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THE ANTI-CHRISTIAN THREAT AND HOW TO CONFRONT IT

“Part IV: The Antichrist in the narrative of R. H. Benson”

The second author I will discuss in this series on the threat of the Antichrist is the English Catholic priest Robert Hugh Benson. His book *The Lord of the World* was published in 1907.

It is a futuristic novel with apocalyptic overtones. It is of particular interest to us as believers because it portrays the conflict between a world that has abandoned the faith and the Church. Moreover, it offers a vision of what the figure of a future Antichrist might be like.

Benson’s novel was written a few years after Soloviev’s narrative. Given the similarity of theme and the resemblance of certain passages, it is reasonable to assume that Benson was familiar with Soloviev’s work. It is also possible that both authors drew inspiration from other sources discussing the Antichrist.

Robert Benson depicts the rise of a world ruler whose uncanny power extends over all things. People regard him as a new messiah who proclaims a universal message of peace. Julian Felsenburgh, as Benson names him, even succeeds in winning over believers and priests with his charisma.

The Church recognizes the deadly danger posed by this “new Messiah,” who exerts an almost magical power over people. It has already been marginalized in this progressive society and is merely tolerated. Its situation worsens when a new law is introduced. With the help of apostate priests, a separate cult is developed for all people, and all citizens are compelled to belong to it. For Catholic believers, this is unacceptable, and their already painful martyrdom intensifies as public sentiment toward Catholics grows increasingly hostile. When it becomes known that “extremist Catholics” are planning an attack on the new public cult, this is used as a pretext to bomb and destroy Rome, the seat of the Catholic Church. All the governments of the world, now led by Felsenburgh, endorse this plan.

With the attack on Rome, the last enemy of true peace is believed to have been destroyed. But the laws are tightened even further, and ultimately it is planned to determine, by means of an interrogation, whether people believe in God — which would mean a death sentence for them.

However, not all of the prelates are killed when Rome is bombed. Some flee to the Holy Land. Father Percy is elected pope and takes the name Sylvester. In secret, he begins rebuilding the Church's hierarchy. Upon learning of the impending interrogation, he seeks to gather his supporters to prepare them for martyrdom. Through treachery, Felsenburgh learns that there is still a pope and an intact hierarchy. He then prompts a joint operation with representatives from all nations to attack the Pope's seat and destroy the Catholic Church once and for all. Everything is prepared for the attack on Nazareth, where Pope Sylvester has taken up residence. But before this final, decisive blow can be struck, God intervenes.

Let us summarize a few points we can take from this book for our reflections on an anti-Christian regime:

- The modern, liberal, and enlightened age can easily lead to a dictatorship of relativism.
- If man's inner longing for God is not properly addressed, it can lead to neo-pagan and pantheistic religiosity.
- Catholicism remains the primary enemy of all anti-Christian spirits unless it weakens from within, losing its identity and mission to the point of entering into ideological collaboration with forces that persecute the Church.
- Under certain circumstances, even democratic states can fall under the influence of a charismatic figure and submit to him.
- The portrayal of the Antichrist as a peacemaker endowed with extraordinary charisma is possibly quite accurate. He could hardly win hearts if he appeared as a strict dictator like the antichrist figures of the past. More subtle deceptions must be employed to win people over.

- The faithful Church must expect persecution, which may escalate in terms of the use of violence. This does not refer to Christians in places where they are already persecuted. Under a world order dominated by the Antichrist, the persecution of Christians will be global.
- As depicted in the novel, there must be resistance today on the part of Christians against modern trends in which the spirit of the Antichrist is already at work. Added to this is the willingness to suffer, even martyrdom, for the truth of the faith.
- God will intervene when all seems lost!

We will continue this topic tomorrow.

Reflection on the Daily Reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/gods-strength-2/>

Reflection on the Daily Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-lord-weeds-out-the-darnel-2/>