

I John 5:7 and the Trinitarian Formula: A Plea for Truth over Tradition

Debate has occasionally swirled in conservative circles over I John 5:7-8 and the difference between the KJV/NKJV and essentially all other modern English versions of the passage. It has for years been a kind of storm center for the “KJV Only” debate. In fact, some advocates of a KJVO position consider it a passage that clearly shows the superiority of the KJV over most modern versions. While there are a few other textual variants that are longer (i.e., John 7:53-8:11 and Mark 16:9-20), there are probably none generally considered more theologically significant, and there are almost certainly none more famous. The debate arises because the KJV/NKJV has the additional words, ‘*in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one; and there are three that bear witness in earth*’ which are not present in the vast majority of English translations. The longer form of the passage is known as the *Comma Johanneum*, (*comma* meaning phrase/s, *Johanneum* meaning relating to John) or the Trinitarian Formula. A few things should be kept in mind from the outset. Whether the passage is original or not, biblical Trinitarianism is still intact. In other words, the Trinity is still true, is still in the Bible, and is historically still part of the core of orthodoxy. Every orthodox Christian believes firmly in the Trinity, and most of them do not use a KJV, and do not have this verse. History abounds with creeds and confessions with robust statements of Trinitarian faith that were composed by, and agreed to, by people who don’t use the KJV, and who did not have this verse in their Bibles. The editors and translators of practically all modern versions believe in the Trinity and would love to have this verse in their versions, if they thought it were authentic. In other words, there is no grand conspiracy to “cut the Trinity out of the Bible” or any such thing, and there never has been. The question at issue is not in any way shape or form, “Is God a Triune Being?” The question at issue is; “Did John speak of the Trinity here, at this passage, in these words, or not?” What is the manuscript evidence for or against the extra clauses? More to the point, did John write these clauses under inspiration, or didn’t he, and should we consider them part of inspired Scripture? To answer this question, we will look first at the external and then the internal evidence.

External Evidence

Remember that external evidence refers to the actual physical materials, their date, character, location, and contents. I have again placed the external evidence in a chart form, so that we can see each part of it and how it relates to each other part. The data is combined from the standard sources and apparatuses,¹ as well as the images available at the CSNTM and INTF websites.² The Greek, Versional, and Patristic evidence for the shorter reading is on the left side of the chart. I have again bolded and underlined the Greek columns, as I believe that the Greek support should carry the most weight, as every textual critic I know also does. Note that I have used an extremely small font for the later minuscules (especially those from the 12th-14th centuries, which are the most numerous), in order to still place them on the chart without it becoming multiple pages long. On the right side of the chart is the Greek, Versional, and Patristic evidence for the longer reading.

¹ See NA 28, pg. 725; UBS 5 pg. 793-794; *Biblia Sacra* pg. 1,878; *Text Und Textwert*, Vol. 1 pg 1-15; *ECM*

² <http://www.csntm.org> and http://egora.uni-muenster.de/intf/index_en.shtml primarily <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace>.

I John 5:7
- The External Evidence -

DATE	Shorter Reading			Longer Reading				
				Non-KJV/TR Forms			KJV/TR Form	
	Greek Manuscripts	Versional	Patristic	Greek	Vers (Lat Only)	Pat	Greek	Vers/ Pat
1								
2								
3		Cop ^{sah} ; Cop ^{fay} ; Syr ^c	Clem ^{lat} Rebap. (Orig ^{lat})					
4	01, 03	Cop ^{mid}	Amb. (Ps-Cyp.)			Prisc. Ps-Vigil.		
5	02, 048	Geo;Vg ^{mss} Arm ⁽¹³⁰⁰⁺⁾ Syr ^{p(300+)}	Aug. Quod. (Cyril)			Spec. Varim.		Vit. ?
6	0296	Eth (200+)	Fac.			Fulg.		
7		Syr ^h			It ⁱ ; It ^q ; vg ^{mss}			vg ^{mss}
8			(Jon. Dam.)					
9	018, 020, 025, 049, 0142, 1424, 1862, 1895, 2464,	Slav; Cop ^{bo} ; It ^{ar}						
10	044, 056, 82, 93, 175, 181, 221 ^{text} , 307, 326, 398, 450, 454, 456, 457, 602, 605, 619, 627, 832, 920, 1066, 1175, 1720, 1739, 1829, 1836, 1837, 1841, 1845, 1851, 1871, 1874, 1875, 1880, 1891, 2125, 2147,						221 ^{vr}	
11	35, 36, 2, 42, 43, 81, 104, 131, 133, 142, 177 ^{text} , 250, 302, 325, 312, 314, 424, 436, 451, 458, 459, 462, 464, 465, 466, 491, 506, 517, 547, 606, 607, 617, 623, 624, 635, 638, 639, 641, 699, 796, 901, 910, 919, 945, 1162, 1243, 1244, 1270, 1311, 1384, 1521, 1668, 1724, 1730, 1735, 1738, 1828, 1835, 1838, 1846, 1847, 1849, 1854, 1870, 1888, 2138, 2191, 2344, 2475, 2587, 2723, 2746,			177 ^{vr}				
12	3, 38, 1, 57, 88 ^{text} , 94, 97, 103, 105, 110, 180, 203, 226, 256, 319, 321, 323, 330, 337, 365, 431, 440, 442, 452, 618, 620, 622, 625, 632, 637, 656, 720, 876, 917, 922, 927, 1058, 1115, 1127, 1241, 1245, 1315, 1319, 1359, 1360, 1448, 1490, 1505, 1573, 1611, 1646, 1673, 1718, 1737, 1740, 1743, 1752, 1754, 1850, 1853, 1863, 1867, 1868, 1872, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1894, 1897, 2127, 2143, 2186, 2194, 2289, 2298, 2401, 2412, 2541, 2625, 2712, 2718, 2736, 2805			88 ^{vr}		Lat.		
13	4, 5, 6, 51, 204, 206, 172, 141, 218, 234, 263, 327, 328, 378, 383, 384, 390, 460, 468, 469, 479, 483, 496, 592, 601, 614, 643, 665, 757, 912, 914, 915, 941, 999, 1069, 1070, 1072, 1094, 1103, 1107, 1149, 1161, 1242, 1251, 1292, 1297, 1352, 1398, 1400, 1404, 1456, 1501, 1509, 1523, 1563, 1594, 1595, 1597, 1609, 1642, 1719, 1722, 1727, 1728, 1731, 1736, 1758, 1780, 1827, 1839, 1842, 1843, 1852, 1855, 1857, 1858, 1860, 1864, 1865, 1873, 2180, 2374, 2400, 2404, 2423, 2483, 2502, 2558, 2627, 2696,							
14	18, 62, 76, 189, 201, 209, 216, 223, 254, 308, 363, 367, 386, 393, 394, 404, 421, 425, 429 ^{text} , 453, 489, 498, 582, 603, 604, 608, 621, 628, 630, 633, 634, 680, 743, 794, 808, 824, 913, 921, 928, 935, 959, 986, 996, 1022, 1040, 1067, 1075, 1099, 1100, 1102, 1106, 1248, 1249, 1354, 1390, 1409, 1482, 1495, 1503, 1524, 1548, 1598, 1599, 1610, 1618, 1619, 1622, 1637, 1643, 1661, 1678, 1717, 1723, 1725, 1726, 1732, 1733, 1741, 1742, 1744, 1746, 1747, 1753, 1761, 1762, 1765, 1769, 1831, 1832, 1856, 1859, 1866, 1877, 1881, 1882, 1886, 1890, 1892, 1899, 1902, 2080, 2085, 2086, 2197, 2200, 2261, 2279, 2356, 2431, 2466, 2484, 2492, 2494, 2508, 2511, 2527, 2626, 2675, 2705, 2716, 2774, 2777,			629, 429 ^{vr}				
15	69, 102, 149, 205, 322, 368, 385, 400, 432, 444, 467, 615, 616, 631, 636 ^{text} , 664, 801, 1003, 1105, 1247, 1250, 1367, 1405, 1508, 1626, 1628, 1636, 1649, 1656, 1729, 1745, 1750, 1751, 1757, 1763, 1767, 1830, 1876, 1896, 2131, 2221, 2288, 2352, 2495, 2523, 2554, 2652, 2653, 2691, 2704,			636 ^{vr}				
16	90, 296, 522, 1702, 1704, 1749, 1768, 1840, 1844, 1861, 2130, 2218, 2255, 2378, 2501, 2516, 2544,			918, 61				vg ^{cl}
17	1101, 1721, 1748, 1869, 1903, 2243, 2674, 2776						2473	
18	1104						2318	
19		Vg ^{ww} ; Vg st						

Note that the right side of the chart is in two parts; those witnesses that have the longer reading in a form *different* than the KJV/TR, and then further right, in darker grey, those witnesses that have the longer reading in the TR/KJV form. This is an incredibly important distinction that needs to be made and is routinely skipped over by those advocating any kind of a perfect KJV or perfect TR. I don't know of a single KJV or TR advocate who would allow us to re-write the passage into a different form, even if the vast majority of the support for the longer reading actually supports a different form. Thus, the external evidence in the middle section of the chart actually witnesses against the TR /KJV reading. Nonetheless, we will consider and walk thorough all of the data. Note also that a "v.r." after a witnesses refers to the fact that the reading of that witness is a marginal addition ("variant reading") in the margin of the witness, where the reading of the text itself then has a "text" after it. We will now walk through each of the witnesses in more detail.³

The longer Reading – Versional Evidence

The longer reading is evidenced among the ancient versions only in the Latin language. No ancient version in any other language has it. The longer reading appears in some Old Latin and in some Latin Vulgate manuscripts. But it appears distributed in several dozen different forms. I will not spell out every one of those forms here, but they are easily accessible.⁴ Most notably, the form closest to the KJV does not appear in Latin manuscripts until the 7th century. Even then, technically, there is not a single Latin manuscript which has the exact KJV/TR form, due to the fact that it is an interpretive translation from a later Latin form. But the form in the 7th century is *essentially* the TR/KJV form of the reading, apart from minor particulars. This is the form which had become the standard form in the time of Erasmus. It was the form printed in the Clementine edition of the Vulgate in the late 16th century, and was the form that was dogmatized by the RCC at the council of Trent, and at its later decision specifically dogmatizing the comma, which we will explain below.

The Longer Reading – Greek Evidence

There are 552 extant Greek manuscripts that contain parts or all of the General Epistles. A little over 500 of them contain I John. Of those that contain this section of I John, here is the external data for the longer reading. All of the Greek support for the longer reading is very, very, late, as you can see in the chart. Minor, late, and seemingly irrelevant as it may be (from a text-critical perspective), there is nonetheless a difference in the readings of the Greek manuscripts here, so we must seek to explain the rise of the variant. One of the difficulties of KJV-only presentations though is that it will lump all of the Greek manuscripts together, and not explain the diversity of witness present in those manuscripts (this is a common inadequacy of their treatment of most textual variants). At best they usually say something like "these manuscripts have the KJV reading, *with variation*." But that is not looking closely at the evidence. God's Word is worthy of more than a cursory glance intended to superficially bolster a presupposition that one already holds—especially when we then refuse to allow that presupposition to be challenged with basic facts. Thus, we will examine the evidence for the longer reading in more detail. Fortunately, there is so little of it that it won't take very long.

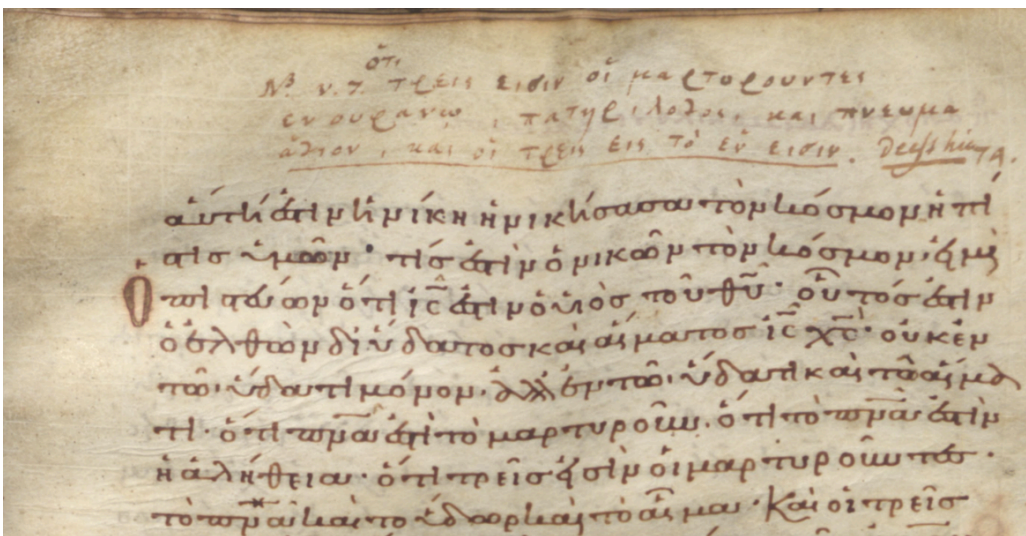
There are 5 manuscripts which have some form of the comma in the actual text (the first of which is penned in the 14th century); 629 (a 14th century diglot which translates the Vulgate into Greek); 918

³ Note that this is a condensed form of a much longer essay which deals with the external and internal data in much greater detail, and dwells more on the implications of that data for a KJVO or TRO position. The full form is available at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/gi790upevgeom3g/I%20John%205.7%20-%20Long%20Form.pdf?dl=0>

⁴ See the textual apparatus in Wordsworth-White, "*Nouum Testamentum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi Latine*" (2nd ed) Vol. 3, pg. 373-374 for the details of the different forms and the Latin manuscript support for each.

(from the 16th century); 61 (a manuscript penned around 1520); and 2473 and 2318, from the 17th and 18th centuries. There are also 5 manuscripts in which the comma has been added by a later scribe as a marginal addition (221, 177, 88, 429, 636). Among just these 10 manuscripts, the comma appears in 6 *different forms*. The patterns found in these differences, as well as the diglot character of some of the manuscripts, as well as elements of some of the marginal notations, makes it quite evident that every one of these manuscripts represents a scribe translating some form of the common Latin text into Greek. Not one of these manuscripts is a scribe copying the comma from a Greek manuscript.

But more importantly than that, none of these instances of the comma occur in the first millennium. As you can see in the chart, the manuscripts which have the comma occur quite late. In fact, they occur much later than the chart reveals. The marginal additions (listed as a mss^{vr} in the chart) obviously are written much later than the text which created the margin, and in some cases we can even tell that they represent a scribe adding the text from a printed New Testament long after Erasmus. For example, not miniscule 177. The chart above reveals that the miniscule was penned in the 11th century. But it is clear that the marginal addition which has the comma is much later. Notice,



This manuscript is from the 11th century. But a later scribe has added the longer reading (in a form different from the KJV/TR) at a later time. When does he do this, and what was his source for adding it? We can tell from looking closely at his note. His notes says, “N. [note] V. [verse] 7. “In heaven, father, word, and Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three who testify on the earth.” He explicitly states that what has been “left out” is verse 7, and adds it as he sees fit. *But verse divisions for the NT were not invented until Stephanus in his 1555 edition of the Greek New Testament.* They were then included in common Latin printed texts. That tells us directly that this is not an early scribe adding a verse from an ancient manuscript that got left out on accident – this is a scribe in the latter half of the 16th century (or later!) who has a *printed* edition of the New Testament (very likely a Latin one) which dates *after* 1555, and which contains verse divisions - otherwise, he wouldn’t know to call it “verse 7!” The chance that such later marginal notes, in the margin of already late manuscripts, could be correcting the text to conform to the original reading is little more than wishful thinking, which runs directly contrary to every piece of historical evidence that we have available today. The actual KJV/TR form occurs only in miniscule 221 as a marginal addition (which is almost surely added after Erasmus) and in miniscules 2473 and 2318, both penned after the KJV was translated. There is zero chance that they preserve the original reading. And each of these manuscripts of course disagrees with the KJV/TR at numerous other points.

The Longer Reading – Patristic Support

The Patristic support for the longer reading is found in a brief mention in a work of the heretic Priscillian;⁵ Psuedo-Vigilius;⁶ Speculum;⁷ Varimadum;⁸ Fulgentius;⁹ Victor of Vita (Vitensus);¹⁰ Fuldensis;¹¹ and Cassiodoris.¹² All of these witnesses have three things in common;

1. They are all Latin Fathers using a Latin translation of the New Testament from one particular, limited, geographic locale. They all originate from the Spanish Latin locale. None of them are Greek fathers quoting a Greek text. There is no Greek Patristic version of the comma until the 12th century Lateran council.
2. None of them writes prior to the Trinitarian controversy that was taken up at Nicaea in 325. All of them write in the later half of the 4th century or later. This is after Nicaea had so firmly (and rightly) stamped a clearly articulated Trinitarian theology upon the church that it was seen everywhere—behind every Scriptural bush so to speak.
3. Not one of them has the longer ending in the KJV/TR form. Apart from Victor of Vita, each of the patristic witnesses that has the longer reading has it in one of the Latin forms 1-4 spelled out above, or with even greater variation from those forms. This is because they are using the Latin texts which we have already alluded to. This is also true of later fathers not included in the chart. The only exception, and thus the closest one comes to the TR /KJV form is, Vitensus. I included it on the right side of the chart, despite its differences from the TR, to be gracious. He at least has the right order of the triads!

Again, note that all of the patristic support for the longer reading comes from *Latin* Fathers quoting from *Latin* texts. There is simply not any early patristic support for the longer reading from the Greek Fathers (or at all until the 12th century Lateran council). Furthermore, even among the meager patristic support found among the Latin Fathers for the longer reading, *none* of them have it in the TR/KJV form. They have it in a diversity of forms, like the Latin manuscripts which we have already examined.

The Shorter Reading

The Shorter Reading – Patristic Support

The patristic support for the shorter reading is almost unanimous. Apart from the few later Latin Fathers we saw earlier, every single time an early Father quoted the text of I John 5, he quoted the shorter reading. Clement of Alexandria,¹³ Ambrose,¹⁴ Augustine,¹⁵ Leo,¹⁶ and Gregory the Great,¹⁷ are

⁵ *Liber Apologetics*, late 4th century. Since the comma fits the modalism of Priscillian so well, some have suggested that he created it. In any case, there is no evidence for it in any language prior to his quotation. He has it in Latin form 1 shared above.

⁶ *De Trinitate*, Circa 400

⁷ *Liber de divinis Scripturis sive Speculum*, a 5th century work falsely attributed to Augustine.

⁸ *Contra Varimadum*, sometimes falsely attributed to Augustine, circa 450.

⁹ *Responsio Contra Arianos*, and *De Trinitate*, 527

¹⁰ *Historia Persecutionis Africanae Provinciae*, 484

¹¹ *Prologue to the Catholic Epistles*, Falsey attributed to Jerome, Circa 450.

¹² In *Epistolam S. Joannis Ad Parthos*, 583

¹³ Whose comments on the first epistle of John in the late 2nd century seem to know only the shorter reading, and who seems to engage in early Trinitarian speculation.

¹⁴ Ambrose cites the passage 4 times, always with the shorter reading.

particularly notable examples, as they each write in a detailed way about the Trinity, and several quote this very passage. Yet none of them quotes the longer reading; they know only the shorter form. Augustine writes his famous work on the Trinity, *De Trinitate*, and quotes the shorter reading, but doesn't quote the longer reading there in any way. If these authors knew of this longer addition, it seems incredibly odd that they don't mention it, even in their defense of the Trinity.

This silence expands beyond just those witnesses that we have included in the chart. Those witnesses on the left side of the chart are Fathers who directly quote the passage, and quote it in its shorter form. We could also add the many early patristic writers who discuss the Trinity,¹⁸ and yet never mention this passage. If this passage had been written by John, it would be by far the clearest and most direct passage on the Trinity anywhere in the Bible. It is simply impossible that these men who intended to set forth the Bible's teaching on the Trinity would not have even mentioned it if they had the longer reading.

This is even more striking during the Arian controversy at the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century.¹⁹ A young preacher named Arius had arisen who had begun to preach that there was a time when Jesus did not exist. He had been a disciple of Lucian of Antioch, to whom he attributed the genesis of his ideas. He began to teach that the Son of God was not eternal. He had no problem speaking highly of Jesus, and even worshiping him. But he believed that Christ was merely the very best of all God's created beings. He was adamant that the transcendent God could not have had contact with creation without some intermediary who was considerably less than very God of very God. He thus denied any Godhead of equals. His views became so widespread that a major controversy erupted throughout the empire. He even created songs that would be sung in some churches, claiming that "there was a time when he [Jesus] was not." Faithful pastors all over the world were fighting against his ideas even while many others were "buying into" his new views and still others were seeking a way for everyone to get along.

Understand that Christianity had largely been illegal and heavily persecuted (especially under Domitian) until the edict of Milan in 313. Many of these pastors had lived in hiding, unable to effectively communicate with each other. After the edict of toleration, Christianity was no longer illegal (at least for a short time). So, for the first time in history, they could meet publically *en masse* to discuss such issues, without fear of reprisal. At the council of Nicaea in 325 AD, 318 pastors²⁰ (each bringing 1-2 deacons with them) met together to discuss the question of Arianism and a few other divisive issues. Pastors were invited from both East and West, so that the meeting would represent every part of the world. These pastors had been through a veritable hell for their firm belief in Jesus. Many had been imprisoned multiple times. Many of them had been tortured for their faith. Several had limbs missing which had been removed during torture because they would not recant their faith in Christ. When they came together, limping in with their broken bodies to discuss Arius and his views, you can imagine that passions ran

¹⁵ *Contra Maximinum*, 2.22.3, where he decidedly quotes the shorter reading, and extrapolates from it an allegorical interpretation of the Trinity. *De Civitate Dei* 5.11 has occasionally been cited by KJVO advocates as Augustine quoting the comma, but it is not a citation of a biblical text, does not contain any citation formula, and is Augustine's own Trinitarian reflection, in the same language that became the form of the comma, which was derived from his aforementioned Trinitarian interpretation of the shorter reading. He could have become aware of the Priscillian form of text, but it is unlikely given its limited locale to that time. In either case, he doesn't give the passage as a citation of a scripture text, and likely reflects its wording due to the same historical linguistic trajectories that caused its rise. See below.

¹⁶ *Epistle to Flavianus*, read at Chalcedon in 451.

¹⁷ Mid 4th century.

¹⁸ For example, see "Trinitarian" discussion of a sort in Tertullian, Origen, Hilary, and many others. But see appendix A for qualifications.

¹⁹ See Schaff, "*History of the Christian Church*" vol. 3, pg. 616-697, for details.

²⁰ The traditional figure, the exact attendance specifics are disputed.

high. Every weapon in their arsenal was brought to bear. Every Scripture they could come up with was used. Every argument that could be thought of was presented.

At the fore of the discussion was the Trinitarian Godhead. The pastors contended that Jesus had always existed. That he was eternal. That he was equal with the Father. They contended against Arius that Jesus was “*homoousios*” or “of the same substance or same essence” as the Father. One young deacon in particular shared Scripture with passion in defense of the Trinity. His name was Athanasius. He made the case for historic Christianity—biblical Trinitarianism.²¹ A representative presented the views of Arius. Then, the pastors voted. Only one, a good friend of Arius, voted that Arius and his views were acceptable. Every other pastor present, and the wide swath of Christianity which they represented, voted that Arius was a heretic and his views were heretical. After the council, many of these pastors continued to write against Arius and his (still popular) views. Athanasius soon became a pastor and spent the rest of his life defending (and being persecuted for defending) the historic theology of the incarnation, the eternity of Jesus, and the Trinitarian shape of the Godhead.

What is important to note is the place of the longer reading of I John 5:7 in this debate. If John had written the longer reading, then it is by far the most clear, direct statement of the Trinity anywhere in the Bible. There is not a single passage of Scripture that could have been more important to this debate. Because this council represented Christians from every part of the evangelized world, if the passage had appeared as part of the Bible at any point, in any manuscript, anywhere in the world, in any language, it would have been brought to this debate. If these pastors had the longer reading anywhere in any Bible, then wielding the other passages which they mention so fervently is the equivalent of bringing a knife to a gunfight. The *Johannine Comma* would have been a cannon that would silence all Arian opposition in a single fatal shot. There are literally thousands of pages of writings from this debate which we still have access to. It is probably the single greatest doctrinal controversy the church has ever faced.²² Yet in all of the pre-Nicene²³ and Nicene²⁴ discussion of the Trinity, (and we have literally thousands of pages of such discussion),²⁵ no one quotes the longer reading of I John 5:7-8. *Not even one time*. And there is no manuscript evidence anywhere in any language for the comma prior to this point. While we usually think of an “argument from silence” as being weak, when arguing *for* silence (i.e., the nonexistence of a text at this stage) the silence becomes the most powerful argument that can be made. And this silence, at this juncture in history, is in fact deafeningly loud. There is only one reasonable explanation for this silence.

²¹ See Appendix A for a brief survey of this discussion previous to Nicea.

²² In fact, Arianism has never really gone away. It is still with us today. It is still present in groups like the JW's. (They are typically utterly ignorant of the source of their views.)

²³ See ANF, volumes 1-10.

²⁴ See portions of the NPNF first set, volumes 1-14; and portions of the NPNF second set, volumes 1-14.

²⁵ See especially the many works of Athanasius (e.g., *Deposition of Arius*, *Council of Nicaea*, *Statement of Faith*, *Defense of the Nicene Council*, *Arian History*, *Against the Arians*, etc.), who in particular often makes much of the titles of Jesus and specifically makes much of the title, “Word,” which becomes his favorite title to use of Christ as member of the Divine Triad. See also points where he refutes the Arian notion that the Word could be not a part of the Godhead. His opponents argued that since John 1:14 says the Word was made flesh that this title is an earthly description of the earthly Jesus, and that 1:1 calling him “God” is only a metaphorical usage. Athanasius refutes such notions – but how better to refute them than with a passage, by the same author, that describes the Word alongside the Father and Spirit, asserting their unity, as a *heavenly* witness? Athanasius bore a deep love for the Word, and the Trinitarian conception of God. He would write, “For thus we confess God to be one through the Triad, and we say that it is much more religious than the godhead of the heretics with its many kinds, and many parts, to entertain a belief of the One Godhead in a Triad” (*Discourse II Against the Arians*, chapter 25). If he had known of I John 5:7, and its description of the “The Father, and the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these there are one,” which sounds almost like his own language, he not only could never have failed to quote it, he would have shouted it from the housetops, and it would have been his most well-worn battle weapon.

They did not quote the comma for a very simple reason – they did not have it in their Bibles. It had not yet been created. It simply did not yet exist.

The Shorter Reading – Versional Support

Remember that the versions are typically considered *secondary* support for or against a reading. They are an indirect witness to Greek manuscripts which we no longer have. The translators are translating from Greek manuscripts into other languages. Since translation can be a difficult endeavor, their data is sometimes ambiguous, and we don't know if they are translating reading *a* or reading *b*. However, when it comes to the inclusion/exclusion of a longer section of text like this, the data is much less ambiguous. The manuscripts they are translating from either have the longer reading, or they don't. There is really nothing ambiguous about that. We saw earlier that the longer ending is found in some of the Old Latin manuscripts, and some of the Latin Vulgate manuscripts from the West. But here is what needs to be noted in terms of the evidence for the shorter reading. All of the Latin manuscripts until the 7th century, both Old Latin and Latin Vulgate, have the shorter reading. The longer forms we detailed earlier don't appear until then. And further, as noted above, when the longer reading does appear, it is found in a great variety of different forms, and isn't normally found in anything like the KJV form until much later. Most modern printed editions of the Vulgate (The Wadsworth-White, etc.) have the shorter reading, being based on the older Latin manuscripts. This variety of reading would seem to directly cancel out the Latin evidence for the longer reading. What basis is there for saying, "I like this late reading in Latin. But I don't like that earlier one in Latin." The only possible answer of course is simply, "This one agrees with the KJV," which makes appeal to the Latin as "support" for the reading rather disingenuous.

But what about the translations into language other than Latin? When we come to the ancient translations of the NT into other languages, we find an almost unanimous agreement that is almost never found among the versions. A variety of different translators in a variety of different locales in a variety of different times can produce almost any number of different variants. Typically almost any variant that we know of can be found witnessed across the early versions. Not so in this case. Apart from the Latin witnesses which we have looked at already, the ancient versions are unanimous in having the shorter reading in I John 5:7-8. The Sahidic and Fayumic Coptic translations²⁶ in Egypt in the 3rd Century translate the shorter reading. So does the Curetonian Syriac from the same century. What about the Middle Egyptian Coptic translation made in the 4th century? Only the shorter reading. What about the Georgian translation in the next century? Only the shorter reading. What about the Armenian translation? We have hundreds of witnesses to the passage in manuscripts of this 5th century translation. (There are over 1300 Armenian manuscripts in total, but not all are complete New Testaments.)²⁷ You guessed it—every single Armenian manuscript prior to the KJV translates the shorter ending.

Next comes the Syriac Peshitta. The was the version which was translated in Antioch in the 4th or 5th century, and which became, after the Old Syriac,²⁸ the standard Bible of the Christians in Antioch.²⁹ We have several hundred manuscripts of the Peshitta today. Every single one of them has the shorter reading.³⁰ The Christians in Antioch knew nothing of the longer reading. *Ever*. A common KJVO argument

²⁶ See Metzger, "The Early Versions" pg. 99-152.

²⁷ See Metzger, "The Early Versions" pg. 153-181.

²⁸ The Old Syriac, of which the Peshitta is a revision, was written before the Syriac-speaking church had accepted the general epistles and Revelation as part of the canon. Because Syriac-speaking Christianity had not yet included the general epistles into the cannon at that point, the general epistles are not part of the Old Syriac Bibles, and there is no witness to either reading of I John 5:7 at all in them. (Metzger, "The Early Versions" pg. 44.)

²⁹ See Metzger, "The Early Versions" pg. 4, and pg. 48-62.

³⁰ Note that there was a 15th century *printed* edition of the Syriac where the editor (Tremellius) placed a translation of I John 5:7 from Latin into the margin of the text, but this was a translation from Latin, into

says, “We use the KJV because it is the Bible of Antioch.” But any argument that wants to say, “I use the Bible of Antioch” or that wants to in any way build a connection between the KJV and Antioch and say, “that is why I’m KJVO”, is either invalid from the starting point, or must remove the comma from their Bibles. It would actually have to make hundreds of changes to the KJV, since the Syriac versions very often unanimously have readings different than the KJV,³¹ which would mean the KJV would have to be changed in many places if that evidence were even remotely valid support for the position. Of course no KJVO advocate will do that, because (despite what I have been told several times by good friends) no one who holds a KJVO position really does so because of any “Syriac evidence.” Someone who holds that position rather does so precisely because they are completely ignorant of the evidence, or, because what they actually believe deep down is that God supernaturally moved the KJV translators to recreate the exact text of Scripture perfectly, so that all manuscript evidence is utterly irrelevant to their position. In addition to those mentioned above, we could go on and talk about the early Ethiopic translation (6th century), or the Slavonic, or the Boharic versions (9th century) – they all have the shorter reading, at different times, in different locations all over the world. No manuscript of any ancient translation of Scripture (apart from some of the Latin ones) prior to the 1500’s has ever been found that has the longer reading in it. *Period*. It is a phenomenon unique to the Latin language, and to a handful of Greek manuscripts that were clearly influenced by Latin.

The Shorter Reading – Greek Support

We have examined the Greek support for the longer reading in great detail. There is a much greater amount of data to cover for the shorter reading, but we will be able to do this in a very brief amount of space. While there are a few other textual variants in other parts of the passage, all of the witnesses on the left side of the chart are uniform in one respect – they all have the text in its shorter form, and do not contain the longer reading in any form whatsoever. They uniformly have the text of I John with the reading, “*For there are three who bear witness, the spirit, and the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one.*” Our most important witnesses are those which come from the first millennium. Most textual critics believe that witnesses from the first millennium should be given a much greater weight than later witnesses from the second millennium. This just makes good historical sense. Of course, within that first millennium, all other factors being equal, the earlier a witness is, (and thus the closer the witness is to the original autographs), the more weight it has. Manuscripts that are almost a full millennium closer to the autographs are most likely to reflect the original text. Our Greek witnesses from the first millennium come from several different geographical locales. From the first 6 centuries, we have five such witnesses – Majuscules 01, 03, 02, 048, and 0296. These early witnesses would carry the greatest weight, regardless of the reading of the later miniscules, and they all have the shorter reading. But we have even more. Still prior to the tenth century, we can add majuscules 018, 020, 025, 049, 0142, and miniscules 1424, 1862, 1895, 2464. I wouldn’t usually spell out each of the later miniscules, as they carry much less weight than the early papyri and early majuscules. But in this particular textual problem, there is near perfect conformity among all the manuscripts, such that we could almost say that we don’t have a textual variant here. Thus we can also add the other later Alexandrian and Western manuscripts,

the margin of a printed text. No Syriac *manuscript*, or any kind of Syriac text prior to the 15th century has ever been found with the longer reading. (C.F. Metzger, “*The Early Versions*” pg. 53)

³¹ If anyone wants it, I could compile a partial list of places where the “Bible of Antioch” (i.e., the unanimous testimony of the Syriac versions) disagrees with the KJV. To take one example, note that none of the Syriac manuscripts contain the *Pericope Adulterae* of John 7:53-8:11, they all have the shorter reading which picks up with what we call 8:12 right after what we call 7:52. It is nothing short of astounding when KJVO advocates try to argue that this story is original because God preserved it in the “true line” of Antioch – when none of the manuscripts from Antioch ever had it! See Metzger, “*The Early Versions*” pg. 48.

as well as the Byzantine manuscripts, which are the large chunk of manuscripts from mostly the 10th century + in Byzantium. Thus we add, in chronological order, the miniscules:

044, 056, 82, 93, 175, 181, 221text, 307, 326, 398, 450, 454, 456, 457, 602, 605, 619, 627, 832, 920, 1066, 1175, 1720, 1739, 1829, 1836, 1837, 1841, 1845, 1851, 1871, 1874, 1875, 1880, 1891, 2125, 2147, 35, 36, 2, 42, 43, 81, 104, 131, 133, 142, 177text, 250, 302, 325, 312, 314, 424, 436, 451, 458, 459, 462, 464, 465, 466, 491, 506, 517, 547, 606, 607, 617, 623, 624, 635, 638, 639, 641, 699, 796, 901, 910, 919, 945, 1162, 1243, 1244, 1270, 1311, 1384, 1521, 1668, 1724, 1730, 1735, 1738, 1828, 1835, 1838, 1846, 1847, 1849, 1854, 1870, 1888, 2138, 2191, 2344, 2475, 2587, 2723, 2746, 3, 38, 1, 57, 88text, 94, 97, 103, 105, 110, 180, 203, 226, 256, 319, 321, 323, 330, 337, 365, 431, 440, 442, 452, 618, 620, 622, 625, 632, 637, 656, 720, 876, 917, 922, 927, 1058, 1115, 1127, 1241, 1245, 1315, 1319, 1359, 1360, 1448, 1490, 1505, 1573, 1611, 1646, 1673, 1718, 1737, 1740, 1743, 1752, 1754, 1850, 1853, 1863, 1867, 1868, 1872, 1885, 1889, 1893, 1894, 1897, 2127, 2143, 2186, 2194, 2289, 2298, 2401, 2412, 2541, 2625, 2712, 2718, 2736, 2805, 4, 5, 6, 51, 204, 206, 172, 141, 218, 234, 263, 327, 328, 378, 383, 384, 390, 460, 468, 469, 479, 483, 496, 592, 601, 614, 643, 665, 757, 912, 914, 915, 941, 999, 1069, 1070, 1072, 1094, 1103, 1107, 1149, 1161, 1242, 1251, 1292, 1297, 1352, 1398, 1400, 1404, 1456, 1501, 1509, 1523, 1563, 1594, 1595, 1597, 1609, 1642, 1719, 1722, 1727, 1728, 1731, 1736, 1758, 1780, 1827, 1839, 1842, 1843, 1852, 1855, 1857, 1858, 1860, 1864, 1865, 1873, 2180, 2374, 2400, 2404, 2423, 2483, 2502, 2558, 2627, 2696, 18, 62, 76, 189, 201, 209, 216, 223, 254, 308, 363, 367, 386, 393, 394, 404, 421, 425, 429text, 453, 489, 498, 582, 603, 604, 608, 621, 628, 630, 633, 634, 680, 743, 794, 808, 824, 913, 921, 928, 935, 959, 986, 996, 1022, 1040, 1067, 1075, 1099, 1100, 1102, 1106, 1248, 1249, 1354, 1390, 1409, 1482, 1495, 1503, 1524, 1548, 1598, 1599, 1610, 1618, 1619, 1622, 1637, 1643, 1661, 1678, 1717, 1723, 1725, 1726, 1732, 1733, 1741, 1742, 1744, 1746, 1747, 1753, 1761, 1762, 1765, 1769, 1831, 1832, 1856, 1859, 1866, 1877, 1881, 1882, 1886, 1890, 1892, 1899, 1902, 2080, 2085, 2086, 2197, 2200, 2261, 2279, 2356, 2431, 2466, 2484, 2492, 2494, 2508, 2511, 2527, 2626, 2675, 2705, 2716, 2774, 2777, 69, 102, 149, 205, 322, 368, 385, 400, 432, 444, 467, 615, 616, 631, 636text, 664, 801, 1003, 1105, 1247, 1250, 1367, 1405, 1508, 1626, 1628, 1636, 1649, 1656, 1729, 1745, 1750, 1751, 1757, 1763, 1767, 1830, 1876, 1896, 2131, 2221, 2288, 2352, 2495, 2523, 2554, 2652, 2653, 2691, 2704, 90, 296, 522, 1702, 1704, 1749, 1768, 1840, 1844, 1861, 2130, 2218, 2255, 2378, 2501, 2516, 2544, 1101, 1721, 1748, 1869, 1903, 2243, 2674, 2776, 1104.

That is to say, all of our Greek manuscripts that have this passage (around 500), apart from the small handful of late exceptions which we noted earlier, uniformly have the shorter reading. The Greek manuscripts are unanimous in their reading of the text here, except for five exceptionally late manuscripts (14th century and later) and the marginal notes in five others (which notes are all almost certainly later than the 14th century). Further, those 10 late manuscripts which do have the longer reading have variation even among themselves about the reading. Of only ten manuscripts which have the longer reading in the text or in the margin, the reading is found in *six different forms*. It is hard to describe how convincing that kind of data should be to anyone who cares at all about evidence, to anyone who believes God preserved His word instead of magically “restoring” it in 1611, or to anyone who cares about truth at all.

Summary of External Evidence and a Plea for Integrity

The main reason I wanted to deal with this text is not to convince anyone that the *comma* was not written by John. I think that is obvious, even before we get to the internal data, but that is not my intent. I raised this passage because I want you to understand the utter lack of integrity involved in claiming that the KJV is supported by “the best manuscripts,” or by “the Byzantine manuscripts,” or by “the majority of manuscripts.” These are the most common arguments I hear for why someone is KJV only, not only from men with a penchant for dishonesty, but by almost all KJV advocates. They usually say something like “all of the manuscripts agree exactly with the KJV, and there is perfect agreement between them, except for a handful (really only two, and we hate those two), so we go with the KJV, because that is going with the ‘preserved’ word of God.” But this kind of statement is nothing more than a made up fiction. As we have

seen, there is not perfect verbal agreement between any two manuscripts of any substantial size. All of them contain textual variants. All of them (except for a handful of small fragments) are different at points from the TR and the KJV. There is not a single Greek New Testament manuscript in existence that contains all of the readings of the TR. *Not one. Not even close.* The TR on which the KJV is based is an eclectic, critical text, initially compiled by Erasmus from seven relatively late Greek minuscules, later revised with slightly more manuscripts, slightly revised again by Stephanus and Beza, and finally revised again in the minds of the KJV translators, whose choices between those texts were later reconstructed by Scrivener. It's true that at some points the TR aligns with the Majority text. But this is utterly irrelevant to an argument suggesting the superiority of the TR, because it's also true that *every* Greek text in existence aligns with the Majority text over 90% of the time. For a "majority" to be any kind of a valid argument in favor of the TR, the TR would have to have majority support in *every* variant passage. Yet quite the opposite is the case. The TR is very often a minority text (and sometimes a text with no Greek support whatsoever). But it is on all accounts a *late* text. In at least one passage, you have now been shown the evidence that reveals such KJVO statements to be utterly false.

This passage is only one of many such "minority" passages in the TR, due to each edition of the TR being simply a new revision of the text of Erasmus, which was itself not well sourced from a manuscript perspective, at least by today's standards. Maurice Robinson has written in the preface of his *"The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform"* about the relation of the majority of Greek Manuscripts and how they often diverge from the TR. He says, "Early printed Textus Receptus (or 'Received Text') editions closely resemble the Byzantine Textform but often diverge from it in significant readings. Such editions primarily derive from the limited selection of a small number of late manuscripts, as utilized by Erasmus, Ximenes, or their immediate historical successors. The Overall text of these early printed editions differs from the Byzantine Textform in over 1800 instances, generally due to the inclusion of weakly supported non-Byzantine readings. Since the Receptus from of text does not provide an accurate reproduction of the common Greek manuscript tradition, the present edition strives to rectify that situation by presenting the readings of the Byzantine Textform in a more precise manner."³²

If you choose never to change your position, that's fine. But please, hold and present your position with integrity. Don't ever tell anyone that the "majority of manuscripts" have anything to do with why you hold your position. Don't ever tell anyone that the Byzantine manuscripts have anything to do with why you hold your position. Don't ever tell anyone that the "best" manuscripts have anything to do with your position. And have the integrity not to sit silently by the wayside when other KJV advocates put forth those arguments as support. If those arguments were relevant at all, then you are bound to follow that evidence when it disagrees with the KJV. This is one of many, many, texts where such evidence disagrees. Anyone who looks at this evidence and is unwilling to say "the KJV is wrong at I John 5:7" can never with integrity tell someone that they hold a KJVO or TRO position because of the Byzantine text, the "Antioch school," or "the majority of the manuscripts." That would simply be dishonest. Jesus is not honored by dishonesty. It is one thing to be ignorant. I suspect most who make those statements are simply ignorant. Ignorance is forgivable. But it is another thing to know the data, and continue to make statements which are patently false. That is not honoring to Jesus. It is not integrity. If you refuse to say the KJV is in error here, that's fine. But I implore you, please don't lie to yourself or to others about the reasons why. Don't pretend it is because of the majority of manuscripts. Don't pretend it's because of the

³² Robinson, Maurice, *"The New Testament"* (preface), pg. i, footnote 1; See also De Jonge, *"Novum Instrumentum"* pg. 408-409, who, ironically, is Erasmus' biggest living fan, and one of the world's leading Erasmus scholars, and is defending him. But he defends him not by ignoring that the TR is so often a minority, but by pointing out that since the Latin text was his primary goal, Erasmus shouldn't be faulted for creating a poor Greek text; C.F. Combs, *"Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,"* pg. 45-48; Metzger, *"The Text of the New Testament"* pg. 93-118; Rummel, *"Erasmus Annotations"* pg. 35-88, et al for further sources explaining that the TR is not in any way a majority text.

Byzantine text. Don't pretend it is because you follow the "Bible of Antioch." Don't pretend it is because of *any* of the manuscript evidence. That would be lying to yourself and others. The exact KJV reading is in fact supported prior to the KJV only by a marginal addition in one late manuscript from the second millennium. And that manuscript disagrees with the KJV within just a paragraph or two from I John 5:7, and in hundreds of other places. God is honored by integrity. He is most honored by us when we are most honest with ourselves and others. Whatever position you hold, do so with integrity.

Let me give you an example to illustrate what I mean. Imagine you are a Judge hearing a difficult and complex case. I know this could never happen exactly this way legally, but just go with me. There has been a multiple homicide. Several people are dead. To complicate matters, it appears that there were several different men who committed the murders. To make matters worse, each man died as a result of a bullet fired from the same gun. A lawyer, (we'll call him Bob) is defending one of the men (we'll call him defendant A), who he is trying to prove innocent of killing one of the homicide victims whose murder he has been charged with. But Bob is also the same lawyer who is the prosecuting attorney who is trying to convict Defendant B of homicide on the charge of murdering one of the other victims. (I know, not quite what you would see on Law and Order, but just hang with me.) Bob makes his case against defendant B using three clear lines of evidence. He demands that defendant B be found guilty of homicide for three reasons. 1. - Multiple witnesses saw him fire the lethal shot; 2. - His fingerprints have been found on the weapon; 3. GSR from the shot was found all over his sleeve. It's an open and shut case. The lawyer wants him convicted. The evidence is clear. You condemn the man to the death penalty.

Then, you move to the part of the case involving defendant A. The prosecuting attorney makes a case using three lines of evidence. He produces the weapon, which has on it the fingerprints of defendant A. Then, he brings eyewitness forward who saw defendant A pull the trigger and commit the murder. Finally, he points out that GSR from the shot was found on defendant A's sleeve. Ironically, he produces the exact same weapon you just used to convict defendant B. Even more ironically, he produces exactly the same eyewitnesses that you used as grounds to convict defendant B. Same courtroom. Same convoluted case. What kind of judge are you? You have moved to condemn defendant B on account of these three clear lines of evidence. These same lines of evidence now condemn defendant A. There's just one problem - defendant A is a friend of yours, and you want him to go free. Perhaps you could move that it all be stricken from the record in both cases. Fair enough. But say they move to strike it completely, and you object, demanding that the evidence stand as sufficient to convict defendant B, but demanding just as loudly that it not be seen as sufficient evidence to convict defendant A. At that point, you no longer are demonstrating an impartial and fair treatment of the evidence. You could perhaps even be accused of schizophrenia. At the least, I would suggest that you are not demonstrating integrity. You simply cannot be called a just judge.

This is what I mean when I implore you each to have integrity in your position about the KJV. If you tell yourself (or others) that the manuscript data is support for your position, and then refuse to follow the manuscripts at any place where they manifestly and indubitably speak against your position, that is simply not honest. If you tell yourself (or others) that an oversimplified dichotomy between the "Antiochene text" and the "Alexandrian text" is somehow support for your position, but then refuse to follow that support the moment it disagrees with your position, that is not integrity. If you tell yourself that the "Byzantine text" is why you hold your position, but then reject that text anywhere it disagrees with the KJV, that is nothing short of deception. Hold whatever position you choose, but please do so with integrity. Don't write bibliology curriculum or FB articles or blogs that invoke those lines of evidence if at the end of the day you definitively reject those lines of evidence at every place where they don't support your position. Jesus is truth Incarnate. He deserves honesty from us. I think we should do our best to demonstrate it, both in what we believe, and in why. Be honest. Be just. Be fair. Be truthful.

Internal Evidence

Intrinsic Probability

The external evidence is definitive, before we even look at the internal evidence. Nonetheless, minor though it is, we do have a textual variant. We have examined the external data. Now we will bring internal considerations to bear on the data. Remember that internal evidence has to do with which reading the author and scribe is more likely to have written. We deal first with intrinsic probability – what John is most likely to have written.

The vocabulary of Johannine Witness

The word translated “Bear record” in I John 5:6-8 is a significant one. The language of “witness” is very common in John, and is a regular part of his vocabulary (used 47 times by John).³³ It has the basic idea of “testimony” either as a signature as a witness, a reporting of an event, or, with judicial connotations, to one called to witness in a legal sense (BDAG). Because martyrs were “testifying” to the gospel by their death, they also came to be known as “witnesses.” In fact, our English word, “martyr” comes from this word. John uses the word regularly, but note some patterns from what might be called a Johannine “theology of witness.”

1. *John precludes Jesus from witnessing to Himself, except where special conditions are met.* In John 5:31-39, John presents Jesus as making it clear that if He bears witnesses to himself, His witness is not true. If John at any point presents Jesus as witnessing to Himself, he has allowed a *prima facie* example of Jesus lying. His high Christology would not likely allow this. In certain conditions, the appeal to Jewish jurisprudence can be flipped around, and so Jesus can bear witness to Himself. But in such a case, John is careful to clarify that an exception is at play, in order to “get Jesus off the hook” so to speak. Thus, in John 8, John presents Jesus explaining the “flipped around jurisprudence” at play, explaining that in such a case, He can witness to Himself. The fact the he presents such qualification there reveals that he can sense the tension inherent in the suggestion of Jesus bearing witness to Himself. But in I John 5:7, Jesus (the Word) bears witness to Himself, and there is no qualification or explanation given. Just read those two texts together, and sense the contradiction they would cause; “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: (1Jo 5:7 KJV),” but, “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. (John 5:31 KJV).” There is no qualifying explanation given. The jurisprudence here is not flipped around. Allowance is not made here for an exception. Thus, if John had written the passage, he would have created a serious difficulty or contradiction for his readers which he not only doesn’t resolve; he doesn’t seem to even notice it. Why? Because he didn’t write the comma.
2. *John Presents the Spirit as an earthly witness.* In John’s presentation of the “farewell discourse” of Jesus, Jesus presents the longest, most sustained, and most lofty presentation of pneumatology in all of his writings. In fact, it is probably the most lofty presentation of “Spirit theology” in the whole Bible. Presenting the Spirit as the “Comforter” (John 13:31-16:33), Jesus explains to his disciples (much to their disappointment) that he will soon depart the earth (at least bodily). But in his stead he will send the Spirit (John 14:16-17; 25-26). When this Spirit comes to earth (i.e., manifest his earthly presence more fully at Pentecost and beyond), his ministry will be to testify to Jesus, and to empower the disciples to do the same. Jesus thus presents the Spirit’s witness to him as being a distinctly earthly witness, not a heavenly one. He 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... (John 15:26).” Note that even more explicitly in the KJV of I John 5:6, the Spirit is a distinctly earthly

³³ Jn. 1:7-8, 15, 32, 34; 2:25; 3:11, 26, 28, 32; 4:39, 44; 5:31-33, 36-37, 39; 7:7; 8:13-14, 18; 10:25; 12:17; 13:21; 15:26-27; 18:23, 37; 19:35; 21:24; I Jn. 1:2; 4:14; 5:6-10; 3 Jn. 1:3, 6, 12; Rev. 1:2; 22:16, 20

witness. In verse 8, the Spirit is distinctly an earthly witness. In the shorter reading, the Spirit is identified as witnessing “on earth.” This is consistent with how John speaks of the Spirit’s witness in every other place in his writings. For John, the Spirit is the primary witness on Earth to Jesus. But in the longer reading, the scribe who has accidentally imported the “in heaven” which created the “In Heaven” / “On earth” structure of the longer reading, has unwittingly involved the Spirit in the activity of witnessing both from earth (which is Johannine), and from heaven (which is decidedly not Johannine). How could John create such a contradiction? The answer is of course, that he didn’t, because he didn’t write the comma.

3. *John’s entire point is undermined by the comma.* John’s usage of this language probably builds from the use of Jewish jurisprudence presented in OT texts like Deut. 17:6; 19:15. This usage was upheld by Jesus (Matt. 18:16), and Paul (2 Cor. 13:1). Some have gone so far as to suggest that there is in John a fully developed “Cosmic Trial Motif” of which this witness language is a part.³⁴ That may go too far, but understand that either way, the whole point of this particular element of jurisprudence is that a greater number of credible congruent witnesses equals a greater strength of testimony.³⁵ John does this kind of “stacking up” of witness for example in John 5:19-47. The second part of this long discourse adduces a series of witnesses,³⁶ which combined corroborate the claims of Jesus to be equal with God: John the Baptist (5:33-35); the works of Jesus (5:36); the Father (5:37); the Scriptures (5:39); and Moses (5:46). John employs the same usage in I John 5:6-11.³⁷ This being the case, the shorter reading is John, consistent with his usage elsewhere, showing that there are multiple witnesses to Jesus, that these witnesses are separate but in agreement, and thus, that there is greater strength to the testimony. But the language of the longer ending (specifically the latter part, “these three are one”) would actually work directly against John’s point. If one professes three witnesses (as the Persons of the Trinity), but then asserts that these three are in fact only one, (“these three are one”), he is reducing rather than increasing the number of witnesses, and thus weakening rather than strengthening the testimony being adduced. The “these three agree in one” of the shorter reading is part of a good Johannine theology of witness. The “these three are one” of the longer reading, while an orthodox expression of Trinitarianism, is language that would work directly against John’s normal use of witness language, and directly against his clear intention for such language in this very passage. John simply did not write this language here. He did not write the comma.

The Vocabulary of Johannine Christology

Much more relevant than the language of “Witness” in John is the language he uses of each member of the Trinity. “Word” (λογος) is common language in John,³⁸ almost always used of speech or discourse (and thus, almost never of Christ). However, “Son,”³⁹ which is essentially shorthand for “Son of God,”⁴⁰ is clearly John’s most common designation for Jesus. Occasionally he also uses, usually on Jesus’

³⁴ See Kostenberger, *“Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters”* pg. 454-456.

³⁵ I find it somewhat ironic that such a principle is ignored by those who accept the extremely late (thus not truly credible) minority witnesses to this text’s authenticity, when this text then builds on the principle of multiple credible witnesses increasing the strength of testimony.

³⁶ Ibid, pg. 209.

³⁷ Ibid, notes that 10 of the 12 usages of “Witness” language in I John occur in this passage.

³⁸ Jn. 2:22; 4:37, 39, 41, 50; 5:24, 38; 6:60; 7:36, 40; 8:31, 37, 43, 51-52, 55; 10:19, 35; 12:38, 48; 14:23-24; 15:3, 20, 25; 17:6, 14, 17, 20; 18:9, 32; 19:8, 13; 21:23:1, 10; 1 Jn. 2:5, 7, 14; 3:18; 3 Jn. 1:10; Rev. 1:2-3, 9; 3:8, 10; 6:9; 12:11; 19:9; 20:4; 21:5; 22:6-7, 9-10, 18-19

³⁹ John 1:18, 49; 3:16, 17; 3:35, 36; 5:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26; 6:40, 62; 8:35, 36; 14:13; 17:1; I John 1:3, 7; 2:22, 23, 24; 4:9, 10, 14, 5:9, 10, 11, 12; 2 John 1:9

⁴⁰ 1:34, 49; 3:18; 5:25; 6:69; 9:35; 10:36; 11:4, 27; 19:7; 20:31; I John 3:8; 23; 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12, 13, 20; 2 John 1:3; Rev. 2:18

own lips, “Son of Man.”⁴¹ These are his normal designations, and the normal way he refers to Jesus. In fact, in all of John’s writings, John only uses “Word” of Christ in three passages, always at some of the most intense moments in his corpus; John 1:1, 14; - where he introduces in the prologue the preexistent Christ as the Creative “λογος” who was made flesh; I John 1:1 – where he uses that same language to introduce Christ in his epistle, with the same overtones of preexistence and Creation, and; Rev. 19:13 where he climaxes his corpus of writings (and, unwittingly, the Christian canon), by designating the Christ who consummates human history as the eternal “Word” from God. These are “exceptional moments” that represent some of the highest points of John’s literary productions, and are fitting places to break into the highest Christology that John ever uses.

The point is that “Word” is not at all the normal way that John refers to Jesus, and when he does use it, it is at major climactic moments in his writing, not as the kind of “aside” that it would serve as in I John 5:7. Further, never elsewhere does he refer to Jesus as “Word” in an explicitly Trinitarian context (John 1:1 would be a binitarian statement, since there is not direct mention of the Spirit until much later in the gospel, and in either case doesn’t present God as Father). In such contexts, he always refers to Jesus as “Son” (see references above) to spell out the Trinitarian connection between Father and Son. John’s Trinitarian moments present Christ as the Son of the Father, not the Word from God. These considerations don’t make it impossible that John could use that designation here (since he does occasionally use it elsewhere) but it does make it much less likely.

The Vocabulary of Johannine Pneumatology

John’s usual designation for the third person of the Trinity is simply “Spirit”⁴² or “Comforter.”⁴³ When John does use an adjective or noun modifier to describe the Spirit, he consistently follows the same linguistic pattern in his language. He always, without fail, places the descriptive modifier *after* the noun.⁴⁴ He only ever uses the adjective “Holy” of the Spirit four times - John 1:33; 7:39 (this is a predicate use of the adjective, which is something else altogether, but still has the adjective after the noun); 14:26; 20:22.⁴⁵ Among all of John’s uses of “Spirit”, he very rarely adds the modifier “holy.” But when he does add “holy,” or a modifier of any kind, he always consistently follows the same syntactical pattern, placing the modifier *after* the noun. Thus, he doesn’t use “Holy Spirit” in I John at all, and the actual phrase of I John 5:7, “The Holy Spirit,” with the adjective *before* the noun, never occurs in John’s writings. *Ever. Anywhere.* John speaks of the Spirit often, and pneumatology is an especially strong theme of his. But I John 5:7 is linguistically unlike how he speaks of the Spirit in every other place.

In fact, this particular phrase (placing the adjective before the noun) almost never occurs anywhere in the NT at all, with a small handful of exceptions in Luke; (Luke 12:10-12; Acts 1:8; 2:33, 38; 9:31; 10:45; 15:28; 16:6), and twice in Paul; (I Cor. 6:19; II Cor. 13:14). In over 385 uses of “Spirit” in the NT, most as a reference to the Holy Spirit, and over 80 uses of some form of the actual phrase, “The Holy

⁴¹ John 1:51; 3:13, 14; 5:27; 6:27, 53; 8:28; 12:23, 34; 13:31; Rev. 1:13; 14:14

⁴² Jn. 1:32-33; Jn. 3:6, 8, 34; Jn. 4:24; Jn. 6:63; Jn. 7:39; Jn. 14:17, 26; Jn. 15:26; Jn. 16:13; Jn. 19:30; Jn. 20:22; 1 Jn. 4:2, 6; 1 Jn. 5:6-8; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; Rev. 3:6, 13, 22; Rev. 11:11; Rev. 14:13; Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:17

⁴³ John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7

⁴⁴ Thus, using a noun, “The Spirit of Truth” (always in the second attributive position); τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας (Joh 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1Jo 4:6 SCR). Or “The Spirit of God” τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ (1Jo 4:2 SCR). Or, using an adjective, “The Spirit of Life” πνεῦμα ζωῆς (Rev 11:11 SCR).

⁴⁵ He uses the adjective “holy” in the first attributive position twice, the second position once, and the predicate position once. Thus, “Spirit Holy/The Spirit Holy” Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ (Joh 1:33 SCR); Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον (Joh 20:22 SCR); ἦν Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον (Joh 7:39 SCR) (this is the predicate position – i.e., “The Spirit is holy”); τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον (Joh 14:26 SCR) (this is the second attributive position).

Spirit” in the NT, in 15 different books, by 7 different authors, this exact phrase is found only in the above mentioned handful of Lukan passages and two very rare uses by Paul.⁴⁶

The placement of the adjective before the noun in the phrase “the Holy Spirit” could almost be called a distinctly Lukan idiom, which his good friend and longtime traveling companion Paul has on two rare occasions imitated. It is certainly not Johannine, and if John wrote I John 5:7, he is using a phrase incredibly rare for him, and a word order for this phrase which he never uses anywhere else in his writings, and which almost no one but Luke ever uses anywhere in the NT.

The vocabulary of Johannine Trinitarianism

“These three are one” – While John uses the word τρεῖς (three) 15 times (present passage excluded), he most often uses it in reference to a number of days. He does use it in reference to the three-fold witness in verse 8. But he never uses the word as a description of the Godhead. While John is certainly “Trinitarian” in that he sees Father, Son, and Spirit as God,⁴⁷ the “these three” as a reference to the triune Godhead is simply not part of John’s normal language. And to say, “these three are one” is unlike anything else said anywhere in the NT. It would be the most natural, most sophisticated, and most clear way to describe the Godhead, if John had such language in his toolbox. So, if he was aware of it, why would he only use it at this one place? Why no where else? Why is this the first and only expression of such explicitly articulated “Triune” language? Further, if this language appears early in John’s writings, then why is it not picked up again in his later epistles, or his gospel, or especially, in his final Revelation? John regularly picks up there themes and language from his earlier writings. If John wrote the comma, he has stated some of the most profound theology in the history of God’s revelation. How could we explain the fact that he neglects to pick up and repeat this language anywhere else, at any time? The truth is, there is simply no way that John could yet use this language, because it is the clear (and excellent) articulation, not of John, but of the later church.

The Trinity of course has been eternally existent, but God did not immediately reveal his triune nature to his people. This revelation developed slowly throughout the giving of the canon. Most especially, it was revealed in the historical events of the Incarnation and Pentecost. These historical events showed God to be a triune being of three equal but distinct persons. The church would continue to develop how they articulated this truth. They did not develop the Trinity, for the Godhead is eternal, but they did develop the language that we use to express that Godhead. They did develop in their articulation.⁴⁸ The point is, on any account, the language of I John 5:7 is the language of the articulation of the later church. It is not the language of John, and it would be anachronistic to find it on his lips. John didn’t use this language, and John didn’t write the comma.

Conclusion

Thus, to conclude this examination of the longer reading of I John 5:7, it is obvious that every strand of the data arrives firmly and independently at the conclusion that the shorter reading is undoubtedly the original one. The external data is definitive. If we only knew the versional witnesses, we would be able to tell that the longer reading occurs only in Latin, and only later than the shorter reading.

⁴⁶ For examples of the normal order, see Mat. 1:18, 20; 3:11; 12:32; 28:19; Mark 1:8; 3:29; 12:26; 13:11; Luke 1:15, 35, 35, 41 67; 2:25, 26; 3:16; 3:22; 4:1; 11:13; John 1:33; 7:39; 14:26; 20:22; Acts 1:2, 5, 16; 2:4, 33; 38; 4:8, 31; 5:3; 5:32; 6:3; 6:5; 7:51, 55; 8:15; 8:17, 18, 19; 9:17; 10:44, 47; 11:5, 16, 24; 13:2, 4, 9, 52; 15:8; 19:2; 16:6; 20:23; 20:28; 21:11; 28:25; Rom. 5:5; 9:1; 14:17; 15:13, 16; I Cor. 2:13; 12:3; 2 Cor. 6:6; Eph. 1:13; 4:30; I Thess. 1:5, 6; 4:8; 2 Tim. 1:14; Titus 3:5; Heb. 2:4; 3:7; 6:4; 9:8; 10:15; I Pet 1:12; 2 Peter 1:21

⁴⁷ See “*Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel*” by Kostenberger for a thorough presentation of John’s Trinitarian thought.

⁴⁸ See Appendix A of the full essay for a brief outline of this development.

In light of the additional versional witnesses, which unanimously testify to the shorter reading, the versional data is conclusive. The patristic data tells the same story. The longer reading is known only among Latin fathers, and only after Nicaea, never before. When we look at the Greek manuscripts, the data is overwhelmingly on the side of the shorter reading, with the shorter reading supported not only by every early witness, but by essentially every witness from any time and place.

Examining the internal evidence only further confirms what we could already conclude. In terms of intrinsic probability, the language of the comma is not at all Johannine, disturbs the context of the passage, works against John's point, and is historically anachronistic. In terms of transcriptional probability, the great variety of the forms of the passage (6 different forms among only 10 manuscripts that have it) would alone show it to clearly be an addition. The fact that exactly half of these witnesses have the comma as a marginal addition would by itself explain that it was an "addition" to the original text. The extremely late nature of these witnesses would make the reading irrelevant in terms of establishing the original text of the NT. But the fact that all of even these few late witnesses show clear evidence of being translations from Latin only seals the deal. Thus, the three separate strands of evidence combine and intertwine to become a three-fold cord not easily broken. John simply did not write the longer reading of I John 5:7. Anyone who values truth over tradition must come to this conclusion. Period.

Where The Longer Reading Came From

But what about the right side of the chart? Several different forms of the comma do become common, even if it is only in Latin that this happens. Then, in the second millennium, we do have a few Greek witnesses, disparate though they may be, that have some form of the longer reading. How does this scenario explain those witnesses? In other words, where did the KJV reading actually come from, and how did it make its way into the KJV? Let me suggest a very plausible scenario. I would never say, "It happened exactly this way." This is only a suggested possibility. But almost all of the external data, (Greek, versional, patristic) and all of the internal data (transcriptional and intrinsic) have already spoken clearly and loudly in favor of the shorter reading being original. We are perfectly justified in ruling conclusively on that mountain of evidence. But if we can provide a plausible scenario that would explain the few disparate parts (the right side of the chart), then we can "tie up the loose ends" so to speak, and every single witness can be accounted for, and we can make sense of every single element in our chart.

The Comma Was Born As A Patristic Reflection on Verse Eight

Cyprian, writing in the 3rd century, in "*De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate*" or "*On the Unity of the Church*" writes, "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.' And does anyone believe that this unity which thus comes from the Divine strength and coheres in celestial sacraments, can be divided in the Church, and can be separated by the parting asunder of opposing wills? He who does not hold this unity does not hold God's law, does not hold the faith of the Father and Son, does not hold life and salvation."⁴⁹

Notice that Cyprian is making a case for the unity of the divine persons being a teaching that comes from "The Divine strength" yet does not quote the longer reading. Rather, the only "quotation" from I John 5 is the phrase from verse 8, "and these three are one." If he had the longer reading, in an attempt to make his case, it is unthinkable that he wouldn't quote the longer reading. What he does do is quote the shorter reading, but he interprets it allegorically as a reference to the Trinity. He has understood the "spirit and water and blood" to be allegorically referring to the three members of the Trinity. It is easy to see how he has made this leap. Jesus had said in John 10, "I and the Father are one." And Cyprian can see the Trinity in such a statement. (Technically, this is a binitarian statement.) But Cyprian can also see John using the phrase, "these three are one" which sounds so much the same as

⁴⁹ ANF, Schaff, vol. 5, pg. 423.

Jesus' statement about the Father. This sounds exactly like what one might say about the Trinity, and after all, spirit+water+blood = three witnesses, just like there are three members of the Trinity. Simple. In an age when allegorical interpretation is abundant and common, it is an easy step to see spirit, water, and blood as allegorical references to the members of the Trinity (after all, the Spirit is directly mentioned, and if one adds two other entities to the Spirit, what else could they be talking about?)

But notice that he has slightly misread the text. He writes, "Dicit Dominus: *Ego et Pater unum sumus. Et iterum de patre et filio et spiritu sancto scriptum est: Et tres unum sunt.*"⁵⁰ He has read, "*Et tres unum sunt,*" where all the Latin manuscripts read, "*Et hi tres unum sunt.*" In fact, as we saw earlier, that is the reading of the Latin manuscripts both in verse 8 and the later addition which has become our verse 7. Without the pronoun, the phrase could be mistaken to have the sense, "the three are a unity," or, in the witness context, "the three are in agreement." Note also that his reference to the Trinity is the common form in the Western church, "the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Not, Father, *Word*, and Holy Ghost. Cyprian saw a clear statement of the unity of the Father and Son in John 10:30. And he was eager to find one that supported the Trinity he held so dear, so he saw a statement of the unity of the members of the Trinity in the Latin translation of John's statement in I John 5:8, "and these three are one." His interpretation of the passage (the shorter reading of I John 5:7, interpreted as a reference to the Trinity) became immensely popular. It may even have become the major interpretation of the passage in church of that day. It would be an easy jump for an interpreter to make, and even interpreters today, who do not accept the longer reading, sometimes interpret verse 8 in this way, as a reference to the Trinity.

The Early Church Promoted This Trinitarian Reflection On The Shorter Reading

Many other patristic writers either follow Cyprian's interpretation, or make a similar jump themselves, with minor differences in how they interpret parts of the shorter reading. These authors are sometimes cited as support for the longer reading, but only by those who have not read them closely (or who have intentionally misrepresented them). In each case, they are quoting only the shorter reading, but interpreting verse 8 as a reference to the Trinity. Again, it is an easy jump to make. Augustine provides a prime example.

This Reflection Gained A Glossary Status, And Slipped Into The Text

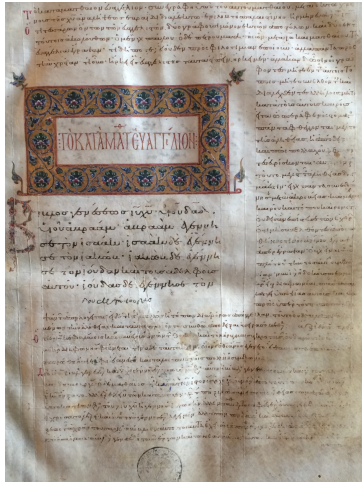
When scribes copied out the text of scripture, they always created a "margin" or a blank border around the text. Oftentimes they then made use of that border. But they could make use of that border in several different ways. These ways are known under the umbrella term "glosses." They had several different purposes. As we've looked at the data above, we have seen several examples of a later scribe who uses the border to "correct" the reading of the manuscript. This is where a scribe is saying, "I think the scribe who wrote this manuscript accidentally left something out. Here is what the text should have said." Or, in one or two cases, the marginal note that contains the longer reading may be what is called a "variant reading," or v.r. This is where the scribe producing the manuscript knows of two different readings, but isn't sure which is original, so he writes one in the text, and another in the margin. Yes, footnotes that some would claim "cast doubt on the Bible" (if one wants to use that extremely pejorative language), existed thousands of years before modern versions, and are a basic part of half of the only 10 manuscripts that have the longer reading.

But there was another common use of the margin. It was often used as a place to write commentary on the text of Scripture. Some scribes produced their own commentary on Scripture. (Let's be honest – each of us who preach do this all the time while in the pulpit.) Many other scribes would take the comments of a well-known patristic author from their own or a previous generation, and they would write that commentary in the margins of the manuscript. In fact, sometimes, scribes would write commentary, not only in the margin, but in the flow of the text. They might differentiate the text and their

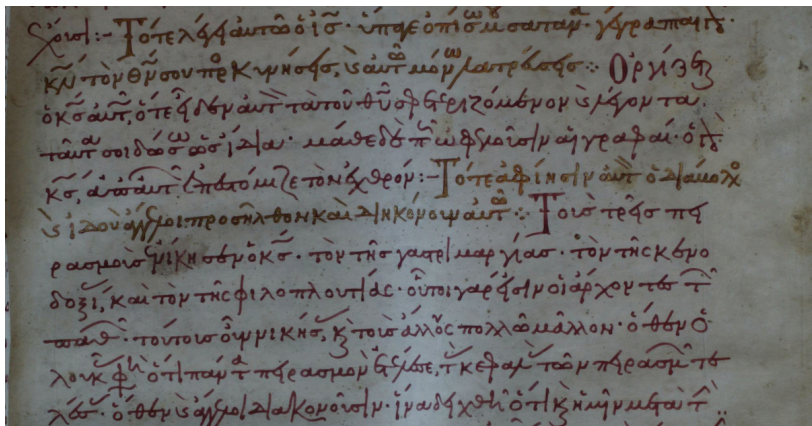
⁵⁰ See a critical edition of the Latin text at; <https://archive.org/details/librdecatholic00krabgoog> pg. 15.

own commentary by writing the text in capital letters, and the commentary in lowercase. Or they might write the text in one color of ink, and the commentary in another.

For example, here is a Greek manuscript of Matthew with commentary written all around the text. Notice the 7 lines of the first part of the text of Matthew, but surrounded on top, right, and bottom, by scribal commentary;



But again, sometimes a scribe wrote commentary in line with the text. For example, here is one example of where the scribe wrote the commentary within the text, but using two different colors of ink (gold for the text of scripture; red for the text of his comments);



Do you see his half line of commentary, then line and a half of text; then three and a half lines of commentary, then line and a half of text, etc.? What if a scribe writing a manuscript like this accidentally used the wrong color pen, and wrote his comment with the color used for the scripture text? Or what if the colors simply became indistinguishable over time? If you didn't look really close, you might go to make a copy of this manuscript later, and think you were copying out the text, but actually be copying out the commentary.

Or, if you're a scribe who goes to copy the text, you might see a marginal note, but you aren't sure what the note means. Remember, the margins could serve multiple purposes. They could include commentary, variant readings, or corrections. You see a note in the margin, but you don't know - Is this marginal note a comment on the text? Is it a variant reading? Is it a correction, where the scribe before you was saying, "This goes in the text, I just accidentally skipped it when I was writing." It could be any one of the three. You would have no way to know for sure. And the scribes of the Greek manuscripts are known for being much more careful in making clear what is text and what is margin. Of course, in early Latin works, this can be quite a bit messier.

This is likely one of several reasons why the so called “Western text” (which is where most of the Latin manuscripts would fall) has so many wild additions to it not found in the other text-types. For example, did you know that if we added all of the textual expansions inserted into the Western manuscripts to the text of the Bible, the text of the book of Acts would grow by over 10% from what’s our Bibles? Scribes of the Latin manuscripts accidentally included glosses or inserted expansions into the text all the time. If a scribe does this, and someone copies his manuscript, we now have two manuscripts which have a reading that was originally just a marginal gloss. If two scribes each make copies of their texts, then we have six witnesses that have the reading. And so on, and so on.

We only find the longer reading in the Latin manuscripts until the second millennium, but the earliest forms of it all have the two triads in the opposite order of that found in the TR, and this is especially significant in reconstructing the rise of the variant. The earliest variant of the passage in Latin is actually the rare addition of the phrase, “in earth” to the shorter reading. Thus we have one early Latin manuscript which reads, “*Thus three* there are, who testimony give in earth; spirit, and water, and blood. and these three are one.” Until somewhere around 600 AD, the triads are found with the “earthly” witness before the “heavenly” witnesses. This is precisely what we would expect to find if the longer reading were originally a marginal gloss providing an interpretation of the shorter reading as allegorically representing the Trinity. In fact, if the comment was written within the text using the “two-color ink” method shown above, the reading and its comment would look like this;

“Thus there are three, who testimony give on earth; Spirit, and water, and blood: and these three are one. *And there are three, who testimony give in heaven; Father, Word and Spirit, and these three one are.* 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.”

Which is, in fact, exactly the Latin form we noted above which became so common. If a manuscript had such a comment within the text, it would be almost impossible for it not to slip into the text at some point by a later scribe copying the text. Even if this form never occurred in a two-color-ink manuscript, the marginal interpretation of the shorter reading would still be placed in the margin right after the phrase, “these three are one.” If that comment was accidentally inserted, it would again yield the exact form shown above, the form evidenced early in the Latin manuscripts. One can see clearly what could have happened, and the mistake that led to a Trinitarian interpretive gloss accidentally slipping in to the text of some Latin manuscripts, and being copied from there.

Notice, there is no malice here. There is no “conspiracy” to remove things from the Bible or add things to it. There is no intentional change of the text by heretical parties. Such conspiracy theories are the fantasy playground of modern skeptics, and TRO/KJVO advocates seem to regularly adopt their claims of malicious alteration without question. But what we actually have is just good scribes, who want to make a good copy of the Scriptures they revere, but who happen to have this one thing in common with you and I; they are fallen people and they make mistakes. The fallen state and lack of perfection of every human being has been called the single most empirically verifiable element of all of theology. No one can truly deny their own ability to regularly make mistakes. If you’ve ever met a single other human being in your life, then you know others are just as prone as you are. The fallen state and propensity of these scribes to make such mistakes is something that you inherently know to be true. One might claim, “but I believe God supernaturally protected the scribes from such mistakes.” But the existence of every single variant form of the passage found among the Latin and Greek manuscripts (to say nothing of every single textual variant in every single manuscript we possess) is empirically verifiable proof that God did not magically prevent such scribal errors. In fact, if one holds the KJV/TR correct in this passage, he is forced to admit that 99% of the Greek manuscripts of this passage represent such scribal error in one form or another, and that the vast majority of these scribes did not have some “Divine Insurance policy” which ensured their text was perfect, which makes such an objection rather self-refuting.

Is it possible that scribes writing commentary on the text of the shorter reading of I John 5:7-8 might put the allegorical interpretation of Cryprian, Augustine, or themselves, in the margins of some of their manuscripts? It is almost certain that they did at points. Is it then possible that a scribe might then copy a Latin manuscript that had a comment in the margin, and might accidentally think that what was intended as a comment to interpret the text was actually supposed to be part of the original text? Are you kidding? It would be almost impossible if this didn't happen at some points in the transmission of the text. It probably happened at many different points in the transmission of the Latin text. (Which is why the longer reading appears in several different forms in the Latin tradition.) But it is easily detectable to anyone who both looks at the evidence, and actually cares what it reveals. Because Latin scribes were most prone to such errors, the variant occurs in the Latin tradition. Because the variant was never part of the original text of I John, it is found only in the Latin tradition.

Does this mean the text of the NT cannot be found today? That it is so corrupted by scribal error that it is completely irrecoverable? Of course not. Look again through the chart of external data. God has given us a wealth of historical data, and it is frankly overwhelming. There is no doubt about the wording of the original text here. In fact, amazingly, the vast majority of the text of the NT is not affected at all by textual variation or scribal error. And in the vast majority of places even where the text is affected, we have such an incredible amount of data available that even the most skeptical scholars, with a serious bias against the Bible, have to admit that we can reconstruct the text of the NT with virtual certainty in all but a few hundred places. All of the debate between textual critics is about these few hundred places.

There are several ways to approach such data. One can come to a text like this one as many modern skeptics do, and say, "We have no idea what the original said." But to make this claim, they must ignore every ounce of the actual historical data. Every piece of external data in the chart above refutes the skeptic and says that we know exactly what the wording of the original autographs was here. Their position only works by completely ignoring the data. Or, one can come with a bias that says, "The KJV can never be wrong." But to make this claim, one must again ignore every ounce of the historical data. If our attitude is "all of the data must be rejected and ignored – it is all corrupt" and the basis for saying this is that no reading could ever be correct that is not the reading of the KJV, then our foundation is the same as the skeptic. We have abandoned all of the data, and condemned all of the evidence. Our argument is no longer "look at the evidence." It is now, "be just like me, and reject all of the evidence like I do, and just choose to believe wishfully that God supernaturally recreated perfectly in 1611 the text which had for all ages previous, in every language, been lost." Belief in this magical recreation in 1611 must then become the sole and only grounds for trusting the Word of God.

The other way to approach the data is to actually believe in preservation; to believe that God's words have never been completely lost, and did not need magically restored in 1611. This approach looks at the wealth of data above and says, "I know exactly what the wording of the originals was here. I know exactly what John wrote. I know exactly what God said." While the first two approaches demand a wholesale rejection of the historical data, this position is reasonable, verifiable, and evidential. It doesn't ignore the data – it trusts it. This is the approach which I believe most honors God.

The Comma becomes a Vulgar Reading

Now that we can see how the variant arose, we must ask, how did it become the common reading of the Latin church? The Latin Vulgate became the standard Bible of the western church for almost a full millennium. It became common to claim that God had in fact originally written the Bible in Latin. In 1401 a statute was passed that made it illegal to read even a scrap of the Bible in any language but Latin, punishable by burning at the stake.⁵¹ When Gutenberg invented printing, an edition of the Latin Vulgate was the first work to come off his press in 1456. In fact, over 100 different editions of the Latin Bible were printed before the first Greek New Testament was printed in 1514. The Latin text, in various forms,

⁵¹ Daniel, David, introduction to "*The New Testament 1526 edition Facsimile*" by William Tyndale. No page numbers.

was literally everywhere. It was the common Bible of the established church at the time of Erasmus. And most editions of this Bible contained the longer reading of I John 5:7. St. Thomas Aquinas had declared the text authentic, despite its complete absence from the 1st millennium of the Greek tradition.

This attitude toward the Vulgate, and the authenticity of the comma, came to a fuller expression at the Council of Trent in 1545. Among the many grievous errors of that council, they asserted that “Moreover, the same sacred and holy Synod,— considering that no small utility may accrue to the Church of God, if it be made known which out of all the Latin editions, now in circulation, of the sacred books, is to be held as authentic,—ordains and declares, that the said old and vulgate edition, which, by the lengthened usage of so many ages, has been approved of in the Church, be, in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions, held as authentic; and that no one is to dare, or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever.” Ironically, if one were to replace “Latin” with “English,” and “Vulgate” with “Authorized” in that statement, it would sound disturbingly like many KJVO statements of faith. In either case, it is quite evident that by the time Erasmus set out to write a new translation of the Latin text, the comma had become rather universally accepted, and especially so in Roman Catholicism. In 1897, the “Sacred Congregation of the Inquisition in Rome” issued a declaration (confirmed by Pope Leo XIII) that one could not call into question the authenticity of the comma.⁵²

The Comma gets translated into Greek, and put into Erasmus’ text against his better judgment

Erasmus’ Text

Erasmus was a Roman Catholic, committed to the authority of the Latin text, he was also a humanist (in the old sense of the word, not the modern one), with a desire to spread learning across the west. This caused something of an internal conflict within him. He sought to revive the learning of the original tongues of Scripture, and he constantly encouraged the study of the Scriptures in the original languages. This was quite an unpopular thing to say in his day. But he went even further than recommending the study of the original languages. He often suggests that the original languages should be used to correct the common Vulgate. But Erasmus could detect clear places where the Vulgate was divergent from the form of the Greek manuscripts he knew, and thus from the form of the Greek original. So he occasionally was brave enough to correct the Vulgate text to conform to the Greek original.

One of the places where Erasmus sought to correct the common Latin Vulgate by the Greek texts was in the reading of the *Johannine Comma*. The comma was not part of the Greek manuscript tradition, even in the very limited way that Erasmus knew it. Further, based on the clear patristic and versional evidence, Erasmus could clearly tell that the comma was not originally written by John, but was the addition of a later Latin scribe.

Thus, when he printed his edition of the Latin text, with the Greek text beside it, he did not include the comma. He printed the shorter reading. In his first edition, in 1516,⁵³ Erasmus prints the shorter

⁵² Brown, “*The Epistles of John*” pg. 780. As Brown (a Roman Catholic) explains, Roman Catholics today have found ways to “get around” both Trent and the Inquisition declaration, as well as the constitutions of Oxford. It would be something of an embarrassment to have the Church officially declare original a text which historically they all must admit wasn’t written by John, so it is now suggested that Trent can be complied with by any form of the Latin, and the Inquisition is taken to be affirming only that the comma is Catholic Scripture, not that it was actually written by John, which all must now admit that it was not. Thus, most editions of the Vulgate (and most “Rome-approved” translations from Greek) do not include the comma today, as noted in the chart above with the Vgst and Vg^{ww} sigla. Others do, and thus the comma may still be regarded as Roman Catholic Scripture, while being acknowledged as not originally written by John.

⁵³ Erasmus “*Novum Instrumentum*” 1516. To see the text itself, without the *Comma* of I John 5:7 included, see *Novum Instrumentum*, 1516 pg. 183.

http://images.csntm.org/PublishedWorks/Erasmus_1516/Erasmus1516_0257a.jpg

reading in both the Greek and Latin text. He explains why in his annotation on the passage,⁵⁴ writing, “*in graeco codice tantu hoc reperio de testimonio triplici, or “I find that in the Greek manuscripts this is only a three-fold witness”* (meaning, the 6-fold witness of the longer reading is not in the Greek manuscripts that he has found). And then he quotes the shorter reading, without the comma, as being the original one. The second edition in 1519 likewise prints the shorter reading,⁵⁵ and presents the same brief comment that the comma is not original.⁵⁶

After the printing of his text without the comma, Erasmus discovered that he had opened quite a can of worms.⁵⁷ It might not be too much to say that the omission of the comma was among the greatest causes of derision and attack Erasmus ever faced. Stunica and Lee both wrote detailed attacks upon Erasmus for having omitted the comma. Stunica had been the primary editor for the Complutensian polyglot, which, while printed in 1514, was finally published in 1520-22. He had added a detailed note on the comma. He included the Latin text he had landed at on the right side of the page, and translated it into Greek on the left side of the page. But the editors (primarily Stunica) go even further than that, directly admitting, “*Sed hoc in veritas exemplaribus non habentur*” or “but it is true that we do not have any copies of it [meaning in the Greek manuscripts].” But then, the very next thing they do is start calling names. So they pronounce, “*sed dicitur esse appositum ab hereticis arrianis ad pervertendum intellectum sanum auctoritatis premissae de unitate essentiae trium personarum.*” Or, “but anyone who says that it has been added is an Arian heretic who is trying to deteriorate the authority of the unity of the essence of the three persons.” While the comma didn’t figure at all in the original Arian controversy, patristic authors continued to write against Arianism for the next thousand years, and Latin scholars as early as the 5th century had begun to appeal to the comma in the Latin Vulgate as support against Arianism. They end their note by again invoking the authority, not of any Greek manuscript, but of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The note of Stunica gives us a window into the controversy of the day surrounding the comma. It was apparently well known that there was no Greek support for the clause, but everyone implicitly trusted the authority of the great medieval theologians who had already pronounced directly upon its authenticity. Further, it didn’t bother most people that there was no Greek support, because most scholars of the day were deeply distrustful of going back to the original languages to begin with. They felt that they had a perfect translation in Latin, the “preserved word of God” in the official language of the Church, and no one should be questioning that translation on the basis of the original languages. Erasmus faced repeated resistance for his ideas of improving the Latin with Greek. And because of the history of the church’s struggle with the Arian heresy, no one wanted to say that this beautiful and orthodox verse which so clearly stated the unity of essence of the three persons of the Godhead was not authentic. In fact, more than that, to suggest that it was not authentic was to be immediately labeled a heretic, even if one did still believe in the Trinity. This is precisely the charge that Stunica and Lee brought against Erasmus when he didn’t include the comma in his first two editions of the Greek NT. Erasmus explained that it wasn’t in any Greek manuscripts. In fact, in a written correspondence, Erasmus later asked Stunica directly if he had ever come across a Greek manuscript which contained the comma, and Stunica admitted that he had not. He admitted that he had translated the Latin Vulgate into Greek to produce a Greek text which did contain the comma. The polyglot with Stunica’s note can be seen here;

⁵⁴ Erasmus, *Annotationes*, 1516, pg. 618. See image at

http://images.csntm.org/PublishedWorks/Erasmus_1516/Erasmus1516_0475b.jpg

⁵⁵ Erasmus, *Novum Testamentum*, 1519, pg. 522-523,

⁵⁶ Erasmus, *Annotationes*, explaining that the Greek manuscripts don’t have the comma, and that he doesn’t think it original, pg 539

⁵⁷ Rummel, “*Erasmus’ Annotations*” pg. 131-134. The controversy actually exploded prior to its publication, when his annotations were sent to Dorp and other scholars for consideration and review, and it became clear that Erasmus was planning to revise the Vulgate.

ἢ ἡπίστις ἡμῶν. Τίς ἐστὶν ὁ μικρῶν τοῦ κόσμου
 εἰ μὴ ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν υἱὸς τοῦ
 θεοῦ. οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ
 αἵματος ἰησοῦς ὁ χριστός. οὐκ ἐμὴ ὕ-
 λατι μόνον, ἀλλ' ἐμὴ ὕδατι καὶ αἵμα-
 τι. καὶ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐστὶν τοῦ μαρτυροῦν ὅ-
 τι τοῦ ὕδατος ἐστὶν ἡ ἀλήθεια. ὅτι τρεῖς εἰ-
 σὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐμὴ ὄνρα μὴ, ὁ πα-
 τὴρ καὶ ὁ λόγος καὶ τὸ ἅγιον ὕδωρ, καὶ
 οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἐμῆ εἰσί. καὶ τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρ-
 τυροῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τοῦ ὕδατος καὶ τοῦ

fides nostra. Quis est at qui vicit mundū
 nisi qui credit quoniam iesus est filius
 dei. Hic est qui venit per aquam et co-
 sanguinem iesus xps. Non in aqua co-
 solum: sed in aqua et sanguine. Et spiritus
 est qui testificatur quoniam
 xps est veritas. Quoniam tres sunt in celo: pater:
 qui testimonium dant in celo: pater:
 verbum: et spiritus sanctus: et hi tres
 unum sunt. Et tres sunt qui
 testimonium dant in terra: spiritus: aqua

Sanctus tho-
 mas in expo-
 sitione secunde
 decretalis de fu-
 sione trinitate et
 fide catholica
 tractans istius
 passum contra

albatem Joachīm vs Tres sunt qui testimonium dant in celo. pater: verbum: et spiritus sanctus: dicit ad litteram verba sequentia. Et ad insinuandam vni-
 tatem trium personarum subditur et hi tres unum sunt. Quod quidem dicitur propter essentie vnitatem. Sed hoc Joachīm periclitari volens ad vni-
 tatem charitatis et consensus inducebat consequentem auctoritatem. Hic subditur ibidem: et tres sunt qui testimonium dant in terra. scilicet spiritus: aqua: et san-
 guis. Et in quibusdam libris additur: et hi tres unum sunt. Sed hoc in veris exemplaribus non habetur: sed dicitur esse appositum ab hereticis arianis ad
 pervertendum intellectum sanam auctoritatis precuisse de vnitatem essentie trium personarum. Hec beatus thomas vbi supra.

Erasmus had been somewhat forced into a corner by the pressure of the Catholic Church, in which he was still a priest, and to whose authority he was still bound (though he occasionally bent those borders some). Thus, in 1522, Erasmus now prints the comma in the 3rd edition of his Greek and Latin text of the NT. It had been common in the past to suggest that Erasmus only included it because he had made a rash promise that he would include it if a single Greek manuscript was found which had the comma in it. De Jonge has shown at length that there is no evidence that Erasmus ever made such a promise, and that while this may be so, there is no evidence that demands it.⁵⁸

Rather, Erasmus included the comma because he knew his NT would be continually rejected as Arian and as heretical if he didn't. (In his words, he said there would be, "occasion for slander" if he left it out.) Erasmus, as a humanist, sought to revive learning in the world at large. He sought to expand knowledge. His revision of the Latin text was a primary way he did this. But in light of the accusations against him, Erasmus knew that he could not accomplish his goals if his NT was universally blacklisted, and it became increasingly clear that if he didn't include the comma, his NT would be so blacklisted. He knew the wisdom of picking one's battles. De Jonge concludes his study by noting, "The goal of Erasmus' undertaking to imbue all Europe with a clear and simple gospel threatened to fail if Erasmus himself were tinged with any suspicion of unorthodoxy. For the sake of his ideal, Erasmus chose to avoid any occasion for slander rather than persist in philological accuracy and thus condemning himself to impotence. That was the reason why Erasmus included the *Comma Johanneum* even though he remained convinced that it did not belong to the original text of I John."⁵⁹ In his previous annotations, Erasmus had written only a brief paragraph explaining why he didn't think the comma was original. Now, having been socially pressured to insert the comma into his text against his will, he expands that paragraph into a three page long explanation of why he is convinced that the comma was not written by John.⁶⁰ He then prints this note with every edition of his text.

Interestingly, he makes the same basic case we have made above. He points out that it was not quoted during the Arian controversy, which is unthinkable if they had had it. He points out that it was used only by later patristic writers against Arianism, but that they were using as a spear what had been "stitched together" by scribes, which is his common way of speaking of scribal alteration. He notes that

⁵⁸ See De Jonge, "Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum."

⁵⁹ De Jonge, "Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum" pg. 385. See also the list of references De Jonge provides to note 32.

⁶⁰ Erasmus, *Novum Testamentum*, 1522. Text, with the comma now added, pg. 522; Annotation explaining that it is not original, *Annotationes* pg 616-618.

the earliest fathers don't have it, and that it occurs only in Latin. He notes that it is not the reading of the Greek manuscripts, though he does note two exceptions. He says that he has seen it in a marginal note in one Greek manuscript that he had once perused (but which he apparently no longer had access to.) But he explains that this marginal note was written in a hand that is "*recens*," or recent. This is likely the manuscript we now know as Minuscule 88. He also notes that it has been found in the text of the codex Montfortianus, (what he calls Britannicus) or what we now know as minuscule 61.

Interestingly though, Erasmus does not print the Greek text as it is found in the Greek sources that he had (as Beza later notes). A glance at minuscule 61 will show the differences from Erasmus' reading. Erasmus knows the reading is simply a translation of the Latin text, but he doesn't think the scribe did a very good job with the translation, and, as usual, thought his own grasp of Latin and Greek superior. So what Erasmus prints in his Greek text is not the text as he finds it in his sparse Greek witnesses. And it is not the text even directly translated from the Vulgate. Rather, he takes the stylistic revision he has made to the Latin Vulgate, and translates his own revision back into Greek. This is the TR form of the Johannine Comma. It was created by Erasmus, as a translation into Greek of his own revision of the Latin reading that he knew and repeatedly explained wasn't an original reading. Erasmus repeats his annotation ardently defending the shorter reading in his 1527 edition,⁶¹ and again in his final 1535 edition.⁶² He took any occasion possible to explain that the comma was not authentic.

However, Erasmus was aware of a fundamental point acknowledged by all evangelical textual critics today, but strangely missed by most who advocate for the comma. He was aware that in terms of theology, it simply doesn't matter. He claimed that textual variants like I John 5:7 don't affect theology, and should not be grounds for division. Doctrine simply isn't built from a single text. It is built from the Bible as a whole. When the Catholic critics attacked his revision of the vulgate, and his annotations pointing out textual variants (I John 5:7 being the preeminent example), claiming that they rendered scripture unsure, and amounted to claiming there are errors in the Bible, he responded in his *Letter to Dorp*, "You think it wrong to weaken in any way the hold of something accepted by the agreement of so many centuries and so many synods." He then points out that when all the Greek copies and all the early patristic evidence agree together against the late Vulgate, it must surely be the Vulgate that is in error. "Again, when you say that one should not depart from a text that enjoys the approval of so many councils, you write like one of our ordinary divines, who habitually attribute anything that has slipped somehow into current usage to the authority of the Church." And, "There are men who do not like to see a text corrected, for it may look as though there were something they did not know. It is they who try to stop me with their authority of imaginary synods; they who build up this great threat to the Christian faith; they who cry 'the church is in danger' (and no doubt support her with their own shoulders, which would be better employed in propping a dung-cart) and spread suchlike rumors among the ignorant and superstitious mob...I see nothing here that much affects the genuineness of the Christian faith. If it were essential to the faith, that would be all the more reason for working hard at it. Nor can there be any danger that everybody will forthwith abandon Christ if the news happens to get out that some passage has been found in Scripture which an ignorant or sleepy scribe has miscopied or some unknown translator has rendered inadequately. There are other reasons to fear this, of which I prudently say nothing here. How much more truly Christian would it be to have done with quarrelling and for each man to cheerfully to offer what he can to the common stock and to accept with goodwill what is offered, so that at the same time you learn in humility what you do not know and teach others ungrudgingly what

⁶¹ Erasmus, *Novum Testamentum*, 1527. Text, pg. 507; Annotations explaining that it is not original, *Annoationes* pg. 695-698. Has the text in the Latin Vulgate, his Latin revision, and his Greek translation of it, with the article on both triads.

http://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/content/pageview/839045

⁶² Erasmus, *Novum Testamentum*, 1535. Text, with the comma, pg. 337; Annotation contending against the comma, *Annoationes*, pg. 768-771.

you do know!”⁶³ He ends his annotation on I John 5:7 with much the same tone as that letter, pointing out that the variant doesn’t affect doctrine, writing, “But to return to the business of the reading: from our remarks it is clear that the Greek and Latin manuscripts are at variance with each other, and in my opinion there is no danger in accepting either reading.”⁶⁴ I John 5:7 is easily the most “theologically significant” textual variant in the entire Bible. It is the “test case” for many advocating for the KJV/TR. But Erasmus, like all modern textual critics since him, recognized that it does not affect doctrine one way or the other. So he puts it in his text, against his will, but writes a note ardently arguing that it was not written by John. He died a few months later, still quite convinced that John did not write the longer reading, and still arguing against its authenticity. Unfortunately, after his death, most people followed what he had reluctantly put in the body of his text, instead of the explanation he had put in the footnote to it.

The Comma Gets Repeated In Stephanus, And Beza, Who Both Explain That It Is Not Original

Robertus Stephanus published four editions of the Greek New Testament, each of which for the most part simply copies Erasmus with slight modifications. He thus caves to the same peer pressure as Erasmus and includes the longer reading of I John 5:7 in his text. Like Erasmus, he probably mostly was concerned about the Latin text. His 1551 edition, the first to include verse divisions, printed the Latin Vulgate in one column, the Latin edition of Erasmus in the next column, and the Greek text of Erasmus, with minor alterations, in the final column.⁶⁵ Like Erasmus, he provides a marginal note about I John 5:7 noting that it is not original. In the “apparatus” in the left hand margin, he lists the sigla, δ, ε, ζ, θ, ι, α, and υ, which are his symbols for miniscules 5, 6, 7, 8 (in the old number system), 38, 2298, and 398. He is noting that none of the Greek manuscripts which he knows have the longer reading that he has included in the text.⁶⁶ He does not list any manuscripts which actually have the longer reading. He reprints it only because it was in the text of Erasmus, and probably because like Erasmus, he didn’t want to be considered an Arian heretic. In the right hand margin is a note explaining that the comma is not original, and that if it were original, the “these three are one” would have been used against Arianism during the Trinitarian controversies.⁶⁷

Theodore Beza, in his 1598 edition of the NT, which became perhaps the primary Greek source which the KJV translators uses, included the longer ending⁶⁸ as Erasmus and Stephanus had done before him, almost certainly for exactly the same reasons. Like Erasmus and Stephanus, he prints the Latin vulgate text on the right hand column, Erasmus’ revision of the vulgate in the center column,⁶⁹ and his Greek text in the left hand column. His text thus reads,

⁶³ Letter to Dorp, CWE vol. 71,

⁶⁴ Erasmus, *Annotationes*, 1535, pg. 771.

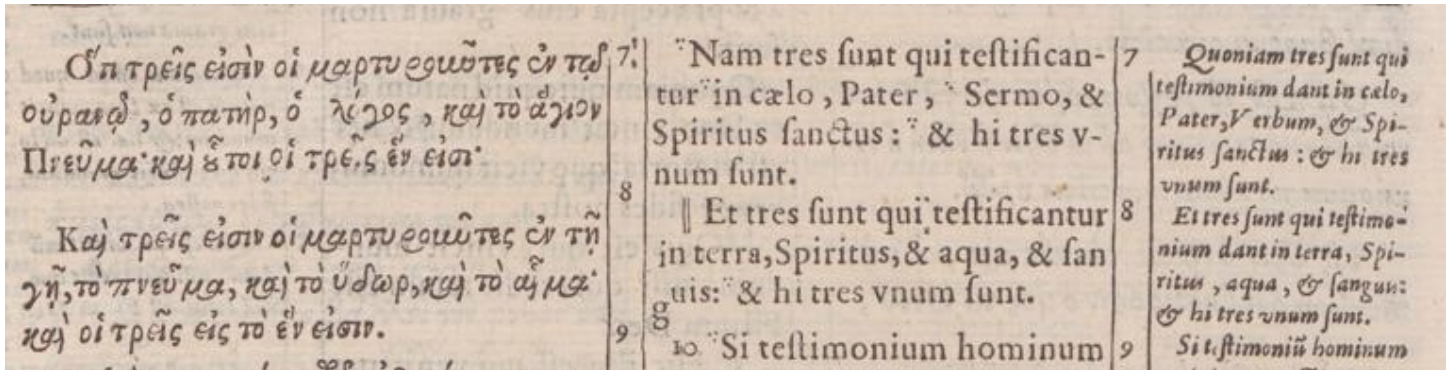
⁶⁵ The 1550 edition can be viewed in its entirety at (<http://www.bibles-online.net/1550/>).

⁶⁶ He apparently never had access to miniscule 61, and never refers to it in his apparatus.

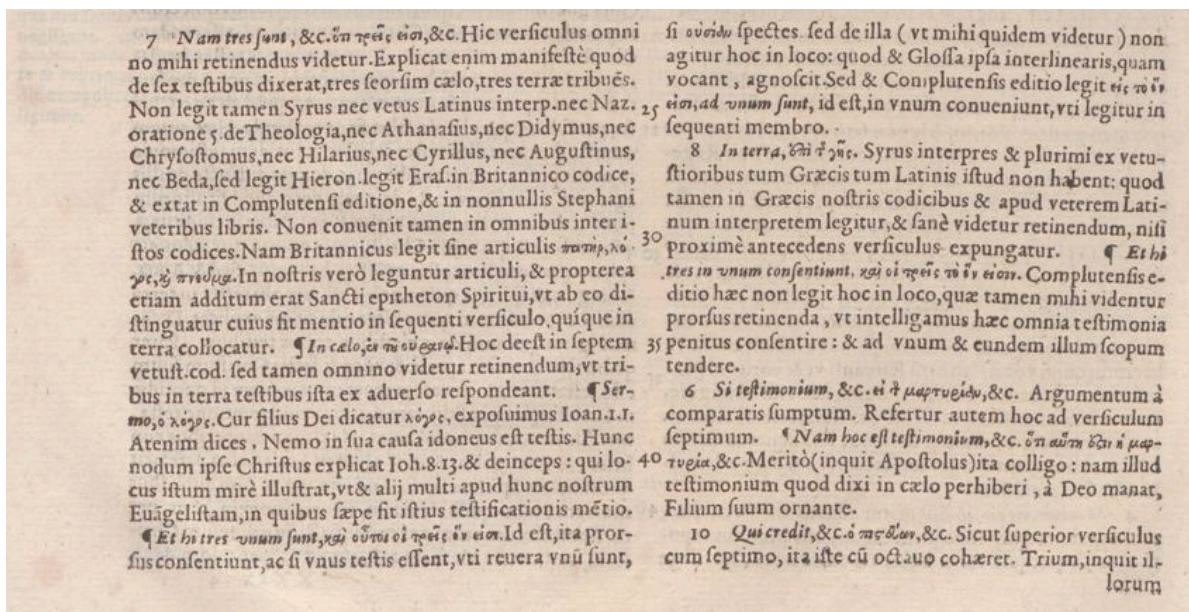
⁶⁷ Stephanus, *Novum Testamentum*, page 167. He writes, “*hoc dictum in qui busdam Codicibus MSS tis detie dicits. sine quidam putant tempore Arianismi dem sim este in = tre sim. Sed hoc falsim codici vetusti timi an qui sinim.*”

⁶⁸ Beza, *Novum Testamentum*, 1598, pg. 506.

⁶⁹ Note that he repeats Erasmus’ revision of the Vulgate from “*Quoniam tres sunt qui testimonium*” (there are three who bear record) to “*Nam tres sunt testificantur*” (for there are three witnesses) and has exchanged “*Verbum*” for “*Sermo*,” all of which are minor stylistic changes to make for smoother Latin.



Like Erasmus and Stephanus, while deferring to the tradition of the established church by including the longer reading on the basis of the Vulgate, he writes a detailed footnote explaining that the longer reading was not written by John. His note reads in full,



He opens his note by stating, “This verse it seems to me should be entirely held back.” He explains that there is no contextual reason for a six-fold witness instead of a three-fold one, then presents a long list of Versional and patristic sources which show that the longer reading is not genuine. He explains that it is not present in the Syriac version, and not in the Old Latin, and notes that the longer reading is, “Not in Gregory Nazianus, (*oratio de theologica*), not in Athanasius, not in Didymus, not in Chrysostom, not in Hilary, not in Cyril, not in Augustine, not in Bede, but is found only in the Vulgate.” He points out that Erasmus included it solely on the basis of the Britannicus codex (what we now call miniscule 61), and that it was found in the Complutensian polyglot, and [he thought] in a few manuscripts known to Stephanus.⁷⁰ But then he points to the fact that since Erasmus created his own translation of the Latin

⁷⁰ Beza has been repeatedly critiqued for being dishonest here, but he actually has simply misread Stephanus. He apparently mistakenly thought that any manuscripts which Stephanus knew but did not list in his apparatus must have supported the reading in the text. But this is not how a “negative apparatus” like that in Stephanus works. The editor is actually listing every manuscript which he knew of which reads at I John 5:7, (the ones he doesn’t list are not omitted because they have the longer reading – they are omitted because they don’t have I John at all), and is noting that all of them which he knows have the shorter reading. A multitude of places where Beza misunderstood the apparatus of Stephanus has been noted by modern textual scholars (See Jan Krans, “*Beyond What is Written*” pg. 241-246).

comma, these “*Non conuenit tamen in omnibus inter istos*” or “don’t agree even among themselves,” and points as an example to the fact that miniscule 61, as we have seen, doesn’t have the articles with the nouns Father, Word, and Spirit, and that it puts “Spirit” and “holy” in the wrong order. He thinks Erasmus’ translation of the Latin is a better one than the Britannicus codex or the Polyglot, so that is the one he includes in his text, even though he is still quite convinced by the evidence that the shorter reading is the original one.

It gets translated by the KJV translators

The KJV translators of course include the longer reading into the English of the KJV. They should not be faulted for this. All of the Greek texts which the KJV translators had access to had the longer reading, since they were essentially just repeating Erasmus here, rather against his will. The translators may have had access to Erasmus’ 3rd edition and Stephanus’ 1550 edition, and they certainly had before them Beza’s 1598.⁷¹ The translators either didn’t read the annotations of these texts (which all explained that the comma is not original), or chose to ignore the notes and translate the text knowing it was unoriginal. This isn’t “dishonest” anymore than it was “dishonest” of Erasmus, Stephanus, and Beza to print the reading in their text, knowing John didn’t write it. It isn’t any more “dishonest” that the NKJV translating the comma, even though every single translator knew the comma wasn’t original. Their work was translation of a given text, not textual criticism. The choice of the KJV translators to include it was likely a political move. Likely, the KJV translators didn’t want to involve themselves in the controversy that had consumed Erasmus’s own career, and so followed his lead in simply caving to social pressure. In light of the growing controversy surrounding the comma, their translation could have been “blacklisted” if they didn’t include it, and that simply wouldn’t be worth it. One wishes they had written a marginal note to explain that it wasn’t written by John,⁷² or at least had put the verse into italics so the reader would clearly know that the text came from the vulgate. The comma had a history in English already, as Wycliffe had translated it into English from the Vulgate. It had also been included in Tyndale, since he translated Erasmus’ 3rd edition, but he had in his second edition placed the verse in brackets to explain that it wasn’t original.⁷³ Other English revisions of Tyndale had simply copied his text of the comma, but they had allowed the brackets to fall off. By a strange misfortune, the KJV translators take none of these measures, and so untold numbers of KJV advocates have taken the inclusion of the verse as a test of orthodoxy, usually claiming that modern translations under some devilish bias “cut the verse out of the Bible” when in fact, as we have seen, they are simply refusing to add to the word of God in English a verse that indubitably was not written by John.

As The Manuscript Data Grows, It Gets Soundly Rejected By All

While the history of English translations had unfortunately begun with translating the vulgate, and had continued with translating the comma which came into the Greek texts only from the Vulgate, the

⁷¹ John Bois, KJV translator, refers to Beza’s 1598 version repeatedly in the notes which he took during the translation, which we still have today.

⁷² Though they had been expressly forbidden to include such textual notes by the rules given them by King James, they do occasionally make exceptions and break the rule, and one wishes they had done so here and prevented the controversy that has exploded from TRO and KJVO advocates.

⁷³ Brown records this, but fails to note that Tyndale didn’t do this until the 1534 edition. I have a facsimile copy of the 1526 edition, and there are no brackets in that edition. Tyndale wrote an exposition of I John in 1531, in which he printed his English text of 1526, and then comments verse-by-verse on each part of it. Interestingly, he prints his 1526 text, which still has the longer reading, but completely skips over the comma in his exposition, as though it were no part of the text (Tyndale, “*Expositions*” pg. 209-210). It is likely that he had by this point already concluded it not original, thus, when he reprinted his NT in 1534, he placed brackets around the text to show that it was likely not original, a practice many modern translations follow in textually dubious passages.

history of the printed Greek texts was decidedly different, being more concerned with Greek manuscripts. Thus Erasmus initially didn't include it, and then when he did reluctantly put it in, noted that it was not the reading of Greek manuscripts. Editors after him followed his lead in still including it, but noting that it had never been part of the Greek manuscript tradition. Stephanus and Beza did this prior to the KJV. In 1707, based on over 5 times the amount of Greek manuscript data available to those editors, Mill did the same. He printed the longer reading in his Greek text,⁷⁴ but noted in the apparatus the now overwhelming evidence against it. He then wrote a 10 page note examining the now conclusive Greek manuscript and Versional and patristic evidence that it was not original,⁷⁵ and had never been part of the Greek manuscript tradition.⁷⁶ As with many of the mistakes made by Erasmus, he reprinted Erasmus' mistake in the text, and only explained in the footnote that the comma was not original. A similar procedure was followed by Wettstein (1752), and Griesbach (1796) in their editions, who print the comma in the text, as they do almost all of Erasmus' errors, but then explain in the footnotes that the text was never part of the Greek tradition, and is not original.

In 1831, all of that changed. While editors previous had for the most part simply reprinted Erasmus' text, and simply noted in the margins where there were errors in it, in 1831 Karl Lachman made the decisive break. Scholars had known since Erasmus in 1516 that the comma was not original, but they had included it out of deference first to the Vulgate and then to the great Erasmus. But Lachman was willing to let the manuscript discoveries and advances in textual criticism reshape not just the marginal notes, but the text itself. Since it had been clear since the publication of the first NT in Greek that the comma was not part of the Greek manuscripts, he printed the shorter reading in the text, explaining briefly the manuscript support against it. Shortly thereafter, Tischendorf multiplied the manuscript data three-fold in his day, and in his text also printed the shorter reading. Thus the English revisions of Tyndale (of which the KJV was but one more) and the Greek editions of the NT had taken two entirely different tracks historically speaking. The KJV had been revised, but they were only revising the English translation, they were not primarily revising the Greek text which stood behind it. The Greek texts continued to be revised on the basis of continually growing manuscript data and the better articulation of textual critical principles.

Obviously, I John 5:7 is omitted by every edition of any form of the "Majority text." Thus, Robinson omits it, and explains that it never was in any way part of the Byzantine manuscript tradition. Pickering, another majority text advocate, omits it, and notes that it is found in the text of less than 1% of the manuscripts, and notes that the only one which has a form close enough to the TR to have been support for it (629) is too far different, and is obviously a translation of the Latin. He concludes, "The shorter reading makes excellent sense. [Those who make 'the three heavenly witnesses' a litmus test for orthodoxy are either ignorant or perverse (or both).]" It is likewise omitted from every "reasoned eclectic" text. It is included only in Greek texts which have retained Erasmus' translation of the passage from the Latin Vulgate, or for historical reasons have reprinted some form of the "Textus Receptus" rather than printing the actual readings of the Greek manuscripts.

Conclusion

We have surveyed the data extensively to show that the comma is not original, and we have further traced its history to show how it arose in the Latin tradition, how Erasmus reluctantly bridged that Latin tradition into his Greek text, and how that mistake ultimately ended up in the translation of the KJV. But I am well aware that for many, such data simply doesn't matter. There is a psychological and emotional attachment to the translation in their own tongue which they are convinced is infallible, and they feel that any attack on any reading in this translation is somehow an attack upon the Word of God.

⁷⁴ Mill, *Novum Testamentum*, 1707, pg. 739.

⁷⁵ Mill, *Novum Testamentum*, 1707, pg. 739-749.

⁷⁶ Mill, *Novum Testamentum*, 1707, Pg. 749.

They will hear nothing of correcting this infallible translation with the original Greek. Their attitude is not new, and is, ironically, exactly the force Erasmus had resisted to produce the text which they now defend. All that has changed is the referent. History repeats itself. Thus, it seems fitting to conclude with a statement of Erasmus against his detractors. While he wasn't speaking just of the comma, he was defending his first edition, and the many passages where he felt the Greek text should correct the common Latin Vulgate, as he had explained in his annotations. He explains that the Latin text can be easily corrupted, but that the Greek manuscripts had a resiliency to them that makes it more difficult for the Greek manuscripts to be corrupted. While there were some passages where he made exceptions, he was one of the first in almost 1000 years to sound the cry that we should return to the original tongues. Since I John 5:7 is the prime example in his work of such a passage, his words are deeply applicable. Since the KJV of I John 5:7 is essentially a translation into English of Erasmus' own translation of his revised Latin text into Greek, his words should be heard all the more forcefully. These words, sounding out almost 100 years prior to the KJV, from the man who created the form of the comma now found in the KJV, should be closely and deeply heard by all who would defend that comma.

“Do you intend to overlook all this and follow your own copy, though it was perhaps corrupted by a scribe? For no one asserts that there is any falsehood in Holy Scripture (which you also have suggested), nor has the whole question on which Jerome came to grips with Augustine anything at all to do with the matter. But one thing the facts cry out, and it can be clear, as they say, even to a blind man, that often through the translator's clumsiness or inattention the Greek has been wrongly rendered; often the true and genuine reading has been corrupted by ignorant scribes who are half-taught and half-asleep. *Which man encourages falsehood more, he who corrects and restores these passages, or he who would rather see an error added than removed?* For it is of the nature of textual corruption that one error should generate another. And the changes I make are usually such as affect the overtones rather than the sense itself; though often the overtones convey a great part of the meaning. But not seldom the text has gone astray entirely. And whenever this happens, where, I ask you, do Augustine and Ambrose and Hilary and Jerome take refuge if not in the Greek original? This is approved also by the decrees of the church; and yet you shuffle and try to reject it or rather to worm your way out of it by splitting hairs. You say that in their day the Greek copies were more correct than the Latin ones, but that now it is the opposite, and we cannot trust the text of men who have separated from the Roman church. [He then proceeds to explain that just because the Greek church separated from the Roman Catholic, doesn't make the Greek manuscripts less accurate than the late Latin, and that further, none of the textual variants shows signs of being an intentional alteration.] Had somebody falsified the Greek texts as long ago as that? Who has ever detected falsification in the Greek texts in even one passage? And finally, what could be their motive, since they do not defend their particular tenants from this source? Besides which, that in every department of learning the Greek copies have always been more accurate than ours is admitted by no less than Cicero, who is elsewhere so unfair to the Greeks. For the difference between the letters, the accents, and the actual difficulty of writing all mean that they are less easily corrupted and that any corruption is more easily mended.”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Erasmus, “*Letter to Dorp*,” translated in CWE vol. 71, pg. 25-26. Emphasis mine.