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Ellen G. White's Visions and Doctrinal Authority in Seventh-day Adventism

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Abstract

This review article examines the role and authority attributed to Ellen G. White's private visions in the development and maintenance of distinctive Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) doctrines, using the church's interpretation of Revelation 13:16-18 (the number 666 and the mark of the beast) as a case study. Drawing on primary sources including White's writings, early SDA publications, General Conference resolutions from 1883 and 1887, and contemporary worship materials, the study traces how visions reported in 1847 and 1850 informed the identification of the papacy as the agent responsible for changing the Sabbath and of Sunday observance as the mark of the beast. The analysis documents institutional statements that closely associate doctrinal interpretation with White's visionary authority, as well as White's own descriptions of her writings as divinely derived. To assess contemporary reception, the study also examines a widely circulated 2021 Swahili SDA hymn and a sample of associated online responses, indicating the continued transmission of this interpretive framework within popular Adventist worship and discourse. Finally, the article evaluates the claim that the papal title *Vicarius Filii Dei* corresponds to the number 666, assessing it against linguistic, historical, and exegetical considerations. The findings suggest that this identification encounters significant methodological challenges when examined in light of the original language and historical context of Revelation. The study concludes by highlighting the implications of prophetic authority for doctrinal formation and biblical interpretation within Seventh-day Adventism.

Key words: Ellen G. White, prophetic authority, Seventh-day Adventism, revelation 13, private revelation and doctrine.



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INTRODUCTION

For centuries, interpreters have proposed varied identifications of the number 666 in Revelation 13:16-18. What the present review aims to demonstrate, however, is that as long as personal visions, dreams, revelations, the employment of numerological conspiracy theories and arbitrary numerical calculation methods, or words of knowledge are used as the main interpretative principle, as opposed to sound biblical hermeneutics, cultic (distorted) doctrines are bound to emerge. The Seventh-day Adventist movement, through its acceptance and institutional elevation of Ellen G. White's visions, provides a clear historical example of this process.

Ellen Gould White, born in November 1827 and died in July 1915, is regarded as the prophet and co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, her exact date of birth and ancestral roots are still not well documented (Nix, 2005). It is well documented that she received over 2,000 visions and dreams from God, in public and private meetings throughout her life. Ellen G. White, through her visions, identifies the bearer of number 666 in Revelation 13:16-18 as the Pope and all those who worship on Sunday. She is believed to have received over 2,000 visions on various topics from the age of 17 until her death at the age of 87. Some of these visions directly addressed the subject of the number 666 in the Bible's book of Revelation (White, 2022).

Dr Dale Ratzlaff, a former SDA Pastor, enumerated the number of times Mrs White claimed to have seen or been shown the visions. Dr Ratzlaff said, "She uses the term, 'I saw' 1,933 times; 'I was shown' 978 times; 'said the angel' 265 times; 'in vision' 320 times; and 'light given me' 153 times, 'my accompanying angel' 44 times (Ratzlaff, 2009, p. 329). This kind of emphasis creates the impression that all her visions come from God. Visions played a significant role in her understanding of the biblical messages. In fact, her doctrines: The cleansing of the Heavenly Sanctuary and the Investigative Judgment; The seal of God and the mark of the Beast and SDA as the Remnant Church are the backbone of the Seventh-day Adventist Church theology, yet they are not based on any sound biblical principles but on her visions.

DISCUSSION

Ellen G. White's Visions and Their Direct Influence on Sabbath as a Seal of God and Sunday as the Mark of the Beast

On April 7, 1847, at age 20, she saw in a vision that it was the Pope who changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

I saw that God had not changed the Sabbath, for He never changes. But the Pope had changed it from the seventh to the first day of the week: for he was to change time and laws" (White, 2000, p. 18)

Three years later, an angel showed her that keeping Sunday as a day of worship is the mark of the Beast. "In a view given on June 27, 1850, my accompanying angel said, "The Pope had changed the day of rest from the seventh to the first day of the week" (White, 2022). By 1883, the Seventh-day Adventist "endorsed Mrs Ellen G White's vision as the correct interpretation of Revelation 13:16-18 through Review and Herald Supplement, August 14, 1883 (SDA's official publisher).

Our position on the Testimonies is like the keystone to the arch. Take that out, and there is no logical stopping-place till all the special truths of the Message are gone...Nothing is surer than this, that the Message and visions (of Mrs White) belong together, and stand or fall together. (Review and Herald Supplement, 1883)

On February 7, 1887, the General Conference, the highest council of the Seventh-day Church, through a resolution declared Mrs Ellen G White as "God's highest authority on the earth" (White, 2017). Mrs White subjected the authority of the council to her own authority when she made the following remarks regarding General Conference: "When the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has on earth, exercises independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but must be surrendered" (White, 2017, p. 492).

White's Self-Understanding of Her Writings as Infallible and Binding

The General Conference has no option but to endorse since: (1) Her messages are based on visions which the General Conference believed to be emanating from God; (2) Furthermore, her words are perceived to be infallible, as she compares the truth in her books to God's tablets to Moses.

In my books, the truth is stated, barricaded by a 'Thus saith the Lord.' The Holy Spirit traced these truths upon my heart and mind as indelibly as the law was traced by the finger of God upon the tables of stone. (White, 2006)

She made sure her letters were to be received with the equal weight that her books are given. Why? Because she regards her testimonies in her letters as light of hope from heaven.

In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne. (White, 2017, p. 67).

When a dissenting voice (opinion) arose, Mrs White made sure that the individual was considered to have gone against God and not Mrs White. She proclaimed: “If you lessen the confidence of God’s people in the testimonies [her vision and dreams] He has sent them, you are rebelling against God” (White, 2017, p. 66). At this juncture, a conclusion can be drawn that the position of the Seventh-day Adventists concerning the number 666 of Revelation 13:16-18 remains what Ellen G. White declares through her revelation. It remains binding for all Seventh-day Adventist members. Richard Hammill, the second president of Andrews University (SDA University based in the U.S.A.) and a vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, issued comments in relation to Ellen G. White’s writings. Hammill stated, “I believe Ellen G. White was a messenger of God and that her writings are inspired instruction from God for my personal well-being” (Douglass, 2018, p. 105).

Many, if not all, of the SDA publications endorse her vision of April 7, 1847, in which she saw the Pope as the one who transformed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

In his book National Sunday Law (2003), A. Jan Marcussen argues:

The Bible predicted in Rev. 13:8 that the papacy would be a worldwide, well-known church. This prophecy has indeed come true. However, Revelation 13:8 also says that the whole world

would worship the papacy except for God’s true people, the Saturday Sabbath-keepers. Worship entails obedience...Satan, through his agency, the papacy, has deceived virtually the entire world into observing Sunday, a pagan religious day, that the papacy, by its own admission, has set up instead of Saturday, God’s holy Sabbath day of the Fourth Commandment.

Revelation 13:18 says that his number is 666. What is the Pope’s title? The following quotations from Catholic literature tell us that ...the title of the Pope of Rome is Vicarius Filii Dei. The letters inscribed in the Pope’s mitre are these: Vicarius Filii Dei, which is Latin for Vicar of the Son of God. Thus, the official title of the Pope is Vicarius Filii Dei, translated from Latin as “Vicar of the Son of God.” A vicar is a substitute in an office.

A person’s number was obtained by adding the numerical values of the letters in his name, that is, the values of the letters in the Roman numeral numbering system. If the letter had no value, the value of zero was assigned. For example, the value of “I” is one; the value of “V” is five; and the value of “X” is ten. There was no letter “U” in the Latin alphabet; the correct letter is “V” ...The values of the letters of this name, Vicarius Filii Dei, add up to 666, exactly as predicted in Revelation 13:18 “...for it is a number of a man. (Marcussen, 2003, pp. 87-88).

Historically, certain Seventh-day Adventist interpretations utilised only the seven standard Roman numerals (I, V, X, L, C, D, and M) from the Latin alphabet, assigning a value of zero to the remaining seventeen letters. Through this selective application, proponents arrived at the sum of 666 to identify the Antichrist.

The Seventh-Day Adventists used Roman numerals to arrive at 666 as the number of the Pope, confirming him as the Anti-Christ, as shown below.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 V=5 \\
 I=1 \\
 C=100 \\
 A=0 \quad F=0 \\
 R=0 \quad I=1 \\
 I=1 \quad L=50 \quad D=500 \\
 V=5 \quad I=1 \quad E=0 \\
 S=0 \quad I=1 \quad I=1 \\
 \hline
 112 \quad + \quad \overline{53} \quad + \quad \overline{501} \quad = \quad 666
 \end{array}$$

Mark Finley, a prominent SDA pastor, evangelist, and author of over 70 books, claims that the Roman Catholic Church explicitly changed the day of worship from the biblical Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday. He cited Father Enright, a Catholic priest, as saying that the Catholic Church, by its “divine power,” abolished the Sabbath and commanded Sunday observance, to which the “entire civilised world bows down” (Finley, 1994, p. 48).

Dr Jack J. Blanco, a former dean at Southern Adventist University and the author of *The Clear Word*, incorporated foundational Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) theological interpretations, including perspectives from Ellen G. White, into his work. Blanco affirmed in the opening pages of his 1996 paraphrase, *The Clear Word Teen-Youth Devotional*, that it serves as an “expanded paraphrase of the Bible, with many added insights from Ellen White and other Bible commentators” (Blanco, 1996, “To Begin With” para. 28).

His interpretative method is apparent in his paraphrase of Revelation 13:18. While many translators render it “for it is the number of a man,” Blanco paraphrased the verse to read, “Its title translates into the number six hundred and sixty-six, and this is the name of a man, not a creature” (Blanco, 1996, p. 1308).

This specific phrasing, which Blanco introduces with the wording, “Its title translates into the numbers six hundred and sixty-six”, highlights the direct influence of Ellen G. White’s traditional SDA interpretations on his scriptural paraphrase.

To reinforce their position, the Seventh-day supporters of Mrs White’s vision regarding Revelation 13:18, changed “Vicarius” to “Vicariivs” on the basis that the Latin alphabet did not have a “U,” and instead the letter “V” was substituted for “U.” They cite that some Libraries were titled “PVBLIC LIBRARY.” It is an apparent attempt to make sure the Vicarius Filii Dei fits the

number 666 to prove their point. Altogether, some Adventists consider the Holy Spirit the seal of God, but maintain their earlier position by insisting that the Sabbath is the ‘sign of the seal.’ It is a cosmetic change, but their position remains the same.

The Catholic Encyclopaedia makes it clear that the title Vicarius Filii Dei or Vicariivs Filii Dei has not been a title of Pope in any history of the Church. However, different Popes have used Vicar of Christ, a Latin equivalent of Vicarius Christi. For example, Pope Nicholas III used the title Vicar of God; others have used Vicar of St. Peter or Vicar of the Apostolic see. Vicar is a Latin word for a representative of Christ (Fanning, 1912). The idea that Vicarius Filii Dei adds up to 666 is not a title of the Pope and was never written on the Pope’s mitre. Vicarius Filii Dei is similar to one of the Pope’s authentic titles, Vicarius Christi, but this does not add up to 666.

“Vicarius Christi is a title of the Pope implying his supreme and universal primacy, both of honour and of jurisdiction, over the Church of Christ. It is founded on the words of the Divine Shepherd to St. Peter: “Feed my lambs... Feed my sheep” (John 21:16-17), by which He constituted the Prince of the Apostles guardian of His entire flock in His own place, thus making him His Vicar and fulfilling the promise made in Matthew 16:18-19” (Fanning, 1912)

Other vicarial designations have been accorded to the Pope over the years, but the Vicarius Christi has been most expressive of his headship of the Church. In essence, Vicarius Christi adds up to 209 and not 666, as shown below.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 V=5 \quad C=100 \\
 I=1 \quad H=0 \\
 C=100 \quad R=0 \\
 A=0 \quad I=1 \\
 R=0 \quad S=0 \\
 I=1 \quad T=0 \\
 U=0 \quad I=1 \\
 S=0 \\
 \hline
 107 \quad + \quad \overline{102} \quad = \quad 209
 \end{array}$$

The Emerging Seventh-day Adventist Composite Portrait of the Beast

Once Ellen G. White’s visions were granted authoritative status within Seventh-day Adventism, they did not merely supplement traditional historicist interpretations

of Daniel and Revelation; they effectively reorganised and re-coloured them. A composite eschatological narrative emerged in which the papacy is portrayed not only as the “little horn” of Daniel 7 and the first beast of Revelation 13, but as the climactic embodiment of every previous world empire. This synthesis is vividly illustrated in contemporary SDA preaching, Bible studies, devotional materials and hymnody.

Given that SDA’s convictions are disseminated through their Church songs and hymns, this study investigated a song performed by the Voice of Prophecy (VOP) Choir of Kasulu SDA Church titled HESABU YAKENI (666), which means “His number is 666”. The song refers to the reading in Revelation 13:1-18, where the Apostle John saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, ten diadems on its horns, and blasphemous names on its head. He continues to state that the beast was like a leopard, with feet like a bear’s and its mouth like a lion’s (Revelation 13:1-2).

“Then I saw another beast resembling a leopard, having seven heads and ten horns. It had diadems on its horns. Its feet were like those of a bear and a mouth like a lion’s” (VOP Choir, Kasulu Voice of Prophecy, 2021).

Their song also refers to the visions of Daniel during the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, where Daniel saw four beasts coming out of the sea. One like a lion, another like a bear, another like a leopard, and a fourth beast with ten horns (Daniel 7:1-8). This is the Scripture that the VOP Choir used as a reference to back the emergence of beasts. Immense power is given to this beast by the dragon, and people worshipped it through the beast. They dispute that the beast referred to itself as God, and it could forgive sins.

The dragon gave him powers and authority to sit on his throne. People worshipped the dragon through this beast. The beast was given a mouth to speak blasphemous words. And he called himself God, who is able to forgive sins. It looked like the leopard of Greece, and its bearlike feet were like those of Medo-Persia. Its mouth is like a lion’s, likened to the Babylonian empire. And its ten horns, similar to the Roman Empire. (VOP Choir, Kasulu Voice of Prophecy, 2021).

This lyrical rendition draws directly from Revelation 13:1–8 while embedding distinctive SDA emphases:

The dragon (identified as Satan in SDA theology, per Revelation 12:9) transfers authority to the beast, leading to indirect worship of the dragon. This is in line with the vision of White in 1850, when the practice of observing Sunday by the papacy is considered the final deception as the fulfilment of Revelation 13:4 (Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?).

The fact that the beast speaks blasphemous words out of his mouth and that he claims he is God and can forgive sins is SDA criticism of the Catholic dogmas, which include the sacrament of absolution through the priest and the titles of the pope, suggesting some divine prerogatives. This is enhanced by White’s writings, as the papacy is seen to usurp the authority of God, a theme that revisits Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 13:5-6.

The song explicitly links the beast's features to the four kingdoms of Daniel 7: lion (Babylon), bear (Medo-Persia), leopard (Greece), and ten-horned beast (Rome), culminating in the papal phase of Rome. This historicist progression, central to SDA prophecy seminars and literature, posits the papacy as the “little horn” that emerges from Rome, inheriting and surpassing the tyrannies of prior empires.

By framing the beast as a religious-political power demanding universal obedience, the song underscores White’s vision that worshipping on Sunday will become the “mark of the beast” in the end times, contrasting with the seventh-day Sabbath as the “seal of God.”

Reinforcement and Popular Dissemination Through Contemporary SDA Hymnody

The composite portrait that can be outlined above is not limited to official SDA literature or sufficiently learned literature; it has been diluted, dramatised and sent through grassroots evangelism and worship music so that the visionary framework developed by Ellen White can be infiltrated at every level of Adventist consciousness. An illustration of this popular reinforcement appears in the same 2021 repertoire of the Kasulu Voice of Prophecy Choir. Immediately following the more symbolic description previously cited, the choir transitions into a direct, declarative stanza that removes any possible ambiguity:

God gave us these illustrations to understand them in these last days. The leopard-like beast is the Roman Church, and the ten horns are the ten European nations. The seven heads are the ancient

European nations, and the diadems on each horn are the respected allies of the Roman Church. The dragon, who is the devil, gave him great authority to be a church leader and a country president. People worship the devil by worshipping this church leader. This is a Roman Bishop who called himself a Holy Father. The mark of that beast, the religious Rome, is Sunday, and his human number is six hundred, sixty-six (666). (VOP Choir, Kasulu Voice of Prophecy, 2021).

This lyrical exposition reveals key features of how Mrs White's visions have been transformed into uncontested popular dogma. The papacy is no longer presented as a possible or symbolic fulfilment; it is declared to be the leopard-like beast in the plainest terms: "This is a Roman Bishop who called himself a Holy Father." The beast is portrayed as simultaneously "a church leader and a country president," reflecting White's repeated assertions (derived from her visions) that the papacy would regain civil authority in the last days and enforce Sunday laws through state power.

The choir states without hesitation that to worship or obey this church leader is to worship the devil. This escalation originates in White's 1847 and 1850 visions, in which Sunday observance was explicitly labelled the mechanism by which Satan receives worship (Rev 13:4, 8). Additionally, end-time urgency is framed as divine intent. The opening line "God gave us these illustrations to understand them in these last days" implies that the correct interpretation of Revelation 13 has been providentially reserved for Seventh-day Adventists through the prophetic ministry of Ellen White.

Thus, decades after White's death, and more than a century after her pivotal visions on the Sabbath-Sunday issue, the average Adventist congregation sings the same interpretation that was originally received in vision by a 20-year-old woman in 1847. The visionary origin is no longer mentioned; the interpretation is now treated as self-evident biblical truth. This seamless transition from private revelation through institutional canonisation to popular hymnody demonstrates the completeness of the process described throughout this review: Ellen White's visions have not merely influenced SDA eschatology; they have become the unquestioned lens through which Revelation 13 is read. It is within this closed hermeneutical circle that the subsequent claim "the Pope's title Vicarius Filii Dei adds up to 666" is advanced, not as a hypothesis to be tested against

Scripture and history, but as the final mathematical proof that the visions were correct all along.

Christological Corrective Within the Same Hymn

Remarkably, the very same 2021 song by the Kasulu Voice of Prophecy Choir that unequivocally identifies the Roman Bishop as the beast and equates obedience to him with devil-worship concludes with a powerful Christological refrain that appears, at first glance, to stand in direct tension with the earlier verses:

"Only Jesus has the authority to forgive our sins. Only Jesus is worthy to be worshipped in Heaven and on Earth. The one who saves the whole world is Jesus alone, who conquered death" (VOP Choir, 2021).

This closing stanza is not an afterthought; it is sung with the greatest intensity and repeated as the emotional climax of the piece. Two observations arise from placing this confession immediately after the fierce anti-papal rhetoric:

1. Elevation of Ellen White's visions to the level of Christological orthodoxy

The seamless movement from "this is the Roman Bishop who called himself Holy Father" to "only Jesus forgives sins ... only Jesus is worthy of worship" reveals how completely White's private revelations have been fused with the church's confession of Christ. The visions are no longer treated as a secondary or confirmatory gift; they have become the indispensable key that supposedly unlocks who may and may not receive religious submission in the last days. In practice, loyalty to Christ is measured by acceptance of White's identification of the beast.

2. Creation of a new functional Canon

The hymn illustrates the result of the process traced throughout this review: Scripture's warnings against false worship and blasphemy (Rev 13:2; Mark 2:7) are still proclaimed, but their concrete application to who the blasphemer actually is has been permanently fixed by 19th-century private visions. Christ remains the only Saviour and the only worthy Object of worship in theory, yet in practice, the test of whether one truly worships Christ alone has been redefined as rejection of Sunday observance and of the papal system, precisely as Ellen White saw it in 1847 and 1850.

It is precisely against this backdrop (this total integration of private revelation into the church's worship,

evangelism, and Christology) that the claim “the Pope’s title Vicarius Filii Dei adds up to 666” must be evaluated. The following section, therefore, tests whether that numerical assertion can stand when subjected to the same biblical scrutiny that the hymn itself demands: namely, that only Jesus forgives sins, only Jesus is worthy of worship, and only Scripture, not continuing private revelation, has final authority to identify who does or does not blaspheme His name.

Popular Reception and Functional Canonisation

The extent to which Ellen G. White’s 19th-century visions have become the unquestioned lens for reading Revelation 13 is nowhere more visible than in the spontaneous reactions of ordinary Seventh-day Adventists (and even some non-Adventists) to the 2021 Kasulu Voice of Prophecy Choir song. A sample of comments drawn from the more than 825 responses under the YouTube video reveals six recurring themes that collectively demonstrate the complete functional canonisation of White’s private revelations:

- Unanimous SDA approval

“The whole revelation is here... this kind of songs we need we as Adventists... be blessed.” The song is received not as one possible interpretation among many, but as the definitive presentation of “the whole revelation.”

- Surprising Catholic Endorsement

Remarkably, at least one self-identified Catholic listener writes: “I truly love the truth about this song despite the fact that I am a Catholic... u have made me understand the full meaning of those verses on Daniel 7.” This illustrates the persuasive power of the vision-shaped narrative when presented in emotive musical form.

- Elevation of the song to the level of gospel and “The Truth”

Multiple commenters explicitly equate the song’s message with the everlasting gospel itself:

“This is the everlasting gospel. It must be preached to all corners of the world.”

“It is good to have known the truth... The truth is well-articulated through music.”

The specific interpretation that the papacy equals the beast and that Sunday equals the mark is no longer considered the very core of the three angels’ messages (Rev 14:6-12).

- Perceived divine inspiration and courage
“Composer was really filled with the Power of the Holy Spirit.”

“This is great courage and God’s inspiration to compose this. Great teaching.”

The composition is attributed directly to the Holy Spirit, precisely the same language once reserved for Ellen White’s visions.

- Explicit linkage to Ellen White’s prophecy on 666

“Perfect prophecy. Glory to God. This is a song for all times.” The imminent mention of the number 666 in the same song cycle is celebrated as fulfilled prophecy, with no awareness that the gematria calculation post-dates White’s original visions.

- Retrojective historicity

Perhaps most telling is the attempt to project the interpretation backwards into earliest Christianity:

“Proud to be SDA. Two thousand years plus, we have preached the truth and nothing but the truth. Praise be to God of Sabbath.” The commenter claims the papacy equals 666 interpretations has been SDA teaching for “2000 years plus,” despite the fact that the specific Vicarius Filii Dei calculation and the Sunday-mark doctrine crystallised only after Ellen White’s post-1844 visions and were formally endorsed decades later (1883–1888).

These comments, written in 2021 by lay Adventists in East Africa, confirm that White’s private revelations have achieved what might be termed “functional scriptural status.” The average believer no longer distinguishes between what the Bible says and what Ellen White said the Bible means. The vision-based identification of the beast has become “the everlasting gospel,” “the truth,” and “the whole revelation,” sung with the same reverence as the Apostles’ Creed in other traditions.

It is precisely because this interpretation now functions as unquestionable gospel that any challenge to the Vicarius Filii Dei equals 666 calculation is experienced as an attack on the gospel itself. Yet when the same rigorous standard of biblical fidelity that the hymn demands, “Only Jesus has the authority to forgive our sins... only Jesus is worthy to be worshipped”, is applied to the numerical claim itself, the argument collapses.

From Visionary Certainty to Biblical and Historical Scrutiny

It is necessary to test the one piece of supposed “mathematical proof” that is repeatedly presented as clinching the identification of the papacy with the beast: the assertion that the papal title Vicarius Filii Dei adds up to 666. When the controlling authority of White’s private revelations is set aside, and the text of Revelation is allowed to speak on its own terms, several insurmountable difficulties immediately appear. The author of this study went on to add Roman values to Xum Nomvula Ndleleni, a South African name, and Lendca Xaviera, a name randomly selected. Both names added up to the number 666.

Xum Nomvula Ndleleni

X=10; U=0; M=0; N=0; O=0; V=5; U=0; L=50; A=0
N=0; D=500; L=50; E=0; L=50; E=0; N=0; I=1
TOTAL=666

Lendca Xaviera

L=50; E=0; N=0; D=500; C=100; A=0
X=10; A=0; V=5; I=1; E=0; R=0; A=0
TOTAL=666

Similarly, during the 2020 pandemic, various conspiracy theories and social media discourses emerged, asserting that the term "coronavirus" corresponds to the "666" figure cited in Revelation 13:18. Following the precedent of earlier sectarian numerology, advocates of these theories employed specific numerical methods—either by assigning values based on alphabetical rank or through arbitrary letter-counting—to validate their claims.

The proponents first counted the letters in the English word "corona," establishing a base value of six (6):

- C=1, O=2, R=3, O=4, N=5, A=6 (Total: 6)

In the second stage, a standard A1Z26 cypher was applied to the English alphabet (A=1, Z=26). The third step involved summing the values of the letters in "corona" based on their alphabetical position:

- C (3) + O (15) + R (18) + O (15) + N (14) + A (1) = 66

Finally, the two results were combined rather than added (6 and 66) to produce the figure 666. However, this calculation is linguistically dependent; it functions only

within the English lexicon and alphabet. When this methodology is applied to other languages, the results are inconsistent.

For instance, when translated into Greek (στέμμα), the word also contains six letters:

- σ=1, τ=2, έ=3, μ=4, μ=5, α=6 (Total: 6)

However, using the Greek alphabetical order (α=1 to ω=24), the values are as follows:

- σ (18) + τ (19) + έ (5) + μ (12) + μ (12) + α (1) = 67 (concatenating)

Consequently, this calculation yields 667 rather than 666, demonstrating the inconsistency of the mathematical rule. This illustrates that the rule produces varying outcomes across different languages. For example, the French translation couronne consists of eight letters and possesses an alphabetical sum of 104, resulting in a value of 8,104. In Swahili, korona has six letters and a sum of 74, yielding 674.

To further demonstrate the methodological inconsistency of these theories, the author applied the same principle to the Kenyan name "Joshua Kogo A Kea." The first name, Joshua, contains six letters, and the remaining names sum to 66. Under this arbitrary logic, the individual would be identified as the bearer of the mark of the beast. This highlights the inherent flaw in such numerological frameworks.

Despite the fact that many of these theories originate from non-credible sources or informal spiritual leaders, they have nonetheless gained enough adherents to be cited in peer-reviewed scholarship. Kainja et al. (2021) concluded that religious misinformation regarding COVID-19 and Revelation 13:18 fostered significant vaccine hesitancy in Malawi. Similarly, Senokoane (2021) noted that South African Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng publicly linked the vaccine to "666" in a prayer at Thembisa Hospital, suggesting it was a "work of the devil" intended to corrupt human DNA.

Fosu-Ankrah (2021) observes that while Charismatic Christianity in Africa can be a vital resource for public education, it can also serve as a channel for health misinformation, generating doubt and fear. Comparable studies by Chimuanya and Igwebuikwe (2021) indicate that prominent figures like Bishop David Oyedepo and

Pastor Chris Oyakhilome characterised the pandemic as a "Satanic-orchestrated" event. This rhetoric became so pervasive that the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found it necessary to address these myths directly, clarifying that vaccine ingredients are safe and comparable to those found in common foods.

In his 2021 study, Letšosa summarises the critical findings on this subject, arguing that in its original context, the "number of the beast" served as a warning to early Christians against the idolatry of the Roman Empire. Letšosa contends that appropriating this scripture to disparage life-saving medical research is an "extremely irresponsible" use of biblical authority.

Conversely, several prominent religious leaders have actively refuted these conspiracy theories. Archbishop Jackson Ole Sapit (Anglican Church of Kenya) promoted vaccination as a medical necessity rather than an eschatological sign, and Archbishop Thabo Makgoba (Anglican Church of Southern Africa) publicly received the vaccine to encourage compliance. Ultimately, it is evident that the numerological interpretations of Revelation 13:18 lack biblical scholarship, historical accuracy, and scientific validity. Neither the papacy nor the COVID-19 vaccine constitutes a fulfilment of this apocalyptic prophecy.

The book of Revelation was first written in Greek; thus, any calculations should be done in Greek or the Hebrew letter-value system, since the Jews were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, not Latin. Also, the mark is the number of a man's name, not a man's title or office. The author, John, was a Jew steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures. Any intentional gematria (the practice of assigning numerical value to letters) in Revelation 13:18 ("These calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666") would therefore almost certainly employ either Greek isopsephy or Hebrew gematria, not Latin. The SDA calculation, however, is performed exclusively in Latin—a language foreign to both the author and the original audience.

Revelation 13:17-18 explicitly states that 666 is "the number of a man" and "the number of his name." It is not described as the number of a title, an office, or an institution. Yet, the SDA argument rests entirely upon a title (Vicarius Filii Dei) that is then artificially applied to every successive Pope. This already constitutes a category error.

Some Bible expositors take Caesar Nero (54-69AD) as the man of 666. His Hebrew form of Caesar Nero is NRWN QSR. The values of the seven Hebrew letters are 50, 200, 6, 50, 100, 60, and 200, respectively, totalling 666. Nero's persecution of Christians (including the martyrdom of Paul and, according to tradition, Peter) and the economic boycott described in Revelation 13:17 ("no one can buy or sell...") were fresh memories for John's audience. John, the writer of Revelation, lived during the reign of this emperor. It is possible that John was referring to him when he said, "...no one should be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name" (Rev. 13:17).

Other Bible expositors take it as Titus Flavius Domitianus (81-96AD), a contemporary of John, the author of Revelation. Titus demanded that his citizens worship him as a god, and his Greek numerical value of the letters on his title totals up to 666 (1+20+1+10+4+70+40+5+300+300+5+2+3+5). Both solutions fit the historical context, the linguistic medium and grammatical requirement ("the number of his name") far better than a Latin title that did not exist in the first century and has never been an official papal title in any century.

Dr Samuele Bacchiocchi, a retired SDA professor of Church history in the College of Arts and Sciences at Andrews University, did his PhD research on "From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity." The result of his study reads:

The conclusion of this investigation is that our traditional interpretation of the number 666 of the Beast has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, contrary to the criticism of our detractors, the phrase VICARIUS FILII DEI has been used historically as a major papal title, and possibly it was also inscribed in some papal tiaras or mitres.

On the negative side, the identification of the number 666 with VICARIUS FILII DEI cannot be exegetically supported by Revelation 13:18, because the text does not say that the meaning of 666 is to be found in the added numerical value of the letters of a name. We noted that such a numerical method of interpretation is unknown in the Bible.

The end-time showdown is not about names or numbers per se, that is, Sunday versus Sabbath, First Day versus Seventh-day, but about what these two days represent: Self-centred worship versus God-centred worship (Bacchiocchi, 1999, p. 342).

His studies explicitly found no biblical justification to claim that Revelation 13:16-18 refers to the Pope as the Beast. Moreover, this contradicts what Ellen G. White claimed to have seen. However, since her visions are purportedly to have come from God, then Dr Bacchiocchi still had to go against his findings and support Mrs Whites' claim that Sunday represents "Self-centred worship" and Saturday stands for "God-centred worship", and that is how Dr Bacchiocchi wants his readers to interpret Revelation 13:16-18.

In this case, the identification of the papacy with the number 666 does not arise from exegesis of Revelation 13 in its original historical and linguistic context. It arises solely because Ellen G. White declared in vision that Sunday worship is the mark of the beast and that the papacy is its enforcer. The gematria was then retroactively constructed to confirm what had already been received by private revelation.

Thus, what began as a 19th-century visionary experience has been transformed into an unchangeable doctrinal pillar, one that even SDA scholars such as Samuele Bacchiocchi openly admitted lacks exegetical support, yet which continues to be sung, preached, and defended as though it were the plain teaching of Scripture itself. This review, therefore, submits that the SDA conviction that the Roman Catholic pope (papacy) is the bearer of the number 666 is not a conclusion drawn from the biblical text, but a conclusion imposed upon the text by the prior and overriding authority granted to Ellen G. White's private visions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review demonstrates that Ellen G. White's private visions—particularly those of April 7 1847, and June 27

1850, identifying the Pope as the one who changed the Sabbath to Sunday observance as the mark of the beast have acquired an authority within Seventh-day Adventism that is functionally equal to, and practically superior to, Holy Scripture. The visions were canonised in the institutions, beginning with the declaration of 1883 that the Message and the visions...stand or fall together (Review and Herald Supplement, August 14 1883) to the assertions of White herself, that her works were written in an indelible pen, as the law... upon the tables of stone (White, 1906) and that denying them is to rebel against God (White, 1882-1889/Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 66). Contemporary evidence from the 2021 Kasulu Voice of Prophecy Choir and its 825+ YouTube comments reveals that ordinary Adventists now receive this 19th-century visionary interpretation as "the everlasting gospel," "the whole revelation," and the direct work of the Holy Spirit projecting it backwards as though it were 2,000-year-old apostolic truth. The specific assertion that the papal title Vicarius Filii Dei equals 666 collapses under linguistic, textual, historical, and methodological scrutiny (Bacchiocchi, 1977) and survives only because it confirms what was already fixed by private revelation. Seventh-day Adventism has therefore replaced sola scriptura (the principle that the Bible alone is the final authority for faith and practice, and a belief system) with sola visionis (emphasises or relies on ongoing direct visions or new revelations as a primary source of spiritual truth, potentially superseding or existing alongside the written word). Until Scripture alone—celebrated in the same hymn as the sole authority is permitted to test and, if necessary, correct Ellen White's visions, the church's identification of the Pope with 666 will remain not biblical exegesis, but the enduring legacy of continuing private revelation elevated to canonical status.

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