

*NAGY József*<sup>1</sup>:

## What Happens from the Foundation of the World? A Crux Interpretum in Revelation 13:8

### *Abstract.*

The phrase *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* in Revelation 13:8 can be interpreted and translated in two ways. First, the Lamb-Christ was slain since the creation. Second, the worshippers of the beast have been missing from the Book of Life since the beginning. The main problem arises from the fact that the phrase *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* immediately follows *τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου*, which points to the lamb. Although the proponents of this reading list many other arguments, the literal proximity provides the basis for all other ideas. However, if we look at the problem from a broader perspective, the conclusion is different. For example, Revelation 13:7–10 focuses on the relationship between the beast and humanity. It can be seen that the section does not centre on the Lamb. Further changes of perspective confirm that *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* refers to individuals not mentioned in the Book of Life (e.g. Rev 17:8).

**Keywords:** the Book of Life, the Book of Revelation, Christology, Last Judgement, predestination

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## Introduction

There are two potential interpretations of **Revelation 13:8b**. A number of exegetes translate the text as follows: “And all who reside on the earth will adore him, those whose names have not been inscribed in the Book of Life of the lamb, slaughtered since the foundation of the world [ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου].” According to this possibility, Christ was killed **since the creation**, or at **the creation**. But some see the expression ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου as a reference to those who are not listed in the Book of Life. This idea leads to the following possibility: “And all who reside on the earth will adore him, those whose names have not been inscribed in the Book of Life of the slaughtered lamb, since the foundation of the world [ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου].” The difference between the two translations is a comma and a change of word order (slaughtered lamb / lamb, slaughtered). In the first solution, the expression “since the foundation of the world” is connected to the verb “slaughtered”, and in the second one, this expression has to be connected to the verb “written.” As is well known, the New Testament papyri and majuscules did not use punctuation. Since the oldest manuscripts do not help to solve the problem, the decision is left to scholars and translators.<sup>2</sup>

In some translations, the difference is even more obvious than in the previous two examples. The NIV offers the following solution: “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” (Rev 13:8). The NRSVUE, which supports the second alternative, translates the text as: “and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the lamb that was slaughtered” (Rev 13:8).

The difficulty of the question is illustrated by the reluctance of some to take a position on it, so Paul and Yeatts leave it open.<sup>3</sup> Lupieri tries to cut the debate short by accepting both options.<sup>4</sup> The caution of these scholars stems from the fact that there are almost as many proponents of both possibilities, and much can be said to support both readings.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. PRIGENT, Pierre (2001): *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*. Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 410–411.

<sup>3</sup> PAUL, Ian (2018): *Revelation. An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC 20). Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press. 233; YEATTS, John R. (2003): *Revelation* (BCBC 23). Scottsdale, Herald Press. 245.

<sup>4</sup> LUPIERI, Edmondo F. (2006): *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 208.

However, the majority of commentators have taken a position on the issue, as we shall see. This paper shows that the decision depends on the way the researcher approaches the problem. Therefore, this paper aims to consider as many aspects as possible. At the same time, we agree with those who argue that *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* **points to individuals not written in the Book of Life.**

### **The Lamb Who Was Slaughtered**

According to the first reading, *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* refers to the lamb, who was slain.<sup>5</sup> The main reason for this translation comes from the syntax. The words of **Revelation 13:8b** go like this: “οὐ οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.” It can be seen that the phrase *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* immediately follows the mention of the death of the lamb. All proponents of this reading stress the importance of the word order. Mounce also reminds us that only the beginning of the clause refers to individuals who are left out from the Book of Life. There is a twelve-word gap between *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* and *γέγραπται*, which is a considerable distance. As a result, many exegetes suggest that syntax is of primary importance.<sup>6</sup>

But this does not solve the problem. Firstly, Greek syntax is fluid. This is best illustrated in **Revelation 17:8**, where *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* refers back to ideas seven

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<sup>5</sup> CAIRD, George Bradford (1966): *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*. New York, Harper & Row. 168; CHARLES, Robert H. (1920): *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC). Edinburgh, T&T Clark. 353–354; FORD, J. Massyngberde (1975): *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 38). Garden City, Doubleday. 212; McDonough, Sean M. (1999): *YHWH at Patmos. Rev 1:4 in its Hellenistic and Early Jewish Setting* (WUNT, 2/107). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck. 210; MORRIS, Leon (1987): *The Book of Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 165; MOUNCE, Robert H. (1977): *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 256; OSBORNE, Grant R. (2002): *Revelation* (BECNT). Grand Rapids, Baker Academic. 503; PRIGENT 2001, 401, 410–411; REDDISH, Mitchell G. (2001): *Revelation* (SHBC). Macon, Smyth & Helwys. 255; THOMAS, John Christopher – MACCHIA, Frank D. (2016): *Revelation* (THNTC). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 236; WITHERINGTON, Ben III. (2003): *Revelation* (NCBC). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 183.

<sup>6</sup> MOUNCE 1977, 256; OSBORNE 2002, 503; REDDISH 2001, 255; SWEET, John Philip M. (1979): *Revelation*. London: SCM. 212.

words earlier. This verse is crucial to our analysis that in Revelation 17:8 ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου points to individuals who are missing from the Book of Life. In **Revelation 17:8**, the connection is clear even though the two phrases are so far apart in the sentence. Although in **Revelation 13:8** τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου comes immediately before ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου, it is not unusual for the temporal ἀπό to come at the end of the sentence. As Skemp suggests, there are also examples where ἀπό does not point back to the immediately preceding words but to an earlier part of the sentence (e.g. Acts 23:23).<sup>7</sup> It can be concluded, therefore, that relying on word order does not resolve the debate.

Supporters of this option also point to linguistic aspects. According to Matthewson, the participle τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου is an attributive genitive that focuses on the lamb, so it is more likely that the phrase ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου refers to the lamb.<sup>8</sup> However, the proponents of the other reading argue for focusing on the construct τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου, which is a genitive of possession or source, modifying τῷ βιβλίῳ.<sup>9</sup> Since the Greek allows for both possibilities, a purely grammatical approach does not get us any closer either. This is confirmed by Skemp, who comes to this conclusion by examining τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου.<sup>10</sup>

Advocates of this reading also tend to infer from the immediate context. It is commonly claimed that **Revelation 13:3** is in contrast to **Revelation 13:8**.<sup>11</sup> In Revelation 13:3, the beast is “as it were wounded to death” (ὡς ἐσφαγμένην εἰς θάνατον). Sweet argues that while Revelation 13:3 describes the (illusory) death of the beast, **Revelation 13:8** recalls the death of the lamb, ordained from eternity.<sup>12</sup> Undoubtedly, the difference amid the beast and the lamb is evident in **Revelation 13:3** and **13:8**. Significantly, in both cases, σφάζω is a perfect participle (ἐσφαγμένην Rev

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<sup>7</sup> SKEMP, Vincent (2008): Participial Aspect and the Lamb’s Paradigmatic Witness in Revelation 13:8. In: Corley, Jeremy – Skemp, Vincent (eds.), *Studies in the Greek Bible. Essays in Honor of Francis T. Gignac, S.J.* Washington DC, The Catholic Biblical Association of America. 193.

<sup>8</sup> MATHEWSON, David L. (2016): *Revelation: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (BHGNT). Waco, Baylor University Press. 169, 174.

<sup>9</sup> STEWART, Alexander E. (2012): *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. 88–89.

<sup>10</sup> SKEMP 2008, 212.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. CHARLES 1920, 353–354.

<sup>12</sup> SWEET, John Philip M. (1979): *Revelation*. London: SCM. 212.

13:3; ἔσφαγγμένου Rev 13:8). It is debatable, however, whether Sweet's reading provides the key to the interpretation of **Revelation 13:8** since other parallels can be drawn. It cannot be overlooked that both verses speak of those who worship the beast. So, **Revelation 13:8** can be understood – again in the light of Revelation 13:3 – that the worshippers of the beast are excluded from the Book of Life from the creation. The crux of **Revelation 13:8** can be decided in either direction in the light of **Revelation 13:3**.

Some also bring Revelation 3:5 into the discussion. Mounce reads Revelation 3:5 as saying that it is possible to be excluded from the Book of Life. If there is a possibility, it is more encouraging that **Revelation 13:8** has an emphasis on the death of the lamb.<sup>13</sup> Yet, Mounce's point cannot be accepted since it is more obvious to read Revelation 3:5 as not suggesting the possibility of falling out of the Book of Life. It should be noted that the letters of Revelation 2–3 are structured according to fixed elements. Revelation 3:5 is among the promises of Christ (cf. Rev 2:7.11). In the light of this, the emphasis in Revelation 3:5 is not about the possibility of being wiped out of the Book of Life, but it focuses on the fact that the overcomers are in the Book of Life.

While Christ's death is a recurring theme in the Revelation, Thomas and Macchia suggest that **Revelation 13:8** also highlights this motif (Rev 1:5–6; 5:6.9; 7:14; 12:11).<sup>14</sup> They argue that the death of Christ is a main idea of the work, and consequently **Revelation 13:8** underscore this topos too. However, given many theological lines found in Revelation (e.g. residents of the earth; Rev 6:10; 13:14; 14:6), this view cannot be decisive.

Researchers often rely on references outside Revelation. Thomas and Macchia's commentary, which often looks for connections between the Johannine writings, mentions John 17:5.24 as a possible parallel. According to this view, the emphasis in **Revelation 13:8**, as in John, is on the eternity of Jesus.<sup>15</sup> However, it can be seen that there are fundamental differences between the verses. For example, John 17:5–24 does not speak of the death of Jesus but of the Father who loves his Son from all eternity.

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<sup>13</sup> MOUNCE 1977, 256.

<sup>14</sup> THOMAS – MACCHIA 2016, 236.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

The most frequently mentioned passage apart from Revelation is 1 Peter 1:19–20.<sup>16</sup> These verses present Jesus as the lamb (ἀμνός) chosen “previous the foundation of the cosmos [πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου].” McDonough also points to Ephesians 1:4, which says that God “elected us in Him before the foundation of the cosmos [πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου].” McDonough says that **Revelation 13:8** follows the emphasis of 1 Peter 1:19–20, while **Revelation 17:8** is close to the presentation of Ephesians 1:4.<sup>17</sup> Here we limit ourselves to the first idea. Since 1 Peter 1:19–20 is often referred to, a more detailed discussion is necessary. Although both 1 Peter 1:19–20 and **Revelation 13:8** present Christ as a lamb, 1 Peter 1:19 uses ἀμνός, while **Revelation 13:8** uses ἀρνίον. Another difference is that 1 Peter 1:20 uses the formula πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, while **Revelation 13:8** contains ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.<sup>18</sup> Both verses speak of Christ, but the emphasis is different. According to 1 Peter 1:20, the Lamb-Christ was chosen before the creation (προγινώσκω). Furthermore, it is not evident how to grasp the meaning of **Revelation 13:8** (i.e. the death of Christ at the beginning of time). Some believe that **Revelation 13:8** speaks of the foreordination of Christ’s death, while others see the verse as referring to the death of the lamb as a pre- or supra-historical event.<sup>19</sup> In Aune’s view, the latter possibility is more likely,<sup>20</sup> but this idea is far from the thrust of 1 Peter 1:19–20. Caird refers to Acts 2:23, which says that Jesus was “handed over by the deliberate will and plan of God.”<sup>21</sup> As in 1 Peter 1:19–20, there is a significant difference between God’s election and the idea that Christ was slaughtered from the beginning (cf. Rev 13:8).

Proponents of this reading also point to extracanonical parallels. According to 1 Enoch 62:7–8), the Son of Man, who will appear at the Last Judgment, was hidden from the inhabitants of the earth for all eternity.<sup>22</sup> This analogy is weakened by the fact

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<sup>16</sup> E.g. BEASLEY-MURRAY, George R. (1983): *The Book of Revelation* (NCB). Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 214; CHARLES 1920, 353–354; OSBORNE 2002, 503; REDDISH 2001, 255; SKEMP 2008, 200.

<sup>17</sup> MCDONOUGH 1999, 210.

<sup>18</sup> SKEMP 2008, 187.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Balthasar, on the basis of Revelation 13:8, states that the cross of Christ is written into the creation of the world from the beginning. BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von (1969): *Neuer Bund. Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik* (III/2/2). Einsiedeln, Johannes Verlag. 198.

<sup>20</sup> AUNE, David (1998): *Revelation 6–16* (WBC 52b). Dallas, Word Books Publisher. 748.

<sup>21</sup> CAIRD 1966, 168.

<sup>22</sup> BEASLEY-MURRAY 1983, 214.

that **Revelation 13:8** does not emphasize the Last Judgment or speak of Christ as unknown to the inhabitants of the earth (cf. **Rev 1:7**). Many suggest Testament of Moses 1:14 as a possible analogy. According to this text, Moses was chosen before the creation to be mediator (*μεσίτης*). By drawing a parallel, it has been suggested that while the Jews see Moses, Christians see Jesus as chosen before creation (cf. **Rev 13:8**).<sup>23</sup> However, it is questionable whether this parallel is a solution to the doubtful reading of Revelation 13:8; especially if one understands Revelation 13:8 to mean that Christ was not only elected from the creation but also killed. In conclusion, none of the parallels outside Revelation are convincing.

### Whose Name Has Not Been Written

Another reading of **Revelation 13:8b**, *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* points to **individuals not written in the Book of Life** from the creation.<sup>24</sup> Proponents often point to the similarities between **Revelation 13:8** and **17:8**. For the sake of clarity, a comparison of the two verses is given in a table. The normal font marks the different words, the **bold** the similarities, and the underline the addition of Revelation 13:8.

**Table 1.** *Comparison of Revelation 13:8 and 17:8b*

“Καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν <u>αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς</u> , οὓς οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου” (Rev 13:8).
“Καὶ θαυμάσθησονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου” (Rev 17:8b).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.*; CHARLES 1920, 353–354; MAIER 2002, 235; FORD 1975, 212.

<sup>24</sup> AUNE 1998, 748; KOESTER, Craig R. (2014): *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYBC 38A). New Haven, Yale University Press. 575; LADD, George Eldon (1993): *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 181; LOHSE, Eduard (1988): *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD 11). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 79; STEWART 2012, 88–89; TALBERT, Charles H. (2011): *The Development of Christology during the First Hundred Years* (NovTSup 140). Leiden, Brill. 148–149; THOMAS, Robert I. (1995): *Revelation 8–22. An Exegetical Commentary* (WEC). Chicago, Moody. 166.

As we can see, the phrases οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα, and ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου occur in both verses. Although προσκυνήσουσιν and θαυμασθήσονται are different verbs, they are used in a similar context. The people of the earth kneel before and adore the beast. Moreover, both verbs are in the future tense. There are other subtle differences. Whereas in Revelation 13:8 it is οὗ and ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ, in Revelation 17:8 it is ὧν and ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον. The main contrast, however, is that the phrase τοῦ ἄρνιου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου is found only in **Revelation 13:8**. Therefore, the problem that arises in the case of **Revelation 13:8** is not present in **Revelation 17:8**. As a result, **Revelation 17:8** leaves no doubt that ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου points to those who are not in the Book of Life. As a result, many commentators suggest that the translation puzzle in **Revelation 13:8** can be solved with the help of **Revelation 17:8**.<sup>25</sup>

According to Bousset,<sup>26</sup> the phrase τοῦ ἄρνιου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου in **Revelation 13:8** was added after the completion of the book. But Bousset's interpretation raises questions. As Charles points out, the phrase τοῦ ἄρνιου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου in **Revelation 13:8** is not unusual in this context, as the perfect participle σφάζω in Revelation 13:3 shows.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the available textual variants do not support Bousset's hypothesis either. It seems more obvious that τοῦ ἄρνιου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου was part of Revelation 13:8.

While we do not agree with Bousset's position, there are compelling arguments that Revelation 17:8 helps us understand Revelation 13:8. It is not only the parallels between the two verses that deserve attention, but it is also worth noting that Revelation 13 and 17 have much in the same manner. For example, both sections focus on the portrayal of the beast. In both units, it has seven heads and ten horns, filled with ungodly names (Rev 13:1; 17:3). It is also worth noting that worshippers of the beast are also present in these passages (**Rev 13:8**; 17:8). However, there are also differences between the two sections. In **Revelation 17**, σφάζω is absent (cf. Rev 13:3.8). Moreover, **Revelation 17** does not allude to the death of the lamb, so the questionable reading of

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<sup>25</sup> KOESTER 2014, 575; LADD 1993, 181; THOMAS 1995, 166.

<sup>26</sup> BOUSSET, Wilhelm (1906): *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (KEK 16). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 364.

<sup>27</sup> CHARLES 1920, 353.



**Revelation 13:8b** that the lamb was killed since the creation does not even appear here or in **Revelation 17:8**. The lamb is only encountered as one who defeats his enemies (Rev 17:14). The similarities between **Revelation 13** and **17** and the differences mentioned above suggest that in **Revelation 13:8**, as in **Revelation 17:8**, *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* refers to the inhabitants of the earth.

However, proponents of the alternative interpretation reject this idea. Mounce says that it is questionable whether Revelation is absolutely consistent in his literary expression. He suggests that it is possible for the same term to be used in different ways.<sup>28</sup> Mounce's insight may be strengthened by the fact that some words in Revelation have multiple meanings. An example is the sea (*θάλασσα*). It can be seen that *θάλασσα* takes on different meanings in contexts dealing with different issues (e.g. Rev 5:13; 13:1; 21:1). However, as the following section will show, there are also many similarities between Revelation 13 and 17. It seems less probable that the Revelation is speaking differently on the same subject.

Lupieri is also of the opinion that Revelation 13:8 should not be read through the lens of Revelation 17:8. His claim is that since Revelation was to be read publicly (Rev 1:3), the ambiguous verses of **Revelation 13:8** were first encountered by the audience.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, he struggles with the idea that the ambiguity of **Revelation 13:8** was resolved many chapters later. Therefore, viewing Revelation 13:8 independently of Revelation 17:8 is a more reasonable assumption. While Lupieri's argument is noteworthy, it is important to see his premise. He assumes that the primary recipients of Revelation found the language of **Revelation 13:8** unclear. This is a bold assumption, and one that would have had to be proven to be valid. But Lupieri makes no attempt to justify it.

Nevertheless, Lupieri's proposal is inspiring. All this invites us to consider whether Revelation 13:8 is ambiguous in its immediate context. One might ask if Revelation 13:8 was ambiguous to those who first heard it. To begin the overview, the tone of unit is set by the appearance of the beast, who has the strength and power of the dragon (Rev 13:2). The beast has won the admiration of the whole earth. Seeing the power of the beast, the people ask the rhetorical question, "Who is compared to the beast, and who is capable to make war against him" (Rev 13:4)? The potential of the

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<sup>28</sup> MOUNCE 1977, 256.

<sup>29</sup> LUPIERI 2006, 208.

beast is demonstrated by its loud mouth and its ability to act (Rev 13:5). The beast behaves as if it were invincible. **Revelation 13:6–10** shows how the “invincible” beast rebels against God and how it deals with people. He speaks against God and the hosts of heaven (Rev 13:6). The connection of the beast and man is described in Revelation 13:7–10. This passage describes two groups of people. The first group mentioned is that of the saints who are attacked and defeated by the beast as described in Revelation 13:7, 10. The text also mentions the people of the earth who are controlled by the beast and worship him (Rev 13:7–8). They are the ones who do not resist and whose names are missing from the Book of Life. In this context, it seems that the phrase *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* does not emphasize the Christological aspect but rather acquires its meaning in relation to the beast and the humanity.

Although **Revelation 13:1–10** focuses mainly on the relationship between the beast and humanity, there are also references to Christ and God. Some of these hints are indirect. The verb ‘given’ (*ἐδόθη*) expresses that the beast appears with God’s permission (Rev 13:5.7). In some cases, **Revelation** also uses motifs in speaking of the beast previously mentioned in relation to Christ. For example, Revelation also speaks of the throne (*θρόνος*) of Christ and of the beast (Rev 3:21; 13:2). There are also direct references to Christ and to God as well. We read that the beast speaks against God (Rev 13:2.5.6), and the lamb is mentioned in connection with the Book of Life (**Rev 13:8**). Despite these, it is clear that the focus is not on God or Christ. Again, Revelation 13:7–10 describes how to respond to the dominion of the beast. In this context, therefore, it seems more likely that *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* refers to individuals without recorded names. Through the lens of Revelation 13:7–10, there is concern as to why Revelation 13:8 would have a focus on the Christological aspect.

In the previous section, we discussed Thomas and Macchia’s observation that the death of Christ is one of the main ideas of Revelation. On this basis, they see *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* as referring to the death of the lamb. This is an essential topos of Revelation. But as Blount notes, it is always with reference to the death of Christ in a historical context (e.g. Rev 1:5; 5:6.12; 12:11).<sup>30</sup> Apart from the dubious reading of

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<sup>30</sup> BLOUNT, Brian K. (2009): *Revelation: A Commentary* (NTL). Westminster, John Knox Press. 252.

**Revelation 13:8**, the lamb is not read as having been slain at the creation of the world, or as having been predestined to be so. Revelation speaks of the pre-existence of Christ, but while it does so, there is no hint to his death. Christ is read as the “beginning of creation” (Rev 3:14), “the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev 22:13), “the first and the last” (Rev 2:8).<sup>31</sup> In these lines, as we can see, the omnipotence of Christ is emphasized.

Proponents of this reading also point to passages from other texts. Koester mentions Ephesians 1:4 and Matthew 25:34 as possible analogies.<sup>32</sup> The former is rejected, especially in view of Skemp’s observation that *ἀπό* and *πρό* are different.<sup>33</sup> Matthew 25:34 is worth mentioning because *ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου* here refers to God electing his people. However, this does not solve the exegetical problem of **Revelation 13:8**. According to Beale, Psalm 69:29 and Daniel 12:1–2 can be used to support this reading. Psalm 69:29 is a prayer against the persecutors to be deleted from the Book of Life, while Daniel 12:1–2 speaks of the deliverance (and return to life) of those who are inscribed in the book. Moreover, both passages, like the narrative of Revelation 13, are set in the context of persecution. In Daniel 12:1–2, it is an encouragement that the names of those who are persecuted will be found in God’s book.<sup>34</sup> As Koester suggests, both in Daniel 12:1–2 and in Revelation those who are inscribed in the book die but are returned to life and judged positively (cf. Rev 20:11–15).<sup>35</sup>

Also noteworthy is Hebrews 9:26, which speaks of Christ’s death using the phrase *ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου*. According to this verse, there is a difference between the sacrifice of the priest-Christ and the sacrifices of the Jewish high priests. Whereas Christ entered the sanctuary once to make atonement, the Jewish high priest does it annually (Heb 9:25). The argument of the letter is that if the sacrifice of Jesus were not a one-time event (*ἄπαξ*), then he would have suffered many times since the creation of the world (*ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου*). Therefore, we can see that in this verse *ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου*

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. SKEMP 2008, 197.

<sup>32</sup> KOESTER 2014, 575.

<sup>33</sup> SKEMP 2008, 187. Other opinions are also expressed. According to Thomas, both *ἀπό* and *πρό* have the same meaning. THOMAS 1995, 165.

<sup>34</sup> BEALE, Gregory K. (1999): *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC). Cambridge – Grand Rapids, Eerdmans. 701.

<sup>35</sup> KOESTER 2014, 575.

and Jesus's sacrifice are mutually exclusive. Although the theological emphasis of Hebrews does not settle the disputed reading of **Revelation 13:8**, it is an interesting addition that deserves attention.

## Conclusions

Istvan Bányai's book *Zoom* guides us into an unusual world. The book contains no words, only pictures. The book actually presents a single image, but with the help of an ever-widening perspective, the graphic takes on a new meaning. The first picture shows a star-like shape. On the next page, after zooming out, there is now a rooster in the picture (and it turns out that the previous shape was a rooster's head), and after zooming out again, new dimensions of the picture are revealed, and things we have seen so far are put into a different context.

This example illustrates the problem of translating Revelation 13:8. It also shows the key to seeing more clearly in this issue. The main problem arises from the fact that *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* comes immediately after *τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου* that points to the lamb. Because of this literal proximity, many interpreters take the verse to mean that the lamb has been slaughtered **since the creation**. Although proponents favouring this reading list many other arguments, this literal proximity provides the basis for all other ideas. However, if we look at the issue from a broader perspective, a different reading of Revelation 13:8 can be drawn. In terms of the wider horizon, it is first Revelation 13:7–10 that puts the problem into a new perspective. This passage shows that the focus is on the relationship between the beast and humanity. Further perspectives also confirm that *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* signals those whose names are missing from the Book of Life. Prominent among these broader viewpoints is **Revelation 17:8**, which helps us understand **Revelation 13:8**.

It is within this framework that the theological emphases of Revelation 13:8 are seen. The wording of the verse is negative, discussing those excluded from the registry of the Book of Life. However, it is probable to see a different emphasis. As indicated above, Revelation 13:7–10 speaks not only of the people of the earth but also of the saints of God. They are called to be faithful to the lamb until death, during the beast's reign. This call is rooted in the fact that saints' names are inscribed in the book from

the beginning. Even if implicitly, Revelation 13:8 emphasizes this. Although the beast is determined to destroy the faithful, the lamb preserves them. Finally, the reference to the slaying of the lamb in Revelation 13:8 is a reminder to the saints that they are under the reign of Christ, who has also experienced suffering and death.

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