

# The Story Behind The Comma Johanneum (1 John 5.7)

How the Most Trinitarian Verse in the Bible Proves that the Bible Does Not Support the Trinity

The most Trinitarian verse in the Bible is found in 1 John 5.7 where the text reads “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.”<sup>1</sup> Recently in conversation with an acquaintance, I was challenged to accept the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of this text. However, this scripture is fraught with difficulties and its history is long and dubious, involving both Greek and Latin manuscripts. Before turning to examine the Latin and Greek histories, I will begin by comparing two of the best known and most influential translations in English and German to more recent ones so as to demonstrate the exact difference between them. The words in italics are known as the *Comma Johanneum* (henceforth *Comma*).

King James Version (1611)	English Standard Version (2008)
7 For there are three that beare record <i>in heauen, the Father, the Word, and the holy Ghost: and these three are one.</i> 8 And there are three that beare witnesse in earth, the Spirit, and the Water, and the Blood, and these three agree in one.	7 For there are three that testify:  8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.
Luther's Translation (1545)	German Schlachter Version (1951)
7 Denn drei sind, die da zeugen <i>im Himmel: der Vater, das Wort und der Heilige Geist; und diese drei sind eins.</i> 8 Und drei sind, die da zeugen auf Erden: der Geist und das Wasser und das Blut; und die drei sind beisammen.	8 Denn drei sind es, die bezeugen:  der Geist und das Wasser und das Blut, und die drei sind einig.

It is hard to estimate how much these two versions, the King James Version (KJV) and Luther's Bible, have influenced untold multitudes of Christians for centuries. How many countless teachers have pointed to this text to explain the doctrine of the Trinity over the years? How often was it used to silence those who doubted the beloved dogma when they encountered the plethora of monotheistic statements in Scripture? Although these words have cast a great shadow, virtually all modern versions have either deleted them altogether or else relegated them to the footnotes. This is particularly remarkable because almost all translations are completed by scholars who affirm the Trinity. For example, Trinitarian apologist and debater, James White, writes, “Anyone who defends the insertion of the *Comma* is, to me, outside the realm of meaningful scholarship...”<sup>2</sup> One might ask, “How did we get from the two most influential versions in German and English to where we are today?” To put the question this way is to subtly miss the facts of the matter. The question does not concern how and why it was deleted, but rather how and why it was inserted in the first place, and this will be my angle of pursuit in what follows. In order to tackle this question I now turn to examine some of its Latin history.

## Latin History

Latin was the legal language of the Roman Empire and eventually became the ecclesiastical language of the Roman Catholic Church. Since most inhabitants of the Roman empire spoke Greek in the first century, and Christianity was an intensely evangelistic movement from the start, the New Testament (NT) was penned in common Greek. Over time, however, the empire came to be increasingly divided between east and west. Once Constantinople was no longer able to retain political control over the west, Latin

<sup>1</sup> New King James Version (NKJV), translated in 1982 by Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> James White, Alpha & Omega Ministries Apologetics Blog, <http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php?itemid=1275> (accessed on 25 May 2011).

came to gain more and more popularity there, while Greek continued to flourish in the east. Eventually the catholic (i.e. universal) church became the Roman Catholic Church (in the west) and the Orthodox Church (in the east) until at last Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453. So, although early Christian literature is almost entirely in Greek, Latin came to dominate ecclesiastical matters in Europe. As we will see, this shift from Greek to Latin played a crucial role in the story of the *Comma Johanneum*. Below I have listed three Latin versions from youngest to oldest:

Nova Vulgata (1986)	
<i>Quia tres sunt, qui testificantur: Spiritus et aqua et sanguis; et hi tres in unum sunt.</i>	For there are three who testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three are in agreement.
Clementine Vulgate (1589)	
<i>Quoniam tres sunt, qui testimonium dant in caelo: Pater, Verbum, et Spiritus Sanctus: et hi tres unum sunt. Et tres sunt, qui testimonium dant in terra: spiritus, et aqua, et sanguis: et hi tres unum sunt.</i>	Indeed there are three who give testimony in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one. And there are three who give testimony on earth: the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three are one.
Stuttgart Vulgate (1983, critical reconstruction from earliest and best manuscripts)	
<i>quia tres sunt qui testimonium dant Spiritus et aqua et sanguis et tres unum sunt</i>	For there are three who give testimony: the Spirit and the water and the blood and the three are one.

The Nova Vulgata is a recent version of the Vulgate that is printed and endorsed by See of Rome for use in the Roman rite. This twentieth century text does not include the *Comma*. However, as we move back to a massively-influential earlier version, the Clementine Vulgate, we observe that the *Comma* was included. However, if we move still earlier to Jerome's Vulgate<sup>3</sup> (as near as modern critical scholars can get to the 405 edition) the *Comma* is once again nowhere to be found. This is certainly a strange pattern, but one that makes sense on inspection. The earliest and best manuscripts of the Latin Bible did not contain the *Comma*. At some point in time the added words crept into a manuscript, which was then used to make new copies. Eventually this variant gained more and more popularity until it became the majority reading. By 1589 the *Comma* was officially recognized as Scripture by Rome's choice to include it in the Clementine Vulgate. Centuries later, as the field of textual criticism developed along with archeology and paleography, it became clear that the *Comma* was not in the original Vulgate so it was taken out. Even though Jerome (347-420) did not include the *Comma* in his work, it is likely that there was at least one manuscript already floating around by the end of the fourth century since a bishop named Priscillian quoted it.

Priscillian (d. 385) served as the bishop of Ávila in Roman Gallaecia (Spain). He was the first Christian legally executed for heresy. Sulpicius Severus called him, "instructed, a man of noble birth, of great riches, bold, restless, eloquent, learned through much reading, very ready at debate and discussion."<sup>4</sup> He practiced extreme asceticism and drew a large following. In his *Liber Apologeticus* Priscillian writes the following:

<sup>3</sup> Damasus I, bishop of Rome, commissioned Jerome to revise the old Latin translations in the late fourth century.

<sup>4</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *The Sacred History*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Alexander Roberts, vol. 11 (2.46) of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, c. 1900), p. 119.

*Sicut Iohannes ait: tria sunt quae testimonium dicunt in terra aqua caro et sanguis et haec tria in unum sunt, et tria sunt quae testimonium dicunt in caelo pater uerbum et spiritus et haec tria in unum sunt in Christo Iesu.*<sup>5</sup>

Thus John says: there are three which declare witness on earth, the water, the flesh, and the blood and these three are one, and there are three which declare witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit and these three are one in Christ Jesus.

According to Bruce Metzger, this is “the earliest instance of the passage being quoted as a part of the actual text of the Epistle.”<sup>6</sup> Even though it is undoubtedly a direct quotation, there are significant differences between Priscillian’s version and that preserved in the later Latin manuscripts. For example the Clementine Vulgate names the heavenly witnesses before the earthly ones whereas Priscillian does the opposite. Furthermore Priscillian’s earthly triplet is different (i.e. “the water, the flesh, and the blood” instead of “the Spirit, and the water, and the blood”). These divergences indicate an unstable text that only became fixed later on. Still, the evidence from Priscillian clearly reveals that at least one Latin manuscript existed no later than 385 containing an early version of the *Comma*.

Defenders of the *Comma* often point to the Latin Father Cyprian (d. 258), the bishop of Carthage, who wrote a treatise defending the Trinity in the mid third century. In his treatise *On the Unity of the Church*, a little after his famed statement that no one can “have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother” he goes on to say:

*Dicit Dominus: Ego et Pater unum sumus. Et iterum de Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto scriptum est: Et hi tres unum sunt (Liber de unitate ecclesiae 6)*<sup>7</sup>

“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.’”(*On the Unity of the Church* 6)<sup>8</sup>

Did Cyprian have a Latin manuscript that contained the *Comma*? In order to answer this question we must make a clear distinction between a quotation and an interpretation. The former would indicate that at least one third century manuscript contained the *Comma* whereas the latter would simply show that at least one third century Christian understood 1 John 5.7-8 (without the *Comma*) as speaking about the Trinity. There are two reasons why this is not a quotation. Firstly, Cyprian’s own wording precludes the possibility since he writes “*de Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto*” or “concerning (the) Father and (the) Son and (the) Holy Spirit.” The little word *de*, translated “of,” “concerning,” or “about,” does not necessitate that the text actually mentioned them, rather it merely means that Cyprian thought the text concerned them. Of course, I am not saying that this alone is evidence that the text did not mention them, but I am saying that this cannot be used to prove that his Bible actually did include the *Comma*. An analogy would be the statement, “There is a passage about the Father speaking to the Son and the Holy Spirit saying ‘Let us make man.’” Of course, Genesis does not actually say the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit anywhere, but this does not stop theologians from interpreting it thus. The second reason why this is definitely not a quotation from some lost Latin manuscript is that the *Comma* reads “*Pater, Verbum, et Spiritus Sanctus*”

<sup>5</sup> Priscillian, *Priscilliani quae supersunt* in CSEL, vol 18., ed. Georgius Schepss (Vienna: Bibliopola Academiae Literarum Caesareae Vindobonensis 1889), p. 6. (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/40048421/CSEL-XVIII>)

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2002), p. 648.

<sup>7</sup> Cyprianus Carthaginensis, *Liber de unitate ecclesiae* in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 4, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Excudebat Sirou, in via Dicta D’Amboise, Pres la Barriere D’Enfer, ou Petit-Montrouge 1844), col. 503A-504A.

<sup>8</sup> Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Ernest Wallis, vol. 5 (1.6) of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896), p. 423.

or “(the) Father, (the) Word, and (the) Holy Spirit” whereas Cyprian writes “*de Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto*” or “about (the) Father and (the) Son and (the) Holy Spirit.” Of course switching out Son for Word is a subtle change but it is enough to indicate that this is not a direct quotation.

Even if Cyprian did not quote the later version of 1 John 5.7-8 he did read the earlier version in a Trinitarian sense. He understood the Spirit, the water, and the blood to be referring to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Daniel Wallace, himself a Trinitarian, writes, “Thus, that Cyprian *interpreted* 1 John 5.7-8 to refer to the Trinity is likely; but that he saw the Trinitarian formula in the *text* is rather unlikely.”<sup>9</sup> From all of this, we can merely conclude that at least one third century Christian read 1 John 5.7-8 in a Trinitarian sense even though the *Comma* was omitted from the text he had.

Before turning to examine the Greek history of the *Comma* we must look to Tertullian (160-220), the father of Latin Christianity, who some allege quoted it. Like Cyprian, Tertullian also lived in Carthage and wrote about the Trinity. In his work, *Against Praxeas*, he writes:

*Ita connexus Patris in Filio, et Filii in Paraclete, tres efficit cohaerentes, alterum ex altero, qui tres unum sint, non unus. Quo modo dictum est: Ego et Pater unum sumus; ad substantiae unitatem, non ad numeri singularitatem.*<sup>10</sup>

Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. These three are one essence, not one Person, as it is said, “I and my Father are One,” in respect of unity of substance not singularity of number.<sup>11</sup>

As with Cyprian’s reference, we once again need to establish whether or not Tertullian was actually quoting a Latin manuscript with the *Comma*. The Latin phrase corresponding to the English translation “These three are one essence, not one Person” is “*qui tres unum sint, non unus*” or, more literally, “which three are one (neuter), not one (masculine).” Recalling that the Clementine Vulgate and Priscillian both had “*hi tres unum sunt*” (these three are one), an immediate difference can be observed. Secondly, Tertullian did not preface this phrase with a quotation formula whereas his mention of John 10.30 in the very next sentences is preceded by the words “*quo modo dictum est*” (by which manner it is said). Thirdly, the statement “three are one” is so short and uses such simple vocabulary that we cannot safely say Tertullian depended on 1 John 5.7 to formulate it. (We could probably find many pagan authors who employ this precise phrase as well, but they are not quoting the Bible.) Any one of these three arguments, if take alone, may not suffice to disprove that Tertullian quoted the *Comma*, but taken together they virtually exclude such a possibility. Thus, we are left with the first evidence of the *Comma* in a Latin manuscript dating to some time prior to 385.

Metzger suggests someone interpreted the original 1 John 5.7-8 in a Trinitarian way and wrote the *Comma* in the margin as an explanatory note, which then was copied into the main body of 1 John by a later scribe. He further notes that the text began to be quoted in earnest in the fifth century in North Africa and Italy (Latin speaking areas), and “from the sixth century onwards it is found more and more frequently in manuscripts of the Old Latin and of the Vulgate.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast, John Painter suggests “the

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *The Comma Johanneum and Cyprian* (published on bible.org in 2004, <http://bible.org/article/Comma-johanneum-and-cyprian>), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Quinti Septimii Florentis Tertulliani, *Adversus Praxeam* in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 2, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Excudebat Sirou, in via Dicta D’Amboise, Pres la Barriere D’Enfer, ou Petit-Montrouge 1844), col. 188A.

<sup>11</sup> Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, ed. Alan Menzies, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 3 (25) of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896), p. 621.

<sup>12</sup> Metzger, p. 648.

evidence indicates that the pressures of the Trinitarian controversy, especially in North Africa, led to the addition of the Johannine Comma.”<sup>13</sup> Considering the intensity with which Nicene and Arian Christians competed for theological supremacy in the fourth century, it is not at all implausible to think someone concocted the *Comma* and inserted it to give the Bible an explicit Trinitarian proof-text. Still, if Painter’s idea is correct, it is remarkable that the *Comma* was limited only to the Latin speaking world whereas the Greek Christians completely ignored it. From the present data, I find it difficult to decide whether the *Comma* came into this fourth century manuscript by accident and was slowly reproduced (Metzger) or it was a theologically motivated insertion to combat Arianism (Painter).

## Greek History

Now that I have recounted some of the Latin history of the *Comma*, I turn now to set forth the Greek evidence. In the following chart are some relevant Greek editions beginning with the most recent first.

Greek Orthodox New Testament (1904)	
ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ Πατήρ, ὁ Λόγος καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσι· καὶ τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῇ, τὸ Πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἷμα, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν	for there are three who testify in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one; and there are three who testify in earth, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are in agreement.
Stephanus/Received Text (1550)	
ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ πατήρ, ὁ λόγος, καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα· καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσιν καὶ τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῇ, τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἷμα καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν	for there are three who testify in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one and there are three who testify on earth, the spirit and the water and the blood and the three are in agreement.
Erasmus (1522)	
ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, πατήρ, λόγος, καὶ πνεῦμα ἁγίου, καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσι. καὶ τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῇ, πνεῦμα, καὶ ὕδωρ, καὶ αἷμα, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν.	for there are three who testify in heaven, father, word, and holy spirit, and these three are one. And there are three who testify on earth, spirit, and water, and blood, and these three are in agreement.
Erasmus (1519)	
ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, τὸ πνεῦμα, καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ, καὶ τὸ αἷμα, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν.	for there are three who testify, the spirit, and the water, and the blood, and the three are in agreement.
Nestle Aland 27 <sup>th</sup> Edition (1993, critical reconstruction from earliest and best manuscripts)	
ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ τὸ αἷμα, καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν.	for there are three who testify, the spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are in agreement.

Again a pattern emerges in which the older and better Greek versions do not contain the *Comma*. However, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, which has now deleted the *Comma* from its official Latin Bible, the Greek Orthodox Church retains the *Comma* in its official Greek Bible. Furthermore there is an interesting change between Erasmus’ 1519 and 1522 editions. The former did not contain the *Comma* (nor did his first edition in 1516), but the latter did. In order to understand what happened a little background may be helpful.

<sup>13</sup> John Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 18 in Sacra pagina series (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press 2002), p. 308.

Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam was an influential Christian scholar and priest who worked hard to rediscover and restore ancient Greek and Latin texts so they could be printed and distributed. He recognized the immense power and utility of the printing press and took full advantage. He also understood the value of publishing first. A group of Spanish scholars supervised by Cardinal Ximenes was working hard to produce the Complutensian Polyglot (a Bible including the original languages along with a Latin translation). They had finished the NT in 1514 but were waiting for papal approval. Not to be beaten, Erasmus rushed his first edition into print handing the printer the Greek manuscript itself with his notes on it. Cleverly he dedicated his *Novum Instrumentum* to Pope Leo X and thus bypassed the long waiting process for approval.

It is important to remember that Erasmus lived in an age when heresy was taken very seriously. For example, William Tyndale was strangled to death and then burned at the stake in 1536 for translating the Bible into English and Michael Servetus was burned to death with green wood in 1553 in John Calvin's Geneva for denying the Trinity. Furthermore, Martin Luther, Erasmus' contemporary, tacked his ninety-five theses to the church door at Wittenberg in 1517, which instigated the beginnings of what became the Protestant Reformation. Erasmus was a man of prudence who admired Luther, even if he thought he had gone too far (especially on the doctrine of free will), but did not throw in his lot with the reformers, preferring rather to remain a Catholic in good standing.

Erasmus believed it was more honest and pious to correct erroneous manuscript readings in an effort to restore the original reading than to merely preserve tradition. Jerry H. Bentley writes, "He complained commonly and bitterly about the audacity of the scribes who took it upon themselves to improve upon the texts they were copying."<sup>14</sup> As a result of his quest to print the best and most reliable Greek NT, Erasmus set to correcting and noting instances of corruption as he detected them. "He insisted," says Joseph M. Levine, "that an accurate reconstruction of the text was required, even if the results should prove inconvenient for the theologian."<sup>15</sup> In 1514, even before his first NT was completed, his friend Martin van Dorp tried to persuade him to abandon the project. Charles G. Nauert writes, "He [Dorp] feared that such a publication inevitably challenged the authority of the church, which had based its teaching on the traditional Vulgate text for a thousand years."<sup>16</sup> Erasmus replied:

Why do Jerome and Augustine and Ambrose so often cite a different text from the one we use? Why does Jerome find fault with many things, and correct them explicitly, which corrections are still found in our text? What will you do when there is so much agreement, when the Greek copies are different and Jerome cites the same text as theirs, when the very oldest Latin copies concur, and the sense itself runs much better? Do you intend to overlook all this and follow your own copy, though it was perhaps corrupted by a scribe?<sup>17</sup>

Dorp did not persuade Erasmus who published his first edition of the Greek NT in 1516. He started to come under attack for breaking with tradition as ensconced in the Vulgate, just as Dorp had predicted. Much of the criticism leveled against Erasmus focused on his failure to include the *Comma*.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, his second edition (1519) was a parallel NT with the Greek on the left page and his own

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<sup>14</sup> Jerry H. Bentley, "Erasmus, Jean Le Clerc, and the Principle of the Harder Reading" in the *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3 (Autumn 1978), The University of Chicago Press, p. 313.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph M. Levine, "Erasmus and the Problem of the Johanne Comma" in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 58, no. 4 (October 1997), University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 582.

<sup>16</sup> Charles G. Nauert, "Humanism as Method: Roots of Conflict with the Scholastics" in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Summer 1998), The Sixteenth Century Journal, p. 434.

<sup>17</sup> Erasmus to Dorp, c. May, 1515, *CWE*, no. 337, III, 111-39, quoted from Levine, p. 583-4.

<sup>18</sup> Another example was his addition of the words "nor the son" in Matthew 24.36, which he later also withdrew.

Latin translation on the right. Many more people could read Latin than Greek and so this second edition's lack of the Latin *Comma* presented a glaring challenge to the standard Vulgate of his day.

Over time more voices joined in the criticism of Erasmus for making the best proof-text for the doctrine of the Trinity suddenly disappear. Ironically, Erasmus was a believer in the Trinity, and was not at all mounting an attack against the dogma. Nauert notes Erasmus' true intention was to tell "theologians that in their defense of Trinitarian orthodoxy, they could not cite this helpful text, because it did not exist."<sup>19</sup> Bentley notes that because he was "accused of harboring Arian views, Erasmus agreed to include the formula in future editions if a Greek manuscript could be found which presented it."<sup>20</sup> Taking him up on his word, Erasmus' opponents had no trouble procuring such a manuscript, all it took was an ink pot, a quill, and a scribe. Before long codex *Montfortianus* came into the world and was readily foisted upon Erasmus as "proof" that the *Comma* was in at least one Greek manuscript after all. Erasmus capitulated and included the *Comma* in his 1522 edition, "but he did so only under protest."<sup>21</sup> He wrote, "From this manuscript I have substituted what was missing in the rest, lest I give any occasion for slandering me."<sup>22</sup> Levine points out, "Erasmus' fear of calumny was justified; Lee had accused him directly of Arianism in this matter and elsewhere in his annotations (and, needless to say, the charge was dangerous)."<sup>23</sup> Even so, Erasmus' decision had long lasting consequences. For his Greek text later came to form the basis of Robert Estienne's (Stephanus) text, which, in turn, was used by the translators of the English version authorized by King James in 1611. Furthermore, Luther, who also worked from Erasmus' Greek, followed a similar pattern, omitting the *Comma* in his 1522 and 1530 editions and then including it in 1545.

It turns out that Erasmus was right; the *Comma* is present in no Greek manuscript before the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, in this tenth century manuscript it was written in the marginal by the hand of a fifteenth or sixteenth century scribe. The first manuscript to contain the *Comma* in its actual text is codex *Ottobonianus* from between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. This codex is a parallel Bible with the Latin and Greek on opposite pages. As we have already seen the *Comma* enjoyed great popularity in late medieval Latin manuscripts, so it is not hard to imagine what happened. As with Erasmus' parallel Bible, any inconsistencies between the Latin and Greek became apparent when *Ottobonianus* was penned. Thus, the scribe(s) chose to back translate the Latin of the *Comma* into Greek so as to preserve conformity (a fact that can be confirmed by observing the absence of the definite article between Father, Word, and Holy Spirit). Metzger writes "The passage is absent from every known Greek manuscript except eight, and these contain the passage in what appears to be a translation from a late recension of the Latin Vulgate."<sup>24</sup> Below is the data in tabular form:

Greek Manuscripts Containing the <i>Comma</i> in Their Main Text			
#	name	date	notes
629	codex Ottobonianus at the Vatican	14 <sup>th</sup> /15 <sup>th</sup> c.	Latin/Greek parallel Bible with the <i>Comma</i> back translated from Latin
61	codex Montfortianus at Dublin	16 <sup>th</sup> c.	this is the manuscript Erasmus was given so that he would include the <i>Comma</i> in his 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed.
918	manuscript at the Escorial in Spain	16 <sup>th</sup> c.	
2318	manuscript at Bucharest in Rumania	18 <sup>th</sup> c.	likely influenced by the Clementine

<sup>19</sup> Nauert, p. 436.

<sup>20</sup> Bentley, p. 315.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> LB IX, 275 B-C, quoted in Levine, p. 588.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 589.

<sup>24</sup> Metzger, p. 647.

			Vulgate
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Greek Manuscripts Containing the <i>Comma</i> in the Margin			
#	name	original date	date of marginal note
221 <sup>v.r.</sup>	manuscript in Bodleian Library at Oxford	10 <sup>th</sup> c.	15 <sup>th</sup> /16 <sup>th</sup> c.
88 <sup>v.r.</sup>	codex Regius of Naples	14 <sup>th</sup> c.	16 <sup>th</sup> c.
429 <sup>v.r.</sup>	manuscript at Wolfenbüttel	14 <sup>th</sup> /15 <sup>th</sup> c.	16 <sup>th</sup> c.
636 <sup>v.r.</sup>	manuscript at Naples	16 <sup>th</sup> c.	16 <sup>th</sup> c.

It is a curious thing that apart from codex *Ottobonianus* (629) all of the Greek manuscripts containing the *Comma* originate or were added to in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Considering the difficult time Erasmus had, and the controversy that surrounded his refusal to concoct and add the *Comma* to his Greek/Latin Bible (in the first two editions), one can easily imagine why there would be a sudden interest in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to discover or produce Greek manuscripts containing the *Comma*. Before the advent of the printing press, scholars like Erasmus would not have been of such concern because books were too expensive for most and were not widely distributed. However, once Gutenberg christened his invention by printing the first Bible, the most read and purchased book was sure to be reprinted in a thousand ways. Now, the lack of the *Comma* was no longer confined to a few Greek manuscripts tucked away in a few far flung monasteries, only readable by a few specialists. A serious threat loomed on the horizon for the Roman Catholic Church's most important doctrine; such a matter had to be handled. What other solution was there except inserting it into the old manuscripts (in the margin) and producing new ones with the forgery right in the text?

Moreover, in addition to the dearth of witnesses among the Greek manuscripts, the Greek Fathers, in fact, never quoted 1 John 5.7-8 with the *Comma*. Such an omission is particularly remarkable since many of them like Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Cyril wrote about the Trinity voluminously and staunchly defended the dogma against the "heretics." It is simply incredible to imagine that Nicene apologists who embroiled themselves in controversy lasting well over a century, never once took advantage of the best Trinitarian text to make their point. Metzger writes, "The passage is quoted by none of the Greek Fathers, who, had they known it, would most certainly have employed it in the Trinitarian controversies (Sabellian and Arian)."<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

Today, the *Comma Johanneum* persists in only the KJV, the NKJV, and a smattering of other outdated translations. Mainstream Bibles like the NASB, NIV, ESV, HCSB, NAB, NET, NRSV, RSV, NJB, etc. have eliminated the forgery. In other words, Catholics and Protestants both admit that the *Comma* should not be considered as legitimate Scripture! But then this brings us to a rather paradoxical conclusion. If the most Trinitarian verse in the Bible was a counterfeit, does that not indicate that someone, somewhere along the line, thought the Scriptures needed help teaching the cherished dogma? Even if we accept Metzger's more benign theory for the origin of the *Comma*, we are still left with the simple fact that every single Greek manuscript testified to its falsity until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when marginal notes were added to four old manuscripts and new ones were churned out to validate the erroneous Latin reading. (This is besides the fact that early Latin manuscripts likewise omitted the text in both the Old Latin and Jerome's Vulgate.) When I consider the audacity and hubris involved in fabricating and forcibly inserting a counterfeit verse into Scripture, I cannot help but ask why? If the Bible already

<sup>25</sup> Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., 5th printing (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2002), p. 648.



clearly taught the Trinity, why would anyone go through the effort to tamper with it? To me, such an act is plain indication that the Bible does not teach the Trinity well at all.