



## THE COMMA JOHANNEUM: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF ITS TEXTUAL AUTHENTICITY AND THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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**Abstract:** *The Comma Johanneum (1 John 5:7–8) has been the subject of significant debate within biblical studies and theology due to its explicit reference to the Trinity and its contested textual authenticity. This study critically examines the textual, historical, and theological dimensions of the Comma Johanneum through a comprehensive literature review. The research explores its presence in later Greek manuscripts, its prominence in the Latin tradition, and its role in Trinitarian theology. While opponents argue that the passage is a later interpolation based on its absence in early Greek manuscripts and its probable origin as a marginal gloss, proponents emphasize its doctrinal clarity, early usage by church figures, and inclusion in the Textus Receptus and the King James Bible. This study synthesizes these perspectives to affirm the Comma Johanneum's theological significance while addressing the challenges posed by textual criticism. Ultimately, the research highlights the enduring relevance of the Comma Johanneum in discussions of Scripture preservation, doctrinal authority, and Trinitarian theology.*

**Keywords:** : *Comma Johanneum, Textual Criticism, Trinitarian Theology, Textus Receptus, Scripture Preservation.*

## INTRODUCTION

The *Comma Johanneum* (1 John 5:7–8) has been one of the most debated passages in biblical studies, mainly due to its explicit reference to the Trinity: “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one (KJV).”<sup>1</sup> While it has been a cornerstone of Trinitarian theology in the Latin tradition, its absence from most early Greek manuscripts has made its authenticity a contested issue among textual critics and theologians.<sup>2</sup> Historically, the passage has played a significant role in doctrinal debates, influencing key developments in the formulation of Christian theology, particularly during the Reformation and the rise of modern textual criticism.<sup>3</sup>

The debate over the *Comma Johanneum* poses a significant challenge for biblical scholars and theologians.<sup>4</sup> For textual critics, its inclusion raises questions about the reliability of manuscript evidence and the processes of textual transmission.<sup>5</sup>

For defenders of the passage, its theological importance highlights the tension between doctrinal necessity and textual authenticity.<sup>6</sup> The lack of consensus has created a divide, leaving many unanswered questions regarding its role in the history of the biblical text, its theological implications, and its place in modern translations and interpretations.

Despite extensive discussion, there remain gaps in understanding how historical, theological, and textual factors have collectively shaped the reception and transmission of the *Comma Johanneum*. While much attention has been given to its textual authenticity, fewer studies explore its enduring theological relevance and function within biblical preservation and interpretation. Additionally, the intersection of textual criticism and theological tradition has often been polarized, leaving room for a more balanced perspective that incorporates academic rigor and faith-based considerations.

This study aims to critically examine the *Comma Johanneum* from both a textual and theological perspective, seeking to bridge the gap between historical-critical analysis and the faith-based defense of the passage. It will comprehensively understand the passage's importance by analyzing its manuscript history, theological significance, and role in preserving Christian doctrine. Ultimately, it seeks to affirm the value of the *Comma Johanneum* within the context of Trinitarian theology and explore how it

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<sup>1</sup> Grantley McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma, and Trinitarian Debate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Rodrigo Galiza and John W. Reeve, “The Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7–8): The Status of Its Textual History and Theological Usage in English, Greek, and Latin,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 56, no. 1 (2018): 63–89.

<sup>3</sup> McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma, and Trinitarian Debate*.

<sup>4</sup> Margalit Finkelberg, “The Original Versus the Received Text with Special Emphasis on the Case of the Comma Johanneum,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 21, no. 3 (2014): 183–97; Joseph M Levine, “Erasmus and the Problem of the Johannine Comma,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 4 (1997): 573–96.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 146–147.

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<sup>6</sup> D. A. Waite, *Defending the King James Bible* (New Jersey: Bible for Today, 1998); David W. Cloud, *Answering the Myths on the Bible Version Debate* (Michigan: Way of Life Literature, 2009), 50; Jeffrey Khoo, *Kept Pure in All Ages: Recapturing the Authorised Version and the Doctrine of Providential Preservation*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2021), 88-91.

can inform contemporary discussions on preserving and interpreting Scripture.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach through a literature review methodology. Analyzing existing scholarly works, historical records, and theological commentaries, it explores the textual, historical, and theological dimensions of the *Comma Johanneum* (1 John 5:7–8). The literature review synthesizes perspectives from textual criticism, doctrinal history, and biblical exegesis to provide a balanced analysis of the passage's significance.

The primary data sources for this study include four key categories. First, works on textual criticism are analyzed, including scholarly studies of Greek and Latin manuscripts, such as the Textus Receptus,<sup>7</sup> alongside critical commentaries by notable textual critics like Bruce Metzger and Kurt Aland.<sup>8</sup> Second, theological commentaries by proponents and opponents of the *Comma Johanneum*, including figures like Matthew Henry,<sup>9</sup> John Gill,<sup>10</sup> and A.T. Robertson.<sup>11</sup> Finally, contemporary discussions on the

*Comma Johanneum's* relevance in biblical studies and its implications for scriptural preservation and doctrinal formulation are included.

The data were analyzed thematically to address four primary areas of inquiry. These include examining the textual history of the *Comma Johanneum*, focusing on its manuscript evidence and textual variants; assessing its theological implications, particularly its significance for Trinitarian doctrine; tracing its historical development, including its inclusion in traditions such as the Latin Vulgate and the Textus Receptus; and evaluating contemporary perspectives on its relevance to ongoing debates about scriptural authenticity and doctrinal authority.

The study's scope is limited to existing scholarly literature without direct analysis of primary manuscripts. While it seeks to provide a balanced synthesis of textual and theological perspectives, the reliance on secondary sources means the findings are shaped by previous scholars' interpretations and conclusions. The study acknowledges the challenges of reconciling textual criticism with theological tradition but seeks to facilitate a nuanced discussion that bridges these fields.

The methodology offers a comprehensive understanding of the *Comma Johanneum*, addressing its textual, historical, and theological dimensions. This approach allows for an integrative discussion that highlights the passage's complexities and significance in biblical scholarship and Christian doctrine.

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<sup>7</sup> Trinitarian Bible Society, *Koine Greek New Testament* (Trinitarian Bible Society, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*; Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Vol. VI - Acts to Revelation* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 1091-1093.

<sup>10</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (Arkansas: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Baker Book House, 1960), 240-241.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Debate on the Authenticity of the *Comma Johanneum*

The authenticity of the *Comma Johanneum*, a phrase found in 1 John 5:7-8, has long been a scholarly debate. Its absence in early Greek manuscripts and controversial inclusion in later texts have fueled discussions about its legitimacy. Historically, the passage has been significant as a Trinitarian proof text, particularly during the Middle Ages and the Reformation. Despite this historical prominence, modern scholarship views it as a later addition to the biblical text.

The historical context of the *Comma Johanneum* reveals its contentious journey into the New Testament. The passage was not included in Erasmus's first two editions (1516 and 1519), as it was not found in the Greek manuscripts accessible to him at the time. However, in his third edition (1522), the *Comma Johanneum* was included after a Greek manuscript was purportedly produced to substantiate its authenticity.<sup>12</sup> This manuscript's credibility is highly questionable, as it is widely believed to have been created specifically to meet Erasmus's condition, casting significant doubt on its legitimacy.<sup>13</sup>

The initial exclusion of the *Comma Johanneum* from early New Testament editions, can be traced to historical factors centered on textual authenticity and the influence of prominent figures such as Erasmus. The absence of the passage in early Greek manuscripts played a pivotal role in its omission from Erasmus's first two editions of the New Testament. This decision was largely shaped by the

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<sup>12</sup> Henk Jan de Jonge, "Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 56 (1980): 381-389.

<sup>13</sup> de Jonge, 381-389.

lack of credible Greek evidence, which contrasted with the reliance on Latin texts where the passage was included.<sup>14</sup>

Erasmus's treatment of the *Comma Johanneum* constitutes a pivotal episode in the early history of the printed Greek New Testament. The passage was not included in his first two editions (1516, 1519), as it was absent from the Greek manuscripts available to him. In the course of the ensuing controversy, Erasmus acquired a Greek form of the *Comma* (between 1520 and 1521), copied from a manuscript he referred to as the Codex Britannicus, now identified as Codex Montfortianus (Gregory-Aland minuscule 61; Trinity College Dublin). On this basis, the *Comma* appeared in his third edition (1522).<sup>15</sup>

Erasmus's reliance on available manuscripts played a critical role in the passage's initial exclusion. The absence of the *Comma Johanneum* in early Greek manuscripts meant there needed to be a more textual basis to justify its inclusion in his first two editions. However, the eventual inclusion in the third edition relied on a single Greek manuscript, furthering doubts about its authenticity and origin. This reliance on dubious evidence highlights the fragility of the passage's standing within the biblical canon.

The *Comma Johanneum* carried significant theological weight as a defense of Trinitarian doctrine, particularly during the debates of the Reformation. Yet, according to Galiza & Reeve,<sup>16</sup> its absence in early Greek

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<sup>14</sup> Galiza and Reeve, "The Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7-8): The Status of Its Textual History and Theological Usage in English, Greek, and Latin", 63-89; de Jonge, "Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum, 381-389."

<sup>15</sup> de Jonge, "Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum", 381-389.

<sup>16</sup> Galiza and Reeve, "The Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7-8): The Status of Its Textual

manuscripts undermined its authority in Protestant circles, where doctrinal arguments increasingly leaned on scriptural texts with robust manuscript support.<sup>17</sup> The passage's exclusion reflects the Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura* and reevaluating biblical texts, prioritizing authenticity and alignment with early manuscript evidence over traditional doctrinal interpretations.<sup>18</sup>

Textual evidence further supports skepticism regarding the passage's authenticity. Its absence in early Greek manuscripts suggests that it was not part of the original text but likely emerged in Latin Christianity (e.g., *Codex Fuldensis* with Priscillian's *Liber Apologeticus* demonstrates).<sup>19</sup> This addition reflects the theological priorities of the time, particularly the desire to strengthen the scriptural foundation for Trinitarian doctrine. While it was historically employed as a doctrinal tool, particularly in defense of the Trinity, the *Comma Johanneum* is now widely regarded as a textual anomaly, emphasizing the divergence between its historical function and its textual origins.<sup>20</sup>

Despite these strong arguments against its authenticity, some scholars advocate for a broader consideration of the *Comma Johanneum*. They argue that the passage offers valuable insights into early Christian theological

development and should be evaluated within the larger tradition of scriptural interpretation. This perspective underscores biblical texts' dynamic and evolving nature, highlighting how their meanings and functions have shifted over time to address changing theological and cultural contexts. This approach not only situates the *Comma Johanneum* within the history of Christian thought but also acknowledges the complexities of its role in shaping and reflecting doctrinal developments.

The absence of the *Comma Johanneum* in early Greek manuscripts has profoundly shaped scholarly opinions regarding its authenticity and theological significance. This textual variant, central to Trinitarian doctrine, has been the focus of intense scrutiny, particularly during the Reformation, when its presence or absence carried significant doctrinal implications. Its contested history has illuminated the complex interplay between textual criticism and theological necessity.

Historically, the *Comma Johanneum* was regarded as a vital proof text for the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly in medieval theology, where its inclusion bolstered the defense of Trinitarian beliefs.<sup>21</sup> Prominent figures of the Reformation, such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, engaged with the debates surrounding the *Comma Johanneum*, underscoring its impact on doctrinal discussions of their time.<sup>22</sup> The scholarly consensus that the *Comma Johanneum* is a later interpolation highlights the challenges of reconciling textual criticism with historical theological usage. Its contested history remains a critical case

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History and Theological Usage in English, Greek, and Latin", 63–89.

<sup>17</sup> Galiza and Reeve, 63–89.

<sup>18</sup> Galiza and Reeve; Clive E Govier, "The Majority Text Debate: A Study in New Testament Text-Critical Method," *Edith Cowan University* (1996), 78-79.

<sup>19</sup> Galiza and Reeve, "The Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7–8): The Status of Its Textual History and Theological Usage in English, Greek, and Latin", 63–89.

<sup>20</sup> Galiza and Reeve, 63–89.

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<sup>21</sup> McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma, and Trinitarian Debate*, 56-58.

<sup>22</sup> McDonald, 56-58.

study in understanding how doctrinal needs and textual evidence have shaped the development of the biblical canon.

### **The *Comma Johanneum* and the Concept of the Trinity**

The *Comma Johanneum* has been a focal point in theological debates surrounding the doctrine of the Trinity. While it appears in the Latin Vulgate, its absence in early Greek manuscripts has been a source of significant controversy, particularly during the Reformation.

Medieval theologians regarded the *Comma Johanneum* as the most apparent scriptural evidence for the Trinity, the Christian doctrine of one God existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup> However, its absence from early Greek manuscripts substantially challenged its textual legitimacy. This gap led Erasmus to exclude the passage from his initial editions of the New Testament, a decision that provoked fierce debates about the scriptural basis for Trinitarian doctrine.<sup>24</sup> Although the Trinity is not explicitly stated in the Bible, it is widely seen as a legitimate doctrinal development derived from biblical texts, with the *Comma Johanneum* serving as a critical and contested element in these discussions.<sup>25</sup>

During the Reformation, the *Comma Johanneum* became a contentious issue. According to McDonald, Erasmus eventually included the passage in his third edition

of the New Testament under considerable pressure despite his reservations about its authenticity. The debates surrounding its inclusion involved prominent figures like Martin Luther and John Calvin and extended beyond textual criticism to address broader concerns about doctrine, morality, and social order.<sup>26</sup> For example, reactions among Protestant circles were not monolithic: in some Lutheran contexts such as the 1531 *Zurich Bible*, the *Comma Johanneum* was printed (albeit in smaller type) in a way that reflected the functional unity of the Trinity drawing on Erasmus's own annotations, showing how Luther's milieu incorporated it in engagement with Trinitarian concerns; by contrast, Martin Luther's own Bible translation did not include the *Comma*, evidencing his caution about its textual basis. Meanwhile, later figures like Philipp Melancthon and John Calvin addressed the passage in theological writings, often deeming it *non-essential* for the doctrine of the Trinity even when recognized in certain printed texts, highlighting the varied Protestant reception of the *Comma* amid the broader Reformation debate.

The tension between the passage's inclusion in the Latin Vulgate and its absence in Greek manuscripts exemplified the clash between tradition and emerging textual criticism, profoundly shaping the theological landscape of the Reformation.<sup>27</sup>

The presence of the *Comma Johanneum* in the Latin Vulgate reinforced the Trinitarian doctrine within Western Christianity, even as its

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<sup>23</sup> Nancy Weatherwax, "Trinity, Doctrine of The," in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah05186>.

<sup>24</sup> McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma, and Trinitarian Debate*, 29-34.

<sup>25</sup> Robert W Jenson, "The Bible and the Trinity," *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 3 (2002): 329-39.

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<sup>26</sup> McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma, and Trinitarian Debate*, 29-34.

<sup>27</sup> McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma, and Trinitarian Debate*, 58-68.

absence in early Greek manuscripts raised questions about the reliability of scriptural texts. This discrepancy highlighted the ongoing tension between the authority of church tradition and the original manuscripts of the Bible.<sup>28</sup> The reliance on Latin texts like the Vulgate for theological formulations underscores the historical dynamics of Western Christianity, where tradition often played a decisive role in doctrinal development.<sup>29</sup>

### The Role of Textual Criticism

Textual criticism is a cornerstone of scholarly inquiry into the authenticity of the *Comma Johanneum*, a contested passage in the New Testament. This method involves meticulously comparing manuscript variants to reconstruct the original wording of ancient texts. In biblical studies, textual criticism is crucial for evaluating passages like the *Comma Johanneum*, providing insights into their transmission, potential alterations, and historical significance. These analyses are grounded in a deep understanding of the historical and cultural contexts surrounding early manuscripts, which shape scholarly interpretations and debates.

The role of textual criticism is foundational in authenticating ancient texts. By comparing manuscript variations, scholars strive to determine the most plausible original wording.<sup>30</sup> This process is vital in biblical studies, where establishing the original text of the New Testament serves as the basis for interpreting contested passages such

as the *Comma Johanneum*.<sup>31</sup> Textual criticism also considers the historical and cultural circumstances under which manuscripts were produced, which can reveal biases, errors, or interpretative practices introduced during their transmission.<sup>32</sup> These contextual insights enhance the reliability of conclusions drawn about the authenticity of biblical texts.

The historical context of early Christian manuscripts significantly influences debates surrounding their authenticity. The social and cultural conditions in which these texts were created often shaped their content and variations.<sup>33</sup> Manuscripts from different periods and regions may exhibit distinct differences, reflecting early Christian communities' oral traditions and interpretative frameworks.<sup>34</sup> Understanding these contexts allows scholars to assess which textual variants most likely align with the original composition, providing a foundation for determining the authenticity of passages like the *Comma Johanneum*.<sup>35</sup>

Arguments for and against the authenticity of the *Comma Johanneum*

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<sup>31</sup> Victor Umaru, "The Relevance of Textual Criticism in Biblical Interpretation," *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation X*, no. IV (2023): 23–29.

<sup>32</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 250–301; Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, 280–316.

<sup>33</sup> Jeremiah Coogan and Candida R. Moss, "The Textual Demiurge: Social Status and the Academic Discourse of Early Christian Forgery," *New Testament Studies* 70, no. 3 (2024): 307–23.

<sup>34</sup> Rafael Rodríguez, "Text as Tradition – Tradition as Text," *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 99, no. 2 (2023): 115–33.

<sup>35</sup> Signe Cohen, *Textual Criticism and Sacred Texts: A Comparative Method* (Lexington Books, 2023).

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<sup>28</sup> McDonald, 1-12.

<sup>29</sup> McDonald, 1-12.

<sup>30</sup> Saniya S. Gosavi and Brijesh R. Mishra, "Review on Importance of Textual Criticism in Ayurveda Manuscriptology," *Journal of Ayurveda and Integrated Medical Sciences* 9, no. 5 (2024): 97–100.

further highlight the importance of textual criticism. Proponents contend that the passage reflects early Christian theological development and should be considered authentic despite its absence in many early manuscripts.<sup>36</sup> Critics, however, argue that the lack of early manuscript evidence strongly suggests it was a later addition designed to support Trinitarian doctrine. Textual criticism offers a framework for evaluating these opposing claims by systematically analyzing manuscript evidence and historical context.<sup>37</sup>

Despite its efficacy, textual criticism faces inherent challenges. The dynamic and pluriform nature of manuscript traditions complicates efforts to establish a definitive original text. These complexities underscore the ongoing nature of debates surrounding passages like the *Comma Johanneum*, highlighting the need for rigorous and nuanced scholarly analysis to advance understanding of their historical and theological significance.

### Theological and Doctrinal Implications

The acceptance or rejection of the *Comma Johanneum* profoundly influences contemporary Christian doctrine, particularly in the realms of Trinitarian theology and biblical inerrancy. Historically, the *Comma Johanneum* was considered a key proof text for the Trinity. However, its absence from early Greek manuscripts has raised significant questions about its authenticity and implications for Christian theology. These debates

continue to shape discussions on biblical authority, scriptural reliability, and modern interpretations of Trinitarian theology.

The historical role of the *Comma Johanneum* in Trinitarian theology must be considered. In medieval Western theology, it was regarded as one of the most apparent biblical evidence supporting the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>38</sup> However, its absence in early Greek manuscripts undermines its credibility as a Trinitarian proof text, forcing theologians to rely on other scriptural passages to support the doctrine.<sup>39</sup> This shift has prompted reevaluating how the Trinity is grounded in scripture, leading to significant developments in theological discourse and education.<sup>40</sup>

The *Comma Johanneum* also raises critical issues regarding biblical authority and inerrancy. The controversy surrounding its inclusion in later editions of the Bible, despite being absent in earlier manuscripts, exemplifies tensions within the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, particularly among those who assert the Bible is entirely free from error.<sup>41</sup> These textual discrepancies highlight challenges in the processes of textual transmission and the establishment of

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<sup>36</sup> Umaru, "The Relevance of Textual Criticism in Biblical Interpretation", 23-28.

<sup>37</sup> Elena Dugan, "Review of the Book Textual Criticism and the Ontology of Literature in Early Judaism: An Analysis of the Serekh Ha-Yahad, by James Nati," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (2023): 344-46.

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<sup>38</sup> McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma, and Trinitarian Debate*, 1-12.

<sup>39</sup> Galiza and Reeve, "The Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7-8): The Status of Its Textual History and Theological Usage in English, Greek, and Latin", 63-69.

<sup>40</sup> McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma, and Trinitarian Debate*, 1-12.

<sup>41</sup> Didit Yuliantono Adi and Yohanes Twintarto Agus Indratno, "Menjawab Tuduhan Comma Johanneum 1 Yohanes 5:7-8 Sebagai Ayat Palsu Melalui Tulisan Bapa-Bapa Gereja," *Philoxenia: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 2, no. 2 (2024): 46-56.

scriptural authority.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the *Comma Johanneum* has become emblematic in discussions about the reliability of biblical texts, influencing theological and ecclesiastical perspectives on the nature of scripture and its interpretative frameworks.<sup>43</sup>

The absence of the *Comma Johanneum* in early manuscripts has further impacted modern interpretations of Trinitarian theology. Theologians now emphasize other scriptural passages and theological constructs to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>44</sup> This has encouraged a broader exploration of the Johannine writings, focusing on their narrative and thematic elements to better understand the nature of God and the Trinity.<sup>45</sup> Such approaches reflect a growing trend in modern theology to integrate historical-critical methods with the complexities of textual history, allowing for a more nuanced engagement with scripture.<sup>46</sup>

While the *Comma Johanneum* is widely regarded as a later addition to the biblical text, its historical role and the inspired debates continue to resonate in theological discussions. These ongoing dialogues underscore more significant questions about the nature of scriptural authority, the reliability of biblical texts, and the development of Christian doctrine. The passage remains a compelling case

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<sup>42</sup> McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma, and Trinitarian Debate*, 1-12.

<sup>43</sup> McDonald, 1-12.

<sup>44</sup> Galiza and Reeve, "The Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7-8): The Status of Its Textual History and Theological Usage in English, Greek, and Latin", 63-69.

<sup>45</sup> Alicia D. Myers, "The Reception History of the Johannine Epistles," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles*, ed. Patrick Gray (Oxford Handbooks, 2024), 385-400.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew T Lincoln, "1-3 John – A Two Horizons Commentary?," *The Expository Times* 133, no. 8 (2022): 349.

study in the interplay between textual criticism, theological necessity, and the evolving understanding of scripture.

### **Arguments from Scholars Who Reject the Authenticity of the *Comma Johanneum***

Bruce Metzger & Bart D. Ehrman thoroughly examines the *Comma Johanneum* and its history in biblical textual tradition. Metzger & Ehrman highlights the passage's controversial inclusion in the New Testament and dubious authenticity. Metzger & Ehrman notes that Erasmus initially excluded the passage from his first editions of the Greek New Testament because it was absent from all Greek manuscripts he consulted.<sup>47</sup> However, under pressure and possibly due to a promise to include it if a Greek manuscript containing it were found, Erasmus added it to his third edition (1522). This inclusion was based on the Codex Montfortianus.

Metzger & Ehrman further explains that the *Comma Johanneum* is present in only eight known Greek manuscripts, all dating from the 14th century or later, and some include it as a marginal addition rather than part of the original text. The passage's earliest known citation is in a fourth-century Latin treatise, *Liber Apologeticus*, attributed to Priscillian or his follower Instantius. It likely originated as a symbolic gloss, added as a marginal note in Latin manuscripts, and gradually entered the biblical text through the Old Latin Bible in the fifth century. It did not appear in Latin Vulgate manuscripts before the 9th century.<sup>48</sup>

Metzger & Ehrman also

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<sup>47</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 146-147.

<sup>48</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, 146-147.

recounts how the passage gained ecclesiastical authority. Despite its late introduction, the *Comma Johanneum* was included in the Clementine edition of the Latin Vulgate (1592). In 1897, the Roman Catholic Church, under Pope Leo XIII, declared it unsafe to deny its authenticity. However, modern Roman Catholic scholars and bilingual editions of the New Testament have excluded it from the Greek text while retaining it in Latin. Metzger & Ehrman underscores that the *Comma Johanneum* has no support from early Greek manuscripts or other ancient versions and is now recognized by scholars as a later addition that does not belong to the original Greek New Testament.<sup>49</sup>

Metzger & Ehrman concludes that the *Comma Johanneum* is a spurious addition to the New Testament text, originating as a marginal gloss in Latin manuscripts and later incorporated into the biblical text through the Old Latin Bible. Its late appearance in Greek manuscripts and absence from early textual witnesses confirm its inauthenticity. While it gained ecclesiastical acceptance in the Latin Vulgate, modern critical scholarship universally rejects its inclusion in the Greek New Testament. The passage does not belong to the original writings of St. John and reflects historical developments in the textual transmission of the Bible rather than authentic apostolic teaching.<sup>50</sup>

A. T. Robertson explains that the *Comma Johanneum* is followed in the Latin Vulgate by words found in the *Textus Receptus* but absent from all early Greek manuscripts. These words are only present in late Greek manuscripts: Codex 162 (15th century,

Vatican Library) and Codex 34 (16th century, Trinity College, Dublin). Jerome did not include this addition in his Vulgate, although Cyprian used Trinitarian language, and Priscillian also referenced it. A. T. Robertson, said that it is likely that a Latin copyist, drawing upon Cyprian's exegesis, entered the interpretative expansion into the margin of the manuscript.<sup>51</sup>

Erasmus initially excluded the passage from his first edition of the Greek New Testament because no Greek manuscripts contained it. Under pressure, he promised to include it if a single Greek manuscript that included the words could be found. Shortly after, Codex 34 emerged, likely "made to order" for this purpose, prompting Erasmus to add the passage in his third edition.<sup>52</sup> A. T. Robertson labels the passage as a spurious addition, noting that the clause "in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost "and these three are one" does not belong in the original text. A. T. Robertson attributes its introduction to a Latin scribe who expanded on Cyprian's exegesis, adding the words to the margin of the text, which eventually made their way into the Latin Vulgate and then the *Textus Receptus*.<sup>53</sup>

A. T. Robertson also emphasizes that the doctrine of the Trinity does not rely on this addition, as it is well-supported by other parts of Scripture. A. T. Robertson criticizes Erasmus's inclusion of the phrase, describing it as Erasmus's poor judgment.<sup>54</sup>

So, A. T. Robertson firmly views the *Comma Johanneum* as a later and spurious addition to the biblical

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<sup>49</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, 101–102, 146–147.

<sup>50</sup> Metzger and Ehrman, 146–147.

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<sup>51</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 240–241.

<sup>52</sup> Robertson, 240–241.

<sup>53</sup> Robertson, 240–241.

<sup>54</sup> Robertson, 240–241.

text. A. T. Robertson critiques its need for more support in early Greek manuscripts, its origin from marginal notes in Latin texts, and its unnecessary inclusion in the *Textus Receptus*.<sup>55</sup> Despite its presence in some textual traditions, Robertson asserts that the passage is not authentic and is irrelevant to the validity of the doctrine of the Trinity, which stands independently of this disputed text.

Albert Barnes argues that the *Comma Johanneum* is not a genuine part of the New Testament text. Albert Barnes supports his position with external and internal evidence and addresses the historical, textual, and theological issues surrounding the passage.<sup>56</sup>

Albert Barnes first highlights the external evidence against the passage's authenticity. Albert Barnes notes that the *Comma Johanneum* is absent from all early Greek manuscripts, only appearing in later ones, such as the Codex Montfortianus and Codex Ravianus, dating to the 16th century. This absence in earlier manuscripts suggests that the passage was not part of the original text. Furthermore, the passage does not appear in the earliest versions of the New Testament, including the Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Arabic translations. These omissions are significant, as these versions predate the passage's inclusion in the textual tradition. Additionally, Albert Barnes observes that early Greek and Latin church fathers, even during theological debates about the Trinity, do not cite this passage.<sup>57</sup> This omission indicates they were unaware of its existence,

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<sup>55</sup> Robertson, 240-241.

<sup>56</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Old and New Testaments* (Baker Book House, 1983), 4879-4880.

<sup>57</sup> Barnes, 4879-4880.

despite its potential to decisively support Trinitarian doctrine.

Internally, Albert Barnes argues that the *Comma Johanneum* disrupts the flow of the text. The surrounding verses focus on the testimony of the Spirit, water, and blood as witnesses to Jesus as the Messiah, a theme unrelated to the heavenly witnesses mentioned in the disputed passage. The inclusion of the *Comma Johanneum* interrupts this argument and appears out of place. Albert Barnes also critiques the language of the passage, pointing out that while John frequently uses the term "Word" (Logos), he never pairs it with "Father" as a correlative term. Instead, John consistently uses "Son" in relation to "Father." Therefore, the passage's style and terminology do not align with John's typical writing, further casting doubt on its authenticity.<sup>58</sup>

Albert Barnes proposes a plausible origin for the *Comma Johanneum*. Albert Barnes suggests that it began as a marginal note in a Latin manuscript, likely reflecting the writer's theological reflections rather than being part of the inspired text.<sup>59</sup> Over time, scribes may have mistakenly incorporated this note into the body of the text. Once included, the passage gained theological significance, particularly in Trinitarian debates, making its removal difficult despite its questionable origins.

Athanasius firmly upheld the doctrine of the Trinity, emphasizing the co-equal and co-eternal nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He described the Trinity as a real and unified existence of three distinct persons, a key aspect of his theological argument. His theological foundation,

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<sup>58</sup> Barnes, 4879-4880.

<sup>59</sup> Barnes, 4879-4880.

deeply rooted in Scripture, was aimed at countering Arianism.<sup>60</sup> However, critics like Barnes argue that certain passages, such as the “*Comma Johanneum*” (1 John 5:7-8), which could have provided strong support for Trinitarian doctrine, were never cited by Greek fathers, including Athanasius, or Latin fathers until the late 5th century. This absence raises doubts about the passage's authenticity, as it is unlikely that such a significant text would have been overlooked in historical theological debates.<sup>61</sup>

In practical terms, Albert Barnes advises against using the *Comma Johanneum* as a proof text for the Trinity, even if one assumes its genuineness. He notes that the doctrine of the Trinity is better supported by other clear and undisputed passages of Scripture. Rejecting the *Comma Johanneum* does not weaken the doctrine, as the Trinitarian belief was established and defended long before the passage appeared in the textual tradition.<sup>62</sup>

Albert Barnes concludes that the *Comma Johanneum* is not a genuine part of the New Testament and should not be used as a proof text for the Trinity. Its absence from early manuscripts, ancient versions, and the writings of early church fathers, combined with its disruption of the text's flow and inconsistency with John's style, provides compelling evidence against its authenticity. Nevertheless, Barnes affirms that the doctrine of the Trinity remains unaffected, as other clear and indisputable parts of Scripture thoroughly support it.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 1962).

<sup>61</sup> Barnes, 4879- 4880.

<sup>62</sup> Barnes, 4879- 4880.

<sup>63</sup> Barnes, 4879- 4880.

### **Arguments of the Defenders of the Authenticity of the *Comma Johanneum***

The discussion on the Johannine Comma or *Comma Johanneum* defends its authenticity and significance, especially regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. As the King James Version (KJV) appears, the *Comma Johanneum* is highlighted as a clear biblical proof text for the Trinity, explicitly stating, “the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” This verse holds theological importance due to its explicit articulation of Trinitarian belief.<sup>64</sup>

The omission of this passage in many modern Bible versions, such as the NIV and RSV, is attributed to the claim that it lacks evidence in early Greek manuscripts before the 16th century. However, Tow and Khoo defend its inclusion by pointing out that the Comma appears in eight Greek manuscripts, five of which pre-date the 16th century (Greek minuscules 88, 221, 429, 629, and 636).<sup>65</sup> Moreover, it emphasizes the extensive presence of the Comma in Latin translations, including the Old Latin manuscripts and Jerome's Latin Vulgate. The defense notes that early Church Fathers, such as Tertullian and Cyprian, used Old Latin manuscripts that included the *Comma Johanneum*.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Edi Purwanto, *Alkitab Telah Dipalsukan?* (Tangerang: Departemen Literatur STTIP, 2014), 59-61.

<sup>65</sup> Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo, *A Theology For Every Christian, Book 1: Knowing God and His Word* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1998), 61, 65.

<sup>66</sup> Jeffrey Khoo, *KJV Q&A: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About the KJV and Its Underlying Texts* (Singapore: Bible Witness Literature Ministry, 2003), 28-29; Tow and Khoo, *A Theology For Every Christian*,

The historical argument further refutes the claim that Erasmus added the Comma to the *Textus Receptus* based on a supposed promise to include it if a Greek manuscript containing the passage were found. Scholars like H.J. de Jonge and Roland Bainton argue that Erasmus included the Comma because he believed it was authentic, as evidenced by its presence in the Vulgate. Additionally, Tow and Khoo addresses the uniqueness of the Comma's phrasing, particularly the use of "the Word" instead of "the Son," which aligns with Johannine terminology found in other writings such as John 1:1.<sup>67</sup> This supports the idea that the Apostle John, not an interpolator, was the source of the text.

Tow and Khoo emphasize the theological significance of the *Comma Johanneum*. It states that nothing in the passage contradicts biblical teachings or fundamental Christian beliefs. Instead, its Trinitarian statement describes the Comma as thoroughly biblical and theologically sound.<sup>68</sup> The defense advocates for its authenticity and encourages its use as the most straightforward proof text in Scripture for the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Matthew Henry defends the authenticity and theological significance of the *Comma Johanneum* by presenting a comprehensive argument rooted in scriptural interpretation, theological reasoning, and textual analysis. Matthew Henry begins by emphasizing the necessity of divine testimony to support the Christian faith. This faith, transformative and victorious, requires

a solid foundation. Matthew Henry explains that Jesus Christ came by water and blood, symbolizing spiritual purification and atonement, vital for humanity's salvation.<sup>69</sup> Together with the Spirit, these elements bear consistent testimony to Christ's divine authority and mission, addressing humanity's internal renewal and outward justification.

Matthew Henry highlights the complementary roles of heavenly and earthly witnesses described in the text. The heavenly witnesses, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, testify to Christ's divine nature and truth, unified in essence and purpose. On earth, the Spirit (regeneration), the water (baptism and purification), and the blood (atonement and sacrifice) confirm Christ's role as the Savior in ways that are observable and experiential.<sup>70</sup> This dual witness structure affirms both the divine and human dimensions of Christ's mission.

Addressing textual criticisms of the *Comma Johanneum*, Matthew Henry acknowledges the omission of 1 John 5:7 in some Greek manuscripts but offers several defenses. He suggests that such omissions could result from transcription errors rather than intentional alterations. Moreover, Matthew Henry points out the verse's theological and stylistic consistency with John's unique focus on the Trinity. Early church fathers, such as Cyprian, provide additional support by alluding to or quoting the verse, indicating its early presence in Christian thought.<sup>71</sup>

Theologically, Matthew Henry asserts that the *Comma Johanneum*

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*Book I: Knowing God and His Word*, 60-63; Purwanto, *Alkitab Telah Dipalsukan?* 59-61.

<sup>67</sup> Tow and Khoo, *A Theology For Every Christian, Book I: Knowing God and His Word*, 60-63.

<sup>68</sup> Tow and Khoo, 60-63.

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<sup>69</sup> Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Vol. VI - Acts to Revelation*, 1091-1093.

<sup>70</sup> Henry, 1091-1093.

<sup>71</sup> Henry, 1091-1093.

encapsulates the doctrine of the Trinity, affirming the unity and co-equality of the Father, the Word, and the Spirit. Matthew Henry highlights the distinction between human and divine testimonies, arguing that God's witness, provided through these three heavenly witnesses, is superior and infallible.<sup>72</sup> This divine testimony forms the ultimate basis for faith in Christ, transcending the limitations of human witness.

Finally, Matthew Henry underscores the practical implications of the witnesses described in the passage. The heavenly and earthly testimonies provide irrefutable evidence of Christ's divine mission.<sup>73</sup> The verse supports the believer's assurance in the truth of the Gospel, demonstrating that faith is not built on human testimony alone but on God's declaration.

Matthew Henry concludes that the *Comma Johanneum* is theologically essential and textually defensible. It offers a profound summary of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and underscores the unity and authority of divine testimony regarding Jesus Christ. The inclusion of 1 John 5:7 strengthens the scriptural record and provides believers with an unshakable foundation for their faith in the Gospel.<sup>74</sup> Through the collective testimony of the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, as well as the Spirit, water, and blood, the passage affirms Christ's divine mission and the truth of Christianity.

John Gill presents a robust defense of the *Comma Johanneum's* authenticity and theological importance (1 John 5:7). John Gill addresses criticisms regarding its absence in

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<sup>72</sup> Henry, 1091-1093.

<sup>73</sup> Henry, 1091-1093.

<sup>74</sup> Henry, 1091-1093.

certain ancient manuscripts and versions and the claim that it is not cited by some early church fathers, offering compelling counterarguments grounded in textual evidence, theological necessity, and historical testimony.<sup>75</sup>

John Gill begins by acknowledging that the passage is missing from some early translations, such as the Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, as well as certain Greek manuscripts. However, John Gill notes that the Syriac version was historically incomplete, lacking other significant portions of Scripture, such as the second epistle of Peter and the book of Revelation until scholars restored them. Similarly, while some Latin manuscripts omit the verse, others, including those used by Jerome, contain it, and Jerome himself criticized unfaithful interpreters who omitted the text. In Greek manuscripts, John Gill emphasizes that it is found in significant copies, including some used in the Complutensian edition and several of Robert Stephens's ancient texts. John Gill also notes that some early church fathers may have omitted the verse due to its absence in the specific copies they used or because they already had ample scriptural support to defend the doctrine of the Trinity without it.<sup>76</sup>

Despite these omissions, John Gill underscores several prominent church fathers cite the verse. For example, Cyprian refers to it in the mid-3rd century, Tertullian in the early 3rd century, and Athanasius around

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<sup>75</sup> Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, <https://biblenotes.online/resources/johngill/1john005.htm>.

<sup>76</sup> Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, <https://biblenotes.online/resources/johngill/1john005.htm>.

350 AD. Jerome also includes it in his Latin translation.<sup>77</sup> This historical testimony and the fact that the verse was undisputed until Erasmus's edition of the New Testament strongly supports its genuineness.

Theologically, John Gill highlights the significance of the passage, which presents the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost as heavenly witnesses to the sonship of Christ. John Gill explains that the Father testified to Christ's divine sonship at His baptism and transfiguration. At the same time, the Word (a title emphasizing Christ's eternal divinity) declared and demonstrated His identity through His works and miracles. As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Ghost testified at Christ's baptism and continues to bear witness through His ongoing work. Being divine and in perfect unity, these three witnesses testify to unparalleled authority and sufficiency.<sup>78</sup>

John Gill concludes that these witnesses are "in heaven," not in the sense of testifying to heavenly beings but in their divine origin. They provide a testimony that is firm, divine, and superior to human evidence. Their heavenly nature underscores the credibility and excellence of their witness, as reflected in Job 16:19: "My witness is in heaven."<sup>79</sup>

John Gill affirms the authenticity and theological

significance of the *Comma Johanneum*, asserting that the combined historical, textual, and theological evidence strongly supports its inclusion in Scripture.<sup>80</sup> The verse encapsulates the Trinitarian witness to Christ's divine sonship, offering a firm foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity and Christ's divinity.

Khoo defense of the *Comma Johanneum* centers on its theological significance, textual support, and historical authenticity. He emphasizes that the Comma, found in 1 John 5:7–8, is a vital proof text for the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. This passage explicitly states, "the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one," making it a unique and critical affirmation of Trinitarian theology. Khoo contrasts this verse with other New Testament texts that are often used to support the Trinity but lack the same level of clarity.<sup>81</sup>

In addressing textual evidence, Khoo challenges the claim that the Comma was absent from all Greek manuscripts before the 16th century<sup>82</sup> (Greek minuscules 88, 221, 429, 629, and 636).<sup>83</sup> He points out that it appears in eight extant Greek manuscripts, five of which predate the 16th century. Additionally, he highlights the significant support for the Comma found in Latin translations, particularly Jerome's Latin Vulgate and the Old Latin manuscripts. Khoo argues that these Latin texts, derived from earlier Greek sources, strongly indicate the Comma's authenticity and early use in

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<sup>77</sup> Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, <https://biblenotes.online/resources/johngill/1john005.htm>.

<sup>78</sup> Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, <https://biblenotes.online/resources/johngill/1john005.htm>.

<sup>79</sup> Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, <https://biblenotes.online/resources/johngill/1john005.htm>.

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<sup>80</sup> Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, <https://biblenotes.online/resources/johngill/1john005.htm>.

<sup>81</sup> Khoo, *Kept Pure in All Ages: Recapturing the Authorised Version and the Doctrine of Providential Preservation*, 88-91.

<sup>82</sup> Khoo, 88-91.

<sup>83</sup> Tow and Khoo, 61, 65.

the Christian tradition.<sup>84</sup>

Historically, Khoo defends Erasmus' inclusion of the Comma in the *Textus Receptus*, refuting the claim that Erasmus inserted it merely because of a "promise" to include it if a Greek manuscript containing the passage was produced. Scholars like H.J. de Jonge and Roland Bainton are cited to affirm that Erasmus believed in the Comma's authenticity based on its presence in the Vulgate and its alignment with Greek textual traditions. Khoo also dismisses the theory that the Comma was an interpolation by an unknown individual, asserting that its use of the term "the Word" reflects Johannine authorship, consistent with other writings attributed to the Apostle John (e.g., John 1:1).<sup>85</sup>

Khoo critiques modern Bible translations, such as the NIV and NASB, for excluding the Johannine Comma, which has led to its marginalization in Christian theology. He argues that the omission is unjustified and that modern criticism often overlooks the historical and theological evidence supporting its authenticity. He also rebukes the idea that the Comma lacks credibility, emphasizing that it aligns fully with core Christian beliefs and traditions.<sup>86</sup>

Khoo asserts that the Johannine Comma is consistent with biblical doctrine, theologically accurate, and provides the most evident scriptural proof for the Trinity. He encourages its acceptance as an authentic part of Scripture and challenges critics to address the extensive evidence supporting its inclusion. Khoo makes a compelling case for the Comma's

significance and authenticity in Christian doctrine by integrating textual criticism, historical analysis, and theological reasoning.<sup>87</sup>

In *The Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith* by Timothy Tow, the *Johannine Comma* is presented as a crucial component of Scripture, with arguments supporting its authenticity and importance. The Comma, which states, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one," is upheld as a vital proof text for the doctrine of the Trinity. Its clarity in expressing the unity of the Father, the Word (Son), and the Holy Ghost makes it a cornerstone for doctrinal teaching, distinguishing it from other less explicit Trinitarian texts.<sup>88</sup>

Timothy Tow critiques the omission of the Johannine Comma in modern Bible versions like the NIV and RSV, countering the claim that it is absent from early Greek manuscripts. He emphasizes its presence in Latin manuscripts, particularly Jerome's Vulgate, which included the Comma. Jerome himself is noted to have criticized its removal by "irresponsible translators" from some Greek texts, a testimony of Timothy Tow regards as strong evidence of the Comma's original inclusion in Scripture. This aligns with Timothy Tow's broader defense of the traditional *Textus Receptus*, on which the King James Bible is based.<sup>89</sup>

The historical and manuscript evidence for the Johannine Comma is another focal point of Timothy Tow's defense. He highlights its attestation in Latin traditions, arguing that it had

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<sup>84</sup> Khoo, *Kept Pure in All Ages: Recapturing the Authorised Version and the Doctrine of Providential Preservation*, 88-91.

<sup>85</sup> Khoo, 88-91.

<sup>86</sup> Khoo, 88-91.

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<sup>87</sup> Khoo, 88-91.

<sup>88</sup> Timothy Tow, *The Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1999), 52, 58.

<sup>89</sup> Tow, 52-58.

early Greek manuscript support, even if these have not been widely preserved. He views its inclusion in the King James Bible as consistent with a faithful transmission of the biblical text and criticizes modern textual criticism for undermining its authenticity.

Timothy Tow also advocates for the Johannine Comma's use in doctrinal teaching, particularly for its theological precision in articulating the Trinity. He argues that it is both reliable and indispensable as a scriptural basis for this core Christian belief. Its omission, he contends, weakens the church's ability to teach and defend this doctrine effectively.<sup>90</sup>

Finally, Timothy Tow connects the defense of the Johannine Comma to the broader Bible-Presbyterian commitment to upholding the King James Bible's authenticity and integrity. He sees the rejection of the Comma as indicative of a wider trend toward liberalism and modern textual criticism, which he strongly opposes. By defending the Johannine Comma, Tow affirms his church's stance on preserving the traditional biblical text and resisting movements that he perceives as diluting scriptural truth.<sup>91</sup>

Maynard provides a detailed argument supporting its authenticity and doctrinal significance. He begins by emphasizing the Johannine Comma's historical roots, highlighting its presence in early Christian writings and versions, such as the Old Latin manuscripts and Jerome's Vulgate. Maynard also points to early Church Fathers who referenced the Comma, arguing that these attestations demonstrate its early existence and significance within the Christian

tradition.<sup>92</sup>

In addressing modern textual criticism, Maynard challenges the view that the Johannine Comma is a later interpolation. He argues that its absence in most Greek manuscripts does not invalidate its authenticity, as evidence suggests that the Comma was deliberately omitted in certain traditions due to doctrinal controversies, particularly those concerning the Trinity.<sup>93</sup> By presenting this argument, he seeks to counter claims that the Comma's exclusion from many Greek texts undermines its legitimacy.

The Johannine Comma's theological importance is central to Maynard's argument. He describes it as the clearest and most explicit scriptural statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, presenting the unity and co-equality of the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost. Maynard stresses its importance for defending orthodox Christian theology against heretical views, such as Arianism, and emphasizes its role in affirming Trinitarian doctrine.<sup>94</sup>

Maynard also discusses Jerome's role in preserving the Comma within the Vulgate, noting Jerome's assertion that some translators had removed it from Greek texts. This supports the argument that the *Comma* was part of the original text but was suppressed in certain traditions due to theological disputes. Jerome's testimony is presented as a key piece of evidence for the *Comma's* authenticity.<sup>95</sup>

Finally, Maynard advocates for

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<sup>90</sup> Tow, 52-58.

<sup>91</sup> Tow, 52-58.

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<sup>92</sup> Michael Maynard, "In Defence of the Johannine Comma," *The Burning Bush* 3, no. 1 (1997): 31-37.

<sup>93</sup> Maynard, 31-37.

<sup>94</sup> Maynard, 31-37.

<sup>95</sup> Maynard, 31-37.

the Johannine Comma's inclusion as part of the *Textus Receptus*, which serves as the foundation of the King James Version. He argues that its inclusion in this textual tradition aligns with the traditional Christian understanding of Scripture and provides a faithful representation of the biblical text. He concludes that the Johannine Comma is a valid part of Scripture and a vital tool for articulating and defending the doctrine of the Trinity, urging critics to reassess their positions in light of the historical, theological, and textual evidence.<sup>96</sup>

Maynard defense integrates textual criticism, historical analysis, and theological reasoning to make a compelling case for the authenticity and significance of the Johannine Comma in Christian faith and doctrine.<sup>97</sup>

The *Trinitarian Bible Society* argues for including the Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7-8) in the Bible by presenting a combination of textual and internal evidence. Although the passage lacks substantial support in early Greek manuscripts, it is found in later Greek manuscripts from the 12th century onwards and is widely attested in Latin sources. Early church figures such as Cyprian (circa 250 CE) referenced the passage, using it to defend the doctrine of the Trinity. The Johannine Comma also appears in Old Latin manuscripts, in treatises like *Liber apologeticus*, and within the Vulgate tradition. The Trinitarian Bible Society<sup>98</sup> argues that Erasmus included the passage in the third edition of his Greek New Testament (1522) due to its broad acceptance in the Latin-speaking church, reflecting divine providence

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<sup>96</sup> Maynard, 31-37.

<sup>97</sup> Maynard, 31-37.

<sup>98</sup> Trinitarian Bible Society, *Why 1 John 5:7-8 Is in the Bible* (Trinitarian Bible Society, 2012).

and preserving the text.<sup>99</sup>

From an internal perspective, the *Trinitarian Bible Society* highlights the theological and grammatical coherence that the Johannine Comma provides. The reference to "the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost" aligns with the Apostle John's consistent emphasis on Trinitarian theology. Omitting the passage introduces grammatical and logical challenges, such as awkward repetitions and incomplete structural flow in the surrounding verses. The *Trinitarian Bible Society* argues that including the Johannine Comma resolves these issues, providing a clear and harmonious explanation of the text.<sup>100</sup>

Prominent defenders of the *Johannine Comma*, including Matthew Henry, R. L. Dabney, and Edward Hills, are cited to reinforce this position Trinitarian Bible Society.<sup>101</sup> These scholars emphasized the passage's theological significance, its alignment with John's style, and its role in articulating the doctrine of the Trinity. They also noted the passage's improbability as a later interpolation, given the boldness and precision such an addition would require.

The *Trinitarian Bible Society* asserts that the Johannine Comma is a vital component of Scripture, divinely preserved to uphold critical doctrines, notably the Trinity. They maintain that its inclusion reflects God's providence and the faithful testimony of the church throughout history.<sup>102</sup>

David W. Cloud strongly supports the authenticity of the *Comma Johanneum*, emphasizing its

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<sup>99</sup> Trinitarian Bible Society, *Why 1 John 5:7-8 Is in the Bible* (Trinitarian Bible Society, 2012), 1-9.

<sup>100</sup> Trinitarian Bible Society, 1-9.

<sup>101</sup> Trinitarian Bible Society, 1-9.

<sup>102</sup> Trinitarian Bible Society, 1-9.

theological, historical, textual, and spiritual significance. David W. Cloud views the passage as a divinely inspired part of Scripture, crucial for understanding Trinitarian doctrine.<sup>103</sup>

David W. Cloud highlights the *Comma Johanneum*'s theological uniqueness, noting the distinctive phrasing "Father, Word, and Holy Spirit." David W. Cloud argues that a forger would have likely used a more common Trinitarian formula, such as "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." This distinctiveness, he believes, points to its authenticity rather than its fabrication.<sup>104</sup>

Historically, David W. Cloud underscores the presence of the *Comma Johanneum* in numerous Latin manuscripts and early translations, such as the Vulgate and the Waldensian and Tepl manuscripts. David W. Cloud emphasizes that its broad acceptance across various languages and traditions supports its legitimacy. Furthermore, David W. Cloud points to its early citation by Cyprian (around A.D. 250) and its use at the Council of Carthage (A.D. 485) as evidence of its recognition and application in defending Trinitarian theology.<sup>105</sup> If Albert Barnes<sup>106</sup> asserts that Athanasius never referenced the *Comma Johanneum*, David Cloud presents a contrasting view. In *The Modern Bible Version Question-Answer Database*, Cloud cites quotations from 18 writers who supported the *Johannine Comma* from the 3rd to the 10th centuries. He claims that Athanasius (c. 350 A.D.) referenced it at least three times in his

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<sup>103</sup> Cloud, *Answering the Myths on the Bible Version Debate*, 181-198.

<sup>104</sup> Cloud, 181-198.

<sup>105</sup> Cloud, 181-198.

<sup>106</sup> Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Old and New Testaments*.

works.<sup>107</sup>

Tertullian, a prominent church father, is well-known for his defense of the Trinity, emphasizing the distinctiveness and unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>108</sup> While David Cloud argues that early Christian leaders, including Tertullian (around 200 A.D.), acknowledged the doctrinal significance of the *Johannine Comma*, Tertullian himself did not explicitly quote it.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, his Trinitarian views align with the theological meaning found in 1 John 5:7. Khoo further asserts that it is inaccurate to claim that 1 John 5:7 is absent in all pre-16th century Greek manuscripts, noting that the verse appears in eight Greek manuscripts, five of which predate the 16th century. Additionally, numerous Latin manuscripts, including those used by Tertullian and Cyprian, provide substantial support for the inclusion of 1 John 5:7.<sup>110</sup>

From a textual perspective, David Cloud criticizes modern textual critics for their double standards. David Cloud argues that they often dismiss the *Comma Johanneum* despite its significant manuscript and historical support while accepting other passages with weaker evidence. Such inconsistency undermines the credibility of their conclusions and reflects a bias against traditional readings like 1 John 5:7.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Cloud, 181-198.

<sup>108</sup> Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>109</sup> David Cloud, "A Defense of 1 John 5:7," *Way of Life Literature*, 2023, <https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/a-defense-of-1-john.php>.

<sup>110</sup> Jeffrey Khoo, "A Clear Bible Proof Text for the Doctrine of the Trinity," in *50 Years Building His Kingdom, Life Bible-Presbyterian Church* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2000), 87-88.

<sup>111</sup> Cloud, 181-198.

David Cloud also brings a spiritual dimension to his argument, emphasizing the role of faith and the guidance of the Spirit of God in discerning the authenticity of Scripture. He criticizes textual critics for relying heavily on rationalistic methods while neglecting spiritual considerations, which David Cloud believes are crucial for understanding the divine preservation of Scripture.<sup>112</sup>

In conclusion, David Cloud asserts that the *Comma Johanneum* is an inspired and authentic part of the Bible. David Cloud views its inclusion in the *Textus Receptus* and translations like the King James Bible as evidence of divine preservation. For Cloud, rejecting the passage diminishes its theological importance and undermines the broader doctrine of Scripture preservation. David Cloud firmly holds that 1 John 5:7 provides a unique and vital testimony to the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>113</sup>

### **Synthesis of Opposing and Supporting Views on the *Comma Johanneum***

Scholars such as Bruce Metzger, A.T. Robertson, and Albert Barnes reject the authenticity of the *Comma Johanneum* based on textual and historical evidence. They point out its absence in the earliest Greek manuscripts and most early translations, including the Syriac, Coptic, and Ethiopic versions. The Comma appears in only a few late Greek manuscripts, and its inclusion in the *Textus Receptus* is attributed to Erasmus, who reluctantly added it to his third edition in response to the appearance of a Greek manuscript of questionable origin.

Critics argue that the *Comma*

*Johanneum* disrupts the flow of 1 John 5:6–8, which focuses on the testimony of the Spirit, water, and blood. Additionally, they highlight its probable origin as a marginal gloss in Latin manuscripts, which later became part of the biblical text. While the Comma was historically significant in Trinitarian debates, opponents assert that the doctrine of the Trinity does not rely on this passage and is well-supported by other Scripture.

Proponents such as Matthew Henry, John Gill, Timothy Tow, Jeffrey Khoo, Michael Maynard, David W. Cloud, and the Trinitarian Bible Society defend the *Comma Johanneum* as an authentic and inspired part of Scripture. They emphasize its presence in numerous Latin manuscripts, including Jerome's Vulgate, and its citation by early church figures like Cyprian and Tertullian. The Council of Carthage (A.D. 485) also referenced it, reflecting its acceptance in early Christian tradition.

Supporters argue that the Comma provides a unique and explicit articulation of the Trinity, using terminology consistent with Johannine theology, such as "the Word" or "*Logos*." They contend that its absence in many Greek manuscripts may have resulted from doctrinal controversies or intentional omissions rather than a lack of authenticity. The theological coherence and doctrinal clarity offered by the *Comma Johanneum* make it a cornerstone for defending the Trinity.

While opposing scholars raise legitimate concerns about the textual history and transmission of the *Comma Johanneum*, these critiques do not necessarily negate its theological value or historical significance. Its inclusion in early Latin traditions and its role in shaping Trinitarian doctrine highlight its importance in the church's life.

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<sup>112</sup> Cloud, 181-198.

<sup>113</sup> Cloud, 181-198.

From a defender's perspective, the *Comma Johanneum* can be seen as a divinely preserved witness to the Trinity, even if its manuscript history raises questions. Faith in God's providence and the Holy Spirit's guidance in preserving Scripture allows room for affirming its authenticity. Additionally, its theological content aligns with and reinforces the broader biblical testimony to the Trinity, offering clarity and strength to this foundational Christian doctrine.

The debate over the *Comma Johanneum* illustrates the tension between textual criticism and theological tradition. We uphold its authenticity and significance while acknowledging the challenges raised by textual evidence. Its role in affirming the doctrine of the Trinity and its widespread use in historical Christianity underscores its enduring relevance. Whether viewed through textual transmission or theological necessity, the *Comma Johanneum* remains a vital witness to the unity and co-equality of the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit.

## CONCLUSION

The debate surrounding the *Comma Johanneum* (1 John 5:7–8) highlights the complex interplay between textual criticism, theological necessity, and the historical development of Christian doctrine. While modern textual critics generally regard the passage as a later interpolation, defenders of its authenticity emphasize its theological significance and historical role in affirming the doctrine of the Trinity.

The absence of the *Comma* in early Greek manuscripts and its limited textual attestation has led many scholars to dismiss its originality. Yet, its widespread presence in the Latin

Vulgate, its citation by early church figures, and its inclusion in the *Textus Receptus* underscore its historical importance and enduring theological impact. Defenders argue that its phrasing, particularly "the Word" of "Logos," aligns with Johannine theology and reflects its early presence in the Christian tradition. Ultimately, the *Comma Johanneum's* significance extends beyond textual debates. It serves as a critical point of reflection on how the church has historically balanced doctrinal clarity with textual evidence. The passage remains a focal point for discussions about preserving Scripture, the relationship between tradition and textual criticism and articulating key theological doctrines such as the Trinity. Whether viewed as a late addition or a divinely preserved text, the *Comma Johanneum* continues to shape the understanding and interpretation of the Christian faith.

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