

THE TRUTH ABOUT 666 AND THE STORY OF THE GREAT APOSTASY

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I

Edwin de Kock, the author of the book whose title appears above and which was published in 2011, was born in South Africa more than 80 years ago. He studied theology, literature, education and linguistics. He taught in colleges for more than 35 years in South Africa, South Korea, and the United States, and traveled tirelessly through the world visiting museums, cathedrals, and other important places from a historical perspective.

He was president of the South African Esperanto Association for twelve years (1977-89) and wrote much poetry in that language, which was later translated into other modern languages. Being a polyglot helped him a lot in the work of investigating the history of the great apostasy, because he was able to trace in history certain beliefs relating to the topic of his book which appeared in different languages.

Other books which de Kock wrote were *Seven Heads and Ten Horns in Daniel and the Revelation* (2011), *The Use and Abuse of Prophecy* (2007), and *Christ and Antichrist in Prophecy and History* (2001). His orientation is historicist, and he is keenly aware of every type of spurious idea introduced into the theology of our church as regards prophecy. In fact, this volume of 874 pages had its origin in the shock he received when he read in the Sabbath School lesson quarterly for 8 June 2002, prepared by Dr. Ángel M. Rodríguez, the negation of what our church has been teaching for a century and a half.

When he started gathering materials to refute A. M. Rodríguez, former director of BRI, he discovered that many pastors and doctors of theology were also disgusted by the changes which Rodríguez had introduced. Rodríguez took these changes, consciously or unconsciously, from Catholics, spiritualists, and Protestants who had tried to oppose the historicist interpretation adopted by the Adventist Church or who simply had lost the prophetic faith of earlier Protestants. Various faithful Adventist historicists, in Europe and the United States, were specialists in different areas, and contributed greatly to the investigation. Such a work could not, in effect, come from only one person with information from so many libraries and specialized centers of the world and the internet, gathered in such a short time to make up such a volume.

The book contains, in reality, three books which de Kock decided to bring together in a single volume. Those books are entitled: (1) The History of the Great Apostasy (in three parts: The Basics, The Papal Rise to Power, and The Pope Comes to Be a King), (2) The Most Extensive Testimony of History, and (3) The Seventh-day Adventist Connection. It also has seven appendices. What most captured my attention was the third of these, where he gives an extensive list in chronological sequence of non-Catholic authors who used the title Vicarius Filii Dei in the XVIII and XIX centuries.

After having read de Kock's gigantic book, I can say that I was impressed because it was so concerned to respond to so many absurd points of interpretation which have been given over the centuries, expounding honestly and objectively the

focus and replying authoritatively and clearly. Practically every author he cites from the history of Christianity until our own day is given a brief biographical sketch which permits the reader to relate each one to the epoch when he lived and the role he occupied. Although that could make the material heavy for many, because it has the effect of making the book seem interminable, for others such as the present reviewer, it makes the book fascinating. Actually, since the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* pertains exclusively to the papacy, and is always linked to its spiritual and political supremacy, the history of the term is, in essence, the history of the great apostasy predicted by Daniel, Paul, and John in the Apocalypse.

II

In the Sabbath School quarterly for 7 and 8 June 2002, Ángel Manuel Rodríguez summarized the problems which he encountered in maintaining that which our church, through Uriah Smith, took from Protestantism in 1865 (p. 456). A. M. Rodríguez adopted the method which was used in Alexandria to resolve difficulties in the Word of God, i.e., allegory. Instead of a concrete name associated with the number 666, he decided that it would be better to spiritualize that term. In my book, *The Apocalyptic Expectation of the Sanctuary*, chap. 10, I demonstrate that that is a tendency which some of our theologians are using more and more to evade saying, as Nathan did to David, you are that man; or as Daniel did to Nebuchadnezzar, you are that head of gold. Through a spiritualization of the apocalyptic content one can speak of ideas and generalities without having to specify by name the entity represented. Thus, a methodology so much in vogue today is called idealism, and this increasingly seeks to obscure the divine commission we have received of denouncing the blasphemy of the Roman papacy (Rev 13:9-11).

We now summarize the rationale A. M. Rodríguez gave for casting aside that which our church had been preaching for more than a century and a half. Not one of those reasons has its foundation in the Bible, or in the history of the church, as Edwin de Kock demonstrates abundantly. Rodríguez asserts that:

- (1) The Bible does not say that the number has to do with the numeric value assigned to the letters of a name.

Brief response: He comes to this conclusion by ignoring the oldest manner in which Rev 13:18 was interpreted, and that which the passage itself gives us to understand, in requiring us to calculate the number of the name. It was common for people to do that in John's day. This is confirmed by the most up to date commentaries. Rodríguez's problem with this is based on the following more serious problem which he reveals, and that is his spiritualization of the name.

- (2) The symbol can serve to represent humanity without divine rest (the seventh day). It does not deal necessarily with the name of a man, but with the name of humanity.

Brief response: Here Rodríguez inexplicably forgets the beast and passes by it to speak of humanity. The beast represents an institution, the papacy, not other institutions or humanity in general which in general fails to keep the true day of rest. E. de Kock shows well, especially in appendix VII (pp. 886-870), that the translation which

some versions offer for *anthropos* as “humanity” is not correct in the context of the Greek Bible, because it deals with the name of the beast, not of humanity. The Greek is rich in adjectives, as for example in the word which occupies us, *anthropeios*, *anthropikos*, *anthropinos*. But *anthropos* is a reference to a man, a human being. Thus, the most creditable translations follow the lexicons which translate “number of man,” that which in Rev 13:18 is a reference to “the man of sin” which sits in the temple of God (the church) making itself pass for God (2 Thess 2:3-5), not all of humanity without God. As I explain in my book cited above, in their efforts to find a supposed symbolic significance in the number, many forget the name.

- (3) The calculation of the numeric value of the letters of a name is speculative, since many names can contain that value.

Brief response: It's not a matter of speculation, but of identifying the “blasphemous” name of the beast (Rev 13:1, 5-6), drawn from the context of the description given in chap. 13. The only blasphemous name or title of the papacy whose letters contain the number 666, is Vicarius Filii Dei.

- (4) One can't prove that the title Vicarivs Filii Dei was an official title of the Roman papacy.

Brief response: De Kock proves amply that it was an official title of the Roman papacy, which various popes have applied to themselves, including the most recent ones, and as many grand dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church have done to bolster the blasphemous political and spiritual authority of the papacy.

- (5) The Bible does not say in which language one should read the name, with the result that any language chosen will be arbitrary.

Brief response: Already Helwig, at the beginning of the XVII century, the German philologist who discovered the blasphemous title of the papacy and its numeric correlation with 666, had established the clear principle that it was necessary to seek it in the official language of the blasphemous entity, i.e., in Latin. There is no sense in seeking it in a language which is not the one used by the blasphemous authority predicted.

- (6) The best option for the moment would be that of a rebellion intensified by the use of a triple use of the number six. (!)

Brief response: Arabic numbers were invented about 1000 years afterward, and were introduced to Europe centuries later. In Greek no one would be able to understand that number as three sixes. [It is written as 600 60 6, not as 6 6 6.]

Before Ángel Manuel Rodríguez a certain controversy had arisen in our church concerning the title Vicarivs Filii Dei, due to Catholic criticism especially, but also due to other symbolic interpretations, both spiritualist and Protestant, which were being introduced. The conflict between liberals and conversatives began in our church long ago, and the liberal wing gained ground with the publication which the Biblical Research Institute of our church prepared on the subject at the end of the decade of the 80's. But the main thing for Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, who in general is considered a conservative, is that he was the first who set forth all those liberal arguments that had come from

outside, in a Sabbath School quarterly which goes throughout the world. Although the , Seventh-day Adventist Church does not consider itself infallible (only God and His Word are infallible), when the Sabbath School quarterly goes through a special committee appointed to review it, and it is published, people interpret that as the official voice of the church.

The result was that, from then on, ministers and laymen all over the world drew on that testimony to stop identifying the Roman papacy by its most specific blasphemous name. It is appropriate, therefore, that this discussion should receive further attention in our church, from its origins, to note the result of not having published a well documented official response which it gave at its moment, due to the dogmatic and close-minded attitude of the liberal wing.

III

Seventh-day Adventists maintained from 1844 to 1872 that the number of the beast in Rev 13 was linked to the Roman papacy. Starting in 1872, everyone was accepting the Protestant interpretation which came from Andreas Helwig at the beginning of the XVII century (which had become especially prominent because of the mortal wound which the papacy sustained in 1798, according to what was prophesied by Daniel and John in the Apocalypse), and even after that event. In appendix III, Edwin de Kock offers a list of about 100 non-Catholic authors with this interpretation.

Nevertheless, many Protestants offered at the same time other names used with reference to the papacy or the Church of Rome, as containing the number 666. The value of Uriah Smith, who introduced that interpretation to our church, was that he referred to the title Vicarius Filii Dei exclusively. The reason he gave was that the other terms that had been offered previously to identify the beast of Rev 13 were too generic (p. 459), and so far as we are able to gather did not identify the truly blasphemous character of the papacy as such. Such an interpretation, since the prophetic testimony of our church was expanding, do not go unnoticed by the Catholic Church, and still more because such an identification of the Roman papacy gathered souls to the Adventist message. That Catholic reaction made itself strongly felt from about the first half of the XX century.

At the beginning of XX century, Adventists were practically the only ones who continued identifying the Roman papacy by the name Vicarius Filii Dei, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Rev 13:18. Consequently, the attack now turned against them. The Catholic Church had received the political mortal stroke in 1798, and lost the Papal States afterward in 1870. Starting then it became easier for Catholics to camouflage the title Vicarius Filii Dei when they found it convenient to do so and to declare that it was never an official title, because it was always linked to the supreme Roman pontiff and to his political and religious authority.

With the passing of time, after that political mortal wound of the Roman papacy in 1798, Protestants started to lose their conviction that that religious-political entity was identified by the prophecy. They didn't capture the fact that Revelation announced its resurrection for the near future (Rev 13), shortly before being destroyed forever at the Second Coming of Christ (Rev 16-19).

The Catholic author who most strongly attacked the interpretation of our church concerning Rev 13:18 was a Jew who had converted to Catholicism. He was named David Goldstein. His attacks on Judaism were especially strong after his conversion, and later he took a turn at our church. His aversion to the Adventist Church manifested itself especially after receiving police authorization to visit an inmate in a Texas prison, a convicted murderer who was awaiting the death penalty. To his surprise, Goldstein learned that Adventists had gathered him to their party, and that the prisoner had been approached by Adventists and that he had been converted to our faith. He saw there various pamphlets of our church with the papal title mentioned above, and drawings that our brother had been making of the papal crown with the inscription Vicarius Filii Dei. In vain our imprisoned brother tried to convince the Judeo-Catholic of that interpretation, who left the prison greatly annoyed. After that he dedicated himself to attacking the Adventist Church in articles and books, and even had an imprimatur from the archbishop of Boston for doing so.

Among the arguments which that Catholic priest used one finds some of those used by A. M. Rodriguez in his Sabbath School quarterly of 2002. Here we will only mention the other arguments that David Goldstein gathered, and which he took in part, from other authors, both Catholic and Protestant, who had preceded him.

- (1) The official title of the Roman papacy was always Vicar of Christ, not Vicar of the Son of God.

Brief response: That is not true. The title Vicar of Christ was applied to oneself primarily by the emperor Constantine, and later by other Christian bishops in the east as well as in the west. It was not a papal invention, nor of exclusively papal use, because until recent times it was applied also by other Christian bishops. One could argue as well that it and of itself this is not necessarily a blasphemous title, because Greek Christos means anointed, and many were anointed in sacred history (kings of Israel, priests and prophets). But the title Vicar of the Son of God is of papal invention and was used exclusively to describe his political and religious authority. It is, furthermore, particularly blasphemous, because even though all of us can be sons of God, we are such by adoption (Rom 8) and by virtue of the unique Son of God.

In my third treatise on the sanctuary, *The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary*, chap. 10, I show why the title Son of God was considered so blasphemous to the Jews (who in passing, never accused Jesus blasphemous for declaring Himself the Christ or Messiah in Hebrew). The manner in which Jesus applied the title to Himself made Him "equal to God" (John 10:29-36). It was the title which at a later time Muslims hated more than any other, and which was qualified as being especially blasphemous. And even the devil tried to plant doubts in Jesus' mind, suggesting that by assuming also human nature, He could not really be the Son of God (Matt 4). We should not be amazed, then, that the devil raises up in the midst of the church the Roman antichrist, who wanted to appropriate to himself that title in the absence of the true Son of God. It is in relationship also with the negation of that title that John in his epistles describes the antichrist who was to come (1 John 2:22-24). Although He pretends to confess the Name of the Son of God, what is required is deeds rather than words. Because eternal life is obtained by invoking the Name of the Son of God (1 John 5:10-13), not by some presumptuous blasphemous vicar who pretends to pardon sins.

(2) The title Vicar of the Son of God was never placed on a papal crown.

Brief response: One cannot prove this, because in 1798, the general Berthier deposed the Roman pontiff and took him captive. Along with him he took all the papal crowns. With those crowns Napoleon later prepared another crown, and sent it to the pope when years later he wanted to reestablish relations with the papacy, now with the pope as a type of vassal prince under him. Later on the popes made other tiaras for themselves, with various inscriptions as titles. There were, nevertheless, those who testified that they had seen that inscription on the papal crown already before 1798, and even later. But it is not necessary to prove the existence of a papal crown that has the inscription Vicar of the Son of God, in order to apply that especially blasphemous title later.

(3) The title Vicarius Filii Dei yields 665, not 666. Because, according to Goldstein's findings, the numbers must be counted compositely.

Brief response: Modern experts that Edwin de Kock cites, such as Eric W. Weisstein, who took a doctorate in technology in 1996 at the California Institute of Technology and wrote an article titled Roman Numerals, have proved that Roman numerals throughout the Middle Ages had an additive numeric system, 4 was written IIII, 40 XXXX, 9 VIIII, and 90 LXXXX. Some wall clocks still use that additive system. Later on a subtractive numeric system was included. The Romans did not use that system for practical purposes, which became popular in Europe after the invention of printing, much later that when the title Vicarius Filii Dei was ascribed to the Roman papacy.

On the other hand, as the Latin [grammar] of Wheelock explains, two adjacent vowels or one vowel and a diphthong were separated. For that reason, the division of the title under consideration must be Vi-ca-ri-vs Fi-li-I De-I, which gives 666, not another number. Other Catholic authors, who probably had greater mastery of Latin than a Jewish-Dutch immigrant like Goldstein, used other arguments that we already considered against the Protestant and Adventist interpretation of Rev 13:18, but without recourse to Goldstein's ignorant argument on the manner of summing Roman numerals.

(4) The name of E. White (Ellen Gould White) also gives 666 (p. 46).

Brief response: E. G. White does not comply with the entire description given in Rev 13 concerning the apocalyptic beast or antichrist which applies, uniquely, to the Roman papacy. Furthermore, the W does not exist in the original Latin alphabet, nor does one treat it in Latin as two V's, because it has to do with a letter which modern languages – like the Dutch of Goldstein and the English – adapted from Latin, but to represent a sound differently. Wheelock explains this also, when he wrote that the Roman alphabet lacked the letters J and W. Moreover, the letter V was originally used for the sound of the vowel U as well as the consonant W. It was not until the second century of our era that the U was doubled for convenience, and so V as well as U is used in Latin texts printed in modern times. Thus, U, V and W all had the same numeric value: 5. In fact, Vicarius Filii Dei was pronounced original in Latin as Wicarius Filii Dei in English (p. 45).

When Edwin de Kock says that originally Vicarius was pronounced Wicarius, he's thinking of English. Windows, Williams, are not pronounced in English as Vindows, Villiams in Spanish. That's how the Russians pronounce W, as well as other Slavic

peoples when they are learning English; so it is like our son when he was an adolescent, who was with us for a month in Ukraine when we were invited to give lectures and workshops for pastors, and began to speak English that way, making us laugh.

(5) The name of Nero Caesar in Hebrew gives 666.

Brief response: Hebrew was not the language used by Roman emperors, nor do the characteristics of those emperors apply to the beast of Rev 13, since we are dealing with a throne which was given to the Roman papacy by the Roman emperor (Rev 13:2).

(6) Vicarius Filii Dei is a title, not a name. The name of the pope is (in their day) Pius XII, not Vicar of the Son of God.

Brief response: In Rev 17:5, the name of Babylon includes various titles. In the same way Rev 19:13, 16 apply to Jesus the name The Word of God and King of Kings and Lord or Lords. In Greek, the word "name" can also signify "title," as one sees when comparing various translations.

It is fascinating to read in de Kock's book about these battles of interpretation. Let us summarize by saying that, when the Catholic critics arose, our pioneers did not have all the answers. And so some were influenced by them and believed that it would be necessary to abandon the medieval Protestant interpretation we had inherited. Others, however, believed that the interpretation was correct, but that they would need to seek answers. Finding them required much effort, but sadly they remain in archives, preventing the church from arming itself well against the doubts and counter-arguments deriving from Catholics and now even from Protestants as well. Why? Edwin de Kock relates all these intricacies in much detail in the enormous book we are reviewing. Here we can draw out only some relevant facts which affect our church up to the present day.

IV

William Warren Prescott (1855-1944) was a vice president of the General Conference, director of the board of the Review and Herald Publishing Association, and editor of the Review and Herald. He was also president of three colleges simultaneously (Battle Creek, Union College, and Walla Walla). He was a prominent man within our church, a highly educated person. His interpretation of the trumpets in Revelation retained the historicist stamp, with notable ideas that he gathered. Nevertheless, the Catholic reaction affect him more than any other in regard to the significance of 666, and he concluded that our church had discredited itself by applying the title Vicarius Filii Dei to the Roman papacy. As a result, he insisted against wind and wave until his death in 1944, that the official title of the Roman papacy was Vicarius Christi, not Vicarius Filii Dei, which for that matter, according to him, never existed. Continuing to insist, he finally secured the appointment of a committee of the General Conference of our church to study the matter, which met at 9:00 a.m., 26 April 1936, under the direction of the president of the General Conference, Charles Henry Watson.

Prescott succeeded in convincing some on that committee concerning his position which he had adopted as a result of Catholic criticism, with the result that it decided not to insist any more on the interpretation which our church had maintained on Rev 13:18, unless a better basis for it were forthcoming. For his part, President Watson

gave his secretary the task of initiating an investigation on the use of the term Vicarius Filii Dei in the principal libraries of the world, especially in Europe and the United States. Others started their own investigations.

The situation appeared to be getting more complicated because even Leroy Froom appeared to be affected by that criticism, especially because he consulted certain specialists in Latin in various cities of Europe and concluded saying that, apart from the false document of the Donation of Constantine in the Decretals of Gracian, he found no document where the pope applied that title to himself. The problem is that part of the discussion at that time had to do with whether or not the title under study was inscribed on the pope's tiara, or whether it was on a door of the Vatican, and for some that got the investigation off its course of examining the use of the title as such. There was even an evangelist, holding meetings in Rome and helping to organize the Adventist Italian Union, who decided Quixotically (according to de Kock) to go with a photographer to the Vatican and ask to see the very rooms of the pope. This was not permitted. He returned to insist and again was turned away. Finally they admitted him with a papal photographer. They showed him three crowns, and none had the inscription he was seeking.

In the investigation the testimony of an evangelist in the United States, Donald Eugene Scoles (1864-1907) was also considered. In the 20 December 1906 Advent Review and Sabbath Herald he had published an article titled, "The Crown of the Pope." Having included sections on the title Vicarius Filii Dei in his meetings, he encountered a former Catholic priest who corrected the drawing he had made, saying that he had seen that inscription on the pope's tiara, but that the title did not appear all together on one line, but that the three words appeared one above another. Eight years later, a Presbyterian pastor who had studied at a Jesuit college in Rome to be a priest, attended his meetings and gave the same testimony. Scoles asked him then if he would leave his testimony written and signed, to which G. Hoffman agreed.

The Catholic Church took in hand later to discredit that testimony *denying to come from a former priest*, arguing that in special gatherings such as the coronation of a new pope there are so many people that it would be hard for a Catholic priest to be close enough to read a title on the papal tiara. But Edwin de Kock followed up the story and found that he was really a priest. He also brought into comparison in his book the testimony of a good number of official tourist guides who told of more than one coronation ceremony in the same terms that that Presbyterian pastor ex-Catholic priest had done.

The details of all the documentation de Kock offers are fascinating, but we are not able to linger here on that because, all that aside, it is not required that the title should be on the tiara or crown of the popes in order for that title to correspond to a title assumed and proclaimed for centuries by many popes in turn. Let us just say here that with time, after 1798, various tiaras were put together (not just the three which the Adventist evangelist saw when he asked to photograph the papal crowns in the papal suites). And the description of Hoffman corresponds in the smallest details with the official description that others have made of the elevation of a new pope, in this case, of Pope Gregory XVI, who perhaps used the crown donated that year by Queen Christina. And so the subject remains open, although without it being necessary to prove how the papal title was used.

Among those who received the challenge to respond to the impassioned criticism of Prescott in our church, was Jean Vuilleumier, son of Albert Frederic Vuilleumier who was among the first to accept the Adventist message in Europe and who, according to what I read in the book on E. White written by her grandson Arthur, translated for E. White when she was in France. (He relates, with amazement, how on visiting certain historic places and cathedrals, the official guide of the place had to step aside because E. White started recounting what she had seen in vision and showed herself to be the real guide.) Let me take this opportunity to say that I had a student when I was teaching theology at Collonges, France, who will have been, I think, a great grandson of Jean Vuilleumier and great great grandson of Albert.

Jean Vuilleumier was editor of the [French language] *Revue Adventiste* and *Signes de Temps*. On receiving Watson's challenge he decided to investigate the use of the title in Paris and at other libraries of Europe. He prepared an extraordinary document in which he proved that that title was used officially by the Roman pope for 1000 years, with the tacit sanction of 150 popes.

As for the Catholic reaction which now denies any validity for the false Donation of Constantine which had granted the pope authority over all Europe, political and spiritual, since it turns out to have been fraudulent, Vuilleumier responded saying that deeds say more than words. That false donation had been bandied about by the popes through practically the entire Middle Ages to vaunt itself as supreme authority over the world, as heir of the presumed seat of Peter, and Vicar of the Son of God. They only deprived themselves of that document when they had exploited it to the maximum and could no longer affirm its authenticity.

Did the pope ever repudiate that title? asked Vuilleumier. Never. On the contrary, de Kock proves that [even] the last popes applied it to themselves. Let me add here that the entire system of worship of the Roman Catholic Church, with the pope at the head as the presumed successor of Peter and vicar of the Son of God, is a farse. Shall we for that reason stop applying the biblical prophecies which warn us of that falsification, which was to come into the Christian church? The very fact that it has been promulgated, spread, and relied upon as legal and foundational for the establishment of papal supremacy in Europe and the world, a document crafted of that nature, makes the strongest case according to the argument of Vuilleumier.

More recently Thomas Hodgkin, an authority on Italian affairs, confirmed the testimony of Vuilleumier. He said that the history of the Donation of Constantine taken in its totality corresponds with few differences to the history of the Middle Ages. It was bandied about the popes as soon as it was invented in the VIII century, and especially starting in the XI century, to establish itself as the supreme governing body of the so called Holy Roman Empire and of the world generally. For centuries it was used by Catholic canon lawyers to aggrandize their edifices, without anyone suspecting its falsity or daring to contradict it. In my meetings I show the medieval scene with Constantine kneeling before the pope with the triple crown, in reference to that presumed concession.

Another director of the Adventist Church that set out to respond was Thomas Marion French (1883-1949), associate editor of the *Review and Herald* from 1934 to 1938. His work was along the same lines as Vuilleumier, showing additionally that some popes applied that title to themselves openly (among them Leo IX in 1054, when he

wrote to the patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, seeking to bring the orthodox churches under his authority, supposedly on behalf of Constantine and of God Himself, all of which brought about the final schism between the Orthodox and Catholic churches (p. 505). Other brothers also from the other side of the ocean (in Europe) found in Catholic dictionaries and other documents the use of the term Vicarius Filii Dei among the titles attributed to the pope, and published their findings in European Adventist magazines.

Despite all of this, not one of these documents with its extensive documentation convinced the already 80 year old Prescott, who insisted in Ministry magazine for March 1939 that not all Catholic writings are equally official. And so he left unanswered the questions and declarations of Vuilleumier and French. In any case, on 30 August of that same year, in the office of the new General Conference president, J. L. McElhany, a committee met to analyze the results obtained from the investigation. Among others [present] were Froom, Vuilleumier, and French, but not Prescott who was not a member of the committee. The works of Vuilleumier and French, plus other documents, convinced the leaders that there was sufficient documentation to maintain that which our church had always preached concerning the application of Rev 13:18. And a smaller committee was named to publish as soon as possible a small book or pamphlet with the aim of making that documentation widely available in our church. But those who had responsibility for publishing the document were preoccupied with revising, among other things, Uriah Smith's book, and [the material on 666] was never published. The committee met again in 1943 (17 February), now under another president, that prepared a document with few changes but which also was never published. Why?

Merwin R. Thurber, editor of the Review and Herald at the time, who had been Prescott's assistant previously, who died at an advanced age the following year (1944), took it upon himself to tell the president of the General Conference and the executive committee which voted the document of 43 pages, no. The reason that he gave was that he could not, in good conscience, publish such a pamphlet. Again, why? Among the reasons he gave was that the material contained many repetitions and that pastors and preachers in general were no better prepared to present the subject after reading it (in this he underestimated the mental equipment of the pastors). He complained, further, that the manuscript was excessively based on the work of Vuilleumier, and that he cited many French authors. As the Adventist Church had begun in an English speaking milieu and since it was going to be printed in English, he felt that it would be best to use English language sources. (De Kock attributes this to North American nationalism and to the lingering influence of his boss Prescott.)

Thus, all this formidable documentation which had enabled our church to preach more freely with the explicit mention of the blasphemous title of the Roman papacy which contains 666, ended by remaining ignored in an archive. With the growth of liberalism in various portions of our church, the liberal position in this aspect of Prescott emerged victorious, creating chaos in respect to our interpretation of Rev 13:18.

If that notable documentation had been published, the Daniel and Revelation committee of BRI would never have depreciated the use of Vicarius Filii Dei in Revelation at the end of the 80's, nor would Angel M. Rodríguez have committed the same error as director of BRI, in offering his opinion in nothing less that a Sabbath School quarterly (August 7 and 8, 2002), a list of reasons on the basis of which that title must be discarded. In the same way Samuele Bacciocchi, immediately afterward, would

not have come out with a string of other unrelated things to reject that title, nor would William Johnson, editor of the Review and Herald, have argued for a presumed Satanic trilogy with the three 6's, nonexistent in Greek, nor would Jon Paulien or Ranko Stefanovic at Andrews have followed insisting on the same error. Not one of all these modern Adventist authors that de Kock analyzes was given the work of investigating the authenticity of the title Vicarius Filii Dei. They simply took the idea which had come down from Prescott in our church as a proof of the weakness of the method, and brought us back to a spiritualization of the number and of the name following Catholic, Protestant, and spiritualist models.

(Let me add here that Michigan Conference, in the United States, requested this writer to respond to the criticisms of Bacchiocchi, in a document which I prepared and which was extensively distributed by internet (I don't find it on my laptop now; it must be on my computer back in the United States). Among other things, I dislodged the problem of Bacchiocchi which he (along with other Catholic and Protestant critics who tried to deny that the mark of the beast was Sunday worship) confused, i.e., the number, the name, and the mark as being all the same thing. The oldest manuscripts and the majority of versions have "the name, or the number, or the mark." De Kock brings this out abundantly in his book, showing the anti-Adventist origin of that criticism, something that was already apparent in 1939.)

V

The prophecy of Rev 13:2 indicates that the beast (the Roman antichrist) was to receive its political and religious authority from the dragon (the Roman emperor, controlled by the prince of this world, Satan). Further, it was to inherit, according to the same prophecy, the throne of the emperor. That throne was to be established, at the same time, within the Christian church, permitting the Roman antichrist to occupy the place of God and of His Son (2 Thess 2:4 ff). Such audacity could never be linked with the truth, but with lies. For that reason, both the apostle Paul and the apostle John used the word "deception" to describe the future antichrist, a characterization that Jesus used also of Satan, as father of lies (John 8).

We need not be surprised, then, that no sooner was the bishop of Rome installed on the throne of the Caesars, with all the authority which emanated from the emperor, the characteristic of fraud was manifested on a level never before seen in history. This is also what the seals of Revelation say by describing in few words the degradation of future Christian testimony in history. In projecting the third seal, whose color is the antithesis of the first, which had reflected the purity of the gospel with Christ as its rider, one sees now the new rider with a balance in his hand and an exploitive and fraudulent aspect.

In my book, *The Seals and the Trumpets* (2005), I offer ample historical documentation on the fraudulent character of the epoch, initiated and promoted by the popes in turn. At the beginning of the VII century pope Gregory began to tell legends about purgatory and hell, a method that the Roman church multiplied in order to threaten kings and princes who had taken lands from them in order to pay their generals who had triumphed in battle. They also invented a thousand stories about terrible calamities which came from Christ because presumably Sunday had been violated, in an effort to justify the change of the true day of the Lord which is Sabbath. Lacking biblical proofs, anything available served to impose it on the Christian and pagan world of that age. But

that which most calls attention of modern historians from a political perspective, is the false Donation of Constantine.

The book by de Kock that we are analyzing sets forth in detail the fraudulent and cruel characteristics of the Roman papacy throughout history, in its expansion and lordship over all Europe and even on other continents. I was a bit surprised to read the documentation he gives to show that the presumably Arrian Germanic tribes removed by the allies of Roman bishop had been misrepresented as Arrians to justify their subjection and extinction. The Waldensians were the remnant of those who survived that epoch, in the mountains of the Piedmont, without having anything to do with Arrianism. Their connection with Peter of the Valleys (Peter Waldo) on the part of the papacy at the beginning of the next millennium was another attempt to hide their antiquity, according to what I read years ago from an article of Dr Jean Zurcher (then secretary of the South European Division).

All that history of the deceptive character and despotism of the Roman papacy, abundantly related and documented by Edwin de Kock, is interrelated with the title Vicarius Filii Dei. That title was attributed by the papacy to himself, apparently, for the first time in the presumed Donation of Constantine. According to that false donation, the Roman emperor in the IV century had ceded to the Roman pontiff practically all the lands of Europe, as well as the supremacy and dominion of the world. In essence, the falsity of that document reflects the intent of the Roman Church to impose spiritual and temporal dominion and to establish the bishop of Rome over and above all rulers of the earth.

In what historical context was a document so daring as the false Donation of Constantine fabricated? The Lombards, one of the Germanic tribes, had established themselves in the northern part of Italy and wanted to subject the bishop of Rome to their domination, demanding payment of taxes or tributes which pope Zachariah (741-752) did not want to pay. On the other hand Pepin was the real ruler of France, but by not coming from the Merovingian dynasty which began with Clovis, his reign was little more than nominal. Thus, the time was ripe for the pope to give legitimacy to the monarchy of Pepin on condition that he defend the pope from the impositions of the Lombards.

But the pope went for more. He crossed the Alps 14 October 753 accompanied by two French nobles, and Pepin went to meet them accompanied by all his court and thousands of other supporters. The king manifested to the pope his concern at seeing the vicar of the Son of God, the Supreme Priest of the Christian world, cross the Alps when ill, and that he was so mistreated by the Lombards, to ask his help in defending the tombs and patrimonies of the apostles. The pontiff showed him then his great preoccupation with the fact that the Lombards had taken the lands which belonged to him as a gift from the emperor Constantine, including the exarchate of Ravenna (a lie unmasked by the fact that it had never belonged to the pope before). At the same time he presented another document which had been written by the apostle Peter in heaven, in letters of gold and beautifully framed in fine leather, and containing his signature at the end. It said: "Peter, chosen as an apostle by Jesus Christ, to our favorite son, the king Pepin, to all his army, to the bishops, abbots, monks, and all the people."

Some historians have ridiculed this story as being not true, and suggested another historical context for the appearance of the false Donation of Constantine. But

we should not be surprised at such a tremendous fraud if we recall that in that day and time the Roman Church produced also a presumed letter of Christ, written with his own blood, in which He manifested great sorrow because Sunday was being violated, and threatened to send flying serpents with teeth of iron to devour women's bosoms. So terrible had been the indignation of Christ that when the letter fell on the tomb of Saint Peter, this had opened and there had been earthquakes and darkness of a day and a half in Rome. The superstitious and ignorant people of those days were better able to swallow stories of that nature.

But Pepin wanted to know how it was possible for such a letter of Peter to come from heaven to earth. The papal spokesman had already prepared the response. The Blessed Peter descended in person from heaven and gave the letter to his successor, the pope in Rome. The now widely recognized king of France did not hesitate to respond with an army that set about to take from the Lombards and give to the papacy, for the first time, the Papal States. And although the presumed letters of Peter and of Jesus in heaven had a shorter life, the false Donation of Constantine was imposed on the west throughout practically the rest of the Middle Ages, without anyone doubting its authenticity or daring to unmask the fraud, except in the east when the pope wanted to impose himself upon the Orthodox churches invoking that false document.

Vicarius Filii Dei occurs in the false Donation of Constantine only once. Together with that title were three other titles: Bishop of the City of Rome, Pontiff, and Pope, with their variations Supreme Pontiff, Principal Pontiff, Universal Pontiff, Universal Pope, Blessed Pope, Most Holy Pope. The presumed succession of Peter and the replacement of the Son of God on the earth went together. The document was invoked whenever necessary to impose itself before kings who tried, at different times, to free themselves from the yoke of submission that the papacy imposed. The testimonies that confirm this are abundant and in fact almost interminable in de Kock's book. With such a sacred fountain of authority, no one should be surprised that the title Vicar of the Son of God, together with the supposed Petrine authority granted by the same Lord and that had gained the throne of Rome, should be invoked by all those who admired and fought in order to exalt the papal image.

VI

Three times Daniel in chap. 8 of his book refers to the self-aggrandizement of the horn which represents the Roman antichrist, something that corroborates Revelation in defining that characteristic as being blasphemous. It exalted itself over the people of God and even over God Himself in His heavenly sanctuary, and over all those that live there (Dan 8:9-11; Rev 13:5-7). (Some translators have translated the term as "grow," which is not in the original.) This was possible because of the Christian apostasy which was already in operation in the days of the apostle Paul (2 Thess 2). The moment would come, however, when it would gain official recognition from the State that would serve as a trampoline to make itself even grander through deception and corruption.

That time came initially in the year 508, when Clovis, the first Germanic king who converted to Roman Catholicism, founded the city of Paris under a system of government where the State and the Catholic Church united in holy matrimony. Every other religion from then on that would not exalt the Roman papacy would be considered intrusive and untrue, and would have to be eradicated. De Kock does not mention that

event which was the most important to occur that year. Instead he mentions as the event which marks the beginning of the 1290 years of the abomination of desolation (Dan 12:11), the allegation of certain recent historians that Clovis had been baptized that year.

Perhaps de Kock doesn't know this. But since a few years ago one can see a kind of confrontation between Gerhard Damsteegt, professor at Andrews University, and certain members of BRI, concerning the event which marks the beginning of the 1290 days, symbol of years. One student of Damsteegt prepared a doctoral thesis where he gathers all his artillery to demonstrate that Clovis was baptized in the year 508, i.e., at the beginning of the prophetic period mentioned. On the other hand, a former Austrian disciple of mine and also of Gerhard Pfandl, prepared a manuscript under the auspices of BRI, where he tries to prove that the date of the baptism of Clovis is not clear and, as a result, it is more reliable to select the foundation of Paris in that year, as capital of the French. That city was the greatest ally of the Roman papacy through the Middle Ages. There Rome tested for the first time also the tribunals of the Inquisition (see my book, *The Seals and the Trumpets*).

Heinz Shaidinger, my ex-disciple already referred to (who for the past few years has been preparing a doctoral thesis in Austria on the Waldenses), sees no reason to emphasize the baptism of Clovis to speak of the rise of the papacy according to the prophecy of Dan 11:31 and 12:11. As I have indicated to both parties at different times in private discussions, I believe that the position of BRI is the more reliable (I wrote previously on this in my book *The Seals and the Trumpets*), but neither do I see the point in trying to discredit the date of the baptism which independent historians are using in that year. I believe it is wise to cite that event also without placing all the weight of the argument on that fact.

One of the fundamental problems has to do with what one understands by the taking away of the daily and the imposition of the amazing abomination in Dan 12:11. De Kock treats of this problem somewhat in his book because he captured the tendency of some Historic Adventists of resuscitating Uriah Smith on this point. By "Historic Adventists" I mean the tendency of some brothers to believe literally the same as the pioneers, ignoring that the truth is not static, and that we do not possess a monopoly on all truth. This week just ended I concluded, for example, a discussion by internet with a North American pastor who wants to revive Uriah Smith also in relation to the king of the North in Dan 11:40, who, before the Ottoman Empire fell, believed that Turkey was that king of the North (something in which James White was not in agreement). He holds that the Ottoman Empire will rise to power again and try to impose Islam (ridiculous).

Although the Bible uses the term *tamid* (continual, or daily, or regular) 50 times in reference to the services of the temple, and all of chap. 8 of Daniel is set in the context of the sanctuary, with terminology appropriate to the services of the tabernacle, William Miller preferred to link the term to the pagan desolation (the Roman-pagan persecution). The pioneers continued with this interpretation through the rest of the XIX century, even though that interpretation was rejected by some, including James White, husband of Ellen White.

The problem has to do now with a statement of E. G. White who declared that the word "sacrifice" was added to the word "daily" (*tamid*), and that God gave the correct interpretation of that term to the Millerites before 1844. Those who believe that this reference of E. G. White involved every interpretation of William Miller believe that the

baptism of Clovis to the Roman Catholic faith in 508 ended the predominance of paganism, and inaugurated officially the papal abomination. Nevertheless, almost all Adventists today believe as James White, and interpret that his wife ratified the Millerite rejection of the word "sacrifice," which is not in the original Hebrew, per not everything Miller said on the subject (p. 185). In fact, E. White intervened later to end the discussion between her husband and Uriah Smith on the continual, declaring that there would be more light on the subject in the future, and that it was inappropriate for the church to be divided by that point in that early formative period.

That light, as one interprets it today, came through further study of the Bible and of the passage under consideration. As a result, almost all believe now that the founding of Paris in 508 under a system that was for the first time Catholic and state run, is an event appropriately given as a fulfillment of prophecy. That founding marked the official rejection of the services of the heavenly sanctuary where our only High Priest (the Son of God), to impose in His place the horrible idolatrous abomination of the papacy, which by then had already claimed, as an impostor, to be His vicar (vicar of Christ). Actually, what Clovis did was imitated in all the other States that came to make up continental Europe. I give abundant historical testimony in my book, *The Seals and the Trumpets*.

From a historical perspective, de Kock emphasizes also the fact that paganism, although it survived until the time of Clovis, did not end with his conversion. Nor can one say that the barbarians were converted from paganism to Christianity then. Clovis (like his sister) had already accepted Christianity, and had converted later to the religion of the bishop of Rome. On the other hand, let me add that paganism as a system of oppressive Roman imperial government ended in Rome in the year 476, when the last imperial Caesar was deposed. Although there had been emperors who were nominally Christians, the formulas and principles of government of the empire continued being pagan. What shall we do with the time intermediate between 476 and 508?

One of the small points on which I differ from Edwin de Kock has to do with the three horns which were uprooted before the little horn, in its career of self-aggrandizement, arrogance, and blasphemy (Day 7). He considers that the three kingdoms were the Vandals, the Heruls, and the Ostrogoths. But he fails to consider the Visigoths. In my investigations I came to the conclusion that the Heruls shared the same faith concerning the Deity as the Ostrogoths, and that they differed from the Trinitarian faith of the Roman papacy. When they were replaced by the Ostrogoths, who assimilated them, the situation of the papacy did not change in any respect. But this is not the place to discuss in detail the topic that, for its part, I treat in my book, *The Seals and the Trumpets*. Both interpretations have been defended in our church.

What we need to emphasize here is that in that spirit of self-aggrandizement, the papacy continued putting itself forward over the course of the centuries using means that were in every way fraudulent, like the fabrication of the false Donation of Constantine, the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne, until it was stopped by the same nation that had supported it initially, i.e., France in the time of the Revolution.

VII

We saw certain passages from Revelation that refer to the characteristic of fraud in the political-religious power that was to succeed the Roman Empire. We also emphasize that characteristic in the second epistle of the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians. It will be appropriate to emphasize that background another time but in Dan 8, with descriptions that are amplified even more in Dan 11:29-39.

“And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit [the apostasy of which the apostle Paul speaks in 2 Thess 2], a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise. His power shall be great – but not by his own power [he will draw on the political power of kings]; and he shall cause fearful destruction [torture, flames, crusades of extermination] and shall succeed in what he does, and destroy mighty men and the people who are the saints. *By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great.* Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes [antichrist who sits in the temple of God causing himself to pass for God; see 2 Thess 2:4-5], and he shall be broken – but by no human hand” (Dan 8:23-25, ESV)

Edwin de Kock emphasizes throughout his book how, from the beginning, the papacy attempted to wipe out every authentic trace of those it destroyed, to make those they condemned to look bad and thus make themselves look good before the world and in history. Since the purpose of this bibliographical review is to establish the interpretation of the papal title *Vicarius Filii Dei* as corresponding to the prophecy of Rev 13:18, let us concentrate now especially on various testimonies which our author collected in that regard.

Pope Nicholas I in the IX century cited the Decretals which contain the false Donation of Constantine and the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* to affirm his Roman supremacy as an absolute monarch, and declared that those Decretals were on the same level as the Bible.

Pope Leo IX (1049-54) verbally cited the Donation with the express declaration of being *Vicarius Filii Dei* on the earth, to reclaim supreme authority over the Orthodox Church in the east, which brought on the definitive schism between east and west.

Pope Gregory VII (1073-85) counted on the support of two cardinals, Anselm II and Deusdedit, in his aspirations to temporal power in the midst of the wars of succession. These two cardinals invoked the Donation of Constantine and the title Vicar of the Son of God.

Pope Honorius III, who succeeded Innocent III, cited the Donation to reassert the supremacy of the Roman Church, and referred explicitly to the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* to reassert the supremacy of the papacy over the entire Roman world.

Pope John XXII, in his bull of 23 October 1327, applied to himself the title under consideration, to affirm his supremacy, presumably given by Christ to Peter and recognized by Constantine in his pretended Donation.

Popes Pius V, Gregory XII, and Paul V, confronted by Protestant criticism in the XVI century, set up the counter-reformation and felt it necessary to amend the Canon Law owing to the attacks of Luther and other Protestants who admired Lorenzo de Valla for having unmasked the fraud of that presumed Donation of Constantine. That emendation of the Canon Law bore the title, Roman Edition (1582). And despite the fact that he had proved the fraud a century before, that document did not discard the Donation of Constantine but confirmed it, and retained the title *Vicarius Filii Dei*. Gregory XIII went on to say that that canon law was totally free from error.

As many historians recognize, daring to speak against the false Donation of Constantine before and after the Protestant Reformation was to expose oneself to martyrdom. That law, according to their argument, had been elevated to the same level as the law of God. After Lorenzo de Valla (1405-57) discovered and unmasked the falsity of the above donation, the popes placed his document on the Index of proscribed books (p. 336). The same Valla was persecuted by the Inquisition, and was saved from the flames because he found in the king of Naples, Alfonso V of Aragón, a protector who contended with the pope to defend his lands. Shortly after this, in 1478, Christians were burned in Strasbourg for daring to doubt the authenticity of the presumed Donation, because it had to do with nothing less than the founding of the temporal authority of the Roman pontiff (pp. 322-23).

Luther, in the following year, declared that that Donation of Constantine had been transformed over the centuries into a statute by which popes as well as cardinals and bishops committed hateful crimes, robberies of gold on a grand scale, the shedding of blood to impose himself as a despot over kings and emperors. And of the title Vicar of the Son of God contained in the document he wrote in the margin that it was the fifth brick in the tower of Babel. It was not without cause that the Jesuit P. Antonio Bresciani stated of Luther and Calvin in the XIX century that they allowed their impiety to go to such extremes that they called the Vicar of the Son of God on earth by the cursed epithet of antichrist (p. 332).

The Roman papacy continued defending the legitimacy of the false Donation until Cardinal Cesar Baronio admitted its falsity at the beginning of the XVII century. That did not mean, however, that the popes agreed with him. A short time later, impressed by the evidences for its status as being fraudulent, cardinal Jacques-Davy du Perron, a younger colleague of Baronio, asked Pope Paul V about what Baronio had written. The pope responded, with a laugh, "What would you like me to say? The Canons hold it so." And that was the posture of the papacy until the beginning of the XX century.

I will allow someone else to take on the task of gathering all the numerous popes, cardinals, and dignitaries of the church that de Kock cites, if they wish to go to the trouble. De Kock also gives testimony concerning innumerable dignitaries of the Roman curia who were successively elevated by the pope to their various positions for honoring him as Vicar of the Son of God.

The title *Vicarius Filii Dei* contained in the false Donation was also included in the *Decretum Gratiani* which appeared first in 1140 and was incorporated as a fundamental part of the teaching of Catholic canon law. With the coming of the printing press in 1500, the Decretum was printed many times. After 1586 it went on to become part of the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (Collection of Canon Law), which remained in effect for another

300 years, until 1917, when it was replaced by the *Codex Iuris Canonici*, which omitted the false Donation of Constantine.

Nevertheless, the fact that the Donation was omitted in the XX century, after having its falseness resoundingly proven, does not mean that the popes have renounced all the titles and dreams of world political and religious domination contained in that thousand year old fable. Actually, the last few popes (from Paul VI to Benedict XVI), have all attributed to themselves the title Vicarius Filii Dei in its various forms.

John XXIII, on 7 November 1958, newly elevated to the papacy, before news correspondents from around the world, paraphrased the declaration which appears in the false Donation of Constantine, applying to himself on earth the title Vicar of the Son of God (p. 535).

Paul VI attributed [to himself] that title two times, in 1965 and 1968, in *Acta Apostolicae* (Apostolic Constitutions, which are on the same high level as papal pronouncements in the form of a bull) (p. 532).

John Paul II, on 28 June 1983, addressing the cardinals when he announced his intention of declaring a year of jubilee, told them: All of you, members of the Roman curia, my colleagues, from me, Vicar of the Son. In 1994, in *Crossing the Shadow of Hope*, in the chapter, The Pope: A Scandal and a Mystery, attributed to the papacy the title as well, paraphrased but complete, of Vicar of the Son of God. Again on 21 October 2003, he addressed his brother cardinals referring to the popes, among whom he included himself, as Vicars of the Son.

Benedict XVI, on 20 April 2005, referred to the Catholic flock that God would never leave without pastors, successors of Peter, i.e., the popes, as Vicars of the Son (p. 536).

All of these most recent declarations of the popes are taken from the false Donation of Constantine, if not literally, in paraphrased form. The papacy will never be able to renounce that falsehood on pain of losing their aspirations to world domination and the influence that it pretends to exercise over all the earth, over governments and religions, a non-negotiable leadership which can be seen today, represented like a shadow over modern ecumenism.

VIII

No one can deny the official status of the title Vicar of the Son of God in reference to the Roman papacy because, as Dr Gerhard Damsteegt has affirmed, a name is official when it appears in an official document. Thus the strategy of wanting to discredit the value of the name which the popes attributed to themselves for centuries and established in their canon law, suggesting that it never was an official title, turns out to be a ridiculous myth which no one would think of maintaining in other contexts.

But why was it given to these most recent popes to return and reclaim for themselves the title Vicar of the Son of God? I would suggest a number of reasons. They have been capturing the fact that the world is becoming ripe for them to regain their lost political-religious authority. John XXIII was the ecumenical pope who ended by

recognizing the other churches but in a project which he does not discard, affirming his supremacy over them as successor of Peter and Vicar of the Son of God. The other churches are “separated brethren” who must return to the petrine fold as the only supreme pastor that God, as he supposes, placed on the earth. Paul VI ended by making a pact with communism, accepting the reality of those rulers and seeking to take advantage of the global political reality. He did this without neglecting to point out that, in spite of this, he was the Vicar of the Son of God on the earth.

John Paul II initiated a political-ideological war against secularism in the world and needed to affirm himself also in the titles which confirmed the primacy on him. He triumphed over communism that collapsed on his watch, and saw the opportunity to call on the orthodox world, outraged by history (then Islam, later communism), that it should accept his supremacy which puts him in the place of God and of His Son. (Leo IX did this too, which he wanted to impose himself over the orthodox world at the beginning of the past millennium, a pretension which ended in that which the Catholic Church considers the great schism of east and west.) Benedict XVI follows the politics of his predecessor and, even though many have not caught this, his invocation of such titles is linked to the canonical foundation received from the Donation of Constantine, which does not need to be cited specifically here.

A second reason to invoke such titles before cardinals and Catholic officials, as well as world leaders, is that the Protestant world has lost its prophetic vision and no longer sees the pope as an enemy. On the contrary, many Protestants feel that he fights against secularism together with them. Even so, one sees a certain tendency in some papal testimonies to use the shortened title, Vicar of the Son, something which conceals a certain preoccupation with camouflaging his identity with Rev 13:18, on pain of reviving the Protestant and Adventist interpretation. But they understand that Protestants, and more recently some Adventists, have revealed a tendency to spiritualize the apocalyptic content of the Bible (they’ve put it on Wikipedia). As a result, they have nothing to fear from using that title which was interpreted as having been anticipated by the prophecy through its number.

The tendency toward idealism as a method for interpreting Revelation is that which now holds sway in the Christian world, together with futurism (which is nothing more than disguised idealism, since it plays with fantasy) and preterism (which relapses into idealism when it is unable to explain everything in the first century). When did this start? When the theologians of Alexandria appeared who started allegorizing everything in the Bible that they couldn’t explain. With Augustine of Hippo that tendency passed to the Roman Church, spiritualizing the millennium and also the image of antichrist, with which they buried historicism throughout practically the entire Middle Ages. But in actuality that method has reappeared due to certain factors.

As I develop in my book, *The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Trumpets Unraveled* (2012), when the political power of the papacy was removed, the pope was no longer seen as a threat by the Protestant world, which started looking elsewhere in its search for candidates for the fulfillment the prophecy. And finding no other satisfying candidate (except for fanatical futurists), they started doing the same thing the Alexandrians and medieval interpreters did, which was to spiritualize Revelation.

God raised up the Seventh-day Adventist Church to show that the political power of the papacy would be revived (Rev 13:3-4), which requires us to keep the Protestant

historicist legacy. But a good number of theologians of our church are now falling into the same trap, following the steps of apostasy of those who were at one time our historicist ancestors. In the same way they spiritualize the trumpets (they don't know where God strikes), they make the identification of the apocalyptic beast ever more vague (it is a symbol of humanity without God), and in regard to the Babylon of Revelation they prefer to mention simply "the apostasy of the last days," without identifying the institutions that produced it.

In the Adventist Church the tendency toward spiritualizing the number 666 was introduced by Roy Allen Anderson, in the middle years of the past century. He did not abandon the identification of the papacy subscribed to above, but added in his interpretation a supposedly Babylonian amulet with the image of the sun on one side [recto] and on the other [verso] an ingenuous numerological array that has the number 111 six times - down one side, and across the other. Since then there has been no lack of people in our ranks who have occupied themselves identifying the number 666 with the Babylon of the Apocalypse. De Kock investigated the photo of that amulet, but without obtaining definite results. For that matter it is doubtful whether it is Babylonian, because among other things, the inscription under the sun is in Latin, not in Babylonian characters. Let us summarize the results of the investigation on those numerological presumably Babylonian amulets.

(1) Matrices with number games like this have appeared in recent times as cabalistic exercises, related to masonry and theosophy, and even with spiritualism. Those games recount the past of Moses, of Babylon, of Rome, or whatever. Thus, Edwin de Kock concludes by saying that such amulets were obviously created after 1705, although the seals and symbols on them are based on and derive from the Jewish Cabala of medieval Europe (p. 29). Even so, such cabalistic games run counter to a symbolism found in 666 in Arabic numerals (which are not in the Greek of the Bible). Because they presuppose that there are three 6's, whereas in fact there are six 111's, or stated differently, 111 6's (p. 35).

Certain terminology employed by these cabalistic movements is seen in the work of Emanuel Swedenborg, who wrote on the Revelation of the Apocalypse in 1766. Considered Protestant, he nevertheless said that he received visions and communications with spirits and angels. This author spiritualized the Apocalypse, including its numbers, with an influence that has made itself felt among many Protestant and Catholic authors.

(2) Later the idea entered our church that the number 6 represented imperfection because it fell short of the number 7, which was considered perfect. But was God ignoring this fact when He failed to remove one or two wings from His angels in Revelation, who are before Him with six wings (Rev 4:8)? Are they imperfect? Was the first man created imperfect on the sixth day, since the seventh day was still lacking which completed the creation? If we're dealing with a symbol of man because Adam was created on the sixth day, then surely it is also symbolic of the animals which were created equally perfect ("God saw that it was good"), by contrast with the apocalyptic beast, which is a monster, and not a divine creation.

(3) De Kock emphasizes also the fact that the number 6 was interpreted for many centuries in Christianity as a symbol of perfection (p. 586 ff.), something which also has its roots in ancient cultures. He does this to show the subjectivity of the method, since

even though a number might have a meaning, a number is not good or bad in itself. For example, the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles represented in the foundation of the New Jerusalem, are multiples of six. The same reference applies to the 12,000 stadia and 144 cubits, which a measure that is at once that of a man and of the angels (Rev 21:17). The city contains 12 gates and 12 pearls, and the wall is made up of 12 stones. The number which recurs in the city of God is the six as a common denominator, not the seven. Is this also a symbol of imperfection?

And what shall we say about Rome with its seven hills on which the woman Babylon sits? Does this portray a perfect city (Rev 17)? The seven heads of the dragon and of the beast (Rev 12, 13), already represented in the four beasts of Dan 7 (the third has four heads, which together with the single heads of the three other beasts sums to seven). What should we conclude? On the one hand the beast has seven heads (symbol of perfection), while on the other specifically stated that the number of his name is 666 (presumed symbol of imperfection). So where does that game take us? (I do not deny that some numbers have symbolic value, but we should proceed with caution because their symbolism in some cases is a clever modern invention, other times it doesn't apply, and the net effect is that it distracts us from the true intent of the book of Revelation.)

(4) But even supposing that 666 is a symbol of imperfection, how can people worship intensified rebellion and total independence from God, as A. M. Rodríguez suggests (p. 625)? Nor are we dealing with all of imperfect mankind, misled by the antichrist to dishonor the seventh day and with no ability to enter the divine rest, but rather with the antichrist, who deceives mankind. De Kock documents that some who read the interpretation of A. M. Rodríguez in the Sabbath School quarterly from 2002 abandoned their Adventist faith and returned to Catholicism.

(5) If, having searched for symbolism in the number of the name, one is not able to identify the name itself, then the seven plagues will not be fulfilled literally, but describe simply the complete and utter destruction of the wicked. Nor should we seek seven periods in the history of the Christian church as set forth in the seven churches, or consider any more that the seven trumpets are historical events, but rather emphasize that they are a symbolic number and forget their application to history, and so on. This is what we now call "idealism," or "ahistoricism."

(6) The presumed satanic trilogy composed of three imperfections (6's) doesn't make sense either. Rev 13 says it is the number of the beast, not of that plus the false prophet and the dragon, with whom the beast supposedly forms a trilogy of imperfection – the opposite counterpart of the divine Trinity (which, in passing, when multiplied by two gives six, not seven). Many ancient versions render the 666 with three different letters, so there are not three 6's, [but 600, and 60, and 6]. Using Arabic numerals (invented in the IX century, and popularized in Europe during the succeeding centuries) [it looks like there are three 6's].

(7) In chap. 10 of my book, *The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary*, I emphasize how in the war between the names of the pagan deities and the Name of the God of Israel, this last commanded to destroy those pagan names in the land which He gave them, and to reverence His Name which He put in His temple (Deut 12; 1 Kgs 18:24, 29; Mic 4:5; Isa 56:6-8; etc.), more specifically in the ark and in His law (2 Sam 6:2; 1 Kgs 8:20-21; cf. Deut 12:11). Neither the pagan names nor the Name of God were mere philosophies or symbolisms, but concrete names such as Ashera, Astarte, Baal,

Mot, in the case of pagan deities, and the Eternal, the Almighty, etc., in the case of the Name of the God of Israel.

In the same way, the final crisis will have to do with a confrontation between a false worship which will consist essentially in an imposter's name and reverencing his day, Vicar of the Son of God, and the worship of the name of God and of His Son on His day, which recognizes Him as Creator and Redeemer. (One receives the beast's mark on the forehead, which signifies conviction, or in the hand, which signifies action without conviction. The Name of the Father and of the Son, are interrelated [John 14:13, 15-17, 20-21, 23; 17:11-12] are honored only by conviction, and so His seal is received on the forehead, which implies that the divine law is stamped on them.) Without conviction and complete conversion to the name of God and of His Son, no one will be able to remaining standing at His coming (Rev 6:17-18), or before the beast and his image (Rev 13:4-5, 17-18).

Conclusion

Adventism must stand firm in the historicist legacy which it received from its Protestant ancestors in order to interpret the prophecies of Revelation. No symbol of any figure and number of the Apocalypse should be allowed to distract our attention from its concrete fulfillment in the history that God clearly anticipated. In connection with the number 666 we must exercise caution that we not lose sight of the beast's name in our search for a presumed numeric symbolism, which may not exist in biblical Greek.

May every pastor and evangelist preach without ambiguity that the pope is the abomination of desolation which the devil (dragon) raised up to deceive the world during the Middle Ages, and that his power will be restored in the end time, as we now see (Rev 13:2-4). There are millions who do not know that and who need to receive the call to come out of Babylon (Rev 18:1-5). They worship an imposter who calls himself Vicar of the Son of God and look to him for forgiveness of sin, forgetting that the only One who can pardon them is God Himself through the unique mediation of His Son in the heavenly sanctuary (1 Kgs 8:39; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 7:25). From there they must learn that eternal life resides only in the Name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13).

Let us exalt the Creator! Let us exalt the Son! The Name of the Father and the Name of the Son must be on our foreheads as a sign that we belong to God. Let us not permit the devil to impose his mark of ownership in the final crisis in which we are now entering. Let us grasp eternal life firmly and triumph in the power of God and of His Son.