

**Antichrist in the early Church.** The word ‘antichrist’ is found in the New Testament only in 1 John 2: 18-22, 4, 3; 2 John 7, and, it is always in the singular, apart from the case of 1 John 2: 18-22, where the masters of error are seen as a mass of antichrists. It is unknown whether it was a creation of the presbyterate, or whether the latter had taken it from an earlier tradition, given that in the Christian milieu it is not found earlier than the end of the first century, namely in Polycarp 7.1. Polycarp takes the word from John 1-2 to apply it to those who deny the incarnation of Christ, but he distinguishes antichrist from the devil and from Satan, from whom he comes and to whom he belongs. In *Sibylline Oracle* III 63-74 we do find Satan identified with the Antichrist. The *Didaché* (16, 3-4) continues the line of the New Testament, presenting the antichrist, in that he is a corruptor who has a universal dominion. Irenaeus as the counterpart of the Son of God. Irenaeus attempts to deduce the term ‘antichrist’ from the number 666 of Apocalypse 13: 18 (*Adv. haer.* V: 25-30), and describes his apostasy and his claim to be adored like God. In the course of Christian history an antichrist at times took on political connotations, in that he was identified with enemies of the Christian faith.

VITTORINO GROSSI

Translation David L D’Avray

**Bibliography:** J. JEREMIAS, *Der Antchrist in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Göttingen, 1930; B. RIGAUD, *L’Antéchrist*, Paris, 1932; A. BAUMGARTEN, *Antichrist among Jews and Gentiles*, in M. GOODMAN (ed.), *Jews in Graeco-Roman World*, Oxford, 1998, pp.113-133.