

March 17, 1995

Dear Friend:

Greetings in Jesus' love!

Because of the huge volume of mail that has come to the office already this year, I am resorting to something I rarely use--a form letter. You were interested or concerned enough to write me about the ongoing discussion of 666 and Vicarius Filii Dei. I appreciate your interest and I wish I had time to answer your letter personally. Under the circumstances, let me share a couple of aspects that will help you understand more clearly my position and give context to the whole discussion.

1. The interpretation of the beast from the sea in Revelation 13 is not at stake. In my paper "The Saints' Victory in the End-time", I laid out 18 points of identification that come from the text itself. These points make clear that the Papacy is intended by the sea beast, as I also indicated in the paper. Thus, as I see it, the historic Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of Revelation 13 is not threatened if we cannot use the Vicarious Filii Dei for the 666.
2. I have preached evangelistically and taught in Bible class the Vicarius Filii Dei interpretation and have no wish to abandon it. My only concern is that Adventists use arguments that can be supported from both the Bible and history. If we can come up with sound historical support for Vicarius Filii Dei, I shall be delighted.
3. My reading of Prescott's work gave me a jolt. He served as editor of a strongly Protestant (anti-Catholic) magazine that the Church published early in this century, but after much search in church history sources failed to find the evidence for Vicarious Filii Dei that he expected to find. An incident that shocked him occurred at one of our publishing houses. When a photograph of the pope's tiara did not have the words Vicarius Filii Dei, the publishing house had one of its artists add them to the picture!

4. I suggest you study the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Students' Source Book (vol. 9 of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary) regarding Vicarius Filii Dei. You find there three references to Our Sunday Visitor, one or more of which some Adventists quoted when they wrote me. Note carefully the editor's note at the end of the discussion. I wish we had better evidence to support our position than this!
  
5. It seems likely from the editor's note mentioned above that the papal tiara does not have these words at the present time. Perhaps it did at one time and the papacy now denies it. Read carefully volume 7 of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary on Revelation 13:18. Notice how tentative is the conclusion, stating that this view is "the best thus far presented, though recognizing that there may be more implied in the cryptogram than this interpretation implies."

If my comments lead to closer study and sounder arguments for our position, I shall be most gratified. It would be wonderful if, as a result of these discussions, some researcher would discover the historical evidence that will make our case clear to all.

Sincerely your brother,



William G. Johnsson  
Editor, *ADVENTIST REVIEW*