

Reply to Eric Svendsen on Matthew 26:26-28

Robert Sungenis

Dr. Svendsen writes:

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## Selected Review of the CAI Study Bible

I was perusing CAI's site after reading Jame's White's blog reference to the upcoming debate between Bob Sungenis and Gerry Matatics, when I happened to notice the advertisement regarding the CAI Study Bible. The CASB (as CAI calls it) makes the following claim:

The CASB gives you an updated version of the Douay-Rheims Bible, the most accurate and authoritative Catholic translation available. The CASB replaces some archaic 16th century words with more precise words. The grammar and syntax of the original Greek and Hebrew are analyzed in conjunction with the Latin Vulgate for the most accurate translation.

[Click here for a sample page from the CASB.](#)

The sample page above caught my attention because it has to do with the interpretation of Matt 26:26-28 (the Last Supper text). In particular, this note on v. 28 from the study Bible intrigued me:

“For this is my blood of the new testament, which is being poured out . . .”

[Greek: *ekchunomenon*] a present participle which follows the present tense verb [*esti* = “is”] in the clause, “this is my blood.” The present participle is an action in progress or simultaneous with the action of the principal verb. This means that the blood, at the

time Jesus is speaking, is *presently* being poured out. As Catholic dogma specifies, the blood of Jesus is under the appearance of wine. This is supported by the addition of the article [*to*] in the phrase [*to peri pollon ekchunomenon*] which sets off the event as a present occurrence (i.e., *that which* is in the act of being poured out for many). [Italics in original]

Just a few cursory observations. First, the Greek word is not *ekchunomenon* but rather *ekchunnomenon* (two nus, not one). Not a huge issue; just a Sungenis scribal gloss.

**R. Sungenis:** Not quite. It all depends on which Greek manuscript one uses. The Stephanus Text of 1550 only has one nu. The Robinson-Pierpont Majority Text 1995 only has one nu. The 1894 Scrivener Text only has one nu.

**Dr. Svendsen:** Second (a bigger issue), is that in his "updated version" of the DRB, Sungenis failed to explain why he left in the word "new" (*kaines*) with "testament." While there are a few manuscripts that support the reading, it's clearly an addition from a scribe who inserted it based on his memory of Luke's account, where *kaines* ("new") is used with *diatheke* ("covenant").

**R. Sungenis:** "Clearly the addition from a scribe"? Not quite. "A few manuscripts that support the reading"? Hardly. The truth is, there is more manuscript evidence for *kaines diatheke* than *diatheke*. If Dr. Svendsen will check his critical Greek New Testament he will find that *kaines diatheke* is supported by Codices A C D K W D P 074, as well as family 1, family 13, and the following minuscules: 28, 565, 700, 892, 1009, 1010, 1071, 1079, 1195, 1216, 1230, 1241, 1242, 1253, 1344, 1365, 1546, 1646, 2148, 2174. It is also found in the Byzantine Lectionary, along with Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, and other versions. It is supported by its use in the Diatessaron, Irenaeus, Origen, Cyprian, Basil, and Chrysostom.

The use of *diatheke* is supported by Papyrus 37 and 45, and Codices  $\aleph$  B L Q 33, a Syriac and Coptic source and Irenaeus, Cyprian and Cyril.

**Dr. Svendsen:** Sungenis claims that the DRB is "the most accurate and authoritative Catholic translation available." He adds, "The grammar and syntax of the original Greek and Hebrew are analyzed in conjunction with the Latin Vulgate for the most accurate translation." But if the Latin is what's really important in translation and exegesis, why engage in a pretense over the importance of the meanings of Greek words?

**R. Sungenis:** I don't think Dr. Svendsen understood what we meant. The Latin is a translation of the Greek, and thus, it would behoove us to see how an expert in Latin, namely Jerome, translated a given Greek word. Because of Jerome's erudition and faithfulness to the original Greek, the Latin Vulgate is one of the most literal and accurate Catholic translations available. His translation helps us to see the meaning and direction of many Greek words which we, being separated from the Greek language by over a millennium, are sometimes not privileged to know as accurately. Moreover, Jerome would more likely know which Greek manuscripts were the more reliable. As such, we don't find him depending on  $\aleph$  and B as much as more modern scholars do. The only real advantage that *diatheke* has is the papyri evidence, but even that is not decisive when there is so much evidence for *kaines diatheke* in the alternative manuscript evidence.

**Dr. Svendsen:** The biggest issue by far is what Sungenis does with the verse. He makes a huge theological claim regarding the present tense of the participle. In Sungenis' view, the "pouring" of Jesus blood occurs as an attendant circumstance to the saying about the blood; that is to say, they occur at the same time (Jesus' blood is *presently* being poured out *as he speaks*). That, in turn, is implicitly used as a "proof" that transubstantiation is taking place.

The problem is, this same verb occurs in *identical form* (present passive participle) just

a few chapters earlier in Matt 23:35, where Jesus again talks about "blood" being "poured out":

"That *upon you may come* all the just *blood* that *hath been shed* upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the just, even unto the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachias, whom you killed between the temple and the altar" (Douay-Rheims).

I used the DR version because that's the version on which Sungenis bases his study Bible. Here we see that *ekchunnomenon*, although in the present tense, is translated as a *past* action. And this is the case even though the main (principal) verb ("[upon you] may come") is itself not a *past*-tense verb, but a *future-referring* subjunctive verb. Hence, using Sungenis' analysis, since the final judgment of the Pharisees (in which they are held responsible for all of the righteous blood shed on the earth) has not yet occurred, and since the subordinate verb ("[blood] has been shed") is technically a present tense verb and therefore "simultaneous with the action of the principal verb," then the action of the present tense verb ("[blood] has been shed") should not have yet occurred. But Jesus indicates the shedding of "righteous blood" has already occurred since it is contained within the covers of the Hebrew Old Testament: "from Abel to Zechariah."

It is not so much the tense that is important in the Greek verb as the context. Present-tense verbs are sometimes past-referring or future-referring. Past- (aorist-) tense verbs are sometimes present referring or future referring. All depends on what is demanded by the context. And a simple appeal to the tense of the verb to make a theological point as weighty as transubstantiation is meaningless by itself. In the case of Matt 26:28, the verb is clearly future referring; and to translate it as "is currently being poured out" is simply naive.

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**R. Sungenis:** First, let me just remind Dr. Svendsen that it is not a "subjunctive" verb in Mt 23:35 but a subjunctive verb. Not a huge issue; just a Svendsen scribal gloss.

Second, Dr. Svendsen argues above:

“It is not so much the tense that is important in the Greek verb as the context. Present-tense verbs are sometimes past-referring or future-referring. Past- (aorist-) tense verbs are sometimes present referring or future referring. All depends on what is demanded by the context.”

But doesn't this just beg the question? If the context of Matthew 26 is transubstantiation, then according to Dr. Svendsen, I then have every right to interpret the present tense participle as occurring at that moment. The quest for Dr. Svendsen, according to his own logic, is to first prove that Matthew 26 is not talking about transubstantiation (or even its close cousins, such as consubstantiation) before making definitive conclusions about what the “context demands.” As it stands, Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans and Anglicans and even the Fathers of the Church and the medievals, see Matthew 26 as having the “context demand” a teaching of either transubstantiation or consubstantiation, and that particular body of Christians makes up about 95% of all Christians who have ever lived. All I am doing with the Greek present participle in Matthew 26:28, then, is showing how the Greek supports the context in a present tense interpretation of the verbal form.

But let's go a little deeper. Let's look again at Dr. Svendsen's argument:

"That *upon you may come* all the just *blood* that *hath been shed* upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the just, even unto the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachias, whom you killed between the temple and the altar" (Douay-Rheims).

I used the DR version because that's the version on which Sungenis bases his study Bible. Here we see that *ekchunnonenon*, although in the present tense, is translated as a *past* action. And this is the case even though the main (principal) verb ("[upon you] may come") is itself not a *past*-tense verb, but a *future-referring* subjunctive verb. Hence, using Sungenis' analysis, since the final judgment of the Pharisees (in which they are held responsible for all of the righteous blood shed on the earth) has not yet occurred, and since the subordinate verb ("[blood] has been shed") is technically a present tense verb and therefore "simultaneous with the action of the principal verb," then the action of the present tense verb ("[blood] has been shed") should not have yet occurred. But Jesus indicates the shedding of "righteous blood" has already occurred since it is contained within the covers of the Hebrew Old Testament: "from Abel to Zechariah."

The problem here is that Dr. Svendsen doesn't recognize why Matthew 23:35 uses the present participle (as opposed to Luke 11:50 using the perfect participle of the same verb).

The present tense usage in Matthew's version is not for the purpose of telling us WHEN the blood is shed, but to give a graphic picture of HOW the blood is shed. Obviously, if the blood was shed in the past between the time of Abel and Zacharias, it is not being shed in the present time. So why does Matthew use the present tense? Because he wants to give a graphic picture of the flow of blood. Although it was shed in the past, the shedding was as if it was a continual stream of blood being poured out from one prophet to another, without cessation. The Greek present tense is used for continuing action, so Matthew employs it here in the participle form to give us a picture of unending bloodshed.

Consequently, the meaning of the present participle in Matt 23:35 has little or nothing to do with Dr. Svendsen's analysis of it. He has misconstrued why the present participle is being used.

Matthew 26:28 has a different use for the present participle than Matthew 23:35. As I said above, (and which Dr. Svendsen quoted from our CASB on Matthew):

This is supported by the addition of the article [*to*] in the phrase [*to peri pollon ekchunomenon*] which sets off the event as a present occurrence (i.e., *that which* is in the act of being poured out for many).

Unfortunately, Dr. Svendsen didn't comment on the use of the Greek article *TO* in the passage. Dr. Svendsen can check pages 776 and 768 of A. T. Robertson's *Greek Grammar*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, to find out why articles are important in such cases. When an article appears before such present participle phrases, it sets it off and calls attention to its present action. As such it means "NB: in the act of being poured out for many." It is telling us that the act in view is commencing as of that moment.

This also means, however, that Dr. Svendsen's appeal to the present participle in Matthew 23:35 really has no bearing on the use of the same participle in Matthew 26:28, since, as Dr. Svendsen has already admitted, the context determines the exact meaning. As such, Matthew 23:35 does not have an article setting off the phrase in question. Its context is concerned about giving a graphic picture of the continual bloodshed caused by the Jews on the Jewish prophets, whereas Matthew 26:28's context is concerned about connecting the Apostle's present drinking of the wine with the present shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins. That is why Jesus says (emphatically in the Greek), "For this is the blood" (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστὶν τὸ αἷμα) right after he tells the Apostles to "Drink all of it." In other words, their sins are being forgiven as they drink the wine made into the

blood of Christ. The “context demands” this interpretation because the context is speaking about a present situation, not a past situation as in Matthew 23:35.

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