



The Didache and early Christian satanology and demonology

Thomas J. Farrar

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¹ Revisions were made to this document after it was pointed out to me by Jonathan Burke that I had not fairly represented his views and also to discuss the complex issues surrounding the Didache in more depth.

1. Introduction

The term "Apostolic Fathers" refers to a collection of writings which

are considered to be consistent with the general principles and theologies of an apostolic tradition that circulated among the churches from the end of the first century into the middle of the second century. These texts, only tentatively defined, are generally seen to include the following works: Epistle of Barnabas, 1-2 Clement, Didache, Epistle to Diognetus, Epistles of Ignatius, Epistle of Polycarp, Martyrdom of Polycarp, Shepherd of Hermas, and the fragments of Papias.²

They were not ultimately not included in the New Testament canon but were also not viewed as scandalous or heretical, and "for some Christians at least, a few of the texts that came to form the Apostolic Fathers were viewed with a reverence that may have approached that of Scripture."³ Their relevance to us is due not any claim that their testimony is inspired or authoritative, but because "As a combined voice they speak loudly about the origins of early Christian faith and culture."⁴

2. The Didache

The Didache (Greek for teaching or instruction) is an early Christian document which survives in only one complete manuscript dating from the 11th century.⁵

"As an oral tradition, the Didache encapsulated the lived practice by which non-Jews were initiated into the altered habits of perceiving, judging and acting characteristic of one branch of the Jesus movement during the mid-first century."⁶

Note that in spite of the quotation above, most scholars date the Didache to the end of the first century,⁷ while acknowledging that it draws on earlier traditional material. Most scholars believe that the Didache is a composite work which has undergone compilation and redaction, perhaps in several steps:

"The Didache is a composite work, which has evolved over a considerable period, from its beginning as a Jewish catechetical work, which was taken up and developed by the Church into a manual of Church life and order."⁸

"It is entirely likely that the Didache is an 'evolved' or composite document and thus may represent several theological perspectives."⁹

2 Jefford 2005: 7-8.

3 Jefford 2005: 7.

4 Jefford 2005: 8.

5 Milavec 2003(2): xiv.

6 Milavec 2003(2): ix.

7 Betz 1997: 244-245.

8 Draper 1997: 75.

9 Jefford 2009: 114.

The Didache consists of three main parts.¹⁰ The Two Ways Teaching (Didache 1-6) contains pre-baptismal instruction for Gentile converts, adapted from an earlier text of Jewish origin.¹¹ Chapters 7-15 contain rules for the formal conduct of the church, focusing on liturgy and church leadership. The final section (chapter 16) is an apocalyptic conclusion. Most scholars believe that its ending has been lost. The ending in chapter 16 is “abrupt and unresolved...obviously only half-complete,”¹² and the way in which the scribe uncharacteristically left space at the end of the work and omitted the usual punctuation mark indicating the end of a literary work suggests that he “knew his exemplar was defective”.¹³

The Apostolic Constitutions are a “moderately edited version of the Didache included in a larger church manual compiled around 380 C.E.” Milavec explains that “The longer ending found therein has been widely accepted as providing a ‘very loose reproduction’ (Niederwimmer 1998: 227) of the ‘lost ending’ of the Didache.”¹⁴ Aldridge states, “There is good evidence that this is the Didache’s true ending (approximately).”¹⁵

2.1. The Two Ways Tradition

The Two Ways teaching in Didache 1-6 draws on a tradition which is found in several other Jewish and Christian texts of the period, including the Community Rule or Manual of Discipline (1QS) from the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Epistle of Barnabas, and the Doctrina Apostolorum. Most scholars believe that all of these texts depend on a common Jewish text which is no longer extant. There is debate about which of these texts is closest to the original. At least one scholar has suggested the Doctrina on account of its brevity,¹⁶ but a number of scholars identify Barnabas as the closest to the original since it is less Christianized.¹⁷

Concerning the date of the Epistle of Barnabas, Holmes notes:

“It appears to have been written after the destruction of the temple in AD 70 (16.3-5) but before the city was rebuilt by Hadrian following the revolt of AD 132-135. Within these limits it is difficult to be any more precise.”¹⁸

It is thus probable that the Epistle of Barnabas is roughly contemporary with the Didache. Thus these two texts appear to represent two parallel traditions concerning the use of the Two Ways teaching in the early church. The way the teaching is preserved is remarkably different. While Barnabas (like the Jewish text 1QS) sets the teaching in a dualistic eschatological context, the Didache has omitted the eschatological and cosmic dualism and focused entirely on ethics. The

10 So North 2014.

11 Van de Sandt 2012: 259; Slee 2004: 60.

12 Aldridge 1999: 3.

13 Aldridge 1999: 4.

14 Milavec 2003(1): 833.

15 Aldridge 1999: 5.

16 Sorensen, p. 198.

17 Paget 1994: 83; Suggs 1972: 70; Koester 2000: 282.

18 Holmes 2007: 373.

Doctrina is closer to the Didache but does retain cosmic dualism in a brief mention of “two angels, one of right, the other of wrong.”

Kloppenborg summarizes the adaptation of the Two Ways tradition in the Didache:

“Ethical motivation is not derived from the figure of the coming judgment or from the sunkrisis of the respective fates of the just and the unjust. Where the Manual [1QS] has harnessed the image of the apocalyptic struggle of the Two Angels in order to motivate ethics, the Didache has eliminated both angels and eschatology.”¹⁹

Instead of being grounded in eschatology, the ethic of the Two Ways in the Didache is grounded in the Decalogue.

“It is also striking how different the Two Ways of the Didache/Doctrina is from that of Barnabas or the Manual [1QS], both in the lack of apocalyptic appeals and in the marked shift toward the authority of the Torah.”²⁰

Whereas Barnabas and 1QS emphasize the final judgment and the respective rewards and retribution to be distributed to the adherents of the two ways, the Didache material is silent on this. In short, the Didache has ‘Torahized’ the Two Ways ethic. Why has this been done?

“Relatively demythologized and ethicized, the Two Ways passage in the Didache appears better formed to serve the simple function of ethical instruction and less useful as an instrument of community identity.”²¹

This explanation makes sense when we consider that this part of the Didache was designed for pre-baptismal instruction of Gentile converts. Simplicity would be paramount. Moreover, other scholars have suggested that the elimination of eschatological content here was a structural move. The Didache closes with an apocalyptic section, and reserving eschatology to that portion of the book would make it more climactic.

“One interesting difference between the Didache and Barnabas concerns the material on the Two Ways. It was noted in 12.2 that Barnabas had several references to evil figures such as Satan, the Black One, etc. However, when the Didache used the same material it omitted all reference to such figures. **This serves to highlight the one passage where the Didache did refer to an evil eschatological figure: Didache 16**, where the appearance of ‘the deceiver of the world’ was described.”²²

“in place of the original brief eschatological conclusion to the Two Ways section, the writer has set ch. 16 as an extended eschatological section, **to be the climax to his work.**”²³

19 Kloppenborg 1995: 97.

20 Kloppenborg 1995: 109.

21 Suggs 1972: 71.

22 Jenks 1991: 308, emphasis added.

23 Chester 1992: 287, emphasis added.

In addition to these functional and stylistic explanations, other scholars have suggested that the Didache's redaction of the Two Ways material was theologically motivated:

Clerici stresses "that the Didache has Christianized the Jewish tradition in a spiritualizing way (that is, the eschatological hope is made ethical, and the concept of the kingdom supraterritorial)."²⁴

"The former position of Clerici, at least, comes close to that of Wengst, who argues that it is now ethics, not eschatology, that has become the controlling element in the Didache, in contrast to the New Testament and especially the Jesus tradition...so eschatology has become a sub-aspect of ethics, and a mere section of teaching concerning the last things."²⁵

In other words, the Didachist may have sought to demythologize or Christianize eschatology.

2.2. The Eschatological Ending

There is a range of scholarly views concerning the literary relationship of the eschatological section of the Didache (chapter 16) and the Two Ways tradition.

Syreeni thinks that "Composition-historically, the Two Ways section, possibly together with Chap. 16, would be the starting-point of the literary evolution,"²⁶ but considers it unlikely that "the whole of Chap. 16 formed a literary unity with the Two Ways section before the redaction of the document."²⁷

Jefford explains:

"Both the Two Ways source and the Two Ways motif are restricted primarily to the materials of chaps. 1-5 (and 16, according to some authorities). This restriction has often lead [sic] scholars to two conclusions: 1) chaps. 1-5 (and 16?) probably reflect the earliest form of the Didache (i.e., the Two Ways source) to which chaps. 6-15 were added subsequently."²⁸

Bammel argues that Didache 16 is based on a variant reading of the Two Ways source, i.e. different to that used by 1QS and Barnabas,²⁹ one which preserves the ethical theme of the Two Ways Teaching.

Peerbolte thinks that "Didache 16 was written as a substitute for the final section of the Two Ways source."³⁰

24 Chester 1992: 287.

25 Chester 1992: 287.

26 Syreeni 2005: 88.

27 Syreeni 2005: 90.

28 Jefford 1989: 22-23.

29 Bammel 1996: 371.

30 Peerbolte 1996: 172.

Whatever the case, most scholars see a literary link between chapter 16 and the Two Ways teaching. If eschatology has been removed from the Two Ways teaching in order to heighten the emphasis on the apocalyptic ending, chapter 16 is that much more important for determining the eschatology of this early Christian community. The extant ending reads thus:

“Watch for your life's sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; but be ready, for you know not the hour in which our Lord will come. But come together often, seeking the things which are befitting to your souls: for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if you are not made perfect in the last time. For in the last days false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate; for when lawlessness increases, they shall hate and persecute and betray one another, and then shall appear the world-deceiver as Son of God, and shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands, and he shall do iniquitous things which have never yet come to pass since the beginning. Then shall the creation of men come into the fire of trial, and many shall be made to stumble and shall perish; but those who endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself. And then shall appear the signs of the truth: first, the sign of an outspreading in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet. And third, the resurrection of the dead - - yet not of all, but as it is said: "The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him." Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.”

2.3. The World-Deceiver

Since we are seeking the Didache's view of Satan and demons, the “world-deceiver” of Didache 16:4 (Greek: *kosmoplanes*) is of particular interest. We must bear in mind that the ending of chapter 16 is probably lost, and all we have is the later, interpolated ending preserved in the Apostolic Constitutions, which Aldridge represents thus:

“8 Then the world will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven with the angels of His power, in the throne of His kingdom, 9 to condemn the devil, the deceiver of the world, and to render to every one according to his deeds. 10 Then shall the wicked go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous shall enter eternal life, 11 to inherit those things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, such things as God hath prepared for them that love Him. 12 And they shall rejoice in the kingdom of God, which is in Christ Jesus.”³¹

Concerning this lost ending, Peerbolte writes:

“It is probable, although uncertain, that the original ending of the Didache contained an account of the defeat of the *kosmoplanes*, and some description of the final judgement...Constitutiones apostolorum VII,32,4-5 does provide a description of Christ's

³¹ Aldridge 1999: 12-13. Emphasis added.

judgement of the *kosmoplanes*, but this text is, at best, an elaboration of the original ending of the Didache.”³²

The key question here is whether the world-deceiver suggests a reference to the devil. The version of the ending preserved in the Apostolic Constitutions explicitly identifies the world-deceiver as the devil, but this is probably an interpolation.³³ It nevertheless represents the earliest known interpretation of the world-deceiver’s identity.

Three views on the world-deceiver’s identity can be found in the scholarly literature. Milavec states that Didache 16 does not endorse the idea that Satan is the source of the signs and wonders associated with the Antichrist figure.³⁴ He is aware that this puts the Didache at odds with 2 Thessalonians 2 which, in a passage that probably draws on shared tradition, explicitly states the link between the signs and wonders of the lawless one and the working of Satan.

Other scholars observe the parallel between the world-deceiver of Didache 16:4 and the “devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” in Revelation 12:9. This has led Jenks to posit a ‘Satanic link’:

“His particular title, *kosmoplanes* (‘world-deceiver’), is not the same phrase as in Rev 12:9 but the description seems to be a clear allusion to the satanic connections of this figure.”³⁵

Verheyden concurs that “This character calls forth associations with traditions on the Antichrist and Satan.”³⁶

Also drawing on this parallel, Niederwimmer describes the world-deceiver’s activities as diabolische (diabolical) and he himself as damonischen (demonic).³⁷

Peerbolte goes even further. Drawing on the parallel with Revelation 12:9, together with the early Christian interpretation preserved in the Apostolic Constitutions, he identifies the world-deceiver as Satan himself:

“The description of the Dragon (=Satan) in Rev 12.9 as ‘deceiving the entire world’ corresponds exactly with the description of the ‘deceiver of the world’ of Did. 16,4. Hence, it is best to regard the title ‘deceiver of the world’ as a description of Satan. This is the way in which the redactor of the Constitutiones apostolorum apparently understood the expression *kosmoplanes*. In the description of the judgement he employs almost the same word, this time as an adjective to ho diabolos (cf. above, p. 180, n. 3).”³⁸

32 Peerbolte 1996: 180.

33 See Garrow 2013: 56-57.

34 Milavec 2003(1): 648.

35 Jenks 1991: 310.

36 Verheyden 2005: 204.

37 Niederwimmer 1993: 262.

38 Peerbolte 1996: 181.

While Milavec has repudiated any link between the world-deceiver and Satan, a number of other scholars have argued that Didache 16:4 does indirectly or even directly refer to Satan.

2.4. Other references to Satan and demons in the Didache

Scholars have identified a number of other possible references to the satanic or demonic in the Didache.

2.4.1. 'The evil one' in Didache 8:2

The Didache cites the Lord's Prayer in chapter 8. The words *alla rhusai hemas apo tou ponerou* in Didache 8:2 are identical to Matthew 6:13b. The Didache's form of the prayer may be dependent on Matthew, or may draw on the same oral tradition as Matthew. Either way, it is likely that Matthew and the Didache's author understood this clause in the same way. The majority of modern translations,³⁹ commentators⁴⁰ and grammarians⁴¹ agree that this clause in Matthew 6:13 should be translated "deliver us from the evil one", a reference to the devil. Ayo notes that "virtually all the Greek patristic writers" saw a reference to the devil in this text in Matthew.⁴² It is thus likely that Didache 8:2 also refers to the devil, and several translators have rendered it as such.⁴³ Sorensen comments that Didache 8:2 "suggests the satanic agent in Matthew's version of the same."⁴⁴ This echoes the earlier assessment of Brown.⁴⁵

Thus, in the Didache's version of the Lord's Prayer, we likely have an explicit reference to Satan as 'the evil one' (*ho poneros*), a term used for Satan in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:13 as well as a number of other New Testament texts (Matthew 5:37; 13:19; 13:39; John 17:15; Ephesians 6:16; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 John 2:13-14; 1 John 3:12; 1 John 5:18-19).

The significance of a reference to Satan in a prayer that obviously occupied a central role in the liturgy of this community cannot be discounted.

2.4.2. Possible references to demons

Commenting on the antichrist theme in the Didache as a whole, Draper comments, "Beneath the ordinary human exterior of any community member in the Didache may lurk the demonic forces which seek to overthrow the community."⁴⁶

Commenting on the relationship between Didache 6:3 and 1 Corinthians 8-10, Cheung writes that "the fundamental reason for the rejection of idol food is the same for both the Didache and Paul: idol food is demonic."⁴⁷

39 NKJV; NRSV; NIV; NET; NLT; HCSB.

40 Bruner 2004: 314; Carson 2010: 208; Evans 2012: 148.

41 Wallace 1996: 233; Zerwick 1963: 29.

42 Ayo 2002: 95.

43 Roberts & Donaldson 1867; Lightfoot 1885; Lake 1913.

44 Sorensen 2002: 199 n. 82.

45 Brown 1961: 204-208.

46 Draper 1995: 284.

Commenting on Didache 11:7-12, Tibbs writes, “All of the statements are uttered by a prophet *en pneumati*, indicating that a foreign spirit is speaking through the prophet.”⁴⁸ He concurs with the earlier assessment of Richardson that *en pneumati* means “speaking while possessed by a divine or demonic spirit.”⁴⁹

Although Sorensen concludes that “the Didache offers little suggestion that demons play a direct role in contrary human actions,”⁵⁰ he further states, “Through its juxtaposition of demonic with divine possession, the Two Ways doctrine offers a theological basis for exorcism before baptism.”

Rordorf goes into more detail on this point, positing that, although the Didache does not mention a baptismal rite of *abrenuntiatio* (renunciation of Satan) as later traditions do, the roots of this rite must go back to Judaism:

“I believe that it is also necessary to mention, in this context, the baptismal rite of *abrenuntiatio*. Although it is attested explicitly only at the end of the second century, its roots must go back far in time. In fact, it is unthinkable that one could have created, at the end of the second century, a rite of renunciation of Satan, of his angels and of his works, a rite which expresses a very marked eschatological dualism. This rite must be connected to a Jewish and Jewish Christian dualistic conception, to which was attached in its turn, as we see it, certain forms of the *duae viae*. But the right [sic] of renunciation of Satan implies the existence of a prior catechesis.

That is to say that there was, without doubt, an uninterrupted tradition of pre-baptismal ethical instruction in the Christian church of the first two centuries, a tradition which has its roots in Judaism, which has its *Sitz im Leben* in the context of the initiation of Gentile converts, and which led to the institution of the Christian catechumenate at the end of the second century. The *duae viae* has its place in this tradition.”⁵¹

Sorensen allows the possibility that Satan or demons are referred to in Didache 3:1 and 6:1. He views Didache 8:2, 10:5 and 16:4 as similarly ambiguous on this point.⁵²

In light of the above, a balanced position would be that there are a number of passages in the Didache which may allude to demons, though none can be said to with certainty.

2.5. Assessing Burke’s claims regarding the Didache and early Christian satanology and demonology

2.5.1. The alleged absence of Satan and demons from the Didache

47 Cheung 1999: 214.

48 Tibbs 2007: 222.

49 Richardson 1995: 176 n. 64.

50 Sorensen 2002: 199.

51 Rordorf 1997: 158.

52 Sorensen 2002: 199 n. 82.

Christadelphian apologist Jonathan Burke claims that the Didache makes no reference to Satan or demons, which he calls “significant” in what is an early Christian creedal statement.⁵³ In light of the possible references to Satan and demons discussed above, his claim must be classified as uncertain at best. Moreover, even if the claim were true, its significance is reduced when we recognize that the Didache is not a creed in the sense of a confession of fundamental Christian theology.

For instance, although the Didache is viewed specifically as catechetical material for baptismal candidates, “Commentators generally agree that the few sentences which are devoted to the baptismal liturgy in the Didache are as notable for what they omit as for what they contain.”⁵⁴ None of the principal theological effects of baptism are described. Similarly, Didache 9.1-10.5 “pictures a meal with no reference to the death of Jesus and without any sacramental character, not followed until 10.6 by a transition to the sacramental eucharist.”⁵⁵ Thus, even the specific areas of focus of the Didache are very light on theology, leaving us with a “deceptively simple text that defies easy interpretation.”⁵⁶

Thus, both Burke’s claim itself, and its significance if it were true, are not very convincing.

Elsewhere Burke has stated that the evidence of the Didache “harmonizes well with the Christadelphian model of a gradually maturing community which put away belief in literal demons.”⁵⁷ The diminution of interest in exorcism in the early church is widely recognized by scholars such as Twelftree and Sorensen, but their explanations for this trend do not include the church abandoning belief in literal demons. Twelftree specifically rules out the idea that exorcism declined because of “increasing intellectual sophistication.”⁵⁸ Sorensen concludes that demonic possession is found both in the narrative and epistolary portions of the New Testament. The difference is that in the narrative writings, demonic possession consists of “physiological disturbances subject to exorcism,” while in the epistles, discussions of possession “tend to revolve around demonic and divine influences upon ethical actions,” which are not subject to exorcism in the New Testament.⁵⁹ It is telling that these experts on early Christian demonology reach very different conclusions than Burke does.

2.5.2. The marginalization of angelology in the Two Ways Teaching

More promising is Burke’s analysis of the Two Ways tradition. He adduces the Didache’s stripping away of references to good and bad angels from its source as “overwhelming evidence” for the marginalization of Satan and demons (or fallen angels). We saw above that the Didache has not merely stripped away reference to angels and possibly Satan, but has stripped away the

53 J. Burke, personal communication, October 10, 2012.

54 Mitchell 1995: 226.

55 Strecker 2012: 168-169.

56 Mitchell 1995: 227.

57 J. Burke, personal communication, May 13, 2013.

58 Twelftree 2007: 290.

59 Sorensen 2002: 168.

eschatological foundation of the Two Ways teaching entirely and moved all eschatological content to the ending. We saw that some scholars explain this redaction at least partly on rhetorical and stylistic grounds. The Two Ways teaching has been simplified, ethicized and ‘Torahized’ which suits its purpose in instructing Gentile converts.

Nevertheless, it must be conceded that the redaction has the effect of demythologizing ethics and eliminating the cosmic dualism present in the Two Ways material in 1QS and Barnabas. This may well reflect a Christian community with a reduced emphasis on Satan and demons in the ethical sphere of life. However, it would be unwise to draw too strong of a conclusion in this regard in light of

- a) The likelihood that the Didache does allude to Satan and demons, and
- b) The fact that this material is specifically designed for pre-baptismal ethical instruction of Gentile converts, and is thus necessarily theologically simple

Rordorf’s synthesis concerning the differences in the Two Ways tradition between Didache on the one hand and Barnabas on the other seems reasonable. He notes that Christianity inherited both dualistic and non-dualistic ethical traditions from late Judaism and that both of these traditions are found in the New Testament. He asks,

“Is it not possible that the different forms of the Christian *duae viae* also reflect the two traditions? From this point of view, the *Doctrina apostolorum* and the Epistle of Barnabas take their place in the dualistic lineage of moral instruction that is found in the Manual of Discipline, while the Didache and the documents derived from it represent the non-dualistic lineage of moral instruction which was formed in the history of Israel and which has passed into the sapiential and synagogal teaching of Judaism (and eventually into the catechism given to proselytes).”⁶⁰

If Rordorf’s assessment is accurate, then the Didache may simply represent a non-dualistic branch within a diverse early church. This is not to say, however, that the Didache community did not believe in Satan or demons; only that these ideas played a lesser role in the community’s conception of ethics.

2.5.3. Implications for our picture of early Christian theology

Burke claims that increasing references to Satan and demons in later Christian literature are a “sign of apostasy.”⁶¹ In the context in which this statement was made, it appeared that the ‘later Christian literature’ to which he referred consisted of later Christian creeds – he mentions those of the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican churches. However, in subsequent informal correspondence he identified “later Apostolic Fathers writings” as part of this trend.

⁶⁰ Rordorf 1997: 153.

⁶¹ J. Burke, personal communication, November 3, 2012.

Let us consider the claim of apostasy within the Apostolic Fathers and later Christian creeds in turn.

In the first place, Burke acknowledges frequent references to Satan and demons in the New Testament, particularly the Synoptic Gospels and Acts.⁶² In these early writings he does not see frequent reference to Satan and demons as a sign of apostasy. (In the case of demons, he sees it as a sign of immaturity). It is unclear, therefore, why the same pattern should be a sign of apostasy in later writings.

Secondly, with respect to the 'later Apostolic Fathers' writings, it appears that the Epistle of Barnabas and the Ignatian Epistles are among those Burke has in view. These were the Apostolic Fathers primarily under discussion when the comment was made, and they both mention Satan frequently.

We noted earlier that the range of dates for the Epistle of Barnabas overlaps with the generally accepted date for the Didache. The Epistles of Ignatius are also roughly contemporary with the Didache: "Scholars almost unanimously date Ignatius' martyrdom to the reign of Trajan (A.D. 98-117), as chronicled by Eusebius."⁶³

It is thus not even certain that the Didache post-dates the Ignatian epistles and Barnabas. Certainly the interval between the Didache and these writings is not likely to be more than two or three decades. It would be better to describe these as roughly contemporary with the Didache than as "later Christian literature."

Recalling too that scholars regard the Two Ways material in Barnabas as closer to the original tradition than that in the Didache, it is unlikely that the references to Satan in the Epistle of Barnabas and the Epistles to Ignatius could reflect an apostasy that post-dates the Didache.

More likely, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Epistles of Ignatius represent a parallel Christian tradition, and one that is very close to the New Testament. Simply contrasting the emphases on cosmic dualism between the Didache and other Apostolic Fathers writings in no way substantiates the charge of apostasy that Burke has leveled at the Apostolic Fathers!

What about the charge of apostasy leveled at much later Christian creeds, such as those of the Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran churches, on the grounds that they mention Satan where the Didache does not? In the first place, the comparison is hardly fair, since these later documents discuss the content of the Christian faith in far greater length and detail than the Didache does.

Even so, if we do proceed with the comparison, the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion mentions the devil only once (a passing reference in an article about predestination),

62 Burke has claimed that Satan is marginalized within the New Testament outside the Gospels and Acts. I have addressed this claim, as far as Satan is concerned, in a blog post entitled 'The Statistics of Satan' (Farrar 2013).

63 Young 2011: 158 n. 23.

and demons not at all.⁶⁴ Merely referring to a concept which is mentioned dozens of times in the New Testament can hardly be called a sign of apostasy. Similarly, an English translation Luther's Augsburg Confession, which contains 28 detailed articles, contains four passing references to "the devil," which mainly reiterate ideas stated in Scripture.⁶⁵ There are a further six passing references to "devils" or "demons" but no specific theological explanation of Satan or demons. It is only the Catechism of the Catholic Church that goes into theological detail about the devil and demons. However, this is an enormous document consisting of 2865 distinct paragraphs. One would obviously expect to find a far more comprehensive account of Christian doctrines here than in the Didache. In summary, Burke cannot simply point to the *mention* of Satan and demons in later (and much more detailed) creedal literature where the Didache has none as a sign of apostasy.

To summarize, Burke's charge of apostasy against later Christian literature on the grounds of increasing references to Satan and demons is completely unfounded. Significantly, the same criterion, if applied consistently, would require him to charge the Synoptic Gospel writers, and even the historical Jesus, with apostasy.

2.6. Conclusion

Burke is to be commended for his study of Didache scholarship and I owe him a debt of gratitude for bringing to my attention the tradition-history of the Two Ways teaching and its bearing upon eschatology in the Didache.

However, instead of reading the Didache in the context of other early post-apostolic literature in order to construct a comprehensive picture of the early church's view of Satan and demons, Burke has opted to focus solely on the Didache, and to classify texts which mention Satan more frequently as apostate.

Burke's simplistic assessment of the early Christian tradition is unconvincing. The reality is that there is a consistent witness both within and without the New Testament to a robust satanology and demonology. The view of Satan and demons on which the orthodox church ultimately settled has a pedigree going back to Second Temple Judaism, Jesus and the apostles.

That the rhetorical function and emphasis of this aspect of eschatology is not uniform across all early Christian texts is hardly grounds for setting the witnesses against each other, and charging some with apostasy.

64 Church of England. Thirty Nine Articles of Religion. Retrieved from <http://www.cofec.org/The%2039%20Articles%20of%20Religion.pdf>

65 Thompson 2005.

3. A survey of references to Satan in the other Apostolic Fathers

As corroboration of the consistent witness to belief in Satan in the Apostolic Fathers, the following survey is provided. Unless otherwise indicated I have used the Roberts-Donaldson translation.⁶⁶

3.1. Epistle of Barnabas

"We take earnest heed in these last days; for the whole [past] time of your faith will profit you nothing, unless now in this wicked time we also withstand coming sources of danger, as becometh the sons of God. That the Black One may find no means of entrance, let us flee from every vanity, let us utterly hate the works of the way of wickedness...Each will receive as he has done: if he is righteous, his righteousness will precede him; if he is wicked, the reward of wickedness is before him. Take heed, lest resting at our ease, as those who are the called [of God], we should fall asleep in our sins, and the wicked prince, acquiring power over us, should thrust us away from the kingdom of the Lord. (Barnabas 4:9b-10, 12-13)

"But let us now pass to another sort of knowledge and doctrine. There are two ways of doctrine and authority, the one of light, and the other of darkness. But there is a great difference between these two ways. For over one are stationed the light-bringing angels of God, but over the other the angels of Satan. And He indeed [i.e., God] is Lord for ever and ever, but he [i.e., Satan] is prince of the time of iniquity." (Barnabas 18:1-2)

Comment: some scholars have seen other references to the devil in Barnabas 15:5 (which translates literally as 'the lawless one' and could refer to Satan or the man of sin as in 2 Thess. 2:8); Barnabas 20:1 (which could be rendered 'the way of the Black One' or 'the way of darkness'), and Barnabas 21:3 ("For the day is at hand on which all things shall perish with the evil [one].")⁶⁷ "The Black One" (*ho melas*) is a novel term for Satan not found in the New Testament, but Peerbolte states that "The use of *melas* for Satan originates in its use as a synonym of *poneros*."⁶⁸

3.2. 1 Clement

"For all our transgressions which we have committed through any of the wiles of the adversary, let us entreat that we may obtain forgiveness" (1 Clement 51:1)

Comment: The word translated 'adversary' here is a form of the Greek verb *antikeimai*. This verb is used of the "man of sin" in [2 Thessalonians 2:4](#), who is closely associated with Satan ([2 Thessalonians 2:9](#)). It is also used in [1 Timothy 5:14](#), possibly of Satan, but certainly in connection with Satan (cf. [1 Tim. 5:15](#)).

66 Roberts & Donaldson 1867.

67 Russell 1987: 38ff; Boyd 1975: 15; Byron 2003: 60ff.

68 Peerbolte 1996: 191.

This text from 1 Clement is taken to be a reference to the devil by standard lexical authorities,⁶⁹ and the word clearly refers to the devil in the Martyrdom of Polycarp (see below).

3.3. 2 Clement

"For I myself too, being an utter sinner and not yet escaped from temptation, but being still amidst the engines of the devil, do my diligence to follow after righteousness, that I may prevail so far at least as to come near unto it, while I fear the judgment to come." (2 Clement 18:2)

3.4. Epistle to Diognetus

This document makes no explicit reference to the devil, although there is a reference to "the serpent" of Eden, who continues to deceive the ignorant today and must be guarded against by displaying good fruit (Chapter XII). This may presuppose the link between the serpent and the devil which is found in the New Testament (e.g. John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 11:1-14; Revelation 12:7-10).

3.5. Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch

There are seven epistles of Ignatius extant which are generally regarded as authentic. There is a longer and shorter version of most of these, so to be conservative we will limit ourselves to references from the shorter version. Going by the shorter version, six of the seven epistles refer to the devil. Only the epistle to Polycarp does not. In addition to "the devil" (*ho diabolos*) Ignatius uses the term "prince of this world" (*archontos tou aionos toutou*) which is close to the term used for the devil in [John 12:31](#); [14:30](#); [16:11](#); cf. [2 Corinthians 4:4](#), [Ephesians 2:2](#).

"Flee therefore the wicked devices and snares of the prince of this world, lest at any time being conquered by his artifices, ye grow weak in your love." (Philadelphians 6:2)

"...I commend the Churches, in which I pray for a union both of the flesh and spirit of Jesus Christ, the constant source of our life, and of faith and love, to which nothing is to be preferred, but especially of Jesus and the Father, in whom, if we endure all the assaults of the prince of this world, and escape them, we shall enjoy God." (Magnesians 1:2)

"I therefore have need of meekness, by which the prince of this world is brought to nought." (Trallians 4:2)

"Not that I know there is anything of this kind among you; but I put you on your guard, inasmuch as I love you greatly, and foresee the snares of the devil." (Trallians 8:1)

"Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let tearings, breakings, and dislocations of bones; let cutting off of members; let shatterings of the whole body; and

69 Arndt, Danker & Bauer 2000: 88.

let all the dreadful torments of the devil come upon me: only let me attain to Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:3)

"The prince of this world would fain carry me away, and corrupt my disposition towards God. Let none of you, therefore, who are [in Rome] help him; rather be ye on my side, that is, on the side of God." (Romans 7:1)

"and let us seek to be followers of the Lord (who ever more unjustly treated, more destitute, more condemned?), that so no plant of the devil may be found in you, but ye may remain in all holiness and sobriety in Jesus Christ, both with respect to the flesh and spirit." (Ephesians 10:3)

"For when ye assemble frequently in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith. Nothing is more precious than peace, by which all war, both in heaven and earth, is brought to an end." (Ephesians 13:1)

"Be not ye anointed with the bad odour of the doctrine of the prince of this world; let him not lead you away captive from the life which is set before you." (Ephesians 17:1)

"Now the virginity of Mary was hidden from the prince of this world, as was also her offspring, and the death of the Lord; three mysteries of renown, which were wrought in silence by God." (Ephesians 19:1)

"He who honours the bishop has been honoured by God; he who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop, does [in reality] serve the devil." (Smyrnaeans 9:1)

It can be observed that nearly all of the references to the devil in the Ignatian epistles (as elsewhere in the Apostolic Fathers) are cursory. They are not introducing a new teaching but allude to a concept with which the readers are assumed to be familiar (as the New Testament writers also do). This suggests that 'the devil' was a well-established doctrine from the mid first century through the early second century. There is no hint of controversy, which casts further doubt on the allegation of apostasy.

Ignatius does not discuss details such as the devil's origin or nature. In a passage in his epistle to the Trallians which follows immediately on a reference to "the prince of this world" (Trallians 4:2), he explicitly states to the Trallians that he is reluctant to discuss angelological curiosities:

"Am I not able to write to you of heavenly things? But I fear to do so, lest I should inflict injury on you who are but babes [in Christ]. Pardon me in this respect, lest, as not being able to receive [such doctrines], ye should be strangled by them. For even I, though I am bound [for Christ], yet am not on that account able to understand heavenly things, and the places of the angels, and their gatherings under their respective princes, things visible and invisible. Without reference to such abstruse subjects, I am still but a learner [in other respects]" (Trallians 5:1-2)

The Greek word for prince (*archon*) in Trallians 4:2 is from the same root as the word for 'princes' (*archontikas*) in Trallians 5:2, who are explicitly angelic rulers. This strongly suggests that 'the prince of this world' in Trallians 4:2 is himself an angelic ruler.

Other Ignatian passages suggest the existence of fallen angels. Smyrnaeans 6:1 declares that those who believe not in the blood of Christ will incur condemnation – even “the things which are in heaven, and the glorious angels, and rulers, both visible and invisible.” This implies at least the possibility of fallen angels, if not the reality. Similarly, Romans 5:3 declares, “And let no one, of things visible or invisible, envy me that I should attain to Jesus Christ.” Elsewhere in Ignatius' writings (as also in the New Testament), the criterion of invisibility versus visibility is used to distinguish spirit beings from material beings (Ign. Magnesians 3:2; Ign. Polycarp 3:2; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15-16; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:3, 27). Thus, Ignatius here expresses the possibility that invisible beings might envy him.

Finally, for Ignatius, the devil or prince of this world is not merely a symbol but an active force. He is responsible for devices, snares, assaults, and dreadful torments. He carries away and corrupts, has powers and aims to destroy believers, leads away captive using false doctrine, and is antithetical to God. The virginity of Mary was hidden from him. When we put all of these statements together, the Ignatian devil can only be a supernatural personal being.

3.6. Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians

"For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist;" and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil; and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts, and says that there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, he is the first-born of Satan." (Polycarp to the Philippians 7:1)

3.7. Martyrdom of Polycarp

"For the devil did indeed invent many things against them; but thanks be to God, he could not prevail over all." (Martyrdom of Polycarp 2:4)

"But when the adversary of the race of the righteous, the envious, malicious, and wicked one, perceived the impressive nature of his martyrdom, and [considered] the blameless life he had led from the beginning, and how he was now crowned with the wreath of immortality, having beyond dispute received his reward, he did his utmost that not the least memorial of him should be taken away by us, although many desired to do this, and to become possessors of his holy flesh." (Martyrdom of Polycarp 17:1)

3.8. Shepherd of Hermas

This document contains no less than 23 references to the devil, of which the following are a sampling:

“For the Lord, knowing the heart, and foreknowing all things, knew the weakness of men and the manifold wiles of the devil, that he would inflict some evil on the servants of God, and would act wickedly towards them. The Lord, therefore, being merciful, has had mercy on the work of His hand, and has set repentance for them; and He has entrusted to me power over this repentance. And therefore I say to you, that if any one is tempted by the devil, and sins after that great and holy calling. in which the Lord has called His people to everlasting life, he has opportunity to repent but once.” (Fourth Commandment 3:4-6)

“For if thou art long-suffering, the Holy Spirit that abideth in thee shall be pure, not being darkened by another evil spirit, but dwelling in a large room shall rejoice and be glad with the vessel in which he dwelleth, and shall serve God with much cheerfulness, having prosperity in himself. But if any angry temper approach, forthwith the Holy Spirit, being delicate, is straitened, not having [the] place clear, and seeketh to retire from the place; for he is being choked by the evil spirit, and has no room to minister unto the Lord, as he desireth, being polluted by angry temper. For the Lord dwelleth in long-suffering, but the devil in angry temper. Thus that both the spirits then should be dwelling together is inconvenient and evil for that man in whom they dwell.” (Fifth Commandment, 1:2-4)

“But fear not the devil; for, if thou fear the Lord, thou shalt be master over the devil, for there is no power in him. [For] in whom is no power, neither is there fear of him; but in whom power is glorious, of him is fear likewise. For every one that hath power hath fear, whereas he that hath no power is despised of all. But fear thou the works of the devil, for they are evil. While then thou fearest the Lord, thou wilt fear the works of the devil, and wilt not do them, but abstain from them.” (Seventh Commandment, 1:2-3)

"He pointed out to me some men sitting on a seat, and one man sitting on a chair. And he says to me, "Do you see the persons sitting on the seat?" "I do, sir," said I. "These," says he, "are the faithful, and he who sits on the chair is a false prophet, ruining the minds of the servants of God. It is the doubters, not the faithful, that he ruins. These doubters then go to him as to a soothsayer, and inquire of him what will happen to them; and he, the false prophet, not having the power of a Divine Spirit in him, answers them according to their inquiries, and according to their wicked desires, and fills their souls with expectations, according to their own wishes. For being himself empty, he gives empty answers to empty inquirers; for every answer is made to the emptiness of man. Some true words he does occasionally utter; for the devil fills him with his own spirit, in the hope that he may be able to overcome some of the righteous. As many, then, as are strong in the faith of the Lord, and are clothed with truth, have no connection with such spirits, but keep away from them" (Eleventh Commandment, 1:1-4)

These, then, are the evil desires which slay the servants of God. For this evil desire is the daughter of the devil. You must refrain from evil desires, that by refraining ye may live to God. But as many as are mastered by them, and do not resist them, will perish at last, for

these desires are fatal. Put you on, then, the desire of righteousness; and arming yourself with the fear of the Lord," (Twelfth Commandment, 2:2-4)

"I say to him, "Sir, listen to me for a moment." "Say what you wish," says he. "Man, sir," say I, "is eager to keep the commandments of God, and there is no one who does not ask of the Lord that strength may be given him for these commandments, and that he may be subject to them; but the devil is hard, and holds sway over them." "He cannot," says he, "hold sway over the servants of God, who with all their heart place their hopes in Him. The devil can wrestle against these, overthrow them he cannot. If, then, ye resist him, he will be conquered, and flee in disgrace from you. As many, therefore," says he, "as are empty, fear the devil, as possessing power. When a man has filled very suitable jars with good wine, and a few among those jars are left empty, then he comes to the jars, and does not look at the full jars, for he knows that they are full; but he looks at the empty, being afraid lest they have become sour. For empty jars quickly become sour, and the goodness of the wine is gone. So also the devil goes to all the servants of God to try them. As many, then, as are full in the faith, resist him strongly, and he withdraws from them, having no way by which he might enter them. He goes, then, to the empty, and finding a way of entrance, into them, he produces in them whatever he wishes, and they become his servants." (Twelfth Commandment, 5:1-4)

3.9. Fragments of Papias

These brief fragments contain no reference to the devil.

3.10. Summary

In summary, it is probable that all of the Apostolic Fathers writings make explicit or implicit reference to the devil at least once, with the exception of Ignatius' epistle to Polycarp and the fragments of Papias.

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Some early Christian writers considered the Didachē canonical, and Egyptian authors and compilers quoted it extensively in the 4th and 5th centuries. Eusebius of Caesarea quoted it in his Ecclesiastical History (early 4th century), and it formed the basis of chapter 7 of the 4th-century Apostolic Constitutions, a collection of early Christian ecclesiastical law. Chapters 1–6 give ethical instruction concerning the two ways, of life and of death, and reflect an early Christian adaptation of a Jewish pattern of teaching in order to prepare catechumens (candidates for Christian baptism). Chapters 7–15 discuss baptism, fasting, prayer, the Eucharist, how to receive and test traveling apostles and prophets, and the appointment of bishops and deacons. Start studying Angelology, Satanology, and Demonology. Learn vocabulary, terms and more with flashcards, games and other study tools. This set is often saved in the same folder as Theo 2 Angelology and Demonology. 95 terms. jared_gerringer. Basics of Demonology. 67 terms. ALHorror0925gmail. The Doctrine of Demons (Demonology). 23 terms. sheetaclar. The Search of Cause (Demonology). 12 terms. Carolina_Coronado8.