

Reflections on the Number 666

For as long as I can remember, Seventh-day Adventist evangelists have applied the number 666 to one of the Latin titles of the Pope, namely, Vicarius Filii Dei. They have claimed that this title (which means “Vicar of the Son of God”) is one of the official titles which have traditionally been used by the popes. Some of our evangelists have also affirmed that the title is (or has been) inscribed on the papal tiara or on his miter.

Have our evangelists been correct in their assessment? Is this really one of the official titles that have been traditionally claimed by the popes? Was this title really on the papal tiara or miter in times past?

Recently several of our ablest scholars have answered “no” to these questions. A new view has appeared on the horizon with defenders of the caliber of Dr. William G. Johnsson, Dr. Beatrice Neall, Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, Dr. Jon Paulien, Dr. Ranko Stefanovic and Dr. Angel M. Rodriguez. These theologians have challenged the traditional view and have proposed a new one. The traditional view is very specific. It applies the name and number of the beast directly to a succession of Roman Catholic popes. The new view has removed this specific meaning from the Roman Catholic papacy and has applied it in general terms to an end-time alienation of man from God.

Several years ago Dr. Beatrice Neall articulated the new view:

“Six is legitimate when it leads to seven; it represents man on the first evening of his existence entering into the celebration of God’s creative power. The glory of the creature is right if it leads to the glory of God. Six hundred sixty-six, however, represents the refusal of man to proceed to seven, to give glory to God as Creator and Redeemer. It represents man’s fixation with himself, man seeking glory in himself and his own creations. It speaks of the fullness of creation and all creative powers without God—the practice of the absence of God. It demonstrates that unregenerate man is persistently evil.” Beatrice Neall, *The Concept of Character in the Apocalypse with Implications for Character Education*, pp. 153-155.

This rather philosophical, conjectural, if not speculative definition of the number six has been picked up and simplified by Dr. Angel M. Rodriguez:

“. . . the Greek phrase translated ‘It is a man’s number’ (Revelation 13:18) could be also rendered ‘it is the number of humanity.’ In that case, it is not referring to a particular person but to a characteristic of humanity separated from God. Since God created humans during the sixth day, it could stand as a symbol of humanity, but a humanity not yet at rest with God and without the joy of a harmonious relationship with God during the seventh day. The number reveals the rebellious nature of the enemies of God and His remnant. That seems to be the best available interpretation.” Angel M. Rodriguez, *Future Glory*, p. 122. Bold type is mine.

This change has upset some in the church who feel like the traditional view is more than adequate to explain the mystery of the number 666. Many feel that the new view has taken what is definite and clear and has made it indefinite and fuzzy. Others have gone so far as to believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been infiltrated by Jesuits who have the hidden agenda of destroying our distinctive prophetic roots with a view to ultimately destroy the Seventh-day Adventist Church itself.

This later fear has been fed in recent years by Adventist college teachers who have stated that we should build bridges of understanding with Rome rather than criticizing her. The conspiracy flames have been further fanned when a medal was given to the pope by the religious liberty department of the General Conference and also when the flag of the Holy See was paraded on stage at the 2005 General Conference session in St. Louis during the March of Nations.

In this article I would like to take a closer look at the number 666 as it relates to the name of the beast. As we begin, there are several Biblical facts that will help us understand this enigmatic number and the system to which it applies.

First, a very important fact that has been overlooked more frequently than not is that the name of the beast is a blasphemous name. This is stated explicitly in Revelation 13:1: "Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name."

Now that we know that the name (whose number is 666) is blasphemous, we must discover the Biblical definition of blasphemy. Does the Bible contain a clear definition of what constitutes blasphemy? The answer is unmistakably yes.

The Scriptures clearly define blasphemy as the attempt of man to make himself God and as such to exercise the power and prerogatives of God. When Jesus affirmed: "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30) the Jews went ballistic. They picked up stones to execute the death penalty required by the Law (Leviticus 24:16). When Jesus asked them what evil work He had done to merit stoning, they responded: "'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.'" (John 10:33) The terminology of the accusation is significant. Notice that Jesus was told that He blasphemed because He, being a man, made himself God. In fact, Jesus not only claimed to be God, He also claimed to work the works of God! (John 10: 28, 37, 38)

Interestingly, in the way of thinking of the Jewish leaders Jesus was guilty of blasphemy when He claimed to be the Son of God (Matthew 26:64; 10:36, 37; John 19:7). All the Jews claimed to be sons of God in a general sense but it is clear that Jesus did not claim to be a Son of God in a general sense but in the strictest sense of being the representative of God on earth! He was the spokesman for God on earth—His vicar, if you please! This is the reason why Jesus could say: "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Jesus undoubtedly claimed to be Vicarius Dei, and rightfully so.

Blasphemy is also defined as when a mere man claims to have the power to forgive sins. This means that any man who claims to have the right to exercise the prerogatives of God is guilty of blasphemy. When Jesus told the paralytic of Capernaum: "Your sins are forgiven" the religious leaders murmured saying: "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). The religious leaders were actually thinking: If this man claims to have the right to forgive sins, then he must claim to be God because only God can forgive sins.

II Thessalonians 2:3, 4 has similar terminology. Here we are told that the man of sin sits in the temple of God (the church) proclaiming himself to be God. Once again we notice that this power is human and yet it seeks to occupy the place of God. Later on in the passage we are told that this power also claims to perform the works that Jesus Himself performed while He was on earth (II Thessalonians 2:9; Acts 2:22). II Thessalonians 2:3, 4 actually paraphrases the language from Daniel 11:36 where we are told that the king of the north "shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods." It will be noticed that the exaltation of the king of the north to the level of God is linked with the great words that He speaks against the God of gods. The use of the word "man" in these verses does not require that we find one particular person as the fulfillment. Adventists have understood the word "man" in this passage to refer, not to an individual, but rather to a succession of persons, namely, the popes of Rome.

In this context it is worthy of note that the little horn of Daniel 7 (which symbolizes the same power as the beast of Revelation 13:1-10 and the man of sin of II Thessalonians 2) has a mouth that speaks "pompous words against the Most High" (Daniel 7:25). These great words are identified as blasphemies in Revelation 13:5 where we are told that the beast was given a mouth that speaks "great things and blasphemies." This little horn/beast not only claims to be God but also claims to have the power to exercise the prerogatives of God even to the point of changing God's prophetic times and His Law! (Daniel 7:25) Thus, in a very specific sense, the little horn (or the beast) claims the right to occupy the place of God and to exercise the power and prerogatives of God.

In what sense does this little horn/beast speak blasphemies against God? Daniel 8 provides the indisputable answer. In Daniel 8 (in distinction to Daniel 7) we are not told that the little horn speaks blasphemies against the Most High. Rather, we are told that the little horn attempted to supplant or take the place of the Prince of the host by taking away the daily ministration from Him (Daniel 8:11). Thus the little horn's blasphemy consists in the act of trying to supplant or take the place of the Prince of the host and to carry on His work.

In the light of this overwhelming Biblical evidence, it would seem that the blasphemous name of the beast must be linked with his attempt to supplant or occupy the place of God and to exercise the power and prerogatives of God.

There can be no doubt that the power represented by the little horn, the beast and the man of sin is the Roman Catholic Papacy. The little horn (and the beast) does not appear in a

vacuum. There is a clear sequence of powers which precede the horn's arrival on the scene. The kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and divided Rome must rule before the little horn comes on the scene.

Numerous quotations could be provided from Roman Catholic writers to the effect that the pope claims to occupy the place of God on earth. Space limitations will allow for only a few examples.

“ . . . the pope can modify divine law, since his power is not of man, but of God, and he acts in the place of God upon earth, with the fullest power of binding and losing his sheep.@ (Lucius Ferraris, Prompta Bibliotheca, vol. 2, article APapa@, bold is mine)

Pope Nicholas I (who ruled from 858-867 A. D.) once said:

It is evident that the popes can neither be bound nor unbound by any earthly power, nor even by that of the apostle [Peter], if he should return upon the earth; since Constantine the Great has recognized that the pontiffs held the place of God upon earth, divinity not being able to be judged by any living man. We are, then, infallible, and whatever may be our acts, we are not accountable for them but to ourselves.@ (Cormenin, History of the Popes, p. 243, as cited in R. W. Thompson, The Papacy and the Civil Power, p. 248, bold is mine).

Pope Leo XIII in an Encyclical Letter ('On the Chief Duties of Christians as Citizens') dated January 10, 1890 affirmed: "But the supreme teacher in the Church is the Roman Pontiff. Union of minds, therefore, requires, together with a perfect accord in the one faith, complete submission and obedience of will to the Church and to the Roman Pontiff, as to God Himself." (The Great Encyclical Letters of Leo XIII, p. 193, bold is mine)

Leo XIII in an encyclical letter dated June 20, 1894 stated: "We hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty.@ (The Great Encyclical Letters of Leo XIII, p. 304, bold is mine)

Repeatedly Roman Catholic sources refer to the popes as vicars of Christ, vice-regents of Christ, representatives of Christ, and, yes, Vicars of the Son of God (proof to be provided later in this article).

Furthermore, the popes have claimed the right to exercise the power and prerogatives that belong only to God. They claim to have the right to forgive sins (cf. Mark 2:7), to set up and remove kings (cf. Daniel 2:21), to be bowed down to (cf. Revelation 19:10), to be called Holy Father (cf. Matthew 23:9), to execute the death penalty upon dissenters (cf. Daniel 7:21), to change the Sabbath (cf. Daniel 2:21; 7:25), to change God's prophetic calendar (cf. Daniel 7:25), to be the supreme judges of heaven, earth and hell whose decision cannot be appealed (cf. John 5:22, 27) and to be infallible expositors in matters of faith and morals (cf. James 1:17).

Second, besides the name of the beast being blasphemous, the name also has a number (Revelation 13:17). The critical question at this point is this: How do we get a number from a name? The answer lies in the fact that in ancient times numbers were written with the letters of the alphabet. This practice, referred to as gematria, was used in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. This means that when the letters of the beast's blasphemous name are given their respective numerical value the total will be 666. The Living Bible captures well the meaning of Revelation 13:18: "Here is a puzzle that calls for careful thought to solve it. Let those who are able, interpret this code: the numerical values of the letters in his name add to 666!" The New English Bible renders Revelation 13:18 in similar fashion: "The number represents a man's name, and the numerical value of its letters is six hundred and sixty-six." Even the Roman Catholic Douay Version adds a footnote to Revelation 13:18 which states: "The numeral letters of his name shall make up this number."

Recently, Dr. Bacchiocchi has argued that the text of Revelation 13:18 requires a name rather than a title. After all, the text says that 666 is the number of the beast's name and not the number of his title. Dr. Bacchiocchi therefore states that Vicarius Filii Dei, being a title rather than a name, cannot fulfill the specifications of the text (Endtime Issues, Online Newsletter, "The Saga of the Adventist Papal Tiara," part 2). This argument is superficial and can be disposed of quite readily by noting that in Revelation 19:16 Jesus is described as one who has a name written on his vesture and on his thigh. But the name is not a personal name but rather a title: "King of kings and Lord of lords." So the word "name" can refer to a title rather than to a proper name.

Third, we are told in Revelation 13:18 that number 666 is the number of a man. It is noteworthy that the little horn has eyes like a man, the apostate one of II Thessalonians 2 is called the man of sin and here the beast has the number of a man. This is certainly a system that is based on man.

Some of our scholars have recently attempted to say that the expression "the number of a man" should really be translated "the number of humanity." But the book of Revelation does not use the word anthropos in this sense. To translate the word anthropos in this manner denotes the art of interpretation rather than of translation. I checked several of the better known versions of the Bible (New International, Jerusalem, New English, New American Standard, King James, New King James, New American, Weymouth, Phillips, RSV) to ascertain how they translate the expression: "arithmós gár anthrópou estín" ("it is the number of a man"). Interestingly, only the RSV with its liberal gender inclusive slant translates: "it is a human number." Not one of the major versions translates "for it is the number of humanity."

Is the text of Revelation 13:18 really telling us that the number 666 applies to humanity in general rather than to the beast specifically? A careful study of Revelation 13:1-10 (and also of Daniel 7 and II Thessalonians 2) reveals unmistakably that the beast represents the Roman Catholic papacy as a system, not humanity in general. If the number is the number of the beast, and the beast is a symbol of the papacy, then the number cannot apply to humanity in general but rather specifically to the papacy.

A parallel text would be II Thessalonians 2 where the same system is referred to as the man of sin. The word “man” here is not referring to a specific individual but rather to a succession of rulers who make man the measure of all things rather than God. Would any serious Biblical scholar say that the expression “man [anthropos] of sin” should be translated “the humanity of sin”? Would it be proper to translate the “eyes of a man” in Daniel 7:8 as “the eyes of humanity”? This would be absurd. The simple fact is that the system represented by the little horn/man of sin/beast is based on the wisdom and prowess of man while claiming to have the right to exercise the power and prerogatives of God. In other words it is a system that is man-centered rather than God-centered. In this sense there is a grain of truth in the idea that the number 6 represents a system which is centered in man while the number 7 represents a system that is based on God.

A very important question arises at this point: In which language should we look for the name or title? Should the name be sought in Hebrew, Greek, Latin or perhaps even English? Angel Manuel Rodriguez has advised caution at this point. He states that “we confront the problem of determining which language to use. The biblical text does not specify any particular language; therefore, any that we selected would be a matter of personal opinion.” (Angel Manuel Rodriguez, *Future Glory*, p. 122)

But is Dr. Rodriguez’ statement accurate? I believe that we can definitely know from the Bible itself which language to use! And which language is that? There is persuasive evidence that the name and number must be found in the Latin language.

You are probably wondering why the name and number should be in Latin. The answer is actually quite simple. The beast is clearly a Roman power and the official language of Rome was Latin (that Latin was the Roman language of New Testament times can be proved from John 19:20).

Notice that according to Revelation 13:2 the beast received his “power, his throne, and great authority” (Revelation 13:2) from the dragon. Though the dragon primarily represents Satan (Revelation 12:9), it also represents the kingdom through which Satan attempted to slay the man child and this kingdom was Rome (Matthew 2:16; Revelation 12:1-5) It is not coincidental that the Catholic Church is officially called the Roman Catholic Church.

Now, if the beast represents the Roman Catholic papacy, then we should look for his name in Latin, the official language of ancient Rome and Papal Rome! And if the name is in Latin then we should use Roman numerals to ascertain the number of his name! In short, both the name and the respective numerical equivalents of its letters must be sought in the Latin language.

Let’s summarize what the Bible tells us about this number: First, it must be a blasphemous name. That is to say, it must be a name whose bearer claims to represent God and to exercise the power and prerogatives of God. Second, the name must be in Latin, the language of Rome. Third, the numerical equivalents of the letters of the name

must be found in Roman numerals. Fourth, the number must be that of a man. It will be noticed that the title Vicarius Filii Dei fits all of these criteria. But two critically important questions remain to be answered. But before we do, allow me to digress for just a moment.

It is noteworthy that the Latin poets who originally devised the system of Roman numerals broke with the norm of the day and instead of using all the letters of the alphabet to represent numbers they chose only six characters to represent all numbers: I, V, X, L, C and D (the M was not part of the original numerical system. Before the advent of the M, the number 1000 was written by placing two D's side by side). When the six Roman numerals are added the total is 666. This strongly suggests that the number 666 is linked in some manner with Rome.

Now to the two questions: Is the name Vicarius Filii Dei a title which has been given to the pope by Roman Catholics themselves or is it a Protestant fabrication? And, was this title ever inscribed on the papal tiara or miter? Let's wrestle with the first question.

The historical evidence indicates that the answer to the first question is yes. Some, such as Roman Catholic apologist Patrick Madrid, have claimed that the name Vicarius Filii Dei has never been used as a title for the pope (though later he revised his statement to say that it was never an official title). Says Madrid: "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." (Envoy Magazine, March/April, 1998) An examination of the historical records clearly reveals that this is an inaccurate statement.

The Donation of Constantine which was used by at least ten popes to justify their claims to temporal power contains this very title:

“. . . as the Blessed Peter is seen to have been constituted vicar of the Son of God [vicarius filii Dei in the original Latin] 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 is seen to have conceded to it.”

The Donation was purportedly a letter written by Constantine the Great to Pope Sylvester I. In the letter Constantine supposedly gave temporal power to the pope. We know for certain that the Donation was in existence as early as the ninth century but was used beginning in the eleventh century to justify the outrageous temporal claims of the papacy.

The authenticity of the Donation of Constantine was first questioned in the fifteenth century with the advent of historical criticism. Nicholas of Cusa had serious reservations about the Donation and around 1450 it was proved to be a forgery and a fraud by the scholarly work of Laurentius Valla. Notably, the Vatican did not appreciate Valla's work as can be seen by the fact that the Office of the Inquisition officially placed his work on its index of forbidden books in 1559.

Roman Catholic apologist, Patrick Madrid, has brushed aside this evidence by stating the obvious, that the Donation of Constantine was a forgery. Madrid therefore concludes that it cannot be used as an official and authorized statement of the Roman Catholic Church.

Though it is true that the Donation was a forgery, it is also beyond dispute that the Donation was passed off as authentic and official by various popes and Roman Catholic theologians for hundreds of years to sustain the temporal power of the papacy. Though a forgery, it was used as an official document by these popes to sustain their claims to temporal power. If they used it knowing full well that it was a forgery then they were guilty of deception. On the other hand, if they did not know that the Donation was a forgery, what does this say about their infallibility?

It is significant that Gratian's Decretals (published in 1140 and deemed official by the Roman Catholic Church) incorporated the papal title from the Donation into Roman Catholic canon law. Here are the words: "Beatus Petrus in terris vicarius Filii Dei esse videtur constitutus." (Aemilius Friedberg, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, column 342, emphasis mine)

In more recent times the title has been applied to the pope by Cardinal Edward Manning in his book *The Temporal Power of the Vicar of Jesus Christ* (1862). In the first statement, Manning indicts the Roman Catholic nations of Europe of his day for their failure to defend the temporal power of the pope:

"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 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." (pp. 140, 141, emphasis mine)

After mentioning the growing temporal power of the papacy under Gregory I, Leo III, Gregory VII and Alexander III Manning elevates the idea of the temporal power of the pope to the level of 'a dogma,' 'a law of conscience,' 'an axiom of the reason,' and a 'theological certainty':

"So that I may say there never was a time when the temporal power of the Vicar of the Son of God, though assailed as we see it, was more firmly rooted throughout the whole unity of the Catholic Church and convictions of its members. . ." (p. 231)

Manning explained why European nations enjoyed stability in the past as compared with the disarray of Europe in the times when he wrote:

"It was a dignified obedience to bow to the Vicar of the Son of God, and to remit the arbitration of their griefs to one whom all wills consented to obey." (p. 232, emphasis mine)

Lucii Ferraris in his prestigious encyclopedia, *Prompta Bibliotheca*, also applied the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* to the pope (1890 edition volume 6, p. 43, Column 2)

In his immensely popular book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, p. 3, Pope John Paul II explained what he understood to be the source of the power of his office:

“The leader of the Catholic Church is defined by the faith as the Vicar of Jesus Christ (and is accepted as such by believers). The Pope is 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.”

Notice that John Paul not only affirms that the Pope is the Vicar of Jesus Christ who “represents the Son of God,” but he also explains what he means by the word “represents” when he says that he “takes the place” of the Second Person of the omnipotent God of the Trinity.” The expression “takes the place” is the exact English equivalent of the Latin word “Vicarius”

Even Dr. Bacchiocchi has candidly admitted that *Vicarius Filii Dei* has been an official papal title in the course of many centuries:

‘Madrid’s denial [that *Vicarius Filii Dei* has been an official papal title] is absolutely false. We noted earlier that the papal claim to be the *Vicarius Filii Dei* is found in major Catholic historical documents and is acknowledged even by Prof. Johannes Quasten, the leading Catholic Patrologist in the world.’ (Endtime Issues, Online Newsletter, “The Saga of the Adventist Papal Tiara,” part 2)

The reference that Dr. Bacchiocchi makes to Professor Johannes Quasten is interesting. There is a notarized affidavit in the General Conference archives signed by Conrad Stoehr and Robert F. Correia where Dr. Quasten, in his own handwriting wrote: "The title *Vicarius Christi*, as well as the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* is very common as the title of the Pope"

But is this title presently inscribed on the papal tiara or miter? Or even more pointedly, was it ever inscribed on the tiara or miter?

Recently, Dr. Bacchiocchi has claimed that he had the opportunity to examine thirteen extant papal tiaras (all used after the year 1800). He claims that only two of the tiara’s have inscriptions and that neither one of them bears this title. To date there have been a total of 266 popes. It must be recognized that 13 tiaras out of 266 (granted that all the earlier popes probably did not wear the tiara) is a very small percentage indeed!

But does the present absence of the inscription on the tiara even prove that it was never there? Should it really surprise us that the title is not presently there? Wouldn’t we expect this to be the case? Would the papacy want to display such incriminating evidence? Of course not!

Well do I remember when I was a student at the Andrews University Theological Seminary in the early 70's that Dr. Bacchiocchi had just returned to the United States from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. There was great fanfare when he exhibited his regalia, his gold medal, his diplomas and his newly published dissertation on the change of the Sabbath with the imprimatur. I remember thinking: "This is either an incredible miracle of God or it is too good to be true! How is it possible for a Seventh-day Adventist to be the only non-catholic to be accepted at the Pontifical Gregorian University in over 400 years? How could he have been allowed to do a dissertation on the change of the Sabbath? How could he have received the maximum academic honors and a medal from the very hands of the pope?"

Well, recently we have been told by official Pontifical Gregorian University sources that Dr. Bacchiocchi's story was too good to be true! According to Dr. Barbara Bergami, the General Secretary of the Pontifical Gregorian University, there is no record of Dr. Bacchiocchi ever receiving the academic distinction of summa cum laude, of receiving a gold medal from the Pope or of having his dissertation published in toto with the imprimatur. The records have vanished from the Gregoriana! Dr. Bacchiocchi provides all sorts of documentation to prove that he did indeed graduate summa cum laude, that he did receive a medal and that his book did receive the imprimatur. But how do we know that the evidence he provides is trustworthy? How can we be sure that his medal and diplomas are genuine and not well crafted forgeries? Why shouldn't we accept the statements of the Roman Catholic Pontifical Gregorian University at face value? In short, why should we believe Dr. Bacchiocchi rather than the Gregoriana?

Obviously I am playing devil's advocate here to make a point. I personally do believe that Dr. Bacchiocchi graduated summa cum laude, that he got a medal and that at least a portion of his dissertation was published with the imprimatur. But this agonizing personal experience should have taught Dr. Bacchiocchi a lesson about the expunging power of the Roman Catholic papacy. His educational records have been expunged or "lost"!

Dr. Bacchiocchi's seems to want it both ways. On the one hand he complains: "The Papacy 'lost' my educational records because my works on the Sabbath have caused them great damage." But on the other hand, he finds it improbable that the Papacy could have ever expunged or "lost" the title Vicarius Filii Dei from the papal tiara and miter because of the damage it causes to the papacy!

There are eyewitnesses that claim to have seen the tiara at various papal ceremonies inscribed with the title Vicarius Filii Dei. Were these witnesses lying? Were they seeing visions? Did they have overactive imaginations? Why should Dr. Bacchiocchi impugn their credibility and not that of the Roman Catholic Church? Is it because these individuals didn't have doctoral degrees and therefore in his view they do not meet the scholarly litmus test?

Why does he accept the testimony of W. W. Prescott (who exhibited less than full confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy at the 1913 Bible Conference), Charles T. Everson (who claimed to have examined one papal tiara that was used in the coronation of Leo

XIII in 1836 and who did not say that the title had never been on the tiara but rather that it was not on the tiara “at present”) and L.E. Froom (notorious for his selective and ecumenical use of Ellen White in Questions on Doctrine) while he brushes aside the testimony of those who claim to have seen the title on the tiara? What makes one group more trustworthy than the other?

Dr. Bacchiocchi argues that if the Papacy found it necessary to expunge the title Vicarius Filii Dei from the tiara or miter, it would stand to reason that they would also want to expunge it from all historical documents where it appears. But this argument is weak. It belies the fact that it is far more incriminating to have the title on the tiara for everyone to see than it is to have a few references tucked away in the books of scholars and intelligentsia that rarely, if ever, are seen by the layman in the pew. Even Roman Catholic apologist, Patrick Madrid, did not know that the title was used in various Roman Catholic sources until it was brought to his attention by an Adventist! If a professional apologist didn't know, how would a common layman in the pew know?

Ellen White has stated that the Papacy destroyed many incriminating records that documented its horrific cruelty during the dark ages. Are we to expect less when it comes to the papal tiara and miter?

“Rome endeavored also to destroy every record of her cruelty toward dissenters. Papal councils decreed that books and writings containing such records should be committed to the flames. Before the invention of printing, books were few in number, and in a form not favorable for preservation; therefore there was little to prevent the Romanists from carrying out their purpose.” The Great Controversy, p. 61.

There is evidence, even from Roman Catholic sources, that the title was once on the papal tiara or miter. In the November 15, 1914 edition of Our Sunday Visitor (the official organ of the Archdiocese of Baltimore) the following question was addressed to the Bureau of Information: “Is it true that the words of the Apocalypse in the 13th chapter, 18th verse refer to the Pope?”

The answer was as follows: “The words referred to are these ‘Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast. For it is the number of a man: and the number of him is six hundred sixty-six.’ The Title of the Pope in Rome is Vicarius Filii Dei. This is inscribed on his mitre; and if you take the letters of his title which represent Latin numerals and add them together they come to 666.” (emphasis is mine)

In the April 18, 1915 edition of Our Sunday Visitor this information was confirmed once again. The question was: “What are the letters supposed to be in the Pope's crown, and what do they signify, if anything?”

The answer was explicit: “The letters inscribed in the Pope's mitre are these: Vicarius Filii Dei, which is the Latin for the Vicar of the Son of God. Catholics hold that the church which is a visible society must have a visible head. Christ, before His ascension

into heaven, appointed St. Peter to act as His representative. Upon the death of Peter the man who succeeded to the office of Peter as Bishop of Rome, was recognized as the head of the Church. Hence to the Bishop of Rome, as head of the Church, was given the title ‘Vicar of Christ.’”

Roman Catholic apologist Patrick Madrid claims to have contacted Robert Lockwood, the editor of Our Sunday Visitor about this 1915 issue and he was told that the entire issue had been expunged from the archives. This is an interesting admission. Even in modern times expunging is used as a method by the Papacy to delete information that incriminates it!

It is true that on September 16, 1917 (and also again on August 3, 1941) Our Sunday Visitor did an about face and totally changed its tune:

“The words Vicarius Filii Dei are not the name of the Pope, they do not even constitute his official title.” The question is: which of the two versions of Our Sunday Visitor are we to believe? Can we really trust the word of an organization that has majored in deception throughout the centuries?

It must be admitted that we cannot prove beyond any doubt at this time that the title Vicarius Filii Dei was ever on the pope’s tiara or miter. The evidence we have at present is mixed at best. Only when the judgment sits and the books are opened in God’s heavenly tribunal will we be able to see whether the name was there or not. One thing is crystal clear, however, and that is that the name Vicarius Filii Dei is an official title which has been assumed by the popes and the name is in perfect accordance with their blasphemous claims. It is important to remember that the prophecy of Revelation 13:18 does not require that the title or name of the beast be found on the papal crown or tiara.

Various other names and titles have been suggested as fulfillments for the name and number of the beast of Revelation 13:18. Some have suggested dux cleri (head of the clergy), lateinos (Latin man) or ludovicus (chief of the court of Rome). The problem with all of these suggestions is that none of them is particularly blasphemous. But there is a name which has been officially assumed by the bishops of Rome that is clearly and unmistakably blasphemous: Vicarius Filii Dei.

The Bible makes it crystal clear that the Holy Spirit is the Vicar of the Son of God. Before Jesus left He promised His disciples: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:16-18). Jesus made it very clear that the visible Head of the church (Jesus) would be in heaven while the invisible Head of the church (the Holy Spirit) would take his place on earth. Roman Catholic theology has changed this around. They affirm that the visible head of the church (the pope) is on earth while the invisible head (Jesus) is in heaven. Thus the popes not only usurp the place of Jesus but they also usurp the place of the Holy Spirit! This is the epitome of blasphemy!!

Amazingly, the Greek word antichristos has the same basic meaning in Greek as does Vicarius Filii Dei in Latin. Most people assume that the word antichrist means “one who is against Christ.” It is true that in Greek the preposition anti can mean >against.= But it is equally true that this preposition can mean >instead of,= or >in place of.’ In classical Greek, for example, the word antibasileus means >one who occupies the place of the king.= In the New Testament, the name Herod Antipas means that Herod ruled >in place of= his father.’ (Revelation 2:13) The word antitype means >that which takes the place of the type.= Christ is spoken of as having given His life as a ransom in place of (antilutron) all (I Timothy 2:6). Thus the word antichristos in Greek and Vicarius Filii Dei in Latin bear the same basic meaning!

Though I disagree with Dave Hunt’s futuristic interpretation of the antichrist, I believe that he has given an accurate description of what the Biblical antichrist is like. He is not one who openly blasphemes Christ but rather one who seeks to supplant Christ:

While the Greek prefix >anti= generally means >against= or >opposed to,= it can also mean >in the place of= or >a substitute for.= The Antichrist will embody both meanings. He will oppose Christ while pretending to be Christ. . . . When the time has come for his ascension to power he will be in the midst of an unprecedented global crisis. He will be hailed as the world’s savior, and so he will appear to be. . . . Instead of a frontal assault against Christianity, the evil one will pervert the church from within by posing as its founder. He will cunningly misrepresent Christ while pretending to be Christ. And by that process of substitution he will undermine and pervert all that Christ truly is. . . . If the Antichrist will indeed pretend to be the Christ, then his followers must be >Christians=! The church of that day will without dissenting voice, hail him as its leader. @ Dave Hunt, *Global Peace*, pp. 7-8, 45, 200. (Bold is mine and italics are his)

In closing I would like to make a few remarks about the name of Ellen G. White. Roman Catholic apologist Patrick Madrid (and others before him) has claimed that the name Ellen Gould White also totals 666 (L+L+L+D+W+I). On the surface this appears to be true, however, there are several insurmountable problems with this view.

First, she was a woman and the number must be that of a man.

Second, a little cheating must take place in order for this identification to work out. The “W” in White has to be converted into two V’s. Needless to say, this was never done in the Latin manner of reckoning numbers. In fact, the “W” does not even exist in the Latin language!

Third, and more devastating, the name Ellen Gould White is not a blasphemous name.

Fourth, there is no justification for using the Latin number system for a name which is in English. If Ellen White’s name were in Latin then we would be justified in using the Latin numbering system.

Finally, and most importantly, we must remember that the number 666 is the number of the beast. Ellen White does not fit any of the other specifications of the beast. She arose in the United States, not Rome, she did not uproot three kingdoms, she did not think to change times and laws (rather she upheld the law including the Sabbath!), she did not persecute the saints, she did not speak blasphemies against God, she did not rule for 1260 years (she lived a long life but not this long!), she did not exercise dominion over every nation, kindred and tongue, she did not receive a deadly wound which was healed and the whole world did not marvel after her. Even if the name Ellen Gould White totaled 666, which it does not, the number is only one of the specifications of the beast and none of the other characteristics of the beast fit Ellen White.

I once heard someone say: But Ellen White received a deadly wound when a classmate hit her with a stone on the bridge of her nose when she was 9 years old and though her doctors said she was going to die, she recovered from her wound! It never ceases to amaze me to what lengths people will go in order to sustain their private beliefs! There are two problems with this scenario. First of all, Ellen White was wounded while she was a child but the beast was wounded at the end of its career. Second, Ellen White was wounded with a stone while the beast was wounded with a sword! (Revelation 13:10, 14)

In the light of the Biblical and historical evidence that we have at our disposal, I believe that it is not unreasonable to believe that the title Vicarius Filii Dei is an adequate explanation of the number 666. This is an official title of the popes even though at present there is no way of proving beyond any doubt that the title was on the tiara or the miter in times past. I therefore agree with the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary:

“Whether the inscription Vicarius Filii Dei appears on the tiara or mitre is really beside the point. The title is admittedly applied to the pope, and that is sufficient for the purposes of this prophecy.” Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, page 823-824

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