

HISTORY OF CHIEF VIEWS ABOUT THE ANTICHRIST

A quick sketch by Martin R. Noland, September 24, 2024

Based on Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994). McGinn was at Univ. of Chicago Divinity School.

OT Sources: Daniel 7-12 – the four beasts, ch. 7. Luther says these are: Assyrians or Babylonians; Medes and Persians; Greeks; and Romans (AE 35:295) (McGinn notes the “11th horn” is described in Daniel 7:24-27; 8:9-14, 23-26; 9:27-28; and 11:21-12:45).

Non-canonical Apocalyptic Sources: The Book of Jubilees; The Testament of Moses; 1 Enoch 85-90 (aka The Animal Apocalypse); Sibylline Oracles, Book 3; The Apocalypse of Moses; The Apocalypse of Abraham; 1 Enoch 91 and 93 (aka The Apocalypse of Weeks); 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra; 3 Baruch; Paraleipomena of Jeremiah (i.e., the omitted parts of Jeremiah), et.al. (McGinn says there are about 15 sources total).

NT Sources: Little Apocalypse (Matthew 24:1-15; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-38); 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (Man of Sin; Man of Lawlessness; Son of Perdition); 1 John 2:18-19, 22 (the Antichrist; the Liar); 1 John 4:3 (the Antichrist); 2 John 7 (the Deceiver, the Antichrist); Revelation 11:7 & 13:1-10 (Beast from the Abyss, Beast from the Sea one of whose heads received a fatal wound).

Christian Views:

Didache 16:3-4 (late 1st century): “in the last days . . . shall appear the Deceiver of the World” (McGinn, 57).

Irenaeus (130-200) “Against Heresies” 5.30.1: “Antichrist will recapitulate apostasy in himself”; Irenaeus was one of the first millennialists (i.e., Christ will come to establish a thousand-year reign on earth, a future golden age for Christians) (McGinn, 58-60).

Hippolytus (170-236) “On the Antichrist.” (McGinn, 60-62).

Tertullian (160-225) – a Montanist, who believed in current antichrists (heretics) AND a final Antichrist who will persecute the faithful. (McGinn, 62-63).

Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Tertullian – represent the “mainline eschatology” of the early church (McGinn, 63).

Augustine (354-430) – opposed all attempts at reading the course of history and determining the end time and the millennium; see “Letter 199” and *City of God* 18 and 20. In *Homilies on 1 John*, interpreting 1 John 2:18-27, antichrists are ALL heretics, both those who leave the church and those who stay in it. (McGinn, 76-78).

Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202) – restored the idea of the millennium and attempted to read the course of history and determine its end time. In this “new apocalyptic theology of

history, antichrist – both collective, multiple, and individual – played a key role” (McGinn, 135-142).

Amalricians at Paris (influenced by Joachim; declared heretics in 1210) – “pope was the antichrist, prelates of the church his members, and Rome was Babylon.” (McGinn, 153).

Rhetorical attacks between the courts of Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen vs. Pope Gregory IX & Innocent IV (1236-1286) – Pope Gregory attacked Frederick as being the “beast arising from the sea”; Frederick’s court identified the pope as the red horse (Rev. 6:4), the dragon (Rev. 12), and the angel from the abyss (Rev. 16:1-3), and that since *Innocencius papa* = 666, Innocent IV was the true antichrist. (McGinn, 152-157).

Franciscan order - after death of Saint Francis, it was influenced by Joachim. Key figure was Peter Olivi (1248-1298) who gave the papal Antichrist a central role. An entire order was asking the question, “Could the pope be the antichrist?” Bonaventure was appointed by the pope to suppress those who taught or followed these ideas. (McGinn, 157-166).

The 2nd Great Schism (1378-1417) – Two pope, one at Avignon and one at Rome. Their supporters split Europe into two factions; both popes were considered by the other faction to be the antichrist, and their own pope the angelic pastor. (McGinn, 177-181)

John Wycliff (1330-1384) – in his “On Apostasy,” “On the Pope’s Power,” and “Evangelical Work” (books 3 & 4) “the pope is the evident Antichrist, not just the individual person who sets up more laws that are against Christ’s law, but the multitude of popes from the time of the Church’s endowment [314-335 A.D. per Donation of Constantine] and of cardinals, bishops, and their other accomplices. The person of Antichrist is a monstrous composite one” (*Opus evangelicorum*, III, p. 107; McGinn, 182).

Lollards – followers of Wycliff in England, 1382 to the English Reformation, concluding with the 2nd Act of Supremacy by Queen Elizabeth I (1559).

Jan Hus (1372-1415) – very similar position to Wycliff, burned at the stake at the Council of Constance after being assured of safety.

Hussites – follower of Hus in Bohemia and Moravia, 1450-1620.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) – in February 1502, after Luther became acquainted with Lorenzo Valla’s book exposing the fraud of the “Donation of Constantine” “he had virtually no more doubts that the pope was the expected antichrist” (Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, p. 346). This resulted in his response to Augustine Alveld’s treatise, Luther’s was titled “On the Papacy in Rome: Against the Most Celebrated Romanist in Leipzig” (AE 39:49-104), the first of many anti-papal tracts and treatises.

Smalcald Articles II, iv – Luther’s own testament: The Papacy, sec. 10 “The pope is the real Antichrist who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, for the pope will not permit Christians to be saved except by his own power”

Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, section 39: “it is plain that the marks of the Antichrist coincide with those of the pope’s kingdom and his followers.”

Augsburg Confession Art. 28, section 13-14: “[The spiritual power] should not invade the function of the [temporal power], should not set up and depose kings, should not annul temporal laws or undermine obedience to the governments, should not make or prescribe to the temporal power laws concerning worldly matters.”

John Calvin (1509-1564) – Agreed with Luther on the view of the papacy as an institutional Antichrist, but as a rule Calvin avoided apocalyptic speculations (McGinn, 212-213).

Anabaptists (16th cent), e.g., Thomas Müntzer, and the Peasants Revolt – generally believed that not only the pope, but also Luther and other leaders of the institutional church were part of the Antichrist. Strong apocalypticism in their teaching (McGinn, 213-217).

English Reformers – Agreed with Luther’s view on the papacy, especially after the inquisitorial reign of Queen Mary (McGinn, 218-220).

English Separatists and Puritans – argued that the English church remained part of Babylon after the Reformation, and its bishops were therefore antichrists (McGinn, 220-226).

Catholic Counter-Reformation – originally, Luther was argued to be the antichrist or his immediate successor. The Jesuits argued on the basis of the New Testament and the Fathers that the papacy could NOT be the antichrist, because the “Last Enemy” was a future figure without ties to current events. This became the dominant view thereafter in the Catholic church (McGinn, 226-230).

Antichrist views in the New World – The Anglo-American Puritans argued that the English church was part of Antichrists’ Babylon. This contributed to the American Revolution. A similar view among Puritans of the French Catholic church appeared during the French Revolution. A farmer, William Miller, in upstate New York taught a premillennial view, i.e., Jesus would return in 1843, establish his millennial earthly kingdom, followed by the Antichrist, then Jesus’ return (founder of the Millerites and the 7th Day Adventists) (McGinn 236-242).

Dispensationalism premillennialism – John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) distinguished seven dispensations, with the last dispensation being the millennium, and the Antichrist appearing prior to Jesus’ return. Made popular by W. Blackstone’s *Jesus is Coming* (1886); also, by Dwight Moody (1837-1899; founder of Moody Bible institute in 1886); *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909); Bible Institute of Los Angeles (f. 1907, aka “Biola”); Dallas Theological Seminary (f. 1925); John Walvoord (1910-2002; at Dallas Theological Seminary); and Hal Lindsey (1929- ; author of *Late, Great Planet Earth*, 1970). It is the dominant view among fundamentalists and Evangelicals today (McGinn, 247, 252-262). See also George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford U. Press, 1980) and Matthew A. Sutton, *American Apocalypse* (Belknap Press of Harvard U., 2014).