

## "THE SPIRIT OF THE ANTICHRIST IN HISTORY" from the MYSTERY OF INIQUITY

by ANTANAS MACEINA

[**The Mystery of Iniquity: The Antichrist in History According to the Tale by V. Soloviev** was published in Lithuanian in 1964, in Brooklyn, N. Y., by the Ateitis Federation. The excerpt which follows is taken from this edition. A version in German, **Das Geheimnis der Bosheit**, was published in 1955. According to Maceina, the work was written around 1950. It was originally planned as the second volume of the **Cor Inquietum** series, but no such designation is made in the Lithuanian version.

As the subtitle indicates, the **Mystery of Iniquity** is a study of V. Soloviev's "A Short Story of Antichrist" which concludes his **Three Conversations**. According to Maceina, the topic of these conversations is the question whether evil is only a lack and an imperfection which will disappear with the advance of goodness or a "real force" which acts upon the world. Maceina holds that the whole conception of history rests upon an answer to this question. When evil is interpreted in the first sense, history is viewed as only a calm flow ever growing in perfection. However, if evil is a malicious force, history becomes a drama, a constant struggle involving both heaven and earth, not only men but God also. This struggle is moving towards the decisive confrontation in which evil will be completely defeated, an event which will conclude human history. The decisive moment will be signaled by the appearance of the antichrist.

The reader may be interested in the conception of the antichrist which Maceina finds in Soloviev's tale. The antichrist knows that there are spiritual beings and, thus, knows that God and Christ exist. From an external point of view, he is a benefactor of religion and of men. For example, to the Church, particularly the pope in Rome, he restores all the ancient rights and liberties and thus obtains the devotion of most bishops, priests, and laymen. To men generally, he provides food and satisfies their other needs. However, while he knows that God exists, the antichrist does not love God. The antichrist loves only himself. As one who does not love God, the antichrist is an atheist. Because he loves only himself, his seeming good deeds are not acts of charity, but only attempts at enslavement. The goods of the antichrist are only bribes to tempt men into selling themselves into slavery. Maceina summarized the resulting contrast in the aphorism: "Christian caritas is the service of one's neighbor, the beneficence of the antichrist is power over one's neighbor." Trans.]

### 1. The Religious Character of History

What is history in the light of the Christian faith? Bossuet called it "**gesta Dei per Francos.**" The Lithuanian philosopher and theologian A. Dambrauskas-Jakštas<sup>1</sup> extended this definition and called history "**gesta Dei per homines.**" In either case, whether taken in a narrower sense or as including the whole of mankind, in essence history is the joint activity of God and man in time. For the Christian, history is not only an earthly process, because its real springs, from which it takes its origin, are not in this world. The prologue of history is in heaven. The Old Testament Drama of Job is a clear indication of this. Job was "sincere and upright, and fearing God and avoiding evil" (Jb. 1:1).<sup>2</sup> He conscientiously cared for his family, "rising up early, made burnt offerings" (1:5). Nevertheless, one day Satan, the eternal "accuser of our brethren," (Ac. 12:10) appeared, and standing before the face of Jahweh accused Job of servility: "Did Job adore his Lord God for nothing? Did You not Yourself erect a fence around him, his home, and his whole wealth? You have blessed the fruit of his hands, and his property has spread throughout the land. But only raise Your hand and strike his whole wealth: surely, he

will curse you to your face" (Jb. 1:9-11). The outcome of this accusation is well-known. The Lord God allowed Satan to destroy first Job's wealth, then his sons and daughters. Afterwards, Satan afflicted "even his bones and flesh" (2:5).

Thus we see that the prologue in heaven forms an essential and constitutive part of man's fate on earth. The story shows that here we are never left alone; that our existence is essentially open and for that reason accessible. Our existence is the joint activity of man and God, or of man and Satan. Man's existence is always in relation with someone. Man is an observer with his face turned to everything; even more, man is an agent together with someone else.

First of all — not in the order of time but of logic (**natura prius**) — man is in contact with the encompassing realm of nature. He is in contact with nature not because of a "Wille zur Macht" (Nietzsche), not in a search for dominion, but because of a definite mission given him by the creator: "Multiply, fill the earth, and govern it" (Gen. 1:28). Because of his capacity to give form, man can participate in the governing of the world by God, he can represent God on earth and extend His creation. Just for this reason he becomes the "world's small God," as he is called by Goethe's Mephisto. However, the nature in which this "little God" is placed does not provide perfect conditions for his existence. In its original and immediate form, nature is hardly capable of keeping man alive and does not provide conditions for the growth of man's spirit. Solely in terms of his natural abilities, man cannot compete with any beast in the struggle for survival. He has managed to survive on this earth and has even come to rule it only because he has created a new environment, which better suits the needs of his body and spirit and makes possible his earthly existence.

This new environment — the space for a truly human existence — is called culture. Culture is the creation of man. It is man's creature in the true and literal sense of that word: his embodied hope and his triumph over the forces of nature. For this reason, the process of the rise and development of culture is the first form of a historical existence. Human existence manifests itself first in the form of culture. Because of this, history can be called the process of cultural development: a development in the course of which the earth comes increasingly under control, the secrets of nature are increasingly revealed, and the powers of nature are increasingly harnessed to serve human existence. In this way, history is the process whereby man makes himself at home in the world.

However, the process of cultural development is not the whole of history. Man is not called to exist only on this side; hence, the earth is not the only arena of his existence, and the shaping of the earth is not the only kind of life and activity for him. Another dimension of reality is open to him — the supernatural. Without losing touch with the realm of nature and without any limiting of his creative powers, man turns his gaze upwards and understands himself not only as a creating genius but as also himself a creature, called to be by the will of the Absolute. Alongside his relation to "everything that is placed at his feet" (Ps. 8:7), man finds another relation which points to the giver of all gifts, to Him who crowned the "small God" with glory and majesty and gave him dominion over the works of his hands (cf. Ps. 8:6-9). If in the cultural realm man feels himself the only lord and rules with considerable sovereignty, in this new relation he experiences his total dependence and his existence under the dominion of others. He sees before him a stronger being and experiences this being as a personal force which reveals itself to him, speaks to him, and engages him.

This new relation, this higher dimension of man's existence, is called religion. Like culture, religion also comes to man from his essence. Both have their roots in his deepest essence, both are fundamental forms of his existence. As there are no nations without culture, so there are none without religion. Everywhere man appears, smoke rises not only from hearths but also from altars; man raises not only tents but also sanctuaries; not only wedding songs can be heard, but also the hymns of priests. Thus, religious life is the second fundamental form of human history. Religious ideas, experiences, actions, institutions, communities affect the course of history greatly and deeply; they leave their mark upon its development and shape. Man's historical existence on this earth develops not only culturally, but also religiously. In this sense we can and must title history the process of religious development, in the course of which man increasingly clarifies his relations with God, comes to better understand his earthly existence, and gives his faith ever stronger communal forms. In this respect, history is man's coming to understand his origins, vocation, and purpose.

Neither the shaping of nature nor relation to the supernatural exhausts history completely. History contains both areas. It is the manifestation, in their mutual relations, of humanness and divineness.

If history depicts the fate of man, the role of religion here is more important than that of culture. Without culture, man could not survive on earth and come to rule it; in this way, culture is the basis of history. Without religion, man could not solve the problem of his fate, for this fate depends not only upon himself. God himself is an active participant in man's fate. "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). These words of Christ clearly point to the historical way which man must travel in order to reach the solution of his mysterious existence. The turning towards God manifests itself as a principle of fate in which is hidden the final decision about man's existence. Religion is a force which turns the whole of the world's process towards the final solution.

Silent and passive, the realm of nature stands before us. We form it according to our will and, as is said, are the only sovereigns in the realm of culture. But the opposite holds in religion: we are neither alone nor do we act with sovereignty. In the religious act we stand as persons before God who is also a person, whose words and acts are here more important than ours. Religion in essence is a relation between two persons. Man can create culture by his own will, but not religion. The question of man's being, which in principle can be raised only in religion, demands God's answer if it is to be answered at all. The question requires revelation, redemption, grace. Any so-called religion of humanity, one concerned

only about relations with impersonal human or cultural values, is fundamentally a distortion of religion. The world's religious process is an extended dialogue between God and man, the constant interaction between heaven and earth.

Precisely because religion is a dialogue and reciprocal action, there is ever the threat that man will break it off. Although man by his nature is religious, because relation with the supernatural befits his internal essence, he still is able — because he is free — to become silent and remove the earth, which he governs, from interaction with Heaven. There is no ontological atheism and there can be no such, but there is a psychological irreligiousness, a conscious turning away from God, a stubborn silence in one's existence. The rejection of God is a factor in the life of the single person as well as the community. The chorus of nymphs in Aeschylus' **Prometheus** sings: "Never will the plans of a mortal transgress the divine order." The divine order is the order of being. To go beyond it is to go beyond oneself; in other words, to be grateful to oneself for one's own existence; that is, to be one's own creator. But this is clearly an absurdity. For this reason, in its deepest sense, any rejection of the divine order is a depletion of being and thus of one's own existence. The nymphs of Aeschylus add another important sentence to their pronouncement: "We declare this for we see, Prometheus, destruction in your fate." Man's revolt against God means his own destruction. Still, mortals do not cease rebelling against God. The tower of Babel remains unfinished and will remain so until the end of time. But what is culture, if not mankind's constant effort to erect this tower? History is not only the development of religion; it is at the same time the development of godlessness among men. The factor of freedom here plays the decisive role and transforms history into the real fate — for man and the world — a fate in which religion, man's decision concerning God, has the last word. Religion, not culture, holds the key to the secrets of history. In the course of religion, not of culture, time flows towards its consummation: **adesse festinant tempora**. History is the objectification of our decision about God. Its blessing, but also its risk, lies exactly here, because this decision cannot be avoided.

So, what is history in the light of Christianity? Nothing else than a time given to us by God. The philosophy of history long ago formed the profound notion that time becomes history only when man is conscious of its flow. History and the consciousness of time are related to each other essentially. However, this consciousness becomes clearest not in the philosophy of history as some think (for example, K. Joel), but in religion. The philosophy of history reflects upon time as an object of knowledge, as something which while it permeates us does not enter into our moral commitments. Because of this, the consciousness of time in the philosophy of history is always only a logical consciousness, not a moral one. A purely logical consciousness cannot be either as clear or as sharp as the moral one. This last we can acquire only in religion, for in our relations with God we experience time as a gift, as talents given to us which one day we will have to give an accounting of. Philosophical time is the abstract and general process of things; religious time, however, is our time, entrusted to us, given to us as a gift, and thus personal and concrete. Religious time is decision and engagement upon which our fate rests. In order to give our existence a meaning of one kind or another, we need nothing other than time. In the light of the Christian religion, time manifests itself as the most valuable of all of the natural gifts of God, as the instrument for our freedom, as the field for our activity. As long as we have time, we have our fate in our own hands.

## 2. Christ at the Center of History

[God as the source of all being is a hidden God, completely outside time. If religion is to be possible, God must reveal Himself and enter into history. The function of history is to prepare the ground for this meeting between God and man. The entry of God into history has already taken place through the person of Christ. Christ possesses human nature in its most perfect form, but He is truly a man, and He is also God. He is thus the Godman. History is centered around the person of Christ. The time before His incarnation is the period of the promise, a period of awaiting; the time after, is a time of preparation for the second and final coming of Christ. This second period is a time of sorting out, a time of deciding for or against Christ. Trans.]

## 3. The Conception of Antichrist

Since history is a time of sorting out, it is not only the role of Christ that is clarified in its course but also the role of his opponent who by Holy Writ and the Christian tradition is marked with name of antichrist. The antichrist faces Christ as a historical force which rejects him, which ever battles him and corrupts his works in history. The two beasts mentioned in the mysterious Book of Revelation (13:1-11), the great harlot "who sits upon many waters" (17:2), Babylon the great (18:2), the dragon, and the primeval serpent (20:2), are nothing but symbols of the historical forms and shapes which in the course of time have been assumed by the antichrist, shapes through which he has influenced history. The beast from the sea "opened it jaws to blaspheme" (13:6) and mouthed its blasphemies against God, against his name, for forty-two months. The beast from the ground "worked great signs, even to calling down fire from heaven on to the earth" (13:13); the statue of the beast comes alive, so that it speaks and destroys those who do not worship it (13:15). The "kings of the earth" commit fornication with the great harlot, shower her with "gold and jewels and pearls," and make themselves drunk

together with her upon the blood of the saints and the confessors of Christ (17:2-6). Traders from Babylon the great, the glittering worldly city, enrich themselves and become "princes of the earth" (18:23); the city itself poisons all nations with its spells and fouls itself with "the blood of prophets and saints, and all the blood that was ever shed on earth" (18:24). Thus history is full of the efforts and deeds of the antichrist. It is the genuine field of action not only for Christ but for his foe as well.

Even in nature we can note an anti-divine character. That universal harmony and wonderful exactness which astonishes us particularly in living things is here and there twisted and injured as if by some black hand. Some kind of malicious plan can be glimpsed in some of the laws of nature. A kind of mockery and laughter at times interrupts the symphony of the cosmos. There are things in nature which have been planned and brought about to mock the divine creation, that creation about which it was once said that it is even "very good" (Gn. 1:13-31). Man's reason fails to find a satisfactory explanation for this. However, in the light of revelation, these misshapen embryos and misshapen forms, these caricatures and mockeries in nature, are completely comprehensible. Satan together with his angels was hurled down to earth (cf. Rv. 12:9-12). As they had raised their voices against God in heaven, so they continue their rebellion on earth, attacking everything that has marks of divinity. Innocent nature which was originally good was their first victim. Nature was distorted and injured; its innocence was taken away and it was filled with evils. The Book of Revelation threatens destruction upon those who have "corrupted the earth" (11:8). If history, as we said, is first the process of cultural development — that is, the growing control of nature by the creative powers of spirit — man finds the field for his labors already soiled and therefore must combat the satanic elements already in his own works. The antichrist lurks in the lowest levels of earthly existence and gnaws at the physical part of history.

But nature is mute and passive. It cannot choose. It can only suffer the ravages of the dragon and with groans await the time when it will be freed from "enslavement by temporality" and raised to the primordial "freedom of the children of God." Nature is only the patient recipient of the devil's blows. It defends itself only with its stubborn capacity to suffer. However, history gives a direct and active reply to the attempts of the primordial serpent. Man as the true bearer of historical existence is not a passive recipient, but is also one of the agents, a friend or an enemy. Against the attempts of the dragon and his angels, he opposes not only his own nature, but also his free and conscious will. But a free will chooses, and this choice is not always a positive one for God and Christ. Nature can never fall away from God and lose its hope for salvation. It can be robbed of its visible divineness in concrete manifestations only by someone else, and it can never be turned into something Godless. But for spirit, both alternatives are open: a positive one, a decision in favor of God and Christ, or a negative one, a decision against God and Christ. The negative alternative provides the way for the entry of the antichrist into history. The dragon, having mocked the divine creation with his distorting of nature, in history after Christ, attempts to ridicule the act of redemption and make it pointless.

In its course, history becomes not only the self-manifestation of God-manness, the unfolding in space and time of the body of Christ, but also the manifestation of godlessness in its sharpest form, the embodiment on earth of the **civitas diaboli**. Against the Logos, incarnate and through the Church constantly at work, arises the foe, who has rejected the Logos from the start and is trying to draw the whole historical existence of mankind within the scope of his negations. History is not only the **gesta Christi per homines**, but also the **gesta diaboli per homines**. The antichrist appears not as an accidental aspect of the historical process, but as an integral part of it, as a capacity realized by the negative resolve of spirit, as the godless form in all the areas of life among historical embodiments. With reason Berdyaev claims that "the antichrist is a problem for the metaphysics of history," or, to put it more accurately, for the theology of history, because neither history itself nor the philosophy of history can say anything about the antichrist. Only the appearance of Jesus Christ on earth revealed his foe. The more visible is the presence of Christ in the church, the more visible becomes the antichrist; and when the second fullness of time comes and the second coming of Christ is declared, the antichrist will then appear in his greatest rage. As J. H. Newman said, "the first coming of our Lord had its forerunner and so will the second. The first forerunner was 'more than a prophet' — the blessed Baptist. The second, will be more than a foe of Christ: he will be the very image of satan, a horrible and detestable antichrist."

But what is the antichrist himself? What is his essence? St. John answers this question very clearly: "He is antichrist who denies the Father as well as the Son" (1Jn. 2:22); and in another place: "Any spirit which will not recognize Christ is not from God, but is the spirit of antichrist" (4:3). We find a similar description in the second letter of Saint John: "There are many deceivers about in the world, refusing to admit that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Such a man is a deceiver, is antichrist" (2 Jn. 7). The words of Saint John clearly show that the essence of the spirit of the antichrist is the rejection of the fullness of the God-manhood of Christ. Christ is true man and true God. He is a hypostatic totality. He who denies a part of this totality — "severs Jesus, solvit Jesum" as the Vulgate translates the passage (1 Jn. 4:3) — disarranges his personality and thereby becomes antichrist. Everywhere Christ is in some way distorted, there is the antichrist. It makes no difference whether this distortion is expressed in the form of philosophy or art, in communal life or the attitude of a separate person. Where it appears, there is antichrist. The antichrist is the embodiment of the distorted Christ (cf. 2 Th 2). In this sense, antichrist is as old as history itself. Even more, he was included in the heavenly prologue of the historical process. If Lucifer refused to serve and worship the divine Logos because the Logos was destined to become man, as Duns Scotus teaches, he of himself became the enemy of Christ from the very beginning. Any other historical denial of the Son of Man is in essence only a continuation and extension of that primordial denial which took place in heaven.

It is possible that this negative attitude towards Christ will be given the form of a person at the end of history, when the divine and demoniac powers will become especially clear. Holy Writ itself provides a basis for such an explanation. When St. Paul warned the Thessalonians about their conviction that the second coming of the Lord will take place shortly, he pointed to the antichrist as a sign of the coming end of history. "First, the great revolt must take place and the man of sin must be revealed, the lost one, who is the enemy, the one who claims to be greater than what is called God and is worshipped, so that he enthrones himself in God's sanctuary and claims that he is God." (2 Th. 2:3-5)

If mundane history, as has been said, is a constant growing of evil, it is not impossible that the evil spirit would concentrate itself in one point and as a human person would celebrate a special triumph and in this way obtain a certain "incarnation" as a mockery of the divine incarnation. Soloviev himself sees the parallel between Christ and antichrist as between two persons. According to him, Christ is the personal and unique incarnation of goodness. The antichrist is likewise a full and complete personal incarnation of evil. He manifests himself as the bearer of Lucifer's hatred for the divine Logos and, at the same time, for everything in which the Logos manifests himself. If history before Christ was a long period of preparation for the coming of the God-man, then history after Christ is a preparation against the devil-man. The appearance of the antichrist in human form would be Lucifer's mocking reply to the incarnation of the divine Logos long ago revealed to him. This is the theological meaning of the speculations which we find in the Christian literature of all ages and which always suggest that the antichrist as a person will occupy a throne in this world. Since the antichrist, as we will soon see, always and everywhere imitates the deeds of Christ, such speculations become even more probable.

It would be a mistake, however, even a danger, to understand the antichrist as only the manifestation of evil in human form and to view the struggle against Christ as limited to the blows of this amazing personality. It would be a mistake to think this and to act as if it were so, as if antichrist were an element of the last days only and the whole of history were free of his influence. If revelation supports the interpretation of the antichrist as a person, revelation also makes clear that antichrist is an ever present aspect of history. St. Paul expresses this quite clearly: "The secret of malice is already at work and the one who is holding it back has first to be removed. Then, the unjust one will appear openly" (2, Th. 2:7). In other words, the antichrist is held back by God's decree. At the end of history, he will manifest himself as godless, but in this manifestation there will be nothing new, only a measureless concentrating of the ancient forces of evil ever at work in history. The antichrist as a person will only be the ripest fruit of the antichrist spirit. It seems that St. John claims the same thing: "As you heard, an antichrist is coming, and now several antichrists have already appeared (1, Jn. 2:18). And further on, "many false prophets have entered the world" and the spirit who does not recognize Christ is "from the world" (4, 2-4). It is true that St. John comforts Christians by saying that the Christ who lives in us is "greater than he who is in the world" (4:5). But with these words he clearly admits that the enemy is already at work.

Most surprising, however, is the fact that St. John considers this ever working demonic power to be a sign of the last hour of the world's history. He writes: "Children, this is the last hour. You heard that an antichrist is coming, and now several antichrists have already appeared; we know from this that these are the last days" (1 Jn. 2:18-29). The appearance of Christ on earth, as was said revealed also his foe in concrete human existence. But with this, history turned itself towards its own end. If the ages before Christ could boast that they were hurrying towards the center of earthly time, towards the Logos becoming flesh, to the ages after Christ nothing else remains but to flow towards the second coming of Christ, that is, towards the end. The last hour of history has begun with the ascension of Christ into heaven. The appearance of many antichrists, false prophets, spirits that deny Christ, is the sign that in essence little time remains until the final flowering of goodness and evil. For this reason, the work of the demoniac powers has now become more intense and evident than in the period before Christ. In pagan history, the dragons attempted to govern man through his physical nature; possession was the main form of such rule. The older antichrist acted more as a power without God, governing nature. In Christian history, however, the serpent attacks mostly human spiritual existence, for this through the sacrament of baptism has become the residence of the Blessed Trinity. The new antichrist takes on a spiritual form and in this way becomes a historical power. He leaves "the places in the deserts of nature" and enters culture, philosophy, art, the state, industry, infesting these areas now no less than he infested the body of man long ago. As in earlier times the devil performed wonderful things through man's physical nature, so now he performs "great signs and wonders" (Mt. 24:24) in the spiritual world," so that even the chosen be misled (if that is possible) (24:25). Christian man is no longer a man of nature. Today he works not as a doctor or magician but as a philosopher, artist, politician, statesman, or industrialist. For that reason the sorting out of spirits is the most important but also most difficult task in the period after Christ.

At the end of the **Three Conversations**, the participants in the discussion agree that everything is as if covered by some thin and intangible veil. Total clarity is lacking — and this not only in heaven, but also in the soul. An unrest lurks in the air and a foreboding; and this is not only a sign that the earth has aged and that our powers of observation have weakened but also that the evil power is at work. The sensing of darkening is noteworthy in the course of history. The prominence of evil covers everything as if with a veil, and our gaze can nowhere find pure values. The corruption of the earth, spoken of by the Book of Revelations of St. John (11:8), is ever increasing; man ever more definitely opens himself to sin; the secret of malice is active ever more widely. The antichrist manifests himself through "force, deceptive signs and miracles, and everything evil that can deceive" (2 Th. 2:9). The history redeemed by Christ will not accept the "love of truth," so that God visits upon it a "power to delude them and make them believe lies" (2 Tm. 2:12). History is on a path which unavoidably will end in a universal breaking up. Soloviev writes: "The drama of history is completed, only the epilogue remains. Of course, it can be stretched out to five acts like in Ibsen; much nonsense can still be said and many foolish things done on the world's stage, but the play has long ago been written, and neither the spectators nor the actors are free to change anything

in it." Soloviev attempts to express the essence of the antichrist with a single simple statement: "not everything that glitters is gold." The antichrist has a great deal of glitter, but "no real power." This glitter blinds the vision and misleads the spirit. This is the strength of the power of the antichrist. For this reason, for each new epoch, Christianity sets the task of more exactly investigating the manifestations of the antichrist in man's historical existence. To bare this deceitful glitter and bring out into open the wiles of the antichrist in all the areas of life is the purpose of the following chapters of this study.

1. [Aleksandras Dambrauskas (pen name — A. Jakštas), 1860-1938. Dambrauskas was concerned with almost all intellectual matters. He published works of literary criticism, wrote on mathematics, the natural sciences, theology, and philosophy. Among his many writings there are a number of essays on the relations between theology and philosophy, and a textbook in logic. A Catholic priest, Dambrauskas on several occasions taught in seminaries. Trans.]

2. [ Biblical passages are translated from the Lithuanian text used by Maceina. The translator relied heavily upon the *Jerusalem Bible* published by Doubleday & Co., in 1966.]