

That Notorious Number

by Edwin de Kock

Revelation 13 begins by presenting features that identify the leopard beast through its close resemblance to the four beasts of Dan. 7. It ends with a challenge to the reader to unmask the Antichrist by calculating "the number of his name," which is *six hundred and sixty-six* (vs.18, RSV).

To many of our time, this is a puzzling statement. But to John's contemporaries, the original readers of the Apocalypse, the passage was crystal clear, as indicated by two words in the original. The first, ἀριθμός (arithmós), means a calculable number, even a "reckoning"—from which *arithmetic* is derived.¹ The second, ψηφισάτω (psēphisátō), is from ψηφίζω (psēphízō), "to count *or* reckon, *properly* with pebbles (ψηφοί [psēphoi])." To this explanation, our *Greek-English Lexicon* adds, "cf. Latin *calculare* from *calculus*."² The *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* confirms and further explains the etymology of the latter word, as it has come down to us in its English variant, **calculate**: "Latin *calculatus*, past participle of *calculare*, from *calculus* pebble (used in reckoning) . . ." People living in the ancient Mediterranean countries did their sums by setting aside and counting off small stones. The abacus was a later improvement.

Languages like Hebrew, Greek, and Latin had dual-purpose alphabets. Some letters represented numbers as well as sounds. Therefore, a name quite naturally also had a numerical value. According to Adam Clarke, "Representing numbers by letters of the alphabet gave rise to a practice among the ancients of representing names also by numbers. Examples of this kind abound in the writings of heathens, Jews, and Christians."³ One of the earliest commentators to apply this idea to Rev. 13:18 was Irenaeus (c. AD 130-c. 202). "He identified the beast as the Antichrist, and believed that the numerical values of the letters of his name would add up to 666."⁴

The following are the equivalents of well-known Roman names in church history: Nero = 61, Constantine = 228, and Augustine = 77. How did we arrive at these numbers? First, we used their full and correct names, as those who bore them would have done on formal occasions. Second, we did so in Latin, because that was their mother tongue or they wrote in it. Third, we confined ourselves to Roman numerals, as those men would normally have done. *Nero Claudius Caesar*: *c* (100) + *l* (50) + *u* (5) + *d* (500) + *i* (1) + *u* (5) + *c* (100) = 761. *Flavius Valerius Constantinus*: *l* (50) + *v* (5) + *i* (1) + *u* (5) + *v* (5) + *l* (50) + *i* (1) + *u* (5) +

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$c(100) + i(1) + u(5) = 228$. *Aurelius Augustinus: u(5) l(50), i(1) + u(5) + u(5) + u(5) + i(1) + u(5) = 77*.

But would any of John's initial readers have known Latin? Of course they would. In his and their time, as for centuries to come, it was the main administrative language of the empire—and its offshoot, the Roman papacy. Latin would also have been spoken at home by at least some believers at the seven churches to which the beloved apostle originally sent the Apocalypse. One of the very first Gentile converts to the gospel had been Cornelius at Caesarea in Palestine, the centurion whose three-man delegation asked the apostle Peter to go to him (Acts 10). Subsequently more and more Latin-speaking Romans, who settled all around the Mediterranean including Asia Minor, followed his example.

In both Antiquity and during the Middle Ages, throughout the West, Roman numerals were not merely common; for many centuries they were the *only* method of writing and reckoning with numbers, before the introduction of Hindu-Arabic numerals in about 1200.⁵ This new and vastly superior system had been known for nearly two centuries, but reactionary elements long resisted it—despite the fact that Roman numerals "prevented any addition or multiplication from being done on paper." And so people had to rely on the abacus. "Even as late as 1299 and in the greatest banking center of the West, Florence, the use of the numerals instead of the old alphabetical system was forbidden by law."⁶

Seeking to explain Rev. 13:18, not a few have devised their own calculation methods, for instance $a = 1$, $b = 2$, $c = 3$, etc. But these alternatives, which they have sucked out of their thumbs, are arbitrary, spurious, and therefore unacceptable. But with Roman numerals we are on solid ground; they dominated the math of Western civilization for almost half of its history.

One person, Andreas Helwig, or Helwich (c. 1572-1643) had the wisdom and understanding called for by the Apocalypse (Rev. 13:18). Apparently the first of anybody in the world,⁷ he found that an important title—which aptly describes and fits the pontiff through the office that he claims—has a numerical value of *six hundred and sixty-six*, in Latin, the language of the papacy throughout its 1260 years of ecclesiastical domination.

Helwig, a German intellectual, was "a professional teacher of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew for twenty-seven years." He was inter alia the author of an etymological Greek Dictionary and in 1614-16 professor of poetry at the University of Rostock. "His specialty in language and his conspicuous ability in Greek and Latin won him the standing of royal crown poet."⁸ His great prophetic work, *Antichristus Romanus, in Proprio Suo Nomine, Numerum Illum Apocalypticum (DCLXVI) Continente Proditus* (The Roman Antichrist, in His Own Name That Notorious Apocalyptic Number [*six hundred sixty six*] . . .) appeared in 1616, almost four hundred years ago.

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Like others before and after him, Helwig assumed that a title also qualifies as a "name," since the word ὄνομα (ónoma) of Rev. 13:17, in Greek as in English, has both a restricted and more general meanings, e.g. "a phrase" or an "expression."⁹ He "cites certain Hebrew names, such as *Romith*, which yield 666, applied by writers to the pope. He also cites five Greek names, some reaching back to the third century, such as *Lateinos*, each similarly yielding 666. He then cites certain Latin names, used by, or applied by others to, the pope. These are (a) *Vicarius Filii Dei*, (b) *Ordinarius Ovilis Christi Pastor*, (c) *Dux Cleri*, and (d) *Dic Lux*—each likewise yielding 666."¹⁰ The numerical value of *Vicarius Filii Dei* was his own discovery.

Helwig also established sensible guidelines: He "shows that the mystic name (1) must yield the required number; (2) must agree with the papal order; (3) must not be a vile name applied by enemies, but acceptable to Antichrist himself; and (4) must be one of which he can boast." He particularly focused on *Vicarius Filii Dei* (Vicar of the Son of God), which he regarded as a lengthened equivalent of *Vicarius Christi* (Vicar of Christ).

The latter expression did not, as present-day Catholics may suppose, originate with the apostles in the first century or any of their successors but during the fourth century in the eastern Roman Empire, with Constantine. He also styled himself *Pontifex Maximus* ("High Priest"), *Bishop of Bishops*,¹¹ and even *Isapostolos* ("Equal of the Apostles").¹² Only when Byzantine power began to decline in Italy, did the papacy presume to apply such lofty titles to itself. "Early bishops of Rome were designated "vicar (representative) of Peter." *Vicarius Christi* "was first used by the Roman Synod of AD 495 to refer to Pope Gelasius I, an originator of papal supremacy among the patriarchs."¹³

The pontiff actually boasts many titles and forms of address. Amongst others, he is known as *Sansctissimus Pater* (Most Holy Father) and *Sanctissimus Dominus Noster* (Our Most Holy Lord). The word "pope" is an informal epithet, since it also applies to the Coptic Church with its headquarters in Alexandria. In canon law, the person we are discussing "is referred to as the 'Roman Pontiff.'" Formally his full title is "Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Jesus Christ, Successor of the Prince of the Apostles, Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, Patriarch of the West, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province, Sovereign of the State of the Vatican City, Servant of the Servants of God." This, however, "is rarely seen or used in full."¹⁴

Today *Vicarius Christi* (Vicar of Christ), appropriated—as we have seen—from his ancient Byzantine overlord, is a frequently used title of the pope, the usual one according to Froom,¹⁵ although we should not make too much of this. Adopting the more or less synonymous *Vicarius Filii Dei* seems to have been a purely Vatican invention.

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Helwig's calculation follows. It is natural, simple, and based on five of the seven letters that in the Roman system had numerical values, namely *i*, *v*, *l*, *c*, and *d*. Incidentally, *u* was originally the same as *v*, which can sometimes still be seen on monuments and tombstones.

V	5	D	500
I	1	E	
C	100	I	1
A			
R			
I	1		666
V	5		====
S			
F			
I	1		
L	50		
I	1		
I	1		

This discovery about *Vicarius Filii Dei*, though momentous, lay largely dormant until the French Revolution,¹⁶ which via one of its generals tried to eliminate the papacy in 1798. From this date, which begins the time of the end with its great increase in knowledge (Dan. 12:4), it has attracted considerable attention.

For Christians, *filius Dei* (the Son of God) is a very holy title, which the Saviour claimed for himself, for instance after extending the gift of sight to a man born blind (John 9:35-38). John 3:16, which summarizes the plan of salvation perhaps more clearly than any other verse in the Bible, also contains it: "For God [Deus] so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son [Filium], that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Filius Dei is a beautiful expression. *Vicarius Filii Dei*, however, is virtually synonymous with "Antichrist." Why? The prefix *anti-* in Greek can signify not only "against" but also "instead, in the place of,"¹⁷ while the Latin *Vicarius*—originally an adjective—means "a deputy," somebody "put in place of."¹⁸ A close equivalence therefore also exists between *Vicarius Christi* and ἀντίχριστος (antichristos, "antichrist"); structurally they differ, but in their meaning they are basically the same.

Vittorio Messori, an Italian Catholic writer of many religious books and articles, unwittingly corroborates this idea, though without grasping its prophetic implications. Introducing the remarks by John Paul II in a chapter entitled "'The Pope': A Scandal and a Mystery," he says, "The leader of the Catholic Church is defined by the faithful as the Vicar of Jesus Christ (and is accepted as such by believers). The Pope is

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considered the man on earth who represents the Son of God, who 'takes the place' of the Second Person of the omnipotent God of the Trinity."¹⁹

Vicarius Filii Dei is a most descriptive title, summarizing, with very great accuracy, the basic claim of every pope that has ever reigned: the idea that he derives his authority, via the apostle Peter, from Christ—in unbroken apostolic succession.

But nobody in the universe can take the place of the incomparable One, our incarnate Lord. Though he is now in heaven, interceding for all believers and even the human race as a whole, he also promised with his last words at the ascension: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

Furthermore, our heavenly Father has sent—as Jesus' real representative—the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18), to be a mighty helper in our salvation. He woos our hearts and brings us to Christ, he causes us to be born again, he lives within to sanctify us, he even edits our imperfect prayers to make them acceptable to God (Rom. 8:26). If necessary, he performs great miracles.

Yet even he, the third member of the Godhead, never presumes to usurp the Saviour's place. There is not and cannot be a substitute for Jesus, no "other Christ" as every Catholic bishop and priest²⁰—and therefore also, preeminently, every pontiff—claims to be.

Since this is what *Vicarius Filii Dei* represents, the Lord may well regard it as the most odious of pontifical titles, which is why the Apocalypse hints at it via its numerical value.

In teaching us, the Holy Spirit must "bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (vs. 26). This sacred Being, also called the Spirit of truth, "will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." (John 16:13, 14)

Though himself divine, the third person of the holy Trinity never contradicts God's Word and always adheres most carefully to the Saviour's will. How different this is from the arrogance of Rome, which has imagined itself empowered even to change the Law of God, for instance by abolishing its second commandment and introducing idolatry into the church.

Let us also ask whether the Redeemer had anything to say about religious leaders who claimed the right to modify religion as revealed by God on the basis of authority derived from their forebears, literal or otherwise. Yes, he did, in response to the Pharisees who sought to validate their status, as well as their errors and wickedness, through a historical connection with Abraham, with whom the Lord had made an everlasting covenant.

Jesus could hardly deny that biologically they were the offspring of the great patriarch: "I know that ye are Abraham's seed" (John 8:33).

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But spiritually they were not; for "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." Unlike that great man, these theologians of Judaism were rejecting truth and seeking to kill the One who taught it. (vv. 39-40) Therefore, the Saviour rejected their claim to Abrahamic succession and even descent in the sense that really mattered. He boldly proclaimed: "Ye are of your father the devil" because "ye do the deeds of your father" (vv. 42, 41).

Ellen White, in her incomparable biography of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*, discusses this very point and adds perceptively: "This principle bears with equal weight upon a question that has long agitated the Christian world,—the question of apostolic succession. Descent from Abraham was proved, not by name and lineage, but by likeness of character. So the apostolic succession rests not upon the transmission of ecclesiastical authority, but upon spiritual relationship. A life actuated by the apostles' spirit, the belief and teaching of the truth they taught, this is the true evidence of apostolic succession. This is what constitutes men the successors of the first teachers of the gospel."²¹

In an epistle that he may have written on or after his release from Patmos, the beloved apostle noted that then, in about AD 100, the early church was already expecting the coming of ἀντίχριστος (antíchristos, "antichrist"). (1 John 2:18)

This expectation may have been stimulated by its reading of the freshly written Apocalypse, which John would have brought with him from the prison island; but it was also based on a prophecy by the Saviour himself. A few days before his passion, looking down the vistas of the future prior to the Second Coming, he had said about the period just after the great medieval tribulation (538-1798), "And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there; believe him not: For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect" (Mark 13:21, 22).

For the understanding of Rev. 13 and other passages in the Apocalypse, this prophecy is most significant. Jesus spoke of ψευδόχριστοι (pseudóchristoi, "false Christs") and ψευδοπροφήται (pseudoprophētai, "false prophets"). Now what is an antichrist if not an imposter, a false Christ?

The prediction of our Lord is mirrored in the very language of Rev. 13. We especially note the following words about the false Christs and false prophets: [they] "shall shew signs [σημεία, semēia, "signs"] and wonders, to seduce [ἀποπλανᾶν, apoplanān, "to lead astray"] if it were possible, even the elect" (Mark 13:21, 22). Compare this with what John wrote about the Antichrist's latter-day assistant, the two-horned beast: "And he doeth great wonders [σημεία, semēia], so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth

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[πλανῶ, planāi, "leads astray," etc.] them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles [τὰ σημεῖα, ta semēia, "the signs"] which he had power to do in the sight of the beast . . ." (Rev. 13:13)

In their word choice, these two passages closely reflect one another; each of them speaks of signs, deception, and universal success for these associated powers: the beast with its delusive name and its prophet.

Its prophet? Yes, for the latter word appears in Rev. 19:20: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet [ψευδοπροφήτης, pseudoprophētēs, "false prophet"] that wrought miracles [τὰ σημεῖα, ta semēia, "the signs"] before him, with which he deceived [ἐπλάνησεν, eplānēsen, "deceived"] them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone."

This text is virtually a summary of Rev. 13:11-14. It is so obviously based on that passage that we must conclude the two-horned beast is incontrovertibly the false prophet of the Apocalypse, who claims to speak for God but is actually a mouthpiece for the Antichrist.

Catholicism has naturally not taken kindly to Helwig's or similar ideas and their perpetuation by later Protestants. Its attempts at rebuttal have included the idea that *six hundred and sixty-six* can really be made to fit any name, and denials that *Vicarius Filii Dei* is a papal title.

A good example of the former stratagem appears in *Our Sunday Visitor*, a widely read Catholic weekly, on 15 November 1914. Commenting on the calculation of *six hundred and sixty-six* applied to *Vicarius Filii Dei*, it says: "This question was submitted to Rev. Ernest R. Hull, and answered in the following manner: 'Almost every eminent man in Christendom, who has enjoyed the privilege of possessing enemies, has had his name turned and twisted till they could get the number 666 out of it. In past history there have been numberless beasts or Anti-Christes, all of whose names counted up to 666. I fancy that my own name, especially in Latin form, might give the number of the beast:

E R N E S T V S R E G I N A L D V S H V L L
5 1 50 500 5
5 50 50 = 666

Quod erat demonstrandum, namely, that Rev. Ernest R. Hull is Antichrist, or the Beast of the Apocalypse!' Perhaps a little ingenuity with *your* name will show that you are the beast of the Apocalypse too."²²

But no twisting, turning, or ingenuity is required for working out the numerical value of *Vicarius Filii Dei*. Itself a Latin expression, it does not need to be manipulated or adapted in any way. And why did Hull

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not also latinize his last name as *Hullus*? This would have added an extra 5 to his number.

It is untrue that every name or title can be made to produce the figure *six hundred and sixty-six*, with the honest use of Roman numerals. Like the editor of *Our Sunday Visitor* so many years ago, we herewith also invite our readers to see whether their names are equal to *six hundred and sixty-six*. We are sure it will be a different figure. I tried with my own name, employing several variants: Edwin de Kock, Edwin de Cocq (the original spelling used by my first South African ancestor), and even Edvinus Coquus. In Latin, the last-mentioned surname means "(the) cook," exactly like the Dutch equivalent. In each case, the numerical total is considerably more than *six hundred and sixty-six*.

Some critics of Adventism have tried to show that the name Ellen Gould White has a numerical value of *six hundred and sixty-six*. To do this, they resort to a blatant falsehood by saying that the letter *W* = 10. This, however, is nonsense. Ancient Latin lacked a *W*, instead of which it used *U* = 5. The numerical value of her name is therefore 661.

The reader may smile at Hull's cleverness and the editor's bantering tone. But there is something troubling about the suggestion that people should simply ignore the number. This implies its uselessness—it is an idea that may just as well be deleted from the Scriptures. Did these men not notice that such an excision, textual or otherwise, incurs the dreadful curse of the Apocalypse? It stands written into a most emphatic place, right near the end of the book and even of the Bible itself: "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:19).

The second Catholic stratagem to get around the number *six hundred and sixty-six* and its applicability to the pope has been simply to pretend that *Vicarius Filii Dei* was never really one of his titles. This is ridiculous, but can be made plausible because history entails so much (even the events of a single century may overburden the mind), and most people know little about the past—what used to be commonplace in former ages is easily forgotten. As Sophocles put it so many years ago:

The long unmeasured pulse of time moves everything.
There is nothing hidden that it cannot bring to life,
Nothing once known that may not become unknown.²³

Accordingly, a hair-splitting controversy was launched against the Seventh-day Adventists in the period just before and during the Second World War. Francis D. Nichol (1897-1966), Australian-born theologian, apologist, and later editor of the *Review and Herald*, had just in the

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Signs of the Times published an article that elicited a response from a Jesuit editor.

Apparently someone in Rome had reported seeing the words *Vicarius Filii Dei* inscribed on the pope's tiara, a triple crown. Immediately, a Jesuit editor contradicted Nichol's claim and said the Adventists had for years been maintaining that the Pope "had this undocumented title." He demanded that they now prove its existence or desist from preaching about it.²⁴

Nichol could have reacted by quoting two former Catholic priests, M. De Latti, who had become a Seventh-day Adventist, and B. Hoffman, then a retired Presbyterian minister. Though these two men may never have met, they both—at different times—told D.E. Scoles, an Adventist evangelist, that they had personally seen the tiara in Rome with precisely those words inscribed on it. But curiously, in view of Nichols' Australian origin, Scoles's account had been issued or reprinted in the *Union Conference Record* (page 8), a paper officially published at Cooranbong, New South Wales, on 18 March 1907, by the Australasian Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This appeared when he was a boy aged ten. Therefore, he may never have read it, his parents having immigrated to America when he was only eight.²⁵

Scoles's article, now scanned and circulated over Internet with its published source, is of considerable interest, since the two converted clerics were also in agreement about other details.

De Latti had visited Scoles while the latter was "pastor in St. Paul, Minn., several years" before the article was written. The minister showed him a tract he had written, "The Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast." But De Latti, having spent four years in Rome, immediately told him "that the inscription was not correctly placed. He stated that he had often seen it in the museum of the Vatican, and gave a detailed and an accurate description of the whole crown." He "said the first word of the sentence [sic] was on the first crown of the triple arrangement, the second word on the second part of the crown, while the word *Dei* was on the lower division of the triple crown. He also explained that the first two words were in dark colored jewels, while the *Dei* was composed of diamonds entirely."

Scoles met Hoffman, who attended the evangelist's tent meeting a short time before he wrote his article. The topic was "The Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast", presented with charts and illustrations. One of them showed the papal crown in accordance with what De Latti had specified. When Scoles described the tiara, Hoffman "spoke out publicly and made a statement to the congregation, saying that while in Rome, studying for the priesthood, he had seen this very crown, and noted its inscription, and that the word *Dei* was composed of one hundred diamonds." Scoles visited this retired minister at his home and "was convinced from his description that this was the identical crown that

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Brother De Latti had seen, but which had been denied by many. I then asked him for a written statement, and he gave me the following, which explains itself."²⁶

This is what Hoffman wrote a hundred years ago:

To whom it may concern:

This is to certify that I was born in Bavaria in 1828, was educated in Munich, and was reared a Roman Catholic. In 1844 and 1845 I was a student for the priesthood in the Jesuit College in Rome.

During the Easter service of 1845, Pope Gregory XVI, wore a triple crown upon which was the inscription, in jewels, *Vicarius Filii Dei*. We were told that there were one hundred diamonds in the word *Dei*; the other words of some other kind of precious stones of a darker color. There was one word upon each crown, and not all on the same line. I was present at the service, and saw the crown distinctly, and noted it carefully.

In 1850 I was converted to God and to Protestantism. Two years later I entered the Evangelical Church ministry, but later in life I united with the Presbyterian Church, of which I am now a retired pastor, having been in the ministry for fifty years.

I have made the above statement at the request of Elder D.E. Scoles, as he states that some deny that the pope ever wore this tiara. But I know that he did, for I saw it upon his head.

Sincerely yours in Christian service,
(Signed) B. Hoffman.
Webb City, Missouri, Oct. 29, 1906.

Let us note that date, 1845, when the Seventh-day Adventist Church, not yet organized, was still struggling into existence, before Uriah Smith could write his *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (1867). The explanation at the Vatican was even provided a year before Joseph Bates could issue his 48-page tract, *The Seventh-day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign* (1846), which was amplified in republished in 1847.²⁷

About the jewel inscriptions, Hoffman agrees very closely with De Latti . . . and Smith's assertion, at least thirty years earlier, in *The United States in the Light of Prophecy* (1876). This says, "The pope wears upon his pontifical crown in jeweled letters, this title: "*Vicarius Filii Dei*" . . ."²⁸

Collusion by Uriah Smith was chronologically impossible, also due to his having died in 1903, which was three years before Hoffman signed

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his testimony and four before Scoles could write an article about it. The present-day *Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation* is, as is widely known, a later revision by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It does not always reflect what Smith wrote.

With three such separate, unconnected witnesses, it is rather difficult to ignore that detail about the jeweled inscription—unless it was all a clever lie concocted by a Seventh-day Adventist evangelist, D.E. Scoles. This is most unlikely. His credibility is bolstered by the details he provides. For instance, just why would he have invented those different types of jewelry, or stated that owing to De Latti's objection he had redesigned his tiara illustration to show the phrase broken up and displayed over all three crowns?

Hoffman's account has been fiercely attacked, as in the Wikipedia article about "Vicarius Filii Dei" of 7/28/2006. We mention and respond to a few of the criticisms. First, why did he refer to "the Easter service of 1845"? (Emphasis added) As a former student for the priesthood, he should have called it "the mass"! Second, just how could a junior cleric have been close enough to read the lettering on the tiara, especially of those diamonds? Third, the pontiff never wears his triple crown when he performs the Eucharist. If he happens still to have it on his head because of a previous state appointment, "he might place the tiara to one side on the special platform on the altar to symbolize Christ's reign over the Church,"²⁹ and to signify his own humility.

At the time of the Hoffman document, those events lay more than threescore years in the past. He was now an old man of 78 and a retiree, having labored for half a century as a Protestant minister. Was it so strange for him, in speaking to another Protestant, to describe those proceedings of so long ago with the word "service" instead of "mass"?

We can, moreover, not be sure that in 1845 there was no deviation from usual ecclesiastical procedures. Popes have long regarded themselves as infallible and do not always have to abide by traditional rules. Gregory XVI, a fierce and stubborn autocrat, was worried about the onslaughts of Italian nationalists, who wanted to abolish his kingship over the Papal States. That year was fraught with events of crisis proportions for him and his church: "In 1845 there was another insurrection at Rimini. It was quelled by Cardinal Lambruschini . . . , but its leaders made a great stir in Italy and abroad by publishing a fiery manifesto demanding the widest possible reforms."³⁰ In such circumstances, there may have been more to the Easter "service" than a normal Pontifical High Mass. Wearing a tiara instead of a miter could have been the pope's way of making a special statement.

Be that as it may, Hoffman certifies having observed the pope with that tiara on his head. As for the lettering of the title, he says, "we were *told*" [emphasis added] the details about the hundred diamonds—probably small ones—"in the word *Dei*." The same applies to "the other

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words of some other kind of precious stones of a darker color," with "one word upon each crown." There was, in other words, an explanation, perhaps to all present or to the sacerdotal students. Consequently, the young seminarian does not need to have sat where he could directly, unaided, read the inscription. Like De Latti, he would also have been able subsequently to inspect that tiara in the Vatican's exhibition and verify what he had seen.

Protestants are inclined to assume that there is such a thing as a single tiara worn by the pope at his coronation and on other occasions. This is far from the truth. "A number of 19th century popes, notably popes Gregory XVI, Pius IV and Leo XIII received a number of tiaras during their reign, from among other sources their previous cardinalate sees, religious orders, the Palatine Guard, the women of the Belgian Court and heads of state such as the Catholic Queen Isabella of Spain and the Protestant Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany. Gregory XVI received three tiaras, Pius IX six and Leo XIII four."³¹

A complication is that, supposedly, "All but one of the ancient papal tiaras were destroyed by invading French troops in 1798,"³² the rest being manufactured at a later time. Of this, however, it is impossible to be sure. The wily men of the Vatican may well have been able to hide away another, special tiara, bedecked with jewels, perhaps the very one that Hoffman, De Latti, and others observed. We shall probably never know.

What is on record is that pontiffs have sometimes worn tiaras made for or used by predecessors. For instance, Pope John XXIII (1881-1963) of Vatican II fame was crowned in 1958 "with the 1877 papal tiara."³³ The identity of the one that Gregory XVI wore on that occasion in 1845 remains a mystery. It did not have to be one of those that are normally associated with him.

Nichol, in dealing with that Jesuit objection does not seem to have had the Scoles document at his disposal. He could, however, have responded by quoting from *Our Sunday Visitor*. On 18 April 1915, eight years after Scoles's article appeared in Australia, it had said, in answer to a reader's question: "The letters inscribed on the Pope's mitre are these, *Vicarius Filii Dei*, which is the Latin for Vicar of the Son of God. Catholics hold that the Church, which is a visible society, must have a visible head."³⁴ The title was therefore not undocumented within the ambit of Catholicism itself. But someone in Adventist circles doubted whether this source could be regarded as authentic documentation, it being alleged that "in the very next issue of *Our Sunday Visitor*, the editor published a denial indicating that he was mistaken about what was mentioned in the previous issue regarding the Pope's title."³⁵

Nichol and his co-religionists thought they had a serious problem. This did not center in the subsidiary question as to whether the wording *Vicarius Filii Dei* was inscribed on the pope's *tiara* or *miter* or (or even

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both). This is not so important. Nichol, a formidable apologist, was concerned about a larger issue: did the title really exist, and what was the evidence for it? He consulted the scholars of his denomination both in America and around the world; but nobody could help him. It would seem that none of them referred to Scoles's article. The Adventist General Conference even set up a special committee to continue the quest.³⁶

Eventually Robert F. Correira, a young theology student, and his companion acquired copies of *Our Sunday Visitor*, both the 18 April 1915 and following two issues. The passage cited was authentic, and no denial or retraction had been printed! Correira and Benjamin Mondics also on 5 March 1943 personally obtained the following statement from Dr. J. Quasten, S.T.D., professor of Ancient History and Christian Archaeology, School of Sacred Theology, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.: "The title *Vicarius Filii Dei* as well as the title *Vicarius Christi* is very common as the title for the Pope." Then, on 10 March 1943, they had Quasten's handwritten and signed statement, beneath his university's letterhead, notarized—under their own two signatures—in the nation's capital city.³⁷

Dr. Quasten could have added that *Vicarius Filii Dei* is also an ancient title. For instance, it occurs in the eighth-century Donation of Constantine, in the following sentence. We quote it in Latin, together with Christopher B. Coleman's translation:

"Ut sicut Beatus Petrus in terris *Vicarius Filii Dei* fuit constitutus, ita et Pontifices eius successores in terris principatus potestatem amplius, quam terrenae imperialis nostrae serenitatis mansuetudo habere videtur" (emphasis added).³⁸

"As the blessed Peter is seen to have been constituted *Vicar of the Son of God* on the earth, so the pontiffs who are the representatives of that same chief of the apostles, should obtain from us and our empire the power of a supremacy greater than the clemency of our earthly imperial serenity" (emphasis added).³⁹

Let us briefly look at the background, essence, and aftermath of that document.

The eighth century Pope Stephen II (752-57) not only headed the Roman Church but also ruled over part of Italy. This was a duchy that he held on behalf of the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople, who was, however, effectively an absentee landlord. He could not help when King Aistulf of the Lombards, who had invaded Italy and was controlling large parts of it, claimed sovereignty over the pontiff and the territories under him, demanding a poll tax of one gold *solidus* for every inhabitant. Stephen immediately opened negotiations with Pepin III (*d.* 768), the Short, the king of the Franks. He secured that monarch's protection, and with two Frankish nobles crossed the Alps.⁴⁰ In France, he

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persuaded Pepin to come to his aid, which he did in 754 or 755, and yet again in 756.

Although formidable when facing Italian and Byzantine troops, the Lombards were no match for the Franks. But these did not at that time establish their own rule in Italy. Instead, the king turned over the conquered territories to the *pope*, by virtue of a decree that is known as the Donation of Pepin. In this way, the Papal States were created. Why did Pepin do such a thing? For this, there were two reasons.

First and foremost, he was indebted to the Vatican for his crown, which he had obtained from Pope Zacharias (741-752), Stephen's predecessor. Pepin had not always been a monarch, but only the mayor of Paris. The real king was Childeric III, the last of Clovis's Merovingian line to hold that office. His house having waned in power, he was only a figurehead, the nominal ruler. The actual potentate was Pepin, who, however, was not content with being the power behind the throne; he wanted to sit on it. But Pepin, a son of the Catholic Church, was well aware of the Vatican's favorable disposition toward King Clovis and his descendants. Nevertheless, Zacharias, by the authority that he claimed was vested in him, anointed Pepin to supplant Childeric—allegedly like the ancient prophet Samuel who had anointed David to succeed King Saul.⁴¹

But Zacharias was now dead, and his successor had become the suppliant of King Pepin. It was by no means certain that mere gratitude, always a short-lived thing, would suffice to secure for Pope Stephen the additional prize he was yearning for: extended temporal rule in Italy. So on his way across the Alps, the pontiff carried with him a brand-new but allegedly ancient document: the Donation of Constantine.

When and where did it originate? According to Nicolas Cheetham, it was "reputed to have been fabricated in the papal Chancery during the feverish weeks when Stephen was preparing to leave for France" ⁴² Dated 30 March 315, it was a letter allegedly from Constantine to Pope Sylvester I (314-35). It granted him and his successors "spiritual supremacy over the other great patriarchates and over all matters of faith and worship, and of temporal dominion over Rome, Italy and the entire western world."⁴³

When the pope persuaded Pepin to take Ravenna and other Italian towns from the Lombards, he told the king that these had previously belonged to the papacy, to which they should be *restored*.

It is true that for generations the Church had been accumulating a vast acreage of real estate, and in the recent past the Byzantine emperor had confiscated its properties in Sicily, Sardinia, Calabria, and Corsica.⁴⁴ But this claim to even more extensive parts of Italy was a blatant fabrication. For instance, Ravenna had never belonged to the pope but had been continuously ruled by or on behalf of the Roman emperors—whether in Italy or in Constantinople. In that ignorant age, however, the precise details about the past were not widely known beyond a limited

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circle of churchmen, who in any case monopolized the writing of the history books.

Under the pressure of papal desperation, clerical effrontery was limited by neither respect for the truth nor common sense. Apart from the Donation, the pontiff's spokesman submitted to Pepin's court and displayed a second document: an epistle—golden letters on beautiful vellum—supposedly written in heaven by the apostle Peter himself. This was an eloquent plea for Frankish intervention to save the Romans from their enemies, and offered in exchange a place with him hereafter.

It began with the words: "Peter, elected Apostle by Jesus Christ. to our favorite Son, the King Pepin, to his whole army, to all the bishops, abbesses, monks, and to the whole people." The document was, or so the envoy assured his astounded audience, in its author's own handwriting. He even personally vouched for Peter's signature!⁴⁵

Now the Franks, though limited in formal education, were no fools and asked some pointed questions. Pepin wanted to know exactly how the letter had found its way from heaven to earth. But the papal spokesman had a ready answer for the king and his entourage: "The Blessed Peter in person had come down from Heaven and given the letter to his successor, the pope of Rome."⁴⁶

Today historians know that the so-called Donation was a forgery, created by Catholics to boost the power of the pontiffs. But they also used their fictitious document later on and for many centuries to come, energetically. "The earliest certain appeal to it by a pope was made in 1054 by Leo IX in a letter to Michael Cerularius, the patriarch of Constantinople. From that time forward it was increasingly employed by popes and canonists in support of the papal claims, and from the 12th century onward it became a weapon of the spiritual powers against the temporal." Only during the Renaissance in 1440, did Lorenzo Valla (c. 1407-57) prove its falsity, igniting a controversy that raged until the eighteenth century.⁴⁷

Valla was a most courageous man for butchering this holy cow of the Roman Church. Not surprisingly, the gentle fathers of the Inquisition tried to destroy him for this and other heterodox activities. Their design, however, was thwarted by his powerful employer, Alfonso V (1396-1458), King of Aragon, who held court at Naples. This monarch did not want to lose his extremely gifted Latin secretary, who so usefully buttressed his own political pretensions against the territorial claims of the pope. "Only Alfonso's personal intervention saved him from the stake."⁴⁸

This has not prevented recent apologists for the Vatican from claiming Valla as one of their own. Nominally he was a Catholic, like most people in the West of those days; and afterwards he did act as Apostolic Secretary for Pope Nicholas V and was favored by Calixtus III.⁴⁹ But he was a proto-Protestant and his critical knife cut very deep.

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Apart from debunking the Donation, he also "denied that the Apostles [sic] Creed was composed in succession by each of the twelve Apostles," said that Augustine had committed heresy, ridiculed the Latin used by Jerome when he translated the Vulgate, and "questioned the utility of monastic life."⁵⁰ That Valla never repented of or desisted from his attacks on those whom the papacy deeply venerated is shown by his last performance in 1457, the year when he died. He had been asked to speak on the anniversary of Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval Catholic scholar and saint. But instead of simply praising him before the Dominicans who had gathered at Rome to celebrate the day in the church of Sta. Maria sopra Minerva, Valla criticized "St. Thomas' style and his interest in logic that advocated a return to the theology of the Fathers of the church."⁵¹

No, he was never a gentle son of mother Rome; and it does not surprise us to learn that Erasmus praised him or that Luther "had a very high opinion" of him. During the Contra Reformation, Jesuit Cardinal Bellarmine (1542-1621) justly characterized Valla as a *praecursor Lutheri* (a forerunner of Luther).⁵²

As for his and anybody's assault on the Donation, it greatly angered the Vatican. About this, Lord Acton (1834-1902), the great Catholic historian—renowned for his dictum "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely"—, has left a most significant finding. His mother belonged to the German aristocracy; therefore, after Oscott College, Warwickshire, he went on to study at Munich. Here he was grounded in the new scrupulous German methods of historical research by Joseph Ignaz von Doellinger. As a consequence, Acton applied a "rigorously scientific approach to history."⁵³ According to Gertrude Himmelfarb's intellectual biography, he characterized the work of the Inquisition as follows: This body had not been created to combat sin, "unless accompanied by [theological] error. . . . The gravest sin was pardoned, but it was death to deny the *Donation of Constantine*." Indeed, "the *Donation* was put on a level with God's own law."⁵⁴

That this indeed was the case is proven by a fearsome fact: "In 1478, Christians were burnt at Strasburg for having dared to doubt its authenticity!"⁵⁵ They had no doubt read Valla's exposé, and paid for it with their lives. But after three centuries of controversy subsequent to that time, the Catholic establishment did at last, reluctantly, admit the Donation to have been a tissue of lies.

Nowadays apologists for the papacy belatedly try to argue that because that document was a forgery, we cannot use it as evidence, although *Vicarius Filii Dei* features in it prominently and therefore must have existed at least since 752-74. That was 1250 years ago. Of course, the Donation is fraudulent in claiming to have been written by Constantine and that he handed over all those territories and such a high dignity

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to the Roman pontiff! But it is also a genuine Catholic and probably a papal fabrication.

Forgers make their documents look as authentic as possible. That clerical falsifier of the eighth century would therefore not have included a spurious title for the pontiff. If he had dared to do so, he could not have got away with it. Pepin's lawyers were sure to scrutinize the document minutely and with suspicious eyes. Everything in the Donation had to ring true; it therefore looked like and also, wherever possible, was the real McCoy. This included the descriptive title *Vicarius Filii Dei*, the name of Pope Sylvester, and every possible detail about the Emperor Constantine. Of course, regrettably, neither his signature nor seal was real. The former had long since rotted away with his hand, now dead these four hundred years, while the latter—if it still existed—was inaccessible in far-away Constantinople. And that city, about to be deprived of its Italian possessions, would obviously not have cooperated with this swindle. As Ralph Ingersoll, formerly of *Time* magazine, once said, "The way to tell a successful lie is to include enough truth in it to make it believable."⁵⁶

During the eighth century, *Vicarius Filii Dei* must already have been in existence and acknowledged as a pontifical title, especially by the king of the Franks, whom the document set out to hoodwink. Also, the Donation had to be drawn up on the orders or at least with the approval of the pope. If the fraudulent claim to what later became known as the Papal States had been so clumsy as to be spotted immediately, he could have been criminally indicted, subject to the legal principle of *cui bono* ("for whose benefit?").

Yes, the Donation was a forgery, but it was also an authentic Catholic manufacture intended to prove the pope's supremacy and to enrich him. *Vicarius Filii Dei* really does occur in it, and the papacy for a long, long time persevered in using the document together with all its contents—including that interesting title.

How and when did this originate? It could not have been specially thought up for the purposes of the Donation but must have preexisted it. Furthermore, the forger seems to have known that Constantine called himself the *Vicarius Christi* (Vicar of Christ). Therefore, to make his fabrication sound safely genuine, he refrained from also applying that phrase to the pope. Besides, the perpetrator wanted to endow his man with a loftier, more magnificent title, to show his superiority even to kings and emperors.

For century after century, the bishops of Rome enjoyed the benefits derived from the Donation. They never repudiated the title or objected to it, but rather fondled it as an accurate description of the pontiff in exercising his pretentious office and benefiting from the material possessions with which his favorite charter had supposedly endowed him.

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According to Smith, "The Document employing the title was confirmed by a church council, says Binius, a high Roman Catholic dignitary of Cologne, quoted by Labbe and Cossart.^[*] It was incorporated in Roman Catholic canon law by Gratian, and when the last-named work was revised and published, with endorsement by Pope Gregory XIII, the title was retained.^[**] When Lucius Ferraris, wrote his elaborate theological work about 1755, he gave under the article "Papa" the title *Vicarius Filii Dei*, and cited the revised canon law as his authority. Again, when Ferrari's work was revised and enlarged, and published in Rome in 1890, the document and title were still retained."^[***]¹⁵⁷ (We have omitted the superscripts from Smith's text, to avoid confusion with our own, and substituted the asterisks. These are the works referred to: *P. Labbe and G. Cossart, *Sacrosancta Concilia*, Vol. 1, col. 1539-1541; ***Corpus Juris Canonici*, Lyons, 1622; ***Lucius Ferraris, *Prompta Bibliotheca* [Rome, 1890], Vol. VI, p. 43, col. 2.)

After its exposure as a forgery, which the Vatican finally had to admit—though it was extremely loath to do so—, the Donation could no longer serve its original purpose. Besides, the unification of Italy, with the loss of the Papal States in 1870, had rendered it obsolete. Even the title *Vicarius Filii Dei*, contained in it, could now be discontinued, especially since those pestilent Adventist writers and evangelists were harping on that Latin phrase in a most embarrassing way.

Nevertheless, for more than a thousand years *Vicarius Filii Dei* was undoubtedly employed, right down to the nineteenth as well as the early twentieth century by every pope. That the Roman Church has now become rather coy about it is not surprising. But it just will not work to pretend that it has never been a pontifical title.

If it were not, we wonder just why that learned Protestant, Andreas Helwig, would in 1616 have asserted that it was. He wrote *The Roman Antichrist, in His Own Name That Notorious Apocalyptic Number* almost four centuries ago. During more than three of them, Catholic scholars—who assuredly could not have liked his book—kept silent about this point. In all that time, they never sought to deny that *Vicarius Filii Dei* was a papal title, nor were they able to do so. The Vatican was still insisting that, despite Lorenzo Valla's analysis, the Donation with everything in it was as genuine as could be.

Apart from this document, let us note the use of that title by Henry Edward Manning (1808-92), a contemporary of Uriah Smith, who quotes him. A member of the Oxford Movement, who converted from Anglicanism on 6 April 1851, Manning went on to head the Roman Church in England as the archbishop of Westminster. He wrote: "So in like manner they say now, 'See this Catholic Church, this Church of God, feeble and weak, rejected even by the very nations called Catholic. There is Catholic France, and Catholic Germany, and Catholic Italy, giving up this exploded figment of the temporal power of the Vicar of Jesus

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Christ.' And so, because the Church seems weak, and the *Vicar of the Son of God* is renewing the Passion of his Master upon earth, therefore we are scandalized, therefore we turn our faces from him."⁵⁸ (Emphasis added)

This is an important piece of evidence, provided by a very high dignitary of the Roman Church. It certainly proves that in the nineteenth century *Vicarius Filii Dei* was still an indisputable pontifical title.

Is it also inscribed on any of the papal tiaras, with which the more recent popes have been crowned? Apparently, at least by the middle of the twentieth century, it was not—according to a denial in *Our Sunday Visitor* of 3 August 1941.⁵⁹ But what about the *miters*, which the pontiffs more usually wear? That was also moot. But inquisitive Protestants cannot freely handle such sacred Catholic objects. Especially, too, the Vatican archives are not open for wholesale research by just any scholar that may wish to enter them and probe into the past. *Vicarius Filii Dei* may in the meantime have been systematically expunged throughout St. Peter's, but what about the pontifical headgear of previous ages?

This is a murky subject. Perhaps the soldiers of revolutionary France in 1798 destroyed all tiaras, save one. Perhaps they did not. Besides, ecclesiastics have over the centuries not scrupled to lie in defense of the truth as they saw it. Church history is often suspect. We have dealt more fully with this unfortunate phenomenon in other contexts. Suffice it to say at this point that forging the Donation of Constantine, as well as St. Peter's alleged letter from heaven, by no means exhausted clerical ingenuity hell-bent on pursuing its ends.

We also note the following observation by Scoles: "Let none think that Protestants have access to all portions of the Vatican, nor that their inability to find that crown proves its non-existence."⁶⁰ Indeed. And the astute theologians of the Roman Church have by now had more than a century to dismantle and melt it down.

All quibbling based on the difference between the tiara and the miter or merely focusing on an incriminating object, is in any case a red herring, which confuses the issue. As Carlos Olivares puts it, "el debate en cuestión se centra en la existencia histórica del título, no tanto en la inscripción o en la ausencia de éste en alguna de sus coronas" (the debate in question centers in the historical existence of the title, not so much in the inscription or its absence on any of his crowns).⁶¹ Exactamente! And let us note how artfully the 1941 remarks of *Our Sunday Visitor* have blended truth with falsehood: "To give color to their accusation enemies of the Church publicize something that is not at all true, namely that the Pope's tiara is inscribed with the words "VICARIUS FILII DEI", and that if letters in that title were translated into Roman numerals, the sum would equal 666."⁶²

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This sentence cunningly mingles a possible truth with a deliberate falsehood, for in Roman numerals the letters of that expression undoubtedly add up to *six hundred and sixty-six*. This fact stands as firm as the Rock of Gibraltar, and no further reference to Reginald Ernest Hull's name⁶³ or anything of such a nature can obscure it.

The foregoing does not exhaust the topic. Apart from the clearly stated idea in the Apocalypse that 666 is the number of a name or title, we also need to inquire whether the Bible specifically mentions it anywhere else. It possibly does so in Rev. 15:2, although the original text may not have included it. And it occurs in three passages of the Old Testament (1 Kings 10:14; 2 Chron. 9:13; Ezra 2:13). Of these, the first two are interrelated and may be relevant to our discussion. We read that part of Solomon's annual income was 666 talents of gold.

At first sight, this number may be purely coincidental; yet it becomes significant when we remember that ancient Israel's great king—despite his extraordinary cleverness—at last became a monarch especially marked by folly. He apostatized from the Lord, with transgressions so serious that after his death they caused his realm to be split in two, with ten tribes irrevocably lost to the house of David.

Centuries earlier, God through Moses had predicted a monarchical form of government for Israel and given specific instructions to restrict its scope: the king could not be a foreigner, had to avoid a "return to Egypt", and was to refrain from accumulating horses, wives, or silver and gold. Above all, he should not exalt himself above his brethren. To this end, he was to keep with him and continually read a copy of the laws and commandments, which he was to obey in scrupulous detail. (Deut. 17:14-20)

It seems that the Almighty, looking into the future, saw King Solomon; for this man transgressed in all those respects. He did amass and trade in horses as well as chariots, gathered much gold to himself, and had far too many wives and concubines, an astonishing harem of fully a thousand females.

These were mainly foreigner princesses, some from neighboring peoples with whom the Lord had explicitly forbidden intermarriage: "But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto them in love" (1 Kings 11:1, 2). And so in his old age, he did indeed become an idolater (vv. 4-8), incurring the wrath and judgment of God (vv. 9-13).

About the great Mediterranean apostasy, too, we find that Christianity degenerated into syncretism, committing several of these transgressions. Depicted in Rev. 17 and 18 as Babylon the great whore, the

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church made itself guilty of bowing down to graven images—an idolatrous practice which the Old Testament describes as spiritual adultery. It also formed political alliances with the secular rulers of the earth, fornicating with them (Rev. 17:2)—which is what Solomon virtually did by marrying their daughters.

Through the ages, the Antichristian system has also been characterized by a sordid addiction to money, as in the selling of ecclesiastical offices to the highest bidder, property accumulation, indulgences, and payments for prayer to deliver loved ones from the agonies of purgatory—an imaginary place, no doubt invented for this very purpose. At the destruction of prophetic Babylon, arrayed "in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls," the merchants "shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing." They will deeply regret that "in one hour so great riches is come to nought" (Rev. 18:15-17).

As a mystic number, 666 is older than Rome. It also goes back to ancient Babylon. The prophet John observed that the Antichristian leopard had a lion's mouth, which—according to Dan. 7—represents Babylon. Many prophetic expositors have shown how, in the syncretism that created Catholicism, many symbols and observances originated in that ancient empire. Some have written entire books about this topic, such as *The Two Babylons* (1916) by Alexander Hislop, and Ralph Woodrow's *Babylon Mystery Religion: Ancient and Modern* (1966). The latter has been especially popular. By 1993, it had been reprinted twenty-seven times and translated into many languages.

The number 666 appears by implication in the following table on "a popular amulet worn by Babylonian priests":

1	32	34	3	35	6
30	8	27	28	11	7
20	24	15	16	13	23
19	17	21	22	18	14
10	26	12	9	29	25
31	4	2	33	5	36 ⁶⁴

These figures are arranged in six vertical columns and six horizontal files, in accordance with the sexagesimal numeration of Babylon,⁶⁵ which was based on 60 together with its factors and multiples (e.g. 6, 12, 180, 360). We still have a remnant of this in the international system for calculating hours, minutes, seconds, and degrees. In non-metric America, common measurements like inches, feet, and yards are—via old England—another relic from ancient Babylon.

Vertically the numbers in each of the columns, six in all, add up to 111. The same is true horizontally. The totals in both directions add up to 666. That is, $6 \times 111 = 666$.

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In Revelation, *seven* is the signature number of the Lord himself. His dealings with our planet are represented by seven letters to seven churches, the seven eyes of the Lamb which are the seven Spirits of God, the seven thunders, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven last plagues. And the seventh day is the Sabbath.

Six, however, has been taken to designate humanity, fashioned on the last day of creation. It is therefore interesting, and perhaps significant, that it plays a role in the dimensions of Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue on the plain of Dura. This had a breadth of six and a height of sixty cubits (Dan. 3:3). Some have speculated that it was also six cubits thick. All these sixes are vaguely suggestive of but, of course, in no way constitute 666.

All these other matters, however interesting they may be, are nevertheless irrelevant to Rev. 13:17, 18; for this passage focuses specifically on the *name* of the beast and asks the reader, if he or she is able to do so, to puzzle it out on the basis of a numerical calculation.

It seems that some are sidestepping the issue or even retreating before the Jesuitic arguments dealt with above. For instance—according to an e-mail Newsletter from Samuele Bacchiocchi—Angel Rodriguez, during 2005 the Director of the Adventist Biblical Research Institute (BRI), has "proposed the figurative interpretation of 666 as the symbol of incompleteness, imperfection and rebellion."⁶⁶ He cannot, however, represent his entire denomination. Adventism is a radical Protestant movement and unlike the Roman Church lacks a Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, or a cardinal to police its theologians.

On 9 August 2006 at Camp au Sable, near Grayling, Michigan, Kenneth Jorgensen, a Norwegian theologian and doctoral student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, dealt stunning blows against the idea of "666 as the symbol of incompleteness, imperfection and rebellion."⁶⁷

He showed that nothing in the Bible sustains this idea. It is sometimes not even a human but rather an angelic number. When he was called to the prophetic office, Isaiah saw the Lord, who was sitting upon his lofty throne. "Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings . . ." (Isa. 6:1, 2). In the Apocalypse itself, we also read about angels associated with that number. For instance, seven angels come out of the temple in heaven commissioned to punish the earth with plagues, "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates . . ." (Rev. 16:12) It can be argued that *six* is therefore a theologically perfect number; as in arithmetic.

To this we add that even in the Genesis account of man's creation, there is not the slightest hint of "incompleteness, imperfection and rebellion." On the contrary, just after calling into existence the land animals, the Most High, in the course of the sixth day, "saw that it was good" (Gen. 1:25). He then made human beings, bearing the image of God, which was totally perfect. As the sun set upon all he had wrought, he

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looked with delight on everything he had wrought, "and, behold, it was *very good*" (Gen. 1:31, emphasis added).

Jorgensen also pointed out the error of "666 transubstantiated into 6 6 6," that is as *six-six-six*. Triple six does not exist in the Greek New Testament; it is only how the number is represented by us, in Arabic numerals. What the original says is ἑξακόσιοι (*hexakosioi*, six hundred) ἑξήκοντα (*hexakonta*, sixty) ἕξ (*hex*, six), i.e. *six hundred sixty-six*, or *six hundred and sixty-six*, depending on the dialect of English that we speak. The Revelator, like other people of the ancient Mediterranean world, was absolutely unable to write those numbers in figures as we do. If he wanted to represent what we call 666, he had to use the letters χ' (ch) [= 600] ξ' (x) [=60] ζ' (s) [= 6]. Some ancient manuscripts even use these three letters, χξζ' (chxs). Rev. 13:18 speaks of a singular number: *six hundred and sixty-six*, not a series of numerals.

All arguments based on the non-existent triple *six-six-six*, with the detachable sixes, are just chaff in the wind. Or should we say that such expositors are totally at sixes and sevens?

But even if Rodriguez's idea represented a possible overtone of the prophecy, it is really beside the point. The Apocalypse does not ask us to characterize but to identify the Beast. The challenge of the final verse in Rev. 13 is therefore: "*Who* is it? On the basis of the numerical clue we have given you, figure out his *name*, if you can!"

It is also incorrect to confuse the mark and the name of the beast by referring to Rev. 13:17: "And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (AV). There is, indeed, a common denominator that links the mark, the name, and the number. It is the papacy. Nevertheless, although some modern translations confuse these concepts, this cannot be sustained exegetically from the Greek original (which is the real New Testament) or the larger context within which it is embedded.

Nor in this case is an appeal to manuscript variants of any real use. As stated in the Preface of the *New King James Version*, textual criticism has become a good deal more cautious and uncertain. Nowadays, the Nestlé-Aland tradition, popular for a hundred years, is being called into question; and so is the debunking of the Textus Receptus (Received Text), which formed the basis of great translations such as Luther's Bible and the King James. Beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century, such pooh-poohing emanated largely from B. Westcott and F. Hort, who "taught that this text had been officially edited by the fourth-century church," but "a total lack of historical evidence for this event has forced a revision of the theory." Those two men, as well as the Nestlé-Aland tradition that they fathered, relied primarily on two old and famous manuscripts, the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaitus, which together are known as the Alexandrian

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tradition. But now "some scholars have grounds for doubting" their faithfulness, "since they often disagree with one another, and Sinaiticus exhibits excessive omission." Therefore, "it is now widely held that the Byzantine Text [the official New Testament of the Greek Orthodox Church] that largely supports the Textus Receptus has as much right as the Alexandrian or any other tradition to be weighed in determining the text of the New Testament."⁶⁸

Bacchiocchi is mistaken in asserting, "But Revelation 13:17 *clearly* suggests that the three are essentially the same [emphasis added]. 'The mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name' (Rev. 13:17; NIV)."⁶⁹ There can be no clarity in a dubious translation that interpolates the words *which is*, even though they do not occur in the original. Here is what the text says: τὸ χαραγμα, τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θηρίου ἢ τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ (to charagma, to onoma tou thēriou ἢ ton arithmon tou onomatos autou, "the mark, the name of the beast or the number of his name").

In English, our foregoing translation works just fine, and the reader may ask, "What is all the fuss about?" Nevertheless, the omission before *to onoma* (the name) of that little word *ἢ*, which means *or*, has made translators scratch their heads. Both the King James Version and its fine successor, the *New King James Version*, therefore just put in an extra *or*; and that is justified by the larger context. Others, however, opted for more drastic insertions, some of them in conflict with the larger context. This, however, amounts to *eisegesis*, that is, injecting an unwarranted *interpretation* into the text.

Let us particularly note that the verse which immediately follows Rev. 13:17 identifies the number of the beast with its name. With this, we are on very solid ground. But vs. 18 says nothing at all about the mark. It is a separate issue, dealt with in an earlier passage of the same chapter (vv. 14-16). That, together with the rest of the Bible, is the background for understanding the *charagma* (the mark). It is indeed associated with the Antichristian beast, but only indirectly. Why? Because in the United States it is not the Roman Church that will mandate Sunday-keeping—the mark of the beast—for everybody, but largely Protestant America. According to the prophecy, the mark is therefore especially associated with the image of the beast; for it is created at the behest of the two-horned beast.

We believe the Rodriguez approach is a regression to an old-fashioned, nineteenth-century method of interpretation, when various Adventists were still groping for an answer. Olivares, surveying how they have over the years understood 666, mentions inter alia two other interpretive attempts. In 1855, a *Review* article by J.N. Andrews assigned the number to the various classes of blasphemy which would be perpetrated by the image that will be made to the beast. In 1857, J.N. Loughborough in his amplified book expressed the opinion that it re-

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presented the 666 sects of Protestantism. Both these men were reemphasizing ideas that they had already advanced on previous occasions.⁷⁰

We respect both Loughborough and Andrews. Elsewhere, indeed, we have expressed our great admiration for the latter, who truly had a first-class brain. But that bit about "the various classes of blasphemy" was certainly not one of his better efforts.

The man whom Olivares credits with introducing the *Vicarius Filii Dei* explanation into Adventist ranks, was Uriah Smith. It first appeared in his *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* (1867). In 1873, his *Thoughts, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Daniel* was also published. Subsequently combined and issued repeatedly, they became a classic under their present name, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*.

Now Smith, despite his limitations, was a genius, a word we would hesitate to apply to any of his detractors. He also knew his history and about Andreas Helwig's analysis. Consequently, *Vicarius Filii Dei* = 666 became standard Adventist teaching, and until recent times supplanted all these other interpretations. There is no need to regurgitate them. It is significant and much to his credit that Andrews, a humble as well as a brilliant man, gave up his previous feeble idea and by 1876 adopted the one advanced by Smith.⁷¹

Besides, additional and sometimes stunning documentation is now coming to light, like D.E. Scoles's century-old article with its credible twin testimonies of M. De Latti and B. Hoffman, converted priests who had spent some years in Rome. The Internet not only eliminates distance but also reaches back in time. Therefore, it is feasible, even probable, that more such data will yet come to light.

Nevertheless, Olivares, supporting Rodriguez, maintains: "A la luz de la historia y documentos oficiales, hoy en la iglesia adventista no se admite como vera el título, prefiriendo una interpretación simbólica" (In the light of history and official documents the title is not, in today's Adventist Church, admitted as a true one, a symbolic interpretation being preferred).⁷² To many ministers and evangelists in the English-speaking world, who almost uniformly adhere to Smith's explanation, this would certainly be news. We also reject such a sweeping generalization.

More often than not, the weakest link in writings by prophetic expositors is their deficient grasp of history, which also undermines their exegesis. In the foregoing pages, we have said enough to revalidate Smith's explanation, showing that *Vicarius Filii Dei* was for twelve hundred years or more a papal title. We noted the following:

(1) For more than a thousand years, it featured prominently in the Donation of Constantine, a Vatican "documento oficial," if ever there was one—with an agonizing death at the stake for those who dared to

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question its validity. (2) *Vicarius Filii Dei* existed in 1616, when Helwig first calculated its meaning, with not a single priestly voice or pen being ever raised against its validity as title in three hundred years. (3) Lucius Ferraris explicitly uses *Vicarius Filii Dei* in his *Prompta Bibliotheca*, of which the 1913 *Catholic Encyclopedia* says, it "will ever remain a precious mine of information."⁷³ (4) Independently of the Donation, Henry Edward Manning, Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, described the pope as the *Vicar of the Son of God* in the nineteenth century. (5) Then there is the Scoles article of 1907, with its two impressive and independent but closely corresponding eye-witness accounts about that title being seen on a tiara—which closely agrees with a third testimony mentioned decades earlier by Uriah Smith's *The United States in the Light of Prophecy* (1876). (6) *Our Sunday Visitor*, a Catholic publication, on 18 April 1915 in the twentieth century also called it a papal title, even translating it for the benefit of its readers as "the Latin for Vicar of the Son of God." (7) *Vicarius Filii Dei* still remained a title until at least 5 March 1943, according to a notarized statement on official, letterhead paper by Dr. J. Quasten, S.T.D., professor of Ancient History and Christian Archaeology, at the School of Sacred Theology, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

It is true that *Our Sunday Visitor* dated 16 September 1917 backtracks on its previous statement of 18 April 1915. From having said that it was a title of the pope, it now retreats to the position that the words *Vicarius Filii Dei* "do not even constitute his *official* title" (emphasis added). As we have shown, however, the pontiffs have several titles and flaunted this one for many centuries. But *Our Sunday Visitor* also argues that *six hundred and sixty-six* cannot apply to the pontiff because it really represents the *name of a man*.⁷⁴

We have already indicated that the word ὄνομα (ónoma, "name") of Rev. 13:17 has both a restricted and more general meanings. It can also refer to a title. In the Bible, especially Hebrew names are often descriptive. For instance, *Daniel* means "God is my judge" and *Satan* "adversary." The Most High himself is Yahweh, the great I AM, but also inter alia the LORD of Hosts. The last mentioned is a title containing a name (2 Sam. 6:2). In the announcement of the Messiah's birth, the angel tells Joseph the child must be called *Jesus*, "for he shall save his people from their sins," fulfilling the prophecy that "they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:21, 23). *Jesus* is the modernized Latin (and Anglicized) variant of the original Ἰησοῦς (Iēsús). This itself is derived from *Yeshûa'*, because Greek contained no *sh* sound and in it the ending *-a* is mostly feminine. No doubt his relatives, friends, disciples, and enemies addressed or referred to him as *Yeshûa'*—though we are not obliged to do the same, since the New Testament invariably uses Iēsús = Jesus. *Yeshûa'* is "the late form of *Yehôshûa'*, 'Joshua,' meaning 'Yahweh is salvation.'"⁷⁵ Often

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he is called *Christ*. This is a title, which for millions has become a name. It is the Greek translation of *Meshiach*, "Messiah," the Anointed One. *Jesus Christ* combines an awesome, descriptive name with a title suggesting his dual office as high priest and king. Those two words are also, for every believer who utters them together, a confession of faith.

But what about the attempt to restrict the name or title hinted at in Rev. 13:17, 18 to a particular man? That is not feasible. In Greek, a male of the species *Homo Sapiens* is called ἀνὴρ (*anēr*, "man"), to distinguish him from a woman. This word does not occur in Rev. 13. Instead it uses the Genitive of ἄνθρωπος (*anthrōpos*), which means a "human being," as in *Anthropology*. Rev. 13:17, 18 applies both the name and the number to the beast and then informs us that its number is really that of a human being. What does this suggest? It alerts us to the fact that figurative language is involved; it tells us that the beast is not an animal but a person in a generic sense.

The pontiff is not simply who he is, a particular human being, but supposedly—through apostolic succession—an avatar, a kind of continuously reincarnated Peter. By means of this, he is his office. Inscribed within the rotunda of St. Peter's at the Vatican are the words from Matt. 16:18: "Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam meam" ("Thou art Peter, and Upon this rock I will build my church"). Every pope claims to be a Peter, which links together all the pontiffs of Rome, so that there is no essential difference—at least in Catholic theology—between, for instance, Gregory VII almost a millennium ago and John Paul II or Benedict XVI in our time. Without this claim to apostolic succession, the papacy would be nothing and is certain to have vanished long ago.

Like *Our Sunday Visitor*, Bacchiocchi considers *arithmos anthropou* (Rev 13:18) to be of great importance. Indeed it is, but he translates it as "*a human number*"⁷⁶ (emphasis added) and says the expression therefore "suggests that it is not the number of a name, but of a human condition of rebellion against God." This, however, in a short space contains a remarkable number of errors. First, it blatantly contradicts the Bible, which speaks explicitly of "the number of its name," linking it with *six hundred and sixty-six* (Rev. 13:17, 18). Second, the ancient Greek language, renowned for its clarity and precision, would not express "human" in that way, having at its disposal several perfectly good adjectival synonyms: *anthropeios*, *anthropinos*, and *anthropikos*. This is a small, though not insignificant, point. Third, when the Bible employs the phrase *arithmos anthropou*, it does so with the meaning that the translators of the old as well as the new King James versions have attributed to it—even though they used "man" generically, instead of "human being."

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Truly competent people, they knew exactly what they were doing, so they did not render that phrase as "a number of a man [human being]." Why? Because there is a syntactic rule in Greek, with its very free word order, that permits the omission of the definite article for the purpose of distinguishing a predicate noun from the subject of the sentence. The same thing happens in John 1:1: "and the Word was God." Normally the Greek for God is ὁ θεός (ho theos, literally "the God") but here, with the article *ho* left out, the text simply has καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (kai theos ēn ho logos). In English, this word order cannot be preserved, for the result would be "and God was the Word." Jehovah's Witnesses, not knowing or disregarding that rule, have in their traditional New Testament presumed to translate this sentence as "the Word was a god" (emphasis added). Bacchiocchi and possibly his mentors make a similar mistake with "a human number."

Further, the original of Rev. 13:18 is not really *arithmos anthropolou*, but *arithmos gar anthropou [estin]* ("for the number of a man [it is]"). This conjunction is important, because it links up the expression with "the number of the beast," which precedes it and has the same structure. That is, *Arithmos . . . anthrōpou* is contrasted with another Genitive phrase before it: *ton arithmon tou thēriou* ("the number of the beast"). Or would Bacchiocchi like to translate this as "a bestial number"?

Now let us note a serious problem involved in that idea of Olivares and Rodriguez, who in this matter are on the same wavelength as Bacchiocchi, when they speak so blithely of "una interpretación simbólica," which they prefer to calculating the meaning of *six hundred and sixty-six* as the Bible requires.

In Revelation, it is only the Lamb, the various beasts, and some other entities that are symbolic. So also is the year-day equivalence. But the numbers themselves are literal, unless a special reason exists for us to think otherwise. If not, everything about the Apocalypse is jumbled into utter confusion. Can real meanings be determined for the prophetic time periods that it designates as 1260 days, 42 months, 3½ years and so on; and what about the 10 horns, 7 heads, 2 witnesses, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 last plagues, etc.? Are these just enigmatic and indeterminate quasi-numerals? And will the millennium really consist of 1,000 years? If 666 is not an actual number but a so-called symbol—whatever this word is supposed to mean in such a context—, the same may be true of all these figures. If so, we get bogged down in a morass of uncertainty. But as Albert Einstein once pointed out, the good Lord, though often subtle, is never malicious. He really does mean us to understand the prophecies.

We should resort to the word *symbol* with care and sparingly, remembering the pest of arbitrary and long-lasting allegorization with

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which Origen (c. 185-254) infected Christian exegesis in the third century. When we assert that 666 is a symbol of "incompletion, imperfection and rebellion," we need to be able to prove it. Where does the Bible say this, or what logic compels us to think so? (As already indicated, 6 is not 666.)

The Apocalyptic number may have additional symbolic overtones, both biblical and otherwise; yet these extra nuances should never be invoked to obscure the primary requirement of Rev. 13:17, 18, which is to figure out the name of the Antichristian leopard beast and not to wander off into other, fuzzy topics. We here present a time-tested and adequate explanation.

Those who find it unacceptable, yet also cannot come up with something better in the way of a specific interpretation, should admit it. Scientists are never ashamed to say, "I don't know!" Theologians ought to follow their example. But if Adventists have for more than a century been wrong about *Vicarius Filii Dei*, by which they have identified the Catholic pontiff as the Antichrist, they and especially their evangelists owe him a public and abject apology. However, we are confident that this will not be necessary.

Is it so important to determine the meaning of 666? It is a matter of life and death, with eternal consequences for everybody in the final generation. The Bible links the name of the beast with his image (Rev. 13:17; 15:2). This will be the brainchild and fateful workmanship of a global superpower that helps the Antichrist achieve an unprecedented though short-lived triumph in the end time, just before the Lord returns.

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