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# Carlyle's Political Religion

RICHARD J. BISHIRJIAN

THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER of contemporary mass and intellectual movements has been the subject of several important social and political studies. *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957) by Norman Cohn is an analysis of Medieval European religious movements and the similarity of these movements to the modern political phenomena of German National Socialism and Communism. These contemporary political ideologies, Cohn shows, are similar in structure and in some instances take inspiration from what we today would call the fanatical, if not irrational, Medieval phenomena. J. L. Talmon's *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (1960) indicates the similarity of the secular apocalyptic strain in Eighteenth Century French philosophy to the chiliastic Medieval phenomena, and the revolutionary consequences of this political Messianism in Eighteenth Century France. Albert Camus' *The Rebel* (1951) analyzes the variants of rebellion in modern speculation and incisively penetrates to the religious character of revolt. These three studies indicate that analysis of modern political ideologies must cope with the underlying religious implications of the ideas and movements or the essence of this phenomenon will escape us. In this context the political religion of Thomas Carlyle is important. Carlyle himself understood his social vision, his critique of English society in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, and his eschatological prophecy of the imminence of a this-worldly golden age, to be in essence a religious vision.

But what kind of religion was it? That it was not Christian is a view contemporary Carlyle scholars have come to hold. Basil Willey in an essay on Carlyle, for example, calls his reader's atten-

tion to Carlyle's unorthodox description of his religious conversion. Commenting upon the conversion scene depicted in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1933-34) Willey notes:

The Christian reader will notice, in all this, a lack of conformity with the established pattern of conversion: there is no contrition, no reliance upon grace or redeeming love, but on the contrary, much proud and passionate self-assertion. The emotion that follows release is hatred and defiance of the Devil, rather than love and gratitude towards God. Nevertheless, he had found a faith, and never afterwards lost it.<sup>1</sup>

This same unorthodoxy persisted throughout Carlyle's life, according to Willey's comment on Carlyle's thought on this subject written at the end of his life:

In this later account there is more serenity and thankfulness than before, but not more Christianity; the mood is mainly Wordsworthian . . . and the 'redeemer' is Goethe. What he has attained is not humility and love, but a spiritual elevation from whence he can look down, with mingled compassion and scorn, on 'the welterings of my poor fellow-creatures, still stuck in that fatal element' . . .<sup>2</sup>

Early Twentieth Century Carlyle scholars were persuaded otherwise. Louis Cazamian found that "Despite his impatience of sects, Carlyle remains Protestant and even Puritan."<sup>3</sup> Charles Harrold, the erudite student of the German background in Carlyle's thought, saw him to be a Calvinist for whom the "spirit of Calvinism," and the "will to believe" in its basic doctrines is the abiding core of Carlyle's thought. Carlyle's major contribution, in Harrold's judgment, is the fitting out of his Calvinist yearnings in the new clothes of German philosophy and literature. With Cazamian, he is persuaded also that the German philosophy which Carlyle took to be his own was not in conflict with his Calvinism. Yet at the same time he notes that Carlyle rejected the doctrine of original sin, and held that man has no "ingrained depravity," it is only his environment which is evil.<sup>4</sup> This disagreement on the question of Carlyle's

<sup>1</sup> Basil Willey, "Thomas Carlyle," *Nineteenth Century Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 115 (hereafter cited as Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Cazamian, *Carlyle*, trans. E. K. Brown (1932; reprint ed., Hamden: Archon Books, 1966), 120.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Frederick Harrold, *Carlyle and German Thought: 1819-1834* (1934; reprint ed., Hamden: Archon Books, 1966), 110.

religion is important because, as Willey observed, his religion "was the invisible sun by which he lived. . . ."<sup>5</sup> To know the nature of Carlyle's political religion is to know the meaning of Carlyle's rebellious tone, and the revolutionary attitude reflected in his substitution of heroes for saints, literature for the Bible. What type of religious experience did Carlyle's revolutionary attitude reflect? What are its characteristics, its major outlines? It would be impossible here, of course, to examine the Carlylean corpus, extending over the term of his long life and including more than thirty collected volumes of his works. But if we restrict ourselves to his "prophetic literature," following the suggestion of Albert J. LaValley's recent work on Carlyle, and restrict ourselves even further to an analysis of his "novel," *Sartor Resartus*, we will, perhaps, by such an examination reveal the principles of Carlyle's political religion.<sup>6</sup>

The major characters of *Sartor Resartus* reflect both the editorial arrangement of disjointed fragments from the philosophy of clothes of the imaginary German scholar, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, and symbols of real religious insights that appear suspended in solution, rather than real experiences of historical persons. The characters of this "novel" are the unnamed English editor of the German fragments; Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, the author of the philosophy of clothes; his friend, Hofrath Heuschrecke; Teufelsdröckh's first and only love, Blumine; and her eventual husband, Herr Towgood. All are as realistically portrayed as the town from which Teufelsdröckh comes, Weissnichtwo, meaning "Know not where." They are nowhere known except in the mind of Thomas Carlyle, who seizes upon them as means for conveying the deepest sentiments of his life. The didactic fragments of *Sartor Resartus* tell us what is moving, but we ourselves do not experience it. For that reason, perhaps, what we are told by Carlyle, the philosophy of clothes, is not an experiential, ontologically oriented philosophy. Nevertheless,

<sup>5</sup> Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 113.

<sup>6</sup> Albert J. LaValley, *Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern. Studies in Carlyle's Prophetic Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) (hereafter cited as LaValley, *Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern*). LaValley's concept delimits the major works, in which Carlyle's religion is developed, from his journalistic works and translations. His prophetic works are *Wotton Reinfred* (1827); *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34); *Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* (1840); *Past and Present* (1843). Of these, *Sartor Resartus* is most evocative of his religious experience.

it is engendered by religious experience which can be demonstrated by analysis of the conversion scenes of *Sartor Resartus*.

What is it about Teufelsdröckh that he needs to be converted? For Carlyle the answer to this is the question, "Who am I?" Writ large the question asks, what is the origin and destiny of mankind? No less a question than this provides the motivation of *Sartor Resartus*. Teufelsdröckh himself is a foundling, presented as a gift to a childless elderly couple by a stranger who appears in the middle of the night. His own beginnings cast in doubt, Teufelsdröckh becomes for Carlyle a symbol of alienated man, cast into a world in which he is not truly at home, buffeted by a demonic, monstrous existence. The origin of man, however, seems not really to be an open question, if the name Diogenes Teufelsdröckh is symbolically revealing: Man's origin is in God, and his existence is the devil's feces.

Teufelsdröckh, the very embodiment of Carlyle's view of man, is a totally alienated being, which alienation and its resolution is the subject of Carlyle's work. As we are introduced to him Teufelsdröckh is engaged in a pilgrimage, the course of which takes the form of three religious experiences described in Book Two. In the first instance, titled "Romance," Teufelsdröckh encounters "Blumine." The encounter is interpreted in cosmological terms.

'It was appointed,' says our Philosopher, 'that the high celestial orbit of Blumine should intersect the low sublunary one of our Forlorn; that he, looking in her empyrean eyes, should fancy the upper Sphere of Light was come down into this nether sphere of Shadows; and finding himself mistaken, make noise enough.'

Blumine, meaning "Goddess of Flowers," "highborn, and of high spirit," the "Heaven's-Messenger," has the effect upon Teufelsdröckh of a "Seraph's wand"<sup>8</sup> The analogy is of interest not only for its description of the effect of love upon Teufelsdröckh, but also because the concept is earlier used by Carlyle to describe Teufelsdröckh himself.

Gleams of an ethereal love burst forth from him, soft wailings of infinite pity; he could clasp the whole Universe into his bosom, and keep it warm; it seems as if under that rude exterior there dwelt a very seraph.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus, the Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh*, Charles Frederick Harrold, ed. (New York: Odyssey Press, 1937), 136 (hereafter cited as Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 135; 136; 142; 139.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

The implication is that the scope of Carlyle's romance is not restricted to the human level only. He describes the encounter of Blumine, the Messenger of Heaven, and Teufelsdröckh, given of God, by the weaving of theological and magical images into his narrative: the encounter is a "preternatural hour" in which he is bound by Blumine's "art-magic,"<sup>10</sup> and yet it symbolizes also the astonishment reflected in St. Peter's words to Christ.

'To our Friend the hours seemed moments; holy was he and happy; the words from those sweetest lips came over him like dew on thirsty grass; all better feelings in his soul seemed to whisper, *It is good for us to be here.*'<sup>11</sup>

The experience of Teufelsdröckh's conversion is described in this manner:

'Pale Doubt fled away to the distance; Life bloomed-up with happiness and hope. The past, then, was all a haggard dream; he had been in the Garden of Eden, then, and could not discern it! But lo now, the black walls of his prison melt away; the captive is alive, is free. If he loved his Disenchantress? *Ach Gott!* His whole heart and soul and life were hers, but never had he named it Love: existence was all a Feeling, not yet shaped into a Thought.'<sup>12</sup>

The experience of hope, the experience of the removal of doubt and the oppression of his past struggles, are the experiences of the first conversion scene. Their inconclusiveness or incompleteness, suggested by Teufelsdröckh's inability to shape them into "Thought," have psychological consequences. When Teufelsdröckh and Blumine part for the last time, "thick curtains of Night rushed over his soul, as rose the immeasurable Crash of Doom; and through the ruins as of a shivered Universe was he falling, falling towards the Abyss."<sup>13</sup>

The second conversion scene, unlike the unfulfilling encounter with a woman of the first conversion, is a narrative of an experience of nature. Teufelsdröckh renews his pilgrimage by beginning "a perambulation and circumambulation of the terraqueous Globe!"<sup>14</sup> Though he is attempting to work out his grief, we are told that the effect of his encounter with Blumine was not completely negative. ". . . his own nature is nowise dissolved thereby; but rather is compressed closer."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added. See Matt. 17:4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-146.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

For once, as we might say, a Blumine by magic appliances has unlocked that shut heart of his, and its hidden things rush-out tumultuous, boundless, like genii enfranchised from their glass phial: but no sooner are your magic appliances withdrawn, than the strange casket of a heart springs-to again; and perhaps there is now no key extant that will open it; for a Teufelsdröckh, as we remarked, will not love a second time.<sup>16</sup>

We must note here the strange character of Carlyle's interpretation of religious experiences. The above passage reiterates the theme of magic which he used to describe the consciousness of the experience of hope. Also important, however, is the metaphor of the "casket of a heart" and the suggestion of a key which will spring the latch. Is the metaphor of magic descriptive of an answer, the key to the problem of Teufelsdröckh's alienation, that the body of man, the material, is like a casket, or a prison, and the escape from prison, the unlatching of the clasp on the heart, is the release of the enclosed reality of man? To return to the question of who man is, one answer may, in Carlyle's view, be that man is *pneuma* or spirit which is released from the body of magic.

Teufelsdröckh, the wanderer, turns from Blumine into the "wilds of Nature; as if in her mother-bosom he would seek healing."<sup>17</sup> Arriving at the top of a mountain he encounters a magnificent view.

He gazed over those stupendous masses with wonder, almost with longing desire; never till this hour had he known Nature, that she was One, that she was his Mother and divine. And as the ruddy glow was fading into clearness in the sky, and the Sun had now departed, a murmur of Eternity and Immensity, of Death and of Life, stole through his soul; and he felt as if Death and Life were one, as if the Earth were not dead, as if the Spirit of the Earth had its throne in that splendour, and his own spirit were therewith holding communion.<sup>18</sup>

Teufelsdröckh's experience, described in this passage, of a longing desire, and a simultaneous experience of limit and unlimitedness, he attributes to Nature, a Nature understood as "One" and as his mother and divine. This attribution of his experience to Nature admits the possibility that the earth is not dead. There is an earth spirit, he asserts, which is in communion with Nature. The interpretation of the experience is unique. Teufelsdröckh's knowledge is of "Nature," an object which has the attributes of unity, femininity, and divinity. The Earth itself is objectified in the mythical

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

figure of the *Erdegeist*, in communion with Nature, and Carlyle suggests that Teufelsdröckh is really, not metaphorically, the son of nature.

Precisely at this moment of new knowledge, however, Teufelsdröckh is crushed by the appearance of a wedding coach in which Blumine sits with her groom. Despite this latest setback, his experiences of conversion seem, like a building wave, to be carrying him toward some climax. The climax is swift in coming. His longing remains with him, and he experiences the presence of God.

' . . . living without God in the world, of God's light I was not utterly bereft; if my as yet sealed eyes, with their unspeakable longing, could nowhere see Him, nevertheless in my heart He was present, and His heaven-written Law still stood legible and sacred there.'<sup>19</sup>

At this point one may have expected Carlyle to depict Teufelsdröckh's attempt by meditation to re-experience and interpret his consciousness of God. Instead Teufelsdröckh counsels that to "*Know thyself*" is folly. What we must seek is to know that at which we can work. Only work can evoke our "'inarticulate Self-consciousness.'<sup>20</sup> Yet Teufelsdröckh's quest for work is a failure. His life is one of

'continual, indefinite, pining fear; tremulous, pusillanimous, apprehensive of I knew not what; it seemed as if all things in the Heavens above and the Earth beneath would hurt me; as if the Heavens and the Earth were but boundless jaws of a devouring monster, wherein I, palpitating, waited to be devoured.'<sup>21</sup>

As this passage suggests, his experiences of apprehensiveness, of constant fear which is indefinite but real, of faintheartedness, are cast within a demonic universe, the jaws of which seek to devour him. Here the strangeness of Carlyle's description must be noted, and its similarity to Gnostic religion recorded.

Teufelsdröckh's third experience of conversion from insecurity is described in the following passage.

' . . . all at once, there rose a Thought in me, and I asked myself: "What *art* thou afraid of? Wherefore, like a coward, dost thou forever pip and whimper, and go cowering and trembling? Despicable biped! What is the sum-total of the worst that lies before thee? Death? Well, Death; and say the pangs of Tophet too, and all that the Devil and Man may, will or can do against

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-163.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.



thee! Hast thou not a heart; canst thou not suffer whatsoever it be; and, as a Child of Freedom, though outcast, trample Tophet itself under thy feet, while it consumes thee? Let it come then; I will meet it and defy it!" And as I so thought, there rushed like a stream of fire over my whole soul; and I shook base Fear away from me forever. I was strong, of unknown strength; a spirit, almost a god. Ever from that time, the temper of my misery was changed: not Fear or whining Sorrow was it, but Indignation and grim fire-eyed Defiance.

"Thus had the EVERLASTING NO (*das ewige Nein*) pealed authoritatively through all the recesses of my Being, of my ME; and then was it that my whole ME stood up, in native God-created majesty, and with emphasis recorded its protest. Such a Protest, the most important transaction in Life, may that same Indignation and Defiance, in a psychological point of view, be fitly called. The Everlasting No had said: "Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine (the Devil's)"; to which my whole ME now made answer: "I am not thine, but Free, and forever hate thee!"

'It is from this hour that I incline to date my Spiritual New birth, or Baphometric Fire-baptism, perhaps directly thereupon began to be a man.'<sup>22</sup>

Though it is a form of insecurity from which Teufelsdröckh is converted, the conversion scene does provide a few new details which denote it as a type. "THE EVERLASTING NO" is the name Carlyle gives to the experience of the devil who appears to claim Teufelsdröckh. The implication is that an aspect of his being is demonic, as reflected perhaps in the name Teufelsdröckh. The devil (Teufel) has come to claim his feces (dröckh). A basic ontological duality, however, denies the devil's claim. Teufelsdröckh's condition of being "fatherless," and an "outcast," (themselves symbols of ontological insecurity) does not designate the devil's aspect of Diogenes, but rather that in him which is truly himself, what he calls his "'whole ME.'" At issue here, what is being contested between the devil and Diogenes, is the ownership of the Universe, and Diogenes himself. His reply, his "'Thought'" which effects the conversion, is denial of the devil's claim. The significance of these passages for understanding Carlyle's religion should not be underestimated. The question, "Who am I?" is answered with the concept of the "'whole ME'" which is interpreted as distinct from the material, fecal aspect of himself, his body, which is the devil's. The condition of alienation thus stems from his "'whole ME,'" his pneumatic essence, which is not at home in the world, or in his body. The conversion from ontological insecurity is actually a discovery of the divine identity of the self,

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-168.

the "‘whole ME.’" No longer ignorant of its essence, the "‘whole ME’" is released from the terror of ontological insecurity. The initiator of the release is "Thought" which, though spontaneous, is prefigured in the experience with Blumine. This "Thought," the identification of the "‘whole ME’" with the Godhead, is the point toward which his earlier experiences were leading him. He now knows himself to be "‘almost a god,’" "‘of unknown strength,’" a "‘spirit.’" He is still in misery, but there is reason to distinguish between the misery of the "‘outcast’" spirit after it has "Thought," and the misery of ontological insecurity. This distinction is based on Carlyle's understanding of ignorance and the saving function of knowledge. The new knowledge which he possesses and the release he accomplishes he calls his "‘Baphometric Fire-baptism.’" He begins now to be a "‘Man,’" but it must be remembered that his manhood is the manhood rendered reborn in a "‘Baphometric’" baptism of "Thought."<sup>23</sup>

The experience of the conversion itself is purgative, likened to a "‘stream of fire’" which covers his "‘whole soul.’" Accompanying it is an experience of strength, and freedom, perhaps of release. The volitional nature of the experience, however, cannot be ignored. It is described as defiance, indignation, even hate. The experience is noteworthy in the absence, as Willey notes, of contrition, grace, love, and humility.

The experiences of conversion which constitute the religious nucleus of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, we believe, engendered his political vision, the center of which vision is his concept of the "Divine Idea." Teufelsdröckh wrote of George Fox, for example:

"This man, the first of the Quakers, and by trade a Shoemaker, was one of those, to whom, under ruder or purer form, the Divine Idea of the Universe is pleased to manifest itself; and, across all the hulls of Ignorance and earthly Degradation, shine through, in unspeakable Awfulness, unspeakable Beauty, on

<sup>23</sup> Carlyle took the name Baphometus from the character in a myth of Zacharias Werner's *The Templars in Cyprus*. There the myth told as a part of the initiation rite of the Knights Templars describes the fall from the godhead of Baphometus, and his condition of being cast out into the material world. Though ejected from the godhead, this ejection is also the sign that he will be saved from this condition by his own seed. Baphometus is then transformed into a living head, covered in gold, which Medusa-like, has serpents for hair. This is the fire-baptism of Baphometus and may be found in Friedrich Ludwig Zacharias Werner, *The Templars in Cyprus*, trans. E. A. M. Lewis (London: George Bell and Sons, 1886), 167-169.

their souls: who therefore are rightly accounted Prophets, God-possessed; or even Gods, as in some periods it has chanced.<sup>24</sup>

The "Divine Idea" is the substance of all that is unchanging in the world. It manifests itself to chosen men, Heroes, who are representative of what man truly is. The passage on George Fox is taken from notes of Teufelsdröckh entitled "*Perfectibility of Society*,"<sup>25</sup> suggesting perhaps the axiological and teleological components of Carlyle's eschatology: axiological in the sense that the end for man, which the figure of Fox's knowledge signifies, has ramifications for society as a whole, that society itself is perfectible; teleological in that the men who embody the Divine Idea are the efficient cause moving society toward an identifiable end in time.<sup>26</sup> Though Fox is no longer socially relevant, "his 'perennial suit' . . . has been worn quite into ashes for nigh two centuries,"<sup>27</sup> nevertheless the essence of his vision (the Divine Idea) remains. This is the constant of all being.

' . . . the Universe is but one vast Symbol of God; may if thou wilt have it, what is man himself but a Symbol of God; is not all that he does symbolical; a revelation to Sense of the mystic godgiven force that is in him. . . .'<sup>28</sup>

Despite present signs of societal atrophy, the "golden age," the "Millennium" is imminent.<sup>29</sup> "Organic filaments," creative effluences of the phoenix, symbols of Carlyle's eschatological prevision, are visible, such as Hero-worship, newspapers, literature, the religion of work. Belief, the ingredient of a rebirth of society, is not dead: the communion of saints is the community of man reestablished in the knowledge of man's true self; man's church hymns are his work.

Neither say that thou hast now no Symbol of the Godlike. Is not God's universe a Symbol of the Godlike; is not Immensity a Temple; is not Man's History, and Men's History, a perpetual Evangel? Listen, and for organ-music thou wilt ever, as of old, hear the Morning Stars sing together.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 209.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>26</sup> These two components of eschatology were identified by Ernst Troeltsch. See Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1968), 89 (hereafter cited as Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*).

<sup>27</sup> Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 212.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 236; 248.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 253-254.

Basil Willey, perhaps sensing the revolutionary spirit embodied in these words, remarks:

Substitute 'the Immensities and Eternities' for God, substitute 'the Temple of the Universe' for the Church, 'Literature' for the Bible, 'Heroes' for saints, 'Work' for prayer, and the like: do all this, and you have at one stroke destroyed 'superstition' and provided a true religion for honest men in these latter days. Here at last was a creed which *did* 'correspond to fact'; which could be believed without putting out the eyes of the mind.<sup>31</sup>

By way of commentary upon this revolutionary tone of Carlyle's religion, two aspects of *Sartor Resartus* should be noted: (1) the uniqueness of Carlyle's imagery and (2) his description and interpretation of Teufelsdröckh's religious experience.

## I

Woven throughout *Sartor Resartus* are fantastic images which seem to carry, rather than merely ornament, his narrative, and which indicate that the importance of the romance of Teufelsdröckh is not restricted to the human level. If not solely a human romance, then what is the larger context? That Carlyle was familiar with Christian and Jewish variants of Gnosticism is demonstrable. He read Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and no doubt became aware of the importance of Gnostic sects from that work. Moreover, as a major interpreter of German thought for England, Carlyle would also have been aware of the German interest in Gnosticism. In one work of Fichte, which Carlyle read, Fichte uses the term Gnosticism to deride Pauline Christianity, which he saw to be the epitome of Gnosticism. Pauline Christianity, he thought, attempted to dissolve the antagonism between Judaism and Christianity, and in doing so made the written word the criterion of truth. The true, unsullied Christianity, as Fichte saw it, was the Christianity of the Johannine Gospel.

The Johannine Jesus knows no other God than the True God, in whom we all are, and live, and may be blessed, and out of whom there is only Death and Nothingness; and he appeals, and rightly appeals, in support of this Truth, not to reasoning, but to the inward practical sense of Truth in man,—not even knowing any other proof than this inward testimony.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 118.

<sup>32</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Characteristics of the Present Age*, trans. William Smith (London: John Chapman, 1847), 98.

Carlyle himself once uses the term "Gnostic" in *Sartor Resartus* where he indicates that the "Dandies" of England have a touch of "Manicheism, not indeed in the Gnostic shape. . . ." <sup>33</sup> Interestingly enough the Gnosticism other than the Manichaeism he mentions there is Jewish. The passage will be quoted in full because in it Carlyle seems to admit not only familiarity with the Gnosticism in the Kabbalah, but also that he understands it to be of importance for understanding Teufelsdröckh.

To the First Chapter, which turns on Paradise and Figleaves, and leads us into interminable disquisitions of a mythological, metaphorical, cabalistic-sartorial and quite antediluvian cast, we shall content ourselves with giving an unconcerned approval. Still less have we to do with 'Lilis, Adam's first wife, whom, according to the Talmudists, he had before Eve, and who bore him, in that wedlock, the whole progeny of aerial, aquatic, and terrestrial Devils,'—very needlessly, we think. On this portion of the Work, with its profound glances into the *Adam-Kadmon*, or Primeval Element, here strangely brought into relation with the Nifl and Muspel (Darkness and Light) of the antique North, it may be enough to say, that its correctness of deduction, and depth of Talmudic and Rabbinical lore have filled perhaps not the worst Hebraist in Britain with something like astonishment. <sup>34</sup>

What is the "*Adam-Kadmon*" which Teufelsdröckh, the editor notes, knows profoundly? Moreover, is Carlyle using the *persona* of the editor to indicate to his readers the importance for understanding *Sartor Resartus* of his own deep interest in Kabbalistic lore? Is the Kabbalah related to his "magic" imagery? Moreover, what influenced Carlyle to become interested in this? The answers to these questions reveal some of the more interesting aspects of Nineteenth Century literary and political studies.

The Kabbalistic concept of *Adam-Kadmon* is a symbol meaning primal or primordial man, <sup>35</sup> and may be found in the early work of Moses de Leon, the Thirteenth Century *Sefer Ha-Zohar*, and the later development in Kabbalah in the Sixteenth Century by Issac Luria. Luria describes the typically Gnostic intra-divine drama of God's withdrawal into himself, the consequences of that withdrawal, and the correction of the flaws brought about by the event. The withdrawal of God into himself creates a "pneumatic, primordial space" in which the "powers of judgment" of God are concen-

<sup>33</sup> Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 275.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> Our understanding of this aspect of the Kabbalah is taken from Gerschom G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) (hereafter cited as Scholem, *Kabbalah*).

trated.<sup>36</sup> Evil is included in the primordial space as a result of this process of concentration; the withdrawal of God being a necessary part of the extrusion of evil from the Godhead, a seemingly necessary act of purification. The genesis of forms in the primordial space, the *pleroma*; their mixture of God's infinite light and evil; and the breaking through into the *pleroma* of a ray of God's essence, are events which constitute the "one living God" or *Sefiroth*.<sup>37</sup> *Adam-Kadmon* is one of the archetypes of all being which arises in the *pleroma*.

From the ears, the mouth, and the nose of the Primordial Man burst forth lights which produce deeply hidden configurations, states of being and inner worlds beyond the penetration of the human mind, even in meditation. But the central plan of Creation originates in the lights which shine in strange refraction from the eyes of *Adam-Kadmon*. For the vessels which, themselves consisting of lower mixtures of light, were designed to receive this mighty light of the *sefiroth* from his eyes and so to serve as vessels and instruments of Creation, shattered under its impact.<sup>38</sup>

*Adam-Kadmon* symbolizes a later emanation of the infinite, *en-sof*, and the *sefiroth* whose light he bears. It is this relation between *en-sof* and *sefiroth* which was of great interest to the Kabbalists, who created elaborate images to develop what for them was its infinite meaning.

## II

We attempted to distinguish where necessary between Carlyle's description of religious experience, and his interpretation. Teufelsdröckh, we saw, clearly experiences religious hope, the removal of doubt, and fatigue from his past struggle. The spiritual release, if it may be called that, is interpreted as incomplete because Teufelsdröckh is unable to shape the experience into a "Thought."<sup>39</sup> An aspect of Carlyle's view of conversion, it seems, is dependent on the magical ability of the one being converted, as exemplified by the ultimate conversion of Teufelsdröckh from the "EVER-LASTING NO" where the initiator of release is a "Thought" which secures knowledge of the identity of Teufelsdröckh's "whole ME". The conversion, therefore, seems to turn upon creative ac-

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

quisition of the substantive knowledge that man is god. Clearly the nature of Carlyle's religion implies more than a literary fine tuning of old or shopworn religious concepts. Carlyle was consciously engaged in the creation of a religious view of man, history, society and nature based on Gnostic and Kabbalistic symbols. Compare his description of the major *persona* of *Past and Present*, Abbot Samson of the Abbey of St. Edmunds, with the previously quoted passage on the Kabbalistic concept of *Adam-Kadmon*.

There are but two ways of paying debt: increase of industry in raising income, increase of thrift in laying it out. With iron energy, in slow but steady undeviating perseverance, Abbot Samson sets to work in both directions. His troubles are manifold: cunning *milites*, unjust bailiffs, lazy sockmen, he an inexperienced Abbot; relaxed lazy monks, not disinclined to mutiny in mass, but continued vigilance, rigorous method, what we call 'the eye of the master,' work wonders. The clear-beaming eyesight of Abbot Samson, steadfast, severe, all-penetrating,—it is like *Fiat lux* in that inorganic vast whirlpool; penetrates gradually to all nooks, and of the chaos makes a *kosmos* or ordered world!<sup>40</sup>

The image of "clear-beaming eyesight" in this passage may be equivalent to the place in the pattern of salvation of the light from the eyes of *Adam-Kadmon*. The Abbot's penetrating eye is like the command "*Fiat lux*." This calls to mind a similar passage from *Sartor Resartus*.

'But it is with man's Soul as it was with Nature: the beginning of Creation is—Light. Till the eye have vision, the whole members are in bonds. Divine moment, when over the tempest tost-Soul, as once over the wild-weltering Chaos, it is spoken: Let there be Light! Ever to the greatest that has felt such moment, is it not miraculous and God-announcing; even as, under simpler figures, to the simplest and least. The mad primeval Discord is hushed; the rudely jumbled conflicting elements bind themselves into separate Firmaments; deep silent rock-foundations are built beneath; and the skyey vault with its everlasting Luminaries above: instead of a dark wasteful Chaos, we have a blooming, fertile, heaven-encompassed World.'<sup>41</sup>

Through the analogy of creation of "Nature" (not creation of the world as in the Genesis account), Carlyle likens the awakening of "man's Soul" to the beginning, which in his account "is—Light" (not "the heaven and the earth" created in the beginning).<sup>42</sup> The

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle in Thirty Volumes*, H. D. Traill, ed., Centenary Edition (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1896-1899), V:91-92 (hereafter cited as Carlyle, *Works*).

<sup>41</sup> Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 197.

<sup>42</sup> Gen. 1:1.



analogy is ambiguous because Carlyle has purposely chosen a cosmogony other than that of Genesis. Does he do this because it is not the God of Israel who says, "Let there be Light!"? This command is analogous to the new consciousness of a soul which has "vision." It is a "Divine moment," "miraculous" and "God-announcing." Yet if the God who is announced present is not the God of Israel, who is present? Alternatively is Abbot Samson's ability equivalent to the command of the God at the creation of "Nature"? If so, is it not because the Abbot, like *Adam-Kadmon*, is an effluence of God? Elsewhere, Carlyle recalled Novalis' assertion, "There is but one Temple in the Universe . . . and that is the Body of Man."<sup>43</sup> This quotation is paralleled in this same passage by a fragment attributed to St. Chrysostom, "The true Shekinah is Man!" There is evidence which suggests that these concepts too are derivative of the Gnosticism of the Kabbalah. In non-Kabbalistic Jewish tradition the *Shekinah* means God himself. Interpreting the above sentence in this sense, Carlyle is stating that "The true God is Man," a statement clearly unacceptable to this tradition, but consistent with the Gnosticism of the Kabbalah.

In Talmudic literature and non-Kabbalistic Rabbinical Judaism, the *Shekinah*—literally in-dwelling, namely of God in the world—is taken to mean simply God himself in His omnipresence and activity in the world and especially in Israel. God's presence, what in the Bible is called His 'face,' is in Rabbinical usage His *Shekinah*. Nowhere in the older literature is a distinction made between God himself and His *Shekinah*; the *Shekinah* is not a special hypostasis distinguished from God as a whole. It is very different in the usage of the Kabbalah, beginning with the *Bahir*, which already contains most of the essential Kabbalistic ideas on the subject. Here the *Shekinah* becomes an aspect of God, a quasi-independent feminine element within Him.<sup>44</sup>

Carlyle's use of the concept of Man to imply that Man is God is quite similar to the Manichean symbol "Primal Man" which in the system of Mani is a special creation occasioned by the attack upon Light by the King of Darkness.<sup>45</sup>

The first creation produces at the very beginning of the divine history the central soteriological figure of the system: Primal Man. Created to preserve the peace of the worlds of Light and to fight their battle, through his defeat he involves the deity in a long-drawn-out work of salvation, as part of which

<sup>43</sup> Carlyle, *Works*, V:10.

<sup>44</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 104-105.

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of the system of Mani see Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2nd ed. rev. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 206-237.



the creation of the world comes about. The figure occurs widely throughout gnostic speculation. . . . To the Gnostics the existence of a pre-cosmic god "Man" expressed one of the major secrets of their Knowledge, and some sects even went so far as to call the highest godhead himself "Man": "This . . . is the great and hidden secret, that the name of the power that is above all things, the forebeginning of everything, is Man."<sup>46</sup>

One Manichaeian text describes Primal Man who took on his armor for battle, "'and plunged rapidly from the Paradises downward until he came to the border of the area adjoining the battlefield.'"<sup>47</sup> This passage is quite similar to a passage in Carlyle's essay "Signs of the Times":

We figure Society as a 'Machine,' and that mind is opposed to mind, as body is to body; whereby two, or at most ten, little minds must be stronger than one great mind. Notable absurdity! For the plain truth, very plain, we think it, that minds are opposed to minds in quite a different way; and *one* man that has a higher Wisdom, a hitherto unknown spiritual Truth in him, is stronger, not than ten men that have it not; and stands among them with a quite ethereal, angelic power, *as with a sword out of Heaven's own armory, sky-tempered, which not buckler, and no tower of brass, will finally withstand.*<sup>48</sup>

The man who has a higher wisdom stands among men as with a sword out of Heaven's own armory. The figure Carlyle fashions, the evidence suggests, originates in the system of Mani. Carlyle, perhaps, took the concept from Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, where in Chapter IX ("Klingsohr's Fairy Tale") he depicts an ancient hero who is ordered by the King to cast his sword into the world "so they may learn where Peace rests."<sup>49</sup> The center of Mani's system is the defeat and liberation of Primal Man. Does this figure have the same importance in Carlyle's system? The image of the sword cast into the world is perhaps equivalent to Novalis' concept of "First Man," which Carlyle quoted: "'He who has been born, has been a First Man.'"<sup>50</sup> Carlyle, however, did not use either the concept of "Primal Man" or "First Man," but used the concept "*original* man" to describe the "Great Men," the "Heroes."

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Carlyle, *Works*, XXVII:75. Emphasis added.

<sup>49</sup> Novalis, *Hymns to the Night and Other Selected Writings*, trans. C. E. Passage (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1960), 20.

<sup>50</sup> Carlyle, *Works*, XXVII:81.

Such a man is what we call an *original* man; he comes to us at first-hand. A messenger he, sent from the Infinite Unknown with tidings to us. We may call him Poet, Prophet, God;—in one way or other, we all feel that the words he utters are as no other man's words. Direct from the Inner Fact of things;—he lives, and has to live, in daily communion with that. Hearsays cannot hide it from him; he is blind, homeless, miserable, following hearsays; *it* glares-in upon him. Really his utterances, are they not a kind of 'revelation';—what we must call such for want of other name? It is from the heart of the world that he comes; he is portion of the primal reality of things. God has made many revelations: but this man too, has not God made him, the latest and newest of all? The 'inspiration of the Almighty giveth *him* understanding': We must listen before all to him.<sup>51</sup>

Carlyle's description of the "*original* man" is consistent also with his view of man as *Shekhinah*, a revelation of god, a messenger "from the Infinite Unknown."

The question that occasioned this inquiry has led us by examining the evidence to suggest that Carlyle was proclaiming a religion of a distinct Gnostic cast in which man himself is understood to be a god. If the god, in the passage from *Sartor Resartus*, who gave new consciousness and vision, was not the God of Israel, was he not the god "Man" of modern and ancient Gnosticism? Carlyle's description of the "clear-beaming eyesight of Abbot Samson," could of course be a metaphor for the ability of all men to conceptualize, to arrange from an undifferentiated mass of data the view of the whole or parts of the whole which otherwise remain undiscerned. On the other hand, in the light of the background information this passage could also mean that Abbot Samson is a god "Man" making order from chaos, in a continuing process of divine creation, which extends even into the matter of the work necessary to pay the monastery's debts.

Albert J. LaValley considered this passage from a different perspective, the image of the self, and reached approximately the same conclusion.

The origin of this reawakening is primarily the self, but the process is not purely subjective. The heart of man has its correlative in the universal heart of nature, and the light that man irradiates in his spiritual renewal is quite simply the divine light behind the universe. Carlyle's emphasis is always on the man who sees the light and unfolds it organically in real fact. He talks of God's revelation, His coming to man, but his real interest is in man's movement towards a redefined divinity. Carlyle's characters, in description and incident, fulfill this process. For example, Abbot Samson's "clear eyes" were

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, V:45-46.

always "flashing into you". . . , and the clear vision in his heart brought clear vision in his head . . . His eyesight, his spiritual discernment, is in fact almost godlike; Carlyle compares his making of order, his kindling of light, to the creation itself. . . .<sup>52</sup>

Carlyle's "real interest . . . in man's movement towards a redefined divinity" is, the evidence suggests, the *gnosis* that man is an emanation of god, and performs a divine role in the ongoing process of divine revelation. Because of this we suggest that Carlyle's political religion is a modern form of Gnosticism.<sup>53</sup>

The Gnostics too created myths to explain the unacceptability of the created world to their true divine selves. In the system of Mani revulsion against matter is explained by means of an elaborate myth in which matter is seen to have been formed from the carcasses of evil Archons. In this light, Carlyle's view of the material world as the passed filth of the devil is not unique. The symbol is fantastic, but explanatory of his fascination with Gnosticism. This tradition evoked an experience of ontological insecurity or alienation with which he could identify. The term "ontological insecurity" is R. D. Laing's.<sup>54</sup> A person who is "*ontologically secure*,"<sup>55</sup> in the sense of the word "ontology" as "experience of being" used by Laing, is one who is capable of meeting the trials of life "from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity." Such a person's experience of himself as a whole, undivided, "healthy" being in a world of permanent processes and other whole beings, is to be contrasted with those who are "ontologically insecure," that is, who experience themselves as "more unreal than real," "more dead than alive; precariously differentiated

<sup>52</sup> LaValley, *Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern*, 196.

<sup>53</sup> For a fuller investigation see the author's Ph.D. Dissertation, *Carlyle's Political Religion and Nineteenth Century Gnosticism*. (University of Notre Dame, January, 1972). In addition to the previously cited work by Voegelin, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, see also his seminal work, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952). Of value also are Gilles Quispel, *Gnosis als Weltreligion* (Zurich: Origo Verlag, 1951); H. Leisegang, *Die Gnosis* (Leipzig: A. Kroner, 1924); Jakob Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Bern: A. Francke, 1947); Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1934). Of related interest is the author's essay, "Thomas Hill Green's Political Philosophy," *The Political Science Reviewer* (Fall, 1974), IV:29-53.

<sup>54</sup> R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), 39.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question."<sup>56</sup> We have called Carlyle's revolt against his experience of ontological insecurity an "ontological revolt." Albert Camus in *The Rebel* spoke of this phenomenon as a type of "meta-physical rebellion" which he defined as the "movement by which man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation."<sup>57</sup>

The rebel obstinately confronts a world condemned to death and the impenetrable obscurity of the human condition with his demand for life and absolute clarity. He is seeking, without knowing it, a moral philosophy or a religion. Rebellion, even though it is blind, is a form of asceticism. Therefore, if the rebel blasphemes, it is in the hope of finding a new god.<sup>58</sup>

Carlyle's search for a new god succeeded in the discovery of a Gnostic man-god. But we would be in error merely to see in him a religious revolutionary battling in isolation against what for him were the shopworn symbols of orthodox Christianity. We suggested in the beginning that an assessment of Carlyle's political religion was important because of the findings of recent social and political studies that the character of important mass and intellectual movements is religious. The religious experience of ontological revolt against reality construed as defective, and the aspiration to replace our world of contradictions with a unity that cannot be found in reality, because that is an impossible goal to attain, is actually a commitment to permanent revolution. Social scientists grappling with this phenomenon have created numerous concepts to explain it: "secular Messianism,"<sup>59</sup> "parusiasm,"<sup>60</sup> "apocalyptic fanaticism,"<sup>61</sup> and "metaphysical rebellion." Together these concepts articulate the nature of totalitarianism as a form of religious Messianism which became secular. At the transition in English culture between religious and secular Messianism stands the figure of Thomas Carlyle.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>57</sup> Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 23.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>59</sup> J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1961), 8.

<sup>60</sup> Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, 48.

<sup>61</sup> Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, The Academy Library, 1961), 310.