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· *Themes and Contexts of Doctrinal Development since the First Century* ·

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The Doctrinal Development of the Eternal Generation of Christ

The doctrine of the "eternal generation" of Christ originated from the metaphysical blending of the meanings of the two New Testament words *begotten* and *monogenēs*. Standard lexicons concur that the word *begotten* (γεννηθέντα) derives from *gennao* (γεννάω) and primarily means "to be born or conceived." Christ was "conceived" (γεννηθὲν) of the Holy Spirit in Mary, "of whom was born [ἐγεννήθη] Jesus, who is called Christ" (Matt. 1:20, 16). Standard lexicons also agree that the word *monogenēs* (μονογενής) derives from two words: *monos* (μόνος), meaning "one" or "only," and *genos* (γένος), meaning "one of a kind" or "unique."[1] On the dubious assumption that the word *monogenēs* derived from *gennao* ("to beget"), fourth-century patristic writers depicted *monogenēs* as "only-begotten." But *monogenēs* consistently denotes "uniqueness," even in post-apostolic literature. Clement of Rome, in his first-century

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[1] Samples include James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*; Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; George Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*; Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*; and Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989). The word *genos* can refer to a people, a stock, a generation, or a family, such as Joseph's "kindred" (*genos*, Acts 7:13); see Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 194–95, 658. Even in such instances, *genos* retains the element of uniqueness.

Epistle to the Corinthians, describes the legendary phoenix as a one-of-its-kind (*monogenēs*) bird rising up out of her own ashes:

> ὄρνεον γάρ ἐστιν ὃ προσονομάζεται φοίνιξ.
>
> "There is a bird which is called the phoenix."
>
> τοῦτο μονογενὲς ὑπάρχον ζῇ ἔτη πεντακόσια.
>
> "It is the only one of its kind [*monogenēs*] and lives five hundred years."[2]

The phoenix story is a legitimate example of uniqueness. The uniqueness of the bird is her self-existence. She is the only bird inhabiting the eternal forest and she resurrects herself after a self-inflicted death. Each time she prepares to die, she must enter another world where death reigns. After her death and resurrection, she returns once again to the blissful forest where the trees always produce fruit. The fable states, "She is an offspring to herself, her own father and heir, her own nurse, and always a foster-child to herself. She is herself indeed, but not the same since she is herself, and not herself, having gained eternal life by the blessing of death."[3] The point of the story that illustrates Christ is the bird's unique self-existence.

An essential attribute of deity is self-existence. Christ's deity inherently includes the perfection of *autotheos* (αὐτόθεος), meaning "God in Himself." The same is true of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is one divine essence in three distinct persons. "Oneness" and "distinctiveness" are fundamentally equal in importance. The ontological Trinity is not asymmetrical. Each distinct person is an *autotheos* element of the eternal Trinity. Three distinct

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[2] Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians* 25, in Migne *PG* 1.261-65. Unless otherwise noted, patristic citations and references are from ANF, NPNF 1, or NPNF 2.

[3] The phoenix story was popular in the earliest periods of church history. There are many versions, as seen, for example, in Herodotus (*History* 2.73), Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 10.2), and Pomponius Mela, *De Situ Orbis* 3.8, the latter two being closest to the version used by Clement of Rome. Among other Christian writers, Tertullian rightly uses it to illustrate the resurrection (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 13), while Origen correctly scorns anyone who would take the story literally (*Against Celsus* 4.98). A full version that comes close to Clement's is in ANF (7:324–26). A few details differ, such as the number of years for each life-cycle. The fable is at times mistakenly attributed to Lactantius of Nicomedia. It could have originated in Arabia or quite possibly India and was no doubt one of many such tales made popular by Oriental travelers on the ancient trade routes. It is short and entertaining.

persons are substantially one God. They can be neither confused nor divided. This is established not upon fable, but upon Scripture alone, as emphasized by the sixteenth-century Reformers.

"From the moment it is seen, that from eternity there were three persons in one God," from that moment, says John Calvin, "this idea of continual generation becomes an absurd fiction."[4] In like manner, Benjamin B. Warfield argues that the Bible has nothing whatsoever to say about "begetting" as an eternal *act*. It speaks simply of the *fact* of the unique and eternal Son of God.[5] Warfield argues against using either the term *eternal generation* or the term *eternal procession*. To him, such terms risk the suggestion of an eternal subordination of the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is the contextual study of Scripture, not philosophical speculation, that must provide the foundational basis for biblical exegesis.[6]

George Bull (1634–1710) produced an ambitious *Defensio Fidei Nicaenae*[7] to defend the Niceno-Constantinopolitan doctrine of eternal generation, and it is drawn entirely from ante-Nicene statements, including extreme examples, to prove an eternal subordination of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The one thing that Bull does prove is that the teaching of eternal generation depends essentially upon eternal subordinationism. Bull's work has many helpful sections, but he repeatedly utilizes Bible proof texts that are applicable only to Christ's earthly humiliation, and he wrongly applies such texts to our Lord's present state. To his credit, Bull defends the deity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, but the author's inappropriate proof texts, both biblical and patristic, for eternal subordination, are often the same ones used and abused by modern Unitarians.

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[4] *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.13.29.

[5] Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1968), 58–59, and passim.

[6] D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 29–30. Carson discusses *monogenēs* and the book is filled with helpful cautions and examples.

[7] George Bull, *Defensio Fidei Nicaenae: A Defense of the Nicene Creed out of the Extant Writings of the Catholic Doctors who Flourished during the Three First Centuries of the Christian Church; in which also Is Incidentally Vindicated the Creed of Constantinople Concerning the Holy Ghost*, 2 vols. (1685; repr., Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1851–52).

Monogenēs occurs five times in Scripture in reference to Christ, and the apostle John penned them all: John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9. Many conservative scholars believe that in all five verses the word clearly depicts the idea of *one-and-only* and nothing more, as seen in a growing number of translations.[8] The ESV, for example, translates John 3:16, "he gave his *only* son," and the NIV (1984) has it, "he gave his *one and only* son." The NASB adds this marginal note: "Or, *unique*, only one of His kind." Such renderings avoid any blending of the words *begotten* and *monogenēs*. The doctrine of eternal generation does not derive explicitly, nor perhaps even implicitly, from Scripture. That does not mean *per se* that the concept is heretical. The 381 Council dogmatized it into orthodox doctrine. That does not mean *per se* that the concept is biblical. We will focus on its historical provenance and development and draw some additional conclusions.

Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

The 150 who assembled in Constantinople's Church of Saint Irene in the early summer of 381 brought to the table two conjectures that influenced their usage of *begotten* and *monogenēs*. One presumption was etymological, and the other was philosophical. The etymological presumption was that the last part of the word μονογενής (*monogenēs*) derived from γεννάω (*gennao*, "to beget"). Etymology is a weak basis for dogma. The philosophical presumption was that they could properly apply a metaphysical interpretation to *gennao* and *monogenēs*. The outcome of those two conjectures was the transfer of *begotten* from a literal-historical event into an eternal

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[8] The 1952 RSV and the 1989 NRSV surprisingly render *monogenēs* (μονογενῆ) as "only," which is consistent with the doctrine of Christ's virgin conception. See Dale Moody, "God's Only Son: The Translation of John 3:16 in the Revised Standard Version," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72, no. 4 (December 1953): 213–19. The RSV and the NRSV were published by the National Council of the Churches. For years conservatives have rightly criticized their liberal stance, illustrated for instance at Isa. 7:14, where their translators render the word *'almah* (עַלְמָה) as "young woman" and relegate "virgin" to a footnote. For more on the translation of *'almah*, see the valuable discussion by Allan A. MacRae, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:672.

concept. These church fathers believed vehemently in Christ's literal virgin birth. They were not "liberals." In fact, they were great men contributing immeasurably to the proper expression of our fundamental views on the Trinity. We have the advantage of hindsight and of those who have gone before us.[9] The Fathers were virtually inimitable in their extraordinary labors. It is with profound respect for these patristic writers, therefore, that we point out a couple of significant handicaps. Their classical education in the pagan schools made it only natural for them to approach the Scriptures with the standard hermeneutical methods used in every classical school of their day, specifically allegorical, analogical, and philosophical. Even the major Jewish scholars revered these methods. The church fathers employed a Platonic concept in order to answer an immediate heresy.

Platonic philosophy had combined and elevated the words *begotten* and *monogenēs* to a non-historical concept of an eternal generation of Christ. In terms of Platonic philosophy, *monogenēs* can sometimes include the idea of uniqueness, but it always reflects the idea of eternal generation as a higher truth than any literal-historical event. By definition, the concept of eternal generation highlights derivation and subordination. It obfuscates Christ's *self-existence*, which is an essential attribute of deity. It blurs His uniqueness. It is impossible even to express the concept of eternal generation without the use of terms indicative of eternal derivation and subordination. Theological dictionaries, with no explanation or caution, define *monogenēs* in such terms as the "eternal and changeless activity in the Godhead by which the Father *produces* the Son without division of essence and by which the *Second* Person of the Trinity is identified as an individual subsistence . . . of the divine essence."[10] Scripture speaks of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," but Scripture never depicts the persons of the Trinity in terms of "First," "Second," and "Third."

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[9] For a brief defense of the patristic view, see the article, "Eternal Generation," in John Henry Blunt, ed., *Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology* (London: Longmans, Green, 1891), 243-44.

[10] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 127. Italics are added to highlight terms of subordination often found in reference works. Muller's is still a good basic dictionary that I can recommend. Its subtitle qualifies its limitations.

Such terminology has potential for being misleading. In ordinary language, especially in a sports-oriented·society, anyone who is second or third is immediately considered inferior to first. Even in the family unit, such numerical ranking would be considered crude. To use an ancient term now in cinematic vocabulary, we might wonder how the *morphing* (μορφή) of eternal generation emerged in 381 inside Constantinople's opulent Church of Holy Peace. We will take a closer look.

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed begins this section by expressing the patristic belief "in one Lord Jesus Christ" (εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν). Then, as the church fathers proceeded to blend *begotten* with *monogenēs*, the "one-and-only" became the "only-begotten" (τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεννηθέντα). And by adding the phrase, "before all ages" (πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων),[11] they conceptualized *monogenēs* into an "eternal generation" elevated above the temporal realm. Over time, it became a normal assumption that the word *monogenēs* itself comes fully-packed with the whole idea of eternal generation. While this was the first conciliar creed to teach the eternal generation of Christ, the concept was really not a brainstorm of the framers of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. Beginning with Justin Martyr we can trace its roots. Beginning with Origen we can trace its development. We will bring it to Jerome who passed it on to the Nicene fathers who gave it creedal status. The journey will show how the terms *begotten* and *monogenēs* were gradually modified from the grammatical and historical into the conceptual and speculative.

Justin Martyr and Eternal Generation

Justin (ca. 100–167), the Greek apologist, sets a far-reaching precedent by interpreting Proverbs 8:22 in a way that depicts Christ, the Logos, as the created Creator. In a good English rendering of the verse, Wisdom, poetically personified, is exclaiming, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his·way, before his works of old" (KJV). Justin's error is rooted in the mistaken LXX translation of the

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[11] The Greek text is from *ACO* 2, 1, 2, 80 [276].

Hebrew word *qanah* (קָנָה) as ἔκτισε ("created" or "made"),[12] rather than the correct word ἐκτήσατο ("possessed"), as in the ancient text of Aquila. Even the Vulgate has it *possedit me*. Besides the KJV, other English translations, such as the ASV, NASB, and ESV, also render it "possessed." The idea of *created* finds no support from the context. The passage is a poetic declaration that wisdom is an eternal attribute of God, and as such it would never have been created.

By applying the Logos to the LXX rendering, Justin equates the "created" wisdom of Proverbs 8:22 with Christ, who was "begotten as a Beginning before all His creatures and as Offspring by God."[13] Justin adds that God the Father "created and arranged all things by Him."[14] The Arians as well, however, would later appeal to the LXX rendering to teach that Christ was the created Creator. Clearly attempting to connect Christianity with Middle Platonism, Justin tends at times to depict the Logos more as a cosmic concept than as a person of the Trinity. "*Next to God*," explains Justin, "we worship and love the Word (Λόγος) who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God."[15]

In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin twice uses the word *monogenēs* within a quotation from the LXX version of Psalm 22:20.[16] In the first occurrence, he makes no attempt to discuss the meaning of the word—only to preach the message of Christ's crucifixion to Trypho, an unconverted Jew.[17] In the other occurrence, Justin emphasizes the idea of uniqueness and postulates that the application of *monogenēs* is pre-incarnate, in the sense that Christ was the unique Son of God prior to His virgin birth and sacrificial death.[18] It would take many more years for the word *monogenēs* to be used in the sense of *only-*

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[12] The Targums are also mistaken in making the "wisdom" of this passage a creature.

[13] *Dialogue with Trypho* 61–62.

[14] *Second Apology* 6.

[15] Ibid., 13. Italics added.

[16] The chapter number in the LXX is Psalm 21 rather than our familiar 22.

[17] *Dialogue with Trypho* 98.

[18] *Dialogue with Trypho* 105: Μονογενὴς γὰρ ὅτι ἦν τῷ πατρὶ τῶν ὅλων οὗτος, ιδίως ἐξ αὐτοῦ Λόγος καὶ δύναμις γεγενημένος, καὶ ὕστερον ἄνθρωπος διὰ τῆς Παρθένου γενόμενος. A couple of accent marks and breathing marks are difficult to decipher in the worn manuscript, but not enough to compromise accuracy of the essential meaning in the translation process. *Justini Philosophi et*

begotten, but the historical development of the concept of eternal generation would continue unfolding.

Tatian of Assyria and Eternal Generation

As a young man, Tatian (ca. 110–72) had become enamored with Gnosticism and other philosophical schemes, but for a time he seemed to turn against all pagan philosophy. It was probably in Rome that he met Justin Martyr, who introduced him to Christianity and instructed him in the faith. Irenaeus reports that after Justin's death, Tatian apostatized from the faith, left the church, composed his own strange doctrines, including a system of Gnostic aeons, and cast off cardinal Christian doctrines. He established an ascetic group that required abstinence from marriage, wine, and meats.[19] Because of their inward power of self-control, the group's adherents were called Encratites (ἐνκρατής; from ἐν, "in" + κράτος, "strength"). Even while still professing to be a Christian apologist, Tatian wrote an *Address to the Greeks*, his only extant work,[20] in which he postulates that the souls of the wicked are dissolved at death, to be reunited with the body at the resurrection.[21] In the following discussion, Tatian offers his philosophical and candid concept of eternal generation.[22] "Begotten in the beginning," the Logos was brought "into being" by the Father in order to create the world:

> Him (the Logos) we know to be the beginning of the world. But He came into being by participation, not by abscission; for what is cut off is separated from the original substance, but that which comes by participation, making its choice of function, does not render him deficient from whom it is taken. For just as from one torch many fires are lighted, but the light of the first torch is not

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Martyris, Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo (Migne *PG* 6.720–21). In *PG* 6.707-08 Justin uses the word μονογενῆ.

[19] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.28; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.28–29; and Epiphanius, *Panarion* 46.

[20] Tatian compiled his *Diatesseron* in Syriac. This combined the four Gospels into a single consecutive narrative. The original was lost, and it survives in a late Arabic recension. Its value lies in its being yet another witness to the four canonical Gospels being preserved as one unit as early as the second century.

[21] Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 13.

[22] The text is quite legible in Tatianus Syriacus, *Oratio Adversus Graecos* 5 (Migne *PG* 6.813–18).

lessened by the kindling of many torches, so the Logos, coming forth from the Logos-power of the Father, has not divested of the Logos-power Him who begat Him. I myself, for instance, talk, and you hear; yet, certainly, I who converse do not become destitute of speech (λόγος) by the transmission of speech, but by the utterance of my voice I endeavor to reduce to order the unarranged matter in your minds. And as the Logos, begotten in the beginning, begat in turn our world, having first created for Himself the necessary matter. (*Address to the Greeks* 5)

Theophilus of Antioch and Eternal Generation

Little is known of the life of the apologist Theophilus (ca. 115–80). Eusebius describes him as an early bishop of Antioch in Syria. His only extant work is an apology written in answer to an antagonist named Autolycus. Many of his interpretations are so fanciful that they are of little or no theological value. Their value is in their historical significance. Using Proverbs 8:22ff. (like Justin) for his support, Theophilus sets forth his crude notion of an eternal generation of Christ:

God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, begat Him, emitting Him along with His own wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things. He is called "governing principle" [ἀρχὴ], because He rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him. (*To Autolycus* 2.10)

Irenaeus of Lyon and Eternal Generation

While correctly maintaining the eternality of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work in the creation of the universe, Irenaeus (fl. late 2nd c.) erroneously takes the word *bara'* in Genesis 1:1 for "son" (*bar*) rather than "created." Thus, he interprets the words *Bereshith bara* as "the Son in the beginning"[23] rather than "in the beginning created."

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[23] *Demonstration (Proof) of the Apostolic Preaching* 43: "Now that there was a Son of God, and that He existed not only before He appeared in the world, but also before the world was made, Moses, who was the first that prophesied, says in Hebrew: *Baresith bara Elowin basan benuam samenthares*. And this, translated into our language, is: 'The Son in the beginning: God established then the heaven and the earth.'" Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans.

He does lament that Gnostics were beginning "presumptuously" to transfer the theory of eternal emissions to the "only-begotten" Word of God. Paraphrasing from Isaiah 53:8, he asks, "Who shall describe His generation?" The Gnostics "pretend to set forth His generation from the Father." Those who "have excogitated [the theory of] emissions have not discovered anything great, or revealed any abstruse mystery, when they have simply transferred what all understand to the only-begotten Word of God."[24] The Gnostics had "transferred" (*transtulerunt*) the idea of "emissions" (*emissiones*) to the "only-begotten Word of God" (*unigenitum Dei Verbum*).[25]

In the midst of minuscule descriptions of Gnostic speculation concerning emissions (aeons) generating and proceeding from the Pleroma (Πλήρωμα), Irenaeus makes it clear that he believes that there is a *true* eternal generation of the Logos from the Father. He cautiously warns that since Christ's "generation is unspeakable, those who strive to set forth generations and productions cannot be in their right mind, inasmuch as they undertake to describe things which are indescribable."[26] He argues that the apostle John's purpose in writing his Gospel was to refute similar errors. Such was John's reason for beginning his Gospel with "In the beginning was the Word [Λόγος]. . . ." To Irenaeus, the doctrine of the eternal generation of Christ is one of the true and "unspeakable mysteries" of Christianity—"altogether indescribable."

Typically, the Fathers were quick to categorize the idea of eternal generation as a sort of hidden "mystery" of eternal derivation, subordination, or limitation as belonging to Christ. Even Irenaeus

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J. Armitage Robinson (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1920), 108.

[24] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.28.6; see text in *Contra Haeresis* (Migne *PG* 7.809).

[25] The Greek manuscript does not exist. The word *unigenitum* appears to be anachronistic, being from the fourth century, when parts of the manuscript were edited. The phrase "only Word of God" in typical Old Latin is *unicum Dei Verbum*. In John 3:16, God gave "His *monogenēs* Son," rendered in Old Latin as *Filium suum unicum*—"His only Son." When Jerome later translated it as *Filium suum unigenitum*—"His only-begotten Son"—he formally equated *monogenēs* with "only-begotten" and standardized the equation by embedding it into a major Bible translation, the Vulgate.

[26] *Against Heresies* 2.28.5–6; cf. 3.11.1.

instantly focuses the reader on the words of Christ, "that the Father alone knows the very day and hour of judgment." This raises a question that apparently Irenaeus did not wish to answer. He withholds even the modest explanation that Jesus' statement refers only to His own voluntary and temporary setting aside of the knowledge of the "very day and hour" during the time of His earthly humiliation. Irenaeus simply describes "eternal generation" as a mystery as inexplicable as the origin of sin.

Origen of Alexandria and Eternal Generation

It was Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185–254), in *De Principiis*, who firmly established the idea of eternal generation as a Christian doctrine.[27] There is no extant Greek for some sections of the work, but in the fourth-century Latin translation, Origen contends that Christ was "born of the Father before all creation" (*Ante omnem creaturum natus ex Patre est*). Origen made two serious mistakes that became the basis for his own notion of eternal generation, and they quickly become apparent: (1) he interprets the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8:22–25 as the person of Christ; (2) he injects into the Proverbs passage Paul's description of Christ as the "firstborn (πρωτότοκος) of all creation." Origen does not deny Christ's deity or distinct personality, but the eternal subordination of Christ becomes inevitable, especially when Origen interweaves faulty reasoning into a faulty exegesis of Scripture:

> In the first place, we must note that the nature of that deity which is in Christ in respect of His being the only-begotten Son of God is one thing, and that human nature which He assumed in these last times for the purposes of the dispensation (of grace) is another. And therefore we have first to ascertain what the only-begotten Son of God is, seeing He is called by many different names, according to the circumstances and views of individuals. For He is termed Wisdom, according to the expression of Solomon: "The Lord created me—the beginning of His ways, and among His works, before He made any other thing; He founded

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[27] Origen, *De Principiis*, preface, section 4; see also Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877), 2:23.

me before the ages. In the beginning, before He formed the earth, before He brought forth the fountains of waters, before the mountains were made strong, before all the hills, He brought me forth" [Prov. 8:22–25]. He is also styled First-born, as the apostle has declared: "who is the first-born of every creature" [Col. 1:15]. The first-born, however, is not by nature a different person from the Wisdom, but one and the same. Finally, the Apostle Paul says that "Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God" [1 Cor. 1:24]. (*De Principiis* 1.2.1)[28]

Although never denying Christ's eternal sonship, Origen's Christology is false, and, by biblical and post-Nicene standards, it is heretical. Origen was using the LXX version of Proverbs 8:22–25, but here is a better rendering, from the ESV, of God's wisdom speaking forth:

> (22) The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. (23) Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. (24) When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. (25) Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth.

Utilizing an inflammatory term, Origen repeatedly calls Christ the "demiurge" (δηνιουργός), which the Gnostics had applied to the Old Testament Jehovah (or Logos) as creator of evil (matter). Philo had earlier used *demiurge* in a somewhat neutral way simply to indicate *creator*, or fashioner of the world. It was Plato who had first used the term, however, and he applied it figuratively to an *idea*, or ultimate good.

Origen's explanation of the eternal generation of the Son constitutes a connecting link with Plotinus, the founder of Neo-Platonism and this is the first clear instance of pagan Logos philosophy affecting the Christian theology of God's transcendence. Origen's philosophy of the Son's procession from the Father is strikingly similar to Plotinus's philosophy of Mind proceeding from the One. Such

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[28] See also Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* (Homily 9), in vol. 97 of *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. John Clark Smith (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 92–93 (Jer. 11:1–11). The volume also includes Origen's *Homily on 1 Kings 28*.

parallels are especially significant when we recall that Origen and Plotinus both studied under the same teacher, Ammonius Saccas, and they were well aware of each other. In Neo-Platonism, the highest concept imaginable is *the* One, and the One is essentially "True Being" (ὀυσία). True Being is eternal, incomprehensible, and unknowable—the One who is larger than Reason and higher than Goodness. The One does not condescend to create. The universe originated with Mind or Reason (Logos), which proceeded from the One as a necessary emanation.

While insisting that Christ is the eternal, divine, and sinless Creator, it is in the clearest Neo-Platonic language that Origen concludes that Christ remains perpetually inferior to the Father who eternally "created" Him. He never hesitates to use the term *created* for Christ. He explains, "Let no one imagine that we mean anything impersonal when we call Him the wisdom of God." The Son of God is "wisdom hypostatically existing." [29] Origen builds on that clarification: "The Father is the beginning of the Son; and the demiurge the beginning of the works of the demiurge, and that God in a word is the beginning of all that exists."[30] As the created demiurge, Christ became the *arche* (ἀρχή), that is, the first principle of all else that followed:

> For Christ is, in a manner, the demiurge, to whom the Father says, "Let there be light," and, "Let there be a firmament." But Christ is demiurge as a beginning (arche), inasmuch as He is wisdom. It is in virtue of His being wisdom that He is called arche. For Wisdom says in Solomon: "God created me the beginning of His ways, for His works," so that the Word might be in an arche, namely, in wisdom. [It is] Christ we have taken to be the demiurge, and the Father the greater than He.[31]

To Origen, Christ's generation makes Him an eternally derived deity: "Wherefore we have always held that God is the Father of His only-begotten Son, who was born indeed of Him, and derives from Him what He is, but without any beginning."[32] Christ's own existence continues to depend constantly upon the will of His Father.

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[29] *De Principiis* 1.2.2.
[30] *Commentary on John* book 1, section 17.
[31] *Commentary on John* book 1, sections 22 and 40.
[32] *De Principiis* 1.2.2.

When Origen speaks of eternal generation, his language is conceptual rather than historical. He describes it as an act. This act of begetting is only in the mind and will of God the Father. Origen supposes that since everything is eternally in God, the generating (begetting) act *must* be eternal. The Son proceeds from the Father indivisibly, just as *will* proceeds from reason and *acts* proceed from will:

> For if the Son do, in like manner, all those things which the Father doth, then, in virtue of the Son doing all things like the Father, is the image of the Father formed in the Son, who is born of Him, like an act of His will proceeding from the mind. And I am therefore of opinion that the will of the Father ought alone to be sufficient for the existence of that which He wishes to exist. For in the exercise of His will He employs no other way than that which is made known by the counsel of His will. And thus also the existence [*subsistentia*] of the Son is generated by Him. For this point must above all others be maintained by those who allow nothing to be unbegotten, i.e., unborn, save God the Father only. . . . As an act of the will proceeds from the understanding, and neither cuts off any part nor is separated or divided from it, so after some such fashion is the Father to be supposed as having begotten the Son, His own image; namely, so that, as He is Himself invisible by nature, He also begat an image that was invisible. For the Son is the Word, therefore, we are not to understand that anything in Him is cognizable by the senses. He is wisdom, and in wisdom there can be no suspicion of anything corporeal. He is the true light, which enlightens every man that cometh into this world; but He has nothing in common with the light of this sun. Our Savior, therefore, is the image of the invisible God, inasmuch as compared with the Father Himself He is the truth: and as compared with us, to whom He reveals the Father, He is the image by which we come to the knowledge of the Father, whom no one knows save the Son, and he to whom the Son is pleased to reveal Him. (*De Principiis* 1.2.6)

By sheer speculation, Origen states that *the Son was created as inferior to the Father who, through the Son, created the Holy Spirit as inferior both to the Father and the Son*, but of the highest order among the rest of creation:

> We consider, therefore, that there are three hypostaseis, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and at the same time we believe

nothing to be uncreated but the Father. We therefore, as the more pious and the truer course, admit that all things were made by the Logos, and that the Holy Spirit is the most excellent and the first in order of all that was made by the Father through Christ. And this, perhaps, is the reason why the Spirit is not said to be God's own Son. The Only-begotten only is by nature and from the beginning a Son, and the Holy Spirit seems to have need of the Son, to minister to Him His essence, so as to enable Him not only to exist, but to be wise and reasonable and just, and all that we must think of Him as being.[33]

Confessing both the eternality and deity of Christ, Origen continues without qualification to speak of Christ as inferior to the Father. His extreme subordinationism is seen in these remarks: "The Son of God, divesting Himself of His equality with the Father, and showing to us the way to the knowledge of Him, is made the express image of His person."[34] To Origen, "If this be fully understood, it clearly shows that the existence of the Son is derived from the Father but not in time, nor from any other beginning, except, as we have said, from God Himself."[35] Origen applies Christ's words in John 14:28 to the *present* state of Christ and seeks to convince even Celsus that the Father *remains* the greater: "Grant that there may be some individuals among the multitudes of believers who are not in entire agreement with us, and who incautiously assert that the Savior is the Most High God; however, we do not hold with them, but rather believe Him when He says, 'The Father who sent Me is greater than I.'"[36]

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[33] *Commentary on John* book 2, section 6, in Origen's words: Ἡμεῖς μέντοι γε τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις πειθόμενοι τυγχάνειν, τὸν Πατέρα, καὶ τὸν Υἱὸν, καὶ τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, καὶ ἀγέννητον μηδὲν ἕτερον τοῦ Πατρὸς εἶναι πιστεύοντες, ὡς εὐσεβέστερον καὶ ἀληθὲς, προσιέμεθα τὸ, πάντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου γενομένων, τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα πάντων εἶναι τιμιώτερον, καὶ τάξει πάντων τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς διὰ Χριστοῦ γεγενημένων. Origenis, *Commentaria in Euangelium Joannis* (Migne *PG* 14.128–29).

[34] *De Principiis* 1.2.8.

[35] Ibid., 1.2.11.

[36] *Contra Celsum* 8.14.

Gregory Thaumaturgus and Eternal Generation

Gregory Thaumaturgus, bishop of Neocaesarea[37] in Pontus (ca. 240–70; b. ca. 213), was hailed as "Wonderworker" for his purported miraculous powers. For five years, Gregory attended Origen's lectures in Caesarea of Palestine and became so mesmerized by his teacher that, upon leaving the school, he delivered an *Oration and Panegyric Addressed to Origen* expressing his profound appreciation and commitment to his philosophical training and, above all, to Origen, his beloved teacher. Gregory expresses it this way: "One thing only was dear and affected by me: philosophy and its teacher—this divine man" (6).[38] Gregory said that his departure from Origen's school made him feel as a "second Adam," departing from the "Garden of Eden" (16). Upon his return to Neocaesarea, Gregory received his ordination as bishop and brought many lost people into Christendom during his lifetime. One who was impacted, at least indirectly, by his ministry was the matron Macrina, who would become a powerful spiritual influence on her grandchildren, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Peter of Sebaste, and their sister, who was also called Macrina. Ancient tradition has it that when Gregory came to Neocaesarea to begin his ministry, he found only seventeen Christians, and when he came to die, there were found only seventeen pagans.

According to a less reliable but more popular legend, near the end of Gregory's life (ca. 270), the Virgin Mary brought the apostle John to him in a dream in which John dictated to Gregory a Trinitarian creed. Whatever the source of its inspiration, the creed that Gregory wrote is one of the most complete overall ante-Nicene expressions of the Trinity and the earliest creed to use the term *monogenēs* in its conceptual rather than historical meaning. In Origenistic style, the creed affirms that the Father originated His Son. Precisely, the Father is τέλειος τελείου γεννήτωρ, πατὴρ υἱοῦ μονογενοῦς (*monogenēs*), which Philip Schaff translates as "the perfect origin (begetter) of the perfect (begotten): the Father of the only-begotten Son."[39] Basil of

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[37] Neocaesarea in Pontus corresponds to the present-day Niksar area in Turkey.

[38] The translation is from W. Metcalfe, *Gregory Thaumaturgus Address to Origen* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 60.

[39] *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:24.

Caesarea would later describe Gregory Thaumaturgus as a "second Moses" and liken him to prophets and apostles.[40]

Eusebius of Caesarea and Eternal Generation

The following is from the creed that Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–340) placed before Constantine in Nicea in 325. It echoes Gregory's usage of *monogenēs*. The council rejected the creed, but only because the term ὁμοούσιον ("consubstantial") is missing: "We believe in . . . One Lord Jesus Christ . . . υἱὸν μονογενῆ, . . . πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ πατρὸς γεγννημένον," that is, "the only-begotten Son . . . begotten of God the Father before all ages." Schaff translates υἱὸν μονογενῆ as "the only-begotten Son,"[41] which is likely what Eusebius intended to convey.

Hilary of Poitiers and Eternal Generation

Situated on the Clain River in west central France, Poitiers was home to one who in his day was known as the "Hammer" against the Arians. Hilary (d. 367) wrote in Latin but knew a little Greek as well. Now regarded by eastern and western Christendom as an orthodox father, saint, and doctor of the church, Hilary went to great lengths in his work *On the Trinity* to defend the doctrine of the Father's eternal generation of His Son. Realizing that he must explain it in terms of an eternal subordination, he repeatedly presses his conviction that Christ "does not share in the supreme majesty of being unbegotten" since He has "received from the Unbegotten God the nature of divinity." The real importance of Christ's unique and historic birth continued to be elevated from the literal realm to the conceptual. Regarding Christmas, "We believe His birth," says Hilary, "though we know it never had a beginning."[42] While frequently and strongly exalting Christ's deity, Hilary often works from an exegetical method not unlike that of Origen. While subordinating Christ as deriving deity in eternity past, Hilary elevates man as destined to derive deity

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[40] Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* 29.74.

[41] *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:30.

[42] *On the Trinity* 9.57; Hilary's heaviest concentration on eternal subordination seems to be in 12.5–50.

in eternity future. Emphatically he states that God became man so that man may become God:

> When God was born to be man the purpose was not that the Godhead should be lost, but that, the Godhead remaining, man should be born to be God. Thus Emmanuel is His name, which is God with us, that God might not be lowered to the level of man, but man raised to that of God.[43]

Cyril of Jerusalem and Eternal Generation

Like Eusebius's creed, that of Cyril (315–86; creed, ca. 350) includes *monogenēs*, but excludes ὁμοούσιον ("consubstantial"), a term that was needed for widespread orthodox acceptance at that time: "We believe in . . . One Lord Jesus Christ, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ πατρός γεννηθέντα, πρὸ πάντων αἰώνων," that is, "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages."[44] Again, Schaff renders τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ as Cyril likely[45] intended: "the only-begotten Son" (2:31).

Gregory of Nazianzus and Eternal Generation

In the works of Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 326–90), we discover an unusually natural and generous use of the term *monogenēs* in its new conceptual application: "He is called Only-Begotten,[46] not

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[43] Ibid., 10.7.

[44] There is a similar and interesting creed of unknown authorship, originating ca. 300 and sometimes attributed to Lucian, "the Martyr," of Antioch (d. 312). It clearly expresses an eternal generation of the Son of God: "We believe in . . . One Lord Jesus Christ . . . τὸν μονογενῆ Θεόν . . . τὸν γεννηθέντα πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐκ τοῦ πατρός," i.e., "the only-begotten God . . . who was begotten of the Father before all ages." Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom* also translates τὸν μονογενῆ Θεόν as "the only-begotten God" (2:26), which is the concept that the author or redactors probably intended. Schaff attributes this creed to Lucian, but that seems doubtful considering (1) that Epiphanius, in his *Panarion* (section on the Arians), refers to Lucian as an "Arian martyr" and (2) that the creed appears replete with interpolation in places. It is, of course, possible that Lucian wrote it prior to his becoming Arian in his doctrine. The creed was found after his death.

[45] This application of *monogenēs* is clearly evident, for example, in Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 11 and 12.

[46] Arthur James Mason, ed., *The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), 162. The book includes the complete Greek text.

because He is the only Son and of the Father alone, and only a Son; but also because the manner of His Sonship is peculiar to Himself and not shared by bodies."[47] Gregory attempts to explain this in terms that can best preserve the doctrine of Christ's consubstantiality with the Father:

> The Father is Father, and is Unoriginate, for He is of no one; the Son is Son, and is not unoriginate, for He is of the Father. But if you take the word Origin in a temporal sense, He too is Unoriginate, for He is the Maker of Time, and is not subject to Time. The Holy Ghost is truly Spirit, coming forth from the Father indeed, but not after the manner of the Son, for it is not by Generation but by Procession (since I must coin a word for the sake of clearness; for neither did the Father cease to be Unbegotten because of His begetting something, nor the Son to be begotten because He is of the Unbegotten (how could that be?), nor is the Spirit changed into Father or Son because He proceeds, or because He is God— though the ungodly do not believe it. For Personality is unchangeable; else how could Personality remain, if it were changeable, and could be removed from one to another? But they who make "Unbegotten" and "Begotten" natures of equivocal gods would perhaps make Adam and Seth differ in nature, since the former was not born of flesh (for he was created), but the latter was born of Adam and Eve. There is then One God in Three, and these Three are One, as we have said. (*Oration on Holy Lights* 39.12)

Jerome, the Latin Vulgate, and Eternal Generation

Sophronius Eusebius Hieronymus, better known as Jerome (ca. 347–420), would be named in 1298 as one of the four original *Doctores Ecclesiae* of the western Church.[48] He was born to wealthy parents in Stridon. While Stridon was overrun and destroyed by Goths even during Jerome's lifetime,[49] its location was somewhere

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[47] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 30, *Fourth Theological Oration: the Second Concerning the Son* 20; to compare this with the thought of Athanasius, see Panachiotis Christou, "Uncreated and Created, Unbegotten and Begotten in the Theology of Athanasius of Alexandria," *Augustinianum* 13 (1973): 399–409.

[48] The other three were Ambrose, Augustine, and Pope Gregory I.

[49] Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 135.

near Ljubljana, the capital of modern Slovenia. Receiving a classical education in Rome, Jerome identified with Christianity and eventually received baptism. Of the ensuing years we have little more than sketches of his life. He traveled widely, acquired an enduring love for the ascetic life, and began studying Greek. As a newly ordained man in his early or mid-thirties, Jerome traveled to Constantinople to study under the private instruction of Gregory of Nazianzus, whose primary exegetical method was deeply Origenistic. Through Gregory's influence, Jerome immersed himself in the teachings of Origen and totally embraced the Alexandrian's doctrine of eternal generation.[50] He became so enamored with the whole corpus of Origenistic literature that he set out to Latinize Origen by translating scores of his homilies. It was during his time with Gregory of Nazianzus that the Council of Constantinople (381) took place.

Following the Council, Jerome traveled directly to Rome in 382 where, at the request of Bishop Damasus, he undertook a revision of the text of the Old Latin copies of the Scriptures. The expression "Old Latin (*Vetus Latina*) Bible" is an umbrella term referring to the numerous pre-Vulgate translations of the Bible or sections of it. Within a year, Jerome had completed his revision of the four Gospels and had started on the Psalms. Damasus died in 384, and the following year Jerome traveled to the Holy Land to acquire more knowledge of Israel's geography, culture, and Hebrew language. Among the Jewish scholars who provided assistance, there was at least one who was a convert to Christianity. Jerome would live the remainder of his life writing his works in a monastic cell near Bethlehem. Usually surrounded by a select group of well-educated male and female friends,[51] he finally (ca. 404) completed the massive revision of the entire Latin Bible. Known as the Latin Vulgate, from its descriptive phrase *versio vulgata* (commonly used version), this was the only Latin version that the Roman Catholic Church would consider authentic. The Vulgate became its official Bible and the most

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[50] See the valuable study by Alexander Souter, *The Earliest Latin Commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul: A Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 96–137.

[51] Jerome's friend Paula, who ran a nearby nunnery, and her daughter, Eustochium, assisted him in writing his commentaries on Paul's epistles to Philemon, Galatians, Ephesians, and Titus.

commonly used version of the scholastics. The first of its three major editions would appear in the late sixteenth century.[52]

The Old Latin (*Vetus Latina*) remains important, however, especially for comparative studies in textual scholarship. Although there has never been an actual *Vetus Latina* Bible, one is now in preparation[53] since numerous manuscript collections bear witness to a massive number of Old Latin translations that precede Jerome's Vulgate. In the Old Latin, the original meaning of *monogenēs* was *unicus* ("one" or "only").[54] For the word *begotten*, the Old Latin sometimes uses *natus* but usually *genuit* ("to be born" or "begotten"). In all five Johannine Christological passages containing *monogenēs*,[55] Jerome opted to use the word *unigenitus* ("only-begotten"), a blend of *unicus* and *genuit*, thereby introducing the concept of *only-begotten* into the corpus of Scripture. *One-and-only* became *only-begotten*, which was conceptualized into an *eternal generation*. As we have seen, the Greek words translated "begotten" (γεννηθέντα) and "only" (*monogenēs*, μονογενής) received identical morphing, and this would influence later Bible translations. Indeed, the same translational influence of Jerome's Latin Vulgate would pass virtually unnoticed into modern English translations.

Jerome, having recently become infatuated with Origenistic philosophy, had traveled directly from Constantinople to Rome with

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[52] The three major editions of the Vulgate: (1) The Clementine Vulgate, first published in the 1590s, is often preferred by conservative Catholics who lived prior to the liturgical reforms of Vatican II (1962–65). (2) The Stuttgart edition was first published in 1969. (3) The *Nova Vulgata*, published in 1979 and 1986, is now the usual edition published by the Roman See. The popular *Novum Testamentum Latine*, published in 1984 and 1992, is actually the *Nova Vulgata*, but with critical apparatus containing variant readings from the major earlier editions.

[53] The Vetus Latina Institute, founded in Beuron, Germany, in 1945, is still preparing for the publication of a critical edition of the Old Latin Bible. The institute has the complete listing and description of all the manuscripts of this Bible. http://www.vetus-latina.de/en/index.html. http://www.itsee.bham.ac.uk/vetuslatina/index2.htm.

[54] E.g., cf. the Vetus Latin form of the Old Roman Creed, "Jesus Christ His 'only' [*unicum*] Son," with its later revision, "Jesus Christ His 'only-begotten' [*unigenitum*] Son," which in Greek quickly became, "Jesus Christ His 'only-begotten'" (*monogenēs*, μονογενής); see Schaff, 2:47.

[55] John 1:14, 18; John 3:16, 18; and 1 John 4:9. Jerome also changed Heb. 11:17.

incredible devotion to Damasus,[56] who commissioned him to revise the Old Latin versions. Jerome's first project was to revise the four Gospels, and this brings us directly into the magnificent cathedral of an ancient city situated in the Piedmont region of Northern Italy.

In the Cathedral of Vercelli is Codex Vercellensis,[57] one of the earliest and best-preserved Old Latin manuscripts of the four Gospels (codex a). It is calculated to have been written circa 365–70 by Bishop Eusebius of Vercelli (ca. 283–371). Codex Vercellensis provides for us one of the best opportunities for comparing typical Old Latin with Jerome's Vulgate:[58]

- Codex Vercellensis renders John 1:14 as *unici filii a Patre* ("only son of the Father"). Jerome's Vulgate has it *unigeniti a Patre* ("only-begotten of the Father").

- Codex Vercellensis renders John 1:18 as *unicus filius solus* ("one and only son"). The Vulgate has it *unigenitus Filius* ("only-begotten Son").

- Codex Vercellensis renders John 3:16 as *Filium suum unicum* ("His only Son"). The Vulgate has it *Filium suum unigenitum* ("His only-begotten Son").

- Codex Vercellensis renders John 3:18 as *unici Filii Dei* ("only Son of God"). The Vulgate has it *unigeniti Filii* ("only-begotten Son").

Other Old Latin manuscripts reveal that the same thing occurred in 1 John 4:9 and Hebrews 11:17. Is it possible that doctrinal bias rather than linguistic analysis might have prompted such changes? Jerome left the older Latin *unicus* ("only") as the rendering of *monogenēs* in Luke 7:12 (*filius unicus matri*), 8:42 (*filia unica*), and

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[56] E.g., see Jerome, *Letter* 15.1–5 (To Pope Damasus of Rome), in NPNF 2 (6:18–20) and Migne *PL* 22.355–58.

[57] This codex must not be confused with the Vercelli Book of Middle English homilies, also located in this cathedral.

[58] *Codex Vercellensis: Quatuor Evangelia Ante Hieronymum Latine Translata ex Reliquiis Codicis Vercellensis Saeculo ut Videtur Quarto Scripti et ex Editione Iriciana Principe*, denuo ededit, J. Belsheim (Christianiae: Libraria Mallingiana, 1894). The Gospels are listed in the order of Matthew, John, Luke, and Mark. There are a few lacunae, including Mark 16:1–6, but the work as a whole remains a rich source.

9:38 (*filium . . . unicus*), where no Christological issue is involved.[59] Jerome's changes would appear later in English versions. Translators had their Greek texts in hand, but they would have often consulted the Latin Vulgate as well. In all five Johannine Christological passages containing *monogenēs*, the "only-begotten" (*unigenitus*) passed from the Latin Vulgate into every English translation, with one exception, until the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to that time, William Tyndale was the only English translator to render *monogenēs* with the simple *only*, and this occurs in John 3:16 and 18. Tyndale was the first to translate the Bible directly from Greek and Hebrew. While he failed to amend the Latin Vulgate in John 1:14 and 18 and 1 John 4:9 (also Heb. 11:17), Tyndale's rendering of John 3:16–18 is typical of his delightful work. Here is the 1534 edition:

> 16 For God so loveth the worlde, that he hath geven his only
> sonne, that none that beleve in him, shuld perisshe: but shuld
> have everlastinge lyfe. 17 For God sent not his sonne into the

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[59] An excellent analytical tool for comparing Jerome's New Testament Latin with Old Latin manuscripts is this one, edited by John Wordsworth and Henry Julian White: *Nouum Testamentum Domini Nostri Iesu Christi Latine*, secundum editionem, Sancti Hieronymi, ad Codicum Manuscriptorum Fidem Recensuit, Iohannes Wordsworth, in Operis Societatem Adsumto, Henrico Iuliano White (Oxonii: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1889–1954), 1:507–24 for chapters 1 and 3 of *Evangelium Secundum Iohannem*; and 1:347–76 for chapters 7–9 of *Evangelium Secundum Lucam*. There are three volumes, with additional editors contributing to volumes 2 and 3. Contents of the three volumes are as follows: vol. 1: Gospels; vol. 2: Pauline Epistles; and vol. 3: Acts, Catholic Epistles, and Revelation. This recension is a valuable attempt at restoring Jerome's original New Testament by means of a careful collation of ancient manuscripts. At the bottom of each page is the critical apparatus. The Vulgate is printed in the upper part of each page, in double columns, and divided into sections and lines of varying length according to the arrangement found in Codex Amiatinus. Beautifully illuminated, Codex Amiatinus is the earliest surviving and probably the most accurate copy of Jerome's Vulgate. Below this, in the Gospels, is placed the Old Latin text of Codex Brixianus. The reader will notice that Codex Brixianus contains both *unicus* and *unigenitus* in the Johannine passages under discussion, and this is to be expected since the manuscript is a sixth-century edition, well past the Christological controversies. There are other Old Latin text collections that contain both *unicus* and *unigenitus*, but they too were edited after the ecumenical councils. Codex Corbeiensis, for example, uses both words, but it was produced between the eighth and tenth centuries. This later editing explains why *unigenitus* appears to replace *unicus* in a few Old Latin patristic texts, including a few places in Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* that were edited in the fourth century and later.

worlde, to condempne the worlde: but that the worlde through him, might be saved. 18 He that beleveth on him, shall not be condempned. But he that beleveth not, is condempned all redy, be cause he beleveth not in the name of the only sonne of God.[60]

The Twentieth Century New Testament[61] was the first English translation to amend the "only-begotten" (*unigenitus*) of all five Johannine occurrences of *monogenēs*. Released around the turn of the twentieth century, it was a work of some twenty translators using the Greek text of Westcott[62] and Hort,[63] both of whom had published their research on *monogenēs*. Meanwhile, Jerome's *unigenitus* had also passed into the Latin edition of the Westminster Confession, whose 1647 English edition renders it "only-begotten."[64] The Westminster Confession says, "The Father is none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; and the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son."[65] This passed

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[60] From David Beale, *A Pictorial History of Our English Bible* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1982), 16. This provides the *English Hexapla*, depicting the Greek text of John 3:16–18, underneath which, in parallel columns, are juxtaposed the translations from the Wyclif Bible (1380), the Tyndale Bible (1534); and the Cranmer Bible (1539). See also Philip Burton, *The Old Latin Gospels: A Study of Their Texts and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 62–73.

[61] As with other translations, this reference is not intended as an endorsement of *The Twentieth Century New Testament*, which was initially released in two parts, first in 1898 by Horace Marshall in London and then in 1901 by Fleming H. Revell in New York. The 1904 revised edition by Revell became its final.

[62] Westcott emphasizes that the meaning of *monogenēs* is "unique," or "one-and-only." In his discussion of *monogenēs* in 1 John 4:9, he explains: "The earliest Latin forms of the Creed uniformly represent the word by *unicus*, the *only son*, and not by *unigenitus* the *only-begotten son*. . . . But towards the close of the fourth century in translations from the Greek *unigenitus* came to be substituted for *unicus*, and this interpretation has passed into our version of the Constantinopolitan Creed (*only-begotten*)." Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 162–65; and 141; see also Westcott's commentary *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1896), 12, 54–55.

[63] Hort also emphasizes that the meaning of *monogenēs* is "unique," or "one-and-only." See Fenton John Anthony Hort, "On ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗΣ ΘΕΟΣ in Scripture and Tradition," in *Two Dissertations* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1876), 1–72; and by the same author, "On the 'Constantinopolitan' Creed and Other Eastern Creeds of the Fourth Century," in *Two Dissertations* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1876), 73–150.

[64] Westminster Confession, chapter 8 section 1.

[65] Ibid., chapter 2 section 3.

verbatim into the Particular Baptists' Second London Confession.[66] It all began when the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 became the first ecumenical conciliar creed to express the doctrine of eternal generation. All previous creeds that included it were private or local.

These are all remarkably wonderful documents that have defended the faith for centuries. One can understand how those great conciliar creeds developed, ever so slowly, phrase-by-phrase, controversy-by-controversy, over years of battle. Creeds are not inspired and never complete. At best they can only express man's humble attempt at striving scripturally to answer new diabolical assaults against Christ's church in every generation. Creeds are born to be progressively improved and expanded.

These things are reminders never to obfuscate the most vital dimension of the biblical account of Christ's birth. An excellent way to meditate on the incarnation of Christ is to view it as a concrete, once-for-all, historical *fact*: in the fullness of the time (Gal. 4:4), God sent forth His only Son—unique, eternal, and precious—to be conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, in a pivotal moment of time, to take human flesh, to live and to die vicariously, as the perfect and unique God-Man, in order to reconcile sinful man to Himself.

Application and Conclusion

Today many Christians often have as many occasions to speak with Muslims as with Unitarians. Muslims think that since there are many "sons" of God, Christ came into existence at His birth, just like all others. Properly prepared, the Christian must present the powerful message of the uniqueness of Christ as *the* Son of God. He is the one and only Son to whom the title belongs. Most Muslims do not know that Christ was divinely conceived by the Holy Spirit. Many Christians have discovered that it empowers their effectiveness when they use the word *only* (*monogenēs*) to convey the uniqueness

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[66] Second London Confession, chapter 8 section 1; and chapter 2 section 3.

of the consubstantiality of God's precious Son.[67] Believers also find that when they use the word *begotten* (γεννηθέντα) to convey the historical fact of the Son's miraculous conception, it transforms their efficiency. Indeed, many Muslims have been taught all of their lives that the Christians' God begot a son, and that Christians worship the Father, the Son, and His Mother.

Nineteenth-century liberals expressed dismay that conservatives would be willing to accept eternal generation, with its eternal derivation and subordination of Christ. Liberals had rejected the biblical Trinity because they were convinced that any consistent belief in that doctrine must include the belief that "Trinity" has more than a numerical significance, and that "Oneness" and "distinctiveness" must rank as fundamentally equal. They knew that the doctrine of the Trinity must include "self-existence" (*autotheos*, αὐτόθεος) as an essential attribute of deity and that each person of the Trinity must be *autotheos*, "God in Himself."[68]

Unfortunately, many have equated the term *eternal generation* with a separate and fundamental doctrine of Christianity, the *eternal sonship* of Christ. Christ's eternal sonship is *clearly* a Bible truth. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Isa.

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[67] See Francis Marion Warden, "Monogenes in the Johannine Literature" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1938). Warden concluded, "The evidence hitherto presented leads to the necessity of regarding μονογενής as expressing basically uniqueness of being, rather than any remarkableness of manner of coming into being, or yet uniqueness resulting from any manner of coming into being" (35–36). Here are the contents of his study: chap. 1, "The Historical Setting of the Johannine Literature" (1–17); chap. 2, "The Preparatory Development of Μονογενής" (18–36); chap. 3, "Related Terms Compared with Μονογενής" (37–52); chap. 4, "Μονογενής Θεός the Revealer of God" (53–81); and chap. 5, "Ὁ Μονογενής Υἱός the Redeemer of Man" (82–109); bibliography (110–17). The "related terms" covered in chap. 3 are Ἀγαπητός, Ἑαυτοῦ, Ἴδιος, Μόνος, Πρωτότοκος, and Υἱός.

[68] E.g., Moses Stuart, *Letters on the Eternal Generation of the Son of God, Addressed to the Rev. Samuel Miller* (Andover, MA: Flagg and Gould, 1822); and Frederic Schleiermacher, "On the Discrepancy between the Sabellian and Athanasian Method of Representing the Doctrine of a Trinity in the Godhead," trans. with notes and illustrations by Moses Stuart, in the *Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 5, no. 18 (April 1835): 265–353; and 6, no. 19 (July 1835): 1–116. The liberal Stuart was less radical than Schleiermacher, but he described Schleiermacher as a genuine Christian and eagerly introduced his work to conservatives.

9:6*a*). At His appointed time, "God sent forth His Son" (Gal. 4:4). J. Oliver Buswell agrees and cautions that, since the Bible is wonderfully clear in its doctrine of Christ's eternal sonship, one must always avoid the risk of confusing that with the similar-sounding "eternal generation."[69] In the biblical, historic, and miraculous incarnation, the eternal Son of God, acquired a human nature and human flesh. The notions of eternal derivation and eternal subordination are outside the bounds of Scripture.

In His incarnation, Jesus came from His mother's womb as the God-Man, in perfect humiliation, to suffer, to die, and to come forth from the grave for our sins. When Jesus says, "My father is greater than I" (John 14:28), He is referring to His earthly humiliation. "As a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8*b*). "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9–11).

Israel's ancient and clarion creed is as pertinent now as it was in the Old Testament: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). Christ refers to that creed in His high-priestly prayer (John 17:11), and Paul affirms for the Christian that "there is none other God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4). The New Testament presupposes the unity of the Godhead, and it makes the eternal deity, equality, and uniqueness of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to be distinctive and fundamental articles of the Christian faith. It is a mystery incomprehensible, but God reveals Himself in Scripture in a way that, by the Holy Spirit, we can fundamentally know what He is saying. This is why Scripture speaks in such clear terms as God's

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[69] J. Oliver Buswell, *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 1:106–12. On the other hand, Buswell believes that the term *eternal procession* is actually "a hindrance rather than a help"; see 1:119–20. Interestingly, the Westminster Confession says that "the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; and the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son" (Schaff, 3:608).

"only (*monogenēs*) son." This is clear and literal truth with no anomalies and no additions.

Gregory of Nyssa describes the theological cacophony that filled the city of Constantinople during the Council: "If you ask someone to give you change, he philosophizes about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; if you inquire about the price of a loaf, you are told by way of reply that the Father is greater and the Son inferior; if you ask 'Is my bath ready?' the attendant answers that the Son was made out of nothing."[70] The lessons from Gregory should be obvious to each of us as we handle the pure Word of God and, in the mystery of godliness, proclaim the incarnation of His Son (1 Tim. 3:16).

Some of the Fathers thought that they could find the concept of eternal generation in the words of Psalm 2:7, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." The apostle Paul, in his synagogue sermon at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:33), finds its fulfillment in Christ's resurrection.[71] The writer of Hebrews expands its application to the total sphere of Christ's unique preeminence (Heb. 1:5; 5:5).

Hebrews 11:17 says that Abraham was ready to "offer up his only (*monogenēs*) son." Abraham had an older son, Ishmael, but Isaac was Abraham's one-of-a-kind son. Israel's King David and the Messiah would descend through the line of promise in Isaac. God's promises to Israel will find their ultimate fulfillment when Christ rules the world for a thousand years upon the throne of His father David (2 Sam. 7:8–16; Rev. 20:1–7). In Genesis 22, verses 2, 12, and 16, Isaac is called Abraham's "only (*yachid*) son." In Psalm 22:20, the Septuagint translates *yachid* (יָחִיד) as *monogenēs* (μονογεῆ) where some English versions render it "darling." Indeed, God so loved the world that He gave His darling Son to atone for our sin.

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[70] Gregory of Nyssa, *Oration on the Deity of the Son and Holy Spirit* (Migne *PG* 46.557*b*); and Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), 35.

[71] Cf. Rom. 1:3–4.

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