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4. Conclusion

While David Henkel is remembered more as an outspoken defender of Lutheran confessional theology, his translated hymns show that he was also practical. In a place where Lutheran catechesis was lacking, Henkel stepped forward and helped fill the gap so God's word might be better taught. Henkel's hymn translations did not grace the pages of future Lutheran English hymnbooks except for those his family printed. But his efforts in making such translations and publishing them were notable. He helped pave the way for future hymn-translation efforts. Henkel took an edition of the Small Catechism that was available and did his best to bring this foundational confessional writing to people. Sometimes the best a catechist can do is just make that effort.

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Which Happened from the Foundation of the World According to the Book of Revelation: The Lamb Was Slain or Some Names Were Not Written in the Book of Life?

The Greek text of Revelation 13:8 reads as follows: *καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, οὓς οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.* Many Christians over the centuries and in various languages have become quite accustomed to hearing the phrase “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” because the Greek text of Revelation 13:8 has been translated that way by some, such as in the King James Version (1611): “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [i.e., the beast], whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”¹ This translation was long dominant in English largely because

¹ This understanding of Rev 13:8 was present in the Vulgate translation for centuries: “quorum non sunt scripta nomina in libro vitae agni qui occisus est ab origine mundi.” Robert Weber, Roger Gryson, and Bonifatius Fischer, eds., *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, editionem quintam emendatam retractatam (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), at Rev 13:8.

Jon Bruss, a colleague who is a Latinist, shared this observation with me: “The attachment of ‘ab origine mundi’ to ‘occisus est’ is clear since the phrase resides in the relative clause (starting with ‘qui’). Had Jerome wished to preserve a putative ambiguity regarding which verb the adverbial phrase modifies (‘sunt scripta’ or ‘occisus est’) he could have accomplished it like this: ‘quorum non sunt scripta nomina in libro vitae Agni occisi ab origine mundi.’”

of its widespread use, including within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) as Lutherans transitioned from German to English, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century.² A similar English translation continued to have influence within the LCMS during the latter decades of the twentieth century through the extensive use of the New International Version (1973), which renders this verse as follows: “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.”

Those who advocate for the translation “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” or a similar translation certainly recognize the logical challenge that it poses: the Lamb was not slain from the foundation of the world, but was sacrificed by crucifixion “under Pontius Pilate” around AD 30. The beneficial effect of the atoning death of Jesus as the Lamb of God is certainly not locked in time, but extends back from—and even before—the foundation of the world and unto eternity. Commentators who follow this translation in English see it as teaching this truth. For example, Louis Brighton, who translated this portion of 13:8 in his commentary as “the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world,” goes on to explain, “Since God’s plan of election in Christ was conceived in eternity, before the foundation of the world (see 17:8), and because God always brings to completion his plan and promises, 13:8 can speak proleptically of Christ having been slain already before the foundation of the world.”³

It must be acknowledged that there are two legitimate ways to translate the Greek text based solely on its grammar and syntax. The first option is to understand the prepositional phrase ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου (“from the foundation of the world”) as functioning adverbially to modify the perfect passive participle in the phrase τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου (“the Lamb who is in a slain condition”).⁴ The

² It appears Luther followed the Vulgate understanding of Rev 13:8 early in his career because his translation of the New Testament in 1522 translates this verse as follows: “und all die auff erden wonen betten es an, der namen nicht geschrieven sind ynn dem lebendigen buch des lambs, der erwurget ist von anfang der welt.” In the last edition of the Bible from Luther’s lifetime (1546), which influenced subsequent German-speaking Lutherans, the passage is slightly revised: “und alle die auff Erden wonen, beten es an, der namen nicht geschrieven sind in dem lebendigen buch des Lambs, das erwürget ist, von anfang der Welt.” It introduces punctuation that implies that “von anfang der Welt” could modify “geschrieven” instead of “erwürget.” For texts, see Martin Luther, *Deutsche Bibel* (1522, 1546), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Deutsche Bibel*, 12 vols. in 15 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1906–), 7:452, 453.

³ Brighton, *Revelation*, 346. This is just one example of the many commentators offering or using this translation that could be cited.

⁴ Even though this perfect-tense participle is often translated in the manner of an aorist-tense participle (i.e., “who was slain”), the perfect tense communicates the resulting and ongoing condition of a past action (i.e., “being in a slain condition”). The theological significance communicated with the use of this perfect-tense participle is that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb

translation of 13:8b that results is similar to the KJV translation presented above: “[every one] whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb who is in a slain condition from the foundation of the world.” The primary grammatical argument in support of this translation is that it follows the word order. Understood in this way, the prepositional phrase follows immediately after the participle that it modifies. While this word order is typical in Greek, it is also possible that this prepositional phrase could be out of natural word order and modify something else in the sentence. That possibility must be considered.

The second legitimate translation based upon Greek grammar and syntax is to understand the prepositional phrase *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* (“from the foundation of the world”) as functioning adverbially to modify the verb *οὐ γέγραπται* (“has not been written”), even though the prepositional phrase appears some distance after the verb. The translation of 13:8b that results is this: “[every one] whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who is in a slain condition.” This is very similar to the translation that is present in several English translations completed since the middle of the twentieth century, such as the RSV, NASB, ASV, CSB, and ESV; the ESV has been widely used in the LCMS during the past two decades.⁵ I am convinced this is the correct translation of Revelation 13:8b for two reasons.

First, the same prepositional phrase (*ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου*) modifies the same verb (*οὐ γέγραπται*) in Revelation 17:8, which includes phrases that are strikingly parallel to Revelation 13:8 in content and form: *οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* (“the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world”). If one follows the second legitimate translation presented above, then both of these texts in Revelation are very similar statements. What Revelation 17:8 reveals helps us to translate and interpret properly what Revelation 13:8 reveals (i.e., Scripture interprets Scripture). Then why is the prepositional phrase (i.e., the temporal clause *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου*) not closer to the verb that it is modifying in 13:8? Because the seer John, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gives further definition to the book of life here: the book of life is identified explicitly with the Lamb (the book of life of the Lamb), as also found in Revelation 21:27, *εἰ μὴ οἱ γεγραμμένοι ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου* (“except the ones who have been written in the book of life of the Lamb”). In fact, 21:27 states positively the same idea about names

continues to be a prominent characteristic of his resurrected state of being enthroned because this sacrifice is the source of his victory (Rev 5:6, 13:8).

⁵ The RSV and ESV translate the preposition *ἀπὸ* in Rev 13:8b as “before” rather than “from,” but one would expect the preposition *πρὸ* to be present here in order to translate it as “before.” This latter preposition is found elsewhere in the New Testament with *καταβολῆς κόσμου* (e.g., Matt 25:34; John 17:24; Eph 1:4; and 1 Pet 1:20).

being written in the book of life implied in 13:8 and 17:8, which both refer to names that have not been written in the book of life. Unlike 17:8 and 21:27, why does 13:8 have the adjectivally functioning perfect passive participle τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου (“the one who is in a slain condition”)? Because this participle is a major visual characteristic of the “standing as being in a slain condition Lamb” when he first appears in the throne-room scene of Revelation 5:6 (ἀρνίον ἐστηκός ὡς ἐσφαγμένον) and is in contrast here to the appearance of the first beast who has a healed wound (Rev 13:3, 13:12).⁶

The second reason supporting this translation is that nowhere in the rest of Revelation or in the New Testament is the phrase “from [or “before”] the foundation of the world” used to speak of Jesus being sacrificed.⁷ Peter writes of Jesus—even his sacrifice as a lamb without blemish or spot—being “foreknown before the foundation of the world” (προεγνωσμένου μὲν πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου) in 1 Peter 1:20. Jesus speaks of the blood of the prophets that “has been shed from [i.e., since] the foundation of the world” (Luke 11:50), of revealing in parables “what has been hidden from the foundation of the world” (Matt 13:35; cf. Ps 78:2), of the kingdom prepared for the righteous “before the foundation of the world” (Matt 25:34), and of being loved by the Father “before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Paul writes of Christians being chosen/elected in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). The author of Hebrews writes of the works of creation being finished “from the foundation of the world” (Heb 4:3). Later in Hebrews, the author writes of Christ’s sacrifice with these striking words using the prepositional phrase ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου in order to stress both Jesus’ atoning sacrifice once in time and its effect across all time for all people:

Nor [did he enter heaven] in order to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places yearly with blood that is not his own, since then he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world [οὐδ’ ἵνα πολλάκις προσφέρῃ ἑαυτὸν, ὥσπερ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὰ ἅγια κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν ἐν αἵματι ἀλλοτριῶ, ἐπεὶ ἔδει αὐτὸν πολλάκις παθεῖν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς

⁶ G. K. Beale observes that the characteristic of the Lamb as “the one who was slain” in Rev 13:8 may also be present as a contrast to the description given twice in this same context that the beast—who is a parody of the true Christ—has a “mortal wound that was healed” (13:3, 13:12); see his *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 702.

⁷ Revelation testifies to Jesus’ death and resurrection in history repeatedly (Rev 1:5, 1:18, 2:8, 5:6, 5:9, 5:12, 7:14, 12:11, 13:8), and even mentions his crucifixion (Rev 11:8), but does not indicate this sacrifice happened “from the foundation of the world,” except if one follows the first translation option for Revelation 13:8b, which is argued against above. As Siegbert W. Becker states, “nowhere else in Scripture do we have any statement that says that Christ was slain from the creation of the world”; see *Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985), 203.

κόσμου]. But as it is, he has been revealed once at the consummation of the ages for the annulment of sin by his sacrifice. And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that [comes] judgment, so also Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of the many [i.e., the multitudes], will appear a second time, without [a] sin [offering], for the salvation of the ones who are eagerly waiting for him. (Heb 9:25–28)

The “book of life” in Revelation—whether it is referenced as “the book of life” or “the book of life of the Lamb who is in the slain condition” or “the book of life of the Lamb”—is a christological metaphor for election (Rev 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 20:15, 21:27).⁸ The implication of the testimony in both Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 that the names of the unrighteous were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world is that the names of the righteous have been written in the book of life from creation, which is stated in Revelation 21:27 without reference to when the names were written. This is testimony about the effect of Christ’s atoning work for all time: the reason names of the elect can be written in the book of life from the foundation of the world is due to the Lamb being sacrificed in time to “ransom people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). The Formula of Concord makes the close identification between Christ and the book of life when it states, “The Word of God, however, leads us to Christ, who is ‘the book of life’ in which all who are to be eternally saved are inscribed and elected, as it is written, ‘He chose us in him before the foundation of the world’” (FC Ep XI 6; see also FC SD XI 13).⁹

In conclusion, although there are two legitimate ways to translate the Greek of Revelation 13:8, this text cannot be stating two different things. Either it is stating that the Lamb is in the slain condition from the foundation of the world, or it is stating that the names of those worshipping the beast were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. The similar testimony of names not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world in Revelation 17:8, as well as the overall testimony in Revelation and the rest of the Scriptures to the shedding of the Christ’s blood at a particular time in history, is significant evidence for the conclusion that the correct translation of Revelation 13:8 is this: “and all who dwell on earth

⁸ The most immediate Old Testament background for the book of life imagery in Revelation is Dan 12:1, even though there are references to a book elsewhere (Exod 32:33; Ps 69:28) or mention of names in a register (Pss 9:5, 87:6; Isa 4:3). Although the Gospels do not mention the book of life, Jesus used similar imagery of “names written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

⁹ I thank Joseph Greenmyer, my student, who brought these Formula of Concord references to my attention in his paper for my course on the Book of Revelation, “Christ the True Book of Life: Predestination in the Apocalypse of St. John” (February 17, 2022).

will worship it [the beast], every one whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who is in the slain condition.”

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