

2.7.81

Agnes Dei
(Dwarfie
Pater con job)PRAYER <sup>(God in
our midst
n 29)</sup>

There's been a great run of futuristic science-fiction films over the past number of years - Star Wars, 2001 and all the others that have been so popular, and many of them technically very well made. Science-fiction writing too has had a large and devoted readership for much of this century, and the best of it does somehow point to inventions and technologies which become fact rather than fiction, as Arthur C. Clarke (one of the most solid and productive of science-fiction writers) has pointed out. There is, also, a religious dimension in at least some modern science-fiction, as well as in other imaginative creations that have been popular in recent years, like 'Jonathan Seagull' and 'Waterhip Down'. But besides this, you may be aware that there is some deliberately religious science-fiction as well: best known, perhaps, works of C.S. Lewis like 'Perelandra', or Tolkien's 'Lord of the Rings' - about myths, allegories, other planets or galaxies, with a theological basis. But long before Lewis and Tolkien and the others, only very shortly after H.G. Wells' 'War of the Worlds' and Jules Verne, there appeared in 1907 an early example of religious science fiction, called 'Lord of the World', by a man you don't hear about these days, Robert Hugh Benson. In his book, Benson pictured the earth's immediate future as seen from his time - the kind of development a 100 years hence, he wrote about it, which he thought might reasonably be expected if the lines of

what was called 'modern thought' in his day were only prolonged far enough. Some of what he imagined ^{over} 80 years ago has in fact come about, more or less 'true' - though the "musical cry" with which his "volars" passed swiftly overhead is a bit different from the ^{roar or} scream of a modern jet ^{taking off or} landing. His ^{future} history of this century recorded the rise of communism after 1917, the decline of the established church in England after 1930, the triumph of the British Labour Party, and the nationalisation of professions in 1960. He describes the expansion of communism from 1917 to 1984, and the conflicts between great blocks of world power, East - West, North - South. What the novel is about is the unifying of East and West under a political redeemer, and the apocalyptic revenge the nations take upon the only force that opposes their programme of humanist and scientific socialism, the papacy. The tension of the story is between faith and secularism, between belief in the supernatural present within the world, and the control of the world to produce a humanist society. The "Lord" of the title, could be the master of the earth the political redeemer, his master Satan, or the coming Jesus Christ. The powers of earth decide that the church must be obliterated: by the year 2000 it is already outlawed, and the final Pope with his remaining entourage are living at Nazareth. And then the world ends. After our pause for formal prayer and a prayer in music. [I'll tell you a few further reflections on why I've said so much about] an 80-year old science-fiction novel. But first, Ave Maria by Elgar. All My Hope on God is Founded

20th Nov from
H.R.V.E. 728

MUSIC - PRAYERS

It was a recent article on Robert Hugh Benson and his "Lord of the World" that reminded me of, and tied in with both a comment about the assassination attempt on the Pope and an interpretation of his world-view. The connect was to the effect that the real reason for the attack is that darkness hates light, that egotism is bound to war against love: and that, instead of self-examination, the questions asked have been all whys, escapes from a life of personal responsibility. The interpretation of Pope John Paul was to the effect that he sees the present time very clearly as a confrontation between evil and goodness, that this is the real struggle going on, through and beyond mere political and social and economic confrontations: hence his stress on care for others, love for others, cooperation among peoples, community among nations. Hence also his spontaneous reaction: "How could they have done this?" — they, not "he" or "she". The figure of Benson's political redeemer is most attractively drawn — he's not a dictator or tyrant, nothing overtly evil about him, but rational, calm, magnetic, and a model of science, secularity and humanism. But he is a quiet, supreme egotist: and he wins and smother everything. Are we being so smothered and lived today, not so much by obvious evil, but by the power and spirit of it that first makes us selfish egotists, uncaring, unconcerned about our brothers and sisters? so smothered in comforts, conveniences, rights that we claim are ours, so logical, common-sense and natural that we don't or can't hear any more the voice of God and His moral demands on being fully human?