

PATRICK MADRID

More Vicarius Thrills:

*The numbers of the “beast”
and the men who flub them.*

By Patrick Madrid

Do we need any more proof that apologetics is fun? Well, here’s more. When I wrote my article “Pope Fiction” (March/April 1998), I knew it might rile some people, and it did. Shortly after it appeared, I received a letter from a Mr. Allan Drisko. He didn’t care for my piece, especially my refutation of the 666 nonsense sometimes used against the papacy. He wrote:

“In regard to Mr. Madrid’s zealous efforts to eradicate ‘papal fictions’ from the cobwebs of our minds, I was not impressed. To begin with, the attempt to locate an ecclesiastical colossus headed by the papacy at Rome as demonstrated in the New Testament, is an exercise in futility. We Protestants never cease to be amazed at your tireless armchair theological gymnastics to persuade us in the opposite, though not unreasonable direction.

If the Lord Jesus Christ had intended to establish the supreme authority of Peter perpetuated in a dynastic line of popes who would enjoy absolute episcopal jurisdiction over the entire world, all logic demands that He would have categorically and intentionally informed his followers in no uncertain terms! But He did not. Other sacred offices of the church are set forth in Holy Writ, yet strange silence prevails with regard to that which is supposedly the highest of them all! The

silence of the inspired writers in omitting to mention such a high office is equivalent to Napoleon's biographer failing to use the title of emperor.

"Now Mr. Madrid takes great glee in swinging the wrecking ball at those who would entertain the thought that the pope fits the description of the beast in Revelation 13. May I say that the allusions to Catholicism in the book of Revelation are quite intriguing, and many have concluded what Mr. Madrid rejects, but certainly not without reason. Besides, we are told that wisdom is needed here: 'Let him that has understanding count the number . . . for it is the number of a man; and his number is 666.' I noticed no attempt whatsoever on the part of the author to display any understanding in offering an alternative explanation. Hence, it is obvious he is only interested in bashing a popular Protestant position and is content to congratulate himself for doing so. Mr. Madrid triumphantly concludes that the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* is not now, nor has it ever been, a title of the bishops of Rome, and insinuates that Protestants are merely dumb bunnies pulling this 'rabbit' out of a hat. Unfortunately, the author is not being entirely forthright with his readers. He says, 'If the person making this claim dispute these facts, let him produce . . . any official Catholic document in which the pope calls himself or is referred to as, "Vicar of the Son of God" . . . none exist.' Drum roll please.

"In the early collection of canon law, the *Decretum of Gratian*, first published in 1148, we read, (Latin) '*Beatus Petrus in terris vicarius Filii Dei videtur esse constitutus.*' Translated into English, it means, "Blessed Peter is seen to have been constituted vicar of the Son of God on earth." Furthermore, in the revised *Corpus of Canon* (sic), published by order of Pope Gregory XIII, it was to be corrected by, 'the plenitude of apostolic power,' so that it is, 'entirely freed from faults.' Therein we find the same statement as above. And I go on, when Lucius Ferraris wrote, *Prompta Bibliotheca* in 1755, he gave under the article 'Papa,' the title, *Vicarius Filii Dei*, and cited the revised canon law as his authority. When his work was revised and published in Rome in 1890, the document and aforementioned title were retained! Moreover, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* says his work, 'will ever remain a precious mine of information' (1913, vol. 6, p.48).

“In conclusion, a subscriber to *Our Sunday Visitor*, a Catholic weekly periodical, wrote a letter to the editor, wherein he asked, ‘What are the letters supposed to be in the pope’s crown, and what do they signify, if anything?’ The answer given was, ‘The letters inscribed on the pope’s miter are these: *Vicarius Filii Dei*, which is Latin for, Vicar of the Son of God’ (April 18, 1915, Vol. 3, Number 51, p. 3).”

Some weeks later, Mr. Drisko sent me a follow-up letter:

“I wrote to you a couple of months ago in regard to your inaccurate article relating to papal fictions. I thought perhaps you might drop me a line as to where it was I erred, or maybe print a response in your letters section . . . neither of which you chose to do, and I quite understand why. You were wrong and you would look like a fool.”

Clearly, Mr. Drisko was expecting to pull out the history books and have himself a wonderful time, but I’m going to have to disappoint him. As I’ll show in a moment, there’s a lot less to his argument than meets the eye. But first, I should point out that Mr. Drisko was not completely on the level with me in his first e-mail.

He plagiarized a significant chunk of his argument, word for word, from *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, a book written by a Seventh-day Adventist named Uriah Smith. Evidently, he didn’t think I’d be familiar with the book, and thought he could get away with passing off Mr. Smith’s work as his own.

Not long after receiving Mr. Drisko’s letters, I received an e-mail from Michael Scheifler, an Adventist apologist and creator of the *Bible Light Homepage*. Note the striking similarity between Mr. Scheifler’s arguments, and those of Mr. Drisko:

“In your cover story, ‘Pope Fiction,’” he writes, “. . . you issue a challenge for the critics of Catholicism to furnish one example of an official Catholic document in which the pope is referred to as *Vicarius Filii Dei*. I accept your challenge.

“I personally have Lucius Ferraris’ *Prompta Bibliotheca*, 1858 Paris edition, a Catholic theological encyclopedia, in which the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* appears in volume 5, column

1828, under 'Papa,' article 2. I have scanned the item and it appears in an article on my *Bible Light* web site. *Prompta Bibliotheca*, according to the 1913 *Catholic Encyclopedia*, is 'a veritable encyclopedia of religious knowledge,' and 'will ever remain a precious mine of information' and is quoted frequently as an authoritative Catholic source.

"*Vicarius Filii Dei* also appeared repeatedly in Catholic canon law for hundreds of years (Anselm's, Cardinal Deusdedit's, and Gratian's *Decretum*, also known as *Concordia Discordantium Canonum*), in quotes of the *Donation of Constantine*, which contained the title and was considered authentic by the Church for many hundreds of years, having been cited by as many as 10 popes as proof of their temporal authority. One is the 1879 edition of *Corpus Juris Canonici* containing *Vicarius Filii Dei* is presented in my article.

"In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, by Pope John Paul II, in the first chapter, page 3, you will find that, 'The pope is considered the man on earth who represents the Son of God, who "takes the place" of the Second Person of the omnipotent God of the Trinity.' If you directly translate 'represents the Son of God' into Latin, the official language of the Church, you get *Vicarius Filii Dei*.

"I am a Seventh-day Adventist, and wish to dispel the notion that Adventists ignore 'the evidence' as you claim. You may still claim that it is not today, or ever was an officially recognized papal title, but since the association with 666 apparently first surfaced in 1612, it is no real surprise that Catholics are ignorant of the facts on this matter today, or that the title is denied by Catholic apologists.

"The lack of official recognition today, however, does not in any way, prove that *Vicarius Filii Dei* is a fantasy or fabrication concocted by Protestantism. The documented evidence I present shows beyond any doubt that *Vicarius Filii Dei* is not, as your article suggests, merely a groundless anti-Catholic invention. On the contrary, it has a very long history of use by the Catholic Church, having appeared in print in the Catholic Canon Law, a respected Catholic encyclopedia and Catholic newspapers. Those are the hard facts, which the Adventists, at least, choose not to ignore."

Hard facts? Mmm . . . no. I don't think so. But I will say this much for Mr. Scheifler: He obviously thought about this matter long and hard before coming up with the wrong answer. In fact, the "hard facts" indicate that Mr. Scheifler also seems to have plagiarized from the same book out of which Mr. Drisko took his arguments. Perhaps Seventh-day Adventists have only a single anti-Catholic source book to filch from. In any case, at least Mr. Scheifler, unlike Mr. Drisko, had the good taste not to copy Uriah Smith word for word. Even so, the remarkable similarity between his "essay" and the corresponding section in Mr. Uriah Smith's book is unmistakable — the kind of similarity that would get him into hot water, perhaps even expelled, if he tried something like this in a university setting.

But enough. With that unpleasantness aside, I'll now respond to the arguments raised in these letters, most of which (thanks to Mr. Drisko and Mr. Scheifler's, ahem . . . borrowing from a common source) are shared by all three writers.

1. First, Mr. Drisko remarks about me that, "[I]t is obvious he is only interested in bashing a popular Protestant position and is content to congratulate himself for doing so." How ironic! If anyone is "bashing," isn't it the Seventh-day Adventists? After all, they are the ones who conjured up the *Vicarius Filii Dei* canard in the first place to attack the Catholic Church. My article responded to this charge. Mr. Drisko's equating this with "bashing" is astonishing.

2. Mr. Drisko claims that if Jesus meant to found the papacy, "all logic demands that He would have categorically and intentionally informed his followers in no uncertain terms!" Very well. Let's apply this same principle to the Trinity. If Jesus meant for Christians to believe in the Trinity (the most fundamental tenet of the Christian Faith), logic demands that He would have categorically and intentionally informed His followers *in no uncertain terms*. Perhaps Mr. Drisko could show us in Scripture where, "in no uncertain terms," Jesus Christ teaches that God exists in three co-equal, co-eternal, consubstantial persons. Obviously, He nowhere does this. The Trinity doctrine is certainly scriptural, but any systematic biblical defense of it must be assembled from many verses. So, if even as bedrock a doctrine as the Trinity is neither mentioned by name nor categorically explained "in no uncertain terms" in Scripture, it's inconsistent and incorrect to demand the same of the papacy.

Mr. Drisko also argues that “the attempt to locate an ecclesiastical colossus headed by the papacy at Rome as demonstrated in the New Testament, is an exercise in futility.” Here I agree with him, but not for the reason he might think.

He’s right. We shouldn’t (and don’t) expect to find the full-blown, developed papacy, colossal or otherwise, in the New Testament. Why not? Because the New Testament shows us a picture of the primitive Church, the Church as it was in its infancy, the Church in “mustard seed” form. And Christ Himself promised that His Church, “The Kingdom of God,” is an organic entity, one that would grow and develop until it became tree-like.

The mustard seed bears no resemblance whatsoever to its mature form. Surely Mr. Drisko must recognize this. Christ’s teaching about development is true, of course, with the Church’s teachings, such as the Trinity and the papacy. So while it would indeed be futile to attempt to find a fully developed papacy in the pages of the New Testament, it is equally futile for Mr. Drisko to claim that this somehow undermines the Catholic position on the papacy. It doesn’t.

3. Both Mr. Drisko and Mr. Scheifler cite the *Decretum of Gratian* and the *Corpus of Canon Law* as evidence that *Vicarius Filii Dei* is contained in “official” Catholic documents. What they don’t seem to realize is that those sections of the *Decretum* and the *Corpus* are actually from the *Donation of Constantine*, a famous forgery (anyone familiar with medieval Church history could have told them that). Obviously, a forged document is not an “official Catholic document,” even though it may have been regarded by many as authentic.

Mr. Drisko and Mr. Sheifler should have read “Pope Fiction” more carefully, for they seem to have entirely missed the point here. My claim centered on the twin facts that *Vicarius Filii Dei* is not an official papal title and that it is never used as such in actual, official ecclesiastical documents — not forged documents, not civil documents, not unofficial documents. Since these two are fond of quoting the *Catholic Encyclopedia* when it suits them, I should point out that they didn’t bother to quote from the “Pope: Primacy of Honor: Titles and Insignia” article in the same 1913 *Encyclopedia*. Actually, they wouldn’t have been able to quote from it, since, under the section of “official titles,” *Vicarius Filii Dei* is nowhere to be found. But we shouldn’t be surprised that this escaped the notice of these two men. It seems they relied heavily (and in Mr.

Drisko's case, entirely) on the flawed "evidence" contained in Mr. Smith's book, without bothering to check the accuracy of his charges.

The fact that the *Donation of Constantine* was, at one time, wrongly assumed to be legitimate is irrelevant. What makes the *Donation* even more irrelevant to this issue is that even if it were not a forgery, it still wouldn't qualify as an official *Catholic* document. At best, it would have been an official *state* document, emanating from the Roman imperial government. That's because whoever forged it purported to be the Emperor Constantine, decreeing a series of land grants and various other temporal advantages to the bishop of Rome. So, unfortunately for Mr. Drisko and Mr. Scheifler's argument, the forged *Donation of Constantine* cannot qualify, on two counts: A) it's bogus and B) even if it weren't, it would only be a civil document.

4. Next, both Mr. Drisko and Mr. Scheifler cite Lucius Ferraris' *Prompta Bibliotheca* as further evidence that *Vicarius Filii Dei* is an official title of the pope. But here again, both men seem to be lost in a maze of historical details they don't understand.

The section of *Prompta Bibliotheca* Mr. Scheifler refers to is also a quote from the *Donation of Constantine* forgery. Naturally, Fr. Ferraris, a Franciscan ecclesiastical historian, could have been considerably more careful in his use of sources, given the fact that for fully 300 years before he compiled the *Prompta Bibliotheca*, it was widely known that the *Donation of Constantine* was a forgery. But again, his injudicious inclusion of the forgery hardly constitutes evidence of *Vicarius Filii Dei* being used as an *official* title of the pope. In fact, regarding Ferraris' scholarship, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* passage Scheifler and Drisko quote incompletely reads in full, "This supplement serves to keep up to date the work of Ferraris, which will ever remain a precious mine of information, *although it is sometimes possible to reproach the author with laxism.*" His use of the *Donation of Constantine* is certainly one such instance. Not surprisingly, Mr. Scheifler and Mr. Drisko both failed to include the italicized portion of this *Encyclopedia* quote. Why? Because it undercuts their argument, and they apparently don't wish the unsuspecting reader to know that.

5. Mr. Drisko offers a quote from a 1915 edition of *Our Sunday Visitor* newspaper, to the effect that the papal miter is inscribed with diamonds with the title *Vicarius Filii Dei*. I contacted

Robert Lockwood, the president of *Our Sunday Visitor*, about this. He had personally gone through the OSV archives and reported that he had found *no* evidence that this quote ever appeared in any issue of the paper.

Evidently, it had been removed from the archive. The error on the part of a newspaper staffer (and let's remember, the Catholic Church does not claim infallibility for journalists) was caught only after it had slipped into print, but the editor was obviously concerned about the incorrect answer being perpetuated, so he expunged that issue from the archives. Not surprisingly, those who perpetuate the *Vicarius Filii Dei* myth never mention the strong *disavowals* of this issue made by *Our Sunday Visitor* newspaper over the years. For example, in the August 3, 1941 issue, a reader posed this question: "A pamphlet has come to me entitled Mark of the Beast. It identifies the pope with the mark (i.e. 666) referred to in Revelation 13:16-18."

The editor responded: "The question you ask has been answered many times, although not in recent years, in this paper. If we have recourse to the best biblical scholars or exegetes, we find them applying the text from Revelations to Nero, the arch-persecutor of Christianity in the first century. To give color to their accusation, enemies of the Church publicize something that is not at all true, and that is that the pope's tiara is inscribed with the words 'VICARIUS FILII DEI,' and that if the letters in that title were translated into Roman numerals, the sum would equal 666.

As a matter of fact, the tiara of the pope bears no inscription whatsoever." Robert Lockwood has written a letter on behalf of *Our Sunday Visitor* explaining that the 1915 remark regarding the alleged inscription on the pope's miter was an unintentional and unfortunate error that should not be used as "evidence" to support the *Vicarius Filii Dei* argument. A copy of this letter is being sent to the Seventh-Day Adventist headquarters, demanding that they stop using this episode as some sort of "proof" to prop up their argument. Let's hope that honesty and a desire to know the truth will compel Seventh-Day Adventists to stop using the illegitimate OSV quote.

So, if the very best our Adventist friends can do is point to an obscure passage from a newspaper printed nearly a century ago, this demonstrates further the fact that *Vicarius Filii Dei* is not an official title of the pope. If it were, why would Adventists have to go through such gyrations to find an example of it? If it were an official papal title, examples would be strewn

everywhere (as are occurrences of *Vicarius Christi*, *Servus Servorum Dei*, etc.). In spite of his strenuous efforts at historical sleuthing, the “evidence” Mr. Drisko presents is hardly the smoking gun he imagines it to be.

6. Finally, Mr. Scheifler claims that the phrase “represents the Son of God,” quoted from Pope John Paul II’s *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, if translated directly into Latin, comes out to *Vicarius Filii Dei*.

Alas, if only Mr. Scheifler’s Latin were as good as his imagination. In fact, the phrase, “Represents the Son of God,” translated directly into Latin, yields “*Filium Dei Repraesentat*,” not *Vicarius Filii Dei*. Oh well. It should suffice to point out that “represents” is a verb. “Vicar” is a noun. But let’s not belabor the obvious.

To sum up, the errors in both Mr. Scheifler’s and Mr. Drisko’s letters are based on three fundamentally flawed premises. The first is that the Latin form of Vicar of the Son of God is a title (not an actual title, of course, but a made-up one), and the Book of Revelation identifies the number of the Beast as a name, not a title (Rev. 13:17-18). So all this talk about titles is irrelevant anyway.

Second, they erroneously assume that simply because the pope has been called *Vicarius Filii Dei*, or described in a roundabout way as such, that it must necessarily be an *official title* of the pope. Think about that. Office workers often call their supervisor “the boss.” While that’s an apt description, it’s nevertheless *not* an official title. You might also refer to the boss as “the Big Cheese,” or “the Big Kahuna.” While these may be apt descriptions of the individual, they’re nevertheless not official titles. Similarly, the pope can indeed be described as the Vicar of the Son of God, even in official documents, for that is exactly what he is, yet this is not an official title. In my article, I stated that *Vicarius Filii Dei* has never been an “official title” of the pope. I didn’t claim that no one in the 2,000-year history of the Church has ever described him that way.

I am at fault, though, for not having been more precise when I wrote, “If the person making this claim disputes these facts, let him produce . . . any official Catholic document in which the pope

calls himself or is referred to as, ‘Vicar of the Son of God.’” I assumed the reader would understand that the mere fact that if a pope had been *described* as the vicar of the Son of God, which, as I mentioned, is a theologically accurate description, that would not be the same as an example of an official title. If I had left out the phrase “referred to as,” I could have saved Mr. Drisko and Mr. Scheifler all their trouble. *Mea culpa*. (By the way, that adds up to 1155.)

But back to the matter at hand. The third fatal flaw in the Seventh-day Adventist argument is its arbitrary selection of the Latin “title” *Vicarius Filii Dei*. Why not use a real title of the pope? I listed several in my original article (e.g. *Servus Servorum Dei*, *Pontifex Maximus* and *Successor Petri*). The reason our Adventist friends neglect to mention, much less deal with, these actual papal titles is because they refute their claim. None adds up to 666, the number they so badly want to pin on the pope.

And another question: Why do Seventh-day Adventists and other papal critics insist on using a Latin phrase to arrive at 666, when Revelation was written, not in Latin, but in Greek? The numeric identification of the Beast as “666” in Revelation is tied to the values of Greek letters, not Latin ones. Adventists like Mr. Scheifler ignore this basic fact for an obvious reason: The Greek form of *Vicarius Filii Dei* doesn’t add up to 666.

Notice too that Mr. Drisko and Mr. Scheifler ignored the fact that, as I pointed out in “Pope Fiction,” the name of Ellen Gould White, the founder of their religion, adds up to 666 in Latin. The same is true of Martin Luther and of other figures they hold dear. Allow me to demonstrate how this technique works:

First we begin with a title. Since he started the ball rolling, let’s assign one to Allan Drisko. How about, *Drisko Vicar of Scheifler*? Translate that into Latin, and we have Drisko Vicarius Scheifleri which produces a hefty 760. Not quite 666. But in the true spirit of Seventh-day Adventist scholarship, let’s get a little bit more creative:

I ran the numbers on MICHAEL SCHEIFLER. In Latin that comes to 1302 — way too much to get him into any biblical trouble. But then I noticed that $666 \times 2 = 1332$, a mere 30 away from double trouble! So then I made up a Latin title for Mr. Scheifler, to reflect his use of Mr. Smith’s

work: *Scheifler Vicarius Smithi*. That yields 1265, and since Mr. Scheifler can only claim half the credit for his work, we reduce that figure by half and get 632. So close, yet so far. Unfortunately, this tack seemed to lead nowhere, luckily for Mr. Schiefler. So I turned again to Mr. Drisko.

First, I converted ALLAN DRISKO into Greek and Hebrew (the two languages of the Bible). His name in Greek adds up to 1246, while the Hebrew gives us 634. When we put the two together (just as the Hebrew Old Testament was joined with the Greek New Testament) we get 1880. We divide this by three (the three persons of the Trinity being at the center of the Old and New Testaments) and get 626.6666666667.

The first number is an obvious hint as to our next action. 626 can also be understood as saying "6 to 6." So, keeping the Scriptures at the center of all our calculations (to keep Mr. Drisko happy), we count the number of books between the 6th book of the Protestant Old Testament (Joshua) to the 6th book of the New Testament (Romans). The number we get is 40, which is then added to our previous number. The result is a frightening 666.6666666667. Since 7 is the Biblical number indicating perfection or completion, we know we're finished with our calculations. So, it seems that Mr. Allan Drisko bears the number of the Beast not once, not twice, but four times over!

Needless to say, I'll be sending my findings to the Vatican.

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