

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 139
“THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST”

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Every newsletter comes with an element of surprise, not only for you readers, but also for myself. Usually I begin planning for a certain topic, but often I end up posting something totally different. This happens because I let the Spirit impress me on what could be of more immediate relevance to our readers.

The original plan for this newsletter was to post a follow up study on natural disasters. The last newsletter No. 138 “A Rush of Natural Disasters: What is the Lord Telling Us?” generated an unusual volume of favorably responses and many new subscriptions. Some readers, however, lamented the fact that I did not give adequate consideration to the role Satan plays in natural disasters.

One of our subscribers, Dr. Herbert Douglas, who has served our church with distinction as Bible teacher, AUC College President, Associate Editor of *Adventist Review*, Vice President of Pacific Press, author of 16 books, including the recent *Messenger of the Lord*, and *God At Risk*, submitted to me a perceptive essay which I have entitled: “Disasters: Acts of God or Acts of Satan?”

My plan was to post Dr. Douglas’ essay for this newsletter, since it provides a natural follow up to the last essay. I solemnly promise to post shortly Dr. Douglas’ essay in the next newsletter. But after spending the past two months working into the wee hours of the night to prepare a PowerPoint lecture with over 100 slides on THE MARK AND THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST, I thought I ought to share with you some highlights of this fascinating study that has truly intrigued me. The full PowerPoint CD-ROM version of this study, is not only twice as long, but also twice as exciting because it contains over 100 slides of documents, tiaras, popes, and pictures of people connected with this subject. Finding and framing the pictures of all the items discussed, has been a laborious, time-consuming project. Hopefully, the visual display of significant documents and personages, will add interest and credibility to this study.

THE STORY BEHIND THIS LATEST RESEARCH

This latest research project began when Prof. Jon Paulien, Chairman of the NT Department at Andrews University Theological Seminary, and Prof. Ranko Stefanovich, Professor of NT and author of the widely acclaimed Commentary on Revelation, invited me to investigate the question of THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST. The plan was for me to share my findings on Tuesday, November 8, 2005, with their three seminary classes on “Revelation” meeting on the same day. Both professors were eager for me to investigate the use of the papal title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*—VICAR OF THE SON OF GOD, both in official documents and on papal tiaras. The aim was to establish if the numerical value of the letters of this title, represent a legitimate identification of the number 666.

Approximately 150 seminary students, plus numerous visitors attended the three lectures. The final lecture at 7:30 p. m. lasted 90 minutes, that is, twice as long as the regular 45 minutes classes, since there were no other classes meeting at that late evening hour. With the help of 80 slides, I shared my preliminary findings on the numeric interpretation of the Number 666 of the Beast, especially as it relates to the papal title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*.

The response surpassed my fondest expectations. Practically every person who attended the lectures, was eager to order the CD-ROM scheduled to be released by the end of this month, November 30, 2005. The CD-ROM will have the complete PowerPoint lecture on THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST, consisting of over 100 slides with the respective explanatory script for each slide.

To be able to view and read this intriguing PowerPoint presentation, your computer needs to have the Microsoft PowerPoint software that comes with the Microsoft Office program. Let me know if you do not have Microsoft PowerPoint in your computer. I am planning to publish this study in a book form with all the 100 plus color slides. We will be glad to mail you the book version of THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST.

The information on how to order the attractive CD-ROM album on THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST, is given at the end of

this report, together with all the other announcements. Bear in mind that no mailing of the CD-ROM PowerPoint lecture will be possible before the first week of December, 2005. If you order your CD-ROM album now, you will be among the first to receive it as soon as it comes out.

About 80% of the research and of the PowerPoint slides are already done. The remaining 20% should be completed during the next two weeks while I am in London, England, speaking at two major rallies. I plan to devote every free moment to the completion of this project.

I am fortunate to stay with a gracious Adventist couple who offers me, not only Bed and Breakfast at a reasonable price, but also a much needed peaceful retreat from the hustle of my home office. If your travel plans ever call for you to stop in London, feel free to contact Gary and Araxi Keshishian by phone at 020 8866 8821, or by email gary@advent.plus.com You will find them to be a most congenial Adventist couple who will treat you as a family member. You can view their facilities and read a description of their services at: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/Promotions/BED&BREAKFAST.htm>

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ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THE NEWSLETTERS

Several subscribers have suggested me to place all the announcements at the end of each newsletter. This is a valid suggestion that I

intend to follow in this way. At this junction, I will only list each announcement with a short sentence. The details will be given at the end of the newsletter.

This is the list of the announcements described in detail at the end of this newsletter.

1. NEW POWERPOINT CD-ROM ALBUM on THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST. Special introductory offer.

2. PACKAGE OF ALL MY RECORDINGS: Special 70% discount on the package of all my recordings.

3. A WEEKEND SEMINAR AT YOUR CHURCH: Information on how to invite me for a weekend seminar in 2006.

4. CALENDAR OF UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS.

5. TOSHIBA LAPTOPS: Special 30 to 40% discount on Toshiba laptops computers for Adventists.

6. HITACHI PROJECTORS: I received a special overstock discount given from HITACHI on the volume purchase of four models.

7. DA-LITE SCREENS for your church at 30% discount.

8. REMOTE PRESENTER: The smallest and most powerful REMOTE powerpoint presenter by Honeywell.

“THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST”

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Throughout the centuries Christians have speculated about the meaning of “the Mark of the Beast” and “the Number “666” of the Beast” mentioned in Revelation 13. Today the interest continues unabated for this apocalyptic endtime Antichrist who will control the economic, political, and social life of mankind by placing a mark and a number upon people.

In evangelistic crusades, the sermon on THE MARK OF THE BEAST usually draws the largest crowds and convicts more persons about the validity and importance of the Sabbath than any other lecture. The search engine GOOGLE contains over five million entries on “The Mark of the Beast,” and its number “666.” At a time of political and economic uncertainty, when terrorism and natural disasters are threatening the security and prosperity of numerous countries, many Christians turn to Bible prophecies to find out what is going to happen in the near future.

The key passage that has been the object of endless speculations, is Revelation 13:16-18. The reason is that this passage speaks of the mark, the name, and the number of the beast that will be placed on the right hand and forehead of people: “[The Beast] causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six” (Rev 13:16-18).

In this prophecy we are told the endtime generation will receive the mark of the beast. We are told that the mark of the beast is the name of the beast, and the name of the beast is its number 666. In other words, the mark, the name, and the number 666 of the beast are essentially the same. Of the three, the number 666 is most important because it provides the code to decode the name and mark of the Beast.

The call is for wisdom to understand the Number 666 of the Beast, rather than the Name or the Mark of the Beast. Apparently the reason is that the meaning of the number 666, is also the meaning of the name and of mark of the beast. The fact that the three constitute an indissoluble unity, should warn Bible students against attributing one meaning to the Mark of the Beast and a different meaning to the Number 666 of the Beast.

For example, traditionally Adventists have interpreted the Mark of the Beast to be the enforcement of Sunday observance and the Number 666 of the Beast the papal title VICARIUS FILII DEI, allegedly inscribed in the papal tiara. We shall see that this interpretation poses a problem

because it differentiates between the Mark and Number of Beast. Such a differentiation can hardly be justified exegetically, because the text suggests that the Mark, the Name, and the Number are essentially the same thing.

The unity among the three is expressed in modern translations, by the explanatory phrase “that is.” For example the NIV reads: “. . . the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name” (v. 17; NIV). It is evident that the mark, the name, and the number are all part of the same strategy to promote the false worship of the Beast.

IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

I have taken this assignment seriously because I believe that this research can benefit not only Andrews University Seminary Students, but also thousand of pastors, teachers, evangelists, and probing Adventists who are seeking for a more satisfactory interpretation of the MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST.

Lately, even our leading evangelists have contacted me before their NET-CRUSADES, in order to get an update report on the use of the papal title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*. They want to be accurate in their presentations beamed via satellite to thousands of people in different parts of the world.

During evangelistic crusades, the sermon on THE MARK OF THE BEAST, usually attracts the largest crowds and causes more people to accept the Sabbath than any other presentation. Thus, it is imperative to ensure that our interpretation of the Mark and Number of the Beast is both biblically and historically accurate.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The study has two objectives. The first is to trace historically the numeric interpretation of the number 666 of the Beast. The second is to examine the biblical symbolic use of numbers in general and of 666 in particular. We shall see that John uses numbers to provide a human grasp of concepts that transcend human definition.

In the first part of the lecture I attempt to show with the help of 70 slides, the various past and present interpretations of the cryptic number 666. It is amazing to see how many names can be so manipulated so that the numeric value of the letters adds up to 666. Historically attempts have been made to identify the number 666 with the names of such important personages as Caligula, Nero, Domitian, Mohammed, Napoleon, Hitler, Ronald Reagan and the late Pope John Paul II.

Some critics of Adventism have attempted to show that even the letters of the name of Ellen Gould White, add up to 666. The calculation is made as follows:

E	L	L	E	N	G	O	U	L	D	W	H	I	T	E
50	50						5	50	500	10		1	= Total 666	

Does this mean that Ellen White is a likely candidate for the antichrist beast described in Revelation 13? Obviously not! This goes to show that interpreting 666 on the basis of the numerical values of the letters of names can give absurd results.

ELECTRONIC MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST

With the advent of laser scanning and the universal barcode, popular evangelical writers have largely abandoned their attempts to identify the Mark and Number 666 of the Antichrist with the numerical value of the names of possible candidates. Instead, they are looking for the number 666 in barcodes and biochips. They believe that John describes the latest electronic developments in the commercial world: global banking, laser scanning, and the universal bar code.

Some are promoting the idea that the Mark and Number of the Beast will be an invisible barcode tattooed on the hand or forehead, but visible only under ultraviolet light. This will make it possible to scan people rather than credit cards. Incidentally, the barcode is divided into two parts by three markers representing the number 6, as illustrated in the CD-ROM slide of this study.

In their popular Left Behind Series, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins have popularized the belief that the diabolic Mark of the Beast consists in an implantable biochip, linked to a worldwide control net. ‘The min-

ature biochip with the suffix numbers embedded in, it can be inserted as painlessly as a vaccination in a matter of seconds. Citizens may chose either location, and visible will be a thin, half-inch scar, and to its immediate left, in six-point black ink — impossible to remove under penalty of law — the number that designates the home region of the individual. That number may be included in the embedded chip, should the person prefer that one of the variations of the name of the potentate appear on their flesh.” (The Mark: The Beast Rules the World, 2000, p. 86).

The problem with such sensational electronic interpretations of the March of the Beast, is the failure to recognize that barcodes, scanning, and biochips did not exists in John’s time. He could hardly have urged his contemporary readers to be wise in seeking to understand the human number 666, when electronic barcodes and biochips did not exists.

In interpreting the symbolism of Revelation, it is imperative to seek to understand first of all the meaning of the symbolism to the original recipients of the book. It is unfortunate that the vast majority of evangelical interpreters, make no attempt to understand the meaning of the symbolism to the original readers for whom Revelation was written. They ignore that Revelation was written to encourage Christians to remain faithful at a time when the promotion of the Emperor Cult challenged their loyalty to Christ.

MOST ADVENTISTS PREFER THE NUMERIC INTERPRETATION

Most Adventists have not bought into the electronic interpretation of the Mark of the Beast. They prefer to hold on to the historic interpretation that developed in the period following the Reformation. This historical interpretation identifies the number 666 with the papal title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*—meaning VICAR OF THE SON OF GOD. This phrase has been used by popes for centuries to defend their ecclesiastical and temporal authority. The numeric value of the letters of this phrase do add up to 666, as shown in the slides.

This interpretation was introduced relatively late in the Adventist church. It first appears, as we shall see, in 1884 in Uriah Smith book

entitled *The United States in the Light of Prophecy*. Unfortunately some zealous Adventists took some genuine photographs of papal tiaras and lettered upon them the three words *VICARIUS FILII DEI*. The CD-ROM version of this lecture contains two pictures of Adventist-made papal tiaras, which obviously do not belong to the Vatican collection of tiaras. The use of these fraudulent pictures has been strongly condemned by Adventist church leaders. You will read about it shortly.

THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF THE PAPAL TITLES

Before discussing the alleged inscription *VICARIUS FILII DEI* on papal tiaras, it is helpful to look into the origin and evolution of the papal titles. The evolution of the Pope's titles largely reflects the increase in the ecclesiastical and temporal authority of the pope from ONE AMONG EQUAL—*UNUS INTER PARES* to the FIRST ABOVE ALL—*PRIMUS SUPRA OMNIA*.

After the Fall of Jerusalem, the Bishop of Rome emerged as the most influential church leader, largely due to the geographical and political location of his church in the capital city of the Empire. But during the first century he was known simply as THE BISHOP OF ROME.

From the second to the end of the fourth century the Bishop of Rome claimed to be “The Vicar of the Prince of the Apostles—*Vicarius principis apostolorum*,” that is, “THE VICAR OF PETER.”

From “Vicar of Peter” the Bishop of Rome gradually asserted his authority by claiming to be the “VICAR OF CHRIST.” In the early fifth century Bishop Innocent I (401-417) insisted that Christ had delegated supreme power to Peter and made him the Bishop of Rome. As Peter's successor, the Bishop of Rome was entitled to exercise Peter's power and prerogatives. Boniface III, who became Bishop of Rome in 607, established himself as “Universal Bishop”, thus claiming to be vicar and master of all other bishops.

THE ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL USE OF *VICARIUS FILII DEI*

The particular title *VICARIUS FILII DEI* appears for the first time in the fraudulent document called “THE DONATION OF CONSTAN-

TINE.” This is the most famous forgery in European history that played an inestimable role in boosting the temporal power of the papacy during the Middle Ages. You will see in the CD-ROM version of this study, the magnificent painting of Raffaello in the Vatican Museum, portraying Emperor Constantine kneeling at the feet of Pope Sylvester, and handing him a statuette of Roma Aeterna (Eternal Rome). This act symbolizes the transfer of power from the emperor to the papacy.

According to the forged document, the Constantine affirms that when he was baptized by Pope Sylvester in A. D. 324 (in reality he was not baptized until A. D. 337), he presented the Pope with the Lateran palace, all the imperial insignia, together with territories of the western Roman Empire. The document states that the Emperor made this generous gift to Pope Sylvester I, because the pope is *VICARIUS FILII DEI*—THE VICAR OF THE SON OF GOD. The truth is that Constantine donated to Pope Sylvester only the Lateran Palace, which had been the residence of emperors and lately of his wife, Fausta. No territories of the Western empire were given to the pope.

This fraudulent document was fabricated in the eighth century by unscrupulous Catholic clergymen. The aim of this forgery was to prove that the Italian territories given to the Pope in 756 by the Frankish King Pepin and later reconfirmed by Charlemagne, belonged to the Pope in the first place, since he had received them five centuries earlier from Emperor Constantine. Thus, the Frankish kings were not giving, but returning the papal lands which had been illegitimately taken away from the pope by the Longobards.

THE IMPORTANCE OF VICARIUS FILII DEI

The importance of the title *VICARIUS FILII DEI* can be seen in the alleged reason given by Constantine for granting to Pope Sylvester his Lateran Palace, his insignia, and vast territories, namely, the belief that the Pope has been constituted VICAR OF THE SON OF GOD.

Irrespective of any possible connection between the number of the Beast and *VICARIUS FILII DEI*, the fact remains that the pope’s claim to be the VICAR OF THE SON OF GOD, was embedded in the most

notorious forged document, that has served historically to defend and boost the temporal and religious supremacy of the Pope.

The Donation was proven to be a forgery in 1440 by Lorenzo Valla, a Vatican Librarian. In that year he published his Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine, in which he enumerated the large number of historical anachronisms that pervaded the work. For instance, the forgery mentions Byzantia as a province when in the fourth century it was only a city, and it refers to ‘Judea’ though in Constantine’s time the Romans referred to this territory as ‘Palestina.’ Valla could have added the fact that emperor Constantine never had leprosy, thus making it impossible for Pope Sylvester to have cured him of this disease.

For over 150 years the Catholic Church attempted to suppress Valla’s work, placing it in the INDEX—the list of forbidden books. Finally the Catholic Church conceded the Donation of Constantine to be a forgery, but only after Cardinal Cesare Baronio published his famous Ecclesiastical Annals in 1592, in which he admits the Donation to be a fraud.

The importance of the Donation of Constantine lies in the fact that this forged document was used by 10 popes over a period of six centuries to assert, not only their ecclesiastical supremacy over all the churches, but also their political sovereignty over what became known the Papal States, which included most of Italy.

CATHOLIC DENIAL OF THE USE OF VICARIUS FILII DEI

Catholic sources tend to deny that *VICARIUS FILII DEI*, first mentioned in the forged Donation of Constantine, has been used historically as one a title of the Pope. This denial is not surprising, because the Catholic church has a historical track record of denying the truth. We just noted that for 150 years the Catholic Church denied to have fabricated the most famous forgery of European history.

In the cover article of *ENVOY MAGAZINE*, entitled “Pope Fiction,”—an article especially aimed against Adventists— Patrick Madrid, the editor of the magazine, writes: “*VICARIUS FILII DEI*, or ‘Vicar

of the Son of God,' is not now, nor has it ever been, a title of the bishop of Rome" (March/April 1998). Madrid's picture as well as that of the magazine are shown in the CD-ROM slides of this study.

Contrary to the criticism coming from our detractors, the phrase *VICARIUS FILII DEI* has indeed been used as an official papal title in Catholic literature, including the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, that is, the Canon Law that governs the Catholic church. The CD-ROM version of this study, offers visual and written documentation of the consistent use of this title to boost papal claims of spiritual supremacy and temporal sovereignty. Even the late Pope John Paul II uses this title in his popular book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.

The issue is not the use of *VICARIUS FILII DEI* as an official papal title, possibly inscribed even on some tiaras or mitres. (See the discussion of this question in the CD-ROM version of this study). Competent Catholic scholars do acknowledge the use of the phrase as an official papal title. For example, Prof. Johannes Quasten, the world-leading authority on Catholic church history, author of the four volumes reference set on Patrology, in a handwritten statement wrote: "The title *VICARIUS CHRISTI*, as well as the title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*, is very common as the title of the Pope." He wrote this statement by hand in an official the letterhead of the Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C. In one slide I show Prof. Quasten's handwritten statement, which was later notarized.

THE SYMBOLIC USE OF NUMBERS IN REVELATION

The real issue is not the use of *VICARIUS FILII DEI* as an official papal title, but whether such title represents a legitimate interpretation of the number 666 of the Beast. The second part of this study examines this issue. Recent Adventist studies question the traditional interpretation on exegetical and historical grounds.

In the CD-ROM version of this essay, I expand on these studies, by looking at the symbolic use of numbers in Revelation. My study suggests that numbers are used in Revelation as human analogies to help readers grasp truths that transcend human comprehension.

For example, to help the readers understand the vision of the “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation” (Rev 7:9), John uses the human code number of 144,000, with 12,000 from every tribe. This means that the number 144,000 is a human number to help readers conceptualize the sight of a “great multitude that no one could count”—a description that transcends human comprehension.

Another example is John’s description of the Holy City, as having 12 foundations and 144 cubits thick walls. It is evident that these numbers are a “human measurement” of the New Jerusalem which cannot be measured in human terms. By means of these human analogies John reassures the readers that the Holy City is a place of perfect safety and security. Several other examples are given in the CD-ROM version of this study.

There seems to be a consistent pattern in John’s use of numbers as human symbols to help grasp realities that transcend human definition. In the light of this pattern, the number 6, being one less than 7, may symbolize mankind that falls short of perfection. Despite the monstrous claims of the Beast, its true nature is a parody of perfection, that is, imperfection upon imperfection.

The number 666 comes short of perfection in each of its digits. This could represent failure, upon failure, upon failure. The evil trinity of 666 apes the Holy Trinity of 777, but fall short and fails.

The number 6 is also the number of Babylon. Babylonians used sexagesimal system, in which the basic counting units were 6 and 60. This system has been accepted universally for the measurements of arcs, angles, and the division of time. 60 was also number of gods in the Babylonian pantheon at different times. This explains why King Nebuchadnezzar’s golden statue was 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide (Dan 3:1).

Babylonian priests wore a popular amulet that contained a mysterious configuration in a square where the numbers add up to 666 whether counted horizontally or vertically. The picture is shown in the CD-ROM version of this study.

The association of the idolatrous worship of Babylon with 666, may explain why John used this number to warn against the false worship promoted by the Beast. It is important to recognize the typological correspondence between Daniel 3 and Revelation 13. As in Daniel's time the setting up of a golden image to honor the king of Babylon was followed by the decree to worship the image (Dan 3), so in Revelation 13, the setting up of "an image in honor of the beast" (Rev 13:14; NIV), is followed by the enforcement of the worship of the Beast and of the reception of his mark and number.

The above considerations suggest that the number 666 is a "human number," that is, a human analogy designed to represent the Antichrist effort to exalt himself above God. John refers to his number to help believers recognize the deceptive nature of the false worship promoted by the Beast. The promotion of false worship assumes different forms at different times.

In John's time the false worship was promoted especially by the Emperor Cult which expected people to worship the Emperor as "Dominus et Deus—Lord and God." John was exiled for refusing to render such worship to the Emperor Domitian. In our times, Satan uses a variety of methods to lead mankind to the false worship of human beings, ideologies, and objects. The veneration of the Pope must be seen as a major manifestation of false worship. As the Romans were called upon to worship the Emperor as Lord and God, so people are expected today to venerate the Pope as Vicar of Christ, Holy Father, and Ruler of the World.

THE HISTORY AND USE OF THE PAPAL TIARA

Before discussing the identification of the number 666 with the alleged inscription *VICARIUS FILII DEI* on the papal tiaras, I trace briefly with slides their history and use. You will be delighted to see some brilliant papal tiaras with the three golden crowns set in precious stones. Contrary to the claim of critics who deny any inscriptions on papal tiaras, two of them that I have been able to find, have inscriptions on each of the three crowns. Their pictures are shown in the CD-ROM version of this study.

The use of the Papal Tiara with one crown, began in the ninth century when the Pope became the political ruler of the Papal States. The second and third crowns were added in the 14th century. The Triple Crowns on the Tiara symbolize the threefold authority of the Supreme Pontiff: Universal Pastor (top crown), Universal Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction (middle crown) and Temporal Power (bottom crown). Of the last, only the Vatican City State remains from the past papal territories.

The triple tiara has been used for the papal coronation. In a ceremony lasting several hours, the new pope was carried in state on the *sedes gestatoria* (portable throne), with attendants fanning the pontiff with ostrich feathers to the location of the coronation.

Pius XII's papal coronation in 1939 (shown in the CD version of this study) was the grandest for over a hundred years. The ceremony was attended by leading dignitaries from many countries. At the moment of the coronation, the new pope was crowned with the words: "Receive the tiara adorned with three crowns and know that thou art Father of Princes and Kings, Ruler of the World, Vicar of Our Savior Jesus Christ on earth, to him be the honor and glory forever and ever."

These preposterous claims, titles, and semi-divine attributes, speak volumes about the idolatrous veneration of the pope, which has been a historical trademark of the CREATURE-CENTERED worship of Roman Catholicism. By exalting popes, saints, and Mary to a semi-divine place, Catholic worship is CREATURES-CENTERED, rather than GOD-CENTERED. It obscures the true worship of God. This is an important point to keep in mind when studying the false worship promoted by the Beast of Revelation 13.

TERMINATION OF THE USE OF THE TIARA

Papal Tiaras were worn by all popes from Pope Clement V (1264-1314) to Pope Paul VI, who was crowned in 1963. Though Pope Paul VI abandoned the use of his own tiara during the Second Vatican Council, symbolically laying it on the altar of St. Peter's Basilica, he did not

abolish its use. In his 1975 Apostolic Constitution, Paul VI explicitly instructs his successor be crowned.

However, Paul VI's immediate successors, John Paul I, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, declined a coronation ceremony with the Tiara. Instead, they chose a papal inauguration Mass with the Mitre. The reason given by John Paul II at his Papal Inauguration Mass, is the past association of the tiara with the temporal power of the Popes.

The decision of the latest Popes to discontinue the use of the tiara, poses a problem for those Adventists who identify the number 666 with the alleged inscription *VICARIUS FILII DEI* on the tiara. The fact that latest popes have chosen to dispense with the use of the tiara altogether because of its association with the past temporal sovereignty, makes it more difficult for Adventists to argue that the number 666 is found on the papal tiara worn by the pope at his coronation ceremony.

As the latest popes have shown good judgement in doing away with the coronation ceremony and with the use of the tiara—both sad reminders of past popes' attempts to act as temporal rulers— so it has been wise for our Adventist church to abandon the traditional numeric interpretation of *VICARIUS FILII DEI* which lacks both exegetical and historical support. It is unfortunate that some Adventists view as “apostasy” the change from a numeric to a symbolic interpretation.

APPLICATION OF THE NUMBER 666 TO *VICARIUS FILII DEI*

All the giants of the Reformation identified the Antichrist beast of Daniel and Revelation with the papacy, but none of them identified the number 666 with the papal title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*.

The first attempt to compute the numerical value of the letters *VICARIUS FILII DEI*, which yield the number 666, was made by Master Andrews Helwig or Helwich (c. 1572-1643). Helwig was a professor of classic Greek literature and wrote an Etymological Greek Dictionary. In 1612, at the close of his rectorship in Berlin, he wrote his *Antichristus Romanus—The Roman Antichrist*.

In his book Helwig explains how he tried to solve the riddle of the number of 666 by computing fifteen different names in three different languages. He finally decided on *VICARIUS FILII DEI* because he felt it was a legitimate expansion of the actual historical title of the Pope, *VICARIUS CHRISTI*. He felt that this modification was justified because the pope fulfilled the characteristics of the Beast of Revelation 13. This interpretation remained largely unnoticed until the French revolution, when computation on this and other titles of the pope became increasingly common. (See L. E. Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, vol. 2. 605-608).

ADVENTIST PIONEERS AND THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

Adventist Pioneers early identified the Mark of the Beast with the enforcement of Sunday observance, but they were uncertain regarding the meaning of the Number of the Beast (666). You may be surprised to learn that our pioneers (possibly including Ellen White) initially believed that the number 666 represented the total number of Protestant sects influenced by the Roman Catholic Church.

Initially Ellen White may have shared this view, because she wrote in 1847: "I saw that the number (666) of the Image Beast was made up" (*A Word to the Little Flock*, April 7, 1847). Supposedly the number 666 was made up in the sense that an adequate number of Protestant sects had already come under the spell of the Catholic Church. This was the prevailing view among our pioneers for several years.

In his book *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, Francis Nichols goes to a great length to explain that the phrase "'I saw that the number (666) of the Image Beast was made up,'" was most likely inserted by Joseph Bates who edited and published the vision. Nichols' explanation poses a problem, because if major sentences were changed or deleted in the process of editing Ellen White's writings, then the authenticity of all her published material is open to question. In the light of this consideration, it may be wiser to accept Ellen White's statement as reflecting her initial understanding of the number 666 of the Beast.

Even as late as 1860, John N. Andrews identified the number of the Beast with the Protestant churches of his day. He wrote: "The image

it appears is made up by legalizing the various classes that will acknowledge the blasphemous claims of the beast, by taking his mark. Every class that will therefore acknowledge the authority of the beast may be legalized and form a part of this image; but when this is accomplished, woe to all dissenters. It is thus that we understand the number of the beast as six hundred three-score and six. The mark will determine to which class each individual belongs” (J. N. Andrews, *The Three Messages of Revelation 14:6-12*, 1860 ed., p. 103).

URIAH SMITH WAS THE FIRST TO IDENTIFY 666 WITH VICARIUS FILII DEI

It was only considerably later in 1884 that Uriah Smith first identified the number 666 with the pope’s title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*. His identification was based on reports from people who claimed to have seen the phrase inscribed on the papal tiara, while in Rome watching the pope participating in religious ceremonies. The credibility of these reports is negated by the fact that popes have worn the tiara only during the coronation ceremony, not for other religious ceremonies. The last three popes have discontinued the use of the tiara altogether, because of its past association with the temporal sovereignty of the papacy—a sovereignty that was lost in 1870 when the Papal States were taken away from the Pope by the newly formed Italian Republic.

Uriah Smith wrote: “The number over which the saints are also to get the victory, is the number of the papal beast, called also the number of his name, and the number of a man, and said to be six hundred three scores and six. The pope wears upon his pontifical crown in jeweled letters, this title, *VICARIOUS FILII DEI*, vicegerent of the Son of God. The most plausible supposition we have seen on this point is that here we find the number of the in question. It is the number of the beast, the papacy; it is the number of a man, for he adopts it as his distinctive title; it is the number of a man, for he who bears it is the ‘man of sin’” (Uriah Smith, *The United States in the Light of Prophecy*, 4th edition, 1884, p. 224).

In spite the lack of documentary evidences, Uriah Smith’s interpretation soon gained wide acceptance in the Adventist church, partly because it was defended by the leading Adventist scholar, John N. An-

drews. Since that time, pastors, evangelists, and writers have boldly presented, sometimes even with dubious pictures, the identification of 666 with the papal title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*.

In all her voluminous writings, Ellen White does not comment on this interpretation. In view of the importance attached to the Mark and Number of the Beast during her lifetime, it is hard to believe that she openly opposed this new interpretation, especially since it was often presented in Adventist literature and evangelistic meetings. Had she felt that the meaning of the number 666 of the Beast could not be legitimately identified with the numerical value of the letters *VICARIUS FILII DEI*, most likely she would have spoken and written against it, as she did on many other subjects. Her silence may reflect a tacit endorsement of what was in her time a popular interpretation of the Number of the Beast.

ADVENTIST PICTURES OF INSCRIBED TIARAS

It is unfortunate that some zealous evangelists have sometimes shown fraudulent pictures of inscribed papal tiaras to impress their audiences. The story of how this happened is both intriguing and distressing. Two pictures of these Adventist papal tiaras with *VICARIUS FILII DEI* are shown in the CD-ROM version of this study.

LeRoy Froom, a respected Adventist church historian, author of several books, including the classic four volumes set on *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, offers a concise and stern account of the fraudulent Adventist pictures of the papal tiaras. In a short article entitled “Dubious Pictures of the Tiaras,” published in *The Ministry*, November 1948, Froom wrote: “Years ago one of our leading evangelists, when in Rome, secured some impressive pictures of one of the tiaras. But the photographs were without any wording of any sort on any of the three crowns, front or back. Later, an artist, in attempting to re-illustrate one of the standards books on the prophecies, took this genuine photograph of a plain tiara and lettered upon it the three words *Vicarius, Filii, and Dei*—one on each of the three crowns—on the premise that such was the name the pope bore, and if were not actually on the tiara, it might well be by way of illustration. One of our leading publishing houses, and the General Conference, to whom the altered photograph was submitted, emphatically rejected it as misleading and deceptive, and refused to allow its use. (All honor to them!).”

“Regrettably, some of our evangelists who do not have all the facts, and to whom the appeal of the moment has sometimes outweighed the ethics of the case, and who perhaps have not thought through the fraudulent character of such plausible but specious evidence, have occasionally continued to use this or similar fabrication.

“In the name of truth and honesty this journal protests any such use by any member of the Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventist denomination (our worker body), of which The Ministry is the official organ. Truth does not need fabrication to aid or suppress it. Its very nature precludes any manipulation or duplicity. We cannot afford to be party to any fraud. The reflex action upon our souls should be a sufficient deterrent. We must never use a quotation or a picture merely because it sounds or looks impressive. We must honor the truth and meticulously observe the principle of honesty in the handling of evidence under all circumstances” (The Ministry, November 1948, p. 35).

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Froom’s stern warnings may have discouraged the use of forged tiaras in evangelistic meetings, but not the identification of the number 666 with the papal title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*. Only in recent years our traditional Adventist interpretation of THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST, has been seriously reexamined. Two major factors seem to have contributed to this development.

The first, is the frequent attacks by non-SDA critics who are asking our Adventist church to prove that *VICARIUS FILII DEI* is an official papal title that has been used in official documents and inscribed in some papal tiara. If no proof can be found, critics are asking our Adventist church to desist from spreading what they consider malicious claims against the papacy.

These attacks are groundless, because, as the CD-ROM version of this study shows, even leading Catholic authorities acknowledge that *VICARIUS FILII DEI* has historically been an official papal title. Whether or not this title has been inscribed in a few papal tiaras, it is irrelevant, because Revelation 13:18 does not say that the number 666 is worn on

the head of the beast. The real question is whether or not our historical numerical interpretation can be justified exegetically. To this question we shall return shortly.

Our General Conference leaders have taken these attacks seriously and at one time they even set up a special study committee to look for sources supporting our claim. Elder LeRoy Froom was sent by the GC to the Vatican on a special mission to find the needed documentation, but his efforts proved to be futile.

RECENT SCHOLARLY STUDIES

The second factor that has caused our church to reconsider our traditional interpretation of the number 666 of the Beast, is the findings of recent Adventist studies such as the Symposium on Revelation, sponsored by GC and the Commentary on Revelation, authored by Ranko Stefanovich, Ph. D., and published by Andrews University Press. Several other significant Adventist studies on Revelation have been published recently.

The conclusion of these recent Adventist studies is that the traditional numerical interpretation of the Number 666 of the Beast as representing the numerical value of the letter *VICARIUS FILII DEI*—VICAR OF THE SON OF GOD—, cannot be legitimately defended exegetically and historically. The text does not say that the meaning of 666 is to be found in the added numerical value of the letters of a name, but that it is “a human number” (Rev 13:18), that is to say, it is a human number that represents a human anti-God power that comes short of the divine perfection symbolized by 777.

Recent Adventist studies favor a symbolic interpretation of the number 666. The key phrase phrase “it is a human number —arithmos anthropou” (Rev 13:18), is no longer taken to mean that the number is to be found in a name or title whose letters add up to the numerical value of 666. A major reason for rejecting this interpretation is that such a method of numerical interpretation is unknown in the Bible.

Instead, the phrase “it is a human number” is understood by Adventist scholars today as meaning that 666 is a human number in the

sense that it comes short of the divine perfection symbolized by 777. In the context of the false worship promoted by the Beast and its image, the triple six stands for the total false worship, enforced by the endtime triune Antichrist. This interpretation is expanded at considerable length in the CD-ROM version of this study..

THE SABBATH SCHOOL LESSON OF JUNE 1-7, 2002

The new symbolic interpretation of the Number of the Beast was communicated to the Adventist Church at large through the Sabbath School Lesson of June 1-7, 2002. The author of the Lesson, Dr. Angel Rodriguez, currently serves as the Director of the Biblical Research institute of the GC. He explains in a clear, concise, and compelling way why the symbolic interpretation is preferable to the traditional numeric interpretation.

Regarding the Number of the Beast, Dr. Rodriguez writes: “The mark, the name, and the number of the beast are closely related (Rev. 13:17). Many suggestions have been made to explain the meaning of 666. Here we must be very careful. The Bible does not say that the number is the added numerical value of the letters of a name. Some see in the meaning of 666 a symbol of humanity separated from God. Humans were created on the sixth day, and the number can stand as a symbol for humanity without divine rest (the seventh day). Humans have claimed ultimate independence from God (the cause of their fall), and even now they do not want to find rest in Christ.

“Over the years, numerous Bible students have come up with various explanations for the 666. Some found significance in the fact that if you added up the number of letters in the name of a former president of the United States, Ronald Wilson Reagan, it came to 666; others saw meaning in that, years ago, all the buses in Jerusalem had 666 on their license plates. This is futile speculation that adds nothing toward understanding truth. The important point is that God’s Word has given us enough information to know what the key issues are and who the players will be in the last days, even if we do not know all the details for now, such as the precise meaning of 666.

“*VICARIUS FILII DEI* (Vicar of the Son of God). Since the Reformation, this papal title has been used to calculate the number 666. But there are several questions that should make us cautious. First, it is not clear that this title is an official one. Second, there is no clear indication in Revelation 13 that the number is based on the numerical value of the letters of a name. The phrase “it is the number of a man” (vs. 18, NIV) could be translated “it is the number of [humanity]”; that is, of humans separated from God. Third, those who insist in counting the numerical value of letters confront the problem of deciding which language will be used. Because the text does not identify any language, the selection of a particular one will be somewhat arbitrary. At the present time, the symbolism of intensified rebellion, six used three times, and total independence from God seem to be the best option. Time will reveal the full meaning of the symbol” (Sabbath School Quarterly, Thursday and Friday, June 6-7, 2002).

Rodriguez rightly questions the traditional Adventist interpretation on the basis of three important considerations. First, historically it is unclear that *VICARIUS FILII DEI* was used as the official title of the pope. This argument is only partly true, because we have seen that the two common papal titles are *VICARIUS CHRISTI* and *VICARIUS FILII DEI*. As Catholic Prof. Johannes Quasten, the world-leading patrologist admitted in a released statement: “The title *VICARIUS CHRISTI*, as well as the title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*, is very common as the title of the Pope.”

Second, Rodriguez notes that the phrase “it is a human number” (v. 18), suggests that the number represents “humans separated from God.” In other words, the meaning of the cryptic number must be found, not in the numerical value of a name, but in the human significance of 666, that is, the human refusal to proceed to seven, to give glory to God and find rest in Him.

Third, Rodriguez rightly points out that “the text does not identify any language.” This is a decisive observation. It is absurd to assume that the original recipients of Revelation could identify the number 666 with the pope’s title *VICARIUS FILII DEI*. Why? For two reasons. First, this title was unknown in John’s day as it was coined 8 centuries later in the

forged Donation of Constantine. Second, the Latin language was largely unknown to John and his Greek-speaking readers. His call for wisdom to understand the number 666 would have been senseless, if the information needed to understand the number was in an unfamiliar language and in a forged document that appeared centuries later.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this investigation is that our traditional interpretation of the number 666 of the Beast, has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, contrary to the criticism of our detractors, the phrase *VICARIUS FILII DEI* has been used historically as a major papal title, and possibly it was also inscribed in some papal tiaras or mitres.

On the negative side, the identification of the number 666 with *VICARIUS FILII DEI*, cannot be exegetically supported by Revelation 13:18, because the text does not say that the meaning of 666 is to be found in the added numerical value of the letters of a name. We noted that such numerical method of interpretation is unknown in the Bible.

Our Adventist church has shown courage in recent years by rejecting the traditional numeric interpretation of the number 666, proposing instead a symbolic interpretation based on several possible meanings of the number 6, such as “humans separated from God,” and the human refusal to proceed to seven, to give glory to God and find rest in Him. If the symbol for truth is seven, six stands for the false worship promoted by the Beast.

At this point the challenge is to build upon our newly accepted symbolic interpretation by taking a fresh look at the unity that exists among the *MARK*, the *NAME*, and the *NUMBER* of the Beast. Revelation 13:17 clearly indicates that the three are essentially the same, sharing the same meaning: “. . . the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name” (v. 17; NIV).

By recognizing that the Mark of the Beast and the Number of the Beast are essentially the same, we can hardly still limit the Mark of the

Beast to the enforcement of Sunday observance. The time has come to look for a broader application of the endtime promotion of false worship.

A careful study of how the two beasts of Revelation 13 will join together to force the false worship of God upon “all the inhabitants of the earth” (v. 8), challenges us to explore afresh how Satan is accomplishing his purpose today.

Such a study can broaden our horizon by leading us to recognize, for example, that there is more to MARK OF THE BEAST than the enforcement of Sunday observance. While the latest popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, have made the revival of Sunday observance an absolute priority of their pontificate, the fact remains that in Western countries church attendance is rapidly declining. It is a known fact that in Western Europe less than 10% of Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) attend church on Sunday. For the vast majority of Christians Sunday has become the day to seek for pleasure and profit, rather than for the presence and peace of God.

The issue today is no longer: Which day do Christians observe? But, Do they observe any day at all? By their lifestyle most Christians show that they are not interested in a HOLY DAY, whether it be Saturday or Sunday, but in HOLIDAYS. This can help us understand why the Sabbath is going to be such a controversial, testing truth in the final showdown, simply because it summons people to give priority to God by consecrating their time to Him on the seventh-day. And people are very touchy about their time. They want to spend their time seeking for pleasure and profit, not for the presence and peace of God in their lives.

The endtime showdown is not about names or numbers per se, that is, Sunday versus Sabbath, First Day versus Seventh-day, but about what these two days represent: Self-centered worship versus God-centered worship. It is within this context that THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST must be understood.

The CD-ROM version of this study examines the sharp contrast between the seal of God and the mark of the beast. Their basic function

is to symbolize a religious commitment: one to Christ and the other to the antichrist. Both the seal and the mark embody the inherent motifs of ownership and protection (Ezek 9:4; Rev 7:2-3; 9:4; 13: 16, 17). Both are religious signs of loyalty. This is signified by their placement “on the foreheads”—the place of mental assent— and “on the hand”— the place of external conformity.

Within the context of the great controversy dramatically portrayed in Revelation 12-14, a final showdown is coming between those who are true to “the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17; 14:12), and those who choose to “worship the beast” (Rev 13:8) by obeying a counterfeit moral law.

While the true followers of Christ are willing to lay down their lives to be true to His teaching, the followers of the antichrist enforce a socio-economic boycott of Bible believers who refuse to accept the mark and number of the beast, that is, the false worship promoted by his self-exalting character. It is only as we renew our daily commitment to our Lord that we will be able to withstand the final deception and intolerance of the antichrist, characterized by his mark and number.

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

NEW POWERPOINT CD-ROM ALBUM on THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST

Considerable effort has gone into preparing this PowerPoint study on THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST. Hundreds of hours have been spent in reading, reflecting, writings, and looking for picture of the documents, tiaras, objects, men, and events mentioned in the study. I wanted to make this study as visual and comprehensible as possible for the average person.

The aim of this study if to provide both a historical overview of the interpretation of the number 666 as well as a report on the recent Adventist scholarly studies on this subject. Most Adventists have limited access to the latest research on the Mark of the Beast, some of which done by the Symposium on Daniel and Revelation, sponsored by the General

Conference. This study traces the evolution of our Adventist interpretation from the beginning of our movement to our days.

The CD-ROM Album project is scheduled to be completed by the end of November 2005. We expect to start mailing the CD-ROM album on THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST during the first week of December 2005. The album consists of over 100 slides accompanied by the explanatory script.

To be able to view and read this intriguing PowerPoint presentation, your computer needs to have the Microsoft PowerPoint software that comes with the Microsoft Office program. To help those who do not have this program, the CD-ROM album will include the trial version of the Microsoft PowerPoint that lasts for 30 days.

To make this study accessible to people who do not use computers, a book version of this study on THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST is already in the making. In many ways the book will be a reproduction of the PowerPoint study, with all the over 100 plus slides, each accompanied by the explanatory notes. God willing, the book should be out early in January, 2006.

Until December 31, 2005, the introductory offer for this new CD-ROM album on THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST is only \$35.00, instead of \$50.00. The price includes the AIRMAIL expenses to any foreign country. After December 31, 2005, the price will be \$50.00.

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UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of October, November, and

December 2005. It is always a privilege and pleasure for me to ministers to our fellow believers in England. The reception and response is always very encouraging. I wish to extend my personal, warm invitation to all who are able to attend one of the followings rallies.

NOVEMBER 4-5: ORLANDO – APOPKA SDA CHURCH

Location: 340 East Votaw Road, Apopka, Florida 32703

For directions and information call Pastor Haskell Williams at (407) 383-7250

NOVEMBER 11-12: BRISTOL CENTRAL SDA CHURCH

Location: 31-35 Lower Ashley Road, St. Pauls, Bristol, England.

For directions and information call Pastor Richard Daly at 01452 423 089 or 07958 433744

NOVEMBER 18-19: LONDON, ENGLAND –TOTENHAM SDA CHURCH

Location: 255 West Green Road, London N15, England.

For direction and information call Pastor Nicu Buitoi at 0781 622 7909. He is the new Pastor of the Romanian and Green Acres Totenham SDA churches and is arranging for a rally of several churches

NOVEMBER 25-26: NEW YORK CITY – NEW HAVEN TEMPLE SDA CHURCH

Location: 634 Prospect Place, Brooklyn, NY 11216.

For directions and information call Pastor Allan Hay at (516) 334-6339 or (516) 225-7897.

DECEMBER 2-3: VANCOUVER, BC: SURREY SDA CHURCH

Location: 8520 132nd Street, Surrey, BC V3W 4N7, Canada.

For directions and information call Pastor George Ali at (604) 585-7540 or (604) 591-2922.

DECEMBER 9-10: DETROIT: BURNS SDA CHURCH

Location: 10125 E. Warren, Detroit, Michigan 48214.

For directions and information call Pastor Everett at (586) 786-0035.

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