

Interview of Franco Famularo about his article "What Does Begotten Really Mean?"

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*This interview came about in response to an essay by Rev. Famularo, "What Does Begotten Really Mean? How Misunderstanding Words Can Lead To Unnecessary Division" on appliedunificationism.com, a UTS blog. It has attracted intense interest. The interviewer, in preparation for this conversation, read a 1953 article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* on reaction to the word "begotten" not being in the Revised Standard Version, which stated, "Jerome went to Palestine in AD 385 to complete his revision of what became the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, the Latin Vulgate." It goes on to explain that on that occasion, Jerome changed the Latin text of John 1:14 and 18 and 3:16 and 18 from "only" to "only begotten" and did so "out of interest for ecclesiastical dogma." Bear in mind that from the Vulgate, "only begotten" appears in the King James Version, the English Revised Version and others. The Revised Standard Version corrected that early manipulation.*

What Does "Begotten" Really Mean? How Misunderstanding Words Can Lead to Unnecessary Division - Franco Famularo - January 16, 2017
<http://www.tpaparents.org/Library/Unification/Talks2/Famularo/Famularo-170116.pdf>

Question: What prompted you to write about this topic?



I have been thinking about this matter for the last three or four years, since it became an issue. I have had dialog with other UTS professors and other friends of mine who studied at UTS, generally about this issue. It has been on my mind to put it down on paper for about a year, but given that I have many things to do, I did not get to it.

It was prompted by the fact that through our attendance at UTS, we learned how easily divisions have come about in Christianity. This was one of the issues -- it was not the only issue -- but one of the issues that struck me as being an important one and not just linguistically but theologically. I thought it would help clarify what it is that Unification people believe, in fact, or understood historically through the Principle as being the nature of God, the nature of Christ, the nature of the True Parents and how this is so easily misunderstood on an issue like being born sinless or being a begotten child of God.

While at UTS I wrote a couple of papers on how the "Trinitarian" doctrine evolved and it was also due to a mis-translation of some key words by the Early Christian fathers. In most languages, the word "begotten" is not used. Only in English do we see this word, "begotten," and in this particular instance.

Now, some people say it is not an issue of translation. The English translation is the correct one. If you go to Webster's Dictionary or Google Translate, it translates *monogenes* as "begotten," but in fact, that is the wrong translation. This is why the newer versions of the Bible do not use "begotten." Indeed the word in the version of the Bible that Divine Principle uses, the Revised Standard Version, is the word "only." There was a dispute, some controversy, when the new version of the Bible omitted the word "begotten" in those four verses where you find it in the New Testament.

Question: People accused the translators of the Revised Standard Version of taking "begotten" out because they (the translators) did not believe in Jesus' virgin birth and that Jesus was the same as God. Yet, as Unificationists, we do not believe in those things anyway.

Well, we do not believe in what they refer to as *Theotokos*, which is the Mother of God Theory, which we all learned when we were studying Church History at UTS. We do not believe in the virgin birth. We don't believe that anyone was born, neither Jesus, Father nor Mother was born through an immaculate conception and were begotten directly by God, which is basically what that term came to mean for many

Christians. We would have basically agreed with Arius who claimed that Jesus was of a "similar" nature to God. Although Arius was not the first to raise the issue, he argued as follows: "if the Father begat the son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence; and from it is evident, that there was a time when the son was not." In fact, the Arian movement continued for several hundred years after the dispute at the Council of Nicaea. Some people also speculate that the rise of Islam, with the emphasis on their being only one God and that Jesus was not God himself, has some connection to the fact that many people who had an Arian understanding of the messiahship came to Islam.

Question: But unlike in the time of Jesus, we have a very clear idea of True Parents' birth parents. We know their names, and we have seen their photographs.

So the issue that comes up now is, Was Mother born sinless?

This is what we keep hearing, and that Father was born sinless. Father addressed that long ago, when he told us back in the 1970s, or maybe earlier than that, that the conditions for Father to be born free of sin actually were established at the time of Jesus. The preparation leading to Jesus' birth made the conditions for that to happen. And if I may so bold to say, it really depended on Father and Mother fulfilling their responsibility, their actually responding to God's call, which they did. Special lineages: I'm sure Father and Mother had a special lineage. But it wasn't necessary for all that complicated process of restoration to take place, as we saw through Judah and Tamar, through David and Bathsheba and all that, through Zachariah and Mary in order to lead to Jesus' birth without original sin. That foundation transferred to the returning Lord through the foundation of Christianity.

Question: Is it fair to say that in your essay you conclude that Mother is actually not saying, "only begotten"?

She's not; in fact, I would go further and say that the texts that have been translated into English should be corrected to reflect what Mother is actually saying. What she is actually saying in Korean is probably closer to the original Greek *monogenes*, which mean "first born" or "only born." Whereby, Mother is using the word "only born daughter," if I am correct. I had someone who understands English and Korean well, to help me with this point and that was the conclusion.

Father speaks about this very point in many verses. I mentioned some of those quotations [in the essay]. He is saying is saying, "only born son," "only born daughter," or in some cases he is saying "first-born son." It is similar to when Jesus said, "...before Abraham was, I am." [John 8:58] He was not born before Abraham but he fulfilled what Adam should have fulfilled. So the understanding I think we should have is that True Parents are the first-born of God in the sense that they are the first man and woman to fulfill their responsibility toward God.

Question: A popular Korean-English dictionary and Naver, a popular online crowdsourced dictionary, both translate 독생자 as "only begotten son, Jesus Christ." It seems the Korean followed the biblical error.

The King James Version was the predominant translation in English when the Bible was brought to Korea in the late 1880s and early 1900s. The Revised Standard Version came out in the early 1950s. Now, tie that to the larger understanding that most mainline Christian traditions teach that Jesus was God, that Jesus was born of an immaculate conception, that he was the result of a virgin birth.

So it would make sense that that is the case. But most linguists haven't studied theology and most linguists who participate in translation do not understand theology. I think this is where we need some sensitivity.

Question: Do you see a way forward?

I do. The fact is that True Parents have succeeded in their missions. Father emphasized throughout his life efforts to bring about unity and harmony. Conferences like the one we are attending are the result of his great vision and they have gained more and more credibility, probably more than we even realize. Many people respect the efforts of UPF and other organizations to bring religious people together. Because of that, because of the momentum that we have built, I think that there is a way forward. We just need to settle down a little bit after all the hype, and actually start dialoguing with one another, which is something we have encouraged people from other religions to do.

Question: It is worrisome that the division in Islam is family-related and has lasted centuries.

Yes, and it continues. We just had an incident in Quebec City the other day, which you may have heard on the news. This shootings and killings of six men happened in a mosque. Usually we associate such events with Iraq and some battle between Sunni and Shia where they attack people in mosques or when

they come out of Friday prayers. It is quite concerning that religious misunderstanding can lead to such events. So I hope, first that we as Unification people will not follow that route and that we know better. We have never come even close to thinking like that. I don't think so. I think Unification people that adhere to Father's teachings as peace-loving people. They are going to go the extra mile, as Father taught us -- "in the shoes of a servant, shedding sweat for the earth, tears for man and blood for Heaven." That is what Father taught us all the time. I think because of this deeply rooted philosophy of life, that Father taught us, there is a way forward.

Question: The weight of translating for True Mother, which has consequences, is on the shoulders of young members who have not undergone theological training.

I think it is important that translators and interpreters be trained in this zone because it is not only an issue within the Unification family but as we make efforts to communicate our message beyond the border of the unification family, to traditional Christianity or other religions, it is so easy to get it wrong and end up in complications that are not necessary. This issue of "begotten" is one of them.

Question: Will we reach the stage where our seminarians study Divine Principle based solely on the Korean text?

For sure, and there were efforts when I was there in the early 1990s and earlier to teach us at least some rudimentary Korean. All of us have some interest in that. I admit I am not the best in the Korean language, but I usually try to get to the bottom of it. Not all seminarians know Greek and Hebrew, but if they wish to get to the essence of what Jesus or Paul said, or the prophets, they have to actually gain a basic understanding.

At the very least, when we have True Parents, Mother or Father, expressing such important terms, we should be concerned about what she or he is really saying. Courses in Korean have always been in the curriculum at least since I was there in the early 1990s. UTS has Korean courses, as listed in current catalogue. I think a lot more has to be done on a broader scale as we translate Mother's talks, because English is a language the many other linguistic groups in the world use as a basis for translating texts when they're in a hurry. If you are translating into French, Spanish, Italian or German, you might look at the English as a basis.

Question: Do you foresee than that more such terms can be dealt with?

Yes, I do. This is all part of the maturing of our faith community. We catapulted from a pioneer group just a few decades ago into an institution in almost no time. We have reached a level that early Christianity took several hundred years to get to. It's time that we invest our resources in that, because it's important.