

## What Does “Begotten” Really Mean? How Misunderstanding Words Can Lead to Unnecessary Division

Franco Famularo  
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The English word “begotten” is problematic for Unification teaching both within the Unification family and in efforts of Unificationists to reach out beyond Unification circles – especially, but not limited to, Christians. This article seeks a mediating position.

There are too many lessons from history that demonstrate how one letter, one word or one phrase led to divisive misunderstanding, and in some historical and exceptional cases, violent conflict.

For brevity, consider that the Christian church in the third and fourth century eventually split over the use of one letter.

Was Jesus “*homoousios*” (ὁμοούσιος) or “*homoiousios*” (ὁμοιούσιος)?

Without knowing Greek, it is easy to miss the nuances. However one of the main issues at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. was whether Jesus was of the same substance as God (*homoousios*) or of a similar substance (*homoiousios*). The letter “i” made all the difference.



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This led to the split between Arius, who believed Jesus was of a similar substance but not God himself and Athanasius and those who eventually aligned themselves with Emperor Constantine at the Council of Nicea and concluded that Jesus was of the same substance — God himself. In the view of Nicean Christianity, Jesus is God.

Later the question was whether the “Holy Spirit” proceeded from the Father only or from the “Father and the Son.” The “*Filioque*” crisis along with other issues eventually led to the split between what we now know as Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox Church based in Constantinople. The words “and the son” made all the difference.

“Unificationists” view resolving differences as one of the founder’s major objectives – indeed Reverend Sun Myung Moon is widely known for his efforts to bring harmony and cooperation among representatives of different religions, races and cultures – and among Unificationists of different persuasions!

The word “begotten” is used in some English translations of the Bible – especially the King James version of 1611. The most well-known verse is John 3:16. One also finds the word “begotten” in John 3:18, John 1:14, John 1:18, and 1 John 4:9.

The word “begotten” generally suggests the idea of originating or produced by someone else and, more importantly, a being begets someone or something like itself.

C.S. Lewis wrote about “begotten” in *Mere Christianity* as follows:

“We don’t use the words begetting or begotten much in modern English, but everyone still knows what they mean. To beget is to become the father of: to create is to make. And the difference is this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds. But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a wireless set – or he may make something more like himself than a wireless set: say, a statue.”

However, the Greek word used at the Council of Nicea is “*monogenes*” μονογενής (*monogenes* literally means “only” and “offspring” or “of the same kind”). The Greek word is an adjective compounded of μονο (only) and γενής (species, race, family, offspring).

Latin, the other major language used in the early Christian period, used the word *unigenitum* and is identical in meaning to the Greek *monogenes*.

The word in question was used in the formulation of the Nicene Creed and is drawn from the biblical

verses mentioned above (John 3:16, John 1:18, 1 John 4:9).

Interestingly, the Revised Standard Version of the Bible used in the *Divine Principle* text does not use the word “begotten.” The biblical verses mentioned above simply use the word “only.”

“For God so loved the world that he gave his *only* son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, RSV)

Rev. and Mrs. Moon have been addressing the issue of Jesus’ uniqueness for decades and more recently Mother Moon’s use of the word “begotten” has led to much controversy. Is it really so controversial as to cause schisms within the “Unification” family? Referring to Father and Mother Moon’s words as expressed in Korean may be helpful.

When the late Father Moon spoke in Korean he used the word *dok saeng ja*: 독생자 (獨生子). It means only-born son: 독 (獨) = only, 생 (生) = born, 자 (子) = son.

Mother Moon uses *dok saeng nyeo*: 독생녀 (獨生女). It means only-born daughter: 독 (獨) = only, 생 (生) = born, 녀 (女) = daughter.

It is significant that the words used in Korean are closer to the original Greek (*monogenes*) and Latin (*unigenitum*). The word “begotten” used in some versions of the Bible in English does not capture the original meaning intended in the Greek and Latin used in the early Christian period.

### Differences between Christian and Unification views

Of course, the complexities that emerge are not restricted to linguistics. There are also thorny theological issues that arise with the use of the word “begotten.”

Since the Council of Nicea, Christians, for the most part, generally accept that Jesus was not only born through divine intervention but also stress that Jesus was not born through physical conception as is stated in the Nicene Creed: “Begotten, not made.”

The view is held by all major Christian denominations – Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Churches of the East, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, and most mainline Protestant Churches.

Christian doctrine concludes that Jesus was not conceived by natural conception between a man and woman. Indeed, Jesus, in the traditional Christian view is God himself.

A close reading of the *Divine Principle* chapter on Christology leads to the Unification understanding that stresses Jesus was conceived of a man and woman. Father Moon explained in numerous speeches that Jesus had a literal father and mother. Jesus was conceived through a relationship between a physical man and woman. Furthermore, the Unification view is that Jesus was not God himself, but rather the son of God. Yet Jesus was divine and the mediator between God and human beings.

Therefore, when Father or Mother Moon’s words *dok saeng ja*: 독생자 (獨生子) or *dok saeng nyeo*: 독생녀 (獨生女) are interpreted or translated “begotten” son or daughter, an English-speaking audience is faced with both a linguistic and theological challenge.

As mentioned above, the words used in Greek (*monogenes*) and Latin (*unigenitum*) mean “unique” or “only” offspring. The Korean words used by Father and Mother Moon emphasize “only” born son or daughter or “first” born son or daughter.



It is interesting that the interpreters and translators of Father and Mother Moon’s words have chosen to use the word “begotten” found in the King James Version (KJV) of 1611. It is not widely known that 90% of the KJV is identical to the earlier Tyndale version of the early 1500s. The 10% that is not identical includes references to “begotten.”

Here are some versions of the Bible that do not use the word “begotten” in John 3:16: Common English Bible (2011), Contemporary English Version (1995), English Standard Version (2016),

International Standard Version (2014), New American Bible (Revised Edition 2010), New International Version (2011), Revised Standard Version (1952), New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (1993).

Recent challenges to Mother Moon’s use of the word “begotten” have caused some to disassociate from her. Families have been split. Long-time friendships have ceased. Vitriol has spread through social

network sites and other channels on the web.

Mother Moon was declared to be co-founder, co-messiah and co-True Parent by Father Moon. Regardless, some challenge the very core of Unification understanding of Deity, Christology and the very purpose of Unification teaching itself.

The issue can be easily resolved when one clearly understands the meaning of a few simple words and interprets and translates them correctly.

Father and Mother Moon were not born directly from God as Christians believe of Jesus. Father and Mother Moon were born of a man and woman. They both had physical parents.

When Father and Mother Moon use the word *dok saeng ja*: 독생자 (獨生子) or *dok saeng nyeo*: 독생녀 (獨生女), they both are saying that they are the first to have fulfilled their responsibility and are thus the first born as God's son or daughter.

It is also important to note that theirs is not an exclusive state. They continuously encourage each and every child of God to become a "true" son or daughter of God as well.

Consider the following words of Rev. Moon:

"*Dok saeng ja* means the first son who can receive the first love and the *dok saeng nyeo* means the first daughter who can receive the first love." (Rev. Moon's sermon #203, June 27, 1990)

"*Dok saeng ja* is the one who is connected to the fullness of God's first love for an individual." (Jan. 24, 1986)

"It is the goal of all of us to become the *dok saeng ja* and the *dok saeng nyeo*." (#41, Feb. 15, 1971)

"The most important thing is how to reach the position of the *dok saeng ja* and the *dok saeng nyeo*." (#52, Dec. 30, 1971)

"It is our task to become the *dok saeng ja* and the *dok saeng nyeo* in order to liberate God." (#94, June 26, 1977)

"Blessed families need to become the *dok saeng ja* and the *dok saeng nyeo* so that God says 'You two are the ones I love most.'" (Sept. 29, 2002)

Clarification of words and their meanings should lead to a mature faith practice.

It seems the current spat within the Unification family is between apologists for the "begotten" daughter and those that consider the very concept of Mother Moon as a begotten daughter to be cause to establish a new movement. There are of course serious issues and future consequences theologically, providentially and practically.

The current schism will not easily be resolved since religious disagreements historically have rarely been solved. Can Unificationism be different?

If the fulfillment of God's providence in the Completed Testament Age is the establishment of the "True Parents," and if, after 57 years, one of the established True Parents is perceived to have failed, it will be extremely difficult to persuade a new audience that a new set of "True Parents" will succeed.

On the other hand, if the existing and established order lacks flexibility and the ability to admit mistakes, reconciliation will prove increasing difficult, if not impossible.

The future of the movement founded by Rev. Sun Myung Moon in the 1940s is at stake. Will it flourish and fulfill the dream of world restoration? Or will the Unification Movement devolve into several factions causing efforts to influence society at large to fizzle?

Misunderstanding of one word could be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

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*Rev. Franco Famularo (UTS Class of 1994) lives in Montreal, Canada, and serves as Secretary-General of the Universal Peace Federation, Canada. He is also Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees of Unification Theological Seminary. The views expressed herein are his own.*

Painting at top: *A depiction of the First Council of Nicea in the year 325 A.D.*