

The Trinity Delusion

An exposé of the doctrine of the Trinity

John 1:18

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

The Trinitarian Claim

Trinitarians here claim that Jesus is being identified as "God."

The Claim vs. The Facts

The facts show that Trinitarians are cherry picking a variant manuscript reading of a verse which is known to have suffered corruption.

The Problems with the Claim

1. Authenticity

There are two main manuscript traditions for this passage. Your Bible may show this in a footnote to this verse. The ancient manuscripts we do have in our possession are not in agreement. Some manuscripts read "**God**" while other manuscripts read "**Son**." Most early church writings quote "Son" while some writers quote "God," especially after the Council of Nicea. Hence, at least one of these readings is a corruption and did not originally come from the hand of the Apostle John.

It is very difficult to tell which rendering is authentic based purely upon the manuscript evidence alone. The very earliest manuscript we have reads "*monogenes* God." However, it is a well known fact among textual critics that earliest does not necessarily mean best. Additionally, all the manuscripts which read "God" seem to conspicuously reflect an Alexandrian tradition while the ancient non-Alexandrian tradition seems to consistently have "Son" with few exceptions. Early Christian writings also tend to lean heavily toward the "Son" reading which indicates they were using manuscripts which had that reading. Moreover, some of these patristic documents pre-date most of the earliest manuscripts we have in our possession.

2. Variations in Major Trinitarian Translation

The difference between these two traditions can be seen in major Trinitarian Bible versions, some of which are translated from one manuscript tradition and others which are translated from the other manuscript tradition. The most recent translations tend to have the "God" variant rather than the "Son" variant.

No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten **God** who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (NASB).

No one has ever seen God. The only Son, **God**, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him. (NAB).

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

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (ESV)

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten **Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (ASV).

No one has ever seen God; the only **Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known. (RSV).

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten **Son**, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared [him]. (ASV).

No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten **Son** who is in the Bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (Douey-Rheims).

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten **Son**, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*. (KJV).

The difference in in these Trinitarian translations illustrates a very serious problem in using this passage as evidence concerning Trinitarian doctrine. These differences reflect a changing opinion over time since the Bible was first translated into English. The older translations tend to have "Son," while the newer translations have "God." This is partly due to an accessibility to a wider variety manuscripts for modern translators. The difference in translations is mainly due to modern manuscript discoveries.

3. Manuscript Evidence

Manuscript	Common Name	Date	Text	Origin

p66	Bodmer Papyri	ca. 200	<i>monogenes</i> God	Near Nag Hammadi, Egypt
p75	Bodmer Papyri	ca. 250	<i>monogenes</i> God	Near Nag Hammadi, Egypt
B	Codex Vaticanus	ca. 325	<i>monogenes</i> God	Alexandria (uncertain)
Aleph	Codex Sinaiticus	ca. 350	<i>monogenes</i> God	Alexandria (uncertain)
A	Codex Alexandrinus	ca. 450	<i>monogenes</i> Son	Byzantine (uncertain)
	Curetonian Syriac	ca. 450	<i>monogenes</i> Son	

The earliest manuscripts have "*monogenes* God." However, earliest does not necessarily mean authentic because our earliest copy could very well be a corrupted copy. Textual corruptions, even intentional textual corruptions, are known to have occurred at a very early date in church history. These manuscripts also seem to be concentrated in the Alexandrian locale and textual criticism tells us this means we just might have a locally perpetuated error on our hands. Second, Egypt was known for a high level of Gnostic activity and they were well known to have tampered with Scripture. The Gnostics also would have preferred the rendering "*monogenes* God" as we shall soon see. The Chester Beatty papyri, for example, were found in the Nag Hammadi region where Gnostic Scriptures were also discovered.

4. The Early Christian Witness

We also need to consider the evidence provided by early Christians. Which version did they have in their possession? We can find out by discovering which version they quoted in their writings.

Quotations of John 1:18 in Early Christian Writings				
Author	Reference	Date	Text	Comments
Ignatius Bishop of Antioch Syria	Philippians II	ca. 110	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	Long Recension only
Irenaeus	Against	ca.	" <i>monogenes</i>	

Bishop of Lyons Gaul	Heresies III, 11.6	180	Son"	
Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons Gaul	Against Heresies IV, 20.6	ca. 180	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	
Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons Gaul	Against Heresies IV, 20.11	ca. 180	" <i>monogenes</i> God"	Interpolation
Clement Alexandria	Pedagogue I, 3	ca. 200	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	Head of the School of Alexandria
Clement Alexandria	Stromata I, 26	ca. 200	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	
Clement Alexandria	Stromata V, 12	ca. 200	" <i>monogenes</i> God"	
Hippolytus Rome	Against Noetus V	ca. 205	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	Greek writer
Tertullian Africa	Against Praxeas VIII	ca. 212	<i>monogenes</i> Son "The Son alone knows the Father, and has Himself unfolded the Father's bosom."	Not an explicit quotation of John 1:18 but obviously implied.
Tertullian Africa	Against Praxeas XV	ca. 212	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	Latin writer
Origen Alexandria	Commentary on John II, 24	ca. 230	" <i>monogenes</i> God"	Head of the School of Alexandria
Origen Alexandria	Against Celsus LXXI	ca. 248	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	
	Letter of Hymenaeus	ca. 268	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	

	(Letter of the Six Bishops)			
Archelaus Bishop Mesopotamia	Disputation with Manes XXXII	ca. 280	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	Syriac
Alexander Bishop Alexandria	Deposition of Arius I, 4	ca. 324	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	Arius' initial chief rival
Athanasius Alexandria	De Decretis Defense of the Nicene Definition		" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	
Arian Bishops Antioch	Second Arian Confession	341 A.D.	<i>monogenes</i> <i>God</i>	Not a quote of John 1:18 but very suggestive.
Athanasius Alexandria	Four Discourses Against the Arians Discourse II	357 A.D.	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	Athanasius obviously does not wish to appeal to the unbegotten God text
Athanasius Alexandria	Four Discourses Against the Arians Discourse IV	357 A.D.	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	
Hilary Poitiers	On the Trinity Book IV, V, VI	359 A.D.	" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	
Basil Bishop of Caesarea	On the Holy Spirit VI	ca. 375	" <i>monogenes</i> God"	
Basil Bishop of Caesarea	On the Holy Spirit XI	ca. 375	" <i>monogenes</i> God"	
Gregory of Nyssa	Letter VIII To Flavian		" <i>monogenes</i> Son"	

Gregory Nazianzus	Letters		<i>monogenes God</i> "he declares that the Only-begotten God, the Judge of all, the Prince of Life, the Destroyer of Death, is mortal, and underwent the Passion in His proper Godhead"	Numerous references to "only begotten God"
Chrysostom	Homilies on John XV	ca. 389	" <i>monogenes Son</i> "	
Ambrose Bishop of Milan Italy	The Patriarchs (The Fathers) X1, 51	ca. 389	" <i>monogenes Son</i> "	
Augustine Bishop of Hippo Africa	Gospel of John XLVIII, 3	430	" <i>monogenes Son</i> "	

5. Easy Opportunity for Corruption

Another fact concerning this passage is the *nomina sacra* for "God" and "Son." These were very common scribal abbreviations that lessened the pain of endless hours of manuscript copying. The *nomina sacra* ΘΣ ("God") and ΥΣ ("Son") differ only by one Greek letter providing a high likelihood of scribal error or providing an easy opportunity for corruption.

Analysis of the Facts

1. The Ante-Nicene Voice

Clement of Alexandria, writing in the early 200's in his *Stromata* (V, 12), appears to have " *monogenes God*," but he also has "*monogenes Son*" in the same document (I, 26) and his *The Instructor* has

"*monogenes* Son" (I,3) suggesting that the line which reads "*monogenes* God" in the *Stromata* could be a copy corruption, or vice versa. Origen has "*monogenes* Son" in *Against Celsus* (II, 71) but "*monogenes*" in his *Commentary on John* (II, 24). Both Clement and Origen were Alexandrians.

Tertullian around 212 A.D. has "*monogenes* Son" in *Against Praxeas* (VIII; XV). In the later 200's, Archelaus in his *Disputation with the Heresiarch Manicheus*, still has "*monogenes* Son" (XXXII). Hippolytus has "*monogenes* Son" in *Against Noetus* (V). All these men were writing **before** Nicea and the development of Trinitarian doctrines. Alexander who writes against the Arius and the Arian heresy always refers to "*monogenes* Son." The ante-Nicene texts which have "*monogenes*" God seem to be confined to one locality - Alexandria - where Platonism and Gnosticism flourished. So we can see here a very serious problem with the "*monogenes* God" manuscript reading of this passage. Either the texts of the Bible were later miscopied and/or corrupted, or the texts of these church fathers were later corrupted with an interpolation to meet a new doctrine and/or a later corrupted Bible text.

2. Irenaeus

As we can see from evidence in the above list, and if we assume these early Christian writings are not corrupted, both renderings of John 1:18 are attested from around 200 A.D. With very few exceptions, the "*monogenes* God" version is restricted to the Alexandrian region which strongly suggests a locally circulated corruption. The following quotation by Irenaeus which has "*monogenes* God" is considered to be an interpolation (i.e. corrupted text) by translators and textual critics (and yes they are Trinitarians).

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 *monogenes* 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."

The portion in brackets is thought to have been added to Irenaeus' actual words. The style and structure of the sentence indicates these are not his own words and it would also contain an error because John said these words in narration, not the Lord Jesus as this interpolation mistakenly indicates. Moreover, Irenaeus had just finished quoting John 1:18 as "*monogenes* Son" in the preceding context.

Another interesting fact concerning this particular quotation by Irenaeus is the context in which he said these words. In the following passage, Irenaeus is saying the only begotten Son declares the one God who Irenaeus identifies as the Father.

"Indeed, then, the Scripture declared, which says, "First of all believe that there is **One God**, who has established all things, and finished them, and having caused that from what had no being, all things should come into existence." He who contains all things, and is Himself contained by no one. Rightly also has Malachi said among the prophets, "Is it not **One God** who established us? Have we not all **One Father**?" Corresponding to this, too, does the apostle say, "There is **One God, the Father**, who is above all, and in us all".... There is **One God, the Father**, who upholds all things, and who bestows existence to all, as is written in the Gospel, "**No man hath seen God at any time, except the monogenes Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared.**" (*Against Heresies*, Book IV, 20).

Here we have clear evidence the rendering "*monogenes* Son" was in use in the early church well before 200 A.D. The "*monogenes* God" text seems to first show up around 200 A.D. in Egypt and these are the earliest manuscripts we have in our possession at this time. However, the evidence merely suggests such a date and this reading may have been in circulation at an even earlier time. We must also be reminded that Gnostics were amiable to the "*monogenes* god" rendering and the Gnostic population was relatively large long before 200 A.D. and especially in Egypt. And for the later Arians, it afforded them the same idea they advocated in John 1:1. The Arians believed Jesus was "a god", a begotten God of the unbegotten God. This is likely why we do not find the Athanasians clamouring to use John 1:18 to support his argument against Arius or the Arians.

3. The Two God Dilemma

The meaning of the Greek word *monogenes* is debated. If it does mean "only-begotten," and the text did indeed say, "No one has seen **God**; the only-begotten **God** who is in the bosom of the **Father** expresses **Him**", this introduces the concept of **multiple Gods**. Unbegotten God number 1 is expressed by the other begotten God number 2. One simply cannot escape the fact that John would be describing "a" distinct God that everyone saw from "the" distinct God no one has ever seen, but who is declared by the other God who people can see. Indeed, such a rendering indicates the visible God expresses the invisible God and the unbegotten God begat a begotten God, the second God declares the first God. Since the Word is begotten *of* God then we have a begotten God of the unbegotten God. And in the end, the Trinitarian has two Gods on his hands and is caught in the very predicament he accuses Arians of being found in.

Trinitarian Concept	John 1:18
God (1)	* * *

Unbegotten Father	Begotten Son	Holy Spirit	Unbegotten God (1)	Begotten God (2)
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No one has seen **God the Father**; the only-begotten **God**... declares **God the Father**",

The only way out of this predicament is for Trinitarians to pretend in his mind that John was simply saying that one person of the Trinity is expressing another person of the Trinity. In other words, he must try to insist that this is no different than saying God the Son expresses God the Father. However, this contrivance doesn't work because this claim ignores what the "*monogenes* God" reading states. It simply doesn't say that the Son expresses the Father. This version says the begotten God reveals/declares God the Father. The passage says that one visible begotten God expresses another invisible unbegotten God. This would not be a case of the Son member of the one Triune God expressing the Father member of the one Triune God, but a case of one God expressing another God. It is inescapable.

We must ask ourselves as monotheists what version is more plausible. Is it more plausible for John to have said the begotten God declares/reveals/expresses the unbegotten God? Or is it more plausible for John to have said the Son declares/reveals/expresses God the Father?

Polytheism

Trinitarians insist they do not believe there are three Gods in one God. They say they simply believe there are three persons in one God. This is just a way of saying they believe each of the three persons are God because all three share the common substance of God. In other words, they do not believe in three who's in one who but three who's in one what. Their Triune God is a "what," a substance of being, a divine nature and that is how their God is one.

However, John 1:18 puts them into a dire dilemma. Here we have an "only begotten God." Obviously, this God would need to be distinguished from the Triune God. Hence, the Son is a begotten God, the only begotten God and would be therefore a distinct God from the Trinitarian Triune God. Also, the Father is the unbegotten God in Trinitarianism. Hence, the Father too is a God. And the Holy Spirit is co-equal to the other two and so the Spirit is also a God. And then Trinitarians also believe in one other Triune God making a total of four Gods.

1. The unbegotten God
2. The begotten God
3. The Holy Spirit co-equal with the unbegotten God and the begotten God
4. The Triune God

No matter how you look at it, the Trinitarian ends up with more than one God.

4. The Internal Evidence: Father-Son Relationship

If the passage did say, "*monogenes* God," then such a translation would also be inconsistent with the rest of John's message where Jesus is always portrayed as **God's** only-begotten **Son**. The Greek word itself, *monogenes*, indicates a Father/Son relationship. The same word is used of Isaac at Hebrews 11:17. If we carefully think about the situation, the Father-Son version of the text seems to be far more likely than the only begotten God version. No one has seen **God** but the only-begotten [somebody] who is in the bosom of the **Father** expresses **Him**. If we are to understand that "God" here in this verse is the Father and only the Father, then what word goes with "Father?" The term "only-begotten **Son**" goes with the word "Father." No one has ever seen God but God's only-begotten Son expresses him who is his Father and whom no one has ever seen. Verse 14 tells us that he is the Word that became flesh and verse 15 that he is *the only-begotten* from *the Father* and right here in this passage we see that he is "unto the bosom of *the Father*." Not only so, the point of John's Gospel is that human flesh manifested the Father in terms of the things that flesh said and did; the Father abiding in Jesus did the works (14:10).

Verse	Consistency	Inconsistency
John 1:14	only-begotten of the Father	only-begotten of the Father
John 1:18	only-begotten Son	only-begotten God
John 3:16	only-begotten Son	only-begotten Son
John 3:18	only-begotten Son	only-begotten Son
1 John 4:9	only-begotten Son	only-begotten Son

The "*monogenes* God" version is conspicuously out of place in John's writings. Christ is always portrayed by John as someone of God, Lamb of God, Son of God, Love of God, Glory of God, Word of God, Bread of God, and and begotten *of* God. Secondly, "*monogenes* God" goes against John's immediate message. It makes John out to be speaking ambiguously to say no one has ever seen God, and then to say God

who everyone saw declared God who no one has ever seen. It doesn't make any sense.

Even further, notice what word *monogenes* is modifying throughout the rest of John's writings: son. Jesus is God's unique son. And of course he would be if he was an only begotten son. However, now think about how out of place the term "*monogenes* God" is in contrast to "*monogenes* Son." Why would John import such language to describe God? Why would John refer to an only-begotten God, or if you prefer, a one of a kind God, or a unique God? It is very weird selection of vocabulary to describe God Himself as *monogenes*. It is very understandable why John would describe God's son as *monogenes*. It appears Trinitarians want to read "God" but think "Son" when they read John 1:18.

5. "One of a Kind" you say? So God the Father is the *monogenes* God too?

In order to try and escape the two-God dilemma, Trinitarians need to claim *monogenes* does not mean "only-begotten" and **only** means "one of a kind" or they end up with an (1) unbegotten God and (2) a begotten God who is not the unbegotten God, two Gods. Even further, they claim that they do not believe in three Gods where the implication is that the Son is not a God in addition to the Father, but this would indeed result in such a situation. Hence, Trinitarians are left with the need to claim the Father is the *monogenes* God too since they also claim there is only one God.

In verse 14, Jesus is being describes as "the *monogenes* of the Father. Is that the type of language that could also be applied to the Father? Who is the Father a *monogenes* OF? No, we read throughout John that this language is referring to God's one of a kind son. But why was Jesus a unique son? Jesus was a one of a kind son because he was God's only begotten son. But in verse 18, we would read that the *monogenes* God declares God. Is that the type of language that could also be applied to the Father? Does it make sense to have John's point as, "the one of a kind God" reveals "the one of a kind God" or "the one of a kind God" reveals "the Father" This issue alone should be enough to make one realize the serious problem with this Trinitarian claim. God is not a "kind" or "genus" OF God. When one really gets down to thinking about this matter, it becomes painfully clear that the "*monogenes* God" manuscript reading is a corruption. If Jesus is the *monogenes* of God the Father, then the consequential result is that the *monogenes* God declares the *monogenes* God the Father. Really?

7. *Monogenes* - A Third Possibility

Some manuscripts simply read *monogenes* and do not say "*monogenes* son" or "*monogenes* God." Carefully regard John 1:14.

And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us,
and we beheld his glory, glory as of a *monogenes para* the
Father, full of grace and truth. (Young's Literal).

It seems most likely to this writer that, based purely on the manuscript evidence, that this may be the original text. Why would anyone remove "son" from the text since John uses it elsewhere? Why would anyone completely remove "god" from the text and not just replace the word with "son" especially since this is what Trinitarians suggest is what happened?

8. The History of *Monogenes*

A review of fourth century writings shows that Trinitarians of that time understood *monogenes* to mean "only begotten." And at least since Jerome's Vulgate, this word had been understood to mean, or at least imply, "only-begotten." Jerome translated this word into Latin as *unigenitus* ("only-begotten") whenever it referred to Christ as well as to Isaac in the book of Hebrews (otherwise he also translated it as *unicus*, "only"). It is rather interesting that many Trinitarians are suggesting Jerome intentionally translated *monogenes* in this manner to combat Arianism and promote the Nicean definition ("begotten before all ages"). This is very interesting because Trinitarians normally refuse to entertain the likelihood that the Scriptures were corrupted in the 4th and early 5th century to promote Trinty dogma. But when it suits their **own** agenda they suddenly have no problem making such a claim themselves.

In the following, note how the contextual language demonstrates that the writer understood *monogenes* to mean "begotten."

Ignatius, Magnesians

Jesus Christ. He, being **begotten** by the Father before the beginning of time, was God the Word, the **only-begotten** Son, and remains the same for ever; for "of His kingdom there shall be no end

Tertullian, Against Praxeas (Western church Latin writer)

Then, therefore, does the Word also Himself assume His own form and glorious garb, His own sound and vocal utterance, when God says, "Let there be light." This is the perfect nativity of the Word, when He proceeds forth from God -- formed by Him first to devise and think out all things under the name of Wisdom -- "The Lord created or formed me as the beginning of His ways;" then afterward **begotten**, to carry all into effect -- "When He prepared the heaven, I was present with Him." Thus does He make Him equal to Him: for by proceeding from Himself He became His **first-begotten** Son, because **begotten** before all things; and His **only-begotten** also, because alone **begotten** of God, in a way peculiar to Himself, from the

womb of His own heart -- even as the Father Himself testifies: "My heart," says He, "has emitted my most excellent Word." The father took pleasure evermore in Him, who equally rejoiced with a reciprocal gladness in the Father's presence: "You art my Son, today have I **begotten** You;"

Justin Martyr, Against Trypho, 105

For I have already proved that He was the **only-begotten** of the Father of all things, being **begotten** in a peculiar manner

9. The "Monogenes Son"

If John had simply wanted to say "only son" (which means exactly the same thing as "unique son") he could have used the Greek word *monos* to do so. So we must ask why he chose the word *monogenes*.

Why did John choose to describe Jesus as the "*monogenes* son?" ONLY is just a synonym for UNIQUE and vice versa. If John wanted to simply describe Jesus as an "ONLY" son or a "UNIQUE" son, he simply needed to say he was a "*monos* son" just as the one God is described as "the *monos* God at John 5:44. But obviously, John wanted to say more than this by using this word. What is it that John wanted to convey by use of this word? What does this word imply that *monos* would not? What does *monogenes* tell us about the son that *monos* does not?

10. The Real Questions

The first question is whether or not *monogenes* is derived from *gennao*, to beget, or derived from *ginomai*, to be, to exist. It is also interesting that Trinitarians have had a habit of translating *ginomai* as "born" (= begotten) in the Scriptures (cf. Rom 1:3; Gal 4:4. The Trinitarian claim is based upon the insistence that it is derived from *ginomai*. It is further insisted, or presumed, that *ginomai* bears no etymological relationship to *gennao*

The Trinitarian claim is that *monogenes* simply means "one of a kind." But of course if *monogenes* means "only-begotten" it would also mean "one of a kind." The real question is whether the notion of begetting is absent from the word *monogenes* or whether it is implied, and whether or not the word is etymologically derived from *ginomai* or *gennao*.

11. The Context of the word Monogenes as Used by John

Carefully regard the following two contexts:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is *begotten* of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His *monogenes* Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is *begotten* of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child *begotten* of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is *begotten* of God overcomes the world.

(1 John 4:7-5:4 NASB).

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is *begotten* again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be *begotten* when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is *begotten* of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is *begotten* of the flesh is flesh, and that which is *begotten* of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be *begotten* again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is *begotten* of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I

say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His *monogenes* Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the *monogenes* Son of God. (John 3 NASB).

Notice how "begotten" and "only-begotten" are used in the same context to refer to the same thing.

12. The "One of a Kind" God in the Bosom of the Father?

More evidence of the error is seen in the immediate context. John says that no one has seen God and then he tells us that the someone in the bosom of the Father declares Him. We need to think about this carefully. Would John be speaking in such a manner? Whatever would be the point of such an expression? Whatever would be the point of saying that the one God of Israel is in the bosom of God? Put another way, if Jesus is the "unique God" then the Father is also the "unique God" and John would be saying "the unique God" is in the bosom of "the unique God." What?

13. The Source of the Nicean "Begotten before all Ages."

If indeed the word *monogenes* does not mean "only-begotten," a new problem arises for the Trinitarian, something which the likes of Jerome and Gregory Nazianzus didn't overlook. What then will be the Scriptural basis to support the Nicean Creed and the claim that the Son was "**begotten before all ages**"? The truth is that fourth century Athanasians did understand *monogenes* to mean "only-begotten." Even a cursory reading of the writings of fourth century writers shows that they understood this word to refer to the notion that Jesus was the only one begotten of God.

14. Compelling Evidence for the Source of the Corruption

The historical evidence powerfully suggests the "only begotten God" version is a Gnostic corruption designed to offset the force of John 1:14. It just isn't going to be convenient for Gnosticism to have human

flesh declaring God. The Gnostics were infamous for altering Scriptural texts. In Gnosticism, gods begat other gods. The Gnostics also had a god they called Monogenes. Irenaeus tells us that Ptolemy, a Valentinian Gnostic, used a translation which seems to have referred to an only-begotten god, (*monogenes*), which was a time period when serious corruptions had been occurring. This is also about the same time period when the "only begotten God/god" manuscript reading first shows up. The texts which contain the error seem to be confined to Alexandrian origin, a hotbed of Platonism and Gnosticism.

a. Gnostic Tampering

The Gnostics used the Christian Scriptures but advocated their own brand of the Christian faith. They were also well known to the church as a group that had little reverence the sacred writings of the Christians. They are said to have corrupted the Scriptures regularly to suit themselves.

b. The Corruption of John's Gospel by Ptolemæus the Gnostic (Ptolemy)

Ptolemæus was a Valentinian Gnostic. He may be identical with the Ptolemæus mentioned by Justin Martyr about two decades prior to Irenaeus. Irenaeus makes a very revealing statement when he is charging the Gnostic Valentians with perverting the Scriptures:

"By transferring passages, and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another, they (Gnostic Valentinians) succeed in deluding many through **their wicked art in adapting the oracles of the Lord to their opinions.....** Further, **they teach** that John, the disciple of the Lord, indicated the first Ogdoad, expressing themselves **in these words**:

John, the disciple of the Lord, wishing to set forth the origin of all things, so as to explain how the Father produced the whole, lays down a certain principle,—that, namely, which was first-begotten by God, which Being he has termed both **the only-begotten Son and God....**for that which is **begotten of God is God....** Such are the views of Ptolemæus." (*Against Heresies*, I, 8, 5).

Irenaeus was referring to Ptolemaeus' Commentary on the prologue in the Gospel of John (as preserved by Irenaeus in the same document as above:

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. By this (Son), he says, was emitted the Word, in which

was the entire essence of the aions that the Word later personally formed.

But furthermore (he says), "That which came into being in it was Life." [Jn 1:4] Here he discloses a pair. For he says that the entirety came into being through it, but Life is in it. Now, that which came into being in it more intimately belongs to it than what came into being through it: it is joined with it and through it it bears fruit. Indeed, inasmuch as he adds, "and Life was the light of human beings", [Jn 1:4] in speaking of human beings he has now disclosed also the Church by means of a synonym, so that with a single word he might disclose the partnership of the pair. For from the Word and Life, the Human Being and the Church came into being. And he called Life the light of human beings because they are enlightened by her, i.e. formed and made visible. Paul, too, says this: "For anything that becomes visible is light." [Eph 5:13] So since Life made the Human Being and the Church visible and engendered them, she is said to be their light.

Now among other things, John plainly made clear the second quartet, i.e. the Word; Life; the Human Being; the Church.

But what is more, he also disclosed the first quartet. describing the Savior, now, and saying that all things outside the Fullness were formed by him, he says that he is the fruit of the entire fullness. For he calls him a light that "shines in the darkness" [Jn 1:5] and was not overcome by it, inasmuch as after he had fitted together all things that had derived from the passion they did not become acquainted with him. And he calls him Son, Truth, Life, and Word become flesh. We have beheld the latter's glory, he says. And its glory was like that of the Only-Begotten, which was bestowed on him by the Father, "full of grace and truth". [Jn 1:14] And he speaks as follows: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; we have beheld its glory, glory as of the Only-Begotten from the Father." [Jn 1:14] So he precisely discloses also the first quartet when he speaks of the Father; Grace; the Only-Begotten; Truth. Thus did John speak of the first octet, the mother of the entirety of aions. For he referred to the Father; Grace; the Only-Begotten; Truth; the Word; Life; the Human Being; the Church.

Carefully regard what Irenaeus has said. Ptolemaeus the Valentinian Gnostic had corrupted the first chapter of John to suit himself. Notice that Irenaeus has said this Gnostic has corrupted John to have it say that the first begotten of God is God and Ptolemaeus has therefore styled this firstbegotten as the "only begotten God." (Bentley Layton Translation).

c. Tatian - Disciple turned Gnostic

Tatian wrote in his *Diatessaron*, No man has seen God at any time; **the only Son, God**, which is in the bosom of his Father, he hath told of him." (*Diatessaron*, IV, 1). This is a remarkably odd translation.

Tatian was a disciple of Justin Martyr who considered Christianity to be a system of philosophy, philosophy to be the greatest work of a Christian and that philosophy alone made could make one happy. According to Irenaeus, Tatian got puffed up at the thought of being a teacher after Justin's death in 165 A.D. and began teaching a form of Gnosticism. This was not long after the teachings of Marcion's brand of Gnosticism were first promulgated in Rome. The church fathers later wrote about Tatian.

Tatian, formed a certain combination and collection of the Gospels, I know not how, to which he gave the title *Diatessaron*, and which is still in the hands of some. (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV, 29).

Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus, also wrote:

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.

Whether Tatian wrote before or after being a disciple of Justin Martyr is problematic. It seems that he would have created this work after Justin's death, and not before, when he saw himself as a teacher of the gospel. This work may not have yet been intentionally influenced by Gnostic thought. However, Tatian's character has indeed been called into question and it seems likely he was sympathetic to the Gnostic cause while he was a disciple of Justin's.

d. "Only begotten God" in Gnostic Literature

This ancient Gnostic text known as the Bruce Codex was discovered near Alexandria, Egypt in 1769 and translated into English in 1892 by Carl Schmidt.

"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 is the one without whom nothing exists, 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)."

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: Armodon, 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**."

Plainly, the "only begotten God" was a preferred Gnostic concept. It seems Trinitarians are in the company of the Gnostics.

e. The Arians

Arians could not possibly be the culprit for the error, one way or the other, because the error appeared long before Arius was born. But an examination of Arian creeds and beliefs show they *preferred* the "only begotten God/god" tradition while Athanasians seemed to quote the "only begotten Son" tradition, at least during the major portion of the controversy. The only begotten God rendering seems to be first used by

the Cappadocian Trinitarians around 360-370 A.D. This concept fits perfectly with Arian theology, as we can even see today in Jehovah's Witness Watchtower theology which describes Jesus as another "god" in addition to "God." We must also be reminded the Arian controversy was centered in Alexandria where Alexander and Athanasius were bishops and Arius was a priest prior to his excommunication, and where the early texts with this rendering are found, and where Gnosticism flourished. If indeed this text should say "only begotten *theos*" it does the Trinitarian more harm than good since it favors Arianism and Gnosticism. And this is likely why the Arians favored it early in the controversy and the Trinitarians did not. One does not find Athanasians appealing to this text until the latter days of the Arian controversy around 370 A.D. when Arian strength was beginning waning.

The Second Arian Confession (Antioch, 341 AD)

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/deity** [John 1:18], by whom are all things, who was begotten before all ages from the father, god from God [deity from the Deity], 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 Deity, 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* [John 1:1]; by whom all things were made, and in whom all things consist; who in the last days descended from above, and was born of a Virgin according to the Scriptures, and was made man, mediator between God and man, and apostle of our faith, and prince of life, as he says, 'I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me' [John 6:38]; who suffered for us and rose again on the third day, and ascended into heaven, and sat down on the right hand of the father, and is coming again with glory and power, to judge quick and dead.

And in the Holy Spirit, who is given to those who believe for comfort, and sanctification, and initiation, as also our Lord Jesus Christ

enjoined His disciples, saying, 'Go ye, teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit' [Matt 28: 19]; namely of a Father who is truly father, and a son who is truly son, and of the Holy Spirit who is truly Holy Spirit, the names not being given without meaning or effect, but denoting accurately the peculiar subsistence, rank, and glory of each that is named, so that they are three in subsistence, and in agreement one.

Holding then this faith, and holding it in the presence of God and Christ, from beginning to end, we anathematize every heretical heterodoxy. And if any teaches, beside the sound and right faith of the Scriptures, that time, or season, or age, either is or has been before the generation of the Son, be he anathema. Or if any one says, that the Son is a creature as one of the creatures, or an offspring as one of the offsprings, or a work as one of the works, and not the aforesaid articles one after another, as the divine Scriptures have delivered, or if he teaches or preaches beside what we received, be he anathema. For all that has been delivered in the divine Scriptures, whether by Prophets or Apostles, do we truly and reverentially both believe and follow.
(Athanasius, *De Synodis*, 23. LPNF, ser. 2, vol. 4, 461).

Several other Arian creeds have "only begotten Son" as well. But these examples of Arian belief show us that the phrase "only begotten god/God" is not an idea favoring Trinitarianism but Arianism. Most Trinitarians will most certainly have their eyebrows raised at reading the above confession. While Arianism may be a heresy, the true beliefs of Arians is not honestly reported in most circles.

15. Common Sense

In context, John says that no one has ever seen God. We know our God is the invisible God. While the Bible does make shocking statements from time to time, let us appeal to our common sense. What do you think John intended to say? Did he intend to say the only begotten God in the bosom of God declared/revealed the unbegotten God the Father? Did he intend to say the unique God in the bosom of the unique God declared/revealed the unique God? Or do you think he intended to say the Son reveals his Father who is God? Let us be reasonable and honest with ourselves.

The entire Gospel of John is about the Father being manifested in flesh named Jesus. In other words, the Father was revealed through a human being. This shows that the "God" reading is extremely unlikely. Furthermore, the "God" reading doesn't really make any sense if you think about it. What is the point of God the Son revealing God the Father? Why not God the HS revealing God the Son for example? If there are 3 hypostases who are God, what is the point in the 2nd making the 1st known to us? Why not the 2nd making the 2nd known to us? Or the 3rd? Or the 1st making known to us the 2nd? When you consider these things, it should be apparent that the Trinitarian version of this verse really doesn't make any sense. What is the point of one hypostasis making known another hypostasis when the former hypostasis when in fact it was the 2nd hypostasis who was not previously known yet the 2nd makes the 1st known. It's downright kooky if you think about it. The point of John is to show how Jesus made the only true God known to people. This Gospel isn't about one hypostasis making another hypostasis known but about a man making God known.

Determining Factors

- There are two manuscript traditions. Each of them were widely attested in the early church. The authenticity of the "only begotten God" text is therefore highly questionable on these grounds alone. Are we expected to rest our faith upon such suspicious evidence?
- The earliest Christians attest to the "only begotten Son" version except in the Alexandria region.
- The "only begotten God" version absurdly results in a visible begotten God everyone can see declaring/revealing the unbegotten invisible God no one can see.
- The "only begotten Son" version is the one which is consistent with John's terminology
- During the Arian controversy, the "only begotten God" was not used by the Athanasians but was used by the Arians.
- The manuscript to which Trinitarians appeal, was found in near Nag Hammadi where the Nag Hammadi gnostic collection was found.
- Evidence shows the Gnostics preferred the "only begotten God" version and since they loved to tamper with Scripture, they likely corrupted this passage to say just that. Trinitarians opt for the version that puts them into company with the Gnostics.
- Irenaeus reports how the Gnostics corrupted the Gospel of John and he seems to be referring to John 1:18.

No matter how you look at it, this passage is useless as evidence for Trinitarian doctrine and attempting to *identify* Jesus as "God." Presenting this passage as a Trinitarian "proof-text" is simply one more lame attempt by Trinitarians to promote an untenable doctrine and unscriptural teaching. The text has been corrupted one way or the other. The weight of the evidence seems to indicate it should say, "only begotten Son." If it does, then it says nothing to advance the Trinitarian agenda. And if it doesn't, the Trinitarian is still left with serious theological problems which only a heavy dose of denial can cure.

Conclusion

Based on the manuscript evidence alone, the facts are *inconclusive* at best. It would be quite easy to make a choice based on a theological bias and cherry pick whatever version suits our theological needs. However, this would not be honorable to truth. It would also be quite crazy for anyone to rest their faith upon such a highly doubtful text. Both readings are strongly attested in early manuscripts and early Christian writings. The overwhelming weight of the evidence, however, indicates the passage should say "*monogenes* Son." It is consistent with John's terminology in all his writings. And evidence also strongly suggests the passage is a Gnostic corruption designed to offset the force of John 1:14.

only begotten of the Father. John 1:14.

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