

The Truth About 666 and the Story of the Great Apostasy

INTRODUCTION

Enter the Beast

Just like the prophet Daniel six hundred years earlier, John, the beloved apostle—now an old man not far from his hundredth birthday—in vision gazed upon the Mediterranean. He also saw its surface heave, and then a huge, mysterious Beast came lumbering up from the depths.

It bore a strange yet striking resemblance to the four animals that Daniel had seen and written about in the seventh chapter of his book. Basically it was a giant leopard with seven heads, the paws of a bear, and a conspicuous lion mouth. It also had ten horns, each encircled with a royal crown.

It prospered amazingly, persecuting the saints for forty-two prophetic months or 1260 years (538–1798). At the end of this period, it received a deadly wound in one of its heads. This, however, healed up again, so that the Beast went on from strength to strength. Eventually “all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8).

The creature described in Rev. 13 is a composite of the fearsome four described by Dan. 7: the Babylonian lion, the Medo-Persian bear, the Grecian leopard, and the nondescript Roman-European Beast. The main features of that chapter all recur in the Apocalypse. C. Mervyn Maxwell pointed out that this also applied to the “seven heads and ten horns (The leopard had four heads, the other three had one each, and the

fourth beast had ten horns).”¹ The only element of Dan. 7 not repeated in Rev. 13 is the Little Horn . . . because the Leopard-like Beast essentially *is* the Little Horn.

Two further features in Rev. 13 are the Beast’s notorious mark and 666, the numerical value of its name. Such are the issues that we shall be focusing on. Before doing so, however, let us briefly note the symbolic meaning of the lion, the bear, and the leopard. As discussed by several interpreters,² these animals represent the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, and the Greeks.

But there is a difference: Rev. 13 reverses the order of their presentation. In comparison with Dan. 7, the Grecian element is now mentioned first; this is followed by Medo-Persian and finally by Babylonian imagery. This complete reversal of the symbolism must be significant.

The reason for it is a different vantage point in time. The prophet Daniel wrote when Belshazzar, the last king and co-ruler of Babylon, was still sharing his father’s throne. With its strict chronological sequence, the vision of Dan. 7 simply looks forward, down through the ages. But when John took up his pen some six centuries later, his lifetime as well as the opening stages of the Great Apostasy stood in the sign of the leopard. That is, it bore the impress of Greek thinking and theology.

This symbolism pinpoints the Antichrist historically as the product of a hybrid civilization. No less a historian than Arnold J. Toynbee characterized the empire of apostolic times and later as the culmination of Greek Society (“the Hellenic universal state”).³ C. H. King referred to it as the “Greco-Roman state,”⁴ while Hugh R. Trevor-Roper regarded it as a “cosmopolitan Greco-Roman culture.”⁵ Politically it was the Romans who ruled the ancient Mediterranean world, but the Greeks were still dominating its mind.

From his period, the apostle John also looked back to Medo-Persia and finally to Babylon. And this is why we have, in the thirteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, a different sequence from that of Daniel, which does not, however, seem to

affect the order of the heads. For them, we assume a straightforward chronological order, to parallel Rev. 12:3 and Rev. 17:10.

As Bible readers have recognized through the ages, the Beast depicted in Rev. 13 is the historic Antichrist, which a vast array of authors (especially since the Protestant Reformation) have identified as the papacy. In the year 1600, Andreas Helwig, or Helwich (c. 1572–1643), a brilliant German scholar, demonstrated that a most significant pontifical title *vicarius Filii Dei* (Vicar of the Son of God) had a numerical value of 666. During the last part of the eighteenth and throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, very many Protestant as well as other non-Catholic writers have followed that example. Copious evidence of this fact is presented in Appendix III, which also demonstrates that such an identification did not originate with Seventh-day Adventists. Future chapters will delve into the issues surrounding that discovery.

Let us, however, also ask just why the Apocalypse lays such stress on the leopardlikeness of the Beast? After all, Catholicism has since its beginning had its headquarters in the city on the Tiber and has always been described as the Roman Church. Nevertheless, like the paganism which in its formative period surrounded it, it drew the most vital elements of its culture, philosophy, and religion from the Greeks.

Much of the Great Apostasy in the early Christian centuries had its roots in the Hellenic and Hellenistic world. Stephen N. Haskell, perhaps uniquely among Seventh-day Adventist prophetic writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, touched on this point:

“Through Greece, ‘the prince of the power of the air,’ the ‘old dragon,’ who was cast into the earth, attempted a new scheme for enslaving the truth. Greek culture and intellectual development carried men farther away from the simple truth of God’s Word than any form of religion, or any oppression from the government. The teachers of Greek philosophy followed in the wake of the Alexandrian conquests. The beauty and

aesthetic nature of their learning deceived men as nothing else has ever done. The mixture of good and evil was divinely represented by the spotted leopard, and its universal acceptance, by the lithe form and agile movements.”⁶

This issue was partly dealt with in our former works,⁷ but also awaits treatment in a further book.

What here especially concerns us is that through the allegorizing methods of third-century theologians like Clement and Origen at Alexandria, Egypt, prophetic interpretation and eschatology—like other attempts at understanding the Bible—were perverted. Their mentors if not their boon companions had mostly been pagans, both Platonic and Neoplatonist. Allegorization, by which anything could be arbitrarily made to mean anything else,⁸ mutated into Idealism. All this prepared the way for Augustinian, Medieval ideas.⁹ With a few adjustments by Jesuits during the Counter-Reformation in the last part of the sixteenth century, such conceptions gave birth to Catholic Preterism and Futurism.¹⁰

Idealism apart, these schools do have one thing in common: the interpretation of prophecy by relating it to history. However, both Preterism and Futurism have gaps, for each of them omits the very long medieval period and even the past five hundred years that followed it. Only Historicism is gapless and continuistic, with an underlying premise made clear through Amos, well before our era: “Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Historicism therefore matches prophecy with all the main events of both the remote and recent past, especially in or near the Mediterranean world. This became the epicenter for the great controversy between the Saviour and Satan, as well as their representatives. What has happened in that region has greatly impacted on and continues to affect the planet as a whole.

For more than a hundred years, the largely Historicist Protestants ignored both Preterism and Futurism, recognizing them as attempts to create an intellectual fog for concealing the papacy, so that nobody could identify it as the Antichrist

predicted in 2 Thess. 2, the Apocalypse, and other Scriptures. But from 1826 onward, they have allowed themselves to be seduced into these alternatives. Abandoning Historicism, Protestants have increasingly adopted Preterism or Futurism. The latter is nowadays mostly known as Dispensationalism.¹¹ At present, these schools predominate and greatly impede the comprehension of what Rev. 13:18 means with its reference to 666.

Today the only major bastion left standing for Historicism is the Seventh-day Adventist Church, though even this is now being undermined from within, by some of its own theologians. With regret, we will in its proper place be dealing with this phenomenon.

A cornerstone of Historicism is belief in the year-day principle. According to this, time in apocalyptic prophecies is not literal but symbolic, just like the rest of their contents. Therefore, a day in prophecy represents a calendar year. With this, Seventh-day Adventists think on the same wavelength as Protestant Historicists of the past. To their older insights, present-day scholars have added considerably more, especially William H. Shea in his brilliant two-part study of more than forty pages.¹²

The two most prominent Bible passages that explicitly teach the year-day equivalence are Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6. But Shea has greatly elaborated on this and reviewed “in this study twenty-three biblical reasons validating the application of the year-day principle to the time periods in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.”¹³

Shea did not confine himself to Scriptural analysis, but also stepped outside the Bible by applying two pragmatic tests from history. First, he inquired whether, when the Historicist paradigm is applied, the actual events of the past fulfill the Bible’s predictions. For this, he found vindication by comparing Dan. 9:24-27 with what actually happened.¹⁴ He did so successfully without resorting to the peculiar gap theory propounded by Francisco Ribera in the sixteenth century and present-day Dispensationalists. Second, he asked whether

Historicists had been able to foretell events of the future through the word of prophecy. The following example is compelling:

“In the year A.D. 1689 an English prophetic interpreter by the name of Drue Cressener (1638-1718) published his predicted date for the end of the 1260 days of Revelation 11-13. This particular time period is given in three different ways in these chapters: 1260 days/42 month/3½ times (Rev. 11:2-3; 12:6; 13:5). Beginning the prophetic period in the time of Justinian I in the sixth century A.D., and by applying the year-day principle of these 1260 days, Cressener came to the conclusion that ‘the time of the Beast does end about the Year 1800.’ He applied the symbol of the beast to the papacy, and the pope was indeed deposed in 1798”¹⁵—a mere two years before the date he had calculated!

Cressener wrote this more than a century before it happened. As Shea correctly concluded, “The extraordinary chronological accuracy with which Cressener’s prediction met its fulfillment lends support to the idea that he had indeed employed the correct hermeneutical tool with which to interpret this time prophecy, the year-day principle.”¹⁶

None of this can even remotely be matched by Preterism, Futurism, or Idealism. These schools, moreover, contain the blemish of omitting most events between the earliest church history and the Second Coming, as though the Almighty were not interested in what would happen in between.

That is most peculiar against the background of the Hebrew prophets. Their predictions appear throughout the Old Testament, continuously coordinated with the history of the Chosen People.

Historicism, also known as the continual historical school, is a necessary precondition for understanding the prophetic context of the number 666.

Chapter Eight
CLARIFYING THE CRITERIA

I

Apart from having a numerical value of 666, the name as specified in Rev. 13:18 needs to meet the following requirements:

8.1 It must be a specific name or title applicable to a human entity.

Excluded from the outset are bar codes, bank numbers, a time period, and vague formulations which suggest that 666 just symbolizes corrupt humanity. We are told quite pointedly that, in some sense, the Beast is a person. It symbolizes not a thing, an animal, or a supernatural being—neither Satan nor a heathen deity—and its name or title must be specific. That is to say, only one. The Scripture does not call for a multiplicity of names, a point which, more often than not, prophetic interpreters over the centuries have been inclined to overlook. Not before the later 1800s, with the writings of the Seventh-day Adventist Uriah Smith, did a group—in fact, an entire church—abandon that approach to focus on a single name, which is what Rev. 13:18 calls for.

On the other hand, the expression “forty and two months” (Rev. 13:5), which in prophetic parlance equals 1260 years that are included in the Beast’s career, suggests quite clearly that it does not have a normal human lifespan. It can therefore be no ordinary entity. Our inquiry ranging over all history in the Christian era finds only one “man” who meets this criterion: the Roman pontiff; for he is not simply who he is, a particular human being, but supposedly—through apostolic succession—an avatar, a kind of continuously reincarnated Peter.

At the critical moment in the fraudulent Donation, this is precisely the point the forger made, that “*as the blessed Peter* is seen to have been constituted vicar of the Son of God on the

earth, *so the pontiffs* who are the representatives of that same chief of the apostles,” should in the church and even in the world be supreme. (Emphasis added)

In this way, the popes are their office. Inscribed within the rotunda of St. Peter’s at the Vatican are the words from Matt. 16:18: “Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam” (Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church). Every pontiff claims to be that apostle, which links together all the popes of Rome, so that there is no essential difference—at least in Catholic theology—between, for instance, Gregory VII (c. 1025–1085, reigned from 1073) almost a millennium ago, John Paul II (1920–2005, reigned from 1978), or Benedict XVI (1927–, reigned from 2005) in our time. Without this claim to apostolic succession, the papacy would be nothing and might well have vanished long ago.

8.2 It must refer to the papacy.

This requirement is necessitated by context, the entire Rev. 13 as well as related Scriptures, especially Dan. 7 and 2 Thess. 2:1–9. Protestants from as far back as Wycliffe’s time, and even some of their predecessors like the Waldensians, espousing Historicism, have applied these chapters to the papacy, long before Helwig began to zoom in on *vicarius Filii Dei*.

For background on this matter, we refer the reader to “Two Thousand Years of Prophetic Interpretation” in our previous publication, *The Use and Abuse of Prophecy: History, Methodology, and Myth* (2007). The parallel between Rev. 13 and Dan. 7 was also mentioned earlier in “The Sevenfold Prophecy and the Year-Day Principle” by our *Christ and Antichrist in Prophecy and History* (2001).

The gist of what the last-mentioned work says is that all seven heads, like the horns of the Antichrist, are present in Dan. 7. To determine this, we just need to count and add up the heads of the four creatures. The result is seven! This is also the key to identifying them in the Apocalypse.

That, however, is too extensive a topic for the present work

to elaborate. We deal with it in our *Seven Heads and Ten Horns in Daniel and the Revelation* (2012). Here we just point out that Dan. 7 does not represent the Greeks by one head but by four heads. Likewise, Dan. 8:22 informs us that after Alexander’s death “four kingdoms shall stand up out of *the nation*” (emphasis added).

These four were not necessarily confined to the Hellenistic kingdoms into which the Conqueror’s empire had divided. A case in point is the Western Greeks, who at an early time settled and flourished in Sicily as well as Southern Italy, all the way up to ancient Neapolis (“New Town”) or present-day Naples. So many Greeks lived in that region for centuries that it was called Magna Graecia—Great Greece. These people blended with the Romans, both biologically and in culture, philosophy, and religion.

In only one respect, the beast of Rev. 13 does not seem to be a perfect composite of the creatures in Dan. 7; it lacks a Little Horn. But, to a large extent, the leopard-like beast—vis-à-vis the heads, which culminate in the seventh one, and supported by the horns—*is* the Little Horn. This is suggested by very similar wording in these two chapters. Let us note the parallels:

<i>The Little Horn</i>	<i>The Leopard-like Beast</i>
1. “A mouth speaking great things” (Dan. 7:8).	“A mouth speaking great things” (Rev 13:5).
2. “Great words against the most High” (Dan. 7: 25).	“Blasphemy against God” (Rev. 13: 6).
3. “Shall wear out the saints of the most High” (Dan. 7:25).	“It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them” (Rev. 13:7).
4. “They shall be given into his hand for a time, two times, and half a time” (Dan. 7:25, RSV).	“Power was given unto him to continue forty and two months” (Rev. 13:5).

Both the Little Horn and the Antichristian beast would have a mouth that speaks “great things,” that is, they indulge in arrogant speech and blasphemy against the Lord; both would wage a successful war against his holy ones; and both would prevail for three and a half years or forty-two months (that is, 1260 prophetic year-days).

The Dutch scholar Hans K. LaRondelle (1929-2011) regarded Dan. 7 as the “taproot of all antichrist prophecies.” One of its central components is the time period variously represented as 1260 days, 42 months, and 3½ years, based on the symbolism of the year-day principle.¹ Indeed. The entire sevenfold prophecy is an outgrowth of Dan. 7:23-25. Until the early nineteenth century, such views enjoyed a broad consensus among Protestant interpreters, before they increasingly succumbed to Catholic eschatology, Preterist as well as Futurist—and its offshoot, Dispensationalism—or allegorical Idealism.

We salute LaRondelle for the aptness of his “taproot” metaphor. It is brilliantly insightful. At the same time, however, we caution against some conclusions in his work, especially about the number 666, which this book largely deals with. As will become apparent, especially in our final volume, on this topic he has—like a minority of other Seventh-day Adventist expositors—deviated somewhat from Protestant Historicism.

8.3 It must, at least in its original form, be a Latin name.

Through most of its history, Latin has been the official language of the papacy. Today, at least ecclesiastically, it still is. Its most important works, like the sixteen *Documents of Vatican II* (1963–1965), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), and the pontifical encyclicals are even these days written in it, with translations into English and other languages. For Christmas 2006, Benedict XVI celebrated mass in Latin. Admittedly its oral use has declined, and only a few of its priests can really speak it.

Nevertheless, it is the language of the Roman Church. *Vicarius Filii Dei*, with a numerical value of 666, is a Latin name.

But now a question arises: Does the fateful number not also apply to some individual popes? Considering the many pontiffs that have reigned over much of two millennia, we would expect this to have been the case. After all, as Thomas Bell pointed out and we have quoted above: “If any man’s name among us had the letters J, V, X, L, C, D, they would amount precisely to 666.” In accordance with this fact, we would have expected several pontiffs to have had such a name.

There has been only one, apparently, though this idea will not survive linguistic scrutiny. But it is at least provides a diverting tale.

During 1605, Sir Henry Wotton, the British ambassador of King James I, arrived in Venice, accompanied by his chaplain William Bedell (1570–1642), an Anglican priest. They found the Venetian Republic in turmoil. Due to a quarrel, Pope Paul V had placed that small but still powerful maritime country under an Interdict.

Just then, “a Jesuit who came to Venice printed a book on Divinity with the extravagant and indeed blasphemous dedication, *Paulo V, Vice-Deo, Christianae Reipublicae Monarchae invictissimo et Pontificiae Omnipotentiae conservator[e] acerrimo*” (emphasis added). (To Paul V, God’s Substitute, Invincible Monarch of the Christian Republic and Most Vigorous Preserver of the Omnipotent Papacy.) Bedell immediately perceived that this title had a numerical value of 666.

Like a contagion, that sensational discovery spread through Venice, first to the clergy and politicians, then to the people: the pope was the Antichrist! The republic seriously considered severing its ties with the Vatican and the Papal States. For this, however, it desired the support of King James in London, who had in his correspondence lauded the Anglican solution, with the ruler heading the church. The state of Venice might well have become a Protestant country, if the British ambassador had not—to flatter his monarch—dithered, waiting until St. James’s

Day before approaching the Venetian Senate to explain what advantages such a change could bring.

But Paul V, alarmed, immediately took countermeasures. First, resorting to Ribera's Futurism, "he caused it to be spread abroad that Antichrist was even then in the East, that he had been born in Babylon, of the tribe of Dan, that he was gathering a vast army to destroy Christendom, and that all Christian princes should prepare their forces to resist him." Second, before St. James's Day, the pontiff also "yielded to the demands of the Senate, the quarrel was made up, and the prospects of Reformation in Venice were lost for ever."²

So was Paul V the Antichrist predicted in Rev. 13? There are serious problems with such an idea.

It especially does not meet a very important criterion explained below. The name referred to in Rev. 13:17, 18 must be one that endures for centuries and not be limited to the lifetime of a single person. Further, Bedell's calculation was really incorrect. The Jesuit had written "*to* Paul," which is in the dative case. As a title, it should have to be in the nominative: *Paulus* not *Paulo*, adding an extra 5 for the additional *v*. The same applies to *Deo* (to God), which should properly speaking be *Deus*. That brings the figure up to 676, proving that Paul V was not the Antichrist—at least not more than any other pope.

Perhaps the men elected to head the Roman Church are always careful to check numerical values before they choose their pontifical names. It would in any case seem that among all the 263 popes who the Vatican claims have reigned in Rome since Peter's time not even one has ever had a personal name in accordance with Rev. 13:17, 18.

Nevertheless, *vicarius Filii Dei* does meet the requirement of supplying an excellently descriptive label for the papal office.

8.4 It must be a single name or title.

Like other monarchs through the ages, the pontiff—*il Papa Re*, "the Pope King"—can have several, even many names and titles. That has ever been the custom of royalty. An example of

this was Victoria Regina. She was at one and the same time Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, and Empress of India. She “also bore the titles of Princess of Hanover and Duchess of Brunswick and Lüneberg. In addition, she was the Princess of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha and Duchess in Saxony.”³

In her recent book, the archaeologist Joann Fletcher revealed that this royal habit of having several names and titles antedates the Christian era by more than thirteen centuries. Nefertiti, the wife of the monotheist pharaoh Akhenaten (1353–1336 B.C.), at a certain stage “adopted the name Neferneferuaten. Apparently she became her husband’s co-regent in his twelfth year as king, when she added the name Ankhkheperura to become co-ruler Ankhkheperura-Neferneferuaten. Finally at Akhenaten’s death, she took the throne herself as King Ankhkheperura Smenkhkara.”⁴ Dr. Fletcher later disclosed that Ay, the next pharaoh, “held several titles—Fan Bearer on the King’s Right Hand, Master of the Royal Horses, Royal Scribe, and God’s Father.”⁵

Rev. 13 in its first verse mentions a plurality of names, but at the end the prophecy focuses on only one, which has a numerical value of 666, namely *vicarius Filii Dei*.

But let us briefly also look at some other papal titles, beginning with *vicarius Christi* (Vicar of Christ). This did not, as many may now suppose, originate with the apostles in the first century or any of their alleged successors. It began in the fourth century with Constantine. He it was who first called himself the *vicarius Christi*. By this he meant “he was another Christ acting in the place of Christ.” He also styled himself *Pontifex Maximus* (“Supreme/High Priest”), *Bishop of Bishops*,⁶ and even—“for the last few years of his life”—*Isapostolos* (“Equal of the Apostles”).⁷

Only after the Western emperor had been eliminated and Byzantine power declined in Italy, while Germanic Kings—Odoacar as well as Theodoric—ruled over that country, did the papacy presume to apply such lofty, imperial titles to itself. The bishop of Rome was already calling himself the *vicar of Peter*.

But in 495, Pope Gelasius I, bidding for ecclesiastical supremacy, had himself enthusiastically acclaimed vicarius Christi.⁸

But having been purloined from the emperor in Constantinople, this ascription can hardly be regarded as legitimate. The sometimes offbeat Seventh-day Adventist thinker William Warren Prescott (1855–1944) therefore erred and was reacting simplistically when he conceded to Catholic opponents that “the actual title of the pope was vicarius Christi.” According to Gilbert M. Valentine, his biographer, Prescott up to the end “felt deeply disturbed that people would put the credibility of the church at stake by continuing to apply 666” to vicarius Filii Dei, which he regarded as “a nonexistent title of the pope.”⁹ As this book shows in extensive detail, the latter statement is ridiculous.

The pontiff boasts many titles and forms of address, which over the ages have not all necessarily been the same. Amongst others, he has been and is now known as Sanctissimus Pater (Most Holy Father) and Sanctissimus Dominus Noster (Our Most Holy Lord). As for the word “pope,” it is an informal, unspecialized epithet. It also applies to the Coptic Church with its headquarters in Alexandria, Egypt.

In canon law, the person we are discussing “is referred to as the ‘Roman Pontiff.’” Formally his full title nowadays is “Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Jesus Christ, Successor of the Prince of the Apostles, Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church, Patriarch of the West, Primate of Italy, Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman province, Sovereign of the State of the Vatican City, Servant of the Servants of God.” This, however, “is rarely seen or used in full.”¹⁰ We note that from this “vicar of the Son of God” has been omitted.

The details of Catholic canon law and consequently the titles reflected in it have changed from time to time. The latest revision of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* was initiated by John XXIII (1881-1963, reigned from 1958) on 25 January 1959, though only completed in 1983. It was finally put into effect by John Paul II on 27 November of that year.¹¹

Most of the foregoing titles have, at one time or the other,

been controverted, even the first one. According to the eminent British historian Paul Johnson, a Catholic, it is “anachronistic” to apply the title “Bishop of Rome” to the apostle Peter. He maintained that Pius I (reigned 140–155) was “The first leader of the Roman Church reasonably identifiable as a bishop.”¹² Garry Wills, another first-rate historian, an American Catholic, agreed: “There were no bishops in Rome for at least a hundred years after the death of Christ. The very term ‘pope’ (papa, daddy) was not reserved for the bishop of Rome until the fifth century—before then it was used of any bishop.”¹³

On the other hand, “Supreme Pontiff” is very old. It is the English translation of *Pontifex Maximus*. Together with *pontifex* (priest) or “pontiff,” a present-day synonym for “pope,” it preexisted not only the papacy and Constantine, but even the pagan Roman emperors. They were also each the Supreme Pontiff, or religious head of state. In its beginnings, however, *Pontifex Maximus* goes back to the ancient Republic of pre-imperial times.¹⁴

In contrast with these inherited titles *vicarius Filii Dei* was a purely papal invention—a momentous one, as we will keep on demonstrating.

8.5 It must be a blasphemous name or title.

Rev. 13:17, 18 is the culmination of a vision beginning with verse one. In this, we are informed that apart from ten crowns on as many horns, the beast has seven heads “and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.” The New Revised Standard Version (1989) has “blasphemous *names*” (emphasis added). This plural is, moreover, to be found in other translations, which are not limited to English; languages like French, Esperanto, Spanish, etc., also render it as “names.”

Does this have support in the original Greek of the New Testament? Yes, it does. The widely used Nestle-Aland (1963) gives **onomata**, (names), though some manuscripts do contain the singular **onoma**.

For this verse, we favor the plural, also for reasons that are not

rooted in the language itself; but this, too, is an issue that requires much greater space than the present work will allow. We hope to deal with it in another publication. Here we can only say that to conceive of a single name displayed over seven separate heads is hardly logical, except for those who suppose that these heads refer to just so many popes—although the Roman Church claims to have had 262 by 1979.¹⁵

The word “name/names” is not confined to the beginning and end of Rev. 13. It also occurs in verses 6 and 8. And the theme of *blasphemy*, with which these passages are linked, is pervasive throughout the chapter. We think it is also involved in the special name enigmatically referred to through the number 666 of vs. 18.

But what is blasphemy? According to the Bible, a prime manifestation of it is for a human being to equate himself with God (Mark 2:7; John 8:56–59; John 10:33). Among the Jews of Jesus’ life on earth, making such a claim was to invite execution. The Saviour was condemned to death by the Sanhedrin for precisely that reason (Matt. 26:63–66).

Through the centuries, titles which have this effect or approximate it have often been applied to the pontiffs. Some of them, like *Most Holy Father* and *Our Most Holy Lord*, are undoubtedly blasphemous; for they belong exclusively to God. They meet the specification laid down by Rev. 13: 1, 6, and 8, yet they lack the numerical value of 666; therefore they cannot be the name that is meant at the end of the chapter.

Some papal titles, such as the *Bishop of Rome* and *Sovereign of the State of the Vatican City*, are not offensive. Prophetic expositors of Rev. 13 have frequently erred by dwelling on titles, words, or expressions that cannot be linked with the theme of blasphemy. Then there are those that fail to meet the specification in other respects, including old evergreens in Greek like *Lateinos*—first proposed by Irenaeus and for centuries a great favorite with many Protestant writers—as well as the Hebrew *Romiith*. The former can mean “a Latin-speaking man,” yet it may also be applied to a territory. The latter refers to “(the) Roman kingdom.”

About *Lateinos*, Uriah Smith, as already mentioned, took a

stance which he always maintained: “We think we discover, however, a serious objection to the name here suggested. The number, says the prophecy, is the number of a man; and if it is to be derived from a name or title, the natural conclusion would be that it must be the name or title of some particular man. But in this we have the name of a people or kingdom, not of ‘a man’ as the prophecy says.”¹⁶

When we seek to understand Rev. 13:17-18, such other, unsuitable words or expressions must necessarily be eliminated, which greatly narrows our choice. What is required is a single, specific, and blasphemous name or title applicable to a human entity, with a numerical value of 666. *Vicarius Filii Dei* also passes this test admirably.

8.6 It must endure for centuries.

Of the Antichrist we read, “. . . and power was given him to continue forty and two months” (Rev. 13:5), the 1260 years of the sevenfold prophecy already referred to. Its special name would cover this or much of this period. Its career would also overlap with that of the two-horned Beast described in verses 11-16. Does *vicarius Filii Dei* meet this specification?

Yes, it does. It is first recorded in the Donation of Constantine during the eighth century. This became part of various later Latin documents that culminated in Catholic canon law. Constantly revised and augmented, this corpus was published again and again.

Among the works that antedated Gratian’s *Decretum* and referred to the Donation two were particularly significant because of their connection with Gregory VII, that powerful medieval pope who humiliated the Holy Roman emperor, Henry IV.

The first of these was by Anselm II (1036–1086), Bishop of Lucca in Italy, cardinal and papal legate. He owed his episcopate as well as his red hat to his brother or uncle, Pope Alexander II (d. 1073), who himself “in cooperation with Hildebrand (later Pope Gregory VII) and St. Peter Damien . . . promoted the Gregorian Reform movement begun by Pope Leo IX in 1049.”¹⁷

Anselm “spent his last years assembling a collection of ecclesiastical law canons in 13 books, which formed the earliest of the collections of canons (*Collectio canonum*) supporting the Gregorian reforms, which afterwards were incorporated into the well-known *Decretum* of the jurist Gratian.”¹⁸

In his fourth book about ecclesiastical rights and privileges, Anselm quoted as an important authority the Donation of Constantine, including *vicarius Filii Dei*. He prefaced this by saying: “Inviolata omnibus decrevimus manere temporibus” (We have decreed them to remain inviolable for all time).¹⁹ Gregory VII would no doubt have read and liked this text. Some five centuries later, another Gregory—the thirteenth bearing that name, who reigned from 1572 to 1585 in the heyday of the Counter-Reformation—was also well acquainted with it. Contemplating the just completed revision of what was now officially called the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (Collection of canon law), which still included the Donation, he pronounced its text “entirely free from fault.”²⁰

Presumably Gregory XIII was infallible, like all pontiffs—as the Roman Church now teaches. But so, supposedly, was John Paul II (1978-2005), who after a further four hundred years on 25 January 1983 promulgated the second *Codex Iuris Canonici*, which totally omits the Donation. On the basis of “the supreme authority with which I am vested,” he commanded this new work “to be valid forever in the future.”²¹

It would seem that Catholicism is by no means as unchangeable as it has often vaunted itself to be, with an oft-repeated boast of *semper eadem* (always the same), nor are its allegedly infallible popes. One thing, however, the Vatican has always maintained: the doctrine of papal supremacy. Perhaps it may now look with greater favor on the following sentiment, immortalized by that learned Welshman John Owen (c. 1560–1622) in Elizabethan times:

Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis
(Times change, and we change with them).

This appears in his *Epigrammata* (Epigrams), which he wrote by cleverly reshaping older materials. Apart from his impeccable Latinity, this schoolmaster was an ardent Protestant who turned his barbs against the Roman Church. For his pains, its functionaries placed that volume on its *Index of Prohibited Books*, and his wealthy Catholic uncle irately disinherited him. But after John Owen's death, "a monument was erected to his memory in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, where he was buried."²²

A second important work that was older than Gratian's *Decretum* was the *Collectio canonum* (Canonical Collection) of Deusdedit (d. between 1097 and 1100). This man was the friend and intimate counselor of Gregory VII, who made him a cardinal. Deusdedit's writings, a compilation from earlier sources—partly found in "the archives and the library of the Lateran palace"—are "concerned with the rights and liberty of the Church and the authority of the Holy See." Completed in 1087, two years after Gregory's death, the book was dedicated to the next pope, Victor III.²³

Most probably because Pius IX (1792–1878, reigned from 1846) perceived a parallel with that situation and his own impending loss of the Papal States—which finally occurred on 20 September 1870—Pio Martinucci edited it from Vatican texts and had it reprinted at Venice in 1869. In the third chapter of Deusdedit's book, we find *vicarius Filii Dei* quoted from the Donation of Constantine.²⁴

In Latin publications of this kind, that title was—as will be shown—repeated over and over again for more than twelve hundred years.

8.7 It must be authenticated by history.

But a little more than a century ago, Catholic apologists for the pope—especially in the English-speaking world—began the process of denying that *vicarius Filii Dei* was the pope's official title or even any title at all. At the same time, they tried to reason away the Donation of Constantine as a mere forgery, perhaps an

inconsequential little work, which any sensible person would ignore. But we will demonstrate that it was—though fraudulent—the very charter of papal power and authority. For importance and its impact on history, it easily rates alongside England’s Magna Carta (1215) and the Constitution of the United States of America (1787).

By the third decade of the twentieth century, this technique of denial and misinformation was working so well that even a prominent Seventh-day Adventist scholar like LeRoy Edwin Froom (1890–1974) became, at least for a time, confused by it. Concerning this, we have already cited his letter of 29 August 1938 to Warren E. Howell, an impressive scholar in his own right, who as far back as 1936 had been the “chairman of the committee appointed to revise Uriah Smith’s *Thoughts Critical and Practical, on the Books of Daniel and the Revelation: Being an Exposition, Text by Text, of these Important Portions of the Holy Scriptures* [hereinafter abbreviated to *Thoughts Critical and Practical, on the Books of Daniel and the Revelation*].”²⁵ This activity eventually resulted in the standard text as published from 1944 onward.

Despite extensive research in Rome, Vienna, Geneva, Paris, London, and Berlin, with the assistance of good Latinists as well as other experts, Froom concluded, as he wrote to Howell: “I have never found an authentic use of the title [*vicarius Filii Dei*] by a papal leader, save in the forged Donation of Constantine in the Decretum of Gratian.”²⁶ Our book, however, shows—on the basis of copious additional research during the twenty-first century—that Froom, notwithstanding the many people who had helped him, was in this respect mistaken. Neither Anselm II’s *Collectio canonum* nor that of Deusdedit, which both antedate the Decretum, had been brought to his attention.

What made matters worse is that he and his colleagues were paying far too much attention to a minor and irrelevant controversy: whether or not *vicarius Filii Dei* was ever written on a papal tiara or over a doorway at the Vatican.

The Revision Committee produced a splendid document entitled *The Number of the Beast*, which arrived at results that are

in many ways similar to our own, although we were until recently unaware of its existence. Our copy, derived from the Adventist Heritage Center of the James White Library at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, is anonymous and undated. But from a comparison of materials provided by the General Conference Archives, we believe it was prepared by Howell on the basis of various inputs before and during 1943—previous to his death in the same year. His most important contributor was Jean Vuilleumier (1864-1956), a polyglot scholar from Switzerland. Its documentation is impressive.

Amongst other things, it mentions seven editions of the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, from 1591 (Lyons) to 1879 (Leipzig) which were in the British Museum, London. For these, in each case, it quotes the key sentence from the Donation of Constantine in Latin containing the title *vicarius Filii Dei*. It also lists forty-three editions of Gratian's Decretum between 1471 and 1890, which “may be found in the Paris National Library.” All of them likewise contain that title.²⁷ Additional material, unearthed since 1943, has brought to light considerably more examples, which we will refer to where it is appropriate to do so.

It is strange, however, that none of those men seem to have called attention to the fact that Cardinal Deusdedit published his *Collectio Canonum* (Canonical collection) in 1087, which was fifty-three years earlier than Gratian's Decretum of 1140—and the even earlier Anselm II's *Collectio Canonum*. Froom's letter, quoted above, reveals that even he (at that time the premier researcher of his church) had not discovered or by 1938 noticed these vitally important details.

Why are they so significant? They are relevant to a document that records a meeting held at 9:00 a.m. on 16 April 1936 in the office of Charles Henry Watson (1877–1962), the General Conference President until that year. The others in attendance were Froom, as well as I. H. Evans, F. D. Nichol, M. E. Kern (Secretary), F. M. Wilcox, W. P. Elliott, and A. W. Cormack.²⁸ These men included eminent Seventh-day Adventist scholars. That day's discussion was to be influential in the work of the Revision Committee, soon to be continued under James Lamar

McElhany, the new General Conference President (1936 to 1950).

The meeting had been called at the insistence of and was largely dominated by William W. Prescott, who maintained that the pontiffs had only one official title, namely *vicarius Christi*, adopted—according to him—at the Council of Florence in 1439. While admitting the existence of the expression *vicarius Filii Dei*, he denied it had ever been an *official* title. Catholics, however, have never said the pope had a single or only one official title.

It is, in fact, an inconsequential argument. English is also not the official language of the United States, and yet without it this country could not function or even exist. Indeed, it is one of the three most basic features that determine what it is to be an American. The other two are citizenship and predominant domicile. America has many languages, none of them—according to its law books—official; but all its inhabitants need and therefore have to learn English.

Catholics would especially deny what Prescott implied: that *vicarius Christi* was only really valid since the fifteenth century.

In a further chapter, we will show how in 1983 distinguished American Canon lawyers came to admit that for hundreds of years *vicarius Christi* was not confined to the pontiffs. They have also stated that since Vatican II, it again applies to each and every bishop. That is, it is not a title limited to the pope. Published in an impeccable Catholic source, this acknowledgement nullifies Prescott's point of view.

Despite his dogmatic assertions and a certain glib persuasiveness, he was also historically inaccurate. Neither Prescott's statements nor his conclusions stand up well to present-day scrutiny, however much he may have impressed the men in that office more than seventy years ago.

Note, for instance, how he asks and answers his own question: "Now where was this Donation of Constantine first found? In what is called the Decretum of Gratian." But that is simply untrue; Anselm II and Deusdedit wrote about it several decades earlier. We fear that Prescott was also much mistaken in pooh-

poohing the importance of Gratian's Decretum for the development of Catholic Canon Law. Then there is Prescott's assertion that Leo IX was the *only* pope who ever used the Donation. In what is to follow, we will amply demonstrate that this is far from being the case. Meanwhile, we note a statement in the 2011 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: "Leo IX (1049–54) was the *first* pope to cite it as an authority in an official act, *and subsequent popes used it* in their struggles with the Holy Roman emperors and other secular leaders" (emphasis added).²⁹ Another point is that every republication of the Donation, as in Gratian's Decretum, ipso facto reasserted and insisted on its pontifical claims. Prescott also argued a little too emphatically from a silence he thought he had found in the historical record, which is always a dangerous thing to do. He stressed that Gregory VII (reigned 1073–1085) "who immediately succeeded" Leo IX and was "the most outstanding pope for centuries, as you know, in the establishment of absolute Roman Catholic power, never once appealed to that document for authority."³⁰ Actually, Gregory VII did not directly succeed Leo IX; no fewer than four other popes—Victor II, Stephen IX (X), Nicholas II, and Alexander II—came in between. That is, nineteen years intervened between the pontificates of Leo IX and that of Gregory VII. The supposed silence by the latter is, moreover, compensated for by Bishop Cardinal Anselm's publication as well as by the eloquence of Gregory's friend and counselor, Deusdedit, whose work on his own *Collectio Canonum* must have been undertaken as a papal project. These people spoke for him and what he stood for.

Something else that neither Prescott nor Froom, or their colleagues, seem to have grasped was the ever more inclusive, almost encyclopedic character of Gratian's Decretum and the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* which developed from it. Though never fully complete, these works were continuously absorbing ecclesiastical laws and theological opinions generated by those who supported the Roman pontiff. It was like a rather dirty snowball rolling down the slope of the centuries, growing larger and larger as it gathered to itself the mental detritus that lay across its path. Among the pieces, both old and new, that it picked up was

the Donation of Constantine. Not surprisingly, it therefore did become a part of Gratian's *Decretum*, though it is untrue to suggest that this was its original source. But the resultant collection did to a large extent and for many centuries become the charter of papal power, in a religious as well as a secular sense. And it certainly contained the title *vicarius Filii Dei*.

All the men who attended that meeting in Pastor Watson's office one April morning of 1936 have long since gone to their silent rest, and the reader may wonder why we call into remembrance the fallacies expounded by William W. Prescott. It is because they had a permanent consequence. They played a role in producing the 1944 (and present-day) text of *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, which differs—as we shall yet relate—from earlier editions, omitting material that might have been profitably retained.

In any case, the argument about an *official* title, raised by some Catholic apologists and accepted by Prescott, is a mere quibble with which Rev. 13:18 has nothing to do. This text mentions the “number of his name,” and not the “number of his official name.”

Further chapters of these volumes will provide a large amount of material dealing with the Donation and its aftermath.

What will be new in comparison to other somewhat similar works on this topic is that we do not confine ourselves to Latin or papal publications. Since even before the Renaissance, Westerners have also been writing voluminously in Italian and French, as well as other languages. And authors who were not working for the papacy have sometimes, even inadvertently, left important evidence.

Apart from the original *vicarius Filii Dei* of Latin texts, this expression is used by a remarkable number of vernacular publications. Concerning these, our research has largely focused on material in Spanish (*vicario del Hijo de Dios*), English (*vicar of the Son of God*), Italian (*vicario del Figlio/Figli[u]ol[o] di Dio*), and French (*vicaire du Fils de Dieu*). We have also found examples of this title in German (*Vikar/Stellvertreter des Sohnes Gottes/Statthalter des Gottessohnes*, etc.) and even Portuguese

(*vigario do Filho de Deos*). Undoubtedly more such publications await the diligent researcher, in these and additional languages.

It may be objected that none of these translations has a numerical value of 666, which is true. But behind each of them there is always the original Latin *vicarius Filii Dei*, on which they are based and which they imply.

Why do so many instances of the title occur in French? For three major reasons. First, after Latin and Italian, it became the most prestigious language of the West, an international language widely used for centuries by educated people in many parts of Europe and even America. Second, until its great Revolution, France was continuously Roman Catholic, at times the most powerful such country. Third, Protestant Calvinism, centered in Geneva, Switzerland, also used and favored French.

In what follows, we shall for the main text usually translate the foreign-language material into English, except the title. This is in italics, which is our emphasis. At times, we will also retain a few non-English words to preserve the flavor of the original. The foreign text can be found in the Notes. But wherever *vicarius Filii Dei* occurs in the Latin, we retain it in the main text and also italicize it. Those who originally used it generally did not.

Polyglot purists may dislike this methodology, especially the fact that we will be translating so much of what we quote. But always to cite our text in so many languages, except sometimes in the Notes, could surely discourage and eliminate many readers whom this book intends to reach.

8.8 It must theologically characterize the papacy.

For Christians, *Filius Dei* (the Son of God) is a very holy title, which the Saviour claimed for himself, for instance after extending the gift of sight to a man born blind (John 9:35–38). John 3:16, which summarizes the plan of salvation perhaps more strikingly than any other verse in the Bible, also contains it, as the Latin translation makes clear: “For God [Deus] so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son [Filium], that

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Filius Dei is a beautiful expression. *Vicarius Filii Dei*, however, is virtually synonymous with “Antichrist.” Why? The prefix *anti-* in Greek can signify not only “against” but also “instead, in the place of,”³¹ while the Latin *vicarius*—originally an adjective—means “a deputy,” somebody “put in place of.”³²

Four centuries ago, Andreas Helwig, a professor of Greek as well as a prophetic expositor, discussed the linguistics together with the theology involved. The Catholic apologists had objected that the pope was not directly opposed to Christ and therefore could not be the Antichrist, so that the Antichristian number should not be applied to him. The rebuttal from Helwig’s pen is that it is not necessary for him to be in head-on opposition to Christ in everything or with blasphemous words contradict him everywhere. It is enough that he should do so through his deeds and actions, which is what the pontiff does.³³

Examples of this abound in the numerous dogmas with which the Roman Church contradicts the Gospel, as when it rejects the Bible doctrine that there is only one true mediator between our Heavenly Father and humanity: the man-god Jesus Christ. Instead, it interposes masses of priestly confessors, saints, and especially the Virgin Mary. Then, too, to kill or ill-treat those who serve God according to the dictates of their conscience is also to fight against Christ, as Saul of Tarsus discovered on the Damascus road. He was on his way to that city with warrants to arrest the followers of the Saviour and drag them to Jerusalem for trial by the Sanhedrin. Suddenly he was stopped in his tracks when there appeared before him the glorified Lord, who asked him: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4). This is exactly what the Apocalypse predicts the Antichrist will do: “It was given to him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them . . .” (Rev. 13:7).

Helwig also showed that *anti-* in compounds does not always indicate opposition. To illustrate this point, he dis-

cussed it at some length with copious examples in Greek.³⁴

Vicarius Christi, another title sometimes attributed to the pope, is almost a synonym of *vicarius Filii Dei*, and of **antichristos** (“antichrist”). Nevertheless, these two expressions also differ in important ways, of which we now will mention only two.

First, *vicarius Filii Dei* is an exclusively papal title, never applied by the Roman Church to any other person, ecclesiastical or secular. But *vicarius Christi* began as a designation that the emperor Constantine invented for himself. As twentieth-century canon lawyers have admitted, it was also used by other emperors as well as bishops, the pope being just one of these.³⁵

Second, *vicarius Filii Dei*—unlike *vicarius Christi*—invariably stresses the idea of divinity. Does the Latin *Christus* from **Christos**, the “anointed one,” which is the Greek word for “Messiah,” not do the same? Not necessarily. For instance, Jewish theology does not always include the idea of the Messiah being divine.

That this also comes close to papal thinking is confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI in his *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007). With reference to Peter’s great confession, he told how important *Son of God* has been in comparison with *Christ* and said that the latter, as a “title, taken by itself, made little sense outside of Semitic culture.”³⁶ To some extent we agree, although we also observe that Peter blended these two concepts: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16).

The present pontiff is a very learned and knowledgeable man, an authoritative spokesman for his church. He stated that “the title ‘Son of God’ connected him [the Lord Jesus] with the being of God.”³⁷ But he also linked it with kingship. Looking not only at what the Bible teaches, but beyond it, he pointed out: “The term ‘Son of God’ derives from the political theology of the ancient Near East. In both Egypt and Babylon the king was given the title ‘son of God.’”³⁸ And “the Emperor Augustus, under whose dominion Jesus was born, transferred the ancient Near Eastern theology of kingship to Rome and proclaimed himself the ‘Son of the Divine Caesar,’ the son of

God.” Benedict went on to say: “While Augustus himself took this step with great caution, the cult of the Roman emperors that soon followed involved the full claim to divine sonship, and the worship of the emperor in Rome as a god was made binding throughout the empire.”³⁹

Indeed, and how remarkable that a pope should have pointed this out, for it became a part of the papal heritage. It appears, then, that even for Catholicism *Filii Dei* is more than a Scriptural idea. Behind it there also lurks the syncretism of the Great Apostasy, with political-religious *Romanitas* (Romanness) as a powerful ingredient. There is more to the title *vicarius Filii Dei* than meets the eye: it always suggests the idea of supremacy, over both church and state.

Vicarius Christi (vicar of Christ), though apparently synonymous, is—for popes—an insufficient title, since it is not theirs alone. It falls a good deal short of the more pretentious *vicarius Filii Dei*, which is uniquely a papal title. This is most descriptive, summarizing with great precision the claim that the pontiff as Peter’s successor wields a particular kind of power, derived from the Redeemer (and the ancient Roman emperors), as a king in both heaven and on earth. Specifically included was the pope’s authority as a ruler over Italy, Western Europe, and the ends of the earth.

But apart from the fact that Jesus, speaking to Pilate, denied that he was an earthly monarch, no being in the universe can take his place. He is the incomparable One, our incarnate Lord and God. He has no need of an earthly vicar such as is required by the Roman Church. Although the Saviour has entered the heavenly sanctuary, to intercede for all believers and even the human race, he also promised with his last words at the ascension: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20).

Besides, our heavenly Father has sent—as Jesus’ real representative—the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–18), to be a mighty helper in our salvation. He woos our hearts and brings us to Christ, he causes us to be born again, he lives within to sanctify us, he even edits our imperfect prayers to

make them acceptable to God (Rom. 8:26). If necessary, he performs great miracles.

Yet even he, the third member of the Godhead, never presumes to usurp the Saviour's place. There is not and cannot be a substitute for Jesus, no "other Christ" as every Catholic bishop and priest⁴⁰—and therefore also, preeminently, every pontiff—claims to be. Since this is what *vicarius Filii Dei* represents, amongst other things, the Lord may well regard it as the most odious of pontifical titles. That may be why the Apocalypse has set us the riddle of identifying it via its numerical value.

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

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

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

Jesus could hardly deny that biologically they were the offspring of the great patriarch: "I know that ye are Abraham's seed" (John 8:33). But spiritually they were not; for "if ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." Unlike that magnificent man, these theologians of Judaism were rejecting truth and seeking to kill the One who taught it. (Vv. 39,

40) Therefore, the Saviour rejected their claim to Abrahamic succession and even descent in the sense that really mattered. He boldly proclaimed: “Ye are of your father the devil” because “ye do the deeds of your father” (vv. 42, 41).

Ellen G. White, in her incomparable biography of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*, discussed this very point and added perceptively: “This principle bears with equal weight upon a question that has long agitated the Christian world,—the question of apostolic succession. Descent from Abraham was proved, not by name and lineage, but by likeness of character. So the apostolic succession rests not upon the transmission of ecclesiastical authority, but upon spiritual relationship. A life actuated by the apostles’ spirit, the belief and teaching of the truth they taught, this is the true evidence of apostolic succession. This is what constitutes men the successors of the first teachers of the gospel.”⁴¹

8.9 It must be a name or title indicative of tremendous power.

The Beast is destined eventually to acquire no less than planetary domination: “It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 13:7-8)

At the end of time, it is to be helped to achieve this goal by the second, two-horned beast, which will make an image to the Antichrist and tell everyone in the world to worship it (vv. 14-16).

Papal ambition grew as the centuries marched on. Ecclesiastically the pontiffs were only able at first to identify themselves with and to play the supposed role of the Apostle Peter, whose successors they claimed to be. This, according to Eamon Duffy, a Catholic author and professor in church history at Magdalene College, Cambridge, was the extent of the vision cherished by Gregory VII (1025–1085, reigned from 1073). But

when the pontiffs attained the acme of their medieval power, this no longer suited them: “More than a century after Gregory’s death Pope Innocent III (1198–1216, reigned from 1198) declared, ‘We are the successor of the prince of the Apostles, but we are not his vicar, not the vicar of any man or Apostle, but the vicar of Jesus Christ himself.’”⁴²

Territorially, too, the scope of papal aspiration was in the beginning largely limited to the Mediterranean world, especially Italy and western Europe. Later the pontiffs’ vision also took in such parts of the New World and the Far East as the Roman Church could bring under its sway.

But Rev. 13 predicts that in the end time the pontiff’s reach would be universal, coextensive with our planet itself: the whole world would wonder after the Beast and, by making obeisance, worship it.

Such is the context for challenging the reader to calculate the number of his name, which as already shown can be a title. Expressing the quintessence of pontifical claims, it was—as Gräber put it a hundred and fifty years ago—the *Träger der Macht des Papstthums* (Bearer of the power of the papacy)⁴³ for more than twelve hundred years.

II

We will now trace the steps which the papacy took to reach its objectives as well as the hindrances impeding its progress. At first, the popes found it difficult to achieve religious primacy vis-à-vis the other archbishops around the Mediterranean. The Roman emperors, all being pagans, would not aid them in enforcing it. To some extent, the situation changed with Constantine’s conversion. He favored Christianity, making it the state religion, yet he saw himself as the head of all the churches. This, however, still did not elevate the pontiffs over their colleagues in Constantinople, Alexandria, or Jerusalem. And so Catholicism invoked the doctrine of Petrine primacy. The later emperors, especially in the West, accepted it, but only ecclesiastically. A complicating

factor was the breakup of the Roman Empire and domination by Germanic peoples. These were Christians, though not Catholics, who refused to acknowledge the pope's supremacy or to obey his unbiblical dogmas. This problem was partly solved with the assistance of King Clovis in Gaul, who became a Catholic and used military force to impose his new religion. Thirty years later, Justinian I, reigning in Constantinople, decided to reunite the Roman Empire. To this end, he recognized the pope as the head of all the churches, with a view to gaining support in Italy. He sent his great general, Belisarius, first to crush the Vandals in North Africa and then the Ostrogoths in Italy, together with their Germanic religion. But after Justinian died, the other archbishops ignored his elevation of the pope, whom they no longer accepted as their superior.

To add to the pontiff's woes, another Germanic people, the Lombards, then invaded Italy and tried to dominate him, at a time when weak emperors in Constantinople were no longer able to save him. Thereupon he turned westward and petitioned the Franks to provide the necessary troops. At that time, too, the forged Donation was produced, procuring not only deliverance from the Lombards but also the Papal States, a temporal kingdom that lasted more than eleven centuries, until 1870. After that comes the finale, an even more ambitious scheme of world domination, in league with a global superpower.

It is with such developments that the following parts of this book are concerned.