

the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) should be seen as a parody of a popular but ghastly superstition. How much cooling of the tongue could be accomplished in the heat of hell by a fingertip of water?

God cares! He loves people. He hates sin, not because He's cruel but because He's Love, and love is the opposite of selfishness. He will remove stubborn sinners at the end in order to remove stubborn selfishness, but He'll be a Lover still. He simply couldn't watch His creatures writhe in flames for "ever and ever," the way we use the term. Thank God we know it's an ancient idiom that doesn't mean what it seems.

9. What is the meaning of 666? "This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six." Revelation 13:18. The Phillips translation has, "Understanding is needed here." Monsignor Knox reads, "Here is room for discernment."

Evidently wisdom is needed. Deciphering 666 has proved a puzzle.

Modern languages have at their disposal both numbers and letters. Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, languages of New Testament times, had only letters, some of which did double duty as numbers. In Greek, "A," the first letter of the alphabet, was used for 1. In Latin, capital I served for 1, it being made with a single penstroke. And so on.

Most people have assumed that 666 is to be understood by calculating the numeric value of the letters in somebody's name. The New English Bible even has, the "numerical value of its letters" is 666, which isn't quite fair, since the underlying Greek says simply, "its number is," as the Revised Standard Version does.

Some people have made light of the number 666, showing that it can be applied to all sorts of famous people's names. But this is foolish, for it is not the name of any random individual; it is the number of the beast.

Commentators who think that the beast was Nero say that the letters NERON, in Hebrew, add up to 666. But it seems a bit arbitrary to call Nero "Neron," which wasn't his name, and to evaluate him in Hebrew, which he didn't speak. Besides, we have seen that the beast isn't Nero. See pages 379, 380.

If, as we have seen, the leopard-bodied beast is a symbol for Roman Christianity at its worst, then the number 666 applies in some way to it. The number is the number of a man, our text says; and in Daniel 7 the Roman church is characterized as a horn with "eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things." Second Thessalonians 2:3 speaks of the "man of lawlessness."

Latin is the official language of the Catholic Church. The pope, in Catholic theology, stands for the whole church. One of the pope's titles is said to be *Vicarius Filii Dei*, "Vicar of the Son of God." In response to a reader's question, the Catholic journal *Our Sunday Visitor* for April 18, 1915, replied, "The letters

inscribed in the Pope's mitre [his priestly crown] are these, *Vicarius Filii Dei*, which is the Latin for Vicar of the Son of God. Catholics hold that the Church, which is a visible society, must have a visible head."

The numeric value of this title, using the numeric values of Latin letters, is easy to calculate (as the *Visitor* acknowledged).

| | | | | | |
|---|-----|---|----|---|-----|
| V | 5 | F | 0 | D | 500 |
| I | 1 | I | 1 | E | 0 |
| C | 100 | L | 50 | I | 1 |
| A | 0 | I | 1 | | |
| R | 0 | I | 1 | | |
| I | 1 | | | | |
| U | 5 | | | | |
| S | 0 | | | | |

Total, 666

Here may be the true meaning of 666. But inasmuch as (a) there is some uncertainty about the official status of this title, and (b) the Bible doesn't actually state that 666 is to be calculated on the basis of the numeric value of the letters in a name, let us look for other possibilities.

In Revelation 17 the beast is linked with the harlot of "Babylon." The number 6 and multiples of it such as 12, 36, 60, and 600 were significant to ancient Babylon. Sixty was the number of Anu and Marduk, her supreme gods at different times. See GC 1:49, 50. A popular amulet worn by Babylonian priests contained this mysterious configuration of numbers in a square:

| | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 32 | 34 | 3 | 35 | 6 |
| 30 | 8 | 27 | 28 | 11 | 7 |
| 20 | 24 | 15 | 16 | 13 | 23 |
| 19 | 17 | 21 | 22 | 18 | 14 |
| 10 | 26 | 12 | 9 | 29 | 25 |
| 31 | 4 | 2 | 33 | 5 | 36 |

With your pocket calculator, add up each line, horizontally and vertically, and see what you get. Then add up all 6 horizontal lines and all 6 vertical ones, and see what you get.

This amulet shows that 666 was of considerable interest to ancient Babylonian religion. Here's something else. The fertility god Ningiszida of ancient Babylon, a god whose worship was supposed to encourage intercourse and enhance reproduction, was represented by two serpents wrapped six times around each other.⁸⁶

Now let's try still another approach, asking the Lord for "understanding" and

The most prominent number in Revelation is seven. There are seven churches, seven trumpets, and so on. Seven is also the number of God's sabbath, the seventh day of the week, the day which God has chosen to remind us of "him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water." Revelation 14:7. God's end-time saints worship the Creator and keep His commandments. They are to be seventh-day people.

So seven is a number that honors God.

The number 666 is a "human" number (R.S.V.). The underlying Greek can be translated fairly as "the number of a man" or as "the number of *man* [mankind]." The sixth day, Friday, is the day when man was created. Does 666 then, with its triple sixes, point to man focused inward on himself, on his own ways of doing things, on his own creativity—like the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, boasting of his own activity in defiance or neglect of the true Source of all creativity? See Daniel 4:30 and GC 1:59-61.

In contrast, the crowning day of creation is the seventh day, when God delights in His work (Exodus 31:17) and invites man to enter into His joy (Isaiah 58:13, 14)—when God rests (Genesis 2:2) and man enters into His rest (Hebrews 4:10).

Professor Neall, whom we met on page 386, has discussed this interesting concept:

Six is legitimate when it leads to seven; it represents man on the first evening of his existence entering into the celebration of God's creative power. The glory of the creature is right if it leads to the glory of God. Six hundred sixty-six, however, represents the refusal of man to proceed to seven, to give glory to God as Creator and Redeemer. It represents man's fixation with himself, man seeking glory in himself and his own creations. It speaks of the fullness of creation and all creative powers without God—the practice of the absence of God. It demonstrates that unregenerate man is persistently evil. The beasts of Rev 13 represent man exercising his sovereignty apart from God, man conformed to the image of the beast rather than to the image of God. Man apart from God becomes bestial, demonic. . . .

The mark of the beast, then, is a rejection of the sovereignty of God—the Sabbath principle which is designed to encourage man to seek his dignity not in himself or in nature, but in communion with God and participation in God's rest. It is the Sabbath which distinguishes between the creature and the Creator, which reveals who deserves worship and who does not. It is the Sabbath which demonstrates God's sovereignty and man's dependence. Six hundred sixty-six by contrast is the symbol of the worship of the creature rather than the Creator.⁸⁷

Viewed in the light of this interpretation, *coercive* Sunday observance, *defi-*

antly linked with a determination to worship God *in our own way* in spite of Christ's end-time ministry on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary and of the Ten Commandments which are located beside Him, constitutes the mark of the beast.

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9. I am indebted for this question to Dick Winn and the title of his book: *If God Won the War, Why Isn't It Over?* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1982).
10. See, e.g., Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 15, and Merwyn S. Garbarino, "Indian, American," *World Book Encyclopedia* (1973), 10:127, 138n.
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13. Alfred H. Kelly & Winfred A. Harbison, *The American Constitution: Its Origins and Development*, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1948, 1955), pp. 384-391.
14. See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 492. The case is known as *Berea College v. Kentucky*.
15. The court case is *Korematsu v. United States* (1944). See e.g., Carl Brent Swisher, *Historic Decisions of the Supreme Court*, an Anvil original (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1958), p. 162.
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