

PFRS Commentary

John 1:18

By Tim Warner

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18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten **Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

(NKJV)

I. The Seriousness of Corruptions in the Text

One of the key arguments used by supporters of the Alexandrian Text in translation is the claim that no important doctrine is lost in modern versions based in part on this text. The differences in the underlying manuscripts, or the variant readings introduced into the new translations, are said to be inconsequential to the message of the Scriptures. When the NASB or NIV are charged with omitting the deity of Christ in certain passages, modern version supporters counter that the doctrine is preserved in other verses. Their conclusion is that the overall message of the deity of Christ is preserved in all versions. Ditto for all other important Christian doctrines. So, no harm done! Let's let the current spokesman for the modern version defenders, James R. White, speak for himself.

"The reality is that the amount of variation between the two most extremely different manuscripts of the New Testament would not fundamentally alter the message of the Scriptures!" ¹

It is true that the NASB, NIV, et al. have several verses that teach or imply the deity of Christ. So, it is not fair to say that these versions eliminate this crucial doctrine. But, the situation facing us is much worse than what is portrayed by James White in the above quote. In most modern versions and their supporting manuscripts points of doctrine are sometimes omitted from particular verses. As White says, they are not however lost altogether because they are found in others. Our major concern is not so much with omissions, but with erroneous ideas inserted into the text through textual variants. Omissions are bad enough. But, substituted wrong words and phrases can be poison! This can occur with the change of just one word which can change the meaning of the entire verse. Such corruptions and false ideas are then allowed to compete with other verses and doctrines on a level playing field. That field is the "authoritative" Scriptures.

As long as a false or heretical belief is presented in some other book, it can be weighed against authoritative Scripture, exposed, and eradicated. The Word of God will prevail against it because Scripture carries the authority to expose and overrule any and every idea of man. The Word of Almighty God always supersedes the words of man. Not so once false ideas are brought under the umbrella of "authority" and placed within the text itself. From that point on, false ideas compete with the truth contained in that particular Bible version. These errors gain the advantage of having equal authority with the rest of inspired Scripture. But, even worse, the errors achieve stealth, and become virtually undetectable.

There is no better example of this virus invading the text than the corruption of John 1:18. This corruption seriously threatens orthodox doctrine on the person of Christ, and gives a great boost to the Jehovah's Witnesses and others who hold to the Arian heresy. The one doctrine that John wrote distinguishes between the Spirit of God, and the spirit of Antichrist, is the deity of Christ and His incarnation (cf. 1 John 2:18-23, 1 John 4:2,3, 2 John 1:7).

II. The Doctrinal Problem in John 1:18 NASB

KJV & NKJV *"the only begotten Son"*

NASB *"the only begotten God"*

The idea introduced into the text by the NASB and its supporting Alexandrian manuscripts is multiple "Gods." The Bible does not portray Jesus as "a God" but THE God. John 1:18 makes no sense in the NASB unless it refers to multiple, separate "gods." In fact, the verse contradicts itself. In the NASB, it is clear from the language that two individual persons are described here, the invisible "God" and the visible "God" who declares the first God. Both are called "God." "No man has seen God" refers to the unseen God. But, the words, "the only begotten God" refer to the one who has been seen by men. Literally understood, the NASB is speaking of two distinct "Gods," one visible and one invisible. Furthermore, the use of "only begotten" (mono-genes) with "God" (theos) implies birth or reproduction of the second "God" by the first "God." The NASB's rendering here is absolutely ridiculous and completely heterodoxical.

This corrupt reading promotes (and sprang from) a form of gnosticism that invaded the early Church late in the first century. In Gnostic Christianity, gods begat other gods, and you had families of gods. The "Gnostics" derived the names for these "gods" from the Scriptures, interpreting common words as mythological gods, and developing myths from the use of these Greek words in the New Testament Scriptures. These "gods" (which they called Aeons) were called "Zoe" (life), "Logos" (word), "Anthropos" (man), "Ecclessia" (church), "Monogenes" (only begotten), &c.. 2

The various Gnostic cults held various ideas regarding the man "Jesus." But, they all held in common that the man Jesus was not Himself "God" or divine. While Gnosticism was flatly rejected by the early Church, the idea that Christ was not Himself God was introduced into some of the Churches in the fourth century by Arius. The Arian controversy was the first major doctrinal crisis within the early Church. It was in response to the Arian controversy that the Nicene Council was called in AD325.

The Nicene Creed was developed to standardize the Church's teaching on the Trinity. The Arians were a pseudo-Christian heretical group that sprang up in Alexandria Egypt early in the fourth century, shortly before the Alexandrian manuscripts Aleph and B were made. According to Arius, Jesus Christ was not eternal, nor was He THE God. He was a god created or begotten by God prior to creation. So, while the Father is "the God" Jesus was considered "a god" or a sub-deity, a created or generated god. This is exactly what modern Jehovah's witnesses teach, who are the modern-day "Arians." The Jehovah's Witnesses, in their New World Translation, make use of this corruption in

the text of John in conjunction with a mistranslation of John 1:1 (with the article "a" inserted before "God" in their translation).

John 1:1,18

*1 In (the) beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was **a god**. ...*

*18 No man has seen God at any time; the **only-begotton god** who is in the bosom (position) with the Father, is the one that has explained him.*

(NWT - Watchtower Bible & Tract Society)

As you can see, this corruption of John 1:18 supports the "a god" mistranslation in verse one. And yes it is used today for that very purpose by modern-day Arians. We know from early Church history that the expression "only begotten God" was adopted and used by the Arians. ³

The fact that Jesus Christ was "God," and that Jesus Christ was "begotten" by means of the incarnation, does NOT equal "begotton God." John's point in this chapter is that the divine eternal "Word" (Logos) became flesh. That is, the Divine person of the Godhead (the Word) became the "only begotten Son" through the incarnation. The word "only-begotten" (mono-genes) is used by John as an adjective. It describes either "theos" (God) or "huios" (Son) depending on which manuscript evidence you follow. It is simply not an appropriate adjective to use with "God" in orthodox theology! It was His humanity that was "begotten" not His deity.

III. Internal Evidence

In the New Testament, the "Son" is always seen in relation to the "Father." Not once is Jesus presented as another "God" in relationship to the Father. The Father and Son are never referred to as "God's" (plural) which John 1:18 NASB requires. The Father/Son relationship, where the Son is subject to the Father, is unique to the mystery of the incarnation, and the sojourn of God in human flesh. "Father" in the New Testament is the Father of Jesus Christ the "Son." And He becomes our Father through adoption, "...that we should be called the sons of God." (1 John 3:1), "...now are we the sons of God..." (1 John 3:2), "...to them gave he power to become the sons of God..." (John 1:12), &c.

The orthodox Trinitarian concept is not that there are three Gods. It is that God is a trinity, one God manifest in three persons. God became man through the incarnation. John's use of the word "Son" always points to Jesus' incarnation in human flesh. That is why the term "only-begotten" is used by John. He does not mean to indicate that the "Word" was begotten or born at some point prior to creation, because that would indicate a point of origin. That is, there was a time when the "Word" did not exist. Verse one and two clearly indicate that the "Word" was eternal, from "the beginning." In fact, the first time John introduces the term "only begotten" is in verse 14, in conjunction with the introduction of Christ's incarnation in John's prologue.

*John 1:14 And **the Word was made flesh**, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of **the only begotten of the Father**,) full of grace and truth.*
(KJV)

It is clear that the phrase "only begotten of the Father" is meant to explain the phrase "the Word was made flesh," not describe the state or relationship of the Word to the Father prior to the incarnation as in verse one. How was the Word made flesh? Through the incarnation, the virgin birth. John was not teaching that the Word Himself (the pre-existing one) was "begotten" at some point in the past prior to the incarnation, as the Arians taught. Rather, He was "begotten" of the Father through the incarnation. Hence, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The Word became the "only-begotten of the Father" when the "Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." The relationship of Father to Son through the incarnation is what John 1 is about, along with the pre-existence of the Word (with God/was God) prior to the incarnation! But, in reading the NASB, verse 18 completely undermines the correct doctrine of the Trinity by introducing two God's, one visible and one invisible.

John 1:1-2

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God. ...

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ...

18 No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

(NASB)

This passage proceeds like a symphony until you get to verse 18, where the lead trumpeter hits the wrong note! "Only begotten God???" Where did that come from? There are clearly two distinct "Gods" in the English text here.

Not only does this corrupt reading clash with the rest of the passage, but it also clashes with John's typical jargon. Nowhere else in John's writings (or the rest of Scripture) can we find the expression "only-begotten God." However, "only begotten Son" is without question a typical Johannine expression.

John 1:14 "only begotten of the Father"

John 1:18 "only begotten Son" (KJV, TR, Majority Text, ECF)

John 3:16 "only begotten Son"

John 3:18 "only begotten Son"

1 John 4:9 "only begotten Son"

John no doubt had the second Psalm in mind when using the expression, "only-begotten Son."

*Psalm 2:7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art **my Son**; this day have I **begotten** thee. (KJV)*

"Only begotten God" just doesn't work with Biblical Christianity. It is not in harmony with the rest of Scripture. It is a corruption in the text of the NASB and other Alexandrian based Bibles. It does NOT support the "deity of Christ" as is claimed by New Version proponents, at least not in the biblical sense. The "deity of Christ" implies that He is the

true God, not "a God." Rather, this corruption supports the "deity of christ" in the way the Arians defined it, that of a sub-deity, a "god" created or begotten by the unseen God, and inferior to the unseen God, a "god" who is the messenger of the unseen God.

IV. The Textual Evidence

Most modern versions are based on modified versions of the Westcott Hort 1881 Greek edition of the New Testament. These are the Nestle's and UBS (United Bible Society) texts. Westcott and Hort relied heavily on two fourth or fifth century Alexandrian manuscripts, Aleph (Codex Sinaiticus) and B (Codex Vaticanus). These two manuscripts (and two papyrus fragments discovered later, p66 & p75) contain the "only begotten God" reading against all the rest of the New Testament Greek and Latin manuscripts numbering in the thousands. Even the fifth century Alexandrian codex, Alexandrinus (A), has "only begotten **Son**." So the Alexandrian manuscripts are by no means united against the rest of the manuscript evidence that has "only begotten Son." The Latin Vulgate, which was produced in the 4th century, also contains the "only begotten Son" (unigenetus Filius) reading. So too the Old Latin (Itala).

As is typical, Alexandrian Bible proponents misrepresent the evidence. They typically claim that the KJV/NKJV reading is late, and not supported by the early evidence. Likewise, James White misrepresents the evidence for the "only begotten God" reading. *"Suffice it to say that the most ancient texts, including the oldest existing copies of the book of John, P66 and P75, as well as a number of the early fathers of the Church, refer to Christ as the "only begotten God," or more accurately, the "unique God."* ⁴

Mr. White is at best misleading here. Aleph (Codex Sinaiticus) and B (Codex Vaticanus) are both 4th century Alexandrian manuscripts. P66 is a fragment dated about the beginning of the 3rd century, and P75 is a fragment from the late third century. Both of these papyrus fragments are Alexandrian as well. So, the textual evidence for the reading "only begotten God" is confined to one locality, Alexandria, Egypt, with the earliest evidence from the beginning of the 3rd century.

Furthermore, Mr. White completely misrepresents the Church Fathers. Of all the citations of this verse in the Early Fathers, the only evidence for the "only begotten God" reading **by non-Alexandrian writers** is an interpolation (a later addition) in Irenaeus' fourth book, and one passage in "The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," a 4th century anonymous document pretending to be the direct teaching of the Apostles. What Mr. White forgot to tell you is that there are several citations of this verse by reliable orthodox writers, from various countries, dating from the first century to the fourth century, all quoting "only begotten Son" in John 1:18.

Following are all of the quotations or citations of John 1:18 in the Ante Nicene Fathers.⁵ I have placed them in order by age. These quotes date from the first century until the Arian controversy and the Nicene council that was convened in A.D. 325 to address this heresy promoting a "begotten god." (All authors wrote in Greek unless otherwise noted.) Quotations that are from disputed works are marked with a double asterisk. (**)

Ignatius (1st Cent. - Disciple of John, Bishop of Antioch, Syria)

** "And there is also one Son, God the Word. For **'the only-begotten Son,'** saith [the Scripture], 'who is in the bosom of the Father'." 6

Irenaeus (2nd Cent. - Bishop of Lyons, Gaul {France})

"For 'no man,' he says, 'hath seen God at any time,' unless **'the only-begotten Son of God,** which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared [Him].' For He, **the Son** who is in His bosom, declares to all the Father who is invisible." 7

"He is by no means unknown: for all things learn through His Word that there is one God the Father, who contains all things, and who grants existence to all, as is written in the Gospel: 'No man hath seen God at any time, except **the only-begotten Son,** who is in the bosom of the Father; He has declared [Him.]" 8

... But His Word, as He Himself willed it, and for the benefit of those who beheld, did show the Father's brightness, and explained His purposes (***as also the Lord said: "**The only-begotten God,** which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared [Him];"* and He does Himself also interpret the Word of the Father as *being rich and great*); not in one figure, nor in one character, did He appear to those seeing Him, but according to the reasons and effects aimed at in His dispensations, as it is written in Daniel." 9 [Italics mine]

The *italicised* portion above is clearly a later addition to the text of Irenaeus. The brackets were placed by the translator to mark this interpolation, because he was convinced it was added later by someone else. The structure of the sentence shows clearly that the text originally did not contain this portion. Irenaeus had just quoted John 1:18 as saying "*only begotten Son.*" Furthermore, the addition is in error by saying "as also the Lord said" when in fact it was John the Apostle who was writing his own words as inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is a mistake Irenaeus was not likely to make.

Clement (2nd Cent. - Lived in Alexandria, head of Alexandrian school)

"For how shall he not be loved for whose sake **the only-begotten Son** is sent from the Father's bosom, the Word of faith, the faith which is superabundant; the Lord Himself distinctly confessing and saying, 'For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me;" 10

"For the Word is 'the power and the wisdom of God.' Again, the expounder of the laws is the same one by whom the law was given; the first expounder of the divine commands, who unveiled the bosom of the Father, **the only-begotten Son.**" 11

"No man hath seen God at any time. **The only-begotten God,** who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him,' — calling invisibility and ineffableness the bosom of God." 12

Tertullian (2nd Cent. Wrote in Latin, lived in Carthage {N. Africa})

"With us however, **the Son** alone knows the Father, and has Himself unfolded the Father's bosom." 13

"It is of course the Father, with whom was the Word, **the only begotten Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father, and has Himself declared Him." ¹⁴

Origen (3rd Cent. - Head of Alexandrian school after Clement)

"Jesus taught us who it was that sent Him, in the words, 'None knoweth the Father but the Son;' and in these, 'No man hath seen God at any time; **the only-begotten Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.'" ¹⁵

"'No one hath seen God at any time; **the only-begotten God**, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.' This whole speech is from the mouth of the Baptist bearing witness to the Christ." ¹⁶

Hippolytus (3rd Cent. - Lived near Rome)

"For John also says, 'No man hath seen God at any time; **the only-begotten Son**, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him'." ¹⁷

Archelaus (3rd Cent. - Written in "Syriac," lived in Mesopotamia {Iraq/Iran}, Citations of Scripture are likely from the old Syrian Version.)

"Furthermore, there is but one only inconvertible substance, the divine substance, eternal and invisible, as is known to all, and is also born out by the scripture: 'No man hath seen God at any time, save **the only begotten Son**, which is in the bosom of the Father'." ¹⁸

Alexander (4th cent. - Bishop of Alexandria, led the fight against the Arian heresy and excommunicated Arius and his followers from the Alexandrian church)

"But that the Son of God was not made 'from things which are not,' and that there was no 'time when He was not,' the evangelist John sufficiently shows, when he thus writes concerning Him: '**The only-begotten Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father.' For since that divine teacher intended to show that the Father and the Son are two things inseparable the one from the other, he spoke of Him as being in the bosom of the Father." ¹⁹

The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (4th century - anonymous) does not contain a quote or direct reference to John 1:18. But, it does mention the term "only begotten God" several times. ²⁰ A footnote says "the expression 'only begotten God' had become common with the Arians," and that the Latin version has "Son." ²¹ This implies that the Greek version was corrupted by the Arians.

This is the testimony we have from the first three centuries of the Church, from the hearers of John all the way to the Nicene council in A.D. 325. They strongly favor the "only begotten Son" reading in John 1:18. This is the most ancient and numerous reading in the Ante Nicene Fathers. More importantly, this testimony comes from Greek, Latin, and Syriac, the original Greek and two foreign language translations in which the Scriptures were produced in the first 3 centuries of Christianity. Furthermore, the evidence is very widespread geographically, from Gaul (France) in the west, to Mesopotamia (Iraq/Iran) in the East. From Rome in the north, to Alexandria (Egypt)

and Carthage (N. Africa) in the south. And to top it all off, several of the early quotes are from the very location (Alexandria) where the later manuscripts were produced that contain the corrupt "only begotten God" reading.

The only two "only begotten God" readings in citations of John 1:18 which are not limited to Alexandria are one later addition to Irenaeus, and one fourth century citation in the Greek version of the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, after the Arian heresy had taken hold. Irenaeus used the "only begotten Son" reading in two other quotes of John 1:18, one of them just a few paragraphs before the spurious addition. So, it is apparent that the text of John's Gospel that Irenaeus had before him contained the "only begotten Son" reading in the second century. The "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles" was written in the fourth century, about the time of the uproar over the Arian heresy, and is known to be spurious. We can safely conclude that there are no genuine examples of the "only begotten God" reading of John 1:18 from non-Alexandrian Early Church writers prior to the fourth century.

Of the three Alexandrian Fathers who cited this verse, Clement and Origen quoted both "only begotten Son" and "only begotten God" in John 1:18. Alexander only quoted "only begotten Son." This seems to indicate that in Alexandria both readings were extant at the time. Also, notice that in Clement's quotes, the "only begotten Son" reading is in his earlier work, Book I of the Stromata, while the "only begotten God" is found in Book V. Likewise, Origen's commentary on John was written late in his life, and contains the "only begotten God" reading as opposed to the "only begotten Son" reading in his earlier work. It seems that even among these Alexandrian Fathers, who were familiar with both readings, the "Son" reading is still earlier in the record even in Alexandria! Alexander, the orthodox bishop of the Alexandrian church who opposed Arius, seems to have known or approved of the "only begotten Son" reading alone.

A fair and unbiased evaluation of the patristic evidence points solidly to the "only begotten Son" reading as being the earliest, and by far the most widely accepted reading. Obviously, the "only begotten God" reading is ancient, Clement of Alexandria being the first to quote it. But, the only real patristic evidence for this reading goes back only to the third century, and is limited to Alexandria, Egypt (just like the Bible manuscript evidence which is also third and fourth century, and limited to Alexandria). No one else in Christendom, from the time of the Apostles until about the time of the Arian controversy and the Nicene Council in A.D. 325, seems to have been aware of this reading of John 1:18.

V. Usage of the phrase "Only Begotten God" in Early Christian Jargon

We have successfully traced the "only begotten God" reading of John 1:18 back to Alexandria around the beginning of the third century. But, if the "only begotten God" reading is a corruption, where did this phrase come from? Was it an intentional perversion of the text of John's Gospel? Or could it simply be the result of a careless mistake by a scribe which was later copied into a number of Alexandrian manuscripts? In trying to answer this question, I did a computer search of the entire Ante Nicene Fathers collection looking for the phrases "only begotten God" and "only begotten Son" to see just how common each was in their writings, apart from the citations of John 1:18 covered above. I wanted to see if "only begotten God" was an expression

that was used by the early Church at all in their writings. My hypothesis was this: The frequency of this term in early Christian jargon, whether it was used by the early Fathers that we would consider orthodox, and who was the first to use it in their writings, could all shed light on how it found its way into some of the Alexandrian manuscripts. If "only-begotten God" was an orthodox Christian expression, we would expect to find it being used by orthodox writers from the beginning.

Here are the results of that search. Apart from the actual citations of John 1:18 mentioned above, the phrase "only begotten Son" was used over 150 times by numerous writers, spread over the entire period from the Apostles until A.D. 325, from a wide geographical area, and at least three languages. The phrase "only begotten God" was found only ONCE in Ignatius' Epistle to the Philadelphians. This Epistle has survived in a short and a long version. Scholars attribute the short version to Ignatius, and the long version to later additions to the text at an unknown time. The ONLY use of this expression "only begotten God" was found in the long "embellished" version and not in the short authentic version. Therefore, it is most likely the product of a much later addition, perhaps around the time of the Arian controversy or later. There were no other cases of the use of this phrase until the fourth century, where, as noted above, it is found numerous times in the "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles." This document is known to be spurious and heavily "embellished" by later writers, including instructions for the use of "holy water" and other later Roman Catholic ideas. After the Council of Nice in A.D. 325, the phrase seems to have been rather common among certain writers who tended toward Arianism.

So, what does the usage of the phrase "only begotten God" in early Christian jargon tell us about its origin? It was virtually unknown and/or completely unused by the Church in their writings from Apostolic times until the Arian controversy and the council of Nice. The only real exceptions are limited to Alexandria, one quote from Clement and one from Origen citing John 1:18. Yet, both also quote the same passage in their earlier works with the "only begotten Son" reading. Neither mention the phrase in question apart from these citations. Therefore, we can rightly classify this "only begotten God" phrase as unique to Alexandria between the third and fourth centuries, and thereafter spread to other regions, most likely by the Arians.

At the Council of Nice in AD325, the Nicene Creed was developed as a compromise on the Trinity and the person of Christ that most of the bishops could sign. The council was called and supervised by the Roman Emperor Constantine. Constantine insisted on the unity of the Churches, because the Arian controversy had caused a great division. And division in the official state religion of Rome could not be tolerated by the Church-state marriage initiated by Constantine. In making Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, Constantine could not permit two separate Christian denominations. The Nicene Creed affirmed the deity of Christ. But, its wording leaves the origin of the "Son" a bit ambiguous. It implies that the Son was begotten by the Father prior to creation. But also condemns those who say that he did not exist before He was "begotten." The idea appears to have been that the Son, although eternal, was not distinct from the Father until he was "begotten" at some point prior to creation. By the time of the Council, the main point of contention between orthodoxy and Arianism concerned how the Son came to be "begotten" in ancient times - whether

He was of the same "substance" as the Father, or whether He was a "God" distinct from the Father (that is a sub-deity). The council ruled against Arius. In essence, the Nicene Creed says that God the Son was begotten before creation, as the offspring of the Father, but of the same "substance" as the Father.

Even though most of the bishops signed the creed, after the council there was much chaos regarding what it meant. Also, those sympathetic to some of Arius' ideas held their own councils, and made various decrees and creeds of their own, with varying degrees of compromise between Arianism and the Nicene "orthodoxy," but still maintaining that the Son was a sub-deity not equal to the Father. The Council convened by the Emperor had achieved unity in name only. Not all of the bishops or factions of the Church would let go of all elements of Arianism so easily. But what does this have to do with our study? The Nicene Creed contained the phrase, "only begotten of His Father," but the competing Arian creed contained the phrase, "only begotten God." Following is the Nicene Creed, as signed by the majority of the bishops, and a portion of the competing creed by the Arian influenced faction.

The Nicene Creed	Arian Creed
<p>"We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. By whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth. Who for us men and for our salvation came down [from heaven] and was incarnate and was made man. He suffered and the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven. And he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost. And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion — all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them."</p>	<p>"We believe, conformably to the evangelical and apostolical tradition, in One God, the Father Almighty, the Framer, and Maker, and Provider of the Universe, from whom are all things. And in One Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, Only-begotten God, by whom are all things, who was begotten before all ages from the Father, God from God, whole from whole, sole from sole, perfect from perfect, King from King, Lord from Lord, Living Word, Living Wisdom, true Light, Way, Truth, Resurrection, Shepherd, Door, both unalterable and unchangeable; exact Image of the Godhead, Essence, Will, Power and Glory of the Father; the first born of every creature, who was in the beginning with God, God the Word, as it is written in the Gospel, and the Word was God'..." ²²</p>

The main difference between the two groups concerns the "substance" of Christ and whether He was one with the Father, or whether He was a distinct sub-deity. The Arians saw Him as a sub-deity, and also used the expression, "only begotten God" in their creed.

VI. Intentional Corruption of the Text

Of the four Alexandrian manuscripts containing John's Gospel used to support the "only begotten God" reading in modern versions, p66 is the oldest, dating from about the beginning of the 3rd century. This is about the same time Clement of Alexandria recorded the very first citation of John 1:18 with the "only begotten God" reading. Clement was head of the Alexandrian school at about the time p66 was made in Alexandria. Obviously, this phrase could not have originated with Arius, because he lived about a century later. It predated the Arian heresy, but was adopted and used by them. We have already seen that it was known to Clement of Alexandria, where it seems to have first seen the light of day in the genuine works of the Ante Nicene Fathers. But, who was responsible for its inclusion in at least one Alexandrian manuscript of John's Gospel from the early third century? If it was not original with John, how did it enter the text of John's Gospel in subsequent Alexandrian copies?

We are not left without clues to the source of this corruption. Tertullian (late 2nd cent.) and Eusebius (4th cent.) tell us of malicious tampering with the text, especially the Gospels, by Gnostic heretical groups. The Gnostic cults were known for their acceptance of only one of the four Gospels. Some claimed that Matthew was the only inspired Gospel, others claimed Mark. Marcionites used Luke exclusively. Valentinians used John exclusively. Tertullian wrote:

*"For if the (Gospels) of the apostles have come down to us in their integrity, whilst Luke's, which is received amongst us, so far accords with their rule as to be on a par with them in permanency of reception in the churches, it clearly follows that Luke's Gospel also has come down to us in like integrity until the sacrilegious treatment of Marcion. In short, when Marcion laid hands on it, it then became diverse and hostile to the Gospels of the apostles. I will therefore advise his followers, that they either change these Gospels, however late to do so, into a conformity with their own, whereby they may seem to be in agreement with the apostolic writings (for they are daily retouching their work, as daily they are convicted by us); or else that they blush for their master, who stands self-condemned either way — when once he hands on the truth of the gospel conscience smitten, or again subverts it by shameless tampering. Such are the summary arguments which we use, when we take up arms against heretics for the faith of the gospel, maintaining both that order of periods, which rules that a late date is the mark of forgers, and **that authority of churches which lends support to the tradition of the apostles; because truth must needs precede the forgery, and proceed straight from those by whom it has been handed on.**"* ²³

Notice that Tertullian appeals to the text tradition that was in use by the orthodox churches in opposition to the corrupt text being made by the Gnostic heretics. He clearly implied that there was a *standard text*, or a sort of early "Authorized Version," which was the text preserved by the orthodox local churches, particularly those

churches founded by the Apostles. Tertullian himself provided one of our quotes above for the "only begotten Son" reading. And, several of the Church Fathers whom we cited above were Bishops of orthodox local churches, and therefore their copies of the Scriptures are to be trusted as opposed to those made by the Gnostic heretics, according to Tertullian.

"But their chief and founder, Tatianus, having formed a certain body and collection of Gospels, I know not how, has given this the title Diatessaron, that is the gospel by the four, or the gospel formed of the four; which is in the possession of some even now. It is also said that he dared to alter certain expressions of the Apostles, in order to correct the composition of the phrase." ²⁴

"Tatian the Syrian...also composed the gospel which is called 'Diatessaron,' cutting out the genealogies and whatever other passages show that the Lord was born of the seed of David according to the flesh." ²⁵

Here we have two different fourth century writers making direct charges of tampering with and changing the readings in all four Gospels! Tatian's "Diatessaron" has survived and is included in volume IX of the Ante Nicene Fathers. Just to illustrate that Eusebius and Theodoret weren't kidding, here is John 1:18 from Tatian's Diatessaron, which contains neither "only begotten Son" nor "only begotten God."

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only Son God, which is in the bosom of his father, he hath told of him." ²⁶

Eusebius has more to say about other Gnostic cults.

"...Theodotus, the leader and father of this God-denying apostasy, as the first one that asserted that Christ was a mere man. ... "The sacred Scriptures ... have been boldly perverted by them; the rule of the ancient faith they have set aside, Christ they have renounced, not inquiring what the Holy Scriptures declared, but zealously laboring what form of reasoning may be devised to establish their impiety."... But as to these men who abuse the acts of the unbelievers, to their own heretical views, and who adulterate the simplicity of that faith contained in the Holy Scriptures,... "For this purpose they fearlessly lay their hands on the Holy Scriptures , saying that they have corrected them. And that I do not say this against them without foundation, whoever wishes may learn; for should any one collect and compare their copies one with another, he would find them greatly at variance among themselves. For the copies of Asclepiodotus will be found to differ from those of Theodotus. Copies of many you may find in abundance, altered, by the eagerness of their disciples to insert each one his own corrections, as they call them, i.e. their corruptions. Again the copies of Hermophilus do not agree with these, for those of Appollonius are not consistent with themselves. For one may compare those which were prepared before by them, with those which they afterwards perverted for their own objects, and you will find them widely differing. ... For either they do not believe that the Holy Scriptures were uttered by the Holy Spirit, and they are thus infidels, or they deem themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit, and what alternative is there but to pronounce them

daemoniacs? For neither can they deny that they have been guilty of the daring act, when the copies were written with their own hand, nor did they receive such Scriptures from those by whom they were instructed in the elements of the faith; not can they show copies from which they were transcribed." ²⁷

Note that at least one of those charged with tampering with the text denied the deity of Christ. Also notice the characteristics of the altered texts. Eusebius gives us his theory of textual criticism. He tells us how the early church determined which manuscripts were intentionally and maliciously altered by the Gnostic heretics: *"should any one collect and compare their copies one with another, he would find them greatly at variance among themselves. For the copies of Asclepiodotus will be found to differ from those of Theodotus. Copies of many you may find in abundance, altered, by the eagerness of their disciples to insert each one his own corrections, as they call them, i.e. their corruptions. Again the copies of Hermophilus do not agree with these, for those of Appollonius are not consistent with themselves. For one may compare those which were prepared before by them, with those which they afterwards perverted for their own objects, and you will find them widely differing."* When we apply Eusebius' textual theory to the Alexandrian manuscripts, (p66, p75, Aleph, B), they display exactly the tell-tale signs of forgeries! They are precisely the kind of altered texts that Eusebius warned about! They differ from each other in thousands of places, and differ widely from the Majority Text. The historical evidence clearly shows that many corruptions in the early manuscripts were due to malicious tampering by heretical groups. There was relative agreement in the manuscripts used by the orthodox churches, but widely differing readings in the forgeries. The conflicting readings, between the Alexandrian manuscripts on the one hand and the more unified testimony of the citations of Scripture in by the Early Church Fathers on the other, testifies against the Alexandrian manuscripts in general, and the corrupt reading "only begotten God" in John 1:18 in particular.

Only one of these readings ("only begotten Son" or "only begotten God") is what John wrote. The other is a dangerous corruption of the text. Both cannot be genuine. If "only begotten Son" is the corrupt reading, it would imply that all of the above cited Early Church Fathers, most of them Bishops of local churches, were reading from corrupted copies of John's Gospel and didn't even know it! Was this corruption so widespread that it found its way into the Bibles used by the local churches from Gaul to Mesopotamia, from Rome to North Africa? And in three different languages to boot? Or, does the fact that the only manuscripts that contain the "only begotten God" reading, and the only genuine citations of it came from Alexandria, indicate that p66, p75, Aleph, and B, are corrupt manuscripts? The fair observer can conclude only the latter.

VII. The Gnostic Connection

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, disciple of Polycarp (disciple of John), was the "Walter Martin" cult-buster of the second century. (Or perhaps we should say that Walter Martin was the "Irenaeus" of the twentieth century). Irenaeus' five books are called "The Detection and Overthrow of Gnosis Falsely So-Called," or "Against Heresies" for short. The expression "Gnosis falsely so-called" (pseudo-numos gnosis) comes directly from

Paul's warning to Timothy in 1 Tim. 6:20. All five books are his meticulous cataloging and Scriptural rebuttals of the various Gnostic cults. In the first book he writes of one very well known gnostic group, followers of Valentinus. One of the Valentinian Gnostic writers, Ptolemy of Alexandria, wrote a commentary on the first chapter of John. Irenaeus mentioned this commentary in his first book.

The Gnostics had a mythology consisting of levels of gods descended from the union of other gods, all with Greek names which are common Greek words in Scripture. Ptolemy of Alexandria, a Valentinian Gnostic, had the following arrangement according to Irenaeus.

*"But the followers of Ptolemy say that he [Bythos] has two consorts, which they also name Diatheses (affections), viz., Ennoae and Thelesis. For, as they affirm, he first conceived the thought of producing something, and then willed to that effect. Wherefore, again, these two affections, or powers, Ennoea and Thelesis, having intercourse, as it were, between themselves, **the production of Monogenes** and Aletheia took place according to conjunction. These two came forth as types and images of the two affections of the Father, — **visible representations of those that were invisible**, — Nous (i.e., **Monogenes**) of Thelesis, and Aletheia of Ennoea, and accordingly the image resulting from Thelesis was masculine, while that from Ennoea was feminine. Thus Thelesis (will) became, as it were, a faculty of Ennoea (thought). For Ennoea continually yearned after offspring; but she could not of herself bring forth that which she desired. But when the power of Thelesis (the faculty of will) came upon her, then she brought forth that on which she had brooded."* ²⁸

It seems apparent that Irenaeus was referring to the Gnostic interpretation of John 1:18 which is identical to the corrupt "only begotten god" alteration of John's Gospel. He spoke of the "visible" and the "invisible," the "invisible" God's offspring being "Monogenes." The male deity (Monogenes) is the Greek word translated "only begotten" in John's Gospel. As was typical with the Gnostic mystics, they converted normal Greek words into proper names. The corrupt Alexandrian text actually reads: "No man hath seen God at any time, the Monogenes god, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." That this corruption is a part of the text that the Alexandrian Gnostic Ptolemy was using is shown from Ptolemy's own commentary on John. Unfortunately, his commentary fragment that we have covers only verses 1 through 14. But, Ptolemy does use the expression "only begotten God" in the opening sentences of his commentary.

*"John, the disciple of the Lord, intentionally spoke of the origination of the entirety, by which the Father emitted all things. And he assumes that the First Being engendered by God is a kind of beginning; he has called it "Son" and **"Only-Begotten God."** In this (the Only-Begotten) the Father emitted all things in a process involving posterity."* ²⁹

There is little doubt that the Valentinian gnostic, Ptolemy, made use of a Gospel of John that contained the reading "only begotten God." Notice that the word "only begotten" (Greek - "Monogenes") in John 1:18 was considered to be the Name of this

"god," according to Irenaeus. In the Valentinian Gnostic interpretation of John 1:18, God (Bythos) originally, through the intercourse of "Ennoae and Thelesis" gave birth to two sub-deities, "Monogenes" (only begotten) and "Aletheia" (truth). Hence the expression, "Monogenes god" (or when translated into English, "only begotten God"). Another ancient Gnostic text that was discovered near Alexandria, Egypt in 1769 is the Bruce Codex. It was translated into English in 1892 by Carl Schmidt. The following is from "The Untitled Text."

*"This truly is **the only-begotten God**. This is he whom the All knew. They became God, and they raised up his name : God. This is he of whom John spoke: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. This one without whom nothing exist, and that which has come into existence in him is life" This is the only-begotten one in the monad,. Dwelling in it like a city. And this is the monad which is in Setheus like a concept. This is Setheus who dwells in the sanctuary like a king, and he is as God. **This is the creative Word** which commands the All that they should work. This is the creative Mind, according to the command of God the Father. This is he to whom the creation prays as God, and as Lord, and as Saviour, and as one to whom they have submitted themselves. This is he at whom the All marvels because of his beauty and comeliness. This is he whom the All - those within being a crown upon his head, and those outside at his feet, and those of the midst surrounding him - bless, saying ; "Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou, Thou art living within those that live, thou art holy within the holy ones, thou dost exist within those that exist, and thou art the father within the fathers, and thou art **God within the gods**, and thou art Lord within the lords, and thou art a place within all the places" And they bless him, saying : "Thou art the house, and thou art the dweller in the house." And they bless him again, saying to **the Son who is hidden within him** : "Thou art existent, thou art the only-begotten one, the light and the life and the grace (Charis)" Then Setheus sent the light-spark to the indivisible one. And it shone, it gave light to the whole place of the holy pleroma. And they saw the light of the light-spark. They rejoiced and they gave myriads of myriads of glories to the Setheus and to the light-spark which had manifested, as they saw that all their likeness was in him. And they depicted the light-spark within them as a man of light and truth."*

30

Here is another early Gnostic document, from manuscripts discovered in Egypt in 1945, called "Trimorphic Protennoia."

*"Then the Perfect Son revealed himself to his Aeons, who originated through him, and he revealed them and glorified them, and gave them thrones, and stood in the glory with which he glorified himself. They blessed the Perfect Son, the Christ, **the only-begotten God**. And they gave glory, saying, "He is! He is! The Son of God! The Son of God! It is he who is! The Aeon of Aeons, beholding the Aeons which he begot. For thou hast begotten by thine own desire! Therefore we glorify thee: ma mo o o o eia ei on ei! The Aeon of Aeons! The Aeon which he gave!"*

"Then, moreover, **the God who was begotten** gave them (the Aeons) a power of life on which they might rely, and he established them. The first Aeon he established over the first: Armedon, Nousanios, Armozel; the second he established over the second Aeon: Phaionios, Ainios, Oroiael; the third over the third Aeon: Mellephaneus, Loios, Daveithai; the fourth over the fourth: Mousanios, Amethes, Eleleth. Now those Aeons were **begotten by the God who was begotten** - the Christ - and these Aeons received as well as gave glory. They were the first to appear, exalted in their thought, and each Aeon gave myriads of glories within great untraceable lights, and they all together blessed the perfect Son, **the God who was begotten.**" ³¹

Since the orthodox Fathers used copies of John's Gospel that contained the reading "only begotten Son," and the Alexandrian Gnostics clearly made use of the reading "only begotten God," it is safe to assume where such a reading came from in the some of the copies of John's Gospel made in Alexandria, the headquarters of Valentinian Gnosticism. This is especially true since we have clear documentation from the Church Fathers that heretical and Gnostic groups were in fact altering the sacred Scriptures to suit their heresies. Therefore, p66, p75, Aleph & B, the Alexandrian manuscripts which contain this reading, obviously contain Gnostic corruptions. These kinds of corrupted Alexandrian Gnostic manuscripts were then later used by Arius to support his heresy. That the Arians borrowed from the Gnostics seems apparent when you compare the Gnostic, Ptolemy's commentary on John to the later Arian Creed made in opposition to the Nicene Creed.

Valentinian Gnostic - Ptolemy	Arian Creed
<p>"John, the disciple of the Lord, intentionally spoke of the origination of the entirety, by which the Father emitted all things. And he assumes that the First Being engendered by God is a kind of beginning; he has called it "Son" and "Only-Begotten God." In this (the Only-Begotten) the Father emitted all things in a process involving posterity."</p> <p>29</p>	<p>"We believe, conformably to the evangelical and apostolical tradition, in One God, the Father Almighty, the Framer, and Maker, and Provider of the Universe, from whom are all things. And in One Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, Only-begotten God, by whom are all things, who was begotten before all ages from the Father..." ²²</p>

In the fourth century, when the Arian heresy was at its peak, the orthodox Bishop of the church in Alexandria, who fought against and excommunicated Arius for his heresy that Jesus was "a god" and not "THE God," quoted John's Gospel only with the reading "only begotten Son." If the Alexandrian Church Fathers, Clement, Origen, and Alexander, all cited this verse as containing "only begotten Son" in the centuries before Aleph and B were made, and at about the same time p66 and p75 were produced, exactly HOW could the Alexandrian manuscripts p66, p75, Aleph, and B, all come to include a reading that supports the gnostic and Arian heresies against the orthodox view? Aleph and B are obviously not as old as the copies of John's Gospel that Alexander, Origen, and Clement used! P66 and p75 were written after the Valentinian

Gnostics had been arguing for "only begotten God" according to Irenaeus! It seem all too obvious that p66 and p75 contain Gnostic corruptions, and the later copies, Aleph and B, were most likely influenced by these as well as the Arian heresy.

VIII. Modern Version Damage Control - Redefining "mono-genes"

The obvious problem in the NASB's rendering of John 1:18 which is identical to the Jehovah's Witness' text, has been somewhat disguised in the NIV.

John 1:18

18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

(NIV)

Notice that the words "only begotten" are missing and replaced by the words "one and only." They have retained the Alexandrian reading "God," but apparently recognized the theological problem that a "begotten God" presents. So, they chose to remove the idea of "birth" or ancestry altogether. But, this reading does not completely eliminate the problem, nor is it faithful to the meaning of the Greek word "mono-genes" in this verse. In the NIV, we still have two separate Gods described in John 1:18. And "one and only" is in direct opposition to the sense of the verse in the NIV, which is clearly speaking of two entities, the invisible God, and the God who has made Him known to mankind, Jesus Christ (vss. 1,14). In essence, the NIV still has two Gods, even without the idea of "begetting."

"Monogenes" means "only begotten" because:

1. "Genomai" is the root verb. From this verb several other words are derived. This root verb is used in Scripture in a variety of ways, but always related to "coming into being." Our English word "generate" is related to it. "Genomai" is used by John in the context of John 1 in reference to the creation being "made" (vss. 1,2), believers "becoming" the sons of God (vs. 12), and the Word "becoming" flesh (vs. 14). So, the basic idea of this entire family of words that flow from this verb is "to come into being" or to "come about."

2. "Genos" is one of the nouns that is derived from the root verb "genomai." This noun is related to the basic idea of "coming into being," but has a much more specific meaning regarding those who have come into being, people or animals, through procreation in nature. (As words branch out from the root word they become more specific and less inclusive in meaning). "Genos" is used in a variety of ways, but most commonly of relatives or descendants of people. When used of animals, it has "species" in view in the same way that Genesis refers to animals reproducing "after their kind."

Genos is found 20 times in the NT as follows. Matt. 13:47, Mark 7:26, Mark 9:29, Acts 4:6, Acts 4:36, Acts 7:13, Acts 7:17, Acts 12:26, Acts 17:28, Acts 17:29, Acts 18:2, Acts 18:24, 1 Cor. 12:10, 1 Cor. 12:28, 1 Cor. 14:10, 2 Cor. 11:26, Gal. 1:14, Php. 3:5, 1 Pet. 2:9, Rev. 22:16.

Here is the breakdown and number of times each English word is used in the KJV.

offspring - 3

kindred - 3

stock (family - NKJV) - 2

born - 2

generation - 2

nation - 2

country - 1

countrymen - 1

kind - 4

All of these words carry the idea of descent or offspring. Even "country" or "countrymen" had the idea of physical relationship because back then people did not usually move away from home like we see today. A "country" and "countrymen" were usually of the same clan and ancestry, just like the whole Jewish nation traced its heritage back to Jacob and his 12 sons.

Even in the 4 cases where "genos" is translated "kind," it still has in view "families." In Matt. 13:47 it is referring to species of fish, which in the animal kingdom refers to "offspring." The other three cases where it is translated "kinds" all refer to "languages." And languages were unique to tribes or offspring or race! Paul uses "genos" figuratively to mean "families" of languages.

So, we see that in every single instance of "genos" in the Bible, the idea of "offspring" (either literally or figuratively) plays a part in the meaning. "Genos" does not mean simply "kind" in the sense of one object differing from another of a different kind. "Genos" is never used literally of inanimate objects! It is only used (in a literal sense) of living beings that have come into being through some kind of ancestry. In the few remaining cases where it is used figuratively, "family" (a word that literally refers to offspring) could be substituted in the text for the idea in English.

The idea of "kind" simply as one type of thing as opposed to another is the Greek word "pan" #3956. This word is used where differences of type or of characteristics are meant (not related to offspring or ancestry). "Genos" on the other hand refers to "kinds" only in the sense of tracing ancestry, or heredity, or genealogy.

3. "Genos" (noun) has a sister verb #1080 "gennao." They are like twins, a verb and a noun, with "ginomai" being the parent. Like "genos," "gennao" carries the more specific meaning of "offspring" into a verb form. This verb form of "genos" is translated "begat," and is used in a multitude of verses exclusively in reference to fathering a child, particularly in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke.

4. "Mono-genes" is simply a compound of "monos" (only) and "genos" (offspring). This is the literal meaning. Thayer's Greek lexicon says, "monogenes" is used exclusively of an only-child's relationship to his parents in the Bible.

5. That the literal meaning of "monogenes" is how John 1:18 was understood by the Greek speaking early Church is proven by the early Latin translations, beginning from

the 2nd century, and including the Vulgate (5th century). "Uni- genetus" is the Latin word used by these Greek and Latin speaking translators to convey the meaning of "monogenes." And there is no question that the Latin word has the idea of offspring, ie. an only born child.

6. The English versions prior to Westcott's & Hort's 1881 Greek text translate "monogenes" as "only begotten." Only a few modern versions based on the Westcott & Hort text seek to redefine "monogenes" as "one and only," or "one of a kind." The only reason for this is to get around the huge theological problem introduced into the text by the corrupt reading of "only begotten God" in John 1:18. Even the NIV's "God the One and Only" is a pitiful rendering of "monogenes theos." The NIV's rendering completely eliminates "genos" from the compound word! It reads as though the text actually said "tou monos theos" (the only God) as in John 5:44, 1 Tim. 1:17 & Jude 1:25. And it translates what is clearly as adjective ("only begotten", modifying the noun "Son") as though it was a noun, capitalizing the word "One."

7. The usage of "monogenes" by the Greek speaking Early Church Fathers, as referring to Christ's birth or being generated offspring from the Father, clearly shows that the English words "only begotten" or "only born" convey the proper understanding of the Greek word. Here are a few samples:

*"but we confess that the Father is from none, and that **the Son is begotten of the Father**. Yes, it may be said, but why then does he leave the Father, and speak concerning the Son? Why? because the former was manifest to all, if not as Father, at least as God; but **the Only-Begotten** was not known; and therefore with reason did he immediately from the very beginning hasten to implant the knowledge of Him in those who knew Him not."* ³²

*"For since he is about to teach that this "Word" is **the only-begotten Son of God**, in order that no one may imagine that **His generation** is passable, by giving Him the appellation of "The Word," he anticipates and removes beforehand the evil suspicion, **showing that the Son is from the Father**, and that without His suffering (change),"* ³³

*"For the Birth which He speaks of here is not that according to essence, but according to honor and grace. Now **if the Son is so born** also, in what shall He be superior to men so born? And **how is He Only-begotten?**"* ³⁴

*"After this he pursues the same thought. No one (he says) could allege, that he had another son, and expected the promise to be fulfilled from him, and therefore confidently offered up this one. "And" (his words are) "he offered up his only-begotten, who had received the promises." Why sayest thou "only-begotten"? What then? Of whom was Ishmael sprung? **I mean "only-begotten" (he would say) so far as relates to the word of the promise**. Therefore after saying, **"Only-begotten," showing that he says it for this reason, he added, "of whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called," that is, "from" him**. Seest thou how he admires what was done by the Patriarch? "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," and that son he brought to be sacrificed."* ³⁵

*"but the true Son of God, **forasmuch as he is begotten of the Father, is properly denominated the only-begotten and beloved of the Father."*** ³⁶

It is plain from these quotations that the Early Church Fathers, who were fluent in biblical Greek, understood "monogenes" to refer to offspring. Even the Nicene Creed gives this meaning.

In the New Testament, "monogenes" always refers to Christ, except in one passage. Our opponents sometimes point to this verse as justification for their attempt to make 'monogenes' to merely mean 'unique.'

Heb 11:17

*17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up **his only begotten son**,*
(KJV)

At first glance, this might look like an exception, because Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. But, in reality, this verse actually strengthen's our point. Paul was referring to the following:

Gen 22:2

*2 And he said, Take now **thy son, thine only son Isaac**, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*
(KJV)

Gen 22:12

*12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld **thy son, thine only son** from me.*
(KJV)

Gen 22:16

*16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld **thy son, thine only son**:*
(KJV)

The Hebrew word translated 'only' here is 'yachiyd.' It means 'solitary' (not 'unique'). In fact, in the LXX every occurrence of 'monogenes' is a translation of the Hebrew, 'yachiyd.'

In Heb. 11, Paul was simply giving a direct and literal rendering of the Hebrew of Genesis 22. The question is, why would God refer to Isaac as Abraham's ONLY (solitary) son, when in fact he fathered Ishmael? The answer is simply that Ishmael was born contrary to the promise of God. God made a covenant with Abraham, that his seed would be multiplied as the stars of heaven, and would inherit the land of Canaan. Abraham's fathering Ishmael was contrary to God's promise. Therefore, God did NOT recognize Ishmael as Abraham's heir, and he was NOT included in ANY of the promises

to Abraham's seed. Instead, God gave to Ishmael a distinct promise, saying that He would multiply Ishmael's seed (apart from Abraham's seed).

Gen 21:10-12

10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for **the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.**

11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; **for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.**

(KJV)

While technically, Ishmael was Abraham's son according to the flesh, God did not reckon Ishmael to be Abraham's son, nor was he part of the covenant to Abraham and his physical seed. Therefore, from God's perspective (and the Jew's perspective), Isaac was Abraham's ONLY (yachiyd / monogenes) son. And Paul's use of 'monogenes' in Hebrews is perfectly in keeping with the idea of 'only-begotten,' 'only-child,' 'only-offspring,' and not simply 'unique.' This explanation is the same as that given by the early Church Fathers.

"After this he pursues the same thought. No one (he says) could allege, that he had another son, and expected the promise to be fulfilled from him, and therefore confidently offered up this one. "And" (his words are) "he offered up his only-begotten, who had received the promises." Why sayest thou "only-begotten"? What then? Of whom was Ishmael sprung? **I mean "only-begotten" (he would say) so far as relates to the word of the promise.** Therefore after saying, **"Only-begotten," showing that he says it for this reason, he added, "of whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called," that is, "from" him.** Seest thou how he admires what was done by the Patriarch? "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," and that son he brought to be sacrificed." ³⁵

In the LXX (Greek Old Testament), 'monogenes' appears four times as follows:

Judges 11:34

34 And Jephthae came to Masepha to his house; and behold, his daughter came forth to meet him with timbrels and dances; and she was **his only child, he had not another son or daughter.**

(LXX)

Psalms 22:20

20 (21:20) Deliver my soul from the sword; my **only-begotten** one from the power of the dog.

(LXX)

Psalms 26:16

16 (24:16) Look upon me, and have mercy upon me; for I am an **only child** and poor.

(LXX)

Psalms 35:17

¶ (34:17) O Lord, when wilt thou look upon me? Deliver my soul from their mischief, mine **only-begotten** one from the lions.
(LXX)

In Judges 11:34, the real meaning of "monogenes" is clear from the statement that follows, "he had not another son or daughter." In Psalm 22:20, "monogenes" is a prophetic reference to Christ. In Psalm 26:16, David uses "monogenes" as a figure of speech, because he was all alone and felt like an "only-child." The same appears to be the case in Psalm 35:17. None of these occurrences of "monogenes" in the LXX could rightly be translated "unique."

Rather than translate the Westcott - Hort text as it stands, as the NASB does despite the huge theological problem that it creates, the NIV editors wimped out and reinvented a new definition for "monogenes!" (And then they published their "scholarship" giving their supposed authority for this change. At least the NASB editors stuck to the literal meaning of the Westcott Hort text and didn't play word games in order to sell their translation to orthodox Christians! They just blindly and faithfully followed Westcott & Hort in their veneration of the Alexandrian manuscripts.

IX. Conclusion

1. The "only begotten Son" is the correct reading.
2. The "only begotton God" reading originated with the Gnostic heretics, and found its way into some Alexandrian manuscripts.
3. Modern versions which use these manuscripts are introducing serious error into the text, which then has the illusion of Biblical authority, and potential for great harm to the Christian Faith.
4. James White is simply wrong when he writes,

"The reality is that the amount of variation between the two most extremely different manuscripts of the New Testament would not fundamentally alter the message of the Scriptures!" ³⁷

The NIV has completely removed the "only begotten Son" from their version of the Bible. In order to justify their replacing Son (huios) with God (theos) in John 1:18, they have redefined and consistently mistranslated the word "monogenes" in every passage where it occurs. And in doing so, they have completely eliminated the expression "only begotten Son" and its unique meaning from the entire Bible! Both the NASB and NIV introduce into the text a corrupt Gnostic and Arian idea that Christ is a sub-deity. In doing so, they have elevated the Arian heresy to inspired status. In the NIV/NASB, the Arian heresy is "given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The ghost of Arius and the early Gnostics still haunts the modern Bibles based on these corrupt manuscripts.

NOTES:

1. White, James R., *The King James Only Controversy*, Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, 1995. p. 40
2. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book I, Ch. XII

3. Roberts, Alexander & Donaldson, James, Editors, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., Peabody Mass., 1994. Vol. VII, p. 477
4. White, James R., *The King James Only Controversy*, pp. 199, 200
5. Every effort was made to find each and every citation or allusion to John 1:18 using both the index in the printed edition of the Ante Nicene Fathers, as well as searching the electronic edition using key words. Only citations that contained "only begotten Son" or "only begotten God" are included. A few other citations exist, but only reference the first sentence, "no man hath seen God at any time." Tatian's Diatessaron, which contains the unique reading, "the only Son God" is discussed later in this article.
6. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philipians*, II. This Epistle is not considered authentic by some scholars.
7. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, XI
8. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, XX
9. *ibid*
10. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Book I, ch. III
11. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Book I, ch. XXVI
12. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, Book V, ch XII
13. Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, VIII
14. Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XV
15. Origen, *Against Celcus*, Book II, LXXI
16. Origen, *Commentary on John*, Book II, XXIX
17. Hippolytus, *Against Noetus*, V
18. Archelaus, *Disputation with Manes*, XXXII
19. Alexander of Alexandria, *Epistle on Arian Heresy & Deposition of Arius*, Epistle I, IV
20. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Book VII, XLIII
21. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VII, p. 477
22. Athanasius, *De Synodis*, II
23. Tertullian, *Book III Ch. V*
24. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*. pg. 166
25. Theodoret, *Bishop of Cyrrhus*, *Ante Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IX, p. 37, 38
26. Tatian, *Diatessaron*, Sect. IV
27. Eusebius: *Ecclesiastical History*. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Reprinted 1991. pp. 214-216
28. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book I, Ch. XII
29. Layton, Bently, [The Gnostic Scriptures](#) p. 316
30. The Bruce Codex, [The Untitled Text](#)
31. Robinson, James M., ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library*, revised edition. HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1990. [Trimorphic Protennoia](#) Translated by John D. Turner
32. Chrysostom, *St. John*, II, VII
33. Chrysostom, *St. John*, II, VII
34. Chrysostom, *St. John*, XXVI, I
35. Chrysostom, *On Hebrews*, XXV, III
36. Socrates, *Book II, Ch XXI*
37. White, James R., *The King James Only Controversy*, p. 40