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The Number of the Beast in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century England

by David Brady

The author of this study, who makes his debut in our pages, is a member of the staff of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester. We are grateful to him for thus sharing with us some of the fruit of his research into a fascinating phase of the history of New Testament interpretation.

Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six (Rev. 13: 18).

THIS text has been a *crux interpretum* for commentators on the Book of Revelation since the day that the Apocalypse was first penned. What commentators have said of this text has also been indicative of what they have said about the rest of the book. For this reason, what at first may appear to be a very tiny chapter in the history of Biblical exegesis, is in fact a key to the much larger subject dealing with the history of the interpretation of the entire Book of Revelation. That subject is here narrowed to a brief survey of what was written on this matter in the British Isles in two post-Reformation centuries, in the belief that by concentrating our analysis on this particular text it is possible to obtain a general grasp of a writer's approach to the Book of Revelation as a whole.

The text is not only a mirror to the soul of the individual commentator, it is also a mirror of the times in which he lived. A consideration of what a writer has said concerning this passage is therefore an important sidelight on the ecclesiastical history of the period in which he wrote. We find names of men who are justly famous for things far and away removed from the interpretation of the Book of Revelation—John Napier, John Lightfoot, Sir Isaac Newton, William Whiston, and others—connected with some less well-known characteristics as expositors of the Apocalypse, but these are characteristics which are nevertheless part of the whole man and ought not therefore to be quickly overlooked.

Almost to a man, those who wrote during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on this subject held to the historical method of interpretation, *i.e.* they believed that the Book of Revelation described in its visions the unfolding of all history from the time

when John received the Apocalypse until the end of the age. The seals, trumpets, vials, and even the letters to the seven churches, described in progressive stages the vicissitudes of the Church of God as it struggled against human and demonic forces in its pilgrimage towards the City of God. Not all held to this view, and the contributions of those who found different truths in this book and consequently in this key passage will be considered in their place, but the overwhelming majority *were* historicists and their approach to the book was the only orthodox approach within this period. The mainstream of these writers saw in the description of the Beasts of chapter 13 a picture of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. We will examine this point of view first and then in the second place turn to an assessment of several of those ingenious off-beat proposals for interpreting the number of the Beast, which pinned the interpretation to some other invidious character or feature of history. Finally, we shall attempt from this brief summary to draw one or two conclusions.

I. ANTI-PAPAL INTERPRETATIONS

The commonest way of attaching the number 666 to the Papacy was by means of a name appropriate to the Roman Catholic Church, spelt in Greek, Hebrew, or sometimes Latin, the numerical value of the letters composing this name totalling the specified number of 666. The most frequent of such appellations was Ἀρρείβος, a title first mentioned by Irenaeus¹ in connection with the Roman Imperial power of his day, but discarded by him in favour of Τετάρων, the probable name of the future Antichrist. In 1560, the marginal note to Rev. 13: 18 in the Geneva Bible makes mention of this same descriptive name and remarks that it indicates the Pope's preference for the Latin tongue and his contemning the Hebrew and Greek. It also notes, says the margin, the country, Latinum, from which the Pope should chiefly come. This interpretation is prevalent throughout the subsequent two centuries and beyond, in the various camps of conformity and nonconformity alike. It is found for example in the writings of the martyrologist John Foxe², John Napier, Laird of Merchiston and inventor of logarithms³, the Puritan Thomas Brightman⁴, Joseph Mede, Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge⁵, Thomas Goodwin, one of the Independents

¹ *Adv. haer.* V. xxx. 3.

² *The acts and monuments* (London, Religious Tract Society, 1877), Vol. IV, pp. 103-107.

³ *A plaine discovery of the whole Revelation of S. Iohn*, revised edition (London, 1611), p. 70.

⁴ *The workes* (London, 1644), p. 465.

⁵ *The key of the Revelation*, 2nd edn. (London, 1650), pt. 2, p. 75.

in the Westminster Assembly⁶, John Lightfoot, an Erastian member of the same body⁷, Sir Isaac Newton⁸, and William Whiston, his successor as Lucasian professor of mathematics at Cambridge and a man of Arian leanings in theology.⁹ It is also favoured by the Baptist John Gill¹⁰, Philip Doddridge the Independent hymn-writer¹¹, Anthony Purver the Quaker¹², Thomas Newton, Bishop of Bristol¹³, and many other writers. In defence of this interpretation, Napier points out that John writes for a Greek audience which is accustomed to the practice of numbers being substituted for names and he gives as example the names of the flood Νεῖλος, which is celebrated as holy because it contains the number of the days in the year, *i.e.*, 365.¹⁴ Brightman adds a note which occurs fairly frequently, commenting that leading men, such as emperors, kings, and magistrates, receive the mark of the Beast in the right hand, that is to say they fight as soldiers of the Beast; the common people, on the other hand, bear his mark in the forehead, thereby manifesting their vassalage to the Beast. The "number of the name", he writes, is stamped particularly on the Greeks, since about the year A.D. 1273 Michael VIII Palaeologus made a special covenant with Gregory X at Lyons providing that he and his people would henceforth yield the honour of principality to the Latin Pope; only on these terms did they receive recognition from the Papal jurisdiction.¹⁵ Thomas Goodwin rejected Brightman's fastening of the cipher on "the poor Grecians," but he nevertheless retained Ἀρτεῖνος as the most fitting interpretation.¹⁶

Some writers went one stage further and found that it was possible to translate Ἀρτεῖνος into Hebrew and by adding the Hebrew characters to reach once again the required number 666. Such a writer was Edward Haughton, who, as well as noticing that the Roman numerals in the Latin title *Generalis Dei Vicarius In terris* totalled just 666, also found that the (albeit rather whimsical) Hebrew *rwm'ns*, an equivalent of Greek Ἀρτεῖνος, was also com-

⁶ *The works* (London, 1683), Vol. II, pp. 64f.

⁷ *The harmony, chronicle and order of the New-Testament . . . The times of the Revelation observed* (London, 1655), p. 163.

⁸ *Observations upon the prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London, 1733), p. 284.

⁹ *An essay on the Revelation of Saint John* (Cambridge, 1706), pp. 256-259.

¹⁰ *An exposition of the New Testament* (London, 1809), *ad loc.*

¹¹ *The family expositor* (London, 1756), *ad loc.*

¹² *A new and literal translation of all the books of the Old and New Testament; with notes critical and explanatory* (London, 1764), *ad loc.*

¹³ *Dissertations on the prophecies* (London, c. 1820), pp. 549f.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 459, 461f.

¹⁶ *Loc. cit.*

posed of characters the numerical value of which was 666.¹⁷ Charles Daubuz, in his mammoth commentary on the Book of Revelation, also preferred to interpret the number of the Beast by means of a Hebrew title. Daubuz asks in which language we are to interpret the cipher. It cannot be in Latin, for the letters of that language were not all used as numbers and on this ground he rejects the suggestion of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Meaux, J.-B. Bossuet, who had sought to defend his Church from Protestant expositors of the Apocalypse by following a preterist line of interpretation and thus proposed the Latin name *Diocles AVGVSTVS* as containing the number of the Beast. For Daubuz, who was himself of French Huguenot parentage and had come to England on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the language in question was not Latin but Hebrew. He quotes favourably the suggestion of Claude de Saumaise that John dictated the Apocalypse in Hebrew to an amanuensis who turned it into (a somewhat Semitic) Greek. Daubuz therefore pitches on the adjective *rwmyyt*, which has the feminine termination in order to agree with both *hyh* (beast) and *mlkwt* (kingdom).¹⁸ Daubuz also finds an Old Testament type of what is described in Rev. 13 in 1 Kings 10: 14 (2 Chr. 9: 13), where it is said that "the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold." These 666 talents of gold he interprets as tribute brought from the remnant of the surrounding nations which were now in bondage to Israel. These are therefore a figure of the idolaters who become obedient slaves to the Beast and the False Prophet, *i.e.* the Papacy in its civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction.¹⁹ Several other writers, such as Thomas Pyle (Hoadly's supporter in the Bangorian controversy)²⁰, Thomas Newton²¹, and Philip Doddridge²², in the belief that "two are better than one," find endorsement of the application of the number to the Papacy in the fact that both *Ἀρτεῖνος* and *rwmyyt*, *i.e.*

¹⁷ *The rise, growth, and fall of Antichrist* (London, 1652), p. 25. The printed text of Haughton's book actually proposes *Vicar* in the Latin title and *rwmyyt* in the Hebrew. One can only assume that these are misprints, since they do not in this form give the required sum of 666.

¹⁸ *A perpetual commentary in the Revelation of St. John* (London, 1720), pp. 609-611. For the Greek *Ἀρτεῖνος*, which is masculine, there is no such grammatical agreement with *θηρίον* (neut.) and *βασίλεια* (fem.) and this probably adds to the reasons why Daubuz seeks explanation of the mystical number in Hebrew alone, without reference to the Greek. The suggestion of the Hebrew adjective *rwmyyt* goes back at least to Philipp Melancthon (see L. E. Froom, *The prophetic faith of our fathers* (Washington, 1946-54), Vol. II, p. 291).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 608f.

²⁰ *The Scripture preservative against Popery: being a paraphrase with notes on the Revelation of St. John* (London, 1735), *ad loc.*

²¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 549f.

²² *Loc. cit.*

the same word in the two Biblical languages, spell out the character of the Roman Antichrist and provide his number 666.

Other Hebrew names applicable to the Papacy were discovered by the Rabbinical scholar Hugh Broughton and by John Lightfoot. Broughton draws an interesting contrast between 666 as the number of the Beast and the 777 years in the life of the holy Lamech (Gen. 5: 31). He also compares men's attempts at interpreting the name of the Beast to Adam's naming of the beasts and birds (Gen. 2: 19). Broughton finds the key to interpreting the Beast's name in the text of Ezra 2: 13, where it is stated that the children of Adonikam amongst the returning exiles amounted to 666. Broughton is able to translate the Hebrew name of Adonikam and to give its meaning as a "lord standing up." It is, he says, a name suited to the two-horned Beast, which portrays the Pope of Rome in his claim to universal dominion.²³ But Broughton's guns were spiked by Thomas Brightman, who objected that in Neh. 7: 18 the number of Adonikam's descendants is given as 667 and not 666.²⁴ Lightfoot finds a key to interpretation in Num. 13: 13 where the name of a man is given amongst those who went to search out the land of Canaan. His name is *stwr* (Sethur), a name which means "hidden" or "mystery", a name by which Rome is again referred to in Rev. 17: 5 and one which has the required numerical value of 666.²⁵

By names such as these it was possible to stigmatize the Papacy as the antichristian Beast described in the Book of Revelation. But another method was also popular. The number 666 might refer not to any particular name yielding that number through the numerical value of its letters, but instead to 666 years. By measuring a certain period of 666 years it was possible to arrive at several particularly important dates in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. For example, the marginal note in the Geneva Bible of 1560 not only makes use of the name *Ἀρτεῖνος*, but also suggests that the number 666 indicates so many years after John's vision, when the Pope or Antichrist began to be manifest in the world. This idea goes back at least to Bale and Bullinger²⁶ and was favoured in turn by King James I himself.²⁷ The nonconformist writer Moses Lowman comes to this same interpretation after first rejecting the name *Ἀρτεῖνος*, which those favouring it had been pleased to

²³ *The works* (London, 1662), pp. 474-476. Broughton seems to have been unaware of the analogy that might have been drawn between the name meaning "lord standing/rising up" and the Beast of Rev. 13: 1 who is said to "rise up out of the sea."

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 464.

²⁵ *Loc. cit.*

²⁶ See L. E. Fromm, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 342.

²⁷ "A paraphrase upon the Revelation of the Apostle S. Iohn" in *The works* (London, 1616), p. 43.

find mentioned by Irenaeus. "There had been more reason to follow Irenaeus," he wrote, "had Irenaeus himself been fully satisfied in his own interpretation."²⁸ Lowman prefers to think that the number 666 refers to the time of the Beast's rise in A.D. 756. Strictly speaking, 666 years from the time when John wrote the Apocalypse (A.D. 94), would bring the reckoning to the year 760, but Lowman allows a little extra time, either by allowing some small variation as to the time of vision, or some small variation from the precise year, for the sake of making the number just 666, which has more of the air of a prophetic number than 662. Possibly, he continues, "this number may reach four years beyond the investiture, to take in the full and actual possession of what was granted to the Church, as St. Peter's Patrimony."²⁹ The particular historical event which Lowman had in mind was the conferring of the principalities of Ravenna and Pentapolis on the Bishop of Rome by Pepin the Short. This line of interpretation is followed by Robert Clayton, Bishop of Clogher, in Ireland³⁰, the evangelical Thomas Haweis³¹, and Henry Kett, a writer on prophecy.³² The view is criticised, on the other hand, by G. S. Faber, who makes the just comment that the interpretation cannot fit what the text says about bearing the mark of the Beast.³³

John Bale, though strictly belonging to the sixteenth century, is a pioneer in giving to the number 666 the significance of so many years. He suggests a number of such possibilities. 666 may, for example, be understood as a number of years from the birth of Christ. This would lead to the year (strictly 668) when Pope Vitalian sent Theodore of Tarsus and St. Hadrian of Canterbury to establish Roman usages in the Anglo-Saxon Church; these were the mark of Antichrist.³⁴ Then again, the number 666 might refer to the time spanned between the years A.D. 872, when King Alfred accepted coronation at the Pope's hands, and A.D. 1538, when King Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and broke the Papal yoke.³⁵ Another line of approach, probably originating with Luther³⁶, is to date

²⁸ *A paraphrase and notes on the Revelation of St. John*, 3rd edn. (London, 1773), p. 192.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

³⁰ *A dissertation on prophecy* (London, 1749), p. 128.

³¹ *The evangelical expositor* (London, 1765-66), *ad loc.* For a short critique of Haweis' *Evangelical expositor*, see A. S. Wood, *Thomas Haweis, 1734-1820* (London, 1957), pp. 115-126.

³² *History the interpreter of prophecy*, 5th edn. (London, 1805), Vol. II, p. 3.

³³ *A dissertation on the prophecies* (London, 1806), Vol. II, p. 278n.

³⁴ *Scriptorum illustriū maioris Brytannie . . . In quo . . . mysterijs in S. Ioannis Apocalypsi descriptis . . . historicè & aptè respondeant* (Basilea, 1559), p. 71.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³⁶ *Cf. Sämmtliche Schriften*, ed. J. G. Walch (St. Louis, 1881-1910), Vol XXII, col. 859.

the 666 years from the time of Pompey's invasion of the Holy Land (60 B.C. in this chronological reckoning) to A.D. 606 when Phocas confirmed the title of Universal Bishop to the Pope. This interpretation, found in Bale³⁷, is also found in *An exposition of the whole Book of the Revelation*, written in 1689 by the Particular Baptist divine Hanserd Knollys.³⁸ It is also the subject of a whole volume of 305 pages written by Nathaniel Stephens, Minister of Fenny-Drayton in Leicestershire.³⁹

For Nathaniel Stephens the description of the Beast under the letters $\chi\xi\varsigma$ (the Greek alphabetic notation for 600, 60 and 6, where the third letter is not final *sigma* but the ligature *stau* or *stigma*, combining σ and τ) is figurative in the same way that the description of God as Alpha and Omega in Rev. 1: 8 is figurative, both describing not a literal name but an attribute, and both making reference to the element of time. Thus the Kingdom of Christ is an everlasting Kingdom, whereas the kingdoms of men, described through the symbolic language of Daniel's four beasts, are finite kingdoms, all coming to an end.⁴⁰ Stephens does not take the name of the Beast "in the ordinary way, for *Lateinos*, or any such grammatical name: But the name, in the sense of the prophecy, is the power, headship, and dominion of the Beast."⁴¹ The name of the Beast stands in contrast to the Name describing the Lamb's sovereignty and power: King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19: 16). The words of the text, "it is the number of a man," indicate the correct means of interpretation, by reference to the statue of a man in Daniel's vision (Dan. 2: 31ff.). So Stephens paraphrases: "Let him count by the changes of empire, and by the revolutions of time in Daniel's image."⁴² The four kingdoms of Daniel's visions must be dated not from the time of their origins, but from the time when they gained power over the Church of God. In the same way, the 666 years of the Beast are to be calculated as so many years from the time when the Church of God came under the dominion of the Romans, *i.e.*, from 60 B.C.; we must not begin to reckon from the time of Julius or Augustus Caesar. 666 is thus the "number of the name" because it "doth decypher, specific and characterize the name or headship, in the most remarkable beginning and edition thereof."⁴³

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 67f.

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 179.

³⁹ *A plain and easie calculation of the name, mark, and number of the name of the Beast* (London, 1656). Richard Baxter refers to Stephens as "my old fellow minister in the same congregation" (*A paraphrase on the New Testament*, 2nd edn. (London, 1695), sig. Bbb2v).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-207.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, sig. a3v.

⁴² *Ibid.*, sig. B1r; *cf.* pp. 194ff.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, sig. a3v.

Thus also the Apostle Paul speaks of Antichrist being revealed "in his time" (2 Thes. 2: 6), referring to the same fatal year of A.D. 606.⁴⁴ However, this whole line of exposition fell victim to the acute examination of Daubuz, on the ground that the number 666 must refer to the Beast himself and not to antecedent things.⁴⁵

One or two other interpretations of the number 666 as so many years in the history of the Papacy may be briefly mentioned. Samuel Petto was a man of a remarkably independent mind among Puritan divines. In *The Revelation unveiled* (1693) he disregards the thesis of Nathaniel Stephens, preferring the view that the number 666 refers not to things antecedent to the Beast and so ultimately to his origin, but rather to the time of the Beast's end. He finds an analogous case of such numbering in Dan. 5, where Belshazzar's kingdom is numbered and so concluded. The period of 666 years commences therefore not from the Beast's first rising, but from the time when he first begun to mark his followers and to persecute the reformed churches. Petto suggests a date to within two years of accuracy. The Beast's first persecutions began "about the time of Berengarius whose opinion was condemned by Popish councils at Vercellis and Rome about Ann. 1049 or 1050 &c. therefore his open profession was before; how many years let other judge."⁴⁶ Petto's reluctance as to an exact date was nevertheless resolved in America by Increase Mather who, following Petto's line of argument, concluded the dominion of the Pope in the year 1716.⁴⁷

In *A commentary on the books of the Old and New Testament . . . With practical improvements by William Dodd* (1770) we find another chronology, which is apparently taken from George Burton.⁴⁸ In this system, Daniel's seventy weeks (Dan. 9: 24-27) are interpreted as consisting of 1715 years and are brought to their conclusion in the year 1764. In that year the 666 years of the Beast begin, reaching their conclusion in the still distant year of A.D. 2430, just six years before the commencement of the Millennium.

Our third group of interpretations directed against the Roman Catholic Church consists of two other main lines of attack not yet

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 242f.

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 617.

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁴⁷ *A dissertation, wherein the strange doctrine . . . is examined and confuted* (Boston, 1708), p. 99.

⁴⁸ *An essay towards reconciling the numbers of Daniel and St. John; determining the birth of our Saviour, and fixing the time for the continuance of the present desolation of the Jews; with some conjectures and calculations pointing out the year 1764 to have been one of the most remarkable epochas in history* (Norwich, 1766). I have not been able to find a copy of this book, but it is listed in *A dictionary of writers on the prophecies* (London, 1835), compiled by J. W. Brooks, but published anonymously.

referred to. The first interprets the mark of the Beast as the abuse of the Cross in the Catholic Church, whilst the second, propounded by Francis Potter, proceeds by extracting the square root of the number 666 and applying it to the Papacy.

Proposition 31 of John Napier's *Plaine discovery of the whole Revelation of S. Iohn* states that,

"The visible markes of the Beast, are the abused characters, of $\times\xi$ and crosses of all kindes, taken out of the first beasts name"⁴⁹

—but the middle letter ξ is replaced by ρ surmounted by a tilde. Napier is apparently making allusion to the *Chi-Rho* sign, the superimposed tilde above the *rho* representing the Papal crown and at the same time bringing the symbolism into close visual similarity with the $\chi\xi\zeta$ by which the number 666 is denoted in Greek characters. Napier points out that the first of these ciphers, the χ , is the Greek cross, whilst the second, ξ , is the same as the Latin X and so again symbolizes a cross. As for ζ (*stigma* or *stau*), it is a combination of σ and τ , the last of these letters representing the headless cross. The ligature *stigma* ($=\sigma\tau$) is also the first letter of the word $\sigma\tau\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ (cross).⁵⁰ With one additional stroke of genius, Napier declares that $\chi\xi\zeta$ are also the initial letters of the phrase $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\alpha\gamma\mu\alpha\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \xi\acute{\upsilon}\lambda\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \sigma\tau\alpha\upsilon\rho\omicron\upsilon$, and he compares the Papal abuse of the sign of the Cross to Israel's idolatry of the bronze serpent, an object originally intended for salvation but debased by superstition.⁵¹

Napier's suggestions were even approved by the Bishop of Galloway, William Cowper, who himself noted that the Beast's mark is a form of the *Chi-Rho* sign, for "Anti-Christian heretikes will seeme to glory of the signe of the Crosse, notwithstanding that indeed they may be enemies to the Crosse, and persecutors of Christ."⁵² It is also perfectly to the taste of the elder Robert Fleming, one of the Scottish ejected divines.⁵³ Charles Daubuz is even able to explain the textual variant $\chi\iota\varsigma$ (616) by suggesting that some copyists saw in the number the first and last letters of the name of Christ (X and Σ), with the sign of the Cross, which resembled both the uncial *iota* and the *xi*, between them, thus: $X\uparrow\Sigma$. The symbol therefore represented the abuse made by Antichrist of the Name and Cross of Christ, a veritable False Prophet sporting two horns like a lamb.⁵⁴ G. S. Faber in the early nineteenth century, however, is awake to the possibility that such an interpretation might be levelled not only at the Church of Rome but also at the

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 75f.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁵² *The workes* (London, 1623), pp. 1057f.

⁵³ *The fulfilling of the Scripture* (London, 1835), pp. 244f.

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 617.

Church of England. He agrees that the mark of the Beast is the Cross, "abused by the Papists to the purposes both of the most infernal cruelties [e.g. in the Crusades], and of the most childish superstition." The sign of the Cross as recommended in the 30th Canon of the Church of England is, however, extremely moderate in its requirements on communicants.⁵⁵

In the *Diary* of Samuel Pepys for February 18th, 1666, Pepys remarks on his having purchased a book "writ about twenty years ago in prophecy of this year coming on, 1666, explaining it to be the marke of the beast." He finished reading it on November 10th of the same year and noted in his diary for that day, "Whether it be right or wrong, [it] is mighty ingenious." The book in question did not in fact make the pronouncements about the year 1666 which Pepys had been led to expect, for the book was Francis Potter's *An interpretation of the number 666*, published in 1642 with a laudatory preface by no less an authority on the Apocalypse than Joseph Mede.⁵⁶ Potter's thesis is that whereas Patrick Forbes⁵⁷ and other writers realized the appropriateness of interpreting the number 12 as the "root" of numbers describing the Church in the Book of Revelation, they ought to have gone further and reduced the Beast's number to its "root" in the same way.⁵⁸ Whilst 12 is the number of the Church Militant as described in Rev. 21 and the "root" of the number 144,000 which describes the followers of the Lamb in the verse immediately following our text (Rev. 14: 1), the number 666 has as its "root" 25. 666 is indeed greater than the exact square of 25 (625) and still less than the square of 26 (676), but John chose the number because by it might also be represented the name Ἀρρεῖνος and other literal ciphers. Furthermore, Potter continues, following an idea found originally in Irenaeus, John chose the number 666 because by it might be expressed as allusion to the image erected by Nebuchadnezzar which was sixty cubits high and

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*, pp. 283f. N.B., the sign of the Cross as a seal of discipleship perhaps receives additional support from Ezek. 9: 4, 6 where the word "mark" is in fact the Hebrew letter *taw*, which would have the shape of a cross. A similar usage is perhaps found amongst the members of the Qumran community; see J. L. Teicher, "The Christian interpretation of the sign X in the Isaiah Scroll," *Vetus Testamentum*, V, 2 (1955), pp. 196f.

⁵⁶ Mede read Potter's book in manuscript in 1637 and says of the treatise, "It is the happiest that ever came into the world . . . by the time I had done it left me possess, with as much admiration as I came to it with prejudice." The book was translated into French, Dutch, and Latin and was reprinted at Worcester as late as 1808.

⁵⁷ Patrick Forbes, Bishop of Aberdeen, published in 1613 *An exquisite commentarie upon the Revelation of St. John*.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 43ff.

six cubits broad (Dan. 3: 1).⁵⁹ He goes on to quote ancient writers in evidence of the fact that the number 25 has long been regarded as "a fatal and unfortunate number."⁶⁰ But how does he relate the number 25 to the Roman Catholic Church? His applications are manifold. First of all, in contrast to the Twelve Apostles, the Papacy has 25 cardinals according to their original foundation. Secondly, after Constantine, Rome was divided into 25 parishes or dioceses, corresponding to the 12 gates of the New Jerusalem, "gates" being symbols for churches, which are gates to heaven. In addition, the 25 articles comprising the Profession of the Tridentine Faith, otherwise known as the Creed of Pius IV, stand in marked contrast to the Apostles' Creed, symbolised in the 12 varieties of fruits borne by the tree of life. Moving into the realms of higher mathematics, Potter goes on to show "that as 12000 furlongs are the solid measure of a cube, whose perimeter is equal to the compass of the new Jerusalem: so 25000 furlongs are the solid measure of a cube whose perimeter is equal in compass to the City of Rome."⁶¹ Other applications follow. The *Bibliotheca Chuniacensis* "testifieth that in all those societies, where there is any settled number of monks and friars, there is none so frequent, & remarkable as the number 25".⁶² The high altar in St. Peter's Church in Rome is surmounted by "a gilded crosse of 25 hand-breadths in heighth."⁶³ "In the forepart of this Church are 5 gates, which are commonly used, and one other gate called Porta sancta, which stands open only one yeare in 25, and the twenty fifth yeare being ended, it is againe shut by the Pope."⁶⁴ The high altar of St. Peter's is an exact cube, 25 feet in length along each of its sides and stands in contrast to the number 12 applied to certain altars in Scripture, e.g. 1 Kings 18: 31f.; Ezek. 43: 16.⁶⁵ Finally, the chief holidays of the Church of

⁵⁹ The proposition outlined by Irenaeus is that the number 666 refers primarily to the iniquity in the days of Noah, who was 600 years old on the day that he entered the ark (Gen. 7: 6). In the second place, we are referred to the idolatrous statue set up by Nebuchadnezzar, a prefiguration of the coming of Antichrist, upon whose decree it is that all should worship him alone. The 600 years of Noah's age, together with the 60 and the 6 of the statue's dimensions, signify the 6,000 years which make up the sum total of apostasy, injustice, evil, false-prophecy, and deceit, all coming to their ultimate crisis in the Antichrist, upon whom will come the deluge of fire (*Adv. haer.* V. xxix. 2). E. W. Bullinger points out that the numerical value of the Hebrew characters used in Dan. 3: 1 amounts to 4662, which is just $7 \times 666!$ (*Number in Scripture* (London, 1894), p. 285n.). See also W. Begley, *Biblia Cabalistica* (London, 1903), p. 120.

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 77ff.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 148ff.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 168ff.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 174f.

Rome are on the 25th day of the month, the most notable example of this being the celebration of Christmas on December 25th.⁶⁶

Potter's thesis came in for a certain amount of criticism from Nathaniel Stephens. Stephens admitted that the number 12 as the root of 144,000 is indeed regularly used in Scripture amongst sacred numbers, "But can there," he asked, "be the like reason given, why the Antichristian Church is so frequent in the number 25?"⁶⁷ One *could* say that the characteristic number of the Holy City is 12,000, but the square root of this is 109 and its remainder 119. More important still, the Beast should not be set in contrast to the New Jerusalem, but in contrast to the Lamb, as the context (Rev. 13: 16-14: 5) shows.⁶⁸ On the other hand, Potter's arguments were received favourably in many other quarters, including the pages of Matthew Poole's *Synopsis Criticorum*.⁶⁹ They were also to the satisfaction of the Cambridge Platonist Henry More, who wrote that "Mr. Potter has found out the true and solid solution of this mysterie."⁷⁰ Edward Waple, in his *Paraphrase*, was able to add a few finishing touches to Potter's thesis. He solved the problem of the number 25 being an irregular root of 666 by saying that whilst 12 is a perfect root of 144,000, the pure Church, 25 is an irregular root because it depicts "an irregular religion." In addition, 25 years after the Resurrection (A.D. 33) brings us to the time of the Beast's conception, A.D. 58, about the time when 2 Thessalonians was written, in which Paul spoke of "the mystery of iniquity" being already at work (2: 7). If we add 666 years to A.D. 58 we arrive at the year 724, when the Beast "came to his manly age, as an idolatrous power."⁷¹ Daubuz, on the other hand, was critical of Potter's interpretation, remarking that beyond the obvious necessity of decoding the cipher, this "is but play, ingenious conjecture, and fatal coincidence."⁷² Potter's book was nevertheless agreeable to the taste of the Scottish sectary John Glas, who was able to draw from it the lesson that "whatever society . . . under the name of a church has a broader foundation than the doctrine of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, though it will certainly thereby be larger and more numerous than the true church, yet it so far has the number of the beast's name."⁷³ He further remarks that the number 25 appears frequently in Ezekiel's

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 178ff.

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 230.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-234.

⁶⁹ *Synopsis criticorum aliorumque Sacrae Scripturae interpretum et commentatorum* (Ultrajecti, 1686), Vol. V, cols. 1892-1895.

⁷⁰ *An explanation of the grand mystery of godliness* (London, 1660), p. 195.

⁷¹ *The Book of the Revelation paraphras'd; with annotations on each chapter* (London, 1715), *ad loc.*

⁷² *Op. cit.*, p. 612.

⁷³ *The works* (Perth, 1782-83), Vol. IV, pp. 40f., 124ff.

measurements for the outer-court (Ezek. 40: 21, 25, 29f., 33, 36; 45: 1; 48: 15, 20), that portion which John sees as "given to the nations . . . to trample" (Rev. 11: 2).⁷⁴ Glas then defends 666 as an inexact product of the root 25, by showing that certain acrostics may be made on the Greek letters χξς; e.g., χριστιανοὶ ξένοι σταυροῦ ("Christians strangers to the Cross"), a description which characterizes the followers of the Beast. This is to be contrasted with the Greek letters for 144 (ρμδ), from which we may obtain the phrase ῥήματος μάρτυρες διωκόμενοι ("the persecuted witnesses of the word"). In addition, the root 12 (ιβ) provides the phrase ἱεράτευμα βασιλείου ("the royal priesthood"), whilst the root 25 (κε) provides κυριότης ἔθνικῆ ("the Gentile lordship" or "lordship of the Gentiles").⁷⁵

Such a concerted attack on the Roman Catholic Church by means of this text had very few to oppose it in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England. The main lines of defence were of course pioneered in Catholic Europe, in particular through the preterist interpretation of the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Alcazar and the futurist interpretation of another Spanish Jesuit Francisco Ribera and Cardinal Robert Bellarmine.⁷⁶ The English New Testament for Roman Catholics was also published abroad at Rheims in 1582 and in its marginal notes to Rev. 13: 18 it attempted to give the English Roman Catholic some answer to the opposing line of interpretation which had been popularised through the margin of the Geneva Bible. The marginal note rebuked Protestants for "plucking down the image of Christ out of all churches, and his sign of the Cross from men's fore-heads," thereby making room for "Antichrist's image, and mark, and name." The editors rejected the accusation that the number 666 has any reference to the Pope, for when Irenaeus spoke of Ἀρτεῖνος, he was thinking in terms of the Roman Empire and not of the Pope of his days or after him. Instead of Ἀρτεῖνος, Luderus (Luther) may be as good a suggestion as any. "He is undoubtedly one of Antichrist's precursors, but not Antichrist himself."⁷⁷ Robert Witham,

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 126f.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 129, 138f.

⁷⁶ See L. E. Froom, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 484-509.

⁷⁷ William Fulke replied to this suggestion by saying that the "toy of Luthers name is worthy to be laughed at, seeing it is no hard matter to draw any mans name almost to it: if you may change the letters at your pleasure, and take upon you to know a man's name better than himselfe." The word Ἀρτεῖνος on the other hand, reinforced by its Hebrew equivalent *rwmyyt* and the Greek Ἐκκλησία Ἱταλικά, points clearly to the Pope, "the time of his manifestation also falling about the yeere of our Lord 666." (*The text of the New Testament . . . translated . . . by the Papists of the traitorous Seminarie at Rhemes . . . Whereunto is added the translation . . . commonly used in the Church of England. With a confutation of all such arguments . . . as conteine manifest impietie* (London, 1589), *ad loc.*).

in his *Annotations on the New Testament* (Douay, 1730) takes the same line of defence, whilst following in general the preterist interpretation found in Bossuet's *L'Apocalypse avec une explication* (Paris, 1690). On the other hand, he does not accept Bossuet's suggestion of *DioCLES AVGVSTVS*, since he does not believe that John could have been using Roman numerals. He refuses to commit himself; "Others," he writes, "have produced other names. Such fancies and conjectures seem full as well omitted."⁷⁸

Amongst the vast corpus of writings by Richard Baxter, his *Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685) has earned lasting fame, if only because it brought him nearly two years' imprisonment for certain comments in it which were judged libelous in respect of the Church of England. As in all things, Baxter urges moderation in the interpretation of the Beast's number. He reviews the comments of Junius (which are found in the Geneva Bible from 1599 onwards), Hugh Broughton, Thomas Brightman, Francis Potter, and Nathaniel Stephens, amongst those who apply the number to the Papacy, but he is not greatly impressed by any of them. He also reviews the arguments put forward by those who expound the Book of Revelation by the preterist scheme and he reveals the weakness of this school by showing how easy it is to apply the number to several heathen emperors through the abbreviated Latin inscriptions of their names. He produces no less than ten different examples.⁷⁹ Because of these conflicting views, which he refers to again in the *Advertisement* at the end of the *Paraphrase*, he says, "I mention what I have done, to tell you why I understand not the Revelations, and cannot help it that I am no wiser than excellent Calvin, nor than all the ancient Fathers, (though I disown their conceit of a future Antichrist at the end of the world.)" He leans toward the view that the first Beast of chapter 13 is a representation of the Roman Imperial power, but he is far less certain how to interpret the second Beast and the great Whore of chapter 17. He does not doubt "but many, in blind zeal, will call this my confessed ignorance a warping towards Popery," but goes on to state on other grounds the reason for his abhorrence of Papal doctrine. He remarks that "it is far more dreadful to the Pope, and all his flatterers, and followers, to be plainly condemned by the known laws of Christ, which all Christians receive as past all doubt, than to be under the dread of a dark and controverted prophecy."

In 1653, Henry Hammond published his *Paraphrase and annotations upon all the books of the New Testament*, a volume which contained a brave and lonely attempt to introduce the preterist

⁷⁸ *Ad loc.*

⁷⁹ It is interesting that the now common application of the number to the Emperor Nero does not appear among Baxter's examples.

interpretation of the Book of Revelation to English soil. Hammond laid great stress on the opening words of the Apocalypse in which the book is said to contain "things which must shortly come to pass." Following the way of interpretation which had been pioneered on the Continent and confessing his indebtedness to Hugo Grotius⁸⁰, Hammond suggested that chapters 4-11 describe God's dealings with the Jews, whilst chapters 12-19 describe the infancy and growth of the Church of Christ up to its gaining possession of the Roman Empire.⁸¹ On the number of the Beast, Hammond scores a point in asking why John could not have revealed the name openly: "surely, because some body that lived in his time, or was suddenly to come, was concerned in it." But he refuses to try to decipher its particular application at so great a distance of time, because:

"1. these kind of Arithmetical mysteries were not ordinary among the Greeks of that age, And 2dly, the Greeks had antiently another way of numbring . . . And 3dly, it is much more probable, that S. John had respect to the Hebrew custome, of finding out mysteries in the number of letters . . . All this, and much more might be said, to demonstrate it unreasonable to take any pains in finding out the precise name, whereof this of 666 is the numeral expression . . ."⁸²

Jean Le Clerc, however, the translator of Hammond's *Paraphrase* into Latin, will have no truck with such obscurantism, but he nevertheless rejects the name ΟΥΛΠΙΟΣ (Trajan) suggested by the much admired Grotius. Le Clerc has his own solution to the mystery. Since, according to the interpretation of Hammond, the first Beast represents the idolatry of pagan Rome, why did he not seek the number of the Beast in the names of the gods of Rome's chief mountain, the Capitol? The gods who were chiefly worshipped on the Capitol were Jupiter and Juno and to give them their Greek names in the inscription ΔΙΟΣ ΕΙΜΙ Η ΗΡΑΣ ("I am of Zeus or of Hera") is to produce a motto with the numerical equivalent of 666. "So that he who had these letters χξς written on his wrist . . . it was the same as if he had written upon him . . . I am of Jupiter or of Juno; whereby they professed themselves to be worshippers

⁸⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 910. L. E. Fromm thus errs in stating that Hammond did not refer to Grotius (*op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 525).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 909.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 973. Daubuz objected to Hammond's resignation in the face of the challenge, "Let him that hath understanding count," because "the Revelation is a prophecy given to the Church for the consolation thereof in the times of affliction, when 'tis under the temptation of the fire of persecution. No wonder then," he continued, "if this prophecy be most studied then; or that God should permit one escap'd out of it to have some measure of the gift of interpretation . . ." (*op. cit.*, pp. 614f.). By these last words Daubuz may perhaps be reflecting on his own family's expulsion from France on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

of the Gods of the Capitol."⁸³ The eighteenth-century Presbyterian minister (of Arian leanings) Daniel Mace is one of the few writers who perpetuated Le Clerc's interpretation into the next century.⁸⁴

But those who argued for the preterist interpretation of the Book of Revelation, and for that matter the futurist interpretation also, were arguing for a lost cause, until at least the fourth decade of the nineteenth century. Their views were anything but popular and those who followed them could soon find themselves branded with the infamous mark of the Papal Beast. Orthodoxy in Apocalyptic exegesis was historicism and the greatest enemy in the Apocalyptic description of the Church's history was the Papacy.

II. OTHER HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Several minor episodes remain untold. The customary historical application outlined above was unable to stave the Book of Revelation's capacity to sustain an infinite variety of other applications, which we with our twentieth-century perspective might describe as will-o'-the-wisps, but which to their exponents were the realization of the monstrous substance which the figures of the Apocalypse had foreshadowed long ago. Nevertheless the main highway of interpretation in the number of the Beast has already been described. All that therefore now remains is to give some idea of how this mystical number could be attached to other "monsters" which troubled the sea of modern history. All that we can really attempt here is a brief list comprising a few examples of the lines of approach chosen by some of the exponents. It has often been said that the Book of Revelation is a book for days of crisis and those who love it most are those who suffer most the fires of affliction. Two major crises loom large in the two centuries before us: the chaos of the Interregnum and the terror of the French Revolution. It is not therefore strange that most of the few interpretations which follow attach to these two great periods of history.

1. *Burton, Prynne, and Bastwick*

Richard Hayter, in the dedicatory epistle to his *A meaning to the Revelation* (London, 1676), pointed out that some have found in the Book of Revelation such characters as Henry Burton, William

⁸³ *A supplement to Dr. Hammond's Paraphrase and annotations on the New Testament, in which . . . the sacred text [is] further explain'd* (London, 1699), pp. 654-657.

⁸⁴ *The New Testament in Greek and English* (London, 1729), *ad loc.* For what biographical information is available on Daniel Mace, see Alexander Gordon in *DNB* and H. McLachlan, "An almost forgotten pioneer in New Testament Criticism," *Hibbert Journal*, XXXVII (1938-39), pp. 617-625. Amongst other interesting information, McLachlan points out that Mace's annotated diglot contained the first of the modern attacks upon the apostolic authorship of the Book of Revelation.

Prynne, and John Bastwick, who were all three convicted by the Laudian Star Chamber as scandalous and infamous persons and, amongst other sentences imposed on them, they were to lose their ears in the pillory.⁸⁵ Hayter counted such ideas "as senseless as any of the rest" of supposed contemporary references, but the idea appeared so unusual that it found a place in the third part of Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1678):

"To which it was Reveal'd long since,
We were ordain'd by Providence:
When Three Saints Ears, our Predecessors,
The causes Primitive Confessors,
B'ing Crucified, The Nation stood
In just so many years of Blood:
That multiply'd by Six, exprest
The Perfect Number of the Beast.
And Prov'd that we must be the Men,
To bring this work about agen . . ."⁸⁶

2. The Solemn League and Covenant

Soon after the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant in 1643 and amid the troubles which the Civil War brought to the University of Cambridge, there appeared a note in a book by John Barwick, who was himself a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge and a firm royalist, referring to a suggestion made by William Geast whom he describes as "a very judicious and worthy Divine, formerly of our University, and then a Prisoner (for his Conscience) within the precincts of it, and not yet restored to his liberty, but removed to London."⁸⁷ Geast's explanation of the number 666 seems to have been that the Solemn League and Covenant consisted of six articles which contained a total of 666 words.

⁸⁵ Henry Burton had already levelled his own interpretation of the Beast's number at the Papacy through the Roman numerals of *PaVLo V. VICE Deo* (or in English *PaVL V. VICE GoD*), an application previously made by Philippe de Mornay. Burton also remarked that the Beast's "marke notes that religion, whose mother is ignorance. Ignorants write their marke, in stead of their names" (*The baiting of the Popes Bull* (London, 1627), pp. 49, 2).

⁸⁶ *Op. cit.*, ed. J. Wilders (Oxford, 1967), pt. 3, Canto II, 11. 839ff. Butler's "Hermetic Philosopher" adores the Rosicrucians, who "have found out, who is the true owner of the Beast in the Apocalyps, which has long passed for a stray among the learned; what is the true product of 666, that has rung like Whittington's bells in the ears of expositors . . ." (*Characters and passages from note-books*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge, 1908), p. 103).

⁸⁷ *Querela Cantabrigiensis: or, a remonstrance by way of apologie, for the banished members of the late flourishing University of Cambridge, i.e. pt. 2 of Angliae ruina: or Englands ruine* (1647), pp. 24f. William Geast matriculated sizar from Magdalene in 1615, obtaining the degrees of B.A. (1619-20) and M.A. (1623). He was ordained deacon at Rochester and priest at Norwich on December 18th, 1624. He was Rector of Westerfield in Suffolk, 1630-38, and Rector of Garboldisham in Norfolk, 1637 (J. & J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1922), pt. 1, Vol. II, p. 204).

3. Oliver Cromwell

At the end of the year 1653, Cromwell had assumed the title of Lord Protector. In the eyes of the Fifth Monarchists this was tantamount to re-establishing monarchical rule which had so recently been destroyed and he thereby became their arch-enemy. John More, a seventh-day sabbatarian, in *A second sounding of the Little Horn* (a pamphlet written in answer to William Aspinwall's *Explication and application of the seventh chapter of Daniel*, in which Charles I had been shown to be the malevolent Little Horn of Daniel's prophecy), stigmatized Cromwell as the Beast of the Revelation and through the Roman numerals in the title "Rex Oliver Lord Protector"⁸⁸ showed that his very name held the fateful number 666. A work of a similar nature appeared in 1660, written by Abraham Nelson, and bearing the illuminating title: *A perfect description of Antichrist and his False Prophet: wherein is plainly shewn that Oliver Cromwell was Antichrist, and John Presbiter or John Covenanter his False Prophet.*⁸⁹

4. Muggleton's claims

It is far more difficult to interpret the writings of Ludowicke Muggleton than it is to give an interpretation of the number of the Beast⁹⁰, but it nevertheless appears that he also found the text a useful weapon with which to castigate those who imprisoned him for his own style of witness to the truth.⁹¹ It appears from his *True interpretation of all the chief texts . . . of the Revelation of St. John* (1665) that 666 is the number of the generations of beasts, i.e. persecuting magistrates and kings, from the time of Cain "the first man devil" to his own day. "And those men that have the number of his name, are such as do wear a badge or figure of the Beasts arms."⁹²

⁸⁸ I am indebted for this information to B. S. Capp's article "Extreme Millenarianism" in *Puritans, the Millennium and the future of Israel*, ed. P. Toon (Cambridge, 1970). Capp says that it was necessary for More to discount the capital 'L' in order to achieve the right total. P. G. Rogers strangely gives the title as "Oliver, Lord Protector so-called" (*The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London, 1966), p. 136).

⁸⁹ I have not seen this book, but it is listed in J. W. Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. lxiv.

⁹⁰ "When we come to the *teaching* of Muggleton, we find ourselves in a tangled maze of nonsense far too inconsequential to allow of any intelligible account being given of it" (A. Jessopp, "The prophet of Walnut-tree Yard," *The Nineteenth Century* (August, 1884), p. 297).

⁹¹ Muggleton and his cousin, John Reeve, claimed that they were the "two witnesses" of Rev. 11: 3-6 "and true Prophets of the man Jesus . . . sent by his holy Spirit to seal the foreheads of the Elect, and the foreheads of the reprobate, with the eternal Seals of Life and Death . . ." (John Reeve and Ludowicke Muggleton, *A transcendent spiritual treatise upon several heavenly doctrines* [c. 1660], titlepage).

⁹² *Op. cit.*, pp. 134f.

5. The year 1666

The *Diary* of Samuel Pepys has already suggested to us how speculation was then in the air as to how this year might fit into the prophecies of the Book of Revelation. Perhaps paramount in importance in this connection, if only because the author won higher respect than did the visionary authors of Fifth Monarchist jeremiads, was John Archer's *The personall reigne of Christ upon earth* (1641 and frequently reprinted).⁹³ Archer, like almost all expositors of the Apocalypse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, expounds the 1,260 days of Rev. 12: 6 as 1,260 years. He makes them commence about A.D. 400-406, when "the Bishop of Rome began to usurpe Papall power, and about that time some of the 10. Kingdomes [represented by the toes of Daniel's image] in Europe began to arise . . . it maketh," wrote Archer, "1666. which is the time made the number of the Beast . . . that is, the Papacies duration."⁹⁴ But it was the Fifth Monarchists who most looked to the year 1666, not so much as the date when the Papacy would fall, but as the date when Christ would appear to set up His Kingdom. At least one of them, it would seem, was led to believe in the divinity of the self-styled messiah, the Ottoman Jew Sabbattai Sevi, who made his appearance in that fateful year.⁹⁵ But apart from Sabbattai Sevi, the year was remarkable only for the Plague and the Fire of London, not to mention the ravages of the Dutch navy on the English coast, events apocalyptic enough one might have thought.

6. The turmoil in France

The name *LVDovicVS* contains all the Roman numerals necessary to spell out the number of the Beast and the name could easily be applied to that persecutor of Protestants, Louis XIV.⁹⁶ It was also applied to the Louis who reigned at the time of the French Revolution. This was, for example, the explanation of the lawyer

⁹³ The copy of this pamphlet in the John Rylands Library, which has been clipped and now wants the date (written in as 1642), actually gives the author's name as Henry Archer.

⁹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁹⁵ For further details, see the still unpublished D.Phil. thesis by B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: an analysis of their origins, activities, ideas and composition* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 287-290.

⁹⁶ *E.g.*, it was so used by James Bicheno in *The signs of the times* (London, 1799). Bicheno, a dissenting minister and schoolmaster at Newbury, believed that Louis XIV was indicated by the number 666, not only because of the name "Ludovicus", but because 666 is the number of years from Hugh Capet's seizing the French throne in 987 to the climaxing of the Capet dynasty's tyranny in Louis XIV (*Ibid.*, pp. 24f.).

Joseph Galloway⁹⁷, who interpreted the *earth* of Rev. 13: 11 as France; the Beast represented the French Republic, his *head* was the legislature, whilst his two *horns* stood for the Comité de Sûreté générale and the Comité de Salut public created by the Convention in 1792 and 1793. The *wonders* which the Beast performed were the victories of France, whilst the *image* he set up was the prostitute goddess of reason and liberty; his *mark* was the cap of liberty and the tricoloured cockade. The number 666 described the last French monarch in whose days the Republic would raise its head.

Others tried to find the number 666 in the name of Napoleon Bonaparte⁹⁸, whilst the chronologist William Hales sought to stigmatize Bonaparte by showing that Muhammad⁹⁹ was the name indicated by the number 666 and that Bonaparte is " 'a true Mussulman' in principle," because of his having revived the superstitions of popery in their fullest extent and intolerance, on the ruins of atheism, acting himself as the visible head of the western Church, and virtually succeeding to the popedom."¹⁰⁰

III. CONCLUSIONS

The multiplicity and diversity of interpretations given above (which are by no means an exhaustive list) should be a warning to us that dogmatism of interpretation ill becomes the historical approach. If the truth is one, then the very fact that those who have followed the historical method of interpretation have produced so many different accounts of the truth, should make the unbiased reader to think twice before giving credence to any one of them. If the truth is one, the expositors cannot all be right, because they disagree amongst themselves. For this reason, and no doubt others, the last century has seen a reaction against the historical method of interpreting the Book of Revelation. Any sound exegesis must now first ask the question what the Apocalypse conveyed to its first readers. With this object before the commentator, his exegesis is made to pivot about one central point, a point which is fixed in objective reality, as far as that is now discoverable beneath the

⁹⁷ *Brief commentaries on such parts of the Revelation, and other prophecies, as immediately refer to the present times* (London, 1802). Galloway went to Philadelphia early in life, but returned to England in 1778.

⁹⁸ E.g., Samuel Toovey, who wrote under the pseudonym of "Philo Britannicus" in *An essay on the prophecies of Daniel, and the Revelation of St. John* (London, 1813).

⁹⁹ According to C. Maitland (*The Apostles' school of prophetic interpretation* (London, 1849), p. 430), the application of the number to Muhammad by means of the Greek letters in ΜΑΔΜΗΤΙΣ, was first made in 1680 by Genebrard. It is however found in François Feuardent's notes to his edition of Irenaeus in 1576. Pope Innocent III applied the number to Muhammad as early as 1215, but he did so by treating 666 as a measure of so many years (see L. E. Froom, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 676).

¹⁰⁰ *A new analysis of chronology* (London, 1809-12), Vol. II, p. 1354.

oblivion of ancient history. Despite this critical, objective approach, however, it is still not possible to determine beyond all shade of doubt what exactly the writer intended by the words of Rev. 13: 18. We may be a lot warmer on the scent, but we are still not there to a certainty.

But will we ever be? Nobody knows the answer to this question. but while it remains in doubt, I would like to ask the further question whether those who followed the historical method of interpretation did not have the root of the matter in a very practical sense. In other words, was the historical approach *altogether* wrong? Were their interpretations right and good for themselves in their own day, even if they now prove to be outmoded? Perhaps we have swung too far away from historicism to the opposite extreme which rejects out of hand all applications of the Apocalyptic visions to current events. No doubt we are right in rejecting interpretations of the Apocalypse which require us to believe that John had in view these present days and only these days, but if we may not dogmatize that "This is that," may we not still say, "This is remarkably like that which John had in mind when he wrote the visions"? We should retain the historical approach as supplementary to the contemporary analysis.

No doubt the historicists we have looked at did put the cart before the horse in their interpretations, but is it nevertheless possible that they did find the right "cart"? It is true that in an objective sense they did not all have the same "cart", but then vehicles are apt to change. The Devil does not always keep to one particular form; he can be both a "roaring lion" and "an angel of light" in his appearance.¹⁰¹ Perhaps this view is best expressed by the covenanting divine James Durham. For Durham, the name intended by 666 is descriptive of the Beast's nature, not of one particular name and as far as he himself was concerned, the Pope fulfilled all that Scripture spoke of Antichrist.¹⁰² Nominal ciphers, such as Ἀρτεῖνος, only confirm the application of the description of Antichrist previously arrived at; they may not stand alone as evidence, since Ἀρτεῖνος for example "will agree to heathen Rome or Christian, as well as antichristian." The Lord "numbered Belshazzar, and found him light; not from the letters of his name, but from his practices."¹⁰³ We are led to ask the question, if Durham had been writing in the twentieth century, might he in that case have looked elsewhere than to the Pope to find the Antichrist described by John and hence have found a different interpretation of the Beast's number?

¹⁰¹ 1 Pet. 5: 8; 2 Cor. 11: 14.

¹⁰² *A commentarie upon the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh, 1658), pp. 568f.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 569.

"Looking back, it has been possible . . . to identify the number 666 with the names of the majority of tyrants who in the course of history have persecuted the Church." In this way, the "number remains living throughout the course of history."¹⁰⁴ May not the truth, as subjectively expressed, be of infinite variety in its particular applications? At this level we may echo the words of William Cowper's hymn:

"The Spirit breathes upon the Word,
And brings the truth to sight . . .
The hand that gave it still supplies
The gracious light and heat:
His truths upon the nations rise—
They rise, but never set."

But which of these foregoing interpretations of the number of the Beast was according to the mind of the Spirit who inspired the original text? Only those who participate in the ongoing life of the same Spirit may discern. "Let him who has understanding, reckon."¹⁰⁵

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¹⁰⁴ J.-J. von Allmen, *Vocabulary of the Bible*, trans. P. J. Allcock et al. (London, 1958), s.v. "Numbers".

¹⁰⁵ [As an editorial tailpiece, mention may be made of a respected Professor of New Testament in a European University who in 1971, addressing an international congress on numerical patterns in Luke-Acts, pointed out that Paul's Areopagica in Acts 17: 22-31 contains 666 syllables. He refrained from dogmatizing, but thought it worthy of note that the speech is largely concerned with idolatry.]