

# The meaning of monogenes in the Gospel of John<sup>1</sup>

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1. Portions of this paper are a response to Patrick Morris’ es paper, “Who is Jesus the Christ? -- His name is Only Begotten!”

2. Abbreviations used are defined in Appendix XI-A.

## I. Introduction

Many recent English translations of the New Testament have discontinued the use of the term “begotten” in their translation of John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18, 1 Jo. 4:9, and prefer, “only Son” or “one and only Son” instead of “only begotten Son”. For purposes of comparison the New American Standard updated version (NASB) and the English Standard Version (ESV) are compared below (emphasis mine). Are the recent translations (in this area) to be preferred or should they be rejected?

Ref.	NASB (KJV, NKJV are similar)	ESV (RSV, NIV, NRSV are similar)
John 1:14	And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, <i>glory as of the only begotten from the Father</i> , full of grace and truth.	And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, <i>glory as of the only Son from the Father</i> , full of grace and truth.
John 1:18	No one has seen God at any time; <i>the only begotten God</i> who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained <i>Him</i> .	No one has ever seen God; <i>the only God</i> , who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.
John 3:16	For God so loved the world, that <i>He gave His only begotten Son</i> , that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.	For God so loved the world, that <i>he gave his only Son</i> , that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
John 3:18	He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed <i>in the name of the only begotten Son of God</i> .	Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed <i>in the name of the only Son of God</i> .
1 John 4:9	By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent <i>His only begotten Son into the world</i> so that we might live through Him.	In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent <i>his only Son into the world</i> , so that we might live through him.

Much of this paper is in the form of a research paper, which presents and analyzes a large amount of data leading to certain conclusions, though the conclusions are not always explicitly stated. However, I have provided in Section X a set of conclusions which I believe the analysis of the data in the earlier sections supports.

Most of this paper’s discussion centers around the three terms that Patrick discusses (monogenes, gennao and genos). These are the Greek terms commonly discussed in other literature dealing with this subject. However, in researching the term monogenes, it was discovered that there are nine additional terms which use the *genes* ending. Some of these terms are compound terms like monogenes. If these nine terms were left out of the discussion the conclusion that Patrick’s position is incorrect is strengthened. However, some of these nine terms demonstrate just how wide a semantic range the genes ending can carry when combined with other terms and prefixes, and therefore these terms could be used in support of Patrick’s position. I thought it best (even though Patrick does not refer to these terms) that a discussion of these terms should be considered (see section IX.).<sup>3</sup>

Before discussing the possible meanings of monogenes, some matters relating to the doctrine of scripture, translation, and tradition need to be considered since these subjects are directly and indirectly raised in Patrick’s paper. Sections II - IV address these subjects.

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3. It was Fred Graef who pointed out the existence of these additional terms and their relevance to this subject.

## II. The doctrine of Scripture and translation

There are a number of places in this discussion where our understanding of Scripture itself is influencing how we view the traditional translations of John. Most protestants from the reformation forward, and Jerome (see below), believed that the autographs were inspired by God, not subsequent translations. Divine perfection, as far as the Word of God is concerned, is to be found only in the autographs. This belief is carefully summarized in paragraph 1.8 of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) (emphasis mine).

**“The Old Testament in Hebrew** (which was the native language of the people of God of old), **and the New Testament in Greek** (which, at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), **being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages,** are therefore authentical; (1) so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.(2) But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them,(3) therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come,(4) that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner;(5) and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.(6)”

The confession states that it is the Hebrew and Greek writings that were “immediately inspired by God” and that these writings are to be translated into the vulgar [common] language of every nation unto which they come.

Regarding preservation, the confession is clear. What is, “kept pure in all ages”, are the immediately inspired Hebrew OT and Greek NT, not translations of them. This “singular care and providence” is seen in the fact that we have large numbers of Greek NT texts, some very ancient. The fact that these texts have been preserved, and are now being preserved in ways better than in any previous century is a testimony to God’s sovereign providence in preserving His word. The fact that our translations are being *carefully* examined, and improved when necessary, to conform to the meaning of the “immediately inspired” original writings is an example of God’s continued providence, even over our translations.

Patrick states, “Has God been sovereign over the translation of His Word or has He left His word in the hands of the intelligentsia of each era to decide its interpretation however they deem fit (pg. 3, para. 3)?” It seems that by the question, “Has God been sovereign over the translation of His is word?”, Patrick means, Has not God sovereignly put *perfect translations* into the world? I would have to say, no. But Patrick seems to believe that not only are the autographs perfect, but translations (how many? which languages? which ones?) are also perfect. Here most of the confessions, and Jerome, part from what appears to be Patrick’s doctrine of scripture. Though not stated, he seems to assume, that somewhere among the many nations and languages the gospel was intended to go, that there exists at least one (maybe more) nation, or tongue, that has a *perfect translation*. Or perhaps that Jerome’s Latin Vulgate is the one perfect translation? Or some of the earlier Latin translations?

I do not believe Jerome would agree with Patrick’s approach here. Jerome stated, “I am not so stupid as to think any of the Lord’s words need correcting or are not divinely inspired; but the Latin manuscripts of the Scriptures are proved faulty by the variations which are found in all of them. My aim has been to restore them to the form of the Greek original, from which my critics do not deny that they have been translated.” Jerome seems to state: 1) That the Lord’s words do not need correcting. 2) The Lord’s words *are not* the various Latin versions then in existence, but the Greek original. 3) Jerome already acknowledges that at his time the Latin versions had problems and his aim is to restore them to the form of the Greek original. But since Latin is not Greek, “restoring them (the Latin texts) to the *form* of the Greek original” can only mean to convey the meaning which the Lord’s words have in Greek, in Latin. Is this not what all translations should do? And is the church from Jerome forward to assume Jerome made a perfect translation? It seems that Jerome himself would not approve of this attitude.

I will venture to say that Jerome did not expect his peers to assume his translation was perfect, but expected them to adopt the same procedure he did, “restore them [any translation we may encounter] to the form [meaning] of the Greek original.” Further, I think Jerome would be horrified if he knew people were now viewing him as the individual instrument which was “sovereignly supervised” to produce an infallible translation in another language. I think he would be delighted to know that word by word, phrase by phrase, his translation is still being examined in the light of the best Greek and Hebrew original sources we have available to us. This was his method. How could he possibly fault us for continuing to apply *his* method?

Appendix XI-G contains three quotes from the forward of the BDAG Lexicon, by F.W. Danker, which provide a historical perspective regarding the improvement of our understanding of the language of the NT. This increased understanding of the language that God used to “breath out” His Scripture does, and should, lead us to reevaluate our “human” made translations. To refer to Jerome, the “form” to be given to our translations must be the “form” of the *original* language our Lord used. No amount of tradition or widespread use of a given translation should ever be allowed to compromise this principle.

A word should be said regarding Patrick’s statement, “this answers the skeptic’s contention that only begotten should be removed from the Scripture because of a difficulty in understanding the term” (pg. 6, para. 3). This may be true regarding the skeptics. But it is not true regarding those theologians and teachers I know, and I myself, who advocate a different translation. None of them advocate a different translation because of the difficulty of understanding the term, or phrase “only begotten”. Rather these men set forth the *same reason* Jerome was commissioned to produce the Latin Vulgate, which was to express what God through John, in the Greek language, meant.

### **III. The significance and limitations of tradition**

The many worthies quoted by Patrick are almost universally respected among us. However, many of the quotes are not directly addressing the question at hand. They are using the translations, whether Latin or English, they were holding in their hands at the time. If you study the writings of these worthies, especially those who do exegetical work, you will come across places where they suggest a different English translation than the one given in the Authorized Version. They had no reservation to constantly go back to the Greek text and evaluate the translation they were using. In other words, as regards authority, there was a difference in their minds between the Greek and Hebrew texts, and their translations. I am not implying that any of them suggested a different English translation for monogenes in John other than “only begotten”. I am not aware that any of them did. I am pointing out their attitude toward Scripture and translation in general.

I agree with Patrick, that we should not easily set aside 1800 years of church tradition and understanding of a term. The matter should be visited and revisited. I will go as far to agree with the use of careful skepticism toward linguistic scholars who deny the faith. Have their linguistic conclusions been influenced by their unbelief? The question should be asked. The matter being discussed has been pursued now for at least a century, by “conservative” and “liberal” scholars. A break with 1800 years of tradition has not been flippantly or arrogantly advocated. However, to persist in defending a translation, which cannot be defended on the basis of the Greek language used in the NT would be a mistake.

If we appeal to tradition for our defense we need to be aware of the pitfalls that inevitably attend this approach. Tradition is a sword with two edges, for we do find things in the traditional sources, many appealed to by Patrick, that we now know we must distance ourselves from. This is true of Calvin, Luther, and others. But this is especially true of the apostolic fathers and the church fathers. All great men, but still men. What authority do we have to pick and choose out of a tradition the points of view we

desire to defend, and then to deny our adversaries on other issues the same privilege? This practice is inconsistent with holding a high view of Scripture. *Scripture does not receive its authority from the tradition of its translation.*

However good our translations are, and many are quite good, we cannot attribute the working of the Spirit of God described in 2 Tim. 3:15-17 and 2 Pet. 1:19-21 to any human production of translation. To do so gives an authority to non-prophetic, non-apostolic men which Jesus never gave. The giving of the Word of God has been complete for many centuries. The work of translation of His Word into the languages of every nation under heaven will continue until He returns as part of the church's task of bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth. Every translation stands or falls not on the basis of when it was done, or who did the translating, or how long it has been used, or how many people have used it, but on its faithfulness to the Word of God as God gave it.

I believe I can confidently say that all the worthies quoted by Patrick would approve of the doctrine of scripture outlined in section II and the process outlined below as to how the translation should be determined.

#### **IV. How Should The Translation Be Determined?**

How then should we determine if a particular translation is correct? We should first have a correct view of Scripture itself as explained above and summarized here. Relating to this matter the following points regarding scripture are applicable:

1. The original writing of the inspired authors is the word of God.
2. Translations into any other language are not to be given the same infallible status as the original Greek and Hebrew texts.
3. The Greek and Hebrew language and vocabulary used was the common [vulgar] language used amongst those to whom the original authors wrote and spoke. They wrote to their generation in the language of their generation with the reasonable expectation that their readers would understand what they had written.<sup>4</sup>

Second, we should use the correct process to determine the meaning of the words of scripture:

1. In light of 3 above, *both* biblical and non-biblical literature (which was contemporary with the biblical literature being considered) *should* be used to determine the meaning of terms. It is a mistake to ignore either of these sources in the work of translation.
2. Independent sources for the use of a term, within the same culture as the biblical author, carry much more weight than one translation repeated by many people over many generations. This is relevant to the present discussion. If the meaning of monogenes, as John used it, was not correctly reproduced in pre-Jerome and Jerome NT translations, then it is incorrect in all the translations which follow that assumed it was correct.

It should be kept in mind that as the gospel has spread across the world many more translations have been needed and undertaken. This has driven the church to repeatedly ask, "What did John, Paul, Luke, Peter, etc. write and mean?" This has sustained, especially since the era of modern missions, a constant effort to recover and understand the original text. And when the, "What did they mean?" question is asked, trans-

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4. Here by "understand" I mean intellectually understand what the writer is saying. This type of understanding may or may not be accompanied with agreement and belief of what is written. One can understand what John wrote but refuse to believe it is true.

lators (at least good ones) are not asking, “what did Jerome mean?” They will surely consult Jerome, but they will consult as many earlier witnesses (i.e. users of the term being translated) as they can find. It is this process that has led many conservative scholars and teachers to question if “only begotten” is the correct translation of monogenes in John’s writings.

#### **V. Overview of the three Greek terms being discussed and their translation**

In considering what is the most accurate translation of *monogenes* the references given in the following table should be considered. Reading the ESV and NASB translations of these texts helps in understanding the issues being discussed. It is also helpful to examine the Latin translation of these texts. When reading, the *variations* in the translation of monogenes in the NASB (or KJV, NKJV) should be considered. Are these variations justified?

### Three Greek Terms Commonly Discussed Relating to the Phrase “only begotten”

Greek term	References	English Translations: NASB, NKJV, ESV <sup>a</sup>
<p>monogenhj, monogenes</p> <p>Compound term believed to be from either mono and genos or mono and gennao.</p> <p>The reference list is exhaustive for the NT, LXX and APF.</p>	<p>John 1:14 John 1:18 John 3:16 John 3:18 1 John 4:9 Lk. 7:12 Lk. 8:42 Lk. 9:38 Heb. 11:17</p> <p>Jdg. 11:34 Ps. 22:20 Ps. 25:16 Ps. 35:17</p> <p>Tob. 3:15 Tob. 6:11 Tob. 8:17 Wis. 7:22 Odes 14:13 Ps. Sol. 18:4</p> <p>1Cl. 25:2 Dio. 10:2 Mpo. 20:2</p>	<p>only begotten, only begotten, only Son only begotten, only begotten, only only begotten, only begotten, only only begotten, only begotten, only only begotten, only begotten, only only, only, only only, only, only only <i>boy</i>, only son, only child only begotten <i>son</i>, only begotten son, only son</p> <p>one <i>and</i> only child, only child, only child<sup>b</sup> only <i>life</i>, precious life, precious life lonely, desolate, lonely only life, precious life, precious life</p> <p>only child (RSV) only (RSV) only children (RSV) Unique (RSV) kurie uie monogenh. (no translation available) an only child (LXE, Brenton)</p> <p>the only one of its kind (Lightfoot) only begotten (Lightfoot) only-begotten (Lightfoot)</p>
<p>gennaw, gennao</p> <p>The first 4 references are where the term is used in reference to Christ.</p> <p>The reference list is not exhaustive, but representative.</p>	<p>Acts 13:33 Heb. 1:5 Heb. 5:5 Ps. 2:7</p> <p>Gen. 4:18 Gen. 5:3, Matt. 19:12</p> <p>Plus 344 more times.</p>	<p>begotten, begotten, begotten begotten, begotten, begotten begotten, begotten, begotten begotten, begotten, begotten</p> <p>became the father of, begot, fathered became the father of, begot, fathered born, born, birth</p> <p>It appears in all cases to refer to begetting or birth, or using physical birth as an illustration, (i.e. 1 Cor. 4:15).</p>
<p>γενος, genos,</p> <p>The reference list is not exhaustive, but representative.</p>	<p>Matt. 13:47 Mark 7:26 Mark 9:29 Acts 17:29 1 Cor. 12:28</p>	<p>kind, kind, kind race, birth, birth kind, kind, kind children, offspring, offspring kinds, varieties, kinds</p>

- a. For those references to non biblical literature the source of the translation is given in the () following the translation. For convenience the full text of these references is given in Appendix XI-B.
- b. For OT texts these are english translations of a Hebrew term(s) and the LXX translators used the Greek term monogenes to translate the Hebrew term(s).

## VI. How the commonly suggested English translations for monogenes originate

It is helpful to understand how the three most common translations of monogenes originate.

Greek Compound	Suggested nearest single english terms	Resulting english translation	Comments
mono - genes	one - begotten	“only begotten”	This approach assumes genes comes from the verb gennao, meaning beget, born, generate. Thus the translation “only begotten”. <sup>a</sup>
mono - genes	one - kind	“one of a kind” or “unique”	This approach assumes genes comes from genos, and genos means kind, or type. Thus the translation “one of a kind” or “unique”.
mono - genes	one - only	“one and only”	This approach assumes that genes was added to monos to strengthen the idea of monos as it relates to a person or object. Thus the suggested translations, “one and only”

a. Also, Patrick understands that genes comes from genos, *but that genos is nearly a synonym with gennao*, i.e. genos can mean beget, generate, and does in the Johanine texts. See Patrick, last para. pg. 9. This understanding is discussed in section VIII.

## VII. Psalm 2:7 (and its NT quotes) in relation to the “only begotten” texts of John

When considering this matter it needs to be understood that Psalm 2:7 and its NT quotes (Acts 13:33-34, Heb. 1:5, 5:5) are a distinct group of texts from those written by John. This is not obvious to the English reader because most english translations have used the term begotten in Psalm 2:7 (and associated NT texts) and in the Johanine texts. But Paul (quoted by Luke in Acts) and the author of Hebrews used gennao, and John used monogenes. When an English reader reads “only begotten” in John and “begotten” in acts (or Hebrews) it is natural for him to assume both authors used the same term for begotten and John added the adjective “only”. However, this is not the case. This approach to translation into English would be justified only if gennao and genos (or the genes ending) are nearly identical in meaning. This may be what previous Latin and English translators believed. If the terms are not nearly identical in meaning, then our English translations are representing John and Paul as saying the same thing, when they are not. The LXX translators did not choose to translate the Hebrew text of Psalm 2:7 with genos (the supposed source of begotten in “only-begotten”). They chose gennao. The discussion in section VIII presents a case for not considering the terms as synonyms.

This “leveling” in translation can lead the English reader to make unjustified conclusions as may be the case when Patrick writes, “Jesus asserted, ‘God hath given His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish’ to Nicodemus. It is natural and scriptural that Jesus made this assertion to the learned rabbi. Had not the psalmist declared, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You’... He [Nicodemus] would have understood Jesus to be saying He was Messiah, the king that would restore the throne of David” (pg. 3, 1st paragraph). Patrick may be unaware of the weakness of his point. It is not clear that Nicodemus would have thought of Psalm 2:7 because Psalm 2:7 (LXX) is gennao and John 3:16 is monogenes. If Patrick is aware of this situation then his reasoning is circular and he has already assumed genes (in monogenes) and gennao are nearly identical terms. *But this is the matter that requires proof.*



How should we understand *gennao* in Psalm 2 and its NT references? Acts 13:32-33 is a key text for answering this question. The promise made to the fathers should be understood as God sending the Messiah, the promised Seed (Gen. 3:15, Gal. 3:15-16, Luke 1:68-69) to Israel. The words, “raised up” of verse 32 do not refer to the resurrection of Christ, but of God fulfilling the promise to the fathers to bring forth the Messiah, the Son of God (Gal. 4:4-5). “Raised up” in Acts 13:32 has the same meaning as it has in Zacharias’ prophecy, “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David” (Luke 1:68-69). Zacharias is referring to the coming birth of Jesus, the Christ. In Acts 13:33 Paul explains that this “raising up” of the Messiah is the fulfillment of Psalm 2:7, “You are My, Son, Today I have begotten you”. This is not a reference to the resurrection. It is a reference to the incarnation. When the eternal Son of God took on human nature, this *was the time in history when the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants were fulfilled*. This is the “today” (period of time) of, “Today I have begotten You” of Psalm 2:7. This “Sonship” has been called the “Messianic Sonship”. Everyone agrees that the translation of *gennao* as “begotten” in these texts is correct.

Is there another type of Sonship besides the “Messianic Sonship”? Yes, there is the *eternal sonship of the second person of the Trinity*. He has always existed as the Son of God and as the Word which was with God and was God. This truth is taught by John and his idea of sonship *is different* from that set forth in Psalm 2.<sup>5</sup> Both ideas of sonship are important in understanding who Jesus Christ is. Even if we accept the traditional translation of *monogenes* in John as “only begotten” we cannot allow John to mean what Psalm 2:7 means or we will be led to deny aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity or have to prove that Psalm 2:7 and Acts 13:32-33 are referring to eternal sonship, an interpretation of these texts that is not persuasive.

#### VIII. Examination of Patrick Morris’ es paper, “Who is Jesus the Christ? His name is Only Begotten!”

The following paragraphs deal with Patrick’s treatment of the terms *genos*; *gennao*, and *monogenes* in the last two paragraphs of page 9 and the first paragraph, top of page 10. The quoted sections below are from Patrick.

“Why didn’t John simply write  $\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\sigma$  only  $\upsilon\iota\omicron\sigma$  Son instead of the controversial  $\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\sigma$  only-begotten  $\upsilon\iota\omicron\sigma$  Son.”

It should be noticed that Ignatius can write this very expression,  $\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\sigma$  only  $\upsilon\iota\omicron\sigma$  Son, IRo. 1:1 (see section VIII-D).

“Obviously his [John’s] intent was to write only begotten Son, and not the unique Son.”

This is circular reasoning, one should not assume what one is trying to prove. Patrick is assuming that *genes* in *monogenes* is a synonym of *gennao* and thus means *beget*. But this is the matter which needs to be demonstrated *from the Greek language of the NT*.

“Beisner concedes  $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\sigma$  is a derivative of *gennao*, ‘It [ $\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\sigma$ ] is only *distantly* related to *gennao*, to *beget*.’ While denying it is translated correctly as *begotten*, he admits it is ‘*related to beget*.’”

It is not my intent to defend Beisner’s Christology, with which I disagree. However, Patrick has missed Beisner’s point by dropping Beisner’s most important word, *distantly*. If the *genes* ending in *monogenes* is

5. Liberal theologians have tried to divest John of the idea of a pre-existent (prior to the incarnation) eternal Sonship of the Word and assert that the *only* kind of sonship is the Messianic sonship, which of course denies the deity of the Son. It is not within the scope of this paper to defend the eternal Sonship of the Son. The relationship of Father and Son is an eternal one. Both possess the *identical* nature of eternity, and they have forever existed as Father and Son, in this relationship.

only *distantly* related to gennao then there is no justification for translating monogenes as if genes is *closely* related to gennao. If genes and gennao are only *distantly* related then one *should not* translate them as though they are synonyms, much less as if they are identical, i.e. *both* as beget. In order to justify the only begotten translation of monogenes it must be proven that genes and gennao are so nearly related that we can render them both with the *same* English verb, beget. And this proof appears to be lacking (see below on genos) and this is why the traditional translation has been challenged.

### VIII-A. The use and meaning of γενος, genos in the NT, LXX and in the APF

Before examining the rest of the last paragraph on page 9, the uses of the terms genos, gennao and monogenes in the NT, LXX and APF should be reviewed. Genos occurs 20 times in the NT, 119 times in the LXX and 16 times in the APF. The table summarizes its uses. It should be noted that genos is a noun.

Use	Number of times used.	Sample Text	Other references (not exhaustive)
kind	Many	Gen. 1:11 “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb <i>that</i> yields seed, <i>and</i> the fruit tree <i>that</i> yields fruit according to its kind (genos),	Dan. 3:5, Mark 13:47 1 Cor. 12:28
people/nation/ race/tribe	Many	Gen. 17:4 “But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be <sup>a</sup> cut off from his people (genos); he has broken My covenant.”	Isa. 43:20, Gal. 1:4, 1 Pet. 2:9
descendants/ offspring	5	<b>Acts 17:29</b> “Therefore, since we are the offspring (genos) of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone,	Acts 4:6, 13:26, 17:28, Rev. 22:16

Out of the 155 uses referenced above, all but five clearly fall into the first two categories of meaning:<sup>6</sup> 1) Having to do with objects, or non-human creatures, which have some common trait. All *kinds* of music, all *kinds* of fish, or an animal that reproduces after its *kind*. 2) Human beings, classified together by a common trait. i.e. all descendants from the same ancestor, all living in the same geographic region. Typical translations are: people, race, nation, tribe or family. It should be noted that the idea that links these two categories together is that *the members of the group possess a common trait*.

The basic concept of genos does not have to do with generation, but kind, which is why the term is used in contexts *which have nothing to do with generation*. If the *basic* idea of genos was associated with generation, such entirely non-begetting type uses would not appear. If there is a *distant* association of genos to gennao it is coincidental because all the descendants who have been generated (begotten) from a common ancestor *do share in a common trait*, they are of the same kind. But the point of genos is not generation, but possessing a common trait.

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6. Discussion of the third category is considered below in relation to Patrick’s use of Acts 17:28-29.

### VIII-B. The use and meaning of γενναω, gennao in the NT, LXX

Gennao occurs 97 times in the NT and 254 times in the LXX. It should be noted that gennao is a verb. Gennao is the term repeatedly used in the genealogies of the Old and New Testaments of fathers who beget sons and daughters (see any genealogy). It is used of mothers who give birth to children (John 16:21). Thirdly it is used figuratively in the sense of bringing something forth, or causing something to happen (2 Tim. 2:23, an infrequent use).

One thing is certain regarding gennao, it *always* refers to generation or begetting, or birth, either literally, or in a few cases when used figuratively. This fact has significant implications for our understanding of *genos* and *monogenes*.

It seems safe to conclude that *genos* and *gennao* are *different and distinct terms, not synonyms*. The idea of generation is coincidental in *genos* (see section VIII-A), but essential in *gennao* (see *gennao* in table in section V). The usage of the two terms establishes this.

The meaning we should attribute to *monogenes* would now seem to rest upon the question, does the *genes* in *monogenes* derive from *genos* or *gennao*? If it derives from *gennao* then the translation “only begotten” is surely correct, for *gennao* *always* has a meaning associated with generation or birth. However there are good reasons indicating that the *genes* ending in the compound *monogenes* derives from *genos*.

### VIII-C. The use and meaning of μονογενης, monogenes in the NT, LXX and APF

Twenty two references in the NT, LXX and APF where *monogenes* is used are summarized in the table in Section V. A reading of these references will show that at least in five cases (Ps. 22:20, Ps. 25:16, Ps. 35:17, Wis. 7:22, 1Cl 25:2) *monogenes* is used without any reference whatsoever to the idea of begetting, generation or birth. This means that *genes* cannot be derived from, or synonymous in meaning with, *gennao*. For if it were *monogenes* would not have been used in these contexts, which have nothing to do with generation, keeping in mind that *gennao* always has to do with generation. *Further, these non-generation uses of monogenes follow the usage pattern of genos, not gennao* (see section VIII-A). *Genos* often is used in contexts having nothing to do with generation and is likely never used with the *intent* of conveying the idea of generation (acts 17:28 is examined below).

Luke’s usage of *monogenes* may be considered next (Lk. 7:12, Lk. 8:42, Lk. 9:38). Luke’s intent does not appear to be to focus his readers on the fact that the widow (or father) had an only child *that was begot or birthed*. Also, he could have written “*monos uios*” (only son) to make his point. But, since he wanted to emphasize the child was her *only* son, he wrote “*monogenes uios*”, surely not because he wanted to bring the idea of physical generation into the minds of his readers. No, he wanted to emphasize that the widow had only *one* son. And the term he chose to use to accomplish this was *monogenes*. Our english translators from KJV (1611) forward have understood this as none of them translate the Lukan texts as “only begotten”. However, if *genes* is derived from *gennao*, then the Lukan texts are incorrectly translated. There appears to be no uses of *monogenes* in the NT, LXX or APF which can justify the inconsistent translations between the Johanine and Lukan texts.

The reasoning regarding the Lukan texts applies to the other “only child” texts (Judges 11:34, Heb. 11:17, Tob. 3:15, 6:11, 8:17) also. Finally Pss 18:4 uses *monogenes* to refer to Israel (the nation) as an “only child”. Surely the point here was not to lead people to think about begetting. In danger of sounding repetitious, but, the reason *monogenes* is used instead of simply *monos* is not because these authors wanted to introduce the idea of begetting into the minds of their readers, but to emphasize the individual is an *only* son.

It should be noted that *gennao* has two “n’s” and *genes* in *monogenes* has only one. This is further evidence that the second part of *monogenes* comes from *ginomai* (a verb of being) and not *gennao* (a verb of begetting or generation).

Returning to the last paragraph of page 9 of Patrick's paper.

"It is necessary to understand that *γενος* used in translations as *kind* always refers to the creature." (pg. 9, last para.)

This statement may be true. However it is false to assume that when *genos* is not translated as *kind*, it is because it is referring to the idea of begetting people. Nearly all the non "kind" translations of *genos* are referring to the race or nationality of *people*. The point being however, in such texts, *is not to inform us they were begotten, but that they are related to one another by a common trait*. The semantic focus of *genos* is not on generation but on same kindness. They are all of the same race, family, people, or nation.

When nearly 100 references of *genos* are translated to refer to people, (people of a particular race, family, tribe) to select an English translation of Acts 17:28-29 which uses offspring for *genos*, as the basis for defining *genos* is a faulty procedure. Given the meaning of *genos* as determined from the majority of its uses (see section VIII-A), *as not centered in the idea of generation*, one should ask the question, does the non-generation meaning also apply in Acts 17:28-29? "for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring (*genos*).' Therefore, since we are the offspring (*genos*) of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising." Does the semantic focus of *genos* in these two references suddenly shift from "same kindness" to generation? Which idea did the Greek poets intend to be primary? It seems the thought Paul is conveying is that since we are "of the same kind as God", surely we should not think "*that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone*". The poets could have used *gennao*, the much more common term to express the ideas of begetting and birth.

Those who say *monogenes* derives from *genos* and insist that "only begotten" is the correct translation need to prove that in the *other* 150 uses of *genos* the semantic focus is on begetting. Appealing to one use which *might* carry either meaning and then concluding *genos* does carry the meaning of begetting is not a persuasive argument. Especially so when the meaning in the majority of references appears to work, without a strained interpretation, in the Acts 17:28-29.

Neither is the argument valid that *genos* means "kind" when referring to creatures (I assume non human) and means begetting when referring to people. It is unlikely that *genos* carries two almost entirely different meanings. There is a basic idea in the term and by examining all 155 uses that basic idea appears quite clearly to be the idea of "kind", not generation. Granted, the "same kindness" may be produced by a common generation, but the point of using *genos* is not to convey the idea of generation.

"All three Greek words, *gennao*, *monogenes* and *genos*, deal with paternal relationship." (pg. 10, 1st para.)

This statement may be true in regard to *gennao*, but it is misleading in regard to *monogenes* and *genos*. Ample examples of the use of *monogenes* have been given that have nothing to do with paternal relationship (see sections V and VIII-C) which demonstrates that the idea of begetting or paternal relationship is not essential to the meaning of *monogenes* as it is with *gennao*. The same is true in regard to *genos*. Patrick's treatment of these three terms reduces *genos* and *monogenes* to the level of synonyms of *gennao*. Further, when they are translated into English, they even lose the distinction between supposed synonyms and are translated with the *same* English verb, *beget*. This procedure is not correct and the meaning of the original text is being lost or mis-represented in some manner. We (the church) should strive to do better in our translations. The "pressure" of these issues was on the minds of our English translators and can be seen in the *different* renderings of *monogenes* even within the NT itself (see sections V and VIII-C) and the footnotes they have attached to their translations.

“Genos γένος comes from the verb ginomai γίνομαι, to generate.” (pg. 10, 1st para.)

I have not been able to find any Greek sources that indicate the noun genos comes from the verb ginomai. Perhaps there are. Also, to define ginomai as “to generate” is a large oversimplification. Ginomai is “A verb with numerous nuances relating to being and manner of being.” (BDAG). Ginomai is used 669 times in the NT. Granted, it is used 3 times in relation to being born (John 8:58, Rom. 1:3, Gal. 4:4). Even if (and it is an if) genos comes from ginomai, there is no justification for imputing one of the *many* meanings (BDAG lists 10 with multiple submeanings in each of the 10) of ginomai to genos, and then making this one imputed meaning the central meaning of genos. The meanings of terms must be primarily determined by their usages within multiple contexts.

“Monogenes is used only with children never with creatures.” (pg. 10, 1st para.)

There are two assertions in this statement that can be examined separately. “Monogenes is used only with children”. If only the NT is being referred to, this is true. However, if the LXX is considered, this “rule” of use does not stand (see table in section V). “... never with creatures”. Again, if only the NT is being referenced this is true, but the one use of monogenes by Clement refers to a mythical creature, the phoenix. The term was not a technical term restricted to only biblical literature. In Pss 18:4 monogenes is used of the nation of Israel. In Wis. 7:22 monogenes is used of wisdom, who is referred to as “the fashioner of all things”, an obvious reference to the creator of all things. Thus, it is very unlikely that when the author used the adjective monogenes to describe the “fashioner of all things” he wanted us to think of this Fashioner as begotten. Therefore no one has brought the idea of begetting into the translation of Wis. 7:22.

“Jesus is the equivalent of a mythological creature?” (pg. 10, 2nd para.)

I have no intention of defending Beisner’s Christology or interpretation of the Psa. 2:7 and related NT texts as not referring to the incarnation. I believe they do as expressed above (see section VII). However, Patrick appears to misrepresent Beisner’s point, that being, that monogenes can be used, *even by a great Christian bishop*, Clement of Rome, during the first century to describe the mythical creature we know as the Phoenix (1Cl. 25:2).

“How is it that Christ is not begotten in the incarnation, not *the only begotten* of God in eternity, and yet, he is begotten in the resurrection?” (Patrick is commenting on Beisner’s understanding of how or when Christ was begotten.) pg. 10, 2nd para.

This sentence contains examples of what appears to be a misunderstanding that runs throughout the paper regarding what can properly be referred to as a name for Jesus, the Son of God. “How is it that Christ is ... not *the only begotten* (emphasis his) of God in eternity”. In this sentence Patrick uses the phrase, “only begotten” *as a noun*. However, monogenes in John 1:18, 3:16, 3:18 and 1 John 4:9 is an *adjective*. In John 3:18, “the name” is not fundamentally monogenes. The name in which we are to believe is fundamentally το υιος (noun) του Θεο (noun), the Son of God. Monogenes is an adjective informing us about the noun phrase, Son of God. I do not mean to imply that the importance of the meaning of monogenes is in any way lessened by this fact, and I am not aware that the Bible ever says, “believe in the only begotten”. This is like saying, believe in the purple, i.e. believe in an adjective. This confusion exists throughout the paper. In fairness, it should be pointed out, that monogenes in John 1:14, though grammatically in the Greek text is an adjective, is functioning as a noun, and our English translations reflect this, “and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten (monogenes) of the Father, full of grace and truth. However, Patrick’s focus on the importance of believing in the *right* name is built upon John 1:18 and 3:18 in the beginning pages of his paper. These texts (as well as 3:16) do not command us to believe in the adjective, but the noun which the adjective informs us about, the Son of God.

## VIII-D. Examination of Patrick's references to the apostolic fathers

### Clement of Rome (last para. pg. 8)

Patrick is quoting John Gill who is quoting a translation of Clement's epistle to the Corinthians. The Clement reference appears to be 1 Cl. 36:4, which reads:

**1Cl 36:4** de. tw/ uiw/ autou/ ou/twj eiþen o' despothjÅ Uioj mou ei=su( egw. shmeron gegennhka, se\ aithsai par\ emou( kai. dwsw soi eqnh thn klhronomian sou kai. thh katascesin sou ta. perata thj ghj

"... but of His Son the Master said thus; Thou art My Son, I this day have begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Thy possession."<sup>7</sup>

Clement appears to be quoting Psalm 2:7 from the LXX, letter for letter, egw. shmeron gegennhka, se Psa. 2:7 (LXX), or he may be quoting a NT LXX quote of Psalm 2:7.

No one disputes that Jesus is God's begotten Son as stated in Psalm 2:7, Acts 13:33, Heb. 1:5, 5:5. Nor does anyone dispute that the English term begotten is a correct translation for these passages. But it does not seem that Clement's use of gennao here has any bearing on John's use of monogenes? Also, is it not a weakness in our English translations that prevent English readers from seeing the *difference* in language between the Psalm 2 texts and the Johanne texts (see section VII earlier)?

### Ignatius (first para. pg. 9)

In Patrick's compilation of quotes there are eight quotes regarding begetting in reference to the Son. I have not been able to locate any of them in the genuine epistles of Ignatius. However, I have searched Ignatius' letters to find statements that relate to the Son being born, being begotten and for any places where Ignatius used the term monogenes. Here are the results in Greek and English. None of these appear to be the quotes from John Gill which Patrick quoted (see paragraph below these quotes for further discussion).

**IEp 18:2** o' gar qeoj himwh Vhsouj o' Cristoj ekuoforhgh upo. Mariaj katv oikonomian qeou/ek sperma-toj men Daueid( pneumatoj de. agiou\ oj egennhgh kai. ebaptisqh( iha tw/paqei to. uþwr kaqarishj

"For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary according to a dispensation, of the seed of David but also of the Holy Ghost; and he was born and was baptized that by his passion He might cleanse water."

**ITr 9:1** Kwfwqhte oua( oltan umih cwrij Vhsou/ Cristou/ lalh/ tij( tou/ ek genouj Daueid( tou/ ek Mariaj( oj al hqwj egennhgh( efagen te kai. epien(

"Be ye deaf therefore, when any man speaketh to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of the race [notice genos] of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank,"

**IRo 1:1** Vlnatioj( o' kai. Qeoforoj(th/ hl ehmenh| en megaleiothti patroj uyistou kai. Vhsou/ Cristou/ tou/ monou uiou/ autou/ ekkhsiaj

"Ignatius, who is also Theophorus, unto her that hath found mercy in the bountifulness of the Father Most High and of Jesus Christ His only Son; to the church..."

Though Patrick asks, "why didn't John simply write monos uios (only son) instead of the controversial monogenes uios" (pg. 9, para. 6), we do see that Ignatius was comfortable writing *monou uiou autou* (only Son of Him).

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7. The English translations given of the Apostolic Fathers are from J.B. Lightfoot.

**IEp 7:2** eij iatroj estin( sarkikoj te kai. pneumatikoj( gennhtoj kai. agennhtoj( en anqrwpw| qeoj( en qanatw| zwh. al hqinh( kai. ek Mariaj kai. ek qeou( prwton paqhtoj kai. tote apaqhj( Vhsouj Cristoj o kurioj hmwh

“There is one only physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true Life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

In the above Ignatius references, the term being used is gennao (except in one case genos is used). Thus, these references do not shed light on early uses of monogenes. Unless, one is operating on the assumption that genes is a synonym of gennao.

There seems to be some mistake regarding source material for Ignatius. Patrick is quoting John Gill who appears to have been gathering quotes from Ignatius defending the eternal Sonship of Christ. Gill quotes the phrase, “only begotten Son” four times but the term *monogenes* and the phrase *monogenes uios* never appear in Ignatius’ seven epistles. Neither are there any references to Psalm 2:7, “You are my Son, today I have begotten (gennao) you.” Lightfoot’s introduction to the epistles of Ignatius<sup>8</sup> indicates that there is a “Long Recension [which] consists of the seven genuine epistles but interpolated throughout, together with six additional epistles (Mary to Ignatius, Ignatius to Mary, to the Tarsians, to the Philippians, to the Antiochenes and to Hero).” Is it possible that Gill was using this “Long Recension” which contains the six additional epistles (not considered Genuine)? “The Long Recension was constructed by some unknown author, probably in the latter half of the fourth century”. This places it at least two and a half centuries removed from Ignatius’ martyrdom. Perhaps there is some other explanation for the John Gill quotes of which I am not aware.

### **Justin Martyr (third para., pg. 9)**

I do not have a copy of the Greek text for Justin Martyr. However, since the English phrase “only begotten Son” does not appear in the English version quoted, it is likely that the begotten references are coming from Psalm 2:7 and its NT derivatives. If this is the case, then the situation is the same as stated in reference to 1 Cl. 36:4 above. No one disputes that Jesus is God’s begotten Son in the sense of Psalms 2:7 (see section VII).

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8. The Apostolic Fathers, pg. 58, Baker

### IX. Other terms ending in γενησ (genes)

The following table lists nine additional terms which have the γενησ (genes) ending. These terms give insight into the range of meaning that genes may assume and are significant to this discussion.

Greek term <sup>a</sup>	Lexical definitions	Sample References (not exhaustive)
oiko-genes (11) compound of oikos (house) and genes	LS - born in the house, homebred, of slaves	Gen. 14:4 - ... and eighteen trained <i>servants</i> who were <b>born in his own house</b> . Gen. 15:5 - ... indeed one born in my house is my heir! Gen. 17:12 - ... he who is <b>born in your house</b> or bought with money from any foreigner
allo-genes (47) allo (prefix indicating difference) and genes	LS - of another race, a stranger	Gen. 17:27 - bought with money from a <b>foreigner</b> , were circumcised with him. Lk. 17:18 - was no one found to return and give praise to God except this <b>foreigner</b> ?
proto-genes (2) proto (first) and genes	LS - first born	Ex. 15:2 - ... consecrate to me all the <b>firstborn</b> . Whatever is the first to open the womb
sun-genes (35) sun (prefix indicating an association) and genes	BDAG - belonging to the same extended family or clan, related, akin to	Lev. 20:20 - ... if a man lies with his <b>uncle's wife</b> , he has uncovered Lk. 2:44 - ... but then they began to search for him among their <b>relatives</b> and acquaintances
meta-genes (1) meta (prefix meaning with or after) and genes	LS - born after	1 Esdras 8:1 <b>After these things</b> , when Artaxerxes the king of the Persians .... (RSV)
eu-genes (11) eu (prefix meaning praise) and genes	BDAG - pert. to being of high status, well-born, high-born LS - well-born, of noble race, of high descent,	4 Maccabees 6:5 But the courageous and <b>noble</b> man, as a true Eleazar, 1 Cor. 1:26 - not many were powerful, not many were <b>noble</b> (NKJV), of noble birth (ESV).
gegenes (5)	BDAG - earth born	Jer. 39:20 - and in Israel and among <i>other men</i> ; and You have made Yourself a name, as it is this day. Psalm 49:2 - Both <b>low</b> and high, Rich and poor together. See also Prov. 2:18, 9:18 and Wis. 7:1
agenes (1)	BDAG - not of noble birth, but also in the more general sense base, low, insignificant	1 Cor. 1:28 - and the <b>base things</b> of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen,
Hermogenes (1)	Thayer - i.e. born of Hermes;	2 Tim. 1:15 - those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and <b>Hermogenes</b> .

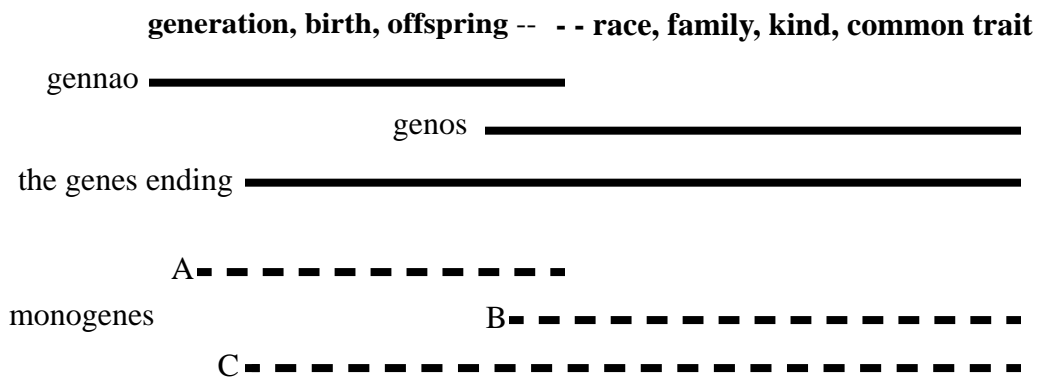
a. “(#)” indicates total number of uses in the LXX and NT.



These additional terms which use the *genes* ending demonstrate that the analysis of monogenes given in section VIII-C would lead one to conclude that the range of meaning of the genes ending is more restrictive than it actually is. Clearly in the case of *oikogenes* and *protogenes* the idea of being physically born is intended. In reference to *metagenes* it is clear that a reference to actual birth is not essential since in Es. 8:1 there is no reference to birth, thus the RSV translation of “after these things”. The same may be said in regard to *eugenes* since in some contexts a translation of noble is correct; i.e. the nobility does not need to be associated with a birth relationship (notice the varying translations of 1 Cor. 1:26). In relation to *allogenes* and *sungenes* the meanings of *genos*; race, family, kind, are clearly evident. These were discussed in section VIII-A and this discussion appears to apply in regard to these two terms. The specific meanings of *gegenes* appear quite varied as a reading of the five references will show. It would not seem wise that our arguments regarding how monogenes should be understood should be heavily dependent on our understanding of this term. *Agenes* appears to be the opposite of *eugenes*, meaning ignoble, but it need not mean of ignoble birth. I am not aware of any english translations that introduce the idea of birth into the translation of 1 Cor. 1:28.

## X. Conclusions

The following figure summarizes the range of meaning of the terms studied above based upon the usage examples considered. The title represents the range of meanings that have been discussed. The length of the lines represent the semantic range for each term. We are faced with what appears to be three possibilities regarding the semantic range of monogenes. These possibilities are represented with the dashed lines A, B and C.



Based upon the analysis presented above the following conclusions appear to be justified:

1. Possibility A is not defensible because monogenes is used in contexts which clearly have no reference to begetting or birth. If the semantic range of monogenes was restricted to line A it would never be used in such contexts. See section VIII-C and the references given in Section V.
2. When examining the KJV, NKJV, NASB, and Lightfoot English translations of monogenes in the 22 references given in Section V, a significant pattern should be noted. When monogenes refers to Christ the translation given is only begotten<sup>9</sup>, but in all other cases begotten is dropped from the translation<sup>10</sup>.

9. John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, 1 John 4:9, Dio. 10:2, Mpo. 20:2, Heb. 11:17 (the overtones of Heb. 11:17 are so heavy that Isaac represents the Son of the Father it can be easily seen why translators that have adopted the course that monogenes should be translated only begotten when referring to Christ, would do so here.)

10. Lk. 7:12, 8:42, 9:38, Jdg. 11:34, Ps. 22:20, Ps. 25:16, Ps. 35:17, Tob. 3:15, Tob. 6:11, Tob. 8:17, Wis. 7:22, Ps. Sol. 18:4, 1Cl. 25:2. The translations of the apocryphal texts which do not include the term begotten are from the RSV. However, in view of how the KJV, NKJV and NASB translators treat the Lukan texts, it appears they would follow the RSV as regards the apocryphal texts. See Luke 7:12, 8:42, 9:38 and compare to the apocryphal texts.

If we leave out the disputed texts we do not find any translations preferring an only begotten rendering of monogenes, which leads one to the conclusion that imposing it on John appears arbitrary. The point is, when we study the usage of monogenes *when not referring to Christ* we would conclude that B represents the semantic range of monogenes. Furthermore, there seems to be no evidence within the context of John's uses that *require* us to see the idea of begetting in monogenes. And, in the context of John 1, the evidence would point in the opposite direction, since John has been stating that the Son *had no beginning* and was forever with God. This line of reasoning leads one to conclude, *unless the usage examples of monogenes outside of John contain a strong case that monogenes is fundamentally associated with the idea of begetting, there is no reason to bring this idea into John's usage.* However, the usage data not referring to Christ points in the opposite direction. It does not contain evidence that the idea of begetting is central to the meaning of monogenes which is why the translation of all the non Christological references do not present the idea of begetting to an English reader. This leads to the conclusion that the inconsistency in English translations is not justified. The ESV, as an example, has removed this inconsistency.

One might offer the argument that the translations referring to Christ as only begotten are correct and all the others are in error; i.e. the idea of begetting should be introduced into all the references listed in footnote 10. However a reading of those texts clearly shows this approach is not defensible.

3. Option C should be considered. If the semantic range of monogenes is as broad as C represents, which is what our older English translations would lead us to believe, this would lessen the force of conclusion 2 since monogenes could be used *with or without* the idea of begetting and the variation in translation could be justified. However, the question should be asked, why does the variation appear only when the term is applied to Christ? This does not appear to be a genuine semantic variation, but one which is being traditionally or theologically imposed. Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, we may assume real variation exists. Here it is appropriate to discuss the group of terms reviewed in section IX that use the genes ending. It was concluded that this group of terms does cover the semantic range represented by C and that the genes ending can supply meanings on either end of the range. However, this does not mean that the ending *always* supplies a generation meaning to the term of which it is a part. It is clear that for some of the nine terms considered the ending does not supply a generation meaning (i.e. allogenes, sungenes, see section IX). We may then ask two questions; 1) does the genes ending *always* supply a begetting meaning to *monogenes*? We have already concluded that it cannot because monogenes is used in a number of contexts which have nothing to do with begetting, 2) does the genes ending *sometimes* supply such a meaning to monogenes?<sup>11</sup> The only way to answer this question is to consider actual uses of monogenes, and we are back to conclusion 2. If we leave out the references to Christ, we find no such begetting uses. If we insist that monogenes does carry the begetting meaning *only* when referring to Christ, this seems quite circular, especially when, based on the other monogenes uses, a non-begetting translation in John works fine without any strain introduced into the context (see conclusion 5). Again, the differences in translations, which include the idea of begetting when we come to the Johanine texts, seem arbitrary.
4. Even if we conclude that monogenes has the semantic range represented by C, we must be open to the possibility that John could have used monogenes as the modern translations render it, because the

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11. It should be understood that the "genes ending" line in the figure actually represents *the combined semantic range of all nine terms* discussed in section IX. I am not aware of any *single* term with the genes ending that has a usage that demonstrates the semantic range represented in the figure. If monogenes does, is it the only one? Conclusions 3 and 4 grant to the defenders of the only begotten translation every possible benefit of the doubt by either assuming or *imputing* to monogenes, the semantic range we have found used in nine other terms with a similar ending. The defense for C is not strong.

data presented establishes that *the “right side” of the semantic range for monogenes cannot be reasonably denied* (see section VIII-C). If C is correct then it is not an exercise in heresy to carefully examine how John has used the term; i.e. left side of C or right side of C?, keeping in mind that the right side of C will not go away. If those who have gone before us related the genes ending to *gennaō*, or just assumed that Jerome’s Latin translation was correct without examining the “right side” of the semantic range of monogenes, then they have not considered all the relevant data regarding how the Johanine texts should be translated and the issue should be re-opened.

The most that we (SGBC leadership) can concede, is that the semantic range may be C, though the strongest evidence for C appears to be the genes endings used on *other* terms (section XI), which is not a strong case for *insisting* John’s uses are to the “left side”, especially since we do not have any “left side” uses of monogenes outside of the supposed ones by John.<sup>12</sup> If such uses were presented it would increase the possibility that John could have used monogenes intending to communicate the idea of begetting, *but it still would not necessitate that he did, for he could have used the right side of the semantic range also*. If the range is C then Christians ought not, at least at this time given the data available to us, divide over this issue. The only option that would justify a dogmatism which necessitates division would be option A. But there appears to be no reasonable defense that option A represents the semantic range of monogenes.

5. If the semantic range of monogenes is C, then the question to be answered is, does John use monogenes with the meaning of the “right side” or the “left side” of the semantic range, or even including both? In such a case the translation of any given instance must be determined by its context. It is beyond this paper to do a detailed study of each of these contexts. But it seems proper that a consideration of John’s use of monogenes in the prologue to his gospel should carry the most weight. It is unlikely that his use in John 3 and 1 John 4 would be different from his use in John 1. What follows is not a detailed exegesis.

John began His gospel by telling his readers that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). No unbiased person, reading this combination of *very common words*, can fail to grasp the “beyond human conception truths” revealed by such a combination of *common words*. The “beyond human conception truths” are often not contained in single words, *but in the combination of the precise common words that God chose to use to speak to us*. In the beginning was the Word. The Word simply *existed* from the beginning. The Word simply was. And the Word was God. The Word simply existed, and existed as God. No unbiased reader would think that some how the Word John is describing needed to be *begotten or generated*, for John has already said, the word was. Simple words, easy to understand, but revealing truths we cannot fully comprehend. Two individuals distinct from each other; for the Word was *with* God. But two individuals having the essence of God, for the Word was God. I do not think when John wrote verses 14 and 18, which further describe the Word he has already introduced, he wanted us to realize that the Word of verse 1 was in some way generated or begotten. Would he not rather want to communicate what Luke communicated regarding the widow’s monogenes (Lk. 7:12, 8:42)? He was her *only* son. As regards the Word, He stands in a relation to the Father as a Son. No other person, or being, exists in this relation to the Father. He, He alone, is in the bosom of the Father. He is the Father’s Son, the Father’s *only* Son. I fear we may have complicated the simple words that God combined to reveal His incomprehensible nature. Even if the semantic range of monogenes is represented by C<sup>13</sup> the contex-

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12. There may be more examples of the use of monogenes in Greek literature beyond what has been summarized in Section V which could shed further light.

tual analysis still leads us to conclude that John is using monogenes in the sense that Luke and other authors have used it, to emphasize one and only, only one, unique.

In summary, an analysis of monogenes in the NT and the other Greek sources referred to above lead us to conclude in favor of the ESV translation approach which eliminates what appears to be the arbitrary differences in the translation of monogenes common in many earlier English versions. The ESV approach also eliminates the appearance of an unwarranted identification in meaning between the Johanine monogenes texts and the gennao texts of Psalm 2:7 and its NT derivatives. To a Greek audience these texts “sounded” different and they should also “sound” different to an English reader. They should sound different because their *meanings* are not near synonyms, much less identical.

To defend the earlier translations one must justify the variation in translation of monogenes or introduce the idea of begetting into the non Johanine texts, or find contextual arguments within John 1 for introducing the idea of begetting, i.e. the meaning represented by “left side” of C if C is valid. None of these alternatives appears defensible.

The impact on the Christian church of a terminology change in the translation of the Johanine texts discussed is not small as it affects the understanding of these significant texts, the language of numerous confessions and liturgies, some of our most cherished hymns, and raises questions regarding the doctrine of “the eternal *generation* of the Son” (see Appendix XI-D). Appendix XI-E summarizes how one’s Christology maybe affected based upon one’s understanding of five areas which could be impacted by a change in the translation/meaning of the texts considered in this paper. A careful consideration of this appendix will provide a summary of the impacts of the matters discussed.

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13. And this is by no means certain. But for sake of argument we are assuming it based upon a study of other terms which use the genes ending.

## **XI. Appendices**

### **XI-A. Abbreviations**

#### **Bible Versions:**

LXX - The Septuagint. A Greek translation of the Old Testament in use by Greek speaking Jews and authors of the New Testament. Many Old Testament quotes in the New and from the LXX. LXX (Roman numeral 50+10+10) represents the number 70 which Jewish tradition states was the number of individuals who produced the translation.

LXE - A Literal English translation of the LXX, by Brenton, 1844. Used here for an english translation of the Psalms of Solomon, 18:4.

RSV - Revised Standard Version

ESV - English Standard Version

#### **Apocryphal books referenced:**

Tob. - Tobit

Wis. - Wisdom

Pss. - Psalms of Solomon

#### **Apostolic Fathers referenced:**

APF. - Apostolic Fathers

1Cl. - First Clement

Dio. - Diognetus

Mpo. - Martyrdom of Polycarp

IEp. - Ignatius to the Ephesians

ITr. - Ignatius to the Trallians

IRo. - Ignatius to the Romans

#### **Lexicons**

LS - Liddle Scott

## XI-B. Non biblical texts which use monogenes

(Emphasis mine indicating English words used to translate monogenes)

**Tobit 3:15** and that I did not stain my name or the name of my father in the land of my captivity. I am my father's **only child**, and he has no child to be his heir, no near kinsman or kinsman's son for whom I should keep myself as wife. Already seven husbands of mine are dead. Why should I live? But if it be not pleasing to thee to take my life, command that respect be shown to me and pity be taken upon me, and that I hear reproach no more.” (RSV)

**Tobit 6:10** the angel said to the young man, “Brother, today we shall stay with Raguel. He is your relative, and he has an **only daughter** named Sarah. I will suggest that she be given to you in marriage, (RSV)

**Tobit 8:17** Blessed art thou, because thou hast had compassion on two **only children**. Show them mercy, O Lord; and bring their lives to fulfilment in health and happiness and mercy.” (RSV)

**Wisdom 7:22** for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me. For in her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, **unique**, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, (RSV)

**1 Clement 25:2** There is a bird, which is named the phoenix. This, being the **only one of its kind**, liveth for five hundred years; (Lightfoot)

**Diognetus 10:2** For God loved men for whose sake He made the world, to whom He subjected all things that are in the earth, to whom He gave reason and mind, whom alone He permitted to look up to heaven, whom he created after His own image, to whom he sent His **only begotten** Son, to whom He promised the kingdom which is in heaven. (Lightfoot)

**Martyrdom of Polycarp 20:2** Now unto Him that is able to bring us all by His grace and bounty unto His eternal kingdom, through His **only-begotten** Son Jesus Christ, be glory, honour, power, and greatness for ever. (Lightfoot)

**1 Esdras 8:1** After these things, when Artaxerxes the king of the Persians was reigning, Ezra came, the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum,

**Psalms of Solomon 18:3-5** <sup>3</sup> Your judgments over the whole world *are* with mercy, and your love is upon the descendants of Abraham, *upon* sons of Israel. <sup>4</sup> Your discipline for us *is* as for a firstborn son, **an only child**, to divert the docile soul from the stupidity *caused* by ignorance. <sup>5</sup> May God purify Israel for the day of mercy in blessing, for the appointed day when He raises up his Messiah.

**XI-C. The use of monogenes, gennao, unigenitum, and “only begotten” in the confessions**

**Notes**

The text of the “Apostles Creed” developed over approximately five centuries, variations in art. 2 shown

**Apostles Creed, article II, “and in Jesus Christ...**

... τον υιον του θεου” . . . . .	the Son of God . . . . .	Irenaeus, A.D. 200
... Filium ejus” . . . . .	Latin . . . . .	Tertullian, A.D. 220
... Filium” . . . . .	Latin . . . . .	Cyprian, A.D. 250
... Filium Dei” . . . . .	Latin . . . . .	Novatian, A.D. 260
... τον υιον αυτου τον μονογενη” . . . . .	His Son the monogenes . . . . .	Marcellus, A.D. 341
... unicum Filium ejus” . . . . .	Latin . . . . .	Rufinus, A.D. 390
... unicum Filium ejus <i>also</i> [unigenitum]” . . . . .	Latin . . . . .	Augustine, A.D. 400
... Filium ejus” . . . . .	Latin . . . . .	Nicetas, A.D. 450
... Filium ejus” . . . . .	Latin . . . . .	Eusebius Gallus, A.D. 550?
... Filium ejus unigenitum sempiternum” . . . . .	Latin . . . . .	Sacramentarium Gallicanum, 650,
... Filium ejus Unicum” . . . . .	His only Son. . . . .	Ultimate text of the western Creed, Pirminius, A.D. 750

**Nicene Creed (325 AD)**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, *begotten* from the Father, *the unique Son*, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, *begotten* not made, of one substance with the Father.

For the italicized words the Greek text has: γεννηθεντα, gennathenta, μονογενη, monogene, γεννηθεντα, gennathenta. I think this is James White’s translation.<sup>15</sup>

**Athanasian Creed (5th Century)<sup>14</sup>,**

For as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord, so are we forbidden by the Catholic religion to say “There are three Gods, or three Lords” *The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.*

I think(?) this creed was originally written in Latin. P. Schaff does not include a Greek version.<sup>16</sup> The Latin expressions for not begotten, and but begotten are: *nec genitus*, and *sed genitus*.

**Chalcedon Statement (451 AD)**

We then... teach men to confess.. our Lord Jesus Christ.. truly God and truly man... consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood, in all things like unto us, without sin; *begotten before all ages of the Father according to the God head*, and in these latter days... born of the virgin Mary.. according to the manhood.

Greek term used is, γεννηθεντα gennathenta.

In the WCF notice a slight strengthening of the idea of “eternal generation” in the change of the Chalcedon phrase “begotten before all ages” to “eternally begotten”. I’m assuming this was done because one could say the Son was “begotten before all ages” but still not eternal as the Father.

**Westminster Confession (1647) (WCF)**

WCF 2.3 (1647) In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.(1) The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father;(2) the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.(3)

14.Author unknown, given Athanasius’ name as it reflects his teaching.

15.Trinity pg. 185 and note 6, pg.210  
16.Creeds of Christendom, vol. 2

It appears the authors of the early creeds assumed that monogenes was compounded from gennaio or that the genes ending meant beget. Thus they needed to explain how the Father could beget the Son and such a begetting not deny the Son's equality with the Father, especially the Son's eternality. The "answer" was the doctrine that has come to be known as, "the eternal generation of the Son"<sup>17</sup> by the Father. The statements in the creeds of, "begotten not made" or "begotten not created" attempt to guard against an idea of the Son's begottenness which denies His deity. This matter has been exploited by the cults to deny the deity of Christ.

The creed authors who refer to the Son of God with the phrase "gennaio [begotten] not made", seem to assume that it is not an illegitimate stretch of the language to say that gennaio, when applied to the Son of God, should not be understood in its ordinary sense. Is it possible that John was well aware of these problems, and wanting to emphasize *eternal* sonship regarding the relationship between the Word and the Father, avoided using gennaio and actually avoided any immediate association with Psa. 2:7 which refers to the Son's messianic sonship, a non-eternity-past idea?

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17. See section XI-D for an overview of what is meant by "the eternal generation of the Son"



## XI-D. The Doctrine of the Eternal Generation of the Son

It seems to first find expression in the creeds in the words, “begotten before all ages”, obviously not referring to the incarnation and explaining one of the unique aspects of the relationship between Father and Son.

In reformed theology the doctrine is often taught, even recently by those who no longer believe the Johanne texts should be translated as “only begotten Son”. See Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology. This also seems to be (but I’m not certain) James White’s approach; to still support the language of the creeds and the idea of an “eternal generation”, though not appeal to the Johanne texts using monogenes for support.

Luis Berkof<sup>18</sup> summarizes what is meant by the “eternal generation of the Son”.

“The personal property of the Son is that He is eternally begotten of the Father (briefly called “filiation”).”

“The doctrine is suggested by... the relation of Father and Son to each other”.

He refers to all the Johanne texts referring to Christ as “the only begotten”.

He then makes statements to protect the deity of the Son from misconceptions of those who say, yes the Son is generated from the Father, and thus is not eternal. The qualifications of the “eternal begetting” are:

- 1.) “It is a necessary act of God” (contrary to Origen, who spoke of it as an act of the Father’s will).
- 2.) “It is an eternal act of the Father.” This he explains, “does not mean, however, that it is an act that was completed in the far distant past, but rather that it is a timeless act, the act of an eternal present, an act always continuing and yet ever completed.”
- 3) “It is a generation of the personal subsistence rather than of the divine essence of the Son” - one simply needs to read his explanation of this statement - he appears to be strenuously trying to guard against Arianism on the one hand and modalism on the other.
- 4) “It is a generation that must be conceived of as spiritual and divine.”

The proof of this doctrine is by inference from other accepted facts: 1) one God, 2) three persons 3) each person has the essence of God 4) The Son is in some sense (other than the incarnation) begotten of the Father. The definition created for “eternal generation” is constructed so as to not deny 1, 2 or 3 and attempt to do justice to 4. John 5:26 is sometimes set forth as a defense of the doctrine of eternal generation.

John 5:25-27 “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, “and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.”

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18. Systematic Theology, pg. 93

**XI-E. Views resulting from combining different understandings of five key areas**

KEY AREA	VIEW				
	Historic Creeds-1	Historic Creeds-2	Liberal/Cults/Islam	Conservative modern - 1	Conservative modern - 2
1) The meaning of monogenes	Derived from gen-nao, begat	Derived from Gen-nao, begat	Derived from Gen-nao, begat	Derived from genos, meaning kind	Derived from genos, meaning kind
2) Meaning of Psalm 2:7 and the texts derived from it. Acts 13:33, Heb 1:5, Heb. 5:5	Eternal generation of the Son.  (see Apx. XI-D)	Messianic Sonship, referring to the “raising up” of the Messiah - i.e. bringing the Messiah into the world, incarnation.	Messianic Sonship, referring to the “raising up” of the Messiah - i.e. bringing the Messiah into the world, incarnation.	Messianic Sonship, referring to the “raising up” of the Messiah - i.e. bringing the Messiah into the world, incarnation. (Because gen-nao is used in these texts.)	Messianic Sonship, referring to the “raising up” of the Messiah - i.e. bringing the Messiah into the world, incarnation. (Because gen-nao is used in these texts.)
3) Meaning of the Johanne Texts John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 18, 1 John 4:9	Eternal generation of the Son.  (see Apx. XI-D)	Eternal generation of the Son.  (see Apx. XI-D)	Genes refers to the incarnation or a purely human birth. The Son is clearly not equal with the Father. He was begotten.	Neither “eternal generation” or “incarnation”  The texts emphasize “God’s one and only Son”. Without reference to any form of generation. The Son is eternal in every way as the Father.	Neither “eternal generation” or “incarnation”  The texts emphasize “God’s one and only Son”. Without reference to any form of generation. The Son is eternal in every way as the Father.
4) How should we understand the use of the names Father and Son between these two persons of the Trinity?	Father eternally generates the Son  Relation of authority and love within Trinity.	Father eternally generates the Son  Relation of authority and love within Trinity.	The Son does not share the same essence of nature as the Father. The Son is not eternal as the Father.	Father eternally generates the Son (implied in the relationship itself, and John 5:26?)  Relation of authority and love within Trinity.	Relation of authority and love within Trinity.
5) Should creeds be changed? should Bible translations be changed?	No / No	No / No	Yes / No	No / Yes	Yes / Yes - the “begotten before all ages”, “eternally begotten” language should be removed.

## XI-F. Definitions of γένος (genos), γενναῶ (gennaō) and μονογενής (monogenēs)

(From the Bauer Danker Arnt Gingrich (BDAG) Lexicon)

*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*  
Third Edition, Copyright © 2000 by The University of Chicago Press

(With the literature references removed)

genoj, ouj, to, (Hom.+; loanw. in rabb.) a noun expressive of relationship of various degrees and kinds.

[Notice these are noun phrases]

1. **ancestral stock, descendant**
2. **a relatively small group with common ancestry, family, relatives**
3. **a relatively large people group, nation, people**
4. **entities united by common traits, class, kind**

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• gennaw fut. gennḥsw; 1 aor. egennḥsa; pf. gegennhka. Pass.: fut. pl. gennhqhsesqe Sir 41:9; 1 aor. egennhqhn; pf. gegennmai (Pind., Hdt.+).—See ARahlf, Genesis 1926, 39. [a verb,] gener[ally], to cause something to come into existence, primarily through procreation or parturition.

[Notice these are verb phrases]

1. **become the parent of, beget**
2. **to give birth to, bear**
3. **to cause something to happen, bring forth, produce, cause**, fig. of various kinds of production

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• monogenhj, ej (monoj, geno; Hes.; LXX; PsSol 18, 4; TestSol 20:2; TestBenj 9:2; ParJer 7:26; ApcEsdr 6:16; ApcSed 9:2; Joseph., Just.; loanw. in rabb.) acc. monogenh/ (-hh **J 3:16 v.l.**; **Hb 11:17 D**; also ApcEsdr 6:16)

1. **pert. to being the only one of its kind within a specific relationship, one and only, only**
2. **pert. to being the only one of its kind or class, unique (in kind)** of something that is the only example of its category.

## XI-G. Quotes from F.W. Danker regarding the language of the NT

Emphasis (bold print) in the quotes is mine.

“Many faults of contemporary NT lexicons were pointed out by Johann F. Fischer in his *Prolusiones de vitiis lexicorum Novi Testamenti* (Leipzig, 1791). Among these defects were neglect of the smaller words, whose frequent use makes them extremely difficult to analyze and classify, **and insufficient attention to the background of New Testament words in Hebrew, the LXX, and general Greek literature.**”

“The first dictionary to appear **after the epoch-making discoveries (especially of papyri) near the end of the nineteenth century** was Erwin Preuschen’s Greek-German lexicon of 1910. **Unfortunately, it failed to make much use of the newfound material, which was of little interest to some scholars because of its documentary banality compared to the purity of Plato’s tongue.** But Preuschen’s work did include for the first time the words of the Apostolic Fathers.”

“For the fourth edition, **Bauer undertook a systematic search in Greek literature down to Byzantine times for parallels to the language of the New Testament.** Hans von Campenhausen acknowledged the magnitude of this task, when he reviewed its first three fascicles (TLZ 75, 1950, 349): We are here dealing with a work “which, when considered as the performance of one man, strikes one as almost fabulous. Not only was there a gigantic amount of material to be mastered, involving the most minute acquaintance with the whole body of Christian literature, but this task required at the same time the gift of combining and relating facts, and of preserving an adequate scholarly alertness which is granted to but few people; one thinks of the difficulty of immediately recognizing parallels in the respective authors and making proper use of them. This art is all the more admirable because its achievements manifest themselves only in the apparently insignificant form of articles in a lexicon, which purposely are kept as brief and factual as possible. Most of the readers will normally not become aware of what has been accomplished.” F. Wilbur Gingrich echoed the accolade (NTS 9, 1962-63, 3-10).” Soli Deo Gloria, Frederick William Danker.

## **XI-H. Other Misc. Stuff**

When CS Lewis writes as Patrick quoted, it seems we are interpreting the greek language based upon the theology of our Creeds, especially in regard to gennethenta (pardon my Greek transliteration) by making this term to refer to “relationship” and not generation, or begetting. I realize most of the early creeds give such a definition of “begotten” - what else could they do if unigenitum was really the right translation of monogenes? Or, if they referred psalm 2:7 to the eternal Sonship of the Son, and not the incarnation.

Also, when John wrote monogenes I don't think he believe it was controversial, at least amongst Christians. He expected they would understand it. It became controversial because of difficulties in translations and heretics. Or that when he wrote the term, applied it to the Son that it was awaiting an explanation in the “eternal generation of the Son” doctrine.