

ANCIENT CREEDAL EVIDENCE AND THE LONGER READING OF I JOHN 5:7

by

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ABSTRACT

After providing certain necessary terms and limitations to the work, I first offer an overview of accepted ancient creedal statements in the apostle John's writings. Second, I go on to delineate the single-mention, bipartite, and tripartite content of John's creedal statements. Third, I give specific attention to I John 4:2-3 noting the potential tripartite hints there. Finally, I turn my attention to the clear tripartite material in I John 5:7. In sum, I conclude that given the internal evidence of tripartite ancient creedal statements in Johannine literature, a strong attestation to the Trinity in I John 5:7 is more than called for and not nearly as strange as first thought.

Not long ago I had the pleasure of attending a series of lectures by Dr. Gary Habermas on the topic of ancient New Testament creeds. More specifically, the discussion revolved around pre-Pauline creeds. Among these early creeds, though not pre-Pauline, are a series of purported creeds in the gospels and Acts. Through the course of our time together a fellow attendee mentioned that noted scholar, Oscar Cullmann, held that Acts 8:37 represented an early creed from the church. In part, here is the quote from Cullmann,

On the occasion of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-38), the order of the liturgy appears quite plainly: the eunuch himself asks whether any hindrance to baptism exists. In verse 37 (lacking in one series of manuscripts, but particularly well attested in the Western text), Philip gives an answer which appears already to have a liturgical character: 'If thou believes with all thine heart, thou mayest [be baptised]'. Then the eunuch pronounces his confession of faith: 'I

believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ This is one of the most ancient confessions of faith which we know.¹

This particular reference presents a bit of a problem in the intervening years between Cullmann’s writing and our current understanding of this passage. Acts 8:37 is no longer regarded as the correct reading for this passage. In fact, several of the more recent and trusted translations of the New Testament call for a removal of verse 37 or its relegation to a footnote.

Of course Acts 8:37 is not the only verse to which such treatment is given. Still, from the perspective of early creeds as a relatively unexplored but formidable branch of New Testament [hereafter: NT] studies, it is the position of this paper that the presence of creedal content should count in deciding whether or not a reading should be included in the biblical text. That is not to say that such evidence is decisive or absolutely authoritative, but to say that such evidence should count in the scales of decision. What follows is a brief discussion of ancient creedal formulation accepted by critical scholarship in this field. And for the purposes of this paper and for clarity of presentation, I propose an examination of Johannine creedal content and whether or not it supports the inclusion of the now spurious I John 5:7. Given these parameters, the thesis of this paper is, given the polemical context of I John, the late nature of its writing, the content of the longer reading of I John 5:7 in conjunction with v.8, as well as the tripartite hints or statements present in I John, this paper concludes that the balance of the creedal

¹ Oscar Cullmann. *The Earliest Christian Confessions*. trans. J.K.S. Reid (London: Lutterworth Press), 1963. 19-20.

evidences presented in I John contributes to the inclusion of the longer reading of I John 5:7.

TERMS

The term “early creeds” refers to certain creedal formulations as they occur in the text of the Christian Scriptures. That is to say that such creeds are not those penned by Irenaeus or the Ancient Church Fathers. Later this paper will address the language which comprises such forms but for now, suffice it so say that the creeds under examination are those creedal formulations found in the body of the Christian Scriptures.

The terms single-member, bipartite, and tripartite refer to the number of divine persons included in a given confessional formula. The first exclusively contains reference to God the Son as Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus, or Son of God. Bipartite formulas include, most often, a referent to the Son and God or the Father. On some occasions bipartite formulas appear with reference only to the Son and the Holy Spirit. Tripartite formulas are the least recurrent formulas in the NT, and contain reference to all three persons of the Trinity. Though they are few in number Cullmann admits that certain hints or prototypical elements do exist in the NT. It is these hints or prototypical elements that serve as a primary focus in the following pages.

LIMITATIONS

Given the length of the project and our given thesis, my scope is limited to the book of I John and the tripartite hints contained therein. For the purposes of this paper the dating of I John as c. 80-95 AD is assumed, thus denoting the contents of I John a relatively late in the formation of confessional formulae in the first century church. Note also that we have no extant

manuscripts of I John as early as we date the writing of the autograph. Indeed, the earliest citation of I John 5:7 is by Cyprian where he states, “He who breaks the peace and the concord of Christ, does so in opposition to Christ; he who gathered elsewhere than in the Church, scatters the Church of Christ. The Lord says, ‘I and my 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.’”² This quote references I John 5:7 and occurs in the work, *The Treatises of Cyprian* which scholars date around 251 AD. Some question the authenticity of this quote. As a result, many take the earliest witness to I John 5:7 to be Codex Aleph and Codex B, both of which omit the longer reading of that same verse. Scrivener says of this passage,

Again, a shorter passage or mere clause, whether inserted or not in our printed books, may have appeared originally in the form of a marginal note, and from the margin have crept into the text, through the wrong judgment or mere oversight of the scribe. Such we have reason to think is the history of I John v. 7, the verse relating to the three heavenly witnesses, once so earnestly maintained, but now pretty generally given up as spurious.³

Still, if the passage dates back to Cyprian “this citation, if a fact, would be a most important one, as it would throw back their reception to an early date.”⁴ Given the dating of I John there still remains an intervening century and a half during which a multitude of emendations, corrections, and corruptions could creep into the text. The state of the case then is that

² S. Caecilius Cyprian. “The Treatises of Cyprian” in *Ante-Nicean Fathers: Fathers of the Third Century* vol.5 ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. (Peabody, MA: Hendricks Publishers), 2004. 423.

³ Frederick Henry Scrivener. *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism fo the New Testament* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell and Co.), 1861. 8.

⁴ See footnote γ in: Gregory Nazianzen. “On the Holy Spirit” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen* vol. 7 ed. Philip Schaffer and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers), 2004. 323.

we have a date for the book concerning which we have no extant first-century manuscripts. Additionally, the only evidence available for its content lies no fewer than a hundred and fifty years from its original writing. It is a contention of this paper that perhaps there is evidence within the text itself that assists in verifying its contents i.e. early creedal formulation.

How then does one identify the form of an ancient creed? In order to answer this question consider the work of Ethelbert Stauffer in his volume entitled, *New Testament Theology*. Stauffer gives a dozen criteria in identifying creedal formulation.⁵ For present purposes the following six criteria serve to focus the work at hand: 1.) Texts that have key words (i.e. deliver, confess etc), 2.) Contextual dislocation – the text is awkward in the context, 3.) Often rhythmic – double stanza, 4.) Often lines of similar length, 5.) Special language not used anywhere else, and 6.) Elementary theology i.e. the Gospel message. Secondly, but equally as helpful, is locating the use of these ancient creeds within their historical context. Cullmann enumerates five uses of such creeds: 1.) Baptism and Catechumens, 2.) Regular worship (i.e. liturgy and preaching), 3.) Exorcism, 4.) Comfort and stability in persecution, and 5.) Polemics against heretics.⁶ Based on these criteria of form and use, this paper asserts that while the balance of textual evidence recommends the shorter reading of I John 5:7, perhaps something of I John's creedal content will

⁵ Ethelbert Stauffer. *New Testament Theology* (London: SCM Press), 1941. 322. He offers twelve criteria in identifying creedal formulae in the Scriptures. See also Richard Longenecker. *New Wine into Fresh Wineskins* (Peabody, MO: Hendrickson Publishers), 1999. 21. Longenecker includes such linguistic features as, 1.) The verb *ὁμολογέω* ('confess'), 2.) Other verbs of kerygma, didactic, or confessional nature, 3.) The *hoti rectiativuum*, a double accusative, or an infinitive (often in combination); and 4.) A participial construction or relative clause."

⁶ Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian*, 18.

serve as evidence for the longer reading. So with this introduction of terms and limitations in hand, let us press on to the body of the argument.

ARGUMENT

C.H. Dodd opines that the writings of Paul and John “as well as those of other New Testament writers, betray a direct acquaintance with the traditional forms of the *kerygma*.”⁷ As the church grew, she “produced a settled organization of its life, the content of the *kerygma* entered into the Rule of Faith, which is recognized by the theologians of the second and third centuries as the presupposition of Christian theology.”⁸ Accepted examples of this “Rule of Faith” in I John are I John 2:22a and I John 5:1a. Longenecker regards these passages as “passages where the title ‘Christ’ appears in a confessional manner”⁹ He also identifies I John 4:15 and 5:5 as “passages that call Jesus ‘Son of God’ in a confessional manner”¹⁰ Gary Habermas recognizes I John 4:2, among several other passages, as creedal in stating,

Although these early creeds are interested in theological elements of Christology, to be sure, they are also early reports of events in the life of Jesus. We are told that Jesus was really born in human flesh (Phil. 2:6; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 4:2) of the lineage and family of David (Rom. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:8). We find an implication

⁷ C.H. Dodd. *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*. <http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-2/Religion-Online.org%20Books/Dodd%2C%20C.%20H.%20-%20The%20Apostolic%20Preaching%20and%20Its%20Developments.pdf#page35> [Accessed 8/2/2018]. 44.

⁸ Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching*, 44.

⁹ Longenecker, *New Wine*, 21-22.

¹⁰ Longenecker, *New Wine*, 22-23.

of his baptism (Rom. 10:9) and that his word was preached resulting in persons believing his message (I Tim. 3:16).¹¹

In short, the content of preaching was becoming a standard of Christian orthodoxy. What was preached became a litmus test for the ancient confessing Christian church. Longenecker recognizes a shift “from a focus on the *the act* of confessing Jesus and one’s relation to him...to an emphasis on *the content* of the confession, apparent in the use of the noun *ὁμολογία* in the later writings.”¹² What we observe here is an evolution of confessional solidity. Where before it was an act, now the church has a seed for the tree that is orthodox Christian doctrine. Longenecker includes I John 2:22-23; 4:2, 3, and 15 as examples of this seed. Takes as such, I John contains no less than seven recognized creedal statements or formulas. In the subsection to follow this paper will consider an eighth creedal statement, a single-statement confession, which will lead to the main discussion on tripartite hints in I John.

¹¹ Gary R. Habermas. *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*. (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company), 2008. 146. Longenecker makes the similar observation regarding I John 4:2 in writing, “Most explicitly, however, the full humanity of Christ, and so his true incarnation, is declared in the confessional formula of I Tim. 3:16 which begins with the words ‘he [ὅς] appeared in the body [ἐν σαρκί],’ and in the confessional statement of I John 4:2, ‘Jesus Christ has come in the flesh [ἐν σαρκί]’” See Longenecker, *New Wine*, 41.

¹² Longenecker, *New Wine*, 32. The term *ὁμολογία* speaks to the act of confessing, occasionally of ones sins and more often of ones belief and/or relationship to Jesus Christ. See Longenecker, *New Wine*, 24. “And while the verb *ὁμολογέω* was used, at times, to mean ‘to confess’ guilt or sin (cf. Acts 24:14; I John 1:9), it usually connotes ‘to confess’ something about Jesus or something about one’s relationship with Jesus.”¹²

Single-statement, Bipartite, and Tripartite Statements and Hints

In this section the following argument will lean heavily on Oscar Cullmann and his evaluation of tripartite creedal formulations. Consider the following summary regarding the confessions of the NT,

The overwhelming majority contain one article alone, the Christological; tripartite confessions are not yet to be found. On the other hand, bipartite formulae are found, though much more seldom, which set the confession of God before that of Christ. Only later are tripartite formulas attested. This suggests the idea of a direct development of single-membered confessions into double-membered, and then further into triple-membered.¹³

Longenecker regards I John 4:15 and 5:5 as single-statement creedal forms. “Important as well, among the single-statement affirmations”, writes Longenecker, “of the NT, are those declaring that ‘Jesus is the Son of God.’”¹⁴ Here again the literature identifies an evolution in the early church’s understanding of the Christian faith. Where the gospel, at first, focused on the deity, death, resurrection of Christ there arose more complex and robust expressions of Christian belief. For instance the “employment of the confession in *baptism* made necessary a tripartite formula, in which the Spirit figures as the effect of baptism.”¹⁵ Still, Cullmann warns the reader about “thinking that each step displaced its predecessor. It is an established fact that formulas or one, two, and after a certain date three articles, contemporaneous and alongside one another, are attested from the earliest time.”¹⁶ So then it appears that formulae expressing the belief in the

¹³ Cullmann, *The Earliest*, 36.

¹⁴ Longenecker, *New Wine*, 37.

¹⁵ Cullmann, *The Earliest*, 43.

¹⁶ Cullmann, *The Earliest*, 36.

Son, the Son and the Father, and the Son, Father, and Spirit coexisted without threat of schism. Cullmann concludes, “We have here the decisive proof that there was a time when one- and three-membered formulas existed alongside one another, neither being renounced in favor of the other.”¹⁷ For Cullmann, the earliest tripartite confession appear in an elaborate quote by Irenaeus around 150 AD.¹⁸ Therefore, as the current scholarship stands, it appears that the only remaining evidence touching tripartite creeds are *hints* to those creeds via baptism and the work of the Spirit of God.

It it appropriate at this point to take a brief excursus into the relation of baptism, the Spirit, and the rise of tripartite confessions. Cullmann says of baptism that we can “rightly claim a special place in the formation of *tripartite* formulas.”¹⁹ For the clearest example, Cullmann offers Ephesians 4:4, concerning which he shares this commentary, “[B]etween [the] mention of the *Kyrios* and of the Father a third expression (apart from that of ‘one faith’) is inserted: *one baptism*. Perhaps we have here the origin of the development from bipartite to tripartite formulas.”²⁰ This theme of baptism in relation to the Spirit of God, Cullmann concludes, “resulted in the introduction of the Trinity, which from the earliest times appeared in other liturgical formulas as the formal principle of the confession. According as the employment of the confession was gradually limited to baptism so the tripartite formula gained supremacy.”²¹ We

¹⁷ Cullmann, *The Earliest*, 37.

¹⁸ Cullmann, *The Earliest*, 36.

¹⁹ Cullmann, *The Earliest*, 44.

²⁰ Cullmann, *The Earliest*, 43.

²¹ Cullmann, *The Earliest*, 44.

gather from this that later formulas tend to be tripartite formulas and for current purposes it is important to note that if I John was indeed written 80-95A.D., it stands to reason that I John would begin to evidence such transitions from single-membered confessional formulas to later and fuller tripartite formulas.

Regardless of one's position on the nature and power of baptism there remains the observation which Cullmann directs the reader's attention to that "displacement of the forgiveness of sins into the third article of the most ancient three-membered formulas shows anew that this third article owes its existence to baptism alone. For beside the gift of the Spirit, the forgiveness of sins is the great work of baptism."²² So in Cullmann's view there are two things which give rise or hint to the tripartite formula: baptism and the forgiveness of sins. Whether baptism in some way causes said forgiveness or is merely emblematic of it, the point is that baptism and forgiveness combined with bipartite formulations gave rise to the ancient church form of Trinitarian confessional creeds. Given these observations is it feasible to identify such hints in I John? It is the position of this paper that such feasibility exists.

Consider the following passages from I John. I John 2:24 states, "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." And what is it that they have heard from the beginning? This paper contends that it is what John had heard from the beginning. Note we have a bipartite formula which refers first to Jesus and also as Son followed by God in the person of the Father. Continuing, I John 1:3 gives us something of a direction in saying, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have

²² Cullmann, *The Earliest*, 45-46.

fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship [is] with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Here again John evinces bipartite content which places the Father first, and again he offers a reference to Jesus as Son. It is important at this point to ask, What then is the axis of this fellowship? Here, I believe, “fellowship” is a hint to the Spirit, given the greater narrative of I John.

I John 1:6 states, “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” And who is a liar, “but he that denieth that Jesus is Christ” (I John 3:22). So then John predicates fellowship on the truth, and more specifically, the truth that Jesus is the Christ. How then, according to John, is the reader to secure this truth? In short, she comes to know such a truth by the Holy Spirit. John, speaking of Jesus, writes “This is he that came by *water* and blood, even Jesus Christ; not of *water* only, but by *water* and blood. *And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth*” (I John 5:6; emphasis: mine). Note the three references to water. Several commentators hold that “water” here is a reference to baptism.²³ In conjunction with this we have the recognized confessional statement of I John 4:2-3a the focus of which is that Jesus has come in the flesh and as such has come by water and blood. The purpose of this observation is not to offer a detailed exegesis of these passages, rather it is to note the presence of baptism as part of the formulation of Jesus’ coming. Jesus Christ came in the flesh and by baptism.

Recall Stauffer’s criteria for identifying confessional formulation and note the parallel structure, tripartite content, and the term “confess”. John writes, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of

²³ The following commentaries on I John 5:6 regarding “water” as reference to baptism: *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary*, *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*, *Jamieson-Faussett-Brown Commentary*, and *Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*. See https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_john/5-6.htm

God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.” So then if the church is to have fellowship, then she must apprehend and confess this truth – the truth that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. But, in a kind of reciprocal nature, if the believing community is to know if the Spirit of God dwells in the some person X then the believing community must look to see if such a person confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. It seems that John offers an example of *kerygma* in the body of his first letter summarized in I John 4:2-3a. In other words, here John presents something of an example of how preaching/teaching became formalized as a Rule of Faith in the first century church.

This paper diverges from Cullmann in making the case that tripartite formulas *do* exist prior to Irenaeus and I John 4:2-3a is such a formulation. Clearly, John makes reference to the Spirit of God, the Son of God, and God. Given the passage’s clarity, it is your author’s opinion that such a formula goes beyond tripartite hints and is more representative of a tripartite statement. Undoubtedly, there is much more to say on this score. Suffice it to say that in opposition to scholarly opinion it appears at least rationally permissible that I John contains one of the few if not the only tripartite confessions in the whole NT and as such John supplies for a first century witness to the Triune nature of the living and true God.

A Case for the Longer Reading of I John 5:7

Given the above, the case for the longer reading of I John 5:7 is divided into three sections: the argument that one of the few tripartite statement in the NT occurs in I John, the historical context in which I John was written, and the language of I John 5:6-7. Given the scope

of our current task, I have said enough on the tripartite elements in I John so let us now turn to the historical matrix into which I John was written.

Vernon Neufeld maintains that upon reading I John “one learns that a schism had occurred in the churches which he addresses, and that certain persons had left the Christian fellowship: ‘they went out from us, but they were not of us.’”²⁴ There had arisen “false prophets whose πνεύμα was not from God (4:1-2).”²⁵ These false prophets did not believe in the incarnation,²⁶ and as such to “John they were nothing other than antichrists (I Jn. 2.18, 22).”²⁷ While the culprit for such a claim is uncertain Neufeld notes that the “error is generally considered to be some form of Gnosticism.”²⁸ Thus I John 4:1-2 becomes “a test for the errorists by which their standing in relation to apostolic Christianity may be determined.”²⁹ Here is a relatively clear example of a creed being used to thwart the preaching of another Gospel. As noted before, the ancient creeds had several uses one of which was as a polemic against heresies. Neufeld contends, given the strife present in John’s letter, that in I John 4:2 we “have therefore a clear instance of the *homologia* being utilized polemically to meet an heretical movement in the church.”³⁰ Continuing in the same vein, Neufeld declares, “Though some deny or minimize the

²⁴ Vernon H. Neufeld. *The Earliest Christian Confessions*. ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1963. 82.

²⁵ Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, 82.

²⁶ Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, 82.

²⁷ Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, 82.

²⁸ Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, 83.

²⁹ Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, 103.

³⁰ Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, 104.

polemical function of the early confession (or creed, as some prefer)...the letters [I-III John] appear to be directed against a syncretistic movement embodying various elements, including those of a Jewish character.”³¹ In sum, not only does John relate a tripartite confession or something akin to it but he presents such a confession in a polemical environment. With this groundwork laid let us consider the content of I John 5:7-8.

As observed before, tripartite formulas are rare or non-existent in the first century church. Still this paper has proffered an argument that such a formula does indeed exist in I John. Furthermore, the matrix into which John wrote was polemical in nature and particularly against syncretism and perhaps Gnosticism. “The function of the *homologia* in Johannine literature is basically threefold...a confession of faith...a profession of faith... [and] a statement of orthodoxy.”³² Should the longer reading of I John 5:7 be included in the Christian Scriptures, it is important to understand that it also was written into this tripartite and polemic matrix. Furthermore, given the brevity of the book coupled with the potential presences of one of the few tripartite creeds, the longer reading does not seem beyond the scope of John’s polemic. So in this sense, 4:2-3a and 5:7 have these two elements in common: they are tripartite in form and are written as part of a Christian polemic contra syncretism and perhaps even Gnosticism. As was already noted, such elements (tripartite form and apologetic emphasis) are indicative of early confessional material.

John writes in I John 5:7, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” Consider these words from John in light of

³¹ Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, 104-105.

³² Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, 106-107.

the criteria from Stauffer. The first of our criteria is that the text under examination has certain key words such as “deliver” or “confess.” I John 5:7-8 contains similar language: “record in heaven” and “witness in earth.” Both bear connotations of prior substance being preserved for posterity. Neufeld reminds us that these ancient creeds have the “key function of serving as the norm for true faith.”³³ This norm serves as a future standard for identifying who is in fellowship, who is walking in the truth, and who is not – “the liar.” Secondly, the tripartite phrasing in 5:7 offers significant contextual dislocation in that, if admitted, the church has one of the earliest if not the earliest tripartite confessions in the Christian tradition. No one else, not even John has been this clear on the Triune nature of God, even if I John 4:2-3a is included. This alone seems enough to earn the designation of contextual dislocation.

Third, observe the existence of double stanzas when including the longer reading of I John 5:7:

v.7 For there are three that bear record in heaven
the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost
and these three are one.
v.8 And there are three that bear witness on earth
the Spirit, and the water, and the blood
and these three are one.

The parallelism is clear, so much so that the fourth of Stauffer’s criteria is also apparent in that the lines are of almost identical length. Borrowing words from Neufeld, this parallelism and equal length “may be understood to reflect a situation of prophetic activity in the church during which the *homologia* was uttered in acclamation or worship.”³⁴ Not only is there a case for the

³³ Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, 103.

³⁴ Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, 99.

polemical use of I John in general and 5:7-8 in specific; there may also be a case for a liturgical use as well given identical length and double stanza nature of I John 5:7-8. Fifth, in aligning this argument with with Cullmann, the existence of such tripartite language does indeed constitute special language not only for John but for the whole of the NT given the clarity of Trinitarian content in passage under examination. And finally, I John 5:7-8 demonstrates foundational theology though of the later sort. If the tripartite hints in I John are accepted and perhaps even concede that I John contains a tripartite statement in 4:2-3a, then John offers his reader a window into that evolution spoken of by Cullmann – the transition from single-membered creeds to tripartite creeds. In short, it seems feasible that by the time of writing I John the core of the faith has moved from the deity, death, resurrection of Christ, to the three that bear witness to that deity, death, and resurrection – the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, John wrote his first epistle in an adverse environment where it appears that the church had experienced a schism because some among God's people had rejected the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As a result, John offers a polemic in the form of a letter. As we noted at the beginning of this work, one use of the ancient creeds was for polemical purposes. Additionally, I briefly noted that in the midst of this polemical environment that John employed the bipartite formula at least, but we also raised the possibility that I John may contain one of the only if not the only tripartite formula in the whole NT found in I John 4:2-3a. Therefore it seems feasible to conclude that I John 5:7-8 fits nicely into this polemical context as well as the tripartite nomenclature found in I John.

I also considered the fact that if the longer reading of v.7 is admitted then the church has yet another tripartite formula consistent with Stauffer's criteria for identifying creeds. Therefore, given the context of I John, the late nature of its writing, the content of the longer reading of I John 5:7 in conjunction with v.8, as well as the tripartite hints or statements, I conclude that the balance of the creedal evidences presented in I John contributes to the inclusion of the longer reading of I John 5:7.