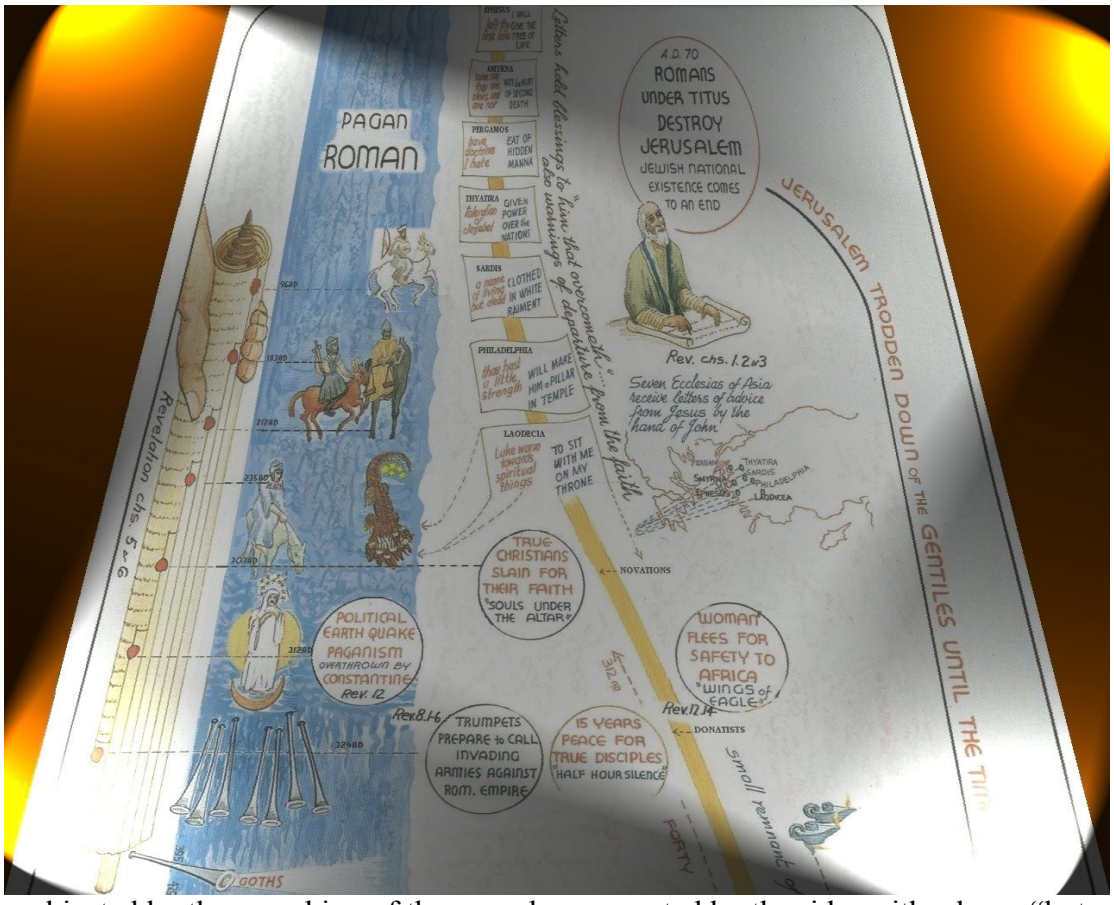
A Critical review of the continuous historical interpretation as garnered from 'Apocalypse for Everyman' by A.D. Norris.

The seals have been held to represent Roman history from the end of the 1st century to the middle of the 4th. Perhaps the clearest presentation of this view is to be found in R. Roberts, "Thirteen Lectures" (on the Apocalypse) (TL), and C.C. Walker, "Notes on the Apocalypse" (NA).

The first four Seals reveal four horses and their riders, said to represent the Roman state, appeal being made to the scholarly work of E.B. Elliot, "Horae Apocalypticae" (HA), Volume I, part I, Introduction. Here the author cites extant coins and other evidences to show the use of the horse as a symbol of Roman power but appears to arrive at his conclusion somewhat negatively by disputing other possibilities. It is not surprising to find the war-horse figuring on certain Roman coins, but normally the coinage pictured some important local event or imperial achievement. The horse is not an outstanding emblem of the Roman Empire.

THE FIRST SEAL: THE WHITE HORSE (6.1-2) In TL this appears to be given a double interpretation, first as a work of righteousness and peace to which Rome was



subjected by the preaching of the gospel, represented by the rider with a bow "but no arrows" (sic); and second of the peaceful condition of the Roman Empire +98 to +180. The second is open to question, as we can see from this summary:

Trajan (98-117): Two major wars, in Lower Danube (101-106) and against the Parthians (113-117). Bloody struggle with the Jews all over the Mediterranean area (115-117).

Hadrian (117-138): Peaceful on the whole, but at the beginning of this reign he had to crush Samaritans, Moors (twice) and Britons, his celebrated wall being built in 122. Later he had to quell a determined Jewish rebellion (133-135) in which more than ½ a million Jews were slain and many perished by hunger, fire and pestilence.

Antoninus Pius (138-161): No major wars, but rebellions and invasions everywhere, including Britain, Mauretania, Germany, Judaea, Greece, Egypt, Dania and North Africa. "It was peace where there was no peace" (Cambridge Ancient History, CAH,11.337).

Marcus Aurelius (161-180): One long catalogue of war, plague, and famine. Invasions and revolts in Britain, Armenia, and Syria. Years of war with Parthians, Germans, Samaritans and Moors followed.

Conclusion: It is hardly true that "peace….prevailed to a great extent during the "First Seal Period" (TL,p.46).

THE SECOND SEAL: THE RED HORSE(6.3-4). This is said to cover the period 211 to 235 (TL), disgraced by numerous assassinations. But the symbol denotes war, not assassination as claimed by TL and NA, as will be seen in the commentary below. There was warfare, indeed, during this period, but the period was no more remarkable for war than the entire period from 161 to the end of the Western Empire in 476, and for centuries after that.

THE THIRD SEAL: THE BLACK HORSE (6.5-6): said in TL to cover the period 211-235. The black colour is fitting for mourning and woe and near-famine, or at least inflation, as suggested by the rest of the symbolism. But this period was no more marked by famine than were others: indeed, there was worse in the troubled half century which followed, while the last half of the period to which this seal is ascribed was quite good under the beneficent reign of Alexander Severus, to whose mother the Roman Christian Hippolytus dedicated a treatise on the resurrection.

FOURTH SEAL: THE PALE HORSE (6.7-8): The symbolism is a fair representation of the terrible era of Roman history from 235-284, but the rest of the symbolism fits far less well. A weakness is the attempt to link "the fourth part of the earth" with the supposed extreme suffering of Italy, one of the four imperial prefectures. But this is not the case: all parts of the Empire suffered frightfully.

THE FIFTH SEAL: SOULS UNDER THE ALTAR (6.9-11): Certainly the symbolism points to persecution, and it is suggested that the reference is to exceptionally severe persecutions under Diocletian. But there had been severe persecution under Marcus Aurelius (161-180) and Septimus Serverus (193-211), Decius (249-251), and Valerian (253-259). For the first 18 years of Diocletian (284-305) Christians were not persecuted, but really severe persecution began in 303. Suffering was terrible in the East until 311, but in the west the moderation of Constantius and his son Constantine (afterwards emperor), considerably softened the impact of Diocletian's decrees. The statement of TL,p.53 that "these terrible visitations upon believers extended throughout the Roman Empire" is hardly correct.

THE SEVENTH SEAL: SILENCE IN HEAVEN (8.1): This is said to denote the peace which prevailed during the later years of Constantine. But there were wars with Alamanni, Goths, and Persians, and the "church" was greatly troubled by the so-called Donatist schism, and then by the long Arian controversy. There is a comprehensiveness about this seal in any case which cannot be confined within so narrow a compass.

THE TRUMPETS

THE FIRST TRUMPET: (Here the A.V. does not make clear that in the original we have also "the third part of the earth was burned up." This is rectified in the R.V. and modern versions). R.R. refers us to the division of the Roman Empire, following the death of Constantine in +337, among his three sons Constantine, Constantius and Constans. But this division was extremely short lived and is of no significance. Constantine lasted three years and Constans 13, and so within 16 years of the death of their father Constantius was sole ruler of a united Empire. After his death, and those of his two successors, the Empire was again divided, this time into two parts, East and West, a division that became permanent in +395 after a few years of union under

Theodosius the Great. C.C.W. omits this part of R.R.'s interpretation.

It is then claimed that the hail and fire of the First Trumpet fell on "the Roman third", in particular on Rome itself and on Italy, the Goths being the instruments of the judgment. Alaric, the formidable Gothic leader, certainly harried Italy and sacked Rome itself, but 30 years before another Gothic host had wrought havoc in south-eastern Europe, which was part of the Eastern Empire, and had inflicted on the Eastern Roman army one of the worst defeats in all Roman history. This fact disposes,

too, of the somewhat unimpressive idea in W.H.B. that the threefold division of the Empire compromised the Latin West, the Hellenic East, and the Hellenised East, for the Gothic onslaught was directed against the Latin West and the Hellenic East alike.

THE SECOND TRUMPET : This is evidently a maritime judgment. In the works referred to it is attributed to the terrible ravages inflicted on the Empire by the Vandals, whose destructive barbarities have given their name to the present day people who delight in destroying property and amenities. The Vandals did indeed engage in maritime activity: "Almost alone among the Teutonic invaders of the Empire, he (Genseric) set himself to form a powerful fleet, and was probably for thirty years the leading maritime power in the Mediterranean." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Edition, under Vandals). Having conquered North Africa, Genseric made Carthage a naval base from which his fleet plundered throughout the Mediterranean, twice defeating Roman fleets. This linking of the Second Trumpet with the Vandals might have been acceptable had the other Trumpets been interpreted with similar historical plausibility.

THE THIRD TRUMPET: For this we are referred to Attila the Hun, whose devastations, we are told, "were principally inflicted on the Alpine region of northern Italy, to which the description 'rivers and fountains of waters' is particularly applicable…..it could not apply to any other region of the Roman Empire." Further, 'wormwood' (*apsinth*) is the name of a river in the Illyrian region ruled by Attila, while 'the great star' is suggestive of "a meteor, which rushed and blazed with destructive brightness, and then disappeared in the midst of the destruction he caused" (R.R., page 75).

It is agreed that Attila's power and family disappeared as soon as his work was done; but it is hardly true to say that the description 'rivers and fountains of waters' could only apply to the Alpine regions of northern Italy. The Pyrenees, Dinaric Alps, and mountain areas of Anatolia and Armenia, especially the last, are possible candidates too. But suppose that the claim is accepted: were the devastations of the Huns concentrated here? Advancing from the steppes north of the Caspian Sea in +372, the Huns successively vanquished Alans, Ostrogoths, and Visgoths. In + 443 the notorious Attila became their king, and pushed west to the Rine, reaching the walls of Orleans; but in a decisive battle at Chalons he was heavily defeated by a mixed army of Romans and Visgoths under Aetius, the last western imperial general of note. Next year Attila ravaged northern Italy, and Rome itself was only saved by the courageous pleading of Pope Leo I. Attila died in +453, and his empire rapidly disintegrated.

It is therefore not correct to say that his devastations were principally inflicted on the Alpine regions of northern Italy; the Hunnish 'capital', moreover, was not in Illyria, but in upper Hungary near the Danube; nor was Attila an Illyrian, being born much further east. We have been unable to find the minor river Aspinth, but a far better river-representation of the Huns would have been the Volga or the Danube. The only item in the description which at all fits the Huns would be the ephemeral, blazing meteor.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET: R.R. considers that the symbolism here is obscure, but applies it to the fall of the Western Empire in +476. This fall, however, was no sudden, catastrophic affair. The Western Empire declined steadily after the death of Theodosius the Great in +395, and the murder of the great general Stilico in + 408. The abdication of the last Western emperor Romulus Augustulus (called not only after the first emperor Augustus as stated by R.R., but also after Romulus, the founder of

Rome itself), was merely the final, pitiful end of the old regime. Moreover, his two barbarian successors, Odoacer and Theodoric (476 to 526), retained much of the Roman system. In fact, under Theodoric, Rome and Italy enjoyed a happier time than they had seen for over a century. The result of the ending of the old Empire was certainly not "a state of things exactly answering the symbol." Further, the Western Empire at the beginning of the fifth century was appreciably more than half of the Roman dominion, and so could not be called "the western third."

THE FIFTH TRUMPET: The sixth century is omitted in the historic interpretation, which passes to the third decade of the seventh. In this Trumpet a star falling from heaven to earth is given the key to the abyss, which it opens; a great smoke ascends, and armoured, crowned, horse-like locusts issue from this to torment for five months those not having the seal of God. The judgments so symbolized are identified with the rise of Mahomet, and the conquest of the East by Arab armies which had embraced the new religion. This view is Scripturally, geographically, and historically untenable. (See 'Apocalypse for Everyman pages 178-180 for a fuller explanation).

THE SIXTH TRUMPET: The loosing of the four angels hitherto bound in the river Euphrates, with a view to a third part of men being slain during a set period by an immense host of fiery cavalry is referred to the various Turkish hordes which swept over the Eastern Empire from the 11th to the 15th centuries. The four angels are said to correspond to the four waves of Seljuks, Mongols, Tartars, and Ottomans who, crossing the Euphrates, afflicted the Persians, Normans, and Crusaders, the last of whom inflicted more damage to the Empire than Mongols and Tartars combined.

It is correct that upper Euphrates "marks the natural line of communication between northern Persia and the West, a route followed by the nomad Turks, Mongols, and Tartars on their way to the rich lands of Asia Minor." It is also true that the Seljuk Turks, held to represent the first of the four angels, invaded Asia Minor under Alp Arslan and crushed the Roman Imperial army at the decisive battle of Menzikat (1071), much of Asia Minor now coming permanently under Turkish rule.

The terrible Mongols from eastern Asia are held to represent the second angel. Under the leadership of Genghiz Khan, they established the largest empire the world has seen, extending from China to central Europe. But the Mongols hardly came into contact with what remained of the Roman Empire, owing to some fortunate diversions. Neither did the Tartars, who are held to represent the third angel. These reached their zenith under Timur, and devastated India and much of central Asia, and, by their crushing defeat of the powerful Turkish sultan Bajazet, actually prolonged the life of the Roman Empire by over fifty years. The fourth angel is held to be represented by the Ottoman Turks who, despite their heavy defeat by Timur the Tartar, recovered after his death and gradually subdued the rest of the Empire, until the fall of Constantinople in 1453 brought to an end an Empire which had lasted nearly fifteen centuries.

The four angels were prepared for "an hour, a day, a month, and a year" which, assuming a day for a year, is given as 391 years 1 month (R.R. and C.C.W.), or 396 years 121 days (W.H.B.). Constantinople fell on 29 May 1453. Subtracting the two periods we get figures a trifle earlier than 1057 and 1052. The Seljuks first invaded the Roman Empire in 1050, Armenia and Gorgia being conquered in 1065 to 1068, but they were driven back over the Euphrates in 1068 to 1070. But in August 1071 the Roman army was decisively defeated by Alp Arslan, and most of Asia Minor fell to him. Yet if a time period is given in Rev.9:15 it is exact, not approximate, and the attempt to make it fit the period in question is not only unconvincing from a

chronological standpoint: it does little justice to what might be called the dignity of divine revelation.

Even if the huge number of 200,000,000 horsemen is accepted as a reasonable representation of the myriads of cavalry comprising a great part of the Seljuk, Mongol, and Tartar hordes (though a formidable infantry corps formed the strongest part of the Ottoman armies), the horsemen of Revelation 9 were no ordinary cavalry: fire, smoke, and brimstone proceeded from their mouths. This is said to represent the Turks prevailing over the Romans by the use of the newly invented gunpowder, the Turks being said to be the first to use cannon drawn by horses. But Seljuks, Mongols, and Tartars did not use cannon, and Gibbon implies that at Angora, when the Turks

were crushed by the Tartars, they did not then employ cannon, for he writes: "Had they borrowed from Europe the recent invention of gunpowder and cannon, the artifical thunder in the hands of either nation must have turned the fortunes of the day." In the last days of the Empire the Ottoman Turks did use cannon effectively against Constantinople, but not horse-artillery, so heavy were the batteries used.

THE TWO WITNESSES

Expositors of the continuous historic view have assumed that all the periods (in Revelation) must be referring to 1260 years (not 1260 days as plainly stated in the text). Accordingly, they have looked for periods of history of this duration when evil powers were ascendant, and the people of God afflicted. But the various historical periods selected are unconvincing, and there are other objections. One should not start, either, with the assumption that the oppressing power is to be identified exclusively with the Roman Catholic Church or the Papacy.

We take the most popular choice first. The period of Papal power is said to extend from a decree of the Eastern Roman emperor Phocas, confirming papal headship of the church in +604, to the end of papal temporal power in 1870, a period of 1266 years. But Pope Gregory the Great (590 to 604) was one of the greatest of the 270 or so Popes of Rome (and incidentally one who looked earnestly for the Lord's second advent), and undoubtedly advanced the prestige of his office. This man did not need, in the last year of his life, any support from Phocas, perhaps the biggest scoundrel of all the eastern emperors. In fact the support was probably an embarrassment to the papacy, especially when it declared that while Rome was the head, Constantinople was the first, of all the churches. The decree acknowledged the Pope as the head of the church, but it gave him no temporal power: to have done that would have transgressed a first principle of the ecclesiastical policy of the Eastern Empire. Papal temporal power did not begin *until 150 years later*.

The foundation of papal temporal power was laid when Frankish king Pepin III handed over to the Pope's sovereignty certain lands in Italy, including Rome and district, formerly belonging to the Eastern Empire, but recently conquered by the Lombards. This took place in 775 to 776, and accordingly an older student of the Apocalypse, Robert, bishop of Clogher, writing in 1751, expected the end of the papal temporal power 1260 years after that, in 2015. In fact that power ended in two stages: in 1861 when the formation of the Kingdom of Italy under Victor Emmanuel deprived the Pope of all his dominions except the 'Patrimony of St. Peter', reducing his provinces from 20 to 5 and their population of more than three million to about 685,000; and in 1870 when these, too, were incorporated in the Kingdom. Time has proved the bishop wrong, but his interpretation was at least consistent. Moreover, the down treading of the spiritual holy city (if Revelation 11:2 were to be so understood) did not begin with the assumption of temporal power by the Popes, nor did it end with the loss of that power. We may ask finally: is it really to be expected that the Holy Spirit would pay so much regard to periods of this kind unless they were far more clearly defined and characterized, historically and especially spiritually?

An even less convincing calculation of the supposed 1260 years is in connection with the prophesying of the Two Witnesses in 11:3, a calculation also supplied to the nourishing of the woman in 12:6. This is the period from 312 to 1572, based on interpreting the Two Witnesses as (1) aggressive and (2) pacific protesters against corrupt ecclesiastical powers. It is said that this witnessing began with the accession of Constantine in 312. But true witnessing in the face of imperial persecution began centuries earlier, against which it is claimed that the witnessing must be understood as

being against professingly Christian but actually apostate authorities. It is hard to discover any basis for this, and in any case Constatine's government was **not** Christian, even though it favoured Christianity. Moreover, Constantine's persecution of the Donatists (supposed to be early witnesses) did not begin until 316, and soon ended. Further, the main difference between Donatists and the orthodox was not doctrinal, but consisted in the stand the former took that clergy who had surrendered sacred books during the recent persecution under Diocletian should be debarred from office in the church. The Novatians around half a century earlier had similarly maintained that those who sacrificed to idols during the persecutions in the mid 3rd century should not be restored to fellowship even when repentant.

The terminal year of 1572 we find to be baseless. The persecution of Huguenots in France went on until the Edict of Nantes in 1598 gave French Protestants the right to worship according to their belief. In Britain under Elizabeth I (1558 to1603), Protestants as well as Catholics were persecuted and martyred. The last religious martyrdom in Britain was the burning of an anti-Trinitarian at Lichfield in 1612. Persecution of nonconformists occurred under Charles II (1660 to 1685). The Conventicle Act of 1662, for instance, forbade religious assemblies other than those of the Church of England. John Bunyan was imprisoned for twelve years under this Act. On the Continent, Protestants were persecuted in Bohemia and much of southern Europe. In 1685 the revocation of the Edict of Nantes led to many Huguenots fleeing to Britain and North America. The period of 312 to 1572 thus fails to satisfy the requirements of 'sackcloth witnessing.'

We consider next the death of the Witnesses, with their dead bodies lying in the street of an evil city before being raised from the dead and caused to ascend to heaven, followed by a great earthquake (11:7-13). The end of the 'sackcloth witnessing' continued, not only in France but also in England, and on the Continent until far into the 17th century. In France, in fact, after a quite period from 1598, persecution gathered momentum after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and continues well into the 18th century.

Accordingly, C.C.W. and R.R. proceed to date the death of the Witnesses as in 1685. But in that event what became of 1572? And incidentally, the renovation of the Edict of Nantes, despite the persecution, which followed, was the signal for a Huguenot revival. Protestantism drew new life from the persecution. Finally it must be recorded that the Huguenots accepted infant baptism, the Trinity and the immortality of the soul. John Calvin fiercely attacked and even persecuted all who thought otherwise.

We come now to the somewhat desperate efforts made to account for the dead bodies of the Witnesss lying unburied in the street of the great city for 3½ days (11:8-9). On the principle of a day for a year, this should be 3½ years, which cannot be made to fit anywhere. Recourse has been had to an interpretation by the Baptist Pastor Bicheno of Newbury (1793). He reckoned the 3½ days as lunar and not earthly, thus 3½ months or 105 earth days, and arrived at 105 years as the meaning, this being the interval between 1685 and the French Revolution (1785 to 1794). What, then happened in the French Revolution which might be said to mark the end of the lying of the Witnesses in the street, their resurrection and ascension?

The answer is the "great voice" (11:2) calling the raised Witness to heaven is to be interpreted as the royal convening of the archaic French States-General in 1789. King Lois XVI was a well-meaning but simple weakling, whose summons could hardly be called "a great voice from heaven." Even more incredible is the view that, as a result of this, the Witnesses "ascend to place and power in the political heavens in multitudes"(C.C.W.). This is wholly untrue of God's Witnesses. What happened is

that the French Revolution brought about the eclipse of the monarchy, a major reduction in the power of the nobles and church, and alleviation in the lot of village priests, freedom and relief for the peasantry, and a reign of terror, which deluged the country in blood. Since the Witnesses cannot possibly be identified with those who came to power in the French Revolution, many of whom were ruffians and members of extreme political clubs, but some of whom were idealists, R.R. leaves the Witnesses on one side, and writes about the common people being "raised to power in a cloud."

The "great earthquake" (11:13), in which "a tenth part of the city fell", is applied to the French Revolution and the fall of France. But immediately after the Revolution there follows one of the most glorious eras of French history, with the rise to power of Napoleon. As for "the remnant giving glory to the God of heaven," this is linked with the revolutionary leader Robespierre having had a decree enacted which proclaimed the existence of a Supreme Being (1794). This was done to oppose both Catholicism and atheism, but is little more than a passing curiosity. The sentimentalism of Rousseau which inspired Robespierre could scarcely be described as giving glory to the true God of heaven.

Finally, is it really likely that the Holy Spirit would devote so much attention to France from 1572 to 1794? The identification of France with the "street of the great city" is without substance. France may have been called "the eldest son of the church", but its relations with the papacy became increasingly troubled throughout the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries.

THE WOMAN, THE MANCHILD AND THE DRAGON

In this interpretation the woman is taken to be the Christian Church, now basking in the sun of royal recognition and favour, the now-subject pagan priesthood being represented by the moon, and the twelve stars standing for the twelve Caesars between Augustus and Domitian. R.R. writes of these twelve, but in fact there were only eleven. J.T. and C.C.W. amend the list by including Nerva, successor of Domitian. But since John received the Revelation in the reign of either Domitian or Nero (depending which view one holds of its dating), and since the vision is supposed to concern a period more than 200 years later, it is hard to see why such a list should be presupposed in any case. By the time of Constantine there had been nearly 40 Caesars. The identification of the moon as the prostrate pagan priesthood is also unacceptable, for paganism still continued, and its priests were in no way under the control of the church at this time: they were simply not allowed to persecute their Christian rivals.

As for the identification of the sun as the possession of political power by the church, this might have been more reasonable were it the fact. But it is not. Persecution ceased, and bishops had certain judicial powers. Christians were exempted from attending pagan festivals, and property confiscated during persecutions under Diocletian and Licinius was restored, while in the later part of Constantine's reign many pagan festivals were suppressed. But the figure under the interpretation considered is far too strong to fit the circumstances of the Church at this time. Moreover, the woman is pictured as clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, **before** giving birth to Constantine (sic), when her circumstances would not have corresponded to this picture at all, for never was the situation worse than under the terrible persecution under Diocletian before + 303.

The 280-day period of human gestation is held to represent the time from the beginning of the Christian Church (+32) to Constantine (312). But Pentecost was two or three years earlier than the former, and Constantine became Caesar in 306. By 312 only one of his rivals had been eliminated; another was swept aside in 313, and Licinius eliminated in 324. The correspondence is at best approximate, even if the chapter made any use of the period of pregnancy, which it does not.

The picture of Constantine ruling all nations with a rod of iron is not a good one. It is true that he was sole Emperor for the last 13 years, and powerful too, but his rulership was not of the "rod of iron" type. In any case he did not rule all nations, for his eastern border extended only to Armenia and Mesopotamia, and his Empire was nothing like as extensive as Alexander's had been. He did not rule over the powerful Persian kingdom; in Africa his kingdom covered only the north coast and Egypt, while the Rhine and the Danube limited his northern frontier, while Ireland and most of Scotland were not under Roman rule. To speak of Constantine as being "caught up to God and his throne" as though it meant "ordained by God" is a poor understanding of the symbolism. To interpret 12:6 as meaning the exile of the woman in the wilderness from 312 to 1572, 1260 years later, yields a beginning which is inconsistent with her glory in 12:1 at the same time, while the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day at the end is hardly a deliverance from exile.

THE BEASTS OF CHAPTER 13

This view, in brief understands the Beast of the Sea to be papal Rome in the Dark Middle ages; the Dragon which gave the Beast its authority to be the Eastern Roman Emperors with their capital at Constantinople; the head which was fatally injured to be the Western Roman Empire which 'died' in +476; the healed head to be a rival of the old Empire (+800 onwards), the Beast of the Earth to be the Germanic Empire (+936 onwards); the image of the Beast to be the Papacy; and its number to denote *lateinos.* The seven heads and ten horns of 13:1 are used as identification marks of the Roman Empire, while the fact that the crowns are upon the horns and not the heads (by contrast with the dragon in 12:3) is said to refer to a state of affairs long after the time of Constantine, when ten kingdoms had made their appearance, said to concern the barbarian kingdoms of the Dark Ages. The names of blasphemy advert to the Papacy, and so the Beast has to do with papal times.

The barbarian kingdoms are said to be those which arose consequent on the fall of the Western Empire, and their names are given (J.T.) as the kings of the Huns, Vandals, Visgoths, Burgundians, Geidae, Lombards, Franks, Suevi, Alans, and Bavarians, though other lists have also been suggested. The seven heads are supposed to denote seven successive systems of government in the Roman Empire, namely: (1) Regal (2) Consular (3) Dictatorial (4) Decemviral (5) Tribunitial (6) Imperial (7) Gothic kingly (C.C.W. page 34).

It seems most unlikely that John would see a Beast complete with ten horns representing barbarian kingdoms, which were not a part of the Roman system until 300 or more years after his time, since such kingdoms already existed in his day, without forming part of the Roman Empire. He sees the Beast complete with horns, and there is no indication that it had ever been without them. Moreover since the same Beast has ten horns in 17: 3,12, at a time shortly before it is destroyed by the Lamb, it is necessary to give a quite different interpretation to the horns in chapter 17 from one which applies to the Dark Ages in chapter 13.

The barbarians had originated in Scandinavia, wandering approximately in two different directions, one eventually reaching the Rhine, and the more easterly group reaching the Danube and the Black Sea. From the first century B.C. they troubled the Empire, but were either conquered or repelled by such commanders as Julius Caesar, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, and the great Illyrian emperors of the later third century. Towards the end of the fourth century the Huns emerged from Central Asia and, penetrating into Europe, routed those barbarians who had settled down in central and eastern Europe, pushing them into Roman Gaul, Spain, Italy, and the Balkans, finally bringing the Western Empire to an end. The menace of the Huns disappeared quickly, and the other barbarians resumed their internecine warfare. It would seem that the ten horns were in fact constantly pushing at one another.

Identification of the Beast with papal affairs on account of its names of blasphemy – R.R., page 123- would not have occurred to the earliest readers, who could reasonably have seen in this the blasphemous emperor-worship of their own days. "Papal times" is in any case a vague expression covering around 1½ millennia; nor is there much justification for thinking of these as times when the Popes exercised temporal power, for the influence of papal Rome was often extremely strong when it had little or no temporal power. The pontificate of Leo I (440-461), for example, set papal primacy on an almost impregnable basis, while Gelasius I (492-496) asserted final jurisdiction in a manner which was highly influential for centuries. In our own day Popes John XXIII and John Paul II have greatly enhanced the reputation of their office.

Moreover, papal temporal power did not, as often affirmed in seeking for a starting point for the supposed 1260 years, commence anywhere near the time of Phocas (+607). It really began with the grant of certain lands in Italy by the Frankish king Pepin ("The Donations of Pepin", ca.754-756), when for the first time the reigning Pope Stephen II was regarded as a sovereign prince. Phocas' decree merely declared Rome to be the head of all the churches, which it had been for some time in any case, and temporal power was not in question. This disposes of the idea that the papal temporal power lasted "42 months" (13:5), and there is nothing to be said for the alternative which dates the period from Justinian (+535) to the virtually meaningless closing years of the 18th century. The short-lived takeover of the Papal States by Napoleon occurred a little too late, in 1808. Moreover, the temporal power of the Popes was revived in 1929 when the Lateran Treaty made Vatican City a sovereign state.

The persecution of spiritual Zion has continued down the ages, and readers of 13:1-10 in varying periods might have thought of persecution by pagan Emperors, governors and mobs; or in mediaeval times by the papal Inquisition; or at other times by various European governments including those of Britain, France, Poland, Austria, and Spain; and quite recently by Nazi Germany or the countries of the 'iron curtain'.

In 13:2,4 we are told that the dragon gave power to the Beast. Two errors are found in the curious idea that the dragon represents the Eastern Roman Empire, and the unhistorical notion that the rulers of that Empire gave the Papacy its power. The dragon of Revelation is the power of sin (12:9; 20:2) underlying kingdoms and men, and is not to be localized in this way; while the Eastern Roman Emperors were more often than not suspicious, even actively hostile, as regards the Papacy. Obsession with political events is a basic flaw in the historical system of interpretation.

It is suggested that the conflict between the hosts of Michael and of the dragon (12:7-12) represents the 11year rivalry between Constantine and the pagan Licinius, ending with the triumph of Constantine in +324. But for nearly all this period the two men were not in conflict, for a single campaign in 314 and a few months' fighting in 324

comprised all the conflict there was, which is hardly on the scale of 12:7-8, especially since the conflict was mainly political. Constantine was a sun-worshipper until 312, when he became convinced that the God of the Christians was on his side. The edict of Milan in 313 gave freedom of worship to all Roman subjects, Christian and pagan alike. Between 320-323 further laws were enacted which favoured the church, but old pagan institutions were allowed to continue, and the emperor retained the heathen priestly title of Pontifex Maximus. Later in the reign of Constantine paganism was further discouraged but not persecuted. Constantine hated schism, and assisted in crushing Donatist 'heretics,' and compelling the Council of Nicaea to adopt the unscriptural view that God and His Son were of one substance, thereby establishing the Trinitarian teaching on a basis, which has lasted to the present day. He was baptized only on his deathbed. Famous and important though he was, Constantine can hardly have been depicted by Michael and his angels; the very idea may be thought derogatory to these heavenly powers.

But because Constantine, after triumphing over Licinius, took over his seat of government at Byzantium, completing the new city of Constantinople in 330 and making it his imperial capital in 331, the view is now advanced that he and his eastern successors (all of whom with one brief exception professed Christianity) became the dragon because they occupied the same capital, ruled the same territory, and showed the same hostility to God's true people. But the same book would hardly represent the same man as Michael and (with his successors) as the dragon, particularly since Constantine's opposition to paganism was greater rather than less from this point on.

His successor Constantinius (337-361) was a strong opponent of orthodox trinitarianism, and later successors strongly opposed the worship of images and relics, and evidence of the persecution of true Christians from Constantinople is not offered in J.T. III or related works: certainly persecution was more severe, more widespread and more enduring in the West, which means that it is wrong to stress the persecuting role of Constantinople and the East.

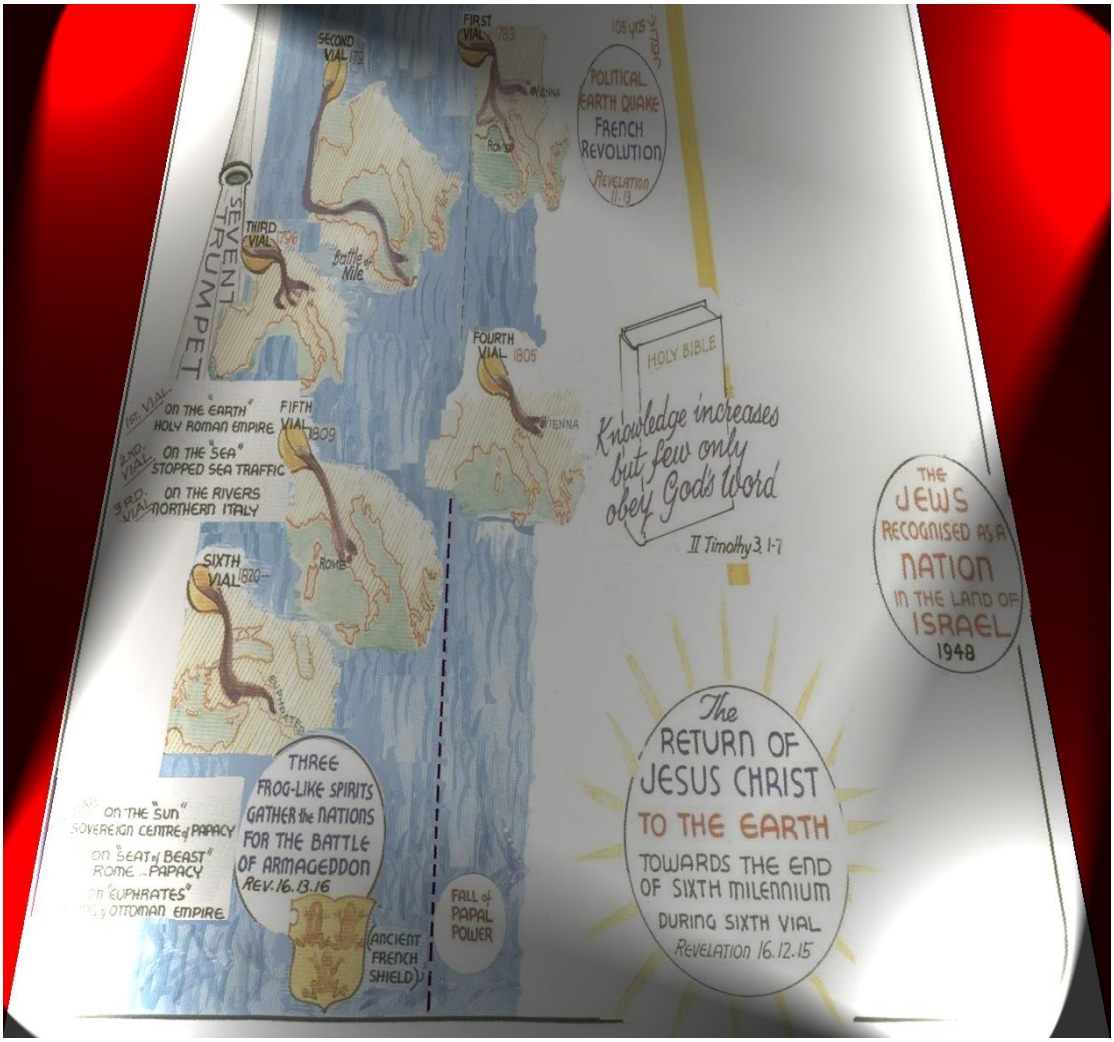
Now the claim must be examined as to whether it was really from the Eastern Empire that the Papacy received its "constitution and recognition, or its power and great authority" (R.R. page 124). The decree of Justinian is of so little import that it is not even mentioned in Gibbon, or in the long article on Justinian in E.B., 11th edition. In C.M.H.(iv) we find that in +535 it was decreed that "Old Rome enjoys the honour of being the mother of law, and none will doubt that she is the head of the supreme pontificate", while in 545 it is declared that "the Pope of Rome is the first of all priests, and the blessed archbishop of Constantinople is second after the holy apostolic see of Rome." Thus Justinian confirmed the primacy of the Bishop of Rome in the church, but the emperor remained "the supreme master, the representative of God upon earth, taking care of the material and spiritual needs of his subjects; only in purely doctrinal matters did he leave the last word to the bishop of Rome" (C.M.H. xiv,437). But he treated the Popes, especially Vigilius, in peremptory fashion, reducing their power to a minimum. Their election was to be subject to his confirmation, for which he was to be paid a fee. "The reign of Justinian proved throughout a period of deep humiliation for the Papacy. Two Popes had suffered indignity, and Vigilius' next two successors were elected under imperial pressure, and were forced to continue the humble servants of the emperor. The church of Revenna, the capital of reconquered Italy, was deliberately exalted at the expense of Rome. The subjection of the patriarch of Old Rome to the emperor seemed likely to continue as absolute as that of New Rome, and his prestige suffered during the reign far more than his colleague's. The Byzantine system of the imperial patronage and complete

dominance of the church had seen its most splendid phase.(Margaret Deanesly, History of the Medieval Church, page 12).
Proceeding to the decree of the brutal ruffian Phocas (+607), we must first say that the real reasons for the growth in papal authority owed little or nothing to Eastern Emperors, but are to be found in the conservatism of the Roman church in the first four centuries, the link of Peter and Paul with Rome, and the fact of it being the church of the imperial capital. The sack of Rome by the Goths in +410, the withdrawal of the Western Emperor Honorius to Ravenna, and the departure and slaughter of many of the leading citizens, left the Pope, at the time Innocent I (402-417) as the greatest man in the capital. Under Leo I (440-461) the primacy of Rome was finally established: it was he who provided it with a dogmatic basis which was to be upheld for centuries. He interpreted Matthew 16:18-19 to mean that Jesus bestowed supreme authority on Peter; he held Peter to have been the first bishop of Rome; he claimed that Peter's authority had been perpetuated in his successors, enhanced by a mystical presence of Peter in the Roman see ; the authority of all other bishops is limited to their own dioceses, whereas the Pope possessed fullness of power over the whole church. These claims were never accepted in the East, but were readily accepted in the West in exchange for papal assistance.
The sixth century saw "the gathering gloom of Byzantine tyranny over the church." The Eastern Roman Emperor Phocas did issue an edict in 607, acknowledging that Rome was the head of all the churches, but this would have afforded little satisfaction to the recently dead great Pope Gregory I (590-604) or to the then-Pope Boniface III' for in the same edict Phocas described the church of Constantinople as the first of all churches, which simply added to the bitterness between Rome and Constantinople that had existed for some years. Gregory needed no acknowledgement of his primacy from such an Emperor, nor did his successor, for Gregory's own character, capacity, and charity increased the prestige of the papacy more than any Pope had since Leo I. Moreover, temporal power was neither sought by these Popes nor conceded by any Eastern Emperor. The relationship between Popes and Emperors was always uneasy, and sometimes stormy. Thus, when Pope Martin I (649-655) protested against the interference of Constantinople, where he was condemned as a traitor, and died in exile. Bad relations continued during the late seventh century and most of the eighth. The idea that the dragon, supposed to be Eastern Church at Constantinople, gave the Beast, supposed to be the Roman Church, its power and authority is a myth.

THE CONTINUOUS HISTORIC VIEW OF THE VIALS OF REVELATION 16

The first five Vials have been supposed to symbolise certain events in Europe just prior to the rise of Napoleon (regarded as a type of Christ in his judicial capacity), and certain features of the Napoleonic Wars up to 1814. The Sixth Vial is then held to represent the decline of the Turkish Empire from 1820 to 1918. Some readers may remember the attractive maps, with the Turkish Empire represented by coloured sections, which could be removed one by one to show the "drying up" of the Empire with time.
THE FIRST VIAL : (16:2) Dates are arrived at by starting from the Decree of Justinian, in +533 (recognising the Pope as lord of all mankind), and adding 1260 years to bring us to 1793, "when all Europe was convulsed by the anti-papal French Revolution" (R.R. page 130). This is already unsatisfactory. The two decrees of Justinian are dated 535 and 545 and, as we have already noted, his reign proved

"throughout a period of deep humiliation for the Papacy." Even if the addition of 1260 years is accepted, this brings us to 1795 and 1805; it is in any case strange that a switch should have been made from a date of +606 and the Decree of Phocas, leading to 1870 or thereabouts, to a decree by Justinian, leading to 1793 or so. The change



was necessary if the scheme of interpretation of the first five Vials as concerning events from 1795 to 1815 was to be retained, but this hardly seems a sufficient reason. Both starting points are in any case unsatisfactory, as we have seen.

Passing by these defects, though, can the history of that period properly be made to correspond to these Vials? First, the great voice from the heavenly temple (16:1) is said (J.T. III, page 472) to be fulfilled in the Declaration of Pillinitz (1791) by which the Austrian Emperor Leopold and the king of Prussia demanded that the French king, now sorely beset by the French Revolution, should be free to go where he pleased, and that the French assembly should be disbanded, in default of which war was threatened. Yet in E.B. (11th Edition, X, page 854) we are told, "this Declaration was but an excuse for non-interference"; and S.R. Atkins ("From Utrecht to Waterloo", page 208) writes, "This guarded statement really meant that the cautious Leopold would do nothing." How this Declaration could fulfil the global terms of 16:1 is beyond understanding. It is noteworthy that this point is omitted in R.R., C.C.W., and W.H.B.

The first Vial proper is interpreted as judgments on the papal populations of Europe, beginning with the terrors of the French Revolution and continuing to the campaigns

of Napoleon. We have already questioned the rightness of referring "them which had the mark of the Beast" to the Catholic people of Europe, and the mark itself to the sign of the Cross. But passing over this, and assuming without necessarily agreeing, that it was the Catholics of Europe who were the worst sufferers in this period, we consider France under the Revolution. The basic purpose of the National Revolutionary Assembly of 1789 was not opposition to Roman Catholicism as such: it was simply the abolition of feudalism and privilege wherever it was found, and the Catholic church was not exempt. Tithes were abolished, ecclesiastical property confiscated, and the Pope deprived of all executive power, the organisation of the church becoming almost Presbyterian in character. Reform rather than oppression marked Revolutionary policy until 1793. Then the Reign of Terror began, political opponents and rebels being the chief sufferers. One section led by Herbert did introduce a religious Reign of Terror also, and churches in Paris were closed, stripped of their bells to make cannon, and of their silver and gold to fill the depleted national treasury. The Committee of Public Safety discouraged violence against priests; in any case Herbert and his principal colleagues were executed in 1794, and the situation of the Catholic Church became much easier.

Napoleon who now rose to power was not anti-catholic; but, like others before him, he was determined to keep the church in its place. In spite of opposition from his advisers he concluded a concordat with Rome in 1801 that remained in force until 1905. The principle European countries troubled by Napoleons campaigns during this supposed First Vial period were Holland, Belgium, Prussia, the North German States, Egypt, and Syria could scarcely be called Catholic, and in any case the hardships which befell the oppressed and largely illiterate populace could hardly be thought to arise because they "bore the mark (sic) of the Beast". Their worst troubles were in fact that the French armies lived off their countries. The hardships of much of Europe during the Thirty Years War two centuries earlier, followed as it was by civil war in France and the Dutch land wars, were far greater and more protracted. In brief, the application of the First Vial to this period is totally unconvincing.

THE SECOND VIAL: (16:3). This is said to have been fulfilled (C.C.W., pages 47-48) when "the maritime power of *the Beast* was destroyed in the wars that followed the Revolution", while we read in R.R., page 153 that, as a result of the victories of the English navy from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th over the ships of "the Beast worshippers", "every living thing died in the sea; that is, every living soul on the sea belonging to the continent (which was the subject of the operation) died in the sense of ceasing to have life permitted on it."

In fact except for short intervals, France and Britain were at war for some 20 years until 1815, and each country tried to blockade the other. British and French fleets were engaged in constant war, and Britain gained complete supremacy. British trade was not seriously affected until 1811, and by 1809 British exports had reached a record height. With Napoleon controlling much of Europe, French trade prospered. France and Italy (two "Beast" countries) suffered little, as both could grow many of the excluded articles. The main nations to suffer were Spain, Holland, and northern Europe, of which only Spain was Catholic. Neutral, including American, shipping prospered in spite of the risks. By no means did the sea become stagnant, as the interpretation demands.

THE THIRD VIAL: (16: 4-7). This is referred to Napoleon's campaigns in northern Italy, desolating the country and decimating its inhabitants; the area being described

as "a perfect network of watercourses", and as a country "most distinguished by the shedding of blood of the saints and prophets" (R.R., pages 132-133). The last statement is incorrect. Bohemia, France in particular, England, Spain and Portugal were much more notorious in this respect. In his "Book of Martyrs" Foxe has much to say about persecutions in Bohemia, France, and England, and nothing about the same in Italy, probably because Protestantism had never made any headway there.

In 8:10-11, the judgment of the Third Trumpet fell on a third part of the rivers and fountains of waters, supposed to denote northern Italy, though C.C.W., page 23, also includes the regions of the Danube and Rhine. We have already noted that two other parts of the Roman Empire would fit this description, if this were the right interpretation. The devastation by Attila the Hun, supposedly occurring under that Trumpet, was far more frightful than anything under Napoleon, yet is directed against the "third part" only, whereas the current prophecy is not so restricted. Napoleon's first invasion of Italy was in 1797-8, when Napoleon issued a proclamation to the people, then under Austria and Sardinia, containing these words: "People of Italy: the French army comes to break your chains…Your property, your religion, and your usages will be respected. We make war as generous enemies, and we have no quarrel save with the tyrants who enslave you." (H.A.L. Fisher, History of Europe, page 823). The assurance was not kept well, for picture-galleries and museums were plundered, heavy taxation levied, and supplies requisitioned, but Fisher adds, after observing that Napoleon himself was an Italian: "Though he was severe, he seems to have been a liberator…Much was forgiven to the young general who broke the Austrian stranglehold…The Italian literati praised him to the skies; the best Lombards crowded to his court." (Page 824).

Napoleon's second campaign was brief (1800), and not marked by severe measures against the Italian people. The professional classes supported the new regime enthusiastically. Only the ecclesiastical hierarchy remained hostile. A number of republics were formed under French control, heavy tribute was levied, and many Italians were conscribed into the French army. But it is estimated that only a minute fraction of the population was involved. The campaign in Italy, and the short-lived occupation of the entire peninsula (not just the north) is hardly a convincing fulfilment of the fearful judgments indicated in this prophecy. It has to be said, too, that the "continuous-historic" school of the 19th century lived too close to the events of the Napoleonic era to assess their passing importance, and their expectation of the Lord's advent in **their own days has not been fulfilled.**

THE FOURTH VIAL: (16:8-9). The sun is said to symbolise the Holy Roman Emperor (R.R. page 134; also W.H.B., C.C.W. page 48, include other 'kings and emperors' made and unmade by Napoleon). The "him" (R.V. "it"). Of 16:8 is regarded as being Napoleon himself (J.T. and W.H.B.).

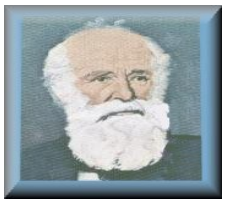
But "him" has nothing to do with Napoleon: it refers to the sun of the symbol, which is a masculine noun. The enhanced heat of the sun here in no way corresponds to the condition of the countries supposed to be represented. The Austrian Holy Roman Empire was crushed by Napoleon's victories, and the Holy Roman Empire came to an end in 1806. As observed by H.A.W., page 196, the result of the Napoleonic wars was the opposite of what is supposed, for they were followed by "the biggest revival of religion the world has ever known, with the possible exception of the Reformation." The revival was particularly prominent in America, and even in France there was a remarkable pro-papal revival in the 19th century. As for the suggestion that Napoleon

was a type of Christ executing judgments, he was totally unlike our Lord, being motivated by sheer ambition.

THE FIFTH VIAL: (16: 10-11). The seat of the Beast is said to be Rome, not in itself an unreasonable identification. Its correctness (R.R., page 135) is regarded as proved by the events after Vials 1-4 being directed against the Pope and his dominions. However:
Though relations between the Revolutionary French government and Pope Pius VI had been strained, Napoleon took exception to the way the Pope had been treated, and to the circumstances of his death. The new Pope Pius VII, was only elected after some delay, and at this time Napoleon was determined to restore the position of the Catholic Church in France to some degree, and signed a Concordat in 1801 on terms favourable to himself. In spite of uneasy relations, in December 1804 the pope was induced to proclaim him Emperor. From summer 1805 relations deteriorated, owing largely to Napoleon's high-handed attitude, and in 1808 the Papal States were put under French military occupation, the Pope's political authority in Rome and district remaining intact. In summer 1809 things came to a head, the Pope's temporal power was abolished, and French troops assumed full control of Rome. The Pope excommunicated Napoleon, and French troops, going beyond Napoleon's orders kidnapped the Pope, and took him to Savona in N.W. Italy, where he lived for some years in virtual captivity. Early in 1811 Napoleon suspended the power of the Papacy throughout his empire, and had the Pope transferred to Fontainebleau, where he remained until 1814. Then, following the collapse of the French Empire, he returned via Savona to an excited reception in Rome. In October 1817 the Pope actually intervened to try to improve the conditions of Napoleon's exile on St. Helena, in the course of which he acknowledged the latter's work in re-establishing the Catholic religion in France.
Must we not say that the terrors predicted in 16:10-11 far exceed the troubles experienced by the Pope early in the 19th century; nor was their any noteworthy "blasphemy" from the subjects of the Beast. To try to stretch the application of 16:11 to events in 1854 and 1870 (W.H.B., 4th Edition reprint 1969, pages 143-144) is a desperate expedient. In any case, the decisions taken by the Papacy during this period should be regarded as wrong rather than especially blasphemous.

THE SIXTH VIAL: (16:12-16). This has been interpreted of the gradual decline of the Turkish Empire from 1820 t0 1918. The author of the present notes (A.D.N.) spent a long time before he rejected it, even when inexorable facts had compelled him to reject the continuous-historic scheme as a whole. Joseph Mede's "Key of the Revelation" was published in 1643. Writing 200 years in advance, when the Turkish Empire was almost at its zenith, Mede viewed this Vial as predicting its decline. The nation of Assyria which occupied the banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris for centuries, is described in Isaiah 8:20 as "the waters of the river", whilst the fall of kingdoms is likened to the drying up of waters in the cases of Egypt (Isa.19: 4-5), and Babylon (Jeremiah 50:38; 51:36), and powerful nations generally (Zech.10: 11). Again, while the entire length of the Euphrates formed part of the Turkish Empire until 1918, once this area (Mesopotamia) had been wrested from it, the long decline was arrested by the famous Mustapha Kamal Ataturk. These seemed to be impressive reasons to accept Mede's views.
But they must now be examined more closely. In the first place, the decline did not begin anywhere near 1820. Some of the eastern conquests were lost in the 17th

century, and the northern territories in the 18th, which breaks the supposed historical sequence as a sequel to the Fifth Vial. Nor is the statement (J.T., III, page 546) that "affairs continued generally prosperous with the Turks till the commencement of 1820" correct. "Things went radically and irretrievably wrong at the end of the seventeenth century" (A.Mango, "Turkey", page 25; cf. H.A.W., page 200). In the second place, Turkey retained control of the Euphrates during the whole period of its decline right up to 1981. But notwithstanding present difficulties, Turkey underwent an immense revival under Ataturk, and this cannot be reconciled with the view that the decline of Turkey could cease as soon as the Euphrates ceased to be part of its territory, **for this is still not the case.** A good one-third of its length is still in modern Turkey, and in the 1970's a giant dam for power and irrigation has been constructed at Keban on this river. If Turkey is understood under this term, the river has not dried up even now.

CONCLUSION

The above critique, culled from "Apocalypse for Everyman" is quite devastating, for it demonstrates that the continuous historical approach is inconsistent with the historical facts. Therefore even without subjecting the continuous historic interpretation to the scrutiny of Scripture we can see that it fails on its own terms. It is this sort of treatment of Scripture that holds it up to ridicule, and reinforces public opinion that "the Bible can be made to say anything, it depends on your interpretation." This is palpably untrue, Scripture speaks clearly to us, provided we approach it with an unbiased view, and we apply hermeneutical principles to the interpretation of texts. The expectation of our early brethren was that the return of Christ was imminent. "Elpis Israel" was published in 1850 and the three volumes of "Eureka" between 1862 and 1869, this explains the fascination with the politics of the day, and why they play such a large part in the expositions. However, world history did not stop in 1870 – we have since had two World Wars (something inconceivable in J.T.'s day), the collapse of Russia and the triumph of global capitalism and above all the **establishment of a Jewish state.** All these important developments are hardly touched upon, yet surely the return of the Jews is more important than the French Revolution? The Jehovah's witnesses predicted the return of Christ in 1914 (they also have a continuous historic approach), when this did not materialise they substituted this with the *parousia*-the invisible return and rule of Christ. Such is the perfidy of human nature; it never wants to admit that it is wrong. Fortunately Christadelphians have never suffered such extremes, although some would almost claim inspiration for J.T.'s works. Here then follow some words from the great man himself: (after being chided for inconsistency), "Must a man never progress? If he discovers an error in his premises, must he forever hold it for the sake of consistency? May such a calamity never befall me – rather let me change every day, till I get it right at last." To this we can only add, **Amen.**