events of peoples, that reason is in world history—not the reason of a particular subject, but the divine, absolute reason—is a truth that we presuppose; its proof is the treatise on world history itself: the image and the work of reason. (p. 29.)

Eric Voegelin

II ERSATZ RELIGION

The Gnostic Mass Movements of Our Time

The term "gnostic mass movement" is not in common use. Therefore, when one encounters it one expects it first to be defined. This, however, is not possible, since for methodological reasons definitions come at the end of the analytical process and not at the beginning. And if the analysis has been carefully carried out, definitions are no longer of any great importance, for they can provide no more than a summary of the results of the analysis. We shall follow the Aristotelian method and speak first illustratively of the subject to be examined, and then, when it is secured at the common-sense level of our experience, proceed with the analysis.

I

By gnostic movements we mean such movements as progressivism, positivism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, communism, fascism, and national socialism. We are not dealing, therefore, in all of these cases with political mass movements. Some of them would more accurately be characterized as intellectual movements—for example, positivism, neo-positivism, and the variants of psychoanalysis. This draws attention to the fact that mass movements do not represent an autonomous phenomenon and that the difference between masses and intellectual elites is perhaps not so great as is conventionally assumed, if indeed it exists at all. At any rate, in social reality

the two types merge. None of the movements cited began as a mass movement; all derived from intellectuals and small groups. Some of them, according to the intentions of their founders, should have grown into political mass movements, but did not. Others, such as neo-positivism or psychoanalysis, were meant to be intellectual movements; but they have had, if not the form, at least the success of political mass movements, in that their theories and jargons have shaped the thinking of millions of people in the Western world, very often without their being aware of it.

A brief outline of Comteian positivism may serve as a representative example of how mass and intellectual movements are connected. Positivism was an intellectual movement that began with Saint-Simon, with Comte and his friends, and was intended by its founders to become a mass movement of worldwide extent. All mankind was expected to compose the fellowship of the positivist congregation under the spiritual leadership of the "*fondateur de la religion de l'humanité*." Comte tried to enter into diplomatic correspondence with Nicholas I, with the Jesuit General, and with the Grand Vizier, in order to incorporate into positivism Russian Orthodoxy, the Catholic Church, and Islam. Even though these grandiose plans fell through, something significant was achieved. There have been strong positivist movements, especially in South America; and

to this day the Republic of Brazil has on its flag the Comteian motto "Order and Progress." Comteian positivism engaged the best minds of the time in Europe. It decidedly influenced John Stuart Mill; and the echo of the Comteian view of history can still be heard in the philosophy of Max Weber, Ernest Cassirer, and Edmund Husserl. Finally, the entire Western world can thank Comte for the word "altruism"—the secular-immanent substitute for "love," which is associated with Christianity: altruism is the basis of the conception of a brotherhood of man without a father. In the case of positivism one can see perhaps most clearly how problems concerning intellectual and mass movements converge.

II

We have located the subject of our inquiry at the level of common sense, and must now proceed to clarify further the degree to which the movements cited can be characterized as gnostic.

Again, we cannot give definitions, only allusions to the historical instances. Gnosticism was a religious movement of antiquity. It can be confirmed as having been approximately contemporary with Christianity—so contemporary, in fact, that it was assumed for a long time that gnosis involved no more than a Christian heresy. This notion can no longer be held today. Although there are no gnostic

sources that can be dated with certainty before the birth of Christ, gnostic influences and terminology are indeed so clearly recognizable in St. Paul that they must stem from a powerful movement in existence before his time. On the historical continuity of gnosticism from antiquity to modern times, let it be said here only that the connections in the development of gnostic sects from those of the eastern Mediterranean in antiquity through the movements of the high Middle Ages up to those of the Western Renaissance and Reformation have been sufficiently clarified to permit us to speak of a continuity.

More important for our purposes than definitions and questions of genesis are the features by which we can recognize gnostic movements as such. Let us list, therefore, the six characteristics that, taken together, reveal the nature of the gnostic attitude.

1) It must first be pointed out that the gnostic is dissatisfied with his situation. This, in itself, is not especially surprising. We all have cause to be not completely satisfied with one aspect or another of the situation in which we find ourselves.

2) Not quite so understandable is the second aspect of the gnostic attitude: the belief that the drawbacks of the situation can be attributed to the fact that the world is intrinsically poorly organized. For it is likewise possible to assume that the order of being as it is given to us men (wherever its origin is to be sought) is good and that it is we human

beings who are inadequate. But gnostics are not inclined to discover that human beings in general and they themselves in particular are inadequate. If in a given situation something is not as it should be, then the fault is to be found in the wickedness of the world.

3) The third characteristic is the belief that salvation from the evil of the world is possible.

4) From this follows the belief that the order of being will have to be changed in an historical process. From a wretched world a good one must evolve historically. This assumption is not altogether self-evident, because the Christian solution might also be considered—namely, that the world throughout history will remain as it is and that man's salvational fulfillment is brought about through grace in death.

5) With this fifth point we come to the gnostic trait in the narrower sense—the belief that a change in the order of being lies in the realm of human action, that this salvational act is possible through man's own effort.

6) If it is possible, however, so to work a structural change in the given order of being that we can be satisfied with it as a perfect one, then it becomes the task of the gnostic to seek out the prescription for such a change. Knowledge—gnosis—of the method of altering being is the central concern of the gnostic. As the sixth feature of the gnostic attitude, there-

fore, we recognize the construction of a formula for self and world salvation, as well as the gnostic's readiness to come forward as a prophet who will proclaim his knowledge about the salvation of mankind.

These six characteristics, then, describe the essence of the gnostic attitude. In one variation or another they are to be found in each of the movements cited.

III

For its appropriate expression, the gnostic attitude has produced a rich and multiform symbolism in the modern mass movements. It is so extensive that it cannot be completely described in this essay. We shall deal with only a few of the most important complexes of symbols. Let us begin with that complex of symbols which can be recognized as modifications of the Christian idea of perfection.

This idea represents the insight that human nature does not find its fulfillment in this world, but only in the *visio beatifica*, in supernatural perfection through grace in death. Since, therefore, there is no fulfillment in this world, Christian life on earth takes its special form from the life to come in the next. It is shaped by *sanctificatio*, by the sanctification of life. Two components can be distinguished in the Christian idea of perfection. The first component is that of the movement toward the goal of

perfection, which is described by the expression "sanctification of life"—in English Puritanism, by the notion of the *pilgrim's progress*. As movement toward a goal, it is referred to as the *teleological* component. Further, the goal, the *telos*, toward which the movement is directed, is understood as ultimate perfection; and since the goal is a state of highest value, this second component is called the *axiological*. The two components, the teleological and the axiological, were identified by Ernst Troeltsch.

The gnostic mass movements derive their ideas of perfection from the Christian. In accordance with the components just described, there are on principle three possibilities of derivation. In gnostic perfection, which is supposed to come to pass within the historical world, the teleological and axiological components can be immanentized either separately or together. There follow a few examples of the three types of immanentization.

To the first type of derivation, the teleological, belongs progressivism in all variants. When the teleological component is immanentized, the chief emphasis of the gnostic-political idea lies on the forward movement, on the movement toward a goal of perfection in this world. The goal itself need not be understood very precisely; it may consist of no more than the idealization of this or that aspect of the situation, considered valuable by the thinker in ques-

tion. Eighteenth-century ideas of progress—for example, Kant's or Condorcet's—belong to this teleological variant of gnosis. According to the Kantian idea of progress, humanity is moving in an unending approach toward the goal of a perfect, rational existence in a cosmopolitan society—although, to Kant's credit, it must be said that he was able to find in the unending progress of mankind no salvation for the individual man, and the relevance of progress for the fulfillment of the person therefore seemed doubtful to him. Condorcet was somewhat less patient than Kant. He chose not to leave the perfection of man to the unending progress of history, but to accelerate it through a directorate of intellectuals. However, his progressivist idea thereby approaches the third type, the activist effort toward perfection; for the three types of derivation are rarely found in pure form in the individual gnostic thinkers, but usually in multifarious combinations.

In the second type of derivation, the axiological, the emphasis of the idea falls on the state of perfection in the world. Conditions for a perfect social order are described and worked out in detail and assume the form of an ideal image. Such an image was first sketched by Thomas More in his *Utopia*. But the design for perfection need not always be as carefully worked out as it is in More. Much more common are those depictions of a desirable final state that are designed as negatives of some specific

evil in the world. The list of these evils has been familiar since antiquity; it was drawn up by Hesiod. Chiefly, it includes poverty, sickness, death, the necessity for work, and sexual problems. These are the principal categories of the burden of existence, to which correspond the models of society offering specific deliverance from one ill or another. Incomplete notions of perfections of this sort may be called *ideals*, in order to distinguish them from the complete models of the utopian kind. Under ideals, therefore, should be included fragments of utopias, such as the notion of a society without private property or of one free from the burdens of labor, sickness, or anxiety. It is characteristic of the whole class of these axiological derivatives that they draw up a comparatively lucid picture of the desirable condition, but are concerned only vaguely with the means of bringing it about.

In the third type of derivation the two components are immanentized together, and there is present both a conception of the end goal and knowledge of the methods by which it is to be brought about. We shall speak of cases of this third type as *activist mysticism*. Under activist mysticism belong primarily movements that descend from Auguste Comte and Karl Marx. In both cases one finds a relatively clear formulation of the state of perfection: in Comte, a final state of industrial society under the temporal rule of the managers and the spiritual rule of posi-

tivist intellectuals; in Marx, a final state of a classless realm of freedom. And in both cases, there is clarity about the way to perfection: for Comte, through the transformation of man into his highest form, positivist man; for Marx, through the revolution of the proletariat and the transformation of man into the communist superman.

IV

A second complex of symbols that runs through modern gnostic mass movements was created in the speculation on history of Joachim of Flora at the end of the twelfth century.

Joachim's historical speculation was directed against the then reigning philosophy of history of St. Augustine. According to the Augustinian construction, the phase of history since Christ was the sixth, the last earthly age—the *saeculum senescens*, the time of the senility of mankind. The present had no earthly future; its meaning was exhausted in a waiting for the end of history through eschatological events. The motives of this view of history are to be sought in the experiences of the fifth century in which it was formed. In the time of Augustine it seemed indeed that, if not *the* world, at least *a* world was approaching its end. But twelfth-century western European man could not be satisfied with the view of a senile world waiting for its end; for

his world was quite obviously not in its decline, but, on the contrary, on the upsurge. Population was increasing, areas of settlement were expanding, wealth was growing, cities were being founded, and intellectual life was intensifying, especially through the emergence of the great religious orders since Cluny. The idea of senility must have seemed preposterous to this vital, expanding age, relishing the exercise of its civilizing powers.

Like Joachim himself, his speculation arose out of the thriving religious orders. He projected his view of history on a trinitarian scheme. World history was a consequence of three great ages—those of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The first age lasted from the Creation to the birth of Christ; the second, that of the Son, began with Christ. But the age of the Son was not, as Augustine had it, mankind's last; rather, it was to be followed by an additional one, that of the Holy Spirit. We can recognize, even in this thoroughly Christian context, the first symptoms of the idea of a post-Christian era. Joachim went further and indulged in concrete speculations about the beginning of the age of the Holy Spirit, fixing its inauguration at 1260. And the new age, like the preceding ones, was to be ushered in by the appearance of a leader. As the first age began with Abraham and the second with Christ, so the third was to begin in the year 1260 with the appearance of a *dux e Babylone*.

So ran the Joachitic speculation. It comprises a complex of four symbols which have remained characteristic of the political mass movements of modern times.

The first of these symbols is that of the Third Realm—that is, the conception of a third world-historical phase that is at the same time the last, the age of fulfillment. An extensive class of gnostic ideas comes under the symbol of the three phases. First and foremost would be the humanistic periodization of world history into ancient, medieval, and modern. This classification was derived in its original version from Biondo. It established as the Middle Ages the millennium from the conquest of Rome by the West Goths to the year 1410. Then, in the eighteenth century, the three-phase laws made famous by Turgot and Comte make their appearance: world history is divided into a first theological, a second metaphysical, and a third phase of positive science. In Hegel we encounter a tripartite division of world history according to levels of freedom: antiquity with its oriental despotism, when only one was free; then aristocratic times, when a few were free; and now modern times, when all are free. Marx and Engels applied this tripartite scheme to their question of the proletariat and spoke of a first phase of primitive communism, a second phase of bourgeois class society, and a third of classless society when the final communist realm of freedom is realized. Again,

Schelling, in his speculation on history, distinguished three great phases of Christianity: first the Petrine, followed by the Pauline, which will be sealed by the Johannine phase of perfect Christianity.

These are only the principal cases. They are cited to show that the projection of a Third Realm of perfection is in fact a ruling symbol in the self-understanding of modern society and that after several centuries of preparation for final Third Realms, the attempt to bring them into existence by revolutionary action should no longer especially surprise us. The enumeration should further serve to suggest that a type of experience and symbolism that has been built up for centuries will hardly lose its dominant position in Western history overnight.

The second symbol Joachim developed is that of the leader, the *dux*, who appears at the beginning of a new era and through his appearance establishes that era. This symbol was avidly snatched up by Joachim's salvation-seeking contemporaries. The first to fall victim to it was St. Francis of Assisi. He was considered by so many to be the leader to the realm of the Holy Spirit that he felt it necessary to take special measures to guard against this misunderstanding of his entirely orthodox actions. In spite of his pains, belief in St. Francis as the leader of the Third Realm persisted, and had a very strong influence on Dante's conception of such a leader-figure. Moreover, the idea dominated the sectarian move-

ments of the Renaissance and Reformation: their leaders were paracletes possessed by the spirit of God, and their followers were the *homines novi* or *spirituales*. Dante's notion of a *dux* of the new realm emerged again in the period of national socialism and fascism. There exists a German and Italian literature in which Hitler and Mussolini are at times glorified as the leaders foretold by Dante.

In the period of secularization leaders could not be presented as God-possessed paracletes. By the end of the eighteenth century a new symbol, that of the "superman," begins to take the place of the old sectarian categories. The expression—coined by Goethe in *Faust*—is used in the nineteenth century by Marx and Nietzsche to characterize the new man of the Third Realm. The process by which the superman is created is closely related to the movement of the spirit in which the older sectarians drew into themselves the substance of God and transformed themselves into the "godded man," the divinized man. God is understood by the secularist sectarians as a projection of the substance of the human soul into the illusionary spaciousness of the "beyond." Through psychological analysis, this illusion can be dispelled and "God" brought back from his beyond into the human soul from which he sprung. By dispelling the illusion, the divine substance is reincorporated in man, and man becomes superman. The act of taking God back into man, just as among

the older sectarians, has the result of creating a human type who experiences himself as existing outside of institutional bonds and obligations. As the main types of the superman we can distinguish the progressivist superman of Condorcet (who even has the hope of an eternal earthly life), the positivist superman of Comte, the communist superman of Marx, and the Dionysian superman of Nietzsche.

The third of Joachim's symbols is that of the prophet. Joachim assumed that the leader of each age had a precursor, just as Christ had St. John the Baptist. Even the leader out of the Babylonian captivity, who was to appear in 1260, had such a precursor—in this case, Joachim himself. With the creation of the symbol of the precursor, a new type emerges in Western history: the intellectual who knows the formula for salvation from the misfortunes of the world and can predict how world history will take its course in the future. In Joachitic speculation, the intellectual is still deeply immersed in the medium of Christianity, in that Joachim understands himself to be the prophet of the coming, God-sent *dux e Babylone*. In the further course of Western history, the Christian tide recedes, and the prophet, the precursor of the leader, becomes the secularist intellectual who thinks he knows the meaning of history (understood as world-immanent) and can predict the future. In political practice, the figure of the intellectual who projects the image

of future history and makes predictions cannot always be clearly separated from that of the leader. In the case of Comte, for example, we doubtless have the figure of a leader before us; but, at the same time, Comte is also the intellectual who prognosticates his own role as leader of world history and, moreover, even transforms himself through the magic of meditative practice from the intellectual into the leader. In the case of communism, also, it is difficult to separate leader and intellectual in the person of a Karl Marx. But in the historical form of the movement, Marx and Engels have been distinguished, by the distance of a generation, as "precursors," from Lenin and Stalin as "leaders," of the realization of the Third Realm.

The fourth of the Joachitic symbols is the community of spiritually autonomous persons. In the spirit of the monasticism of the time, Joachim imagined the Third Realm as a community of monks. In our context, the importance of this image lies in the idea of a spiritualized mankind existing in community without the mediation and support of institutions; for, according to Joachim's view, the spiritual community of monks was to exist without the sacramental supports of the Church. In this free community of autonomous persons without institutional organization can be seen the same symbolism found in modern mass movements, which imagine the Final Realm as a free community of men after

the extinction of the state and other institutions. The symbolism is most clearly recognizable in communism, but the idea of democracy also thrives not inconsiderably on the symbolism of a community of autonomous men.

This concludes our discussion of Joachitic symbolism. In it, we have one of the great complexes of symbols that became active in modern political mass movements and has remained so to the present day.

V

The two complexes we have briefly outlined here by no means exhaust the symbolic language of the mass movements. In order to achieve approximate completeness, we would have to add those that can be traced back to the Latin Averroism and nominalism of the Middle Ages. But the symbols deriving from the Christian idea of perfection and Joachitic speculation are doubtless the dominant ones, to which the others are adjusted. And in both the immanentization of the Christian idea of perfection holds primacy.

This position is ontologically determined by the central importance of the question of immanentization. All gnostic movements are involved in the project of abolishing the constitution of being, with its origin in divine, transcendent being, and replacing it with a world-immanent order of being, the

perfection of which lies in the realm of human action. This is a matter of so altering the structure of the world, which is perceived as inadequate, that a new, satisfying world arises. The variants of immanentization, therefore, are the controlling symbols, to which the other complexes are subordinated as secondary ways of expressing the will to immanentization.

No matter to which of the three variants of immanentization the movements belong, the attempt to create a new world is common to all. This endeavor can be meaningfully undertaken only if the constitution of being can in fact be altered by man. The world, however, remains as it is given to us, and it is not within man's power to change its structure. In order—*not*, to be sure, to make the undertaking possible—but to make it *appear* possible, every gnostic intellectual who drafts a program to change the world must first construct a world picture from which those essential features of the constitution of being that would make the program appear hopeless and foolish have been eliminated. Let us turn, then, to this specific trait of gnostic models of the world. In three representative cases we shall show which factor of reality has been omitted in order to make the possibility of an alteration in the unsatisfactory state of things seem plausible. For our three examples we have chosen Thomas More's *Utopia*, Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and Hegel's construct of history.

In his *Utopia* More traces the image of man and of society that he considers perfect. To this perfection belongs the abolition of private property. Because he had the benefit of an excellent theological education, however, More is well aware that this perfect state cannot be achieved in the world: man's lust for possessions is deeply rooted in original sin, in *superbia* in the Augustinian sense. In the final part of his work when More looks over his finished picture, he has to admit that it would all be possible if only there were not the "serpent of superbia." But there *is* the serpent of superbia—and More would not think of denying it. This raises the question of the peculiar psychopathological condition in which a man like More must have found himself when he drew up a model of the perfect society in history, in full consciousness that it could never be realized because of original sin.

And this opens up the problem of the strange, abnormal spiritual condition of gnostic thinkers, for which we have not as yet developed an adequate terminology in our time. In order, therefore, to be able to speak of this phenomenon, it will be advisable to use the term "pneumopathology," which Schelling coined for this purpose. In a case like More's, we may speak, then, of the pneumopathological condition of a thinker who, in his revolt against the world as it has been created by God, arbitrarily omits an element of reality in order to create the fantasy of a new world.

As More leaves superbia out of his image of man in order to create a utopian order from this new man freed by the intellectual from original sin, so Hobbes leaves out another essential factor in order to be able to construct his *Leviathan*. The factor Hobbes omits is the *summum bonum*, the highest good. Now, Hobbes knows that human action can be considered rational only if it is oriented beyond all intermediate stages of ends and means to a last end, this same *summum bonum*. Hobbes further knows that the *summum bonum* was the primary condition of rational ethics in the classical as well as the scholastic thinkers. Therefore, in the introduction to the *Leviathan* he states explicitly that he proposes to leave the *summum bonum* of the "old thinkers" out of his construct of society. If there is no *summum bonum*, however, there is no point of orientation that can endow human action with rationality. Action, then, can only be represented as motivated by passions, above all, by the passion of aggression, the overcoming of one's fellow man. The "natural" state of society must be understood as the war of all against all, if men do not in free love orient their actions to the highest good. The only way out of the warfare of this passion-conditioned state of nature is to submit to a passion stronger than all others, which will subdue their aggressiveness and drive to dominate and induce them to live in peaceful order. For Hobbes, this passion is the fear of the *summum malum*, the fear of death at the hands of another, to which each man is exposed in his natural state. If men are not moved to live with one another in peace through common love of the divine, highest good, then the fear of the *summum malum* of death must force them to live in an orderly society.

The motives of this strange construct are more clearly discernible in Hobbes than in More. The author of the *Leviathan* formed his image of man and society under the pressure of the Puritan Revolution. He diagnosed the efforts of the Puritan sectarians to set up the Kingdom of God as an expression of the *libido dominandi* of the revolutionary who wants to bend men to his will. The "spirit" that he saw as inspiring these armed prophets of the new world was not the spirit of God, but human lust for power. He then generalized this observation —which was quite accurate in the case of the Puritans—and made the *libido dominandi*, which is the revolt of man against his nature and God, the essential characteristic of human beings. *Every* movement of the spirit became for him a pretext for a movement of the passions. There was absolutely no orientation of human action through love of God, but only motivation through the world-immanent power drive. And these "proud ones," who wanted to rule and pass off their will to power as the will of God, had to be broken by the Leviathan, the "Lord of the Proud," who held them in check with his threat

of death and compelled them to accept the peaceful order of society. The result of these assumptions was the same for Hobbes as for More. If men are incapable of ordering their dealings with each other in freedom through love of the *summum bonum*, if society disintegrates into civil war—in fact, into the state of a war of all against all—and if this condition is considered man's "state of nature" from which there is no escape, then the hour has come of the thinker who possesses the formula for the restoration of order and the guarantee of eternal peace. The society that is governed neither by God's will nor its own shall be placed under that of the gnostic thinker. The *libido dominandi* that Hobbes diagnosed in the Puritans celebrates its highest triumph in the construction of a system that denies man the freedom and ability to order his life in society. Through the construction of the system the thinker becomes the only free person—a god, who will deliver man from the evils of the "state of nature." This function of the system is clearer in Hobbes than it was in More because Hobbes recommends his work to a "sovereign" who may read it, ponder it, and act accordingly. More did indeed construct his Utopia; but this humanist's game, dangerous as it was, was still only a game, for More remained aware that the perfect society was, and would always be, "nowhere." But Hobbes takes his construct in dead earnest. He recommends it to a

person in power who is to suppress the apparent freedom of the spirit and its order, because in Hobbes's opinion man does not have the real thing.

The third case we shall consider is Hegel's philosophy of history. Let us first state that the term "philosophy of history" may be applied to Hegel's speculation only with reservations. For Hegel's history is not to be found in reality, and the reality of history is not in Hegel. The harmony between construct and history could be achieved in this case, too, only through the omission of an essential factor of reality.

The factor Hegel excludes is the mystery of a history that wends its way into the future without our knowing its end. History as a whole is essentially not an object of cognition; the meaning of the whole is not discernible. Hegel can construct, then, a meaningfully self-contained process of history only by assuming that the revelation of God in history is fully comprehensible. The appearance of Christ was for him the crux of world history; in this decisive epoch God had revealed the Logos—reason—in history. But the revelation was incomplete, and Hegel considered it man's duty to complete the incomplete revelation by raising the Logos to complete clarity in consciousness. This elevation to consciousness is in fact possible through the mind of the philosopher—concretely, through the mind of Hegel: in the medium of the Hegelian dialectic the

revelation of God in history reaches its fulfillment. The validity of the construct depends on the assumption that the mystery of revelation and of the course of history can be solved and made fully transparent through the dialectical unfolding of the Logos. We have here a construct closely related to that of Joachim of Flora. Joachim, too, was dissatisfied with the Augustinian waiting for the end; he, too, wanted to have an intelligible meaning in history here and now; and in order to make the meaning intelligible, he had to set himself up as the prophet to whom this meaning was clear. In the same manner, Hegel identifies his human logos with the Logos that is Christ, in order to make the meaningful process of history fully comprehensible.

VI

In the three cases of More, Hobbes, and Hegel, we can establish that the thinker suppresses an essential element of reality in order to be able to construct an image of man, or society, or history to suit his desires. If we now consider the question of why the thinker would thus contradict reality, we shall not find the answer on the level of theoretic argument; for we have obviously gone beyond reason, if the relation to reality is so greatly disturbed that essential elements are on principle excluded from consideration. We must move our inquiry to the psychological level, and a first answer has already yielded itself in the course of our presentation: the will to power of the gnostic who wants to rule the world has triumphed over the humility of subordination to the constitution of being. This answer cannot completely satisfy us, however, for while the will to power has indeed conquered humility, the result of victory is not really the acquisition of power. The constitution of being remains what it is—beyond the reach of the thinker's lust for power. It is not changed by the fact that a thinker drafts a program to change it and fancies that he can implement that program. The result, therefore, is not dominion over being, but a fantasy satisfaction.

Therefore, we must go further and inquire into the psychic gain the thinker receives from the construction of his image and the psychic needs the masses of his followers satisfy through it. From the materials we have presented, it would appear that this gain consists in a stronger certainty about the meaning of human existence, in a new knowledge of the future that lies before us, and in the creation of a more secure basis for action in the future. Assurances of this sort, however, are sought only if man feels uncertain on these points. If we then inquire further about the reasons for the uncertainty, we come upon aspects of the order of being and man's place in it that do indeed give cause for uncertainty—an uncertainty perhaps so hard to bear that it may

be acknowledged sufficient motive for the creation of fantasy assurances. Let us consider some of these aspects.

A complex of derivatives of the Christian idea of perfection proved to be the controlling symbolism in gnostic speculation. Clearly, an element of insecurity must be involved in this idea, which moves men to search for a firmer foundation for their existence in this world. It will therefore be necessary first to discuss faith in the Christian sense as the source of this insecurity.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, faith is defined as the substance of things hoped for and the proof of things unseen. This is the definition that forms the basis for Thomas Aquinas' theological exposition of faith. The definition consists of two parts—an ontological and an epistemological proposition. The ontological proposition asserts that faith is the substance of things hoped for. The substance of these things subsists in nothing but this very faith, and not perhaps in its theological symbolism. The second proposition asserts that faith is the proof of things unseen. Again, proof lies in nothing but faith itself. This thread of faith, on which hangs all certainty regarding divine, transcendent being, is indeed very thin. Man is given nothing tangible. The substance and proof of the unseen are ascertained through nothing but faith, which man must obtain by the strength of his soul—in this psychological study we disregard

the problem of grace. Not all men are capable of such spiritual stamina; most need institutional help, and even this is not always sufficient. We are confronted with the singular situation that Christian faith is so much the more threatened, the further it expands socially, the more it brings men under institutional control, and the more clearly its essence is articulated. This threat had reached the critical point in the high Middle Ages because of widespread social success. Christianity had in fact institutionally encompassed the men of Western society; and in the new urban culture, under the influence of the great religious orders, its essence had attained a high degree of clarity. Coincidentally with its greatness, its weakness became apparent: great masses of Christianized men who were not strong enough for the heroic adventure of faith became susceptible to ideas that could give them a greater degree of certainty about the meaning of their existence than faith. The reality of being as it is known in its truth by Christianity is difficult to bear, and the flight from clearly seen reality to gnostic constructs will probably always be a phenomenon of wide extent in civilizations that Christianity has permeated.

The temptation to fall from uncertain truth into certain untruth is stronger in the clarity of Christian faith than in other spiritual structures. But the absence of a secure hold on reality and the demanding

spiritual strain are generally characteristic of border experiences in which man's knowledge of transcendent being, and thereby of the origin and meaning of mundane being, is constituted. This may be illustrated briefly in three examples taken from different cultural contexts—the Jewish, the Hellenic, and the Islamic.

In the Jewish sphere, faith responds to the revelation of God. The central experience of revelation is transmitted in Exodus 3, in the thornbush episode. God reveals himself in his nature to Moses with the expression, "I am who I am." As the formulation in the Epistle to the Hebrews is the basis of Thomas' theology of faith, so that in Exodus is the basis of his teaching on God. Again, one can say of the latter formulation only: That is all. In the contact the human soul in the world has with the beyond, nothing is discovered but the existence of God. Everything beyond this belongs to the realm of analogical-speculative deduction and mythic symbolization. Even in Moses' experience of revelation, we must observe that the thread on which hangs our knowledge of the order of being, its origin and meaning, is very thin. It was in fact so thin that it snapped, and the bulk of the people reverted to the old gods of polytheistic civilization. Furthermore, the prophet Jeremiah made the penetrating observation that nations in general do not desert their gods, although they are "false"; while Israel, who has the

"true God," deserts Him. This unique case in the history of the peoples of the time attests perhaps most clearly to the phenomenon we just observed in connection with the experience of faith: with the refinement and clarification of the relationship between God and man, the moment of uncertainty, and with it the need for more solid certainty, is intensified. The example of Israel further shows that the lapse from faith by no means must result in this or that form of gnosis. If, experientially, the cultural conditions permit it, the need for certainty can also be satisfied by a reversion to a still vital polytheism.

The great demand on man's spiritual strength is clarified in the symbolism of the Last Judgment as Plato develops it in his *Gorgias*. To his sophist opponents, who operate with the ethic of worldly success of the man of power, Plato counters with the argument that "success" in life consists in standing before the judges of the dead. Before these judges the soul stands stripped of the husk of the body and the cloak of earthly status, in complete transparency. And life should be led in anticipation of this final transparency, *sub specie mortis*, rather than under the compulsions of the will to power and social status. What is being expressed symbolically in the Platonic myth, as in all myths of judgment, is the border experience of the examination of conscience. Over and above the normal testing of our actions

against the standards of rational ethics, which is called conscience and which we as men perform, the experience of examination can be elaborated meditatively and expanded to the experience of standing in Judgment. Man knows that even the most conscientious self-examination is limited by the bounds of his humanity: breakdowns in judgment; on principle, incomplete knowledge of all the factors of the situation and of all the ramifications of action; and, above all, inadequate knowledge of his own ultimate motives, which reach into the unconscious. Proceeding by way of meditative experiment from this knowledge of the limitations of self-appraisal, one can imagine the situation in which a man is to be judged, not at a particular moment in a particular situation of his life and before himself alone, but on the basis of his entire life (which is completed only in death) and before an omniscient judge, before whom there is no longer any pleading of special points and no argument or defense is possible because everything, even the least and most remote, is already known. In this meditation at the border, all pro and con fall silent, and nothing remains but the silence of the judgment that the human being has spoken upon himself with his life.

Plato carried out this meditation—otherwise he could not have composed his myth of the judgment. But if we put ourselves in the situation in which he

has his Socrates relate the myth to his sophist opponents and if we ask about the possibility of its having affected these hardboiled *Realpolitiker*, standing firmly in "life," then we must again doubt that many took it to heart and let their existence be formed by it—even though, while listening, they may have been profoundly touched for a moment. The meditation itself and, still more, existence in its tension would be unbearable for most men. At any rate, we find right in the gnostic mass movements a development of the idea of conscience that leads off in the opposite direction from the meditation at the border, toward worldliness. Conscience is readily invoked, even today, especially when a politician's immoral or criminal conduct is to be justified by having "followed his conscience" or by "being aware of his responsibilities." But in this case conscience no longer means the testing of one's actions against the rational principles of ethics, but, on the contrary, the cutting off of rational debates and the stubborn, demonic persistence in actions that passion incites.

The Islamic prayer exercises that have developed since the ninth century will serve as the final example of a high demand in spiritual tension. Structurally, this meditation, which preceded prayer, is most closely related to the meditative experiment on which the Platonic myth of the Last Judgment is based. When I want to pray, says the rule, I go to the place where I wish to say my prayer. I sit still

until I am composed. Then I stand up: the Kaaba is in front of me, paradise to my right, hell to my left, and the angel of death stands behind me. Then I say my prayer as if it were my last. And thus I stand, between hope and fear, not knowing whether God has received my prayer favorably or not. Perhaps, for the masses, this high spiritual clarity is made bearable through a connection with the neither high nor especially spiritual extension of God's realm by force of arms over the ecumene.

The gnostic mass movements of our time betray in their symbolism a certain derivation from Christianity and its experience of faith. The temptation to fall from a spiritual height that brings the element of uncertainty into final clarity down into the more solid certainty of world-immanent, sensible fulfillment, nevertheless, seems to be a general human problem. Cases of border experience, where the element of insecurity in the constitution of being becomes evident, were chosen from four different civilizational orbits to show that a typical phenomenon is involved in the modern mass movements, despite their historical uniqueness. Empirically, this insight will perhaps contribute something to the understanding of social processes in different civilizations. At any rate, we have managed theoretically to trace the phenomenon back to its ontic roots and to reduce it to ontological type concepts. And this is the task of science.