

## John 1.18

<sup>NIV</sup> “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.”

<sup>HCSB</sup> “No one has ever seen God. The One and Only Son--the One who is at the Father's side--He has revealed Him.”

J.A.T. Robinson:

“It would however be precarious to rest any answer on the quotation of John 1.18, that ‘the only one, himself God, the nearest to the Father’s heart, has made him known’ (NEB margin). For there is a notorious textual crux at this point. From the manuscript evidence there is every reason to believe that μονογεῆς θεός is the reading that reaches furthest back to source, and every modern edition of the Greek Testament properly gives it precedence. It is equally noticeable however that both the RSV and the NEB still prefer ὁ μονογεῆς υἱός in their text, as opposed to the margin, and I am inclined to judge that they are right. For the contrast with ‘the Father’ appears overwhelmingly to demand ‘the only Son’ (as in 1.14), and μονογεῆς θεός is literally untranslatable (‘the only one, himself God’ is a paraphrase to make the best of it) and out of line with Johannine usage (contrast 5.44 and 17.3 of the Father). ...But nothing should be made to turn or rest on this, one way or the other.”<sup>1</sup>

Bart D. Ehrman:

“...[T]he majority of manuscripts are right in ending the prologue with the words: “No one has seen God at any time, but the unique Son (ὁ μονογεῆς υἱός) who is in the bosom of the Father, that one has made him known.” The variant reading of the Alexandrian tradition, which substitutes “God” for “Son,” represents an orthodox corruption of the text in which the complete deity of Christ is affirmed: “the unique God [(ὁ) μονογεῆς θεός] who is in the bosom of the Father, that one has made him known.”...”

It must be acknowledged at the outset that the Alexandrian reading is more commonly preferred by textual critics, in no small measure because of its external support. Not only is it the reading of the great Alexandrian uncials (ⲁ B C), it is also attested by the earliest available witnesses, the Bodmer papyri Ⲕ<sup>66</sup> and Ⲕ<sup>75</sup>, discovered in the middle of the present [20<sup>th</sup>] century...

Here it must be emphasized that outside of the Alexandrian tradition, the reading μονογεῆς θεός has not fared well at all. Virtually every other representative of every other textual grouping—Western, Caesarean, Byzantine—attests ὁ μονογεῆς υἱός. And the reading even occurs in several of the secondary Alexandrian witnesses (e.g., C3 Y 892 1241 Ath Alex). This is not simply a case of one reading supported by the earliest and best manuscripts and another supported by late and inferior ones, but of one reading found almost exclusively in the Alexandrian tradition and another found sporadically there and virtually everywhere else. And although the witnesses supporting ὁ μονογεῆς υἱός cannot individually match the antiquity of the Alexandrian papyri, there can be little doubt that this reading must also be dated at least to the time of their production. There is virtually no other way to explain its predominance in the Greek, Latin, and Syriac traditions, not to mention its occurrence in fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertullian, who were writing before our earliest surviving manuscripts were produced. Thus, both readings are ancient; one is fairly localized, the other is almost ubiquitous...

It is on internal grounds that the real superiority of ὁ μονογεῆς υἱός shines forth. Not only does it conform with established Johannine usage, a point its opponents readily concede, but the Alexandrian variant, although perfectly amenable to scribes for theological reasons, is virtually impossible to understand within a Johannine context.”<sup>2</sup>

Timothy Paul Jones:

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, *The Priority of John*, pp. 372-373.

<sup>2</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 78-79.

“It’s possible that the same sort of change occurred in John 1.18. This verse may have originally described Jesus as “the one and only Son.” Or the text might have read “the one and only God”—the manuscript witnesses to these two readings are, in my opinion, evenly divided.”<sup>3</sup>

So this is a verse which could go either way. If, in fact, the better reading is “the only begotten God” then this would be simply another instance where Jesus is called God in a representational sense. If the better reading is “the only begotten Son” then this also fits very well with the notion that Jesus is the human Son of God, divinely begotten in the womb of the virgin Mary (cf. Luke 1; Matthew 1).

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Truth: A Guide to the Fallacies of Bart Ehrman’s Misquoting Jesus*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), p. 57-58.