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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the remarkable features of the short apocalypse in Didache 16 is the way in which the final evil is envisaged as emerging from within the community:¹

For in the last days, false prophets and corrupters will multiply, and the sheep will turn themselves (πραγματεύονται) into wolves and love will turn into hate. For when lawlessness increases, they will hate one another and persecute and betray, and then the world deceiver will appear as a son of God and do signs and wonders, and the world will be given into his hands, and he will do lawless deeds which have never happened since the creation. (Did 16.3–4)²

The antichrist does not appear to be Caesar, but to be an embodiment of a division within the community itself. Elaine Pagels has aptly characterized this phenomena in the biblical texts with her description of Satan as “the intimate enemy.”³ The Didache here shows a consciousness of a world where appearances cannot be trusted, even within the community of the redeemed. Beware! Lamps are

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³ All translations of the Didache in this essay are my own.

always in danger of being extinguished; the loincloth is always in danger of coming undone. Even a long period of membership is no guarantee that the member will be found perfect (16.1–2)—so fragile is the equilibrium of the community.

This suspicion that the antichrist really reflects division within the community receives support from the warning which is given against teachers\(^4\) who may suddenly turn and seek to destroy the community: “But if the same teacher should turn (στραφεῖσ) and teach another teaching in order to destroy (εἰς τὸ καταλῦσαι), do not listen to him” (11.1).\(^5\) A similar concern informs the conclusion of the Two Ways teaching, where a warning is given: “Beware lest anyone leads you astray from this way of teaching, since he teaches you apart from God” (6.1). Beneath the ordinary human exterior of any community member in the Didache may lurk the demonic forces which seek to overthrow the community.\(^6\)

II. Profile of a Witch-Believing Society

This kind of situation fits the profile of a “witch-believing system” as has been delineated by Mary Douglas in her perceptive book *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*.\(^7\) Her anthropological analysis is based upon the correlation of two variables—grid and group. Grid refers to the degree of formal structure and clear allocation of roles; group

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\(^4\) I translate the label διδάσκων as “teachers” here without necessarily accepting that they are designated officials as such, as is argued by G. Schöllgen, “Die Didache als Kirchenordnung: Zur Frage des Abfassungszweckes und seinen Konsequenzen für die Interpretation,” *JAC* 29 (1986), pp. 19–26. I have argued elsewhere that this passage refers to apostles; see Draper (1991), pp. 356–60; cf. U. Neymeyr, *Die Lehrer im zweiten Jahrhundert* (Leiden, 1989), pp. 139–55.


\(^6\) This ethos is apparent also in Mt 13:36–43, where the weeds which grow together with the wheat are the children of the evil one whom the devil sows among the righteous. The interpretation changes the emphasis of the parable so that it now refers to problems within the Christian community which are caused by πάντα τὰ σκόνδαλα καὶ τοὺς πολεοῦτας τὴν ἀδικίαν (all causes of sin and all evildoers).