work of Irenaeus into the Subalpine regions of what are now northern Italy and southeastern France, generally known as the Piedmont.³⁵ Another tradition suggests the descent of the Waldenses from one Leo, a bishop living in the time of the Emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester I (314-335 AD). Leo, it is said, broke with the Pope over the growing secularization of Christianity and the avarice of Sylvester himself, and drew away the churches of the Piedmont region after him.³⁶ This claim is also supported by Neander.³⁷ A fourth view, also testifying to the extreme antiquity of the Waldenses, is supported by Faber himself. Faber notes that in the time of Jerome, a deacon named Vigilantius led a sect which was opposed to the veneration of saints and martyrs and to the many other superstitious practices creeping into the faith at that time. Jerome specifically attacked this "heresy" in his *Heironymus Adversus Vigilantius*, giving some geographic clues as to the location of this sect, which was called the Leonists. Faber notes that Jerome located this group in Northern Italy, "between the waves of the Adriatic and the Alps of King Cottius,"³⁸ in other words, the Piedmont. Faber then argues for the connection of the Leonists with the Waldenses on both geographical grounds and also from the fact that Jerome identifies Vigilantius' place of birth as a town near the Pyrenees named

This citation seems to arise from a speculated misunderstanding on Dabney's part relating to some textual citations from the 19th century philologist Karl Lachmann. While this is the most likely possibility, such an error on Dabney's part has not actually been proven, nor has it been adequately explained why a man of his tremendous erudition should have made such a seemingly simple mistake. The possibility always exists that Dabney was indeed referring to a Greek manuscript of this great antiquity, one which, for whatever reason, is not generally known nowadays. Bengel, on his part, lists Wizanbergensis (99) as a Vulgate ms. from the 8th century that contains the Comma (see J.A. Bengel, E. Bengel, J.C.F. Steudel, and A.R. Faucette, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, Vol. 5, p. 136, in the notes). Bengel's assertion about the words of the Comma that "All the old versions, as well as Greek MSS, reject them..." has since been shown to be quite false, though we should note that Bengel's information is very outdated. Oddly enough, despite his general agreement with the textual arguments, Bengel still maintained the genuineness of the Comma.

³⁴ A.W. Mitchell, *The Waldenses: Sketches of the Evangelical Christians of the Valleys of the Piedmont*, pp. 28-9

³⁵ W. Gilly, *Waldensian Researches*, p. 50

³⁶ G.S. Faber, *An Inquiry into the History and Theology of the Ancient Vallenses and Albigenses*, p. 275

³⁷ A. Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, Vol. 8, p. 352

³⁸ Faber, *op. cit.*, p. 293

Lugdunum Convenarum³⁹, also called Lyons (not the more famous and northerly Lyons), from whence came the name "Leonists". We should note that Faber's attempt to explain Vigilantius as a Leonist on the basis of his place of origin is not necessary. If indeed the followers of Leo were still around less than 75 years after his time (Vigilantius wrote his treatise against superstitions in 406 AD), then Vigilantius was most likely a member of this sect, or else was closely enough allied to it in thought, if not in fact, to be associated with it by Jerome.

None of these suggestions are necessarily mutually exclusive. That the Christians in Rome would have fled to the hills during the Neroan persecution is certainly plausible, both logically and geographically. Likewise, a different part of the Piedmont, and also Languedoc, could very well have been the object of missionary endeavors instigated by Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons. Likewise, the Leonists as they were called, might very well have been the group standing against corruptions in the faith in the 4th and 5th century. There could indeed have been "cross-pollination" between remnants and local bodies of these various groups in these early centuries. Whatever the origin of the Waldenses, it was almost uniformly understood throughout most of European history that they were an extremely old sect. The Roman Catholic inquisitors in the medieval period testified to its antiquity, men who would normally be expected to assert the newness of the Waldensian doctrines and faith as a means of more easily dismissing it to suppression. However, the Austrian inquisitor of the Diocese of Passau, around 1260 AD, noted the various views concerning their antiquity, and seems to indicate an acceptance of this claim to great age for the Waldensian groups.⁴⁰ He also refers to them as "Leonists", confirming that the link between these two groups extends beyond Faber's somewhat roundabout attempt. Likewise, the inquisitor Reinerius (~1250 AD) indicates the commonly-held belief that the Leonists were a sect older than the Manichaeans or Arians (thus putting them back well into the 4th century at least), and that they were said to have existed "from time immemorial."⁴¹

This view of the Waldensians' antiquity is not without its detractors. For example, Neff and Bender say,

"The tempting and romantic theory of apostolic succession from the apostles down to the Anabaptists through successive Old Evangelical groups, which has been very popular with those among Mennonites and Baptists, who feel the need of such an apostolic succession, always include the Waldenses as the last link before the Anabaptists. It has....no basis in fact."⁴²

Other writers echo this sort of view, and accept instead that the Waldensians, both in name and in doctrine, originated from Peter Waldo, a wealthy Lyon merchant who renounced his wealth and preached the way of poverty and humility, beginning around

³⁹ From Jerome, *Jerome Against Vigilantius*, Ch. 2

⁴⁰ See W. Preger, *Beitrage zur Geschichte der Waldesier*, pp. 6-8

⁴¹ Faber, *op. cit.*, pp. 281, 286-7

⁴² C. Neff and H.S. Bender, "Waldenses", *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, p. 876

1170.⁴³ While attractive to those who do not wish to accept an extreme age for the Waldenses, this view fails to explain why the inquisitors had to note the common opinion that the Waldenses were of great antiquity, older even than the Arians, and had been around for "time immemorial" (a statement hardly applicable to a group which only existed for eighty years). It is to be noted that most of the more recent scholars writing on the subject of the Waldensians are either Roman Catholics or liberal and compromising in theology, both of which are particularly predisposed to reject the view of Waldensian antiquity. However, we have already seen that contemporaries of the Waldensians during the times of the Inquisitions noted the common opinion that the Waldensians were an extremely ancient sect, which would not have been the widespread testimony if they had once recently originated as a distinct group. Further, many of those testifying about the Waldenses, even those who be counted as hostile witnesses, readily admitted the purity and honesty of the lives which the "heretics" led. It is unlikely that a people so noted for their piety and honesty would have been involved in a massive deception to invent for themselves an ancient pedigree.

Moreover, linguistic evidence among the Waldenses has been noted which serves to help confirm the great age of their groups. Raynouard perhaps has the most to say on this matter, having committed the most study to the early language used by the Waldensians and which is represented in the very antiquated *The Noble Lesson*, a Waldensian theological text dated to around 1100. He states,

"Une langue Romane primitive, idiome intermédiaire entre la décomposition de la langue des Romains et l'établissement d'un nouveau système grammatical: circonstance, qui atteste la haute antiquité de cet idiome dans le pays que ce peuple habitait."

("A primitive Romance language, an idiom intermediary between the breakdown of the language of the Romans and the establishment of a new grammatical system: circumstantially, this attests the high antiquity of this idiom in the country which this people inhabit.")⁴⁴

Isolated in their valleys in the Piedmont and Languedoc, the language which the Waldensians spoke, derived from the Latin which dominated since Roman days, had not changed enough to be considered anything more than merely intermediate between the old Latin and the new vernaculars. We see this intermediary language in use, for instance, in the documents containing the Oaths of Strassburg, a treaty of 842, which cemented the division of the Frankish empire of Charlemagne into three kingdoms, one for each of Charlemagne's sons. Owen notes that the treaty was written in three languages - Latin, Frankish (used in the eastern portion of the empire, approximately today's Germany), and in the *lingua romana* spoken in the Western portion⁴⁵, roughly today's France, Savoy, and the Piedmont, which was intermediary between Latin and the Old French which

⁴³ E.g., G. Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent*, p. 10, quoting Bernard Gui's statement on the subject from his *De Secta Valdensium*

⁴⁴ M. Raynouard, *Monumens de la Langue Romane*, p. 137

⁴⁵ F. Owen, *The Germanic People*, p. 114

gradually came into being around the 12th century. Owen also notes that the reason for the *lingua romana* in the western portion of the empire was that the Frankish invaders had mixed with the local population and gradually become submerged among the predominately Latin-speaking populace. The Franks first began their invasion of Gaul late in the 4th century, and had completed their conquest of the entire region by the beginning of the 6th. Thus, the linguistic evidence seems to indicate that the language of the inhabitants of the Waldensian areas, as shown by their ancient written records, stemmed from a source older than the 1170 AD given by Catholic scholars as a date for the start of the Waldensian sect. Instead, the Waldensians were thoroughly steeped in a linguistic tradition dating centuries earlier than the time of Peter Waldo.

Indeed, this slowness to change is also seen in the fact that the Waldenses retained the use of the Old Latin text, as opposed to the innovation of Jerome's Vulgate. Among the Waldensians, the Old Latin, or "Italick", type of text had been used in their liturgies and services for centuries.⁴⁶ Jacobus supports this thesis, stating that the Old Latin Bible was for 900 years the Bible of the Waldenses and other Western Christians who existed at various times outside the Roman Catholic religion.⁴⁷

Harkening back to the belief that at least some of the Waldensians traced back to the missionary work of Irenaeus, we note that there is some circumstantial evidence to support this. The writings of Irenaeus (who wrote in Greek) are noted for the affinities they sometimes show for the Italic Old Latin readings versus those appearing in the Greek tradition.⁴⁸ This suggests that Irenaeus, who would almost certainly have used Latin in his day to day ministrations as Gaul was a Latinized province, was familiar with and used the Old Latin Bible, probably the Italic form. Nolan also confirms both the antiquity of the "Italick" version likely used by Irenaeus and subsequently passed on to the churches of the Piedmont and southern Gaul, and its sequestration from the later Latin Vulgate appearing out of the apostate church of Rome,

"The author perceived, without any labor of inquiry, that it derives its names from that diocese, which has been termed the Italick, as contra-distinguished from the Roman. This is a supposition, which received a sufficient confirmation from the fact that the principal copies of that version have been preserved in that diocese, the metropolitan church of which was situated in Milan. The circumstance is at present mentioned, as the author thence formed a hope that some remains of the primitive Italick version might be found in the early translations made by the Waldenses, who were the lineal descendants of the Italick Church; and who have asserted their independence against the usurpations of the Church of Rome, and have ever enjoyed the free use of the Scriptures.

⁴⁶ P. Allix, *Ancient Churches of the Piedmont*, p. 37

⁴⁷ M. Jacobus, *Roman Catholic and Protestant Bibles Compared*, pp. 4, 200

⁴⁸ E.g. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Bk. 3, Ch. 20.4, note #399 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, Ed. A.C. Coxe, where Irenaeus' quotation from Habakkuk differs both from the Hebrew and from the LXX, most nearly approximating the Old Latin; also see Bk. 4, Ch. 9.2, note #109, where Irenaeus' quotation of I Cor. 4:4 is incorporated into Phil. 3:12 in a manner remarkably similar to the ancient Italic ms. St. Germain.

"In the search to which these considerations have led the author, his fondest expectations have been fully realized. It has furnished him with abundant proof on that point to which his inquiry was chiefly directed; as it has supplied him with an unequivocal testimony of a truly apostolical branch of the primitive church, that the celebrated text of the heavenly witnesses [1 John 5:7] was adopted in the version which prevailed in the Latin Church previously to the introduction of the modern Vulgate."⁴⁹

The Waldensian Bibles and manuscripts bear a consistent witness to the existence of the Johannine Comma throughout their continued Old Latin textual tradition, this being entirely outside of (and often in studied opposition to) the Vulgate Latin tradition of Roman Catholicism. We should also note at this point that the Old Latin used by the Waldenses would also have been spared from the ravaged of the Arians, which may explain why the testimony to the Comma in the Waldensian sources is so common, despite the lack of the verse in the "oldest and best" Vulgate codices, Fuldensis and Amiatinus.

Various medieval versions of the New Testament which were based on the Old Latin contain the Comma. On such text is the Tepl codex, a late 14th century Middle High German compilation.⁵⁰ The verse appears in the version of the Apostle's Creed used by the Waldenses and Albigenses in the 12th century. The Augsburg manuscript (~1350 AD), the oldest complete New Testament in Middle High German, has the verse, and is unusual in that it says "Son or the Word" in v. 7.⁵¹



A page from the Tepl Codex

⁴⁹ F. Nolan, *Integrity of the Greek Vulgate*, pp. xvii-xviii

⁵⁰ J. K. Elliot, "Old Latin MSS in NT Editions," *A Survey of Manuscripts Used in Editions of the Greek New Testament*, p. 280; also A. Merk lists the Tepl among the Old Latin related codices in his critical edition *Novum Testamentum: Graece et Latine*

⁵¹ Maynard, *op. cit.*

Though it is often touted that the Comma “does not appear in the Syriac,” the Syriac evidence is as yet inconclusive as far as the manuscripts are concerned. It is very misleading to claim that the witness from this version knows nothing of the Comma. The Syriac manuscripts which have been studied and collated, and upon which this claim is ultimately based, constitute a very small total of the witness available to this version. The claim rests on a total of five collations,⁵² each utilizing only a handful of manuscripts, with the number used across all these standing at around a dozen manuscripts at most. This is certainly not a very exhaustive sampling of the hundreds of available Syriac manuscripts, most of which have not been examined in any detail nor any results from examination being published. Thus, the evidence from the Syriac version of the Bible must be considered inconclusive until the fuller body of evidence is examined.

Even given what *has* been looked at from the Syriac texts so far, we can see that the claim that the Comma “does not appear in the Syriac” is in the very least rendered questionable on the basis of the existing manuscripts. There is evidence that the verse appeared in Syriac readings, and Jacob of Edessa, a Syriac Father, makes a reference to the verse around 700 AD.⁵³ The Syriac edition of Giles Gutbier from Hamburg 1664, produced from the collation of two Syriac manuscripts, contains the verse.

Further, there is evidence from the Armenian version that this verse may have either been found in the Syriac used to translate it in the early 5th century by Sahak Partev, the Catholicos of Armenia, or in the Greek which was used to revise and confirm the Armenian translation by the council of Ephesus in 431. The Comma was quoted in a synod of Sis, held in Armenia in 1303, which seems to be a positive indication of that verse's existence in the Armenian version at that date.

Some assert that the Armenian version was revised by the Armenian king Haitho II (1224-1270) according to the Vulgate, but this claim primarily rests upon the fact of the Synod of Sis' quotation, and thus is a claim based upon circular reasoning and is therefore to be dismissed. While there was interaction between the Crusaders and the Armenians in Cilician Armenia, there is no actual evidence that the Armenian version was revised to conform to the Latin Vulgate. Indeed, if any revision of the Armenian text took place during this period, it was by one Nerses of Lambron, who is believed by some to have revised the Armenian New Testament according to the *Greek* (not the Latin Vulgate) used by the Eastern Orthodox during the 12th century. However, it is not at all certain that Nerses actually carried out any such revision. Even if he did, and this revision resulted in the inclusion of the Comma at that time (again, another hypothetical

⁵² Maynard, *A History of the Debate Over I John 5:7-8*, pp. 15-6

⁵³ Anton Baumstark, a prominent scholar in the studies of Syriac and Eastern Christianity, observed this citation in his *Ein Syrisches Citat des Comma Johanneum*, appearing in the German journal *Oriens Christianus: Hefte für die Kunde des Christlichen Orients*, Part 2 (1902), pp. 440-1, noting its appearance in Jacob's *On the Holy Mysteries*. Brown mentions this citation in his discussion of the evidences for and against the Comma, attempting in a rather unconvincing manner to downplay its evidentiary value, see *The Anchor Bible: Epistles of John*, Ed. R.E. Brown, p. 778

assertion that is not substantiated by evidence), this would *still* place the Comma in the Greek witness long before modernistic textual critics say it “should” be.⁵⁴

At any rate, the first printed Armenian Bible, impressed at the behest of Bishop Uschan in 1666, contained the verse, and the newest version of the UBS text admits that it is found in some Armenian manuscripts. The first printed Georgian Bible, at Moscow in 1743, also contained the verse, and this edition was based upon "Georgian mss. which reflect an older type,"⁵⁵ suggesting the verse appeared in the older Armenian sources as well.

It should be noted also that Critical Text supporters often cite the Gothic translation of the New Testament as an early version that lacks the Comma. This claim is true - but deceptively so. The only testimonies to the Gothic New Testament that remain in existence (all dating to the 6th-7th centuries) are the Wulfila Bible, Codex Argenteus, the Codices Ambrosianus A-E, Codex Carolinus, Codex Gissensis, and the Fragmenta Pannonica. The Wulfila Bible contains only the Gospels and the Pauline epistles, as well as a few "skeireins" (Gothic biblical commentaries) on these portions. Argenteus contains portions of the four Gospels, while the Ambrosianian mss. contain portions of the Gospels and the Epistles (but not I John 5), as well as several skeireins (again, none on I John 5). Carolinus contains Romans 11-14, and Gissensis has fragments of Luke 23-24. Additionally, Codex Vaticanus Latinus 5750 is listed, though it contains only skeireins for the Gospels. None of these are known to contain I John 5, so therefore in a very technical sense it stands to reason that this version lacks the Johannine Comma. This is not, however, evidence that the Comma was *originally* lacking when this translation was made. At the present time, there is no way to speak to the issue either way, based on the evidences we currently possess.

The Evidence of the Patristic Authors

Another charge laid against the authenticity of the Johannine Comma is that it found no use among the early patristic writers of the Church until very late in the game. This is usually coupled with the claim that the verse was "added" by a careless scribe or an "orthodox" writer who wished to strengthen the trinitarian testimony of the Bible and found I John 5 to be a convenient place at which to do so. Typical of the sort of claim put forward by liberal, naturalistic critics and their compromising allies in the Critical Text movement is found below,

"The mention of the threefold witness suggested to Christian students of a later day the Three Persons of the Trinity. And so, some time in the fourth century or

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that at least one Armenianist observed that the text of the Armenian version in the general epistles has textual affinities with the Greek Codex Vaticanus (see Lyonnet in M.-J. Lagrange, *Critique Textuelle: La Critique Rationnelle*, p. 578, as cited by B. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations*, p. 168). This presents an interesting question – what if this is evidence that could suggest that even the *Alexandrian* text-type bore witness to the Comma, witness that was eliminated in the main, but preserved here?

⁵⁵ A. Vööbus, *Early Versions of the New Testament*, p. 206

toward the end of the third, a Spanish Christian (probably), who wrote in Latin, formed a corresponding sentence: "There are three who bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one." Perhaps he wrote this on the margin of his copy of 1 John and some later copyist thought it was part of the text, but in any case these words were quoted as part of the Latin Bible in Spain at least as early as 380 A.D., *on earth* being added to v. 8 to balance the insertion. This "gloss" (as such insertions are called) spread, and finally became so universal in Latin-speaking Christianity that it was even translated into Greek and was added to a few very late Greek MSS. From these it found its way into printed editions, and so into the first English versions. But R.V. and A.S.V. rightly omit all mention of it, as it has no claim to be considered John's words."⁵⁶

So the Johannine Comma slipped into the Bible as the result of some careless scribe's glossing of a study note? This assertion, of course, is based on simple supposition, without any factual basis whatsoever. Further, the claim for the appearance of this verse in the Latin Bible at or around 380 AD is also quite incorrect, for reasons that will be seen below.

However, at this point, I believe it is appropriate to address yet another myth about the history of the Comma, one that continues to be bandied about by Critical Text supporters (including some cited above), despite having been decisively refuted for over a century. This myth concerns the supposed insertion of the Comma into the text by a heretical Spanish bishop named Priscillian, who quoted the verse in his *Liber Apologeticus* around 380 AD. This argument was systematically propounded by Karl Künstle in his monograph entitled *Das Comma Johanneum auf seine Herkunft Untersucht*, in which he attempted to show that the Comma first appeared in Priscillian's writings in support of his Sabellian-like view of the Trinity.⁵⁷ As we would expect, critical scholarship at the time jumped all over Künstle's article, proclaiming that it settled the debate once and for all.⁵⁸

Yet, Künstle's theory was refuted not long after its publication. In 1909, Ernest-Charles Babut, following several other critics of Künstle's assertions, pointed out several very basic and fundamental problems with Künstle's arguments that relegated the "Priscillian authorship" theory of the Comma to the ashbin.⁵⁹ The primary fault with Künstle's arguments is that nobody at the time, not even Priscillian's mortal enemies (and that is meant literally, he was eventually executed for his heresy), ever thought to accuse

⁵⁶ *The Abingdon Bible Commentary: First John*, Ed. B.S. Easton, p. 1357

⁵⁷ K. Künstle, *Das Comma Johanneum auf seine Herkunft Untersucht* (1905), pp. 45-57

⁵⁸ E.g., T.J. Shahan's review of Künstle's monograph in *The Catholic University Bulletin*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan. 1906), pp. 93-4; W.L. Sullivan, "The Three Heavenly Witnesses," *The New York Review*, Vol. 2 (1907), pp. 175-88, esp. 184-5; etc.

⁵⁹ These can be found in E.-Ch. Babut, *Priscillien et le Priscillianisme*, pp. 267ff; cited by A.E. Brooke, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures Old and New Testaments: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (1912), p. 160; other contemporary scholars who refuted Künstle's theory include Eugène Manganot, *Le Comma Johanneum* (1907) and Adolf Jülicher, *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen*, Vol. 167 (1905), pp. 930-5, both reported by J. Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, p. 586

him of having interpolated anything into the text of I John. Further, as a heretic (and especially one who was supposedly introducing the verse to support a version of Sabellianism) no orthodox Catholic writer would have touched the supposed interpolation with a ten-foot pole, yet many entirely orthodox writers from the fifth century onward used the Comma regularly in their writings, with no hint of its supposedly heretical source, even during the centuries in which Priscillian's heresy continued to be a headache for Spanish Catholic authorities.

Simply put, despite Künstle's assertions, nobody back then seems to have had any idea that Priscillian inserted nearly two entire verses pertaining to one of the most contentious doctrines around into the Bible. It is unreasonable to suggest that Priscillian's enemies would have almost immediately accepted false verses that he himself created, and then used them in their own church councils and writings. It is much more reasonable to simply accept that both Priscillian and the orthodox writers of that era had the Comma in their Bibles.

So we see that Priscillian was not, in fact, the originator of the Johannine Comma. Is it really true, however, that the verse did not find use before Priscillian, as Critical Text supporters routinely assert? An examination of the evidence from the patristic writers of the early churches falsifies the anti-Comma claims.

To begin, we must look to Athenagorus, a 2nd-century Greek writer (~177 AD). In his *Plea for the Christians*, Athenagorus addresses two Roman Emperors, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, seeking from them toleration for Christians within the Empire. As part of his effort, he lays out for them several key points of doctrine, one of which is the view of God as a Trinity consisting of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. While not directly quoting the Comma, Athenagorus' language certainly seems to reflect a knowledge and use of the verse as part of his explanation on the Trinity. In explaining the exact relationship of the Son to the Father, Athenagorus states,

"Nor let any one think it ridiculous that God should have a Son. For though the poets, in their fictions, represent the gods as no better than men, our mode of thinking is not the same as theirs, concerning either God the Father or the Son. But the Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one. And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason of the Father is the Son of God."⁶⁰

His use of the term *Logos* (Word) to describe the Son, is a uniquely Johannine presentation of Jesus Christ. Likewise is the presentation of the Father and the Son as being one (John 10:30, 17:11,22). And whereas John 10:30 is a very explicit passage demonstrating the unity of the Father and the Son, it doesn't speak to the Trinity. However, Athenagorus continues on to clear this matter up through his statement,

⁶⁰ Athenagorus, *Plea for the Christians*, Ch. 10

"The Holy Spirit Himself also, which operates in the prophets, we assert to be an effluence of God, flowing from Him, and returning back again like a beam of the sun. Who, then, would not be astonished to hear men who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who declare both their **power in union and their distinction in order**, called atheists?"⁶¹

Hence, Athenagorus connects the Father, the Son (whom he had previously referred to as "the Logos", the Word), and the Holy Spirit, stating both their union and their **distinction in order**. The only portion of Scripture where these two points are juxtaposed in such a manner is I John 5:7. That Athenagorus likely had this verse in mind is suggested by his prior usage of the term "Logos", which is not used in John 10:30, and hence would not be the source of this term in connection with the unity of the Son and the Father. Further, we should note that the development of more intricate definitions of the Trinity that would rely upon the distinction of the Persons in their order of procession should not be anachronized back onto Athenagorus, for these precise theological definitions and discussions arose much later. When Athenagorus describes the "power in union and their distinction in order," the most logical conclusion is that he has I John 5:7, rather than Augustine or Hilary (obviously!), in mind.

Though Athenagorus' usage is not definite, we next find a much more definite use of this verse by Tertullian around 200 AD. In his apologetic work *Against Praxeas*, He makes the statement concerning the Trinity,

"Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. These Three are one essence, not one Person, as it is said, 'I and my Father are One,' in respect of unity of substance not singularity of number."⁶²

While Tertullian here quotes John 10:30 so as to elucidate the point he makes about the unity of essence, and not of number, among the Persons of the Godhead, his language concerning all three Persons is strikingly particular to that found in I John 5:7. He quotes "these three are", and then clarifies that the "one" is a one of substance and essence, not person. Quite clearly, this is a reference to the Comma. What is important to keep in mind, also, is that *Against Praxeas* is a work specifically designed to explain and defend the doctrine of the Trinity against Sabellianism, which is why Tertullian takes pains to note the unity is one of *essence* and not of *person*. Thus, it's use nearly a century and a half before the Trinitarian controversies (during which the supposed silence of the patristics on the verse is said to suggest that they did not know of the verse) to defend the doctrine of the Trinity is remarkable in itself, as it shows that the verse DID find witness and was employed on this very subject.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, Ch. 25



Tertullian of Carthage (ca. 160 – ca. 220 AD)

Some have argued, of course, that Tertullian was not speaking of I John 5:7, because this would upset a great number of Critical presuppositions about the verse. Souter, for instance, gives us his opinion that Tertullian's statement is referring to I John 5:8 and the unity is that of the three earthly witnesses.⁶³ This argument hardly seems plausible, however, since we note that at least two of the three earthly witnesses (the water and the blood) are not persons, and hence are not what Tertullian was referring to when he said that the connection of the witnesses produces three coherent persons. Further, the earthly witnesses are not said in the Scripture to be one, but to **agree in one**, again casting grave doubt on the idea that they could be the three who are one in essence of which Tertullian writes. The more logical position is to simply accept that this is in all likelihood a reference to the Comma, and move on.

The reason that Critical Text supporters are so loath to admit that this language used by Tertullian is in fact referring to I John 5:7 is that admitting this would destroy the precarious foundation upon which they've built their theories concerning the "introduction of the Comma into the text". Remember, the typical line is that the Comma originated at or around the time of Priscillian in 380 AD (and some still claim he *is* the source, despite this obvious falsehood having been debunked for a century). To find a patristic writer from 200 AD alluding to the verse would turn this claim on its head (as would the next citation, by Cyprian). More particularly to Tertullian, the reference to this verse gives a serious blow to the claim that this verse did not originally exist in the Old Latin. Tertullian likely had access to the Old Latin manuscripts which were then being promulgated in North Africa. Further, the chance that these manuscripts had been corrupted by his time is much less (being only in existence roughly 30 years) than it was much later when we see Augustine referring to the "multiplicity of Latin witnesses". To

⁶³ A. Souter, *Tertullian: Against Praxeas*, p. 125

find the verse even alluded to by Tertullian indicates that it appeared in the very early Old Latin tradition, and not just the European or Italian, but also the African. Further, from what was the Old Latin translated? From the Greek. Scholars debate whether Tertullian used an Old Latin manuscript, or whether he just read the Greek and translated *in situ* into Latin. Either way, however, we should see that the testimony for the Comma extended back even to the Greek (whether through direct reading or as it came out in translation) of the late 2nd century. This period of time is also before the so-called Trinitarian controversies, and much of the supposed impetus for the patristics to add the verse as an interpolation is removed, lending increased authenticity to its reading here. Modernistic textual criticism simply **cannot** accede to any of this, and thus, has to continue to propagate the fantasy that "Tertullian probably didn't quote the verse" even though anyone with their eyes open in either English or in Latin can see that he "probably did."

The next witness for the Comma is Cyprian, another North African bishop, who specifically cites the verse on or around 250 AD. He writes,

"He who breaks the peace and the concord of Christ, does so in opposition to Christ; he who gathereth elsewhere than in the Church, scatters the Church of Christ. The Lord says, 'I and the Father are one;' **and again it is written of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, 'And these three are one.'**"⁶⁴

This is a very clear quotation of I John 5:7, using language that superbly demonstrates the existence of that verse, around 130 years before Priscillian cites it. The critics who attempt to challenge the reality of this being a quotation of the Comma are merely allowing their predisposition against the verse to overtake their reasoning faculties. Cyprian also alludes to the unique construction of the Comma in one of his personal letters.⁶⁵ Some have argued per Facundus (a 6th century African bishop) that Cyprian is referring to the eighth verse in this passage. Again, this makes no sense, as Cyprian explicitly refers to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and says that they *are* one. His use of "Son" instead of "Word" does not get around the more telling use of "these three are one," and is likely more an artifact of Cyprian's mental process at the time (subconsciously substituting "Son" for "Word") than it is of his having a Comma-deleted manuscript. There is no language in this passage either stating that they *agree* in one, nor any that refers to the three earthly witnesses. Scrivener, himself no supporter of the Comma, sums it up when he argues that it makes the most sense to simply accept that this is a reference to the Comma, and leave it at that.⁶⁶

Other scholars have likewise acknowledged that Cyprian cited the Comma. In the 19th century, Bennett observed that Cyprian quotes the Comma, and dismisses the

⁶⁴ Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, Ch. 6

⁶⁵ Cyprian, *Epistle 72, To Jubaianus*, para. 12

⁶⁶ See Scrivener, *op. cit.*, p. 405; Coxe also notes Scrivener's position – and the tendency on the part of critics to contort the evidence to try to deny that Cyprian knew the verse – when he writes, "And Scrivener decides that 'it is surely safer and more candid to admit that Cyprian read it in his copies, than to resort to,' etc. **the usual explainings away.**" See Coxe, *op. cit.*, p. 418.

argument that Cyprian was really presenting an allegorical interpretation of v. 8.⁶⁷ In more modern times, Elowsky, following Maynard, accepts that Cyprian genuinely cited the Comma,⁶⁸ and Gallicet likewise observes that Cyprian's quotation of the Comma is difficult to doubt.⁶⁹ Peiper states the case exquisitely, when he noted,

"Cyprian is quoting John 10:30. And he immediately adds: '*Et iterum de Patre et Fillo et Spiritu Sancto scriptum est: "Et tres unum sunt"*' ("and again it is written of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost: 'And the Three are One'") Now, those who assert that Cyprian is here not quoting the words 1 John 5:7, are obliged to show that the words of Cyprian: '*Et tres unum sunt*' applied to the three Persons of the Trinity, are found elsewhere in the Scriptures than 1 John 5. Griesbach counters that Cyprian is here not quoting from Scripture, but giving his own allegorical interpretation of the three witnesses on earth. "The Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one." That will hardly do. Cyprian states distinctly that he is quoting Bible passages, not only in the words: 'I and the Father are one,' but also in the words: 'And again it is written of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.' **These are, in our opinion, the objective facts.**"⁷⁰

Indeed, it seems fair to observe that those who comment on the matter, and who do not have a particular textual axe to grind, readily acknowledge that Cyprian really, truly did cite the Johannine Comma. It is only when the *a priori* prejudices of a writer interfere, that Cyprian's quotation becomes "unlikely." As an example of this, observe Sadler's statement concerning the question of Cyprian's citation,

"If there had been evidence that the early MSS, and Fathers knew the text of the three heavenly witnesses, there would not have been the slightest doubt but that Cyprian here cites the original text; but the absence of all evidence for it till three centuries later shows that in Cyprian's copy there must have been an interpolation..."⁷¹

Essentially, the argument Sadler is making is that, because we already "know" that the Comma didn't appear until centuries after Cyprian, the very clear citation by Cyprian (which, on its merit alone, would be accepted "without the slightest doubt") *must* therefore be an "interpolation." Why? Because that's what the "accepted" interpretation demands – evidence contrary to the Critical Text dogma of the inauthenticity of the Comma must be explained away and ignored. This sort of argumentation employed by modernistic textual critics is simple intellectual dishonesty. Instead of trying to "explain away" evidence, following Scrivener in accepting Cyprian's citation of the Comma seems to be the best path to follow. Certainly, our interpretation of later evidences, both pro and contra the Comma, should begin from the virtually certain historical fact (as seen from Tertullian and Cyprian) that some manuscripts in use in the churches around 200-

⁶⁷ J. Bennett, *The Theology of the Early Christian Church* (1855), p. 94

⁶⁸ J.C. Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, IVa, John 1-10*, p. 359, note # 37

⁶⁹ E. Gallicet, *Cipriano di Cartagine: La Chiesa*, p. 206, note # 12

⁷⁰ F.A.O. Peiper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Trans. T. Engelder, Vol. 1, pp. 340-1; emphasis mine

⁷¹ M.F. Sadler, *The General Epistles of Ss. James, Peter, John, and Jude* (1895), p. 252, note #1

250 AD, whether Old Latin or the Greek from which the Old Latin was derived, had the heavenly witnesses in their texts.

At this point, we should make a comment about the corroborative nature of these witnesses in the Latin. From Tertullian onward, we see several early Latin witnesses to the Johannine Comma. These witnesses, all located in North Africa, do not exist in a vacuum. While Tertullian's witness from *Against Praxeus* is less clear, the fact that Cyprian clearly cites the verse, in the same geographical area, a mere five decades later, and makes it significantly more likely that Tertullian did, indeed, have this verse in mind when he used the particular language that he did. So likewise does the testimony of the *Treatise on Rebaptism*, mentioned earlier, the text of which also dates to this same general time frame and concerns a doctrinal controversy that took place in this specific geographical area. Cyprian is explicitly corroborated, further, by the fact that Fulgentius, the bishop of Ruspe in North Africa around the turn of the 6th century, both cited the verse in his own writings, *and* pointedly argued in his treatise against the Arians that Cyprian had specifically cited the Heavenly Witnesses. All of these evidences work together synergistically to shown that the Johannine Comma was recognized in the Latin Bibles of North Africa, both before and after the Vulgate revision was made.

Further witness from the 4th century is provided by Idacius Clarus in Spain, who cited it around 350 AD.⁷² The testimony of Idacius Clarus is doubly important, for not only does his citation of the verse precede the use of the Comma by Priscillian (demonstrating *prima facie* that Priscillian could not have been the “originator” of the Comma), but we must remember that Idacius Clarus was one of Priscillian’s foremost opponents in the controversies surrounding the latter’s Sabellian-like teachings. It is extremely unlikely that he, of all people, would have used this verse if Priscillian were known or suspected to have inserted the Comma into the biblical text.

The next to rely upon I John 5:7 in his work is Athanasius, the great (*Greek*) defender of the orthodox faith in the first half of the fourth century. Gill observes that Athanasius, around 350 AD, cited the verse in his writing against the Arians.⁷³ A clear citation of the Comma is also found in the *Synopsis*, also know as the *Dialogue between an Athanasian and an Arian*, attributable to Athanasius. Critics have attempted to dismiss the *Dialogue* as spurious, largely on the basis of stylistic arguments (i.e. the style of the *Dialogue* is not consistent with Athanasius' other writings). For example, one early critic to make this argument was the 18th century classics scholar Richard Porson. However, Charles Forster⁷⁴ refuted this line of argument by showing that the style and type of citation employed in the *Dialogue* is entirely consistent with that which appear in other works of Athanasius that are accepted as genuine by all. Additionally, David Martin (who believed that one of Athanasius' contemporaries was the author) writing in 1772, observed that the *Dialogue* itself speaks of the Emperor Constantine in the present tense,

⁷² J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina*, Vol. 62, Col. 359

⁷³ See John Gill's *Exposition of the Bible*, comments on I John 5:7, where he states that Athanasius cites the verse in his *Contr. Arium*.

⁷⁴ Forster, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-63

as ruling with his son Constantius, which would argue for a date of composition in the first half of the 4th century.⁷⁵

Hence, there is no real reason to accept the arguments that the *Dialogue* is spurious or late - a position which appears to exist for no other reason than to try to get around the evidence testifying to the authenticity of the Comma. Further, as Forster points out, even if the *Dialogue* were attributable to one Maximus, writing in the 7th century, as some revisionists allege, this would *still* clearly demonstrate the existence of the Comma in the *Greek* witness at an extremely early date, which destroys the claims of critics that the Comma only appeared in Greek at a very late date.

It is only after all of this prior witness that we find Priscillian citing the Comma in I John 5:7, this around 380 AD. So much for the claim that it crept in as a gloss in the text at the end of the 4th century, having first been "discovered" or "invented" by Priscillian.

Yet another line of evidence points to the likely early appearance of the Comma in the Greek witness. Forster noted that the Comma was cited three times by Vigilius Tapensis (a Latin North African writer who was earlier observed to have used the verse in another work) in a treatise on the Trinity, dating to 490-500, which he published under Athanasius' name.⁷⁶ As Forster pointed out, Vigilius wrote this treatise while he was in exile in Constantinople because of the Vandal occupation of North Africa. Vigilius' treatise, especially since it was published under the name of one of the most famous Eastern churchmen and from the central point of Eastern Christianity, was intended to be an appeal to the Eastern (Greek) portion of the Christian world. As such, it is highly unlikely that Vigilius would appeal to a verse multiple times, and attribute it to such a famous name, if this verse were lacking in the Greek New Testament at the time and were known or suspected to be a false quotation. That he could have done so and not been immediately caught would be incredible. Therefore, it stands to reason that, Latin writer that he may have been, when writing in Greek for a Greek audience under the name of a famous Greek theologian, the fact that his citation of the Johannine Comma went completely unchallenged strongly suggests that this is because at least some Greek textual witness of the day contained the disputed passage, despite the possible depredations of the Arians.

It is possible that Augustine himself was aware of the verse (~390 AD), due to his interpretive language employed in exegeting I John 5:8. Augustine says,

"I would not have thee mistake that place in the epistle of John the apostle where he saith, 'There are three witnesses: the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three are one.' Lest haply thou say that the Spirit and the water and the blood are diverse substances, and yet it is said, 'the three are one:' for this cause I have admonished thee, that thou mistake not the matter. For these are mystical expressions, in which the point always to be considered is, not what the actual things are, but what they denote as signs: since they are signs of things, and what

⁷⁵ See D. Martin, *The Genuineness of the Text of the First Epistle of Saint John*, Chap. v., V. 7, pp. 137-8

⁷⁶ Forster, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-4

they are in their essence is one thing, what they are in their signification another. If then we understand the things signified, we do find these things to be of one substance. Thus, if we should say, the rock and the water are one, meaning by the Rock, Christ; by the water, the Holy Ghost: who doubts that rock and water are two different substances? yet because Christ and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same nature, therefore when one says, the rock and the water are one, this can be rightly taken in this behalf, that these two things of which the nature is diverse, are signs of other things of which the nature is one. Three things then we know to have issued from the Body of the Lord when He hung upon the tree: first, the spirit: of which it is written, 'And He bowed the head and gave up the spirit.' then, as His side was pierced by the spear, 'blood and water.' Which three things if we look at as they are in themselves, they are in substance several and distinct, and therefore they are not one. **But if we will inquire into the things signified I by these, there not unreasonably comes into our thoughts the Trinity itself, which is the One, Only, True, Supreme God, Father and Son and Holy Ghost, of whom it could most truly be said, 'There are Three Witnesses, and the Three are One:'** so that by the term Spirit we should understand God the Father to be signified; as indeed it was concerning the worshipping of Him that the Lord was speaking, when He said, "God is a Spirit:" by the term, blood, the Son; because 'the Word was made flesh:' and by the term water, the Holy Ghost; as, when Jesus spake of the water which He would give to them that thirst, the evangelist saith, 'But this said He of the Spirit which they that believed on Him were to receive.' Moreover, that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are 'Witnesses,' who that believes the Gospel can doubt, when the Son saith, 'I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me, He beareth witness of me.' Where, though the Holy Ghost is not mentioned, yet He is not to be thought separated from them. Howbeit neither concerning the Spirit hath He kept silence elsewhere, and that He too is a witness hath been sufficiently and openly shown. For in promising Him He said, 'He shall bear witness of me.' **These are the 'Three Witnesses, and the Three are One, because of one substance.** But whereas, the signs by which they were signified came forth from the Body of the Lord, herein they figured the Church preaching the Trinity, that it hath one and the same nature: since these Three in threefold manner signified are One, and the Church that preacheth them is the Body of Christ. In this manner then the three things by which they are signified came out from the Body: of the Lord: like as from the Body of the Lord sounded forth the command to 'baptize the nations in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.' 'In the name:' not, In the names: **for 'these Three are One,'** and One God is these Three. And if in any other way this depth of mystery which we read in John's epistle can be expounded and understood agreeably with the Catholic faith, which neither confounds nor divides the Trinity, neither believes the substances diverse nor denies that the persons are three, it is on no account to be rejected. For whenever in Holy Scriptures in order to exercise the minds of the faithful any thing is put darkly, it is to be joyfully welcomed if it can be in many ways but not unwisely expounded."⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Augustine, *Against Maximinium*, Bk. 2, Ch. 22.3

Given the full statement made by Augustine, it is difficult **not** to see that he knew of the Johannine Comma and was alluding to it during the course of his exposition above. Though it is claimed that Augustine's focus on "the water, the blood, and the spirit" indicates that he did not know of verse 7, this is an unwarranted assumption. His language and construction clearly demonstrates a knowledge of verse 7, as does his repeated reference to these three witnesses being of one substance, something which would not be derivative from the statement about the water, blood, and spirit made in verse 8. Augustine focuses on the things listed in verse 8 because of his exegetical methodology - he appears to be trying to reconcile the witnesses in verse 8 with those in verse 7, and is taking an allegorical approach to doing so. Indeed, it is hard to see from where Augustine could have drawn his allegorical parallelism of the Father with the spirit in verse 8, unless he had verse 7, for verse 6 clearly refers to the Spirit as a person of the Godhead, not a thing, and there is little reason to suppose that Augustine would have confuted the persons of the Father and the Spirit, especially as his whole passage is designed, in part, to argue against those who would confound and unite into one personality the Godhead. Clearly, Augustine has in mind the parallel order of the Father in verse 7 and the Spirit in verse 8.

One last patristic writer, this one a Greek, provides some circumstantial evidence for the Comma being native to the early Greek manuscript tradition. Gregory of Nazianzus, in addressing certain objections from Greek opponents concerning the unity of the Godhead, says this,

"What about John then, when in his Catholic Epistle he says that there are Three that bear witness, the Spirit and the Water and the Blood? Do you think he is talking nonsense? First, because he has ventured to reckon under one numeral things which are not consubstantial, though you say this ought to be done only in the case of things which are consubstantial. For who would assert that these are consubstantial? **Secondly, because he has not been consistent in the way he has happened upon his terms; for after using Three in the masculine gender he adds three words which are neuter, contrary to the definitions and laws which you and your grammarians have laid down.** For what is the difference between putting a masculine Three first, and then adding One and One and One in the neuter, or after a masculine One and One and One to use the Three not in the masculine but in the neuter, which you yourself disclaim in the case of Deity...."⁷⁸

While it seems that Gregory himself does not know of the Comma, it is also apparent that those with whom he was discussing the passage recognized a grammatical error that is present in the text if the Comma is not included. Knittel notes both the objection to verse 8 offered by Gregory's opponents on the basis of the grammatical solecism introduced by the deletion of the Comma, as well as Gregory's attempt to get around the problem by an effected indifference to the problem. He writes,

"And what says the venerable Greek bishop in reply? He says, "It is indifferent to me whether we say *treis* or *tria*, in speaking of things of the neuter gender. Yet,

⁷⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 32, The Fifth Theological Oration, On the Holy Spirit*, para. 19

surely, the Linguists of his day would scarcely have conceded that point to him. Neither Gregory, nor any other Greek, as far as I know, confirms this rule by their style of writing. Neither can we attempt to call the *treis marturountes*, a Hellenism: at least, St. John has distinctly shewn, that he cannot be liable to such an imputation in the present instance; nor, indeed, throughout his First Epistle."⁷⁹

Knittel's argument is simply that despite Gregory's indifference, no knowledgeable Greek writer in that day would *actually* have believed the argument Gregory makes. Gregory's indifference appears to be more intended to turn aside an argument from his opponents through denigration, rather than by an appeal to reason or fact. Gregory himself, as well as other Greek writers (including John himself), did not make the sort of grammatical error introduced into the Johannine text by the deletion of the Comma. Far from being discovered "lately" by Robert Dabney (as certain Critical Text supporters on various internet forums have tried to claim), recognition of the grammatical difficulty for the Critical text supporter in this passage was recognized by a Greek-speaking patristic writer over sixteen centuries ago, though he apparently did not know what to make of it.

Matters of Grammar and Consistency

The grammatical difficulty which is found in this passage if the Comma is deleted rests on a rule of Greek grammar (as well as in many other languages) which demands gender agreement among parts of a sentence. If the Comma is left in place, the masculine article, participle, and number in the apodosis of verse 7 then agree with the two masculine (Father, Word) and one neuter (Spirit) nouns in the protasis. This agreement is made by means of the principle of attraction, a rule of Greek syntax by which a masculine noun in a series of nouns within the same clause determines, or "attracts" to itself, the gender for the series as a whole. This gender of the clause, usually subordinate, agrees with the predicate of the preceding clause within that sentence. Hence, the two masculine nouns in the protasis force the whole list to take on a *de facto* masculine gender, which is then in agreement with the masculine predicate in the apodosis. The problem for those who support the deletion of the Comma is that, if the Comma does not appear in the text, then the masculine predicate in the apodosis of verse 7 is mated with the three neuter nouns (water, blood, spirit) found in verse 8 (which then becomes the subordinate clause), a serious grammatical error. The problem disappears with the Comma in place, because not only does verse 7 agree throughout in gender via the attraction principle, but the mating of the three neuter nouns in verse 8 with the masculine *treis marturountes* (three witnesses) in verse 8 is then also explained by the attraction principle by, as Dabney also says,

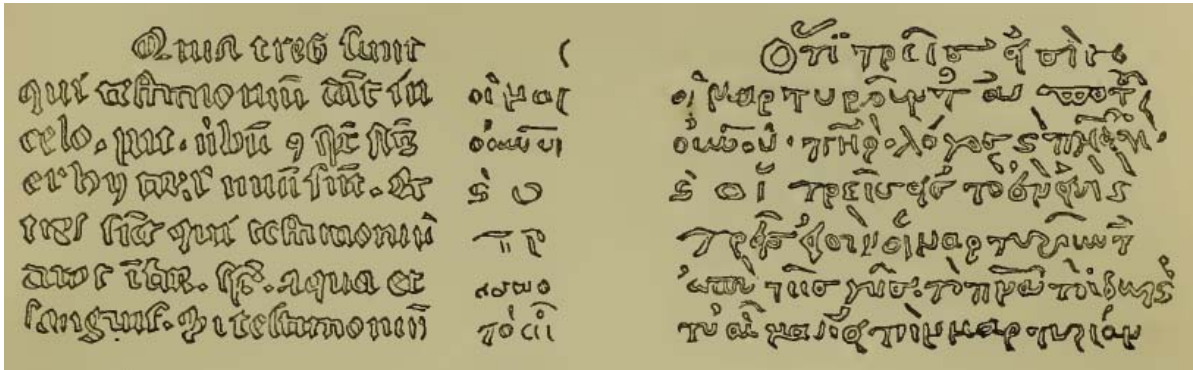
"...the fact that the Pneuma, the leading noun of this second group, and next to the adjectives, has just had a species of masculineness superinduced upon it by its previous position in the masculine group."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ F.A. Knittel, *New Criticisms on the Celebrated Text 1 John v.7*, Ed. Trans. W.A. Evanson, p. 208

⁸⁰ Dabney, *op. cit.*, p. 378

Hence, this close proximity and the fact that the *pneuma* is a carryover noun from the previous list of nouns and was made *de facto* masculine by the Power of Attraction rule in verse 7, cause the nouns in verse 8 to be treated as masculine as well. This all falls apart if the Comma is deleted, as there are no truly masculine nouns (or a masculinated *pneuma*) from verse 7 directing the attraction phenomenon.⁸¹

It may reasonably be suggested that the reason Gregory's opponents (and Gregory himself) did not know of the Comma directly was because of the efforts by Arians in their time to expunge the verse from the copies of Scripture which either fell into their hands, or were of their own manufacture. As there are no other known grammatical solecisms in the Greek Gospel and Epistles of John, it seems more reasonable to suppose that the existence here of such an egregious grammatical error (one noted by *Greek* speakers, remember) is due to the deletion of the relevant portion of the Scripture, rather than an original unique error in John's inspired writing.



The Comma in Greek and Latin, without which there is a grammatical error in the Greek text of John's epistle.

We should note, again for emphasis, that Robert Dabney was not the modern "inventor" of the grammatical problem seen in I John 5:7-8 when the Comma is deleted. As early as 1740, Bengel noted the grammatical issue involved.⁸² Also in the 18th century, we see the testimony to the grammatical problem introduced by the removal of the Comma, as it was recognized by Eugenius Bulgarus, Archbishop of Cherson, a high official and scholar in the eastern *Greek* church. Knittel reproduces Eugenius' discussion of the solecism as it was reported by a Professor Matthaei in Moscow, in 1780, who

⁸¹ It should be noted here that some critics of the Comma do not seem to fully understand the Power of Attraction rule. For instance, see G.G. Thomason, "Scripture, Authentic and Fabricated," which can be found online [here](#). Thomason argues (pp. 49-50) that the grammatical arguments against the exclusion of the Comma are refuted by the presence of the exact same solecism if the Comma is *included*, whereby the masculine *treis...marturoentes en te ge* in v. 8 is mismatched with the three neuter earthly witnesses. He either ignores or is unaware of the fact that the *pneuma* "attracts" a carried over masculineness (as Dabney and others pointed out) that allows this second list of three witnesses to then agree in gender with the masculine clause at the beginning of v. 8. Incidentally, Thomason's article also perpetuates the discredited "Erasmus' Promise" mythology, perhaps giving a hint to the seriousness of his investigations into this issue.

⁸² J.A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 808

included a letter from Eugenius in his own discussion of the passage.⁸³ A similar grammatical argument was advanced by Frederick Nolan in 1815.⁸⁴

In 1808, Middleton (who himself seems to have been unsure of the authenticity of the Comma) noted yet another grammatical problem with vv. 7-8 when verse 7 is missing.⁸⁵ In his discussion of the verses, he notes that the unusual and emphatic use of the article *to* before the *en* in v. 8, *if verse 7 were genuine*, would be easily understandable as referring back to the *en* in v. 7, and would be interpreted as the three witnesses in v. 8 agree with the *one thing* (the person and work of Christ) that was likewise agreed to by the three witnesses in v. 7. Without verse 7, the construction is odd, at best, and the emphatic reference assumed by such a use of the Greek is simply missing. Because Middleton viewed the Comma as an interpolation, he was at a loss to explain the use of this grammatical device in v. 8. If the Comma is genuine, however, this grammatical difficulty, like the previous one discussed, disappears.

Clearly, the grammatical issue introduced by the deletion of the Comma was not "invented" by Dabney, nor was it only noticed in recent times. In fact, those who observed the solecism in the text (whether or not they believed in the actual authenticity of the Comma) ultimately date all the way back to the early centuries of Christianity.

In addition to the grammatical problem, we should note that the deletion of the Comma also introduces a consistency problem with the interpretation of the contextual passage. The full passage, vv. 6-9, read as follows,

"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.*"

The text of the Comma is italicized. The problem lies in that if the Comma is removed, then the passage makes an irrelevant reference. The passage speaks of the "witness of men" and the "witness of God." We know that the record of the "Spirit, water, and blood" is the "witness of men" spoken of. At the beginning of the Johannine Gospel, John the Baptist testified of the Spirit's role as a witness to Christ,

"And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him." (John 1:32)

⁸³ See Knittel, *op. cit.*, pp. 206-8; interestingly, Knittel also notes where Gregory Nazianzus dealt with the grammatical issue.

⁸⁴ F. Nolan, *An Inquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate, or Received Text of the New Testament*, pp. 254-61, 564-5

⁸⁵ T.F. Middleton, *The Doctrine of the Greek Article Applied to the Criticism and Illustration of the New Testament*, pp. 441-3

Likewise, at the end of John's epistle, we see John's own testimony about the water and the blood,

"But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." (John 19:34-35)

In these cases, we see these things - the Spirit, the water, and the blood - being the object of man's (in this case, John's) testimony, as both passages *specifically* record. This seems especially cogent if, as some scholars have suggested, the epistle of I John was originally coupled with the Gospel of John, serving as a sort of "introduction" to the Gospel for John's readers. It would naturally follow that as they read the Gospel, his readers would see and understand the witness of man to the things concerning Christ and His ministry as John relates them.

The Gospel of John contains similar references to the "witness of God" as we saw for the "witness of men." In John 8:18, Jesus (whom John calls "the Word," if we will remember) says, "I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me." In John 15:26, it says, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me..." Hence, in John's Gospel, we see the three Persons of the Trinity each bearing witness to Jesus. If the Comma is removed, then where is the witness of God spoken of in the verse, a witness that most naturally refers to the "Father, Word, and Holy Ghost" who bear record in heaven in the parallel formation? It is not there, and verse 9 refers to....nothing. The parallelism between the Gospel and the Epistle is broken, and the local referent in v. 9 is muddled.

Why Did the Orthodox Writers Not Use This Verse in the "Trinitarian Controversies"?

One argument used by Critical Text supporters to suggest that the verse was not found in the Bible prior to the late 4th century rests upon the supposed lack of use of this verse, which should be a clear proof-text for the Trinity, by Christian apologists and other writers during many of the various doctrinal controversies surrounding the nature of the Godhead. The verse, it is said, was not used during the controversies of the 3rd and 4th centuries, but suddenly appears frequently during the Arian controversies of the late 4th and 5th centuries.

This argument comes from a misunderstanding of the various controversies, which are usually just lumped together under the broad term "Trinitarian controversies." The first of the major controversies came in the 3rd century, dealing with the Sabellians. The Sabellians were Monarchianists (also called Patripassianists), who denied the individual personality of the three Persons of the Godhead. There were (and still are) several permutations of their general heresy, but all end up denying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were separate personalities, united in essence and nature, but individual in personality and function. The Sabellians did not deny the three persons of

the Trinity *per se*, they just denied their individuality, usually saying that the Father IS the Son IS the Spirit, and some also teaching that God revealed Himself as all three, but in a sequential manner, never more than one at a time. Thus, the Sabellian doctrine became one of *de facto* unitarianism.

As such, the Johannine Comma would not have been useful in dealing with these heretics. Indeed, saying that "these three are one", is something to which the Sabellians would have agreed, though for a different reason than orthodox Trinitarians. Sabellians would just as willingly have cited the Comma to prove their position that the three were one in *person*, not in essence. As such, there is no reason why any early patristic writer would have been inclined to find the Comma particularly useful against this particular heresy. We note that Tertullian, even at that early period in which he wrote, found it necessary to strenuously emphasize that the unity of the three in one was a unity of essence, not person. This is quite explicable in view of the fact that Tertullian was directing his arguments against Praxeas, who held to Monarchian theology. In general, though, the patristics probably would have been disinclined to rely upon this verse to defend the Orthodox view of the Trinity, as the verse could just as easily be turned back against them and twisted to support the Sabellian heresy (as was indeed later the case with Priscillian, who twisted the testimony of the Heavenly Witnesses to say, "these three are one *in Christ Jesus*.")

However, the usefulness of the Comma changed when the churches began dealing with the Arians in the latter part of the 4th century, and we begin to see patristic writers, starting with the great Trinitarian defender Athanasius, using the verse, though there was still the tendency to treat the verse gingerly. In the next two centuries afterwards, we see the patristic writers using the verse in quarrels with the Arians (Fulgentius, Cassiodorus, Victor Vitensis, Vigilus Tapensis, etc.) Of course, as was seen above, even Christian writers of the 3rd century did indeed cite and use the verse, even against heresies dealing with the Trinity.

Conclusions

For centuries, the Johannine Comma has been one of the most hotly disputed portions of the holy Scriptures. Though it has been generally rejected by modern textual critics, I believe that this rejection is unwarranted in light of the full body of evidence. Though barely attested in the Greek witness, there is evidence from several corners which suggest that it was originally contained in this language version, and the conditions in the Greek-speaking regions of the Empire were certainly ripe for an attack to be made upon this clear witness to the Trinity. The evidence for the Comma from other sources than the Greek, such as other versions and the testimony of the patristic writers, demonstrates that the Comma was in existence for far longer than the modernistic textual critics will admit, and that it was more generally accepted by the ancients than today's critics would like to acknowledge. Indeed, there is no solid reason, in my opinion, to accept the Comma as anything less than inspired and preserved Scripture. Though there have been evidences which have led many to reject the Johannine Comma, there is much to commend the Comma to us as authentic, and indeed, its obvious preservation through means other than

the Greek witness in no wise disparages or dilutes the principle and doctrine of the preservation of God's Word.