# THE RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS IN THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF T. S. ELIOT

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## INTRODUCTION

### A. Statement and Significance of the Problem

In a recent article concerning his own poetry and drama, T.S. Eliot states:

> For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no farther.[1]

This preoccupation with the realities of life has made T. S. Eliot a superior poet and a significant dramatist. Stanley Romaine Hopper, Professor of Christian Ethics at Drew Theological Seminary, in writing an article on "The Spiritual Implications of Modern Poetry," reminds us: "It has been suggested that the age, esthetically, will be known as, 'the age of Eliot.'"[2] Eliot's position as the greatest poet and influential literary critic of our time is virtually unchallenged; emerging more recently,

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1. Thomas Stearns Eliot: "Poetry and Drama," The Atlantic, CLXXXVII, February, 1951, p. 37.
2. Stanley Romaine Hopper: "The Spiritual Implications of Modern Poetry," Religion in Life, XX, Autumn, 1951, pp. 553-566.

however, as a dramatist Eliot has caused much controversy, not only in the rarified atmosphere of the literary diletantes, but also among the rank and file, the theater goers and readers of current literature. His use of religious problems as the basic point of conflict in his plays has also brought his work to the attention of both the theater and the church. It will be the purpose of this study to discover the religious concepts in his dramatic works as they are evidenced in the movement of the plots and as expressed by the characters portrayed. Since Eliot is a prolific writer, a consideration of his whole work is not feasible for this study, and it has, therefore, been determined to include only his dramatic works.

## B. Delimitation of the Subject

The subject will deal with the religious concepts in four of Eliot's dramatic works, namely: The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral, The Family Reunion, and The Cocktail Party. His only other dramatic work, to date, is Samson Agonistes, a fragment of a play which was to be an Aristophanic melodrama when completed. Because of its fragmentary nature it is not suitable for production and will not be included in this study. There will be no evaluations of any of the actual presentations of these plays, nor will their effectiveness as drama be considered

in this study.

## C. Method of Procedure

The method of procedure will be first to study the background and literary development of the dramatist; and then to survey his literary works. Finally each of the four plays will receive separate and detailed consideration in order to discover the religious concepts therein. The findings of the study will be drawn together in the summary.

## D. Sources

The sources for this study will be the literary works of T. S. Eliot, primarily his plays, the reviews and critical articles about his works, books devoted to a critical study of his works, and a few books which give a general background in the field.

# CHAPTER I

## THE BACKGROUND AND LITERARY DEVELOPMENT OF THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT

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## A. Introduction

He who would express something well must first make it a part of himself, and those who wish to appreciate fully literature must first understand its author. Eliot has often been called esoteric, but his work takes on clarity when considered in conjunction with his life and background. Even as the Shakespeare who produced A Comedy of Errors was not the same man who plumbed the depths of human experience in Hamlet and King Lear; so also the Eliot of Murder in the Cathedral is a metamorphozed Eliot from the one who wrote The Waste Land.

Eliot has long been the subject of literary controversy, ". . . his poetry at first provoked strong disagreement, and the reviews of his latest work, The Cocktail Party, show that his continued development and intellectual growth can still give rise to contemporary misunderstanding."[1] Yet despite the controversy waged on the literary plane, Eliot's position as the true poet who mirrors his time seems secure. ". . .he is a commentator

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1. M. C. Bradbrook: T. S. Eliot, p. 7.

on his age who is considered by some more important than Gabriel Heatter or Walter Winchell--or even Walter Lippman."[1]

It is the purpose of this chapter to investigate the personal life and development of T. S. Eliot and to discover how this development is reflected in his literary work. Special note will be made of the turn taken in his expression after 1930.

## B. Biographical Sketch

T. S. Eliot, British citizen, was born in Missouri of strong New England stock. His ancestors on both sides were among the early settlers of Massachusetts. In 1670, Andrew Eliot went from the village of East Coker, England, to Massachusetts. The Rev. William Greenleaf Eliot, grandfather to T. S. Eliot, was the one to move the family from Boston to St. Louis where he founded the city's first Unitarian Church.[2] Preaching such sermons as, "Suffering Considered as Discipline,"[3] he was a man of some severity.

In 1888 into a family which already boasted six children, Thomas Stearns was born. A frail, quiet child, he became the most coddled of the seven children all of whom enjoyed the atmosphere of a literary-minded family.

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1. "Mr. Eliot," Time, March 6, 1950, pp. 22-26.
2. Ibid., p. 23.
3. Ibid.

With a mother who wrote a dramatic poem on the life of Savonarola and a father who read Dickens to his children, it is small wonder that Tom could be found reading when other children were playing.

During his youth he attended Smith Academy in St. Louis, and later Milton Academy near Boston. The turmoil of these early years is perhaps best illustrated by Eliot's own remarks on this period: "I had always been a New Englander in the Southwest and a Southwesterner in New England. In New England I missed the long dark river, the ailanthus trees, the flaming cardinal birds. . . of Missouri; in Missouri I missed the fir trees, the hay and goldenrod, the songsparrows, the red granite and the Blue sea of Massachusetts."[1]

In accordance with his family tradition, Eliot went to Harvard where he was taught by such men as Irving Babbitt, George Santayana and Bertrand Russell. It was through Professor Babbitt that he became interested in Sanskrit and Oriental religions, to which he later devoted two years of study. Finishing his college career in three years, he remained a fourth year at Harvard in order to receive his Master's degree. After Harvard he went to the Sorbonne to read literature and philosophy and at this time he wrote his first significant poem, The Love Song

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1. Ibid.

of J. Alfred Prufrock. Returning to Harvard for three more years of graduate study, he won a travelling fellowship and in 1914 he went to Germany. His stay here was, however, disrupted by the war and he was forced off the continent to Britain.

Eliot launched his career in England by spending a year at Oxford and then set out to teach in the English schools. Here he became known as "the American master" and taught a variety of subjects, among which were history, Latin, French, German, arithmetic, drawing and swimming.[1] He was married in 1915 to Vivienne Haigh, a ballet dancer and the daughter of a British artist. Eliot the schoolmaster soon became Eliot the banker. He went to work for Lloyds Bank in London, but the life of the banker-poet eventually became too tedious for him and he exchanged banking for publishing. By 1920 Eliot was on the verge of a breakdown and while resting under a doctor's care he wrote The Waste Land, "the most influential poem of the 20th Century."[2] It is a strange poem reflecting in a bizarre fashion what Eliot conceived to be a picture of the barrenness in the modern age. Bitterness and cynicism finally ran their course and in 1927 Eliot was confirmed in the Church of England. During this same year ". . . he

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p. 24.

became a British subject, and announced in the preface to a book of essays that he was now a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics and an Anglo-Catholic in religion, a statement which caused some disturbance in literary circles, where none of these tenets was very prominently advocated."[1] His comment was greeted with a variety of reactions, among them was the reaction of Edmund Wilson, whose book, Axel's Castle, contains the first important critical estimate of Eliot's work.[2] Wilson states:

> One cannot, however, doubt the reality of the experience to which Eliot testifies in his recent writings --though it seems to us less an Anglo-Catholic conversion than a rewakening of the New Englander's conscience, of the never quite exorcised conviction of the ineradicable sinfulness of man. Eliot admired Machiavelli because Machiavelli assumes the baseness of human nature as an unalterable fact; and he looks for the light to the theologians who offer salvation, not through economic readjustment, political reform, education, or biological and psychological study, but solely through "grace." Eliot apparently today regards "Evil" as some sort of ultimate reality, which it is impossible either to correct or to analyze. His moral principles seem to me stronger and more authentic than his religious mysticism--and his relation to the Anglo-Catholic Church appears largely artificial. . . . His religious tradition has reached him by way of Boston.[3]

After 1927 Eliot began to write faith into his poetry, and in 1930 he published his first religious poem, Ash Wednesday. He has experienced both personally and

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1. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 8.
2. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 58.
3. Edmund Wilson: Axel's Castle, pp. 126-127.

artistically a transformation of a sort; his literary works are the record of this metamorphosis, they tell of the struggle of mind and spirit toward faith. His search has been for order in a disordered world. For a time irony served as a defense against the ugliness he beheld, but his quest is now for a surer refuge as his works indicate.[1]

To know Eliot as a friend is to know the well-dressed publisher who likes claret and good cheese; who takes his responsibilities as a church warden at St. Stephen's in Kensington very seriously; and who loves practical jokes.[2] One Fourth of July he upset a solemn board meeting of Faber and Faber by setting off a bucketful of firecrackers between the chairman's legs.[3]

Winner of the 1948 Nobel Prize for literature and awarded the Order of Merit, which is limited to twenty-four members and is one of the highest British orders, Eliot is one of the foremost men of English letters.[4] "In fact there has been no one who occupied a comparable position since the reign of Samuel Johnson, The Grand Cham."[5]

T. S. Eliot is not only a fine poet, a thinking

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1. Ben Ray Redman: "T. S. Eliot: In Sight of Posterity," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXII, March 12, 1949, p. 30.
2. "Mr. Eliot," Time, March 6, 1950, p. 26.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 52.

man, and a sensitive observer; but he is also a Christian, and as such he has shown the literary world that a man can be both clever and religious.

## C. Literary Development

### 1. Period Before 1930

Eliot was primarily a poet in his earlier years. His first published works were romantic verse which he contributed to the Harvard Advocate. However, when he began to undertake serious poetry it was the poetry of boredom. In her book on The Art of T. S. Eliot Helen Gardener writes:

> Up to The Waste Land the movement is from what might be called boredom to something that might be called terror, alternating with its more disinterested companion, horror; or, more truly, since terror and horror are present from the beginning, the poetry shows a deepening sense of horror in which boredom is swallowed up.[1]

It is the world of Henry James and Sinclair Lewis which Eliot mirrors in his early literary expression. The meaninglessness of life, an acute sense of boredom, terror and despair, all seem to permeate this poetry. Beauty and ugliness alike hold for him panic and self-disgust.

The utter stupidity and hopelessness of life is expressed in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, in

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1. Helen Gardner: The Art of T. S. Eliot, pp. 79, 80.

which an aging man comes to the realization that he has spent his life in the grip of timidity and regret. From the expression of supreme boredom Eliot moves to the reflection of spiritual desolation as exemplified in Gerontion, a poem of decaying civilization, displacement and homelessness.

In 1922 with the publication of The Waste Land Eliot's journey into horror and despair seems to have reached its acme. "Dominating the tableau of aimlessness, decay and sterile joy is the image that gives the poem its name: the parched desert through which a wanderer struggles in search of an oasis."[1] Despite the esoteric nature of this poem, the lack of coherent sequence, the mood is unmistakable and somehow it echoed accurately the tone of the age, and the "lost generation" recognized its own voice. One English girl sums up Eliot's impact on her youth: "Somehow Eliot put the situation into words for us, and it was never so bad again. Each in his own prison, but Eliot in the next cell, tapping out his message, if not of hope, at least of defiance. We would not measure out our lives with coffee spoons."[2]

The period of transition began in 1925; The Hollow Men lies at the center of this transition. It is,

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1. "Mr. Eliot," Time, March 6, 1950, p. 24.
2. Ibid.

in fact, a bridge which starts at a point which is perhaps even below that of The Waste Land, at a place where all seems null and void; but it comes at the end to the moment of faint hope, the whisper which may indicate the first movement toward life.[1]

2. Period Since 1930

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the new era in Eliot's expression; in it he attains not only a more poignant lyrical expression than ever before but also, in contrast with the earlier poetry of horror, there are now glimpses of glory. The author of Ash Wednesday is a Christian and the poem is qualitatively different from The Waste Land which was written when the author was not a Christian; the change is undeniable.[2]

Eliot's literary achievement is, however, not limited to the field of poetry. As early as 1931 he entered into the field of church politics by writing a pamphlet, "Thoughts After Lambeth", containing observations on ecclesiastical policy discussed at the Lambeth Conference.

In speaking of the development of Eliot the critic, Bradbrook says that there is a change in his critical work which coincides with the change in his poetic style.[3] Eliot, who was during his earlier years a prolific

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1. Gardner, op. cit., p. 105.
2. Ibid., p. 103.
3. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 51.

critic, tends to write less criticism himself since his own period of formation is passed. "His criticism is now implicit in his creative work, and cannot be separated from it."[1]

Early in his career Eliot indicated an interest in drama and devoted essays to the consideration of dramatic theory, but it was not until the second period of his work that he himself experimented with this form. The fragmentary Sweeney Agonistes is Eliot's first dramatic expression and as such it attempts to handle his earlier themes of horror and ugliness. The significance of this drama, however, lies not only in that fact that it ushers in Eliot's dramatic expression, but also what in his later dramatic works has proven to be, "the finest dramatic verse that has been written in English since the seventeenth century."[2]

In 1934 the pageant-play The Rock appeared, adding the technique of choric verse to his dramatic experiments. It has been said that the choruses from The Rock find the basis of their rhythms in the Authorized Version and in the Prayer-Book Psalms.[3] Here the expression is not of the old themes but of the new; the appeal is to follow the light of the spirit, forsaking the dismal

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1. Ibid.
2. Gardner, op. cit., p. 127.
3. Ibid., p. 133.

paths of materialism.[1]

The following year, Eliot, continuing his dramatic pursuits, published Murder in the Cathedral which in a sense culminates, to date, his experimentation with dramatic techniques by introducing another level in addition to that of the chorus, that is, the level of supernatural beings. Despite this relationship with Sweeney Agonistes and The Rock, which is based on the progression in technical development evidenced in the three plays, Murder in the Cathedral has a more basic kinship with Eliot's two later plays. This latter group of Murder in the Cathedral, The Family Reunion, and The Cocktail Party have as a common element the contrast between the Hero and the Chorus, "between the man who sees and the rest who are blind."[2] They have also at the very center of their movement a single moment of choice set before the main character upon which all else leans for significance.

The Family Reunion which appeared in 1939 is the first of Eliot's plays to deal with the contemporary scene, nevertheless, it too traces its origin to Greek drama. The play deals with the story of a modern Orestes haunted by the Furies.

In the midst of what seemed to be an increasing zeal to be a dramatist, Eliot's next published work was

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1. Floyd Stovall, American Idealism, p. 202.
2. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 38.

verse; not poetry of theology for adults, but a group of verse-biographies of fanciful cats, written for children. Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats was published under a pseudonym coined originally by the poet, Ezra Pound.[1]

In the years that followed 1939 until the publication in 1943 of Four Quartets, his most momentous poetical work since Ash Wednesday, Eliot's literary career took the form of lectures and addresses in criticism and sociology. Perhaps most notable among these are three lectures delivered at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and published together with the title, The Idea of a Christian Society. Eliot's concern in these lectures is with, ". . . the organization of values and a direction of religious thought which must inevitably proceed to a criticism of political and economic systems."[2]

Eliot's second venture into the problems of church politics came in 1943 with the publication of Reunion By Destruction which deals with the consideration of the plan which proposed church union in South India.

Four Quartets, hailed by Helen Gardner and others as Eliot's masterpiece,[3] continued to fulfill Eliot's own statement that"modern poetry must be difficult";[4] and

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1. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 57.
2. T. S. Eliot, The Idea of a Christian Society, p. vii.
3. Gardner, op. cit., p. 2.
4. Redman, op. cit., p. 10.

called forth from literary circles numerous interpretations. The diversity of subject and theme in Four Quartets, and the large number of cross-references between the poems are in part responsible for the "difficulty" of this work.

In 1948 Eliot published a book in which he again looks into the sociological problems. Notes Towards the Definition of Culture attempts first to bring into focus the conditions under which culture and civilization can flourish. One important emphasis in this book is, Eliot's conviction of "the indissoluble connection between religion and culture. . . he sees both religion and culture socially . . . he treats religion as the living nerve of a culture--admittedly defined as what people indeed actually believe in--and not. . . ."[1]

After a lapse of more than ten years in his dramatic writings, Eliot returned to drama as a vehicle for his expression. The Cocktail Party has received wider recognition than Eliot's other dramatic works. Published in 1950, the play enjoyed a long run on both the London and the New York legitimate stage. Like its predecessor, The Family Reunion, it uses contemporary life to portray the underlying religious problems. In this way it is in harmony with Eliot's philosophy of religious literature, "Mr. Eliot's chief concern is that it ought to be

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1. George Catlin: "T. S. Eliot and the Moral Issue," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXII, July 2, 1949, p. 36.

'unconsciously, rather than deliberately and defiantly, Christian.'"[1] Generally accepted as his most mature dramatic work, The Cocktail Party is perhaps not the last of Eliot's excursions into the theater.

## D. Summary

At the beginning of this chapter emphasis was placed on the necessity of studying and understanding the artist as a person in order to capture the artist's work with a discerning mind. It was also suggested that, even as no personality remains static throughout the years, so the artistic or literary expression of a personality tends to mature.

This was followed by a biographical sketch of Eliot, which included not only the major events in his life, a record of his educational and vocational pursuits, but also a history of his spiritual development.

In the discussion of Eliot's literary development which followed, two major phases of his expression were noted: namely, the period of his writing before 1930, and the period which followed. In the earlier period his work was primarily poetry, reflecting what he saw in the world about him, the end of which was despair. In the

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1. Calvin H. Schmitt: "Religion and Literature," McCormick Speaking, IV, April, 1951, pp. 7-10.

second period, characterized by the new words of faith and the entrance into the world of drama, Eliot's personal and literary development coincide as they had in the earlier period as well.

# CHAPTER II

## SURVEY OF THE LITERARY WORKS OF THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT

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### A. Introduction

In order to capture the full scope of the literary work of Eliot, a detailed study of his work seems necessary. Since his literary development has already been traced, it seems advisable to deal with the individual types of his literary works. Because Eliot is not only a poet and dramatist, but a critic-essayist as well, this chapter will treat each of these divisions separately.

Since Eliot has received his greatest attention through his poetry, much has been written concerning the interpretation of his poems. Therefore, in this chapter the discussion of his poetry will be delimited to include only those works which have been widely recognized as having religious significance. These poems are: The Waste Land, The Hollow Men, Ash Wednesday and Four Quartets.

"Had he not become the most famous poet of his time, Eliot would have been known as its most distinguished critic."[1] Eliot has indeed been prolific in this field of literary expression and there will be no attempt in this study to gather up the vast numbers of essays for

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1. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 44.

consideration; there will instead be a focusing upon some of the more outstanding essays and collections. Likewise, a few of Eliot's printed lectures will be considered. Since Eliot's dramatic works are the chief interest in this study, their consideration in this chapter will consist primarily in a survey of the content or general movement of each play.

It will be the purpose of this chapter to survey and highlight Eliot's outstanding works in the field of poetry and criticism and to summarize the plots of his plays.

## B. Poetry

The poetry of T. S. Eliot has made a profound impression in the field of English literature. Often strongly symbolic, it has probably been studied and reviewed by more critics than any other poetry in our time. Outstanding among this poetic work are four poems which to many are indicative of Eliot's intellectual and spiritual development. The first of these, The Waste Land, is an expression of a man who sees clearly the horror and confusion of the age. The Hollow Men, the second of the four, is considered by some as the low point of the poet's experience, others see in it the first rays of hope. Ash Wednesday is acclaimed by all as the poem which marks the turning point in Eliot's career, the first poem of faith.

Four Quartets, Eliot's most recent poetic work, is believed to contain indications of further spiritual development.

1. The Waste Land

> The Waste Land is easier on the ear than on the mind. It is like a kaleidoscopic mirror held up to the age--a patched mirror which at first seems to reflect only a heap of broken images, but which, to a longer view, blends them into a single bizarre picture, at once as strange and as familiar as one's own face (or one's own city) seen in a recurring nightmare.[1]

The untutored ear catches little or nothing of the meaning of these chaotic pieces at the first reading. The five major divisions of the poem, namely; "The Burial of the Dead", "A Game of Chess", "The Fire Sermon", "Death by Water", and "What the Thunder Said," seem to have no integrating center or connecting link. The poem is in fact a series of visions.

Even within the movements there seems to be no unity. In "The Burial of the Dead" there occurs a series of contrasting scenes, which, according to Helen Gardner, in her book The Art of T. S. Eliot, have fear as their common element.[2] The second movement, "A Game of Chess" carries the theme into the more naturalistic interpretation of life, the two scenes, one lush and distasteful, and the other in a public-house, carry with them a more obvious crudity. Emptiness or sterility is the dominating

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1. "Mr. Eliot," Time, Vol. LV, March 6, 1950, p. 24.
2. Gardner, op. cit., p. 90.

message of this portion. In "The Fire Sermon," the third section of the poem, the kaleidoscopic mirror reflects indifference and horror. There are numerous pictures which run throughout this movement--some obscene, others pitiful; but with the final words, "Burning burning burning burning, O Lord Thou pluckest me out, O Lord Thou pluckest--burning,"[1] comes the sense of purgation, and the title of the section.

In the short portion titled, "Death by Water," the poet uses the figure of Phlebas the Phoenician sailor and in a few lyrical lines conveys the feeling of forgetfulness, of peace, a peace which comes with nothingness. The last lyric, "What the Thunder Said," is again a picture of violence and destruction:

> Who are those hooded hordes swarming
> Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
> Ringed by the flat horizon only
> What is the city over the mountains
> Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
> Falling towers
> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
> Vienna London
> Unreal.[2]

Again the conclusion is no conclusion, only the emptiness, the abyss of nothingness, which to those who read it accurately reflected their age, or so they claimed. In her concluding comments on the poem Helen Gardner writes:

> It discovers in its visions man's incapacity to

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1. T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems, 1909-1935, p. 84.
2. Ibid., p. 88.

> achieve satisfaction, the boredom of his quotidian existence, and the horror of his ignobility. . . . For all this, its ending is not despair. Stripped of his illusions, his pride broken, man is left to face the final possibility. The Waste Land ends with the truth of the human situation as the religious mind conceives it: the beginning of wisdom is fear.[1]

2. The Hollow Men

"The Hollow Men marks the dead centre in Eliot's poetry: it records that experience of utter destitution where there are no forms, not even the forms of nightmare."[2] Even in a glance the brief lines indicate the starkness which the poem expresses, the simple images which portray the desolation. Such phrases as those which follow are indicative of the mood and movement of this poem:

> We are the hollow men,
> We are the stuffed men. . .
> *****
> This is the dead land,
> This is cactus land. . .
> *****
> In this last of meeting places,
> We grope together,
> And avoid speech,
> Gathered on this beach of the tumid river.[3]

The last section of The Hollow Men introduces an interesting note by combining a broken portion of a child's rhyme with, "For Thine is the Kingdom," from the Lord's Prayer. The poem concludes with the little stanza which has since brought much comment and commendation:

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1. Gardner, op. cit., p. 98.
2. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 21.
3. Eliot, Collected Poems, pp. 101-103.

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.[1]

3. Ash Wednesday

"Critics and fans who had idolized the bitter, brittle Eliot were appalled when in 1930 he published his first religious poem, Ash Wednesday, the sternly beautiful statement of a man who has found his course. . . ."[2] Ash Wednesday holds no problems for the critics as to its mood and meaning, it is clearly of religious if not Christian import. This poem not only expresses a new mood, but it also expresses the mood with new imagery and rhythm. Eliot continues to use series of pictures to express the thoughts he wishes to convey, but the imagery is no longer the crude imagery of the city. In Ash Wednesday he uses images from nature and traditional symbols.

"It is clear that the poem springs from intimately personal experience, so painful that it can hardly be more than hinted at, and so immediate that it cannot be wholly translated into symbols."[3] Throughout the whole there is a strong sense of repentance and

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1. Eliot, Collected Poems, p. 105.
2. "Mr. Eliot," Time, Vol. LV, March 6, 1950, p. 25.
3. Gardner, op. cit., p. 104.

resolve. Of the six movements of the poem the first is perhaps the most direct, employing less imagery for expression than the others. From the first words in Ash Wednesday, Eliot indicates that there has been a change:

> Because I do not hope to turn again
> Because I do not hope
> Because I do not hope to turn
> Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
> I no longer strive towards such things
> (Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
> Why should I mourn
> The vanished power of the usual reign?[1]

This change seems to involve for Eliot the resignation of certain pursuits, identified later in the poem as intellectual quests.

> Because I know I shall not know
> *****
> And pray to God to have mercy upon us
> And I pray that I may forget
> These matters that with myself I too much discuss
> Too much explain. . . .[2]

Thus, the extent of the intellectual upheaval experienced by Eliot at this point in his life is suggested. The words which indicate an intellectual relinquishment gain added significance when it is remembered that the poem takes its title from Ash Wednesday, the day which ushers in the period of personal sacrifice in the Christian Church. Throughout the poem there is also a repetition of the phrase, "Teach us to care and not to care, Teach us to

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1. Eliot, Collected Poems, p. 109.
2. Ibid., pp. 109-110.

sit still."[1] Such words are more poignant in their meaning when considered in the light of The Waste Land, the poem of confusion and destruction.

In Ash Wednesday Eliot speaks of prayer, of mercy,of God; words seldom found in his earlier poetry. The poem, although not a complete statement of a Christian faith, is indicative of a vital religious experience in the life of the poet. Considered by some his most obscure poem, Ash Wednesday is also widely recognized as Eliot's outstanding religious poem.

4. Four Quartets

In an article in Theology Today, Theodore M. Greene, at the time a professor of philosophy at Princeton University, and at present holding a similar position at Yale University, says of Eliot's Four Quartets: "It may also come to be accepted as one of the greatest religious poems in our language."[2] Greene decries the fact that so few "genuinely religious people" are familiar with the literary works of Eliot and even fewer are able to read them with a sensitive understanding.[3]

Like The Waste Land and Ash Wednesday, Four Quartets consists of a number of individual poems which

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1. Ibid., p. 121.
2. Theodore M. Greene: "Beyond the Waste Land," Theology Today, Vol. I, January, 1945, p. 505.
3. Ibid.

together form the whole. The lyrics are named for places in England and New England which are dear to Eliot; they are "Burnt Norton," "East Coker," "The Dry Salvages," and "Little Gidding." In "Burnt Norton," as in the other three sections of the poem, the underlying theme is time and eternity, "Man's inescapable immersion in the flux of temporal events and the possibility of his finding salvation within this flux by following the way described and practised by the great mystics, notably, by St. John of the Cross."[1]

"East Coker" includes in its expression of the theme of time and eternity passages which speak of the endlessness of passing generations:

> Feet rising and falling.
> Eating and drinking. Dung and death.[2]

In "East Coker" Eliot opens and closes with a variation on one phrase. The poem begins, "In my beginning is my end"; and closes, "In my end is my beginning."

In "The Dry Salvages," Eliot reaches what is perhaps the high point of the message of his poem. After reiterating his theme of time, with great oceans and rivers as the basic symbols, he turns and delivers a poignant passage on saintliness:

> But to apprehend
> The point of intersection of the timeless
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> . . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 506.
2. T. S. Eliot: Four Quartets, p. 12.

> With time, is an occupation for the saint--
> No occupation either, but something given
> And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
> Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.[1]

He goes on to make saints distinct and unique persons, for he speaks of the experience of the majority:

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time. . .[2]

"Little Gidding," the last of the four poems in Four Quartets, gathers up the outstanding thoughts and expressions of the other three poems: "death of air," "death of earth," "death of water and fire."[3] It is therefore the one poem of the four which can be understood as a separate entity. Again there are echoes of the theme of time:

> Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
> Is England and nowhere. Never and always.[4]

And in the last movement of the poem, a further clarification of the phrase which enveloped "East Coker" is given:

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.[5]

There are in "Little Gidding," as in the other poems of the group, references and phrases which have Christian impact. Eliot speaks of "redemption from fire by fire,"[6]

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1. Eliot, Four Quartets, p. 27.
2. Ibid., p. 27.
3. Ibid., p. 33.
4. Ibid., p. 32.
5. Ibid., p. 38.
6. Ibid., p. 37.

he speaks too of, "this Love" and "this Calling"[1] and yet his implications and proclamations are just out of reach, veiled too thickly in the language of poetry.

## C. Essays

T. S. Eliot, literary critic and essayist, has had such terms as: classicist, traditionalist, conservative, and historical critic used to describe him in this field of literature. Such words are a far cry from those used to describe Eliot, the poet. John Crowe Ransom in a book on literary criticism says of Eliot:

> The critical Eliot was Jekyll, the poetical Eliot was Hyde; and it was wonderful to imagine that somewhere in Jekyll's pervasive wisdom was the word which justified the Hyde; both the Jekyll and the Hyde were studied the harder in the effort to harmonize them.[2]

Eliot's own general theory of literature is set forth most clearly in "Tradition and Individual Talent" and "The Function of Criticism." In the former he indicates his belief that the poet or artist must be considered in the light of all other poets, in the light of his relationship to them.[3] He thinks of this as "a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism."[4] Eliot is again concerned with the problem of time, as

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1. Ibid., p. 39.
2. John Crowe Ransom: The New Criticism, p. 137.
3. T. S. Eliot: Selected Essays, 1917-1932, p. 4.
4. Ibid.

he was in much of his poetry, as in Four Quartets. Here, however, his emphasis is that the poet who creates will be aware not only of his own place, but also of the past, not as the dead past, but as the living past. Another principle which Eliot clarifies in this essay is the question of emotion in poetic expression; there is, he feels, much in poetry which must come as the result of deliberate and conscious effort. He states, ". . . the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious."[1] Further, Eliot believes that poetry is not the expression of, but the escape from emotion and personality.[2]

In "The Function of Criticism" Eliot states that function to be "the elucidation of art and the correction of taste."[3] He continues this essay on criticism by evaluating the majority of critics as falling far short of the mark, of profferring their own whims and prejudices instead of seeking to unite with their fellow critics in an endeavor to discover the truth. His immediate conclusion is that the whole group should be dismissed; but he later concludes that there have been some definitely worthwhile and helpful literary criticisms, and the problem is to find a test by which the good may be classified.

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1. Ibid., p. 10.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 13.

The essays, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "The Function of Criticism" along with two other brief essays, "The Perfect Critic" and "Imperfect Critics" have had a tremendous influence upon the entire field of literary criticism.[1]

Eliot's most recent contribution to the field of criticism is his essay Poetry and Drama published in 1951. In February of the same year the essay was reprinted in part in The Atlantic and has received much attention from the literary world. Archibald MacLeish has called this, "The most important statement on poetry for the stage in this generation."[2]

The first part of the essay discusses poetry as it appeared in the dramatic works of other writers, and the validity of using poetry to express drama. The second half of the essay deals chiefly with Eliot's own ventures in poetic drama. Eliot describes his problems with the versification in Murder in the Cathedral and The Family Reunion. Concerning poetic drama in general, Eliot states: ". . . if we are to have a poetic drama, it is more likely to come from poets learning how to write plays, than from skilful prose dramatists learning to write poetry."[3]

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1. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 47.
2. T. S. Eliot: Poetry and Drama, Book Jacket.
3. Ibid., p. 41.

Eliot's essays are not limited to the field of literary theory, however, but encompass a wide span of general literary criticism. Among the various topics which Eliot pursues are religious prose literature and devotional literature. These essays are compiled in For Launcelot Andrewes. In the title essay Eliot discusses the relative literary merits of . Andrewes and John Donne, giving Andrewes the higher praise. Of John Donne he says:

> He is a little of the religious spellbinder, the Reverend Billy Sunday of his time, the flesh-creeper, the sorcerer of emotional orgy. We emphasize this aspect to the point of the grotesque. Donne had a trained mind; but without belittling the intensity or the profundity of his experience, we can suggest that this experience was not perfectly controlled, and that he lacked spiritual discipline.[1]

Such a statement is especially interesting when it is remembered that Eliot himself has been compared with Donne, and that the revival of interest in Donne's poetry is sometimes attributed to Eliot's own poetic approach. In contrast, Eliot's estimate of Andrewes speaks of Andrewes' style as having "intellect and sensibility"[2] in harmony; as well as having the outstanding qualities of "ordanance, or arrangement and structure, precision in the use of words, and revelant intensity."[3] An element

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1. Eliot: Selected Essays, p. 292.
2. Ibid., p. 293.
3. Ibid., p. 292.

fostering these two differing expressions is, in Eliot's opinion, that Andrewes is intensely and completely interested in the object of his writing, unaware of all else; while Donne is a "personality," conscious of expressing a personality. He is an artist even in his devotional literature. "For Launcelot Andrewes" is one of Eliot's most widely read essays, and worthy of note because of its Christian implications.

Entering the field of church politics, Eliot wrote an essay based on a report of the Lambeth Conference in 1930 entitled "Thoughts After Lambeth." He bemoans the report because of its inadequacy on certain subjects, but is cheered when he recalls it is not an individual expression, but the expression of three hundred ecclesiastical minds. This, he feels, accounts for its lack of clarity and ill-phrased thoughts. The main burden of the essay deals with three phases of the report: the items on youth, the portion concerning birth control, and the general question of church unity. In a discussion in which he speaks quite unflatteringly of the philosophy of Aldous Huxley and Bertrand Russell, Eliot concludes that they are philosophies into which there is little danger that youth will fall. This portion of his essay ends: "You will never attract the young by making Christianity easy; but a good many can be attracted by finding it difficult: difficult both to the disorderly mind and to

the unruly passions."[1]

In considering the problem raised by Resolution Fifteen of the report, the problem of marriage and birth control, Eliot's main concern is over the weak and indefinite way in which the report expresses the conclusions in these matters. "In short, the whole resolution shows the admirable English devotion to commonsense, but also the deplorable Anglican habit of standing things on their heads in the name of commonsense."[2]

In a very interesting portion of the essay, Eliot discusses the question of union as brought to the fore by the Lambeth Report. He concludes that the Church of England is in the position where it is responsible for initiating steps toward union. It was Eliot's feeling in 1931, when this essay was written, that the world would continue more and more to divide itself into the Christian and the non-Christian, that, in fact, "The Universal Church is today. . . more definitely set against the World than at any time since pagan Rome."[3] The words with which he concluded this essay, twenty years ago, seem still applicable and true today:

> The World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the

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1. Eliot: Selected Essays, p. 319.
2. Ibid., p. 320.
3. Ibid., p. 332.

> time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from suicide.[1]

Venturing not only into the field of church politics but also into the field of sociology, Eliot wrote his The Idea of a Christian Society. This was given first as a series of three lectures at Cambridge. The first lecture is concerned chiefly with the definition of the title, "the Idea of a Christian Society." It is concerned, too, with the change of attitude which could bring about a society worthy of the name Christian.[2] There is, Eliot believes, a choice before society; the choice lies between a Christian society or a pagan society. Either alternative would bring about radical changes in the present situation. Eliot states that even the Christian may shrink from the idea of a Christian society and the idea becomes palatable only when considered in the light of the alternatives to it.[3] The first lecture is concluded with a statement about the Christian society, "That prospect involves, at least, discipline, inconvenience and discomfort: but here as hereafter the alternative to hell is purgatory."[4]

The second chapter in Eliot's The Idea of a

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1. Ibid., p. 332.
2. T. S. Eliot: The Idea of a Christian Society, p. 7.
3. Ibid., p. 21.
4. Ibid., p. 22.

Christian Society, is devoted to a discussion of the Christian State, the Christian Community, and the Community of Christians, and the distinctions among them. The third portion of the book handles the problem of Church and State, between which there will always be tension according to Eliot, even in a Christian society.

Eliot's final conclusions in this essay came just as the Second World War had broken out, and with reference to it he says that the alternatives, Christianity or paganism, are now more clear than ever.

In 1949 Eliot published his most recent work in the field of sociology, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture. His aim in writing this essay is simple and concise; it is: "to help to define a word, the word culture."[1] At the beginning of the essay Eliot distinguishes and relates the three principle uses of the word: "The term culture has different associations according to whether we have in mind the development of an individual, of a group, or class, or a whole society."[2] The main portion of the essay is devoted to what Eliot considers three important conditions for culture. The first condition is:

> . . . organic (not merely planned, but growing) structure, such as will foster the hereditary transmission of culture within a culture: and

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1. T. S. Eliot: Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, p. 11.
2. Ibid., p. 19.

this requires the persistence of social classes.[1] The second important condition for culture is:.."that a culture should be analysable, geographically, into local cultures. . . ."[2] Religion is the basis for the third condition; Eliot believes there should be a balance of diversity and unity; ". . .universality of doctrine with particularity of cult and devotion."[3] In the two last chapters of the essay Eliot clarifies the meaning of culture and its relationship to politics and education. Eliot's own conclusion is "that culture is the one thing that we cannot deliberately aim at. It is the product of a variety of more or less harmonious activities, each pursued for its own sake. . . ."[4]

Although Eliot has written valuable and interesting essays in the field of church politics and sociology, the majority of his essays are on literary subjects and primarily about individual artists. Such essays include the extensive and widely recognized essay on the poet Dante; essays on Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and William Blake; and essays on literary schools, such as The Elizabethan Dramatists and The Metaphysical Poets.

His essay, "Hamlet," is an example of his interest in drama. In it he discusses at some length the

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1. Ibid., p. 13.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 13-14.
4. Ibid., p. 17.

origins of the story, the work of Kyd and the possibility of the contribution of Chapman. The main thrust of the essay, however, is to point out the inadequacy of Shakespeare's Hamlet.[1]

Eliot's preoccupation with drama is evident in his literary essays. He himself testifies to the truth of this interest: "Reviewing my critical output for the last thirty-odd years, I am surprised to find how constantly I have returned to the drama, whether by examining the work of the contemporaries of Shakespeare, or by reflecting on the possibilities of the future."[2]

## D. Drama

### 1. The Rock

Of the four plays under consideration, The Rock is probably the least dramatic, if by dramatic one means complexity of plot. F. O. Matthiessen in his book, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot, which was at the time of its publication in 1935 the most comprehensive study of Eliot's work, says: "The Rock hardly meets Eliot's test for a religious play, 'that it should be able to hold the interest, to arouse the excitement, of people who are not religious.'"[3]

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1. Eliot: Selected Essays, p. 121.
2. T. S. Eliot: "Poetry and Drama," The Atlantic, CLXXXVII, February, 1951, p. 31.
3. F. O. Matthiessen: The Achievement of T. S. Eliot, p. 162.

The Rock is a pageant play written for the Building Fund of the London diocese;[1] for this reason it is, according to one observer, "frankly propaganda, and has the merits and limits of propaganda."[2]

The play itself failed to have many public performances after its original presentation and has gone out of print. The choruses, however, have been reprinted and placed in the book of Eliot's collected poems. Helen Gardner observes in her book on Eliot that the choruses of The Rock "owe much to the rhythms of the Authorized Version, and to the Prayer-Book Psalms. . . ."[3]

The movement of the play concerns the building of a church. The builders of the church, Ethelbert, Alfred and Edwin, are the chief dramatis personae. The conflict of the play arises through the conversation of the workmen concerning the struggle and worth of building a church. The exposition in the play is carried on by the Chorus. Eliot uses this Greek drama device in a modern setting with what is generally considered a good deal of success. The conflict is given greater clarification through flash-backs into history which bring to the fore other instances when the building of a church was difficult and controversial.

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1. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 37.
2. Ibid., p. 38.
3. Gardner, op. cit., p. 133.

Through these flash-backs the workmen are given a panorama of the history of the English church, specifically of the church buildings. They learn that theirs is not the only church which was ever erected on a building lot which is little more than a swamp. They learn as well of the stability and power of the Christian Church throughout the centuries.

2. Murder in the Cathedral

In 1935, the year following the publication of The Rock, Eliot wrote his second full length verse drama, Murder in the Cathedral. Like The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral was written primarily for a specific performance, the Canterbury Festival in June 1935. Unlike The Rock the play has been performed many times in the United States as well as in England. In New York Murder in the Cathedral is given annually by the Columbia Players, the dramatic group of Columbia University. In four separate editions, the play has received minor alterations; and in 1951 it was given a film script adaptation.[1]

The play is a dramatization of the murder of the Archbishop Thomas Becket at the cathedral at Canterbury during the reign of Henry II. A list of the characters includes Archbishop Thomas Becket, three priests of the cathedral, four tempters, four knights, and a chorus

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1. Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 57.

composed of the women of Canterbury.

It is a play of temptation and martyrdom; a dramatization of the spiritual struggle of the Archbishop. Thomas' temptations are personified and come to him full of memories and promises. His martyrdom is accomplished at the hands of the Four Knights, representatives of the King. Throughout the play the priests and the chorus participate as sharers, to a lesser degree, with Thomas in his contest.

Despite the difficult technique of using the chorus as a leading character in a play, Helen Gardner says, ". . . the play transcends its origin and occasion, and the chorus becomes humanity, confronted by the mystery of iniquity and the mystery of holiness."[1]

3. The Family Reunion

Eliot's first full-length drama with a contemporary setting, The Family Reunion is, like his two earlier plays, a verse drama. Despite the contemporary setting, the play uses The Eumenides, a Greek dramatic device known as Furies. The play describes the spiritual development of Harry, Lord Monchensey, the eldest son of Amy, Dowager Lady Monchensey. Harry's return to the family estate at Wishwood occasions the family reunion, and his mental and spiritual condition precipitated by the accidental death of his wife is the major concern of the family throughout the play. The psychological factors in Harry's

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1. Gardner, op. cit., p. 139.

condition come to light and his cure begins gradually as he is brought into an understanding of himself and his parents.

Agatha, Amy's sister, emerges as the chief protagonist in the play, the one of the group who sees clearly. The other aunts and uncles become a type of chorus, who, due to their lack of perception, may be considered a sort of comic relief. The play concludes as Harry, realizing that his hope for survival lies away from Wishwood, departs on the evening of the same day of his arrival.

4. The Cocktail Party

Most recent and most discussed of Eliot's plays is The Cocktail Party. Published eleven years after The Family Reunion, The Cocktail Party enjoyed not only a successful run on the British stage, but also was performed on Broadway for two years. Like The Family Reunion it is a drama with a contemporary setting. Unlike the others of his plays The Cocktail Party has no chorus, nor ghosts. Eliot here has parted as well from the use of verse in his dramatic expression, ". . . it is perhaps an open question whether there is any poetry in the play at all."[1]

The Cocktail Party involves the spiritual re-

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1. Eliot: "Poetry and Drama," The Atlantic, CLXXXVII, February, 1951, p. 37.

habilitation of three people, Edward Chamberlayne, who has been having a secret love affair with Celia Coplestone; Edward's wife Lavinia, who has recently lost her young lover Peter Quilpe, now also interested in Celia; and Celia herself who for a time thinks that she is in love with Edward. This rehabilitation is instituted and guided by Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly with the aid of his two unconventional assistants, Julia Shuttlethwaite and Alexander MacColgie Gibbs.

The development of the play includes two cocktail parties, two years apart, and two psychiatric consultations. The first party reveals the problems, the individual needs and spiritual conditions of the characters. The consultations clarify the problems and suggest solutions; and the second party, after a two year lapse of time, indicates the results.

## E. Summary

In this chapter Eliot's literary works have been surveyed and individual examples of the three types of his work have been studied. The study of his poetry centered in his religious poems, The Waste Land, The Hollow Men, Ash Wednesday, and Four Quartets. The study of his essays surveyed his work not only in the field of literary criticism, but also in the fields of sociology and Church politics. In the survey of his drama his four major dramatic works,

The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral, The Family Reunion and The Cocktail Party, were reviewed briefly.

The chapter began with a survey of Eliot's major poetical works, The Waste Land, The Hollow Men, Ash Wednesday, and Four Quartets. Each was viewed in relation to its position in Eliot's spiritual development. The Waste Land was seen to express the emptiness which Eliot found everywhere. The Hollow Men, marking the turning point of Eliot's poetry, was considered also the low point in his expression of desolation. Ash Wednesday, the next poem under consideration, while not a complete statement of Christian faith, was found to be an expression of a vital religious experience. Four Quartets, whose underlying motif was the theme of time and eternity, was also found to have phrases of religious significance and worth.

The second portion of the chapter dealt with Eliot's essays. Those considered specifically were three essays on literary criticism: "Tradition and Individual Talent," "The Function of Criticism," and Poetry and Drama. "For Launcelot Andrewes," one of Eliot's outstanding essays on devotional literature, was discussed. Three essays of religious and sociological import were reviewed, "Thoughts After Lambeth," a longer essay, The Idea of a Christian Society; and his most recent publication in this field, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture. Finally as an example of his essays on drama criticism, the essay "Hamlet"

was considered.

In the last section of the chapter Eliot's four major plays were surveyed. The Rock, was discovered to be a pageant play concerning the building of a church. Much of the action in The Rock was described as flash-backs in which the builders of the church learn of other builders, other churches and the continuing purpose of the Church.

Murder in the Cathedral, the second play reviewed in the chapter, was centered around the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket at the hands of the knights of King Henry II.

A brief summary of The Family Reunion indicated that it was a play primarily concerned with the spiritual healing of Harry, Lord Monchensey, whose neurotic condition became the family problem upon his return to Wishwood, the family estate.

The chapter ended with a review of Eliot's most recent play, The Cocktail Party. The play was concerned chiefly with the lives of three people, who eventually went to Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly for advice. The results of this advice were indicated in the last part of the play in which a second cocktail party took place.

# CHAPTER III

## THE RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS IN THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF T. S. ELIOT

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## THE RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS IN THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF T. S. ELIOT

### A. Introduction

T. S. Eliot has long been considered one of the most, if not the most, outstanding men in the field of contemporary English literature. During the past eighteen years his dramatic works have received attention from not only literary and theatrical magazines, but also from current periodicals such as Time magazine and from theological journals such as Theology Today and Religion in Life. This widespread and diversified interest in Eliot's plays may surely not be attributed solely to the artistry of the playwright. Nathan A. Scott says, "In The Cocktail Party T. S. Eliot continues to dramatize the issues of faith as they arise out of the stresses of modern experience. . . ."[1] It is this dramatization of the issues of faith which this study is endeavoring to clarify. Eliot's four major dramatic works, The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral, Family Reunion, and The Cocktail Party have been reviewed briefly in Chapter II. In this chapter each play will be given detailed consideration in order to discover the religious concepts in each play.

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1. Nathan A. Scott: "T. S. Eliot's The Cocktail Party," Religion in Life, Vol. XX, No. 2, p. 274.

## B. The Rock

The Rock, written in conjunction with a church building campaign, has been called an official apologia for the campaign of church-building.[1] Eliot, however, in refuting this idea states:

> And to consider The Rock as an "official apologia" for church-building is to lay a weight upon it which this rock was never intended to bear. It is not an apologia for the campaign, but an advertisement. If I had meant to write an apologia--I do not know whether many other people besides Mr. Verschoyle think that one is needed --I should have written a prose pamphlet.[2]

If advertisement it is, it is also, now years after that campaign, a play rich in Christian heritage and religious concept. "From the moment when the first chorus opens. . . you are carried off on a sea of aesthetic emotion and indignation into a perpetual awareness of the struggle between right and wrong."[3]

The opening scene of the play presents the Chorus decrying the fact that the centuries have not brought nearness to God despite all their knowledge and inventions. The paradox is:

> Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
> All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
> All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
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> . . . . . .

1. Derek Verschoyle: "The Theatre," The Spectator, No. 5, 527, June 1, 1934, p. 851.
2. T. S. Eliot: "Letters to the Editor," The Spectator, No. 5,528, June 8, 1934, p. 887.
3. Francis Birrell: "Mr. Eliot's Revue," The New Statesman and Nation, p. 847.

But nearness to death no nearer to God.[1]

The Chorus sees not only that, "The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust,"[2] but also that the Church is unwanted in both the suburb and the country, and wanted in town, "Only for important weddings."[3] Indicative of Eliot's concept of general decay in this generation, and echoing many of the themes of his early poems, this opening section bespeaks also a movement away from the Church. There is as well, although negatively stated, an inference that a knowledge of the Word would bring a nearness to God, for throughout the play a neglect of the Word of God is associated with all that is evil.

The Chorus describes the situation in which the centuries have brought alienation from God and a people who do not want the Church. Suddenly the Rock appears to tell them that although there are many changes the one thing which does not change through the years is, "The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil."[4] A part of the evil involves two places of neglect, the first is the neglect of the churches and shrines; and the second neglect, reminiscent of The Waste Land, is the neglect and belittling

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1. T. S. Eliot: The Rock, p. 7.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 8.
4. Ibid., p. 9.

of "the desert," "The desert is in the heart of your brother."[1] This is indicative of Eliot's awareness of the barrenness which lies within the heart of contemporary man. Those who do not neglect--build. According to The Rock, "the good man is the builder, if he build what is good."[2] And then the Rock promises to show them some of the things that were done in the history of the Church and are still being done so that they may take heart.

The workmen appear and as they work on the building they discuss the value and reasons for constructing a church. Although many feel that with all the social and educational institutions in modern times that the church is no longer necessary, they conclude that religion, like drink, is something people like to know they can get when they need it. This seems to suggest the attitude of the conservative but secularized churchman, whose concept of the Church is that it is a respectable and therefore worthy institution.

In the first flash back, the workmen are confronted with a scene in which Sabert, King of London, and his people accept Christianity under the ministry of Mellitus, first Bishop of London. Mellitus' sermon includes the teaching of the universal message of Christianity:

But I tell you that God is not only your God but the

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1. Ibid., p. 9.
2. Ibid.

> God of all men. He does not fight for you except you fight for righteousness; for He is the God of your enemies also, even if your enemies know Him not; and He loves all men, and would see them at peace with one another. You must not think, whether God be for you, but whether you be for God.[1]

Mellitus speaks, too, of their escape from damnation. His first admonition to these early Saxons after baptism is that they should build a church to God. The converts are concerned that they too will now eat white bread, and Mellitus assures them:

> You shall have the white bread to eat. For it is written: except ye eat of the Flesh of the Son of man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you. But first of all you must learn to pray.[2]

The scene ends as Mellitus begins to teach them the Lord's prayer.

There is strong indication in this section that Eliot holds to such fundamental beliefs as the Sovereignty of God, the sacraments of baptism and communion, prayer, and an everlasting damnation for those who do not accept the true God. Inherent too in the words of Mellitus is the concept of spiritual instruction and nurture. Thus conversion and nurture both have a place in the ministry of Mellitus, indicating Eliot's understanding these doctrines.

The Chorus returns at the departure of Mellitus, rehearsing the fact that their ancestors thus became

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1. Ibid., pp. 17-18.
2. Ibid., p. 18.

Christians and built on the foundation, "Christ Jesus Himself the chief cornerstone."[1] But as they continue, they come to a discussion of modern times and ask pertinently:

> You, have you built well, have you forgotten the corner-stone? Talking of right relations of men, but not of relations of men to God.[2]

These words are suggestive of Eliot's attitude toward the social gospel in which the primary emphasis gives way to the consideration of social relationships. A glimpse into Eliot's Christological beliefs is also gained in his emphasis on Christ as the cornerstone and His importance to the Church.

The Chorus continues with its exposition and speaks of the church's decay within and attack from without, and of the necessity for the church of continuous building. Following this, the three workmen reappear and proceed to complain about the poor ground upon which they are expected to build this church. They also discuss the poverty of those who are financing the building. As they continue building despondently, they begin to question the reason for building a church in this particular spot. At this point, Rahere appears announcing in answer to their question, "Because God needs a church here."[3] Rahere, builder of St. Bartholomew's Church and Hospital in London,

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1. Ibid., p. 19.
2. Ibid., p. 20.
3. Ibid., p. 24.

tells Alfred, Edwin and Ethelbert of his experience of building on marshy ground at the command of Bartholomew whom he saw in a dream. Eliot's conception of the Church as fulfilling a spiritual function is here partially indicated. The basis for choosing the site of a Church is not, according to Eliot, the place where the best land may be found, but where the human need demands one.

Still discouraged, the workmen complain that times have changed and that there is not much holiness around. Rahere, however, promises to help them:

> If you will have faith, we will help you. Those who helped me, both visible and invisible, shall help you. If you will have faith, all the angels and saints of God shall pray for you, and your work shall be blessed.[1]

Here faith is given as the basis for action. The success of their work depends on their faith; Eliot then is adhering to a basic doctrine of Christianity. He suggests also the efficacy of prayer as an answer to the problems of the church.

The Chorus speaks again, this time bringing a prophetic message prefaced by, "The Word of the Lord came unto me, saying: O miserable cities of designing men, O wretched generation of enlightened men. . . ."[2] This implies, partially at least, the condition of man away from God, that despite progress and wisdom man is not happy

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1. Ibid., p. 28.
2. Ibid., p. 29.

apart from God.

The message of the Chorus has a two fold emphasis, the first concerning the Word of God, that it is unread and unspoken; the second, concerning building, "Much is your building, but not the House of God,"[1] and "We build in vain unless the Lord build with us."[2]

The Chorus adds a warning to those who are of the cities who build not of the house of God, neither read the Word of God: "Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions."[3] Their words convey a hint of Eliot's belief in judgment to come. The Chorus concludes its message with a dirge for men who turn from God, in which they are described as possibly evading life through their devising and exploiting, but as never escaping Death. Again, there is an indication of Eliot's concept of man; that in this life man apart from God is in misery, and the end of such life is death.

An Agitator enters and addresses a tattered crowd urging them to stop the building of the church which he describes as "a place where they practices a degradin' and outworn superstition, an abomination what ought to be swept off the face o' the earth, in what they call these enlightened times."[4] This is followed by an encounter

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p. 30.
3. Ibid., p. 31.
4. Ibid.

between the Agitator and the three workmen with Ethelbert acting as chief spokesman and finally driving the Agitator away.

The Chorus next introduces a scene in which Nehemiah is seen leading and strengthening the people as they build, reassuring them, "Be ye not afraid of them: remember the Lord. . . ."[1] The plot of the enemy to destroy Nehemiah is foiled when he discerns their purpose, and their attack is turned back when they see the preparedness of the Israelites who render praise unto God. This direct use of the Biblical account of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem is perhaps indicative of Eliot's acceptance of the Bible as authoritative history, since the rest of the material in the play in also historical.

Before the Agitator re-enters with a crowd, the Chorus recites a prayer for deliverance, aware of the dangers about them:

> If humility and purity be not in the heart, they are not in the home: and if they are not in the home, they are not in the City. . . . But we are encompassed with snakes and dogs: therefore some must labour, and others must hold the spears.[2]

Illustrating the fact that the dangers are not limited to the time of Nehemiah, the Agitator returns urging that the churches be turned into clubs, concert halls, museums and useful places. To bring such things to pass he advocates

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1. Ibid., p. 36.
2. Ibid., p. 39.

the physical destruction of existing churches, by sabotage if necessary. He is cheered enthusiastically by the crowd, but the scene is interrupted by a brief pantomime reenactment of the Danish invasion in which a Nun is slain and some Monks are attacked but the Crucifix remains untouched. Eliot here expresses his view of the modern tendency toward secularization. He realizes that often those who claim to be concerned only with the good of mankind are quick to reach their goal through violence and destruction.

The Chorus returns and enters upon a poignant passage concerning persecution and the Church:

> Why should men love the Church? Why should they love her laws?
> She tells them of Life and Death, and of all that they would forget.
> She is tender where they would be hard, and hard where they like to be soft.
> She tells them of Evil and Sin, and other unpleasant facts.
>
> * * * * *
>
> And the Son of Man was not crucified once for all,
> The blood of the martyrs not shed once for all,
> The lives of the Saints not given once for all:
> But the Son of Man is crucified always
> And there shall be Martyrs and Saints.
> And if blood of Martyrs is to flow on the steps
> We must first build the steps;
> And if the Temple is to be cast down
> We must first build the Temple.[1]

This passage gives partial expression to Eliot's concept of man and of man's relationship to the church. It witnessess to the Church as the propagator of truth, and man

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 42.

as the creature who seeks to escape the truth. Here, too, the reality of good and evil is implied. In the second portion of the above quotation the implications of a doctrine of atonement are strong, and the concept of the continuing struggle of good against evil is reaffirmed.

The Chorus is yet not without hope, however, and looks to three groups for comfort and assurance. The first of these groups is the Redshirts who come in military fashion speaking of millions of workers and production. The second group is the Blackshirts, also in military fashion, who speak of keeping the law and "the cause."[1] But when questioned concerning the Law of God, they turn on their questioners labelling them as Jews and refuse to converse further. The Chorus next questions the Plutocrats:

> Are you among the loyal to the Faith?
> Are you among the children of the Church,
> Prepared for sacrifice and suffering?[2]

Receiving cheers from both the Redshirts and the Blackshirts, Plutocrat, although he claims to stand for Church and State, declares that the Church oppresses the poor, that the clergy are overpaid, and that the Church must make some concession toward divorce. The Chorus finding no comfort in the words of these three parties, declares that there is no help in them, and seeks to appeal to them as

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 44.
2. Ibid., p. 45.

individuals:

> O world! forget your glories and your quarrels,
> Forget your groups and your misplaced ambitions,
> We speak to you as individual men;
> As individuals alone with God.
> Alone with God, you first learn brotherhood with men.[1]

This, however, is not received by the crowd and Plutocrat offers an alternative, Power, symbolized by the Golden Calf which is brought in and acclaimed by the crowd.

In a seemingly clear conception of the answer to social distresses of any age, Eliot advocates that the primary solution lies in the individual and in his relationship to God. He also implies that the wrong answers seem inevitably to involve false worship. The three groups which represent, superficially at least, the materialists, the bigots whose "cause" is narrow and alienating, and perhaps the most treacherous of the three, the conciliators, all converge eventually in following the Golden Calf. As the crowd leaves, Ethelbert's voice is heard lamenting the conditions which indicate that everything is against those who build the church and crying, "O Lord, help us!"[2] The Rock appears then standing brooding on the pinnacle.

The first part of the play ends as the Rock, describing the nature of man, declares:

> There shall be always the Church and the World
> And the Heart of Man
> Shivering and fluttering between them, choosing and chosen,
> Valiant, ignoble, dark and full of light

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 46.
2. Ibid., p. 47.

Swinging between Hell Gate and Heaven Gate.
And the Gates of Hell shall not prevail.
Darkness now, then
Light.

Light.[1]

This is not a complete, but an inherently profound statement of the theological concept of the two natures in man. Again, there are implications of Eliot's concept of the basic division, of the Good and the Evil, the Church and the World. This first portion of the play concludes on the note, basic to the Christian faith, "the Gates of Hell shall not prevail," the hope and the faith that light will come. Eliot expresses in these lines a belief in the ultimate triumph of good.

The second part of the play opens with a long section by the Chorus in which they are eventually joined by the Rock. The Chorus gives a brief history of mankind in a language which is strikingly Biblical:

In the beginning God created the world.
Waste and void. Waste and void. And
darkness was upon the face of the deep.
* * * * *
And the Spirit moved upon the face of the
water. And men who turned towards the light were known
of the light
Invented the Higher Religions; and the Higher Religions
were good
And led men from light to light, to knowledge of Good and
Evil.[2]

Throughout this section, the Chorus indicates Eliot's con-

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., pp. 47-48.
2. Ibid., p. 49.

cept of God as Creator, of man as utterly dependent upon God, "and man without God is a seed upon the wind: driven this way and that, and finding no place of lodgement and germination."[1] They present man too as a creature who is instinctively driven to worship.

The primary place of Christ in the history of mankind is expressed by Eliot in words which can leave in the mind of the reader no question as to his belief that Christ is uniquely significant:

> Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in time and of time,
> A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history;
> transecting, bisecting the world of time, a moment in time but not like a moment of time,
> A moment in time but time was made through that moment: for without the meaning there is no time, and that moment of time gave the meaning.
> Then it seemed as if men must proceed from light to light, in the light of the Word,
> Through the Passion and Sacrifice, saved in spite of their negative being;
> Bestial as always before, carnal, self-seeking as always before, selfish and purblind as ever before,
> Yet always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming their march on the way that was lit by the light;
> Often halting, loitering, straying, delaying, returning, yet following no other way.[2]

Inherent in this passage, it seems, is Eliot's recognition of Christ's work, of "Passion" and "Sacrifice," and of man's need of salvation. Eliot here expresses a concept of history based not only on the doctrine of God as Sovereign,

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 49.
2. Ibid., p. 50

the Predeterminator, but also on Christ's coming as the event which "gave the meaning."

The Chorus, however, laments the fact that now man has left God, and has disowned the Church. In the middle of this lament the Rock enters to challenge the Chorus:

> . . . Remember, all you who are numbered for God,
> In every moment of time you live where two worlds cross,
> In every moment you live at a point of intersection,
> Remember, living in time, you must live also now in Eternity.[1]

Eliot evidences an understanding and appreciation of the theological concept of time as already a portion of Eternity. His words indicate a concept of a division in humanity, in as much as they apply only to those who are "numbered for God."

The Rock next commands the Chorus in language almost directly quoting Christ, "I have said, take no thought of the harvest, but only of proper sowing."[2] When the Chorus complains that this is a hard saying the Rock adds, "Did He promise the peace of this world to the children of light?"[3] Eliot's idea of this present life seems to be that it is bound up with the difficult and sometimes the bitter, but also always with growth towards God. He suggests also that the church is called to action.

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 52
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

Introduced by the Rock, Blomfield, Bishop of London, a builder of many churches, enters to bring encouragement to the chorus. In his conversation with the Chorus, Blomfield assures them that the present situation is no worse than the one in which he struggled, yet he saw two hundred churches built. A further insight into Eliot's doctrine of man is gained when Blomfield, in answer to the complaint of the Chorus that men do not want churches today, says: "Would it not be miraculous if they did want churches?"[1] Eliot implies that it is not man's nature to wish to serve and honor God. The Chorus then asks Blomfield for an example and he tells them to remember the Crusades, "both in their glory and in their shame."[2]

The Chorus next reviews some of the factors of the Crusades, ending with a commentary on their own time:

> Our age is an age of moderate virtue
> And of moderate vice
> When men will not lay down the Cross
> Because they will never assume it.
> Yet nothing is impossible, nothing,
> To men of faith and conviction.
> Let us therefore make perfect our will.
> O God, help us.[3]

Such words as these bring renewed emphasis on Eliot's attitude toward the spiritual laxity of our time.

Two brief scenes follow, both involve young men about to leave on the Crusades. The first young man,

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1. Ibid., p. 54.
2. Ibid., p. 55.
3. Ibid., p. 57.

urged by his sweetheart not to leave, insists: "I have told you, this is a Holy War. It is not like other wars. Honour demands this sacrifice of us."[1] The second young man bidding farewell to his family tells them, "Ours is a high and holy cause, the holiest war, I think that ever was fought: I had rather give my life than betray the Name I take."[2] The scene concludes with the two taking their vows from the Bishop in a Latin liturgical service.

Eliot does not offer his judgment on the subject of the justification for the war. He does, however, indicate his awareness of the fact that men must sometimes die for the cause of the church.

As the play continues the scene returns to the three builders, Ethelbert, Alfred and Edwin who now, almost finished their task, discuss the miracle of their progress. Three other contemporaries, the Major, Millicent, and Mrs. Poultridge enter and as the builders leave, the newcomers begin to discuss the church which they have come to inspect. A conversation on church architecture and furnishing ensues. Mrs. Poultridge thinks ". . . if the Church gives up Gothic, it may come to disestablishment, or reunion, or nonconformity, or almost anything."[3] Millicent on the other hand, says, "All church decoration is vulgar. . .

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 58.
2. Ibid., p. 60.
3. Ibid., p. 70.

And it's throwing away money that ought to be spent on other things--libraries and health centres and milk for children--. . . . If you take money from those things to decorate a church you're worshipping idols."[1]

The discussion between Mrs. Poultridge and Millicent suggests Eliot's understanding of the false and inadequate views of the church which are held by the public. Eliot also indicates that many people have a complete lack of comprehension concerning the true function of the church.

At this point, as if in answer to the problem, a Preacher of the Reformation times enters exclaiming that, "the Temple of God shall be purged."[2] He continues to preach repentance from idolatry and hypocrisy as first a crowd of 1640 and then a Tudor crowd enters with adornments from the Church. The former intends to destroy the articles and the latter rejoices over their booty. In a vehement declaration the Preacher continues:

> Their stinted service is a Popish beadroll full of vain repetitions as if seven paternosters did please the Lord better than six; and as if the chattering of a parrot were much more the better, because it is much more than enough. Their tossing to and fro of psalms and sentences is like tennis play whereto God is called a judge who can do best and most gallant in his worship; as be organs, solfaing, pricksong chaunting, bussing and mumbling very roundly, on diver hands. Thus they have a show of religion, but indeed they turn it to a
>
> . . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 72.
2. Ibid.

gaming, and play mock-holiday with the worship of God.[1] The Preacher concludes his sermon with a warning of God's coming judgment. Eliot is here apparently decrying the misuse of the liturgy, expressing in part at least, his concept of the nature of corrupt worship.

The Chorus returns expressing first the thought that God's house is not a House of sorrow and advocating: ". . . mourn in a private chamber, learning the way of penitence, And then let us learn the joyful communion of saints."[2] The Chorus then describes what may be considered Eliot's own concept of worship, speaking of man's creative gifts:

> Lord, shall we not bring these gifts to Your service?
> Shall we not bring to Your service all our powers
> For life, for dignity, grace and order,
> And intellectual pleasures of the senses?
> The Lord who created must wish us to create
> And employ our creation again in His service
> Which is already His service in creating.
> For Man is joined spirit and body,
> And therefore must serve as spirit and body.
> Visible and invisible, two worlds meet in Man;
> Visible and invisible must meet in His Temple:
> You must not deny the body.[3]

It would seem that Eliot believes that man serves God not only in direct worship, but also in living creatively in the total consecration of the total personality. Eliot's concept of man as body and spirit is also clearly evident in this passage.

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., pp. 73-74.
2. Ibid., p. 75.
3. Ibid., pp. 75-76.

As craftsmen set about to decorate the finished church, the three builders come to survey the procedure. Satisfied with their work, they leave anticipating the dedication of the church.

The Chorus enters reciting the first two verses of Psalm 84, and continues to give an exposition of what has thus far taken place in the play. They relate that before the dedication of this church other dedications shall be reenacted, "So that you may remember that the Temple is forever building, forever to be destroyed, forever to be restored. . . ."[1] This expresses once again Eliot's concept of the continuing Church. The churches whose dedications are then rehearsed are, the Abbey Church of St. Peter, rebuilt as the Abbey Church of Westminster during the reign of Edward the Confessor, the Church of St. Michael, and St. Paul's. The Abbey Church of St. Peter receives an unusual dedication from St. Peter himself, who is The Rock.

The Chorus now brings a final message of praise and thanksgiving for light. Reminiscent of the opening and closing portions of Ash Wednesday, the Chorus advises:

> Be not too curious of Good and Evil
> Seek not to count the future waves of Time;
> But be ye satisfied that you have light
> Enough to take your step and find your foothold.[2]

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 78.
2. Ibid., p. 84.

These words are indicative of Eliot's concept of faith; his belief that the present should be man's chief concern. This holds special interest when it is remembered that Eliot is often preoccupied with the philosophical theories of time and eternity.

In the words of the Chorus, there is latent Eliot's understanding of man and of his relation to God:

> We are children quickly tired: children who are up in the night and fall asleep as the rocket is fired; and the day is long for work or play.
>
> * * * * *
>
> Therefore we thank Thee for our little light, that is dappled with shadow.
> We thank Thee who hast moved us to building, to finding,
>
> to forming at the ends of our fingers and beams of our eyes.
>
> And when we have built an altar to the Invisible Light, we may set thereon the little lights for which our bodily vision is made.
> And we thank Thee that darkness reminds us of light.
> O light Invisible, we give Thee thanks for Thy great glory![1]

Thus, man is a child, yet capable of building if motivated by God.

The Rock, who is now identified with St. Peter, tells the Chorus that they have spoken well of their church, but that those who have been transformed and behold the glory of the Lord dwell in a place where there is no Temple:

> For the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb,
> They are the Temple.

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 85.

> And the lamp thereof is the Lamb
> And there with us is night no more, but lovely
>
> Light
> Light
> Light of the Light.[1]

The passage implies not only a concept of immortality, but a significant appreciation of a Heavenly Place, an existence in God's presence after this life. Immediately following this statement by The Rock the play closes as the Bishop, revealed by the Rock, pronouces a benediction.

The play incorporates within its basic theme of the stability and reality of the Church, Eliot's concepts of the Sovereignity of God and man's position as God's creative creature, capable of building and sustaining His church when imbued by His power.

## C. Murder in the Cathedral

During the 1936 engagement of Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral at the Manhattan Theatre, an article in the Commonweal magazine said of this play:

> The thesis of T. S. Eliot's tragedy may not be timely, but it is timeless, timeless as all great art is and ever must be--it deals with the problems of the human soul.
>
> * * * * *
>
> To those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, Murder in the Cathedral is a plea for the supreme authority of the Church, and the fact that its author is an Anglo and not a Roman Catholic does not lessen its effect, T. S. Eliot is concerned not with temporal but with eternal things.[2]

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 86.
2. Grenville Vernon: "Murder in the Cathedral," The Commonweal, Vol. XXIII, April 3, 1936, p. 636.

The play was originally written to be performed at the Canterbury Festival in England in 1935, and Eliot's subject of the murder of Thomas a Becket in the cathedral at Canterbury was a fitting choice. In this play Eliot again utilizes the Greek drama technique of the Chorus, who here represent the women of Canterbury in the immediate setting, and all humanity in a wider perspective.

The play begins with the Chorus bemoaning and lamenting their state. For seven years their beloved archbishop has been away, driven to France because of his quarrel with the king. Under King and barons the people have suffered oppressions, but "mostly we are left to our own devices, And we are content if we are left alone."[1] Now however, they are drawn to the Cathedral with a sense of apprehension which is beyond their understanding.

> Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the hands of statesman
> Who do, some well, some ill, planning and guessing,
> Having their aims which turn in their hands in the pattern of time.
> Come, happy December, who shall observe you, who shall preserve you?
> Shall the Son of Man be born again in the litter of scorn?
> For us, the poor, there is no action,
> But only to wait and to witness.[2]

The Chorus, speaking for the great mass of humanity of all the ages, does not see, does not understand, is incapable of action; the women witness the course of history

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1. T. S. Eliot: Murder in the Cathedral, p. 12.
2. Ibid., p. 13.

only with their emotions and live in a labyrinth of waiting. They are, however, endowed with a faith that God is the ultimate and Sovereign Ruler. Through the Chorus, Eliot speaks of the simple faith of humanity. The three priests appear and discuss the situation. As a messenger announces the coming of the Archbishop, their fears for the future become the more pronounced. Learning that the Archbishop's return heralds neither war nor peace but "a patched up affair,"[1] they recall the circumstances which brought about the original rift between king and archbishop. Recalling Thomas's character they say:



> His pride always feeding upon his own virtues,
> Pride drawing sustenance from impartiality,
> Pride drawing sustenance from generosity,
> Loathing power given by temporal devolution,
> Wishing subjection to God alone.
> Had the King been greater, or had he been weaker
> Things had perhaps been different for Thomas.[2]

The Chorus whose fears are even more pronounced than the Priests', expresses its desire that Thomas should return immediately to France. Although the women of the chorus repeat that their existence during the seven years of his absence has been only "Living and partly living,"[3] they dread much more that which they do not understand:

> O Thomas our Lord, leave us and leave us be, in our humble and tarnished frame of existence, leave us; do not ask us
>
> . . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 16.
2. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
3. Ibid., pp. 18-19.

> To stand to the doom on the house, the doom on the Archbishop, the doom on the world.
> Archbishop, secure and assured of your fate, unaffrayed among the shades, do you realise what you ask, do you realize what it means
> To the small folk drawn into the pattern of fate, the small folk who live among small things,
> The strain on the brain of the small folk who stand to the doom of the house, the doom of their lord, the doom of the world?[1]

Eliot's concept of the common experience as being devoid of spiritual insight is expressed elsewhere in his poetry, as for example in "The Dry Salvages":

> And right action is freedom
> From past and future also.
> For most of us, this is the aim
> Never here to be realised; . . .[2]

Further recognition of this concept of the dependence of the small folk upon the great as stated by the Chorus and echoed in part by the Priests is given by John F. Butler in an article in The London Quarterly and Halborn Review:

> It is the great achievement of Mr. Eliot in Murder in the Cathedral to have realized that the tragic hero or saint (his St. Thomas is both) needs to be mediated if we ordinary folk are to win our salvation, and has his main importance in the possibility of this mediation. Hence Mr. Eliot has deliberately made his chorus to be ordinary folk, unable to bear the Saint's passion or understand fully his doctrine, yet able somehow to live upon his spirit, and dependent on that spirit for their own spiritual life.[3]

Carried to its extreme this concept would lead to a doctrine

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1. Ibid., p. 20.
2. Eliot: Four Quartets, p. 28.
3. John F. Butler: "Tragedy, Salvation, and the Ordinary Man," The London Quarterly and Halborn Review, October, 1937, p. 496.

of veneration of the saints not in accord with Protestant theology.

Thomas' arrival interrupts the conversation between the Chorus and the Priests. His first word to them carries with it the irony of the situation: "Peace."[1] Thomas, criticizes the priests for their reprimand of the Chorus, and speaks for Eliot in defining an important facet of the problem of evil. The Chorus, says Thomas, speak beyond their own understanding:

> They know and do not know, that acting is suffering
> And suffering is action. Neither does the actor suffer
> Nor the patient act. Both are fixed
> In an eternal action, an eternal patience
> To which all must consent that it may be willed
> And which all must suffer that they may will it,
> That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action
> And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still
> Be forever still.[2]

Inherent in such a statement seems to be the concept of suffering as a part of the order of the universe which must, therefore, be accepted if not always understood.

The Priests express immediately their concern over the situation, their concern for Thomas' welfare. Giving them little cause for comfort, but affirming a certainty in God's sovereign rule, Thomas tells them: "End will be simple, sudden, God-given."[3]

Eliot, nevertheless, does not leave his hero to

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1. Eliot: Murder in the Cathedral, p. 21.
2. Ibid., p. 21.
3. Ibid., p. 23.

easy strife with mortal foes, but sends Tempters to try his resolution to be the spiritual guide to his people.

The First Tempter comes bringing poignant memories of sensuous pleasure, of friendship with the King, mirth, and gaiety. The Tempter urges a return to these days of ease and pleasure. Thomas, in rebuking this Tempter, reminds him that although man makes the same mistakes in generation after generation, in the life of one man, "never the same time returns. Sever the cord, shed the scale. Only the fool, fixed in his folly, may think he can turn the wheel on which he turns."[1] However, as the Tempter leaves, Thomas' words reveal the reality of the temptation:

> The impossible is still temptation
> The impossible, the undesirable,
> Voices under sleep, waking a dead world,
> So that the mind may not be whole in the present.[2]

Eliot, in developing a concept of temptation in the play, presents as the first type or area of temptation that which is rationally beyond possibility. Thomas knew that to return to such a life, such a relationship with the King was impossible. Yet this temptation is potent because of its sweetness to the senses, and the winsomeness of memory. Thomas' major weapon in defeating this temptation seems to be recognition, he saw and understood it for what it was.

The Second Tempter brings promise of temporal

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1. Ibid., p. 24.
2. Ibid., p. 26.

power through co-operation with the King. The words of the Tempter make power seem a worthy thing:

> Power obtained grows to glory,
> * * * * *
> Power is present. Holiness hereafter.
> * * * * *
> Beneath the throne of God can man do more?
> Disarm the ruffian, strengthen the laws,
> Rule for the good of the better cause,
> Dispensing justice make all even,
> Is thrive on earth, and perhaps in heaven.[1]

When Thomas inquires how this may be, the Tempter answers, "Real power is purchased at price of certain submission. Your spiritual power is earthly perdition. Power is present, for him who will wield."[2] Again Thomas recognizes this temptation for what it is, the acquisition of temporal power at the price of spiritual integrity would be for him no gain. He recognizes too the falsehood in the temptation for worldly power:

> Those who put their faith in worldly order
> Not controlled by the order of God,
> In confident ignorance, but arrest disorder,
> Make it fast, breed fatal disease,
> Degrade what they exalt.[3]

Through Thomas's awareness of the fallacy of temporal power, Eliot seems to express his own doctrine of government which is too often given to "confident ignorance."

Accosted by the Third Tempter, Thomas discovers him to represent the Barons, the enemies of the King who

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 27.
2. Ibid., p. 28.
3. Ibid., p. 30.

hope that an alliance against the King may be formed. The Tempter appeals to Thomas on the more subtle plane of gain not for himself, but for the welfare of England and for the benefit of Rome. This is then the temptation not to temporal power, but to the exercise of His spiritual power for political ends. The temptation lies perhaps in the partial truth of the Tempter's claim: "Church and people have good cause against the throne."[1] Thomas, however, rebukes this Tempter:

> Shall I who ruled like an eagle over doves
> Now take the shape of a wolf among wolves?
> Pursue your treacheries as you have done before:
> No one shall say that I betrayed a king.[2]

A Fourth Tempter appears to Thomas' surprise, since he says he expected three not four. The Tempter, however, assures him:

> Do not be surprised to receive one more.
> Had I been expected, I had been here before.
> I always precede expectation.[3]

Eliot here is describing temptation in its most disarming guise, the unexpected, the temptation out of the very inner being of the individual. The Fourth Tempter proceeds to undermine the suggestions of the other three, substantiating Thomas' own opinions. The advice of this Tempter is to follow the path already begun:

> All other ways are closed to you
>
> . . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 34.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 35.

Except the way already chosen.
* * * * *
You hold the skein: wind, Thomas, wind
The thread of eternal life and death.
You hold this power, hold it.[1]

Thus the greatest of the temptations gains its crowning appeal for Thomas when the probable consequence of martyrdom is considered. The words of the Tempter ring true, "Saint and Martyr rule from the tomb."[2] The Tempter continues with his advice, much of which Thomas recognizes as his own thoughts:

Seek the way of martyrdom make yourself the lowest
On earth, to be high in heaven.
And see far off below you, where the gulf is fixed,
Your persecutors, in timeless torment,
Parched passion, beyond expiation.[3]

Despite the sublety and potency of this temptation Thomas, remembering the other Tempters, points an accusing finger:

Others offered real good, worthless
But real. You only offer
Dreams to damnation.[4]

Now at the height of his confusion and torment, his mind poses the question which perhaps has haunted Eliot himself, the question which through the ages has brought to saints hours of weary contemplation:

Is there no way, in my soul's sickness
Does not lead to damnation in pride?
I know well that these temptations
Mean present vanity and future torment.
Can sinful pride be driven out

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., pp. 36-37.
2. Ibid., p. 37.
3. Ibid., p. 39.
4. Ibid.

> Only by more sinful? Can I neither act nor suffer
> Without perdition?[1]

In an ironic twist, as if in answer to these questions, the Fourth Tempter recites Thomas' own words to the Chorus concerning acting and suffering. The Four Tempters then appear before Thomas and together intone a message of despair:

> Man's life is a cheat and disappointment;
> All things are unreal,
> Unreal or disappointing:[2]

The Chorus, bemoaning their fate anew, plead with Thomas to save them. To destroy himself, will, they say, mean their destruction as well.

The first part of the play is concluded as Thomas reviews his four temptations and says of the last, "The last temptation is the greatesttreason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason."[3]

The temptations of Thomas suggest a comparison with the temptations of Christ in their underlying themes. In his first temptation Thomas wrestles with the needs and desires of the flesh, and Christ in His first temptation was confronted with the legitimate need of the body for food. In his second temptation Thomas spurns the appeal of temporal power, likewise Christ denied the temptation of unveiling his power by casting Himself from the pinnacle

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1. Ibid., p. 40.
2. Ibid., p. 41.
3. Ibid., p. 44.

of the temple. In his third and fourth temptation Thomas' experience parallels Christ's third temptation, that of bowing down to the devil in order to achieve the spiritual dominion to which He was entitled. In this presentation of the nature of temptation, Eliot evidences comprehension of Christian theology.

Between the first and second parts of the play there is an Interlude in which the Archbishop preaches in the Cathedral on Christmas morning in the year 1170. The Archbishop first reminds the people that the celebration of the Christmas Mass commemorates Christ's passion and death as well as His birth. He tells them that on this day they both mourn and rejoice, and the World does not understand. The Archbishop also reminds them that on the day following Christmas they celebrate the martyrdom of Stephen. Then in a statement concerning the nature of martyrdom he says:

> A Christian martyrdom is no accident. Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint, as a man by willing and contriving may become a ruler of men. Ambition fortifies the will of man to become ruler over other men: it operates with deception, cajolery, and violence, it is the action of impurity upon impurity. Not so in Heaven. A martyr, a saint, is always made by the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways.[1]

Eliot is here not only stating a concept of martyrdom with its implications concerning the Sovereignty of God, but he

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 49.

seems also to be indicating the basic fact of alienation which exists between God and man. The need for return, for reconciliation of men with God is implied. In a further description of the true martyr Thomas says that the true martyr, "has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, not lost it but found it, for he has found freedom in submission to God."[1] Eliot is expressing the concept of true freedom analogous to the teaching of Christ.[2]

The second part of the play opens with the Chorus rehearsing the uncertainty of the times:

> The peace of this world is always uncertain, unless men keep the peace of God.
> And war among men defiles this world, but death in the Lord renews it,
> And the world must be cleaned in the winter, or we shall have only
> A sour spring, a parched summer, an empty harvest.[3]

The necessity for purgation is evident even to common man, and again Eliot illustrates his understanding of man's relationship to God as the predetermining factor in man's relationship with man.

Four knights enter upon the scene and as the Three Priests try to deter them from disturbing the Archbishop, Thomas enters. The Four Knights proceed to declaim Thomas as a traitor against the King, recalling his past

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 50.
2. Cf. Matthew 10:39.
3. Eliot: Murder in the Cathedral, pp. 53-54.

relationship and what they consider his present betrayal. Thomas, however, denies these accusations claiming that except for the demands of his religious position he is at the command of the King. The Knights make an attempt to attack Thomas but the Priests and attendants intervene. The Knights continuing their threats demand that Thomas absolve those whom he had condemned, and when he refuses they urge him to leave the country once again. As the Knights are about to leave, Thomas warns them:

> I submit my cause to the judgment of Rome.
> But if you kill me, I shall rise from my tomb
> To submit my cause before God's throne.[1]

Such statements indicate Eliot's belief in immortality, and in ultimate justice executed before God's throne. Rome is throughout the play considered the seat of spiritual power on earth in 1170.

After the Chorus recites a speech expressing the horror which they feel in the situation, Thomas tries to comfort them:

> Peace, and be at peace with your thoughts and visions.
> * * * * *
> Human kind cannot bear very much reality.
> * * * * *
> All my life they have been coming, these feet. All my life I have waited. Death will come only when I am worthy,
> And if I am worthy, there is no danger.
> I have therefore only to make perfect my will.
> * * * * *
> And I am not in danger: only near to death.[2]

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 63.
2. Ibid., p. 67.

In elucidating his theory of the martyr and the saint, Eliot is also implying a standard of value in which physical well-being is inferior to spiritual life. Inherent here is also the concept that the martyr's death comes only when one is worthy, and that such a death to one who is in the will of God is not a thing to be dreaded.

The Chorus enters as the Priests, in an effort to protect Thomas, drag him off to vespers. The words of the Chorus constitute a dirge and end with a prayer illustrating Eliot's concept of the common man's need and his turning to God:

> We fear, we fear. Who shall then plead for me,
> Who intercede for me, in my most need?
>
> Dead upon the tree, my Saviour,
> Let not be in vain Thy labour;
> Help me, Lord, in my last fear.
>
> Dust I am, to dust am bending,
> From the final doom impending
> Help me, Lord, for death is near.[1]

Intrinsic in the prayer is the belief in the efficacy of Christ's death.

As the Priests set about to bar the doors of the Cathedral in order to protect Thomas against the Knights whose return is expected momentarily, Thomas orders them to unbar the doors, saying:

> I will not have the house of prayer, the church of Christ,
> The sanctuary, turned into a fortress.
> The Church shall protect her own, in her own way, not

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 69.

> As oak and stone; stone and oak decay,
> Give no stay, but the Church shall endure.
> The Church shall be open, even to our enemies.
> Open the door![1]

Eliot's concept of the Church as enduring and strong is easily evidenced in The Rock, but here too are implications of its immutability. The spiritual nature of the Church's function is acknowledged by Eliot. The Church's protection is not necessarily the shielding of flesh and blood, but the preservation of the eternal. The Church is here pictured as universal in its concern, open to friend and foe alike.

The Priests, however, argue with Thomas that the Knights who are frenziedly trying to break into the Cathedral are no better than wild beasts and should not be thought of as more. Thomas repeats his command that the door should be unbarred and tells them that their reasoning is coincident with the world's: They judge an act by its results, disregarding the fact that for every act, good and evil results may be noted. He says with time these factors of good and evil become indistinguishable, but that his death is to be the result of a decision out of time: "I give my life to the Law of God above the Law of Man."[2] Eliot's Christian philosophy of history of points in time which are above time, concurrent with time, but

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1. Ibid., p. 70.
2. Ibid., p. 71.

superceding time in their consequence is exemplified in this speech of Thomas'.

Thomas further pictures the immediate situation as an anti-climax to the real battle which he has already fought and won:

> We have only to conquer now, by suffering.
> This is the easier victory. Now is the triumph
> Of the Cross. . . .[1]

There is in these words of Thomas the implication that his experience is analogous to that of Christ's in which the spiritual suffering which preceded the Cross was the paramount sacrifice.

As the Knights enter and begin to harangue against Thomas, he presents himself to them as one ready to die:

> A Christian, saved by the blood of Christ,
> Ready to suffer with my blood.
> This is the sign of the Church always,
> The sign of blood. Blood for blood.
> His blood given to buy my life,
> My blood given to pay for His death,
> My death for His death.[2]

In this statement Eliot clearly indicates an understanding of the doctrine of Christ's vicarious atonement and the efficacy of it for the salvation of man. Eliot also suggests his belief in the total committment of the Christian to Christ as the result of redemption through the blood of Christ. Inherent in the words of Thomas is the concept of man's free choice in conjunction with the teaching

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1. Ibid., p. 72.
2. Ibid., pp. 72-73.

throughout the play of the sovereignty of God.

The Chorus cries out for cleansing in words which are indicative of Eliot's belief in the devastating and far-reaching consequences of sin:

> Clear the air! clean the sky! wash the wind! take stone from stone and wash them.
> The land is foul, the water is foul, our beast and ourselves defiled with blood.
> * * * * *
> Can I look again at the day and its common things, and see them all smeared with blood, through a curtain of falling blood?
> * * * * *
> We are soiled by a filth that we cannot clean, united to supernatural vermin,
> It is not we alone, it is not the house, it is not the city that is defiled,
> But the world that is wholly foul.[1]

All humanity as represented by the Chorus becomes bound to the consequences of evil in the world, the stain is not alone upon the immediate participants but upon the whole world, even reaching out to defile nature.

The murder having been completed, the Knights rationalize their deed in prose speeches. The irony and plausability of their words seem to bespeak Eliot's concept of man's attitude toward sin, that even the grossest evil can be contrived in the mind of man as a service for the benefit of all. (Such rationalization is reminiscent of Raskolnikov's justification of the murder he commits in Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment.) The Knights go so far as to conclude that because Thomas insisted that the

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1. Ibid., pp. 74-75.

doors be opened when he knew their state of mind that a verdict of, "Suicide while of Unsound Mind"[1] should terminate the case.

As the Knights leave, one of the Priests commences to bemoan their situation, alone and desolate, predicting that the heathen will now build a world without God on the ruins of the Church. The Third Priest, however, corrects his brother:

> No. For the Church is stronger for this action,
> Triumphant in adversity. It is fortified
> By persecution: supreme, so long as men will die for it.[2]

Eliot's idea is consistent with that of theologians who recognize the Church's place in history as superceding the moment of defeat with even greater victory and endurance. Inherent throughout the play is Eliot's doctrine of the supremacy of the Church over man and over state.

The play concludes with the Chorus reciting a song of praise to God:

> Those who deny Thee could not deny, if Thou didst not exist; and their denial is never complete, for if it were so, they would not exist.
> * * * * *
> We thank Thee for Thy mercies of blood, for Thy redemption by blood. For the blood of Thy martyrs and saints
> Shall enrich the earth, shall create the holy places.[3]

The undeniable existence of God, the fact of His redemption made possible through blood are recognized by Eliot throughout

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1. Ibid., p. 81.
2. Ibid., p. 82.
3. Ibid., p. 84.

the play. The Chorus includes in this final song phrases indicative of Eliot's concept of the nature of man:

> Who fear the blessing of God, the loneliness of the night of God, the surrender required, the deprivation inflicted;
> Who fear the hand at the window, the fire in the thatch, the fist in the tavern, the push into the canal,
> Less than we fear the love of God.[1]

The extent of man's alienation from God is illustrated by the fact that man will endure much in the way of danger and physical harm rather than come in contact with the love of God. Eliot's words recall Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven in their expression of man's trepidation of God's love. Eliot appreciates too the necessity of the submission of man's will to the Will of God and the inevitable changes which accompany such a surrender.

Acknowledging that the sin of the world is upon their heads, the last words of the Chorus are in liturgical form:

> Lord, have mercy upon us.
> Christ, have mercy upon us.
> Lord, have mercy upon us.
> Blessed Thomas, pray for us.[2]

## D. The Family Reunion

In an article in Christendom magazine, Roy W. Battenhouse says of the reviews which The Family Reunion

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1. Ibid., p. 85.
2. Ibid., p. 86.

received when it first appeared:

> Of significance to the theologically-minded should have been the fact that reviews appeared under such headings as "Original Sin," "The Saving Eumenides," and "Orestes in England."[1]

Eliot's attempt to portray the Christian concept in contemporary and non-theological terms is, in part at least, a success. In turning to the contemporary scene for the expression of spiritual truth, Eliot is concerned that the symbols and words through which Christianity is conveyed may be revitalized. "Eliot is anxious for such revitalization, because he sees himself as a would-be Christian poet in an age in which Christian terminology is a mass of cliches."[2]

The play is divided into two parts; the first part takes place in the afternoon in the drawing room at the family home of Wishwood. Amy, Dowager Lady Monchensey, has called a family reunion to make the return of Harry, her eldest son, as pleasant as possible. As the play begins Ivy, Violet, and Agatha, Amy's three younger sisters, are already at Wishwood; as are also Amy's two brothers-in-law, Colonel the Honorable Gerald Piper, and The Honorable Charles Piper. Mary, a daughter of a deceased cousin of Lady Monchensey, has lived at Wishwood most of her life, and is of course the youngest member of the family who

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1. Roy W. Battenhouse: "Eliot's The Family Reunion as Christian Prophesy," Christendom, Vol. X, (Summer, 1945), p. 307.
2. Ibid., p. 307.

awaits Harry's homecoming. John and Arthur, Harry's younger brothers, are expected to attend the reunion and their arrival is also awaited as the play opens.

In the first moments of the play Agatha is recognizably different from the rest of the uncles and aunts whose trivial conversation adds a light touch to the drama, but reveals them as people who exist on the surface of life. However, Agatha, Mary, Harry and Amy, in her own way, see beyond into the basic realities.

> It is a drama of the inner life. The character contrast which runs through it--the test applied to all the characters in the play--is whether he or she attempts to live on the surface and pretends (that is all that is possible) to ignore the spiritual destiny of man, or accepts a predicament which is essentially tragic.[1]

Amy, who has for many years taken the responsibility of running Wishwood, now hopes that Harry's return after an absence of seven years will mean that he will remain to be the master of the house. During these years she has tried to keep Wishwood unchanged:

> I do not want the clock to stop in the dark.
> If you want to know why I never leave Wishwood
> That is the reason. I keep Wishwood alive
> To keep the family alive, to keep them together,
> To keep me alive, and I live to keep them.
> You none of you understand how old you are
> And death will come to you as a mild surprise,
> A momentary shudder in a vacant room.
> Only Agatha seems to discover some meaning in death
> Which I cannot find.[2]

. . . . . .

1. Desmond MacCarthy: "Some Notes on Mr. Eliot's New Play," New Statesman and Nation, Vol. XVII, March 25, 1939, p. 455.
2. T. S. Eliot: The Family Reunion, pp. 15-16.

Amy seems to be expressing for Eliot the person who lives in time, ruled by the clock, aware vaguely that there is something beyond, and that there are those who see and comprehend that which is beyond the clock. As the family, under Amy's direction, lays plans to conduct things as if Harry had never been away, Agatha remarks that the experience will be painful for Harry:

> I mean painful, because everything is irrevocable,
> Because the past is irremediable,
> Because the future can only be built
> Upon the real past.[1]

Agatha sees as the others do not that, although Amy has endeavored to keep Wishwood the same, Harry will find the surroundings magnify not only the changes in the family but also the changes in himself.

Amy instructs the family not to mention Harry's wife or her accidental death at sea. Amy feels that the death of Harry's wife is not a cause for grief since she would never have fitted into the family pattern nor did she ever want Harry's relatives.

Harry returns and his almost neurotic state of mind is immediately evident. As the family all urge him to explain why he is so upset, he says:

> You are all people
> To whom nothing has happened, at most a continual impact
> Of external events. You have gone through life in sleep,
> Never woken to the nightmare. I tell you, life would be unendurable
> If you were wide awake.[2]

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 17.
2. Ibid., pp. 27-28.

Harry's condition is caused by the death of his wife whom he believes he pushed into the ocean. His consciousness of sin is expressed when he says:

> . . . While the slow stain sinks deeper through the skin
> Tainting the flesh and discolouring the bone--
> This is what matters, but it is unspeakable,
> Untranslatable: I talk in general terms
> Because the particular has no language.[1]

Eliot through Harry expresses his concept of the nature of sin and its effect upon the human soul. The inescapable reality of it haunts Harry the more in the familiar surroundings of his childhood home. As Harry gives the details of his wife's death, his Uncle Charles assures him that he has no reason to be remorseful, that his conscience is clear. In an attempt to make them understand the nature of his conflict Harry replies:

> It goes a good deal deeper
> Than what people call their conscience; it is just the cancer
> That eats away the self. . . . So you must believe
> That I suffer from delusions. It is not my conscience,
> Not my mind, that is diseased, but the world I have to live in.[2]

Here Eliot is still the poet of The Waste Land. In the crime which Harry may or may not have committed in reality, he sees beyond the immediate situation into the disorder of the society as a whole.

Harry next is sent upstairs to rest and the family contrive various ways of getting to the root of

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1. Ibid., p. 29.
2. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

the problem. Dr. Warburton, the family physician and friend, is invited to dinner in the hope that a chat with him will be beneficial for Harry. Downing, Harry's personal servant with him since he first left Wishwood, is interviewed by the Uncles for further information concerning the death of Harry's wife. In their reactions to the situation, the family seem to bespeak Eliot's concept of man's endeavor to escape the underlying realities of life. "The human detail of their comment contrasts with the more abstract language of the principals, concerned as they are with themes as widely dramatic as sin and the meaning of redemption. . . ."[1] Only Agatha sees these actions as irrelevant.

The first scene in the play ends with the Uncles and Aunts, with the exception of Agatha, forming a chorus and phrasing Eliot's concept of the rationalization of the common mind when faced with the uncommon situation:

> We like to be thought well of by others
> So that we may think well of ourselves.
> And any explanation will satisfy:
> We only ask to be reassured
> About the noises in the cellar
> And the window that should not have been open.
> * * * * *
> Hold tight, hold tight, we must insist that the world is what we have always taken it to be.[2]

Man is pictured as desperately denying the supernatural and remaining in bondage to the false security of his

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1. Stephen Potter: "Plays and Pictures," New Statesman and Nation, Vol. XXXII, November 9, 1946, p. 337.
2. Eliot: The Family Reunion, p. 43.

immediate realm of experience.

In the second scene Mary and Agatha discuss the situation with greater perception than the others, and Agatha, expressing a belief in a power beyond themselves, says:

> The decision will be made by powers beyond us
> Which now and then emerge.[1]

Agatha leaves to change for dinner and Mary and Harry have a long conversation, beginning with a recollection of their childhood at Wishwood. They discover that although everything had been planned for their pleasure, and most especially for Harry's, they had never been happy as children at Wishwood. Harry then tries to explain to Mary his utter hopelessness, now even more abysmal since his return to Wishwood. Mary, however, tries to encourage Harry to remain at Wishwood:

> What you need to alter is something inside you
> Which you can change anywhere--here, as well as elsewhere.[2]

Harry attempts to tell Mary about the Eumenides which haunt him, but Mary tells him:

> You attach yourself to loathing
> As others do to loving: an infatuation
> That's wrong, a good that's misdirected. You deceive yourself
> Like the man convinced that he is paralysed
> Or like the man who believes that he is blind
> While he still sees the sunlight.[3]

1. Ibid., p. 49.
2. Ibid., p. 55.
3. Ibid., p. 57.

Their conversation is interrupted by the Eumenides, which here in his own home actually appear to Harry for the first time. However, he is unable to convince Mary of the reality of their presence. According to MacCarthy, "Mr. Eliot has perceived a relation between the Greek Furies and remorse or a maddened conscience."[1]

In a brief conversation before dinner between Harry and Dr. Warburton, Dr. Warburton tells him that his first patient was a murderer suffering from cancer. The doctor recalls his surprise at this man's desire to live. Harry, however, conceives this to be the normal response:

> Cancer is here:
> The lump, the dull pain, the occasional sickness:
> Murder a reversal of sleep and waking.
> Murder was there. Your ordinary murderer
> Regards himself as an innocent victim.
> To himself he is still what he used to be
> Or what he would be. He cannot realise
> That everything is irrevocable,
> The past unredeemable.[2]

Eliot is again expressing the concept of sin and its effect upon man. Eliot believes that man is often unable to comprehend the reality and extent of his own sin. Here he also postulates the supernatural element of sin.

The second part of the play takes place in the library at Wishwood after dinner, and begins with a conversation between Harry and Dr. Warburton. Dr. Warburton reveals to Harry that his mother's condition is not good

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1. MacCarthy, op. cit., p. 456.
2. Eliot: The Family Reunion, p. 65.

and that he must take his responsibilities at Wishwood. Harry, however, is more interested in learning about his father, whom he barely remembers. Their conversation is concluded when news comes that John has been in an accident and Dr. Warburton leaves to check on his condition. When Harry does not express what the family considers the proper concern about John's accident, they accuse him of being callous. Harry replies in what is perhaps Eliot's own concept of the division between those who are spiritually aware and those who are not:

> It's only when they see nothing
> That people can always show the suitable emotions--
> And so far as they feel at all, their emotions are suitable.
> They don't understand what it is to be awake,
> To be living on several planes at once. . . .[1]

As the family continue to speculate over John's accident, Harry renews his exclamations, revealing Eliot's concept of reality:

> You go on trying to think of each thing separately,
> Making small things important, so that everything
> May be unimportant, a slight deviation
> From some imaginary course that life ought to take,
> That you call normal. What you call the normal
> Is merely the unreal and unimportant.[2]

Harry tells them that he at one time considered his own life as a unique and isolated ruin, but that he now begins to see it as a part of an enormous disaster which involves all men.[3] Here Harry gives expression to Eliot's under-

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1. Ibid., p. 85.
2. Ibid., p. 88.
3. Ibid., p. 88.

standing of the universality of sin and its consequences.

Trying to lead Harry further in his spiritual quest, Agatha explains to him that, "To rest in our own suffering is evasion of suffering. We must learn to suffer more."[1] In what is Eliot's most vivid description of sin, Harry reveals to Agatha the extent of his suffering:

> It's not being alone
> That is the horror, to be alone with horror.
> What matters is the filthiness. I can clean my skin,
> Purify my life, void my mind,
> But always the filthiness, that lies a little deeper. . .[2]

Eliot's concept of sin enters the realm of that which is deeper than mind and body, the effects of sin are most devastating upon the soul. The sense of guilt of which Harry is so poignantly aware is given greater elucidation in the second scene when he talks again with Agatha.

Meanwhile the family learns that Arthur has also met with an accident. Although Arthur is unhurt, the family is upset because the accident, which was Arthur's fault, is reported in the newspaper. The Uncles and Aunts in Chorus conclude the scene with words typifying their lack of perception:

> There is nothing to do about anything,
> And now it is nearly time for the news
> We must listen to the weather report
> And the international catastrophes.[3]

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 89.
2. Ibid., p. 90.
3. Ibid., p. 94.

In the second scene, during a conversation with Agatha, Harry progresses in his spiritual pilgrimage. Explaining his experience to Agatha, he says:

> I felt, at first, a sense of separation,
> Of isolation unredeemable, irrevocable--
> It's eternal, or gives a knowledge of eternity,
> Because it feels eternal while it lasts.[1]

Eliot is indicating his idea of the alienation of man from God which comes as the result of sin.

Harry then asks Agatha to tell him the things Warburton would not divulge about Harry's father. Agatha tells him about the unhappy marriage of his parents, tells him that his father wanted to kill his mother before he was born. She also tells him of her own part in the situation, his father's love for her, and how she prevented him from murdering Amy. Harry at last begins to recognize his own marriage as a counter-part of his parents' marriage. With this recognition he feels that, "Everything tends towards reconciliation."[2] He now thinks that perhaps he only dreamed that he pushed his wife into the ocean.

During this discussion between Harry and Agatha, Agatha makes the remark which indicates the key to the entire play:

> What we have written is not a story of detection,
> Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.[3]

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 96.
2. Ibid., p. 101.
3. Ibid., p. 101.

For Eliot the problem lies not with the question of whether Harry murdered his wife or just thought he did, but in the spiritual condition and development of the hero. The development is at first the almost imperceptible movement toward the illumination which comes to Harry as he is aided by the Eumenides, Mary, and Agatha. Agatha continues to lead Harry to a point of recognition or illumination:

> It is possible that you have not known what sin
> You shall expiate, or whose, or why. It is certain
> That the knowledge of it must precede the expiation.
> It is possible that sin may strain and struggle
> In its dark instinctive birth, to come to consciousness
> And so find expurgation. It is possible
> You are the consciousness of your unhappy family. [1]
> Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.

Eliot's concept of sin and the atonement which it demands is brought to light through Harry's illumination. Harry is to be sent forth as a vicarious or representative being, sent forth to fulfill the requirements of the supernatural elements basic in Eliot's concept of sin. "At the heart of the play is the Christian doctrine of the Atonement, and the mysterious exchanges of sin and suffering in the spiritual world through which mankind partakes in that mystery."[2]

The process of expiation having already begun, Harry perceives that those things which he once thought to be real were not:

> The things I thought were real are shadows, and the real
> Are what I thought were private shadows. O that awful
>
> . . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 101.
2. Gardner, op. cit., p. 156.

privacy
Of the insane mind! Now I can live in public.
Liberty is a different kind of pain from prison.[1]

For Harry the strong bonds of illusion and disillusion begin to crumble. His release comes not as the release of his name from the suspicion of murder, but as the release of his mind and understanding. Eliot's understanding of the supernatural qualities and reality of the power of sin and its effect upon the human mind is vividly portrayed through Harry. As Agatha reminds Harry that he has a long journey before him, the Eumenides appear once again but Harry now recognizes them, expects them, and knows that he must follow them. According to one commentator it is this recognition and determination to follow instead of escape which lends meaning to the play: "But the whole point of Mr.Eliot's play is that they (these embodiments of remorse and thwarted spiritual aspirations) are really guiding angels which must be welcomed and followed, if man is to find peace."[2]

After Harry's moment of decision or conversion has passed, he finds that he is once again confused. However, he retains the knowledge of the fact that the decision made in a moment of clarity was the decision to which he must adhere. Eliot reveals through this his keen insight into the nature of intense spiritual experience.

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1. Eliot: The Family Reunion, p. 103.
2. MacCarthy, op. cit., p. 456.

Eliot is aware that often a period of high spiritual comprehension will be followed by a partial return to darkness and to doubt. Harry is, however, determined to leave Wishwood:

> But I know there is only one way out of defilement--
> Which leads in the end to reconciliation.
> And I know that I must go.[1]

Eliot's concept of man's alienation which can be remedied only by reconciliation is indicated in Harry's remark. Although God is not mentioned, it is inherent in the movement of the play that this is a spiritual reconciliation, a reconciliation with God.

When Amy learns of Harry's decision to leave Wishwood she accuses him of running away and although Harry tries to explain that he is not running to hide, but journeying forth to seek, she insists that he is running away. Agatha clarifies Harry's position, perhaps expressing Eliot's own view of the general nature of society:

> In a world of fugitives
> The person taking the opposite direction
> Will appear to run away.[2]

Harry, in endeavoring to explain to his mother where he will go in answer to her desperate question, explains it in words which seem indicative of Eliot's understanding of the spiritual pilgrimage:

. . . . . .

1. Eliot: The Family Reunion, p. 108.
2. Ibid., p. 110.

To the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,
A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,
The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,
A care over lives of humble people,
The lesson of ignorance, of incurable diseases.
Such things are possible.[1]

Eliot does not conceive of the conversion as the end, but as the beginning. Suffering and sacrifice have their place. In the words of Roy W. Battenhouse, "Harry does not yet look upon the Promised Land but he has made his Exodus. This seems to be the measure of Eliot's hope for contemporary man's immediate future."[2]

The scene ends as Harry gives a testimony to what he himself calls his "election" in words which are reminiscent of Pauline expressions:

Why I have this election
I do not understand. It must have been preparing always,
And I see it was what I always wanted. Strength demanded
That seems too much, is just strength enough given.
I must follow the bright angels.[3]

Although not directly stated, the reality of the Being Who elected and Who gives the strength is inherent in Harry's experience.

In the last scene of the play, Amy expresses her bitterness for Agatha, whom she holds responsible for Harry's departure. Amy describes Harry's journey as his becoming a missionary. This causes various reactions from

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1. Ibid., p. 111.
2. Battenhouse, op. cit., p. 315.
3. Eliot: The Family Reunion, p. 111.

the family, typified, however, by Charles's remark: "Such a thing has never happened in our family."[1] Although Harry declares that he never said he was going to be a missionary, he finds other explanations beyond their comprehension.

After Harry's departure, Amy dies. The Chorus meanwhile chants their final dirge, expressing again Eliot's concept of the nature of common man:

> We understand the ordinary business of living,
> We know how to work the machine,
> We can usually avoid accidents,
> We are insured against fire,
> Against larceny and illness,
> Against defective plumbing,
> But not against the act of God.[2]

Man is lost in the labyrinth of everyday living, fearing only that which he does not understand, that which is beyond the grasp of his ordinary experience. "For Eliot is an author who holds that the obscurities of 'humanism' need to be cleared up by the superior vision of a Christian point of view. Humanism and supernatural religion are in a sense discontinuous, even perhaps enemies of each other...."[3]

The play closes with a final benediction pronounced by Agatha, in its words renewing the theme of expiation:

> This way the pilgrimage
> Of expiation
> * * * * *
> By intercession
> By pilgrimage
> By those who depart
> . . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 120.
2. Ibid., pp. 128-129.
3. Battenhouse, op. cit., p. 313.

In several directions
For their own redemption
And that of the departed--
May they rest in peace.[1]

In The Family Reunion Eliot has perhaps traced his own spiritual pilgrimage, or at least reiterated some of the basic elements in his own conversion experience. He has throughout the play indicated his concept of sin and expiation, his understanding of purgation and salvation. "Without saying so, the poet takes his place with all the seers who have understood and tried to teach us, blind as we are, that if we would escape from God, we must escape to God."[2]

## E. The Cocktail Party

The Cocktail Party is probably the most well known of Eliot's four plays. Its production on the stage in both London and New York brought it to the attention of a section of the public who perhaps would not otherwise come into contact with Eliot's works. It is, therefore, interesting to note that "The Theatre" columnist for The Spectator said concerning The Cocktail Party, ". . . the discerning playgoer will feel the presence of a Christian philosophy. . . ."[3]

As the play opens, Edward Chamberlayne, a successful

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1. Eliot: The Family Reunion, p. 131.
2. Edward Shillito: "The Saving Eumenides," The Christian Century, Vol. LVI, September 6, 1939, p. 1073.
3. Kenneth J. Robinson: "The Theatre," The Spectator, September 2, 1949, p. 294.

attorney, has been placed in the embarrassing position of having to explain his wife's absence to his guests at a cocktail party. Unfortunately for Edward, his wife Lavinia has left him, but has neglected to cancel their party and he is forced to create a fictitious sick aunt to explain Lavinia's sudden departure. The guests are Julia Shuttlethwaite, a flighty busy-body; Alexander MacColgie Gibbs, a well-traveled gentleman who has connections almost everywhere; Peter Quilpe, a young writer; Celia Copplestone, a cultured young society lady; and an Unidentified Guest, later identified as Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly.

Although none of his guests believe Edward's explanations about Lavinia, they remain at the party long enough to make Edward frightfully uncomfortable and leave only after expressing much solicitude for his welfare. The Unidentified Guest remains; and Edward, finding himself alone with a stranger, confesses that Lavinia has left him. When the Guest replies that it is probably for the best, Edward decides that he wants Lavinia back, not because he loves her, but because he must find out what has happened during the five years of their marriage. The Guest explains Edward's reaction:

> There's a loss of personality;
> Or rather, you've lost touch with the person
> You thought you were. You no longer feel quite human
> You're suddenly reduced to the status of an object--
> A living object, but no longer a person.[1]

. . . . . .

1. T. S. Eliot: The Cocktail Party, p. 29.

Throughout the play there are indications of Eliot's concept of modern man in his predicament. Edward seems to exemplify at this point the response of man when circumstance brings him to the point of seeking for reality.

The Guest tells Edward that he is able to arrange for Lavinia's return and will do so, but that Edward in the meantime must wait. Edward complains first that the situation is humiliating and secondly that he feels that he is in the dark. In answer to the first complaint the Guest assures him:

> You will find that you survive humiliation
> And that's an experience of incalculable value.[1]

In answering the second complaint the Guest says:

> There is certainly no purpose in remaining in the dark
> Except long enough to clear from the mind
> The illusion of having ever been in the light.[2]

Inherent in these two statements of the Guest are concepts consistent with a Christian philosophy. The experience of humility is basic to the Christian understanding of the creatureliness of man. The fact that the Guest points out to Edward that he will survive indicates Eliot's awareness of the fallacy of pride. In the second admonishment Eliot is pointing out again, as he has in all his plays, that the average man dwells in spiritual darkness.

The Guest promises to have Lavinia back within

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1. Ibid., p. 31.
2. Ibid., p. 32.

twenty-four hours and leaves as Edward is beseiged by Julia, who says she left her glasses; by Alex, who comes to be helpful to poor Edward and succeeds in ruining what little food there was in the kitchen; and by Peter, who comes to Edward for advice concerning Celia whom he loves.

In the second scene Celia returns and the love affair between Edward and Celia is divulged. Celia, happy in the knowledge that Lavinia has left Edward, thinks that now all their difficulties are solved. Then Edward tells her that Lavinia is coming back. Their conversation is interrupted several times by Julia who seems to have various reasons for coming in upon Edward, much to his consternation. When Edward explains that he wants Lavinia back as the result of his conversation with the Unidentified Guest, Celia tells him that he must be mad or at least on the verge of a nervous breakdown and when she mentions a doctor Edward remarks:

> It would need someone greater than the greatest doctor
> To cure <u>this</u> illness.[1]

This suggests Eliot's comprehension of the nature of the disease of modern man. Nathan A. Scott states:

> Eliot's intention here seems clearly to be one of exhibiting a common modern experience of breakdown and collapse as not, of necessity, utterly spendthrift of life, but as an occasion which, when it disabuses us of all strategies of self-protection, may prepare us for a new and different kind of response to "re-

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1. Ibid., p. 61.

ality" or God.[1]

Celia is disillusioned by Edward's attitude and her mood changes quickly from humiliation and anger to sympathy and recognition. Edward tells her that he now sees himself for the first time as a middle-aged man and Celia replies:

> And, Edward, please believe that whatever happens
> I shall not loathe you. I shall only feel sorry for you.
> It's only myself I am in danger of hating.
> But what will your life be? I cannot bear to think of it.
> Oh, Edward! Can you be happy with Lavinia?[2]

Here, at the high point in her disillusionment Celia expresses grief at having lost something which she wanted to exist: she recognizes that Edward never was the fulfillment of this wish. Celia, representing the aesthetic being for Eliot, finds that at the point of reality it is herself she condemns; and she asks Edward's forgiveness.

Edward, too, comes to a point of self-recognition during this conversation. He describes himself:

> The self that can say 'I want this -- or want that --'
> The self that wills -- he is a feeble creature;
> He has to come to terms in the end
> With the obstinate, the tougher self; who does not speak,
> Who never talks, who cannot argue;
> And who in some men may be the guardian --
> But in men like me, the dull, the implacable,
> The indomitable spirit of mediocrity.[3]

Edward is possibly recognizing himself as Eliot's common

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1. Nathan A. Scott: "T. S. Eliot's The Cocktail Party: Of Redemption and Vocation," Religion in Life, Vol. XX, Spring, 1951, p. 274.
2. Eliot: The Cocktail Party, p. 65.

man, incapable of certain spiritual experiences of which others of a more sensitive nature are capable.

In the third scene Edward find himself deluged anew with his visitors of the night before. They come because they have been told by Julia that Lavinia has sent a telegram inviting them. Peter comes with the news that he is about to leave for California and Celia remarks that she too will be going away. When Lavinia arrives she is surprised to find tham all, since she knows nothing of the telegram. After the guests leave, Lavinia concludes that it is Julia who had arranged for their presence. Edward and Lavinia find that they are almost immediately quarreling. Lavinia complains that Edward has no sense of humor, and he charges that she is always nagging him. As they become more and more exasperated with one another, Edward exclaims:

> There was a door
> And I could not open it. I could not touch the handle.
> Why could I not walk out of my prison?
> What is hell? Hell is oneself,
> Hell is alone, the other figures in it
> Merely projections. There is nothing to escape from
> And nothing to escape to. One is always alone.
> * * * * *
> It was only yesterday
> That damnation took place, And now I must live with it
> Day by day, hour by hour, forever and ever.[1]

Eliot suggests that man's greatest horror comes not from the forces from without, but from within, from the aloneness, or alienation which man experiences. Although not

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1. Ibid., pp. 98-99.

explicitly stated at this point, the solution is reconciliation, perhaps reconciliation to God.

Lavinia now also suggests that Edward is on the edge of a nervous breakdown and tries to tell him to see a doctor. This, however, infuriates him; the act ends with Edward decrying his decision to get Lavinia back.

The second act of The Cocktail Party takes place in the consulting room of Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, the Unidentified Guest of the first act. Edward has come to Sir Henry because two people have told him that he is on the verge of a nervous breakdown and because Alex, with whose connections Edward is impressed, recommended Sir Henry. Edward is at first dismayed to discover that Sir Henry is the Unidentified Guest, but is soon explaining his symptoms to Sir Henry. To Edward, his case is unique and difficult:

> . . . I am obsessed by the thought of my
> Own insignificance.
> * * * * *
> It is surprising, if one had time to be surprised:
> I am not afraid of the death of the body,
> But this death is terrifying. The death of the spirit--
> Can you understand what I suffer?[1]

Edward realizes that his disease is of the spirit; he expresses for Eliot the concept of man's spiritual state.

Sir Henry has arranged that Lavinia too should be in his office during the consultation and as Edward and Lavinia chide one another, Sir Henry interrupts them:

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., pp. 111-113.

> I do not trouble myself with the common cheat,
> Or with the insuperably, innocently dull:
> My patients such as you are the self-deceivers
> Taking infinite pains, exhausting their energy,
> Yet never quite successful.[1]

Sir Henry continues to point out to each of them the facts of the other's affairs, Edward with Celia and Lavinia with Peter. He points out to Edward that his affair with Celia and his realization that he did not want her when Lavinia gave him the opportunity had left him with the fear that he was incapable of loving anyone. When Lavinia realized that Peter's interest had shifted to Celia, she began to fear that no one could love her. Sir Henry tells them that this should indicate to them how much they have in common:

> The same isolation.
> A man who finds himself incapable of loving
> And a woman who finds that no man can love her.[2]

With this illumination into the character of the other, the husband and wife conclude that they can go neither forward nor backward and that all they can do is to make the best of a bad job. Sir Henry reassures them that this is the normal condition:

> The best of a bad job is all any of us make of it--
> Except of course, the saints--such as those who go
> To the sanatorium.[3]

Here again Eliot is expressing his concept of the

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1. Ibid., p. 119.
2. Ibid., p. 125.
3. Ibid., p. 126.

division of humanity into those capable of a signigicant religious experience and those who are forever out-of-reach.

Edward expresses a concern that they should not build their lives on the ruins of others. In answer, Sir Henry states:

> Your business is not to clear your conscience
> But to learn how to bear the burdens on your conscience.[1]

Sir Henry's advice is again on the level of those who cannot know the greater experience. His advice to them is that their lives can be most profitable if lived in self-awareness and reality.

As Edward and Lavinia leave his office Sir Henry admonishes them: "Go in peace. And work out your salvation with diligence."[2] Eliot indicates here that this is but the beginning of the task before Edward and Lavinia, that their expiation will come by their own hand. Even on their level of experience, the readjustment is called salvation by Eliot.

Sir Henry's second consultation of the afternoon is with Celia, who comes at the advice of Julia. Celia, unlike Edward, does not consider her case unique, does not in fact consider herself a caes; but tries to describe two things which she cannot understand in the hope that Sir Henry will be able to tell her how to get back to "Normality."[3]

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 128.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 132.

The first is somewhat similar to Edward's alone-ness:

> An awareness of solitude.
> * * * * *
> That one always is alone.
> Not simply the ending of one relationship,
> Not even simply finding that it never existed--
> But a revelation about my relationship
> With <u>everybody</u>.[1]

The second symptom which Celia describes is, "a sense of sin."[2] She goes on to qualify this as not a sense of sin in what she considers to be the ordinary meaning of the word, immorality; but rather:

> It's not the feeling of anything I've ever <u>done</u>
> Which I might get away from, or of anything in me
> I could get rid of--but of emptiness, of failure
> Towards someone, or something, outside of myself;
> And I feel I must. . . <u>atone</u>--is that the word?[3]

If Celia's sense of sin is not what she considers the usual experience of the word, it presents, nevertheless, a basic precept in the Christian doctrine of sin and salvation. Although Celia has in fact sinned in what she calls the usual way, her comprehension lies much deeper. The words "emptimess" and "failure" with which she characterizes her feeling, suggest the Christian concept of universal need; and her awareness of "someone, or something, outside of myself;"[4] is indicative of Eliot's concept of man's relationship to God.

Sir Henry inquires about her relationship with Edward, although neither of them name him. When Celia

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1. Ibid., p. 133.
2. Ibid., p. 134.
3. Ibid., pp. 136-137.
4. Ibid., p. 137.

expresses her pity for Edward Sir Henry tells her, "Compassion may be already a clue towards finding your own way out of the forest."[1] He offers her two alternatives to follow to bring about her own cure. The first alternative is described by Sir Henry in some detail:

> I can reconcile you to the human condition,
> The condition to which some who have gone as far as you
> Have succeeded in returning. They may remember
> The vision they have had, but they cease to regret it,
> Maintain themselves by the common routine,
> * * * * *
> Two people who knew they do not understand each other,
> Breeding children whom they do not understand
> And who will never understand them.[2]

This seems to be Eliot's description of the way of life which must be followed by such as Edward and Lavinia, who were given no choice. Although Sir Henry says that it is a good life, Celia feels that this is not for her:

> But I feel it would be a kind of surrender--
> No, not surrender--more like a betrayal.
> You see, I think I really had a vision of something
> Though I don't know what it is. I don't want to forget it.[3]

The other way which Sir Henry describes for Celia, cannot be as clearly defined:

> The second is unknown, and so requires faith--
> The kind of faith that issues from despair.
> The destination cannot be described;
> You will know very little until you get there;
> You will journey blind. But the way leads towards possession
> Of what you have sought for in the wrong place.[4]

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 138.
2. Ibid., p. 139.
3. Ibid., p. 140.
4. Ibid., p. 141.

This is the way Celia chooses. Although Sir Henry says that neither way is better, he adds that it is:

> No lonelier than the other. But those who take the other
> Can forget their loneliness. You will not forget yours.
> Each way means loneliness--and communion.
> Both ways avoid the final desolation
> Of solitude in the phantasmal world
> Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires.[1]

Eliot's presentation of these two ways of life as equally satisfactory is not carried out in his description of them. Celia's choice is obviously Eliot's choice as well. This is another indication of his dichotomy of spiritual capacities and is perhaps the greatest weakness in his plays as they present his concepts.

Julia and Alex join Sir Henry after Celia departs to prepare for her journey. When Sir Henry tells Julia of his concern for Celia she tells him:

> You and I don't know the process by which the human is
> Transhumanised: what do we know
> Of the kind of suffering they must undergo
> On the way of illumination?[2]

Eliot indicates that Sir Henry, Julia, and Alex are not necessarily in possession themselves of the higher type of life: they are merely aware of it and able to direct those who are capable of it. The expression "transhumanized" may suggest Eliot's understanding of the Christian experience of conversion. The act ends as these three

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1. Ibid., p. 142.
2. Ibid., p. 147.

drink a libation for the protection of the travellers.

In the third act which takes place two years later, the Chamberlaynes are giving another Cocktail party. From their conversation before the party it is evident that their relationship is at least one of friendly tolerance. Julia and Alex arrive early. Alex, having just returned from Kinkanja on government work, is anxious to see Edward and Lavinia. Peter, back from California on a brief business trip, drops in; and Sir Henry is also present. When Peter inquires about Celia, Alex tells them that she is dead. Celia it seems joined a nursing order and was directed to Kinkanja to nurse the natives in a Christian village. During a plague an insurrection broke out, but rather than leave the dying natives, Celia remained and was crucified near an ant-hill by the heathen insurrectionists.

The shock of learning of Celia's death finds expression in varying degrees of despair through the Chamberlaynes and Peter. Sir Henry, however, clarifies for them the reason for their reaction and the significance of Celia's death:

> As for Miss Coplestone, because you think her death was waste
> You blame yourselves, and because you blame yourselves
> You think her life was wasted. It was triumphant.[1]

It may be assumed that Sir Henry is here expressing

. . . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 184.

Eliot's opinion of Celia's death. If she were only by this means able to atone for the sense of sin which she recognized, Eliot's concept of atonement bespeaks the gravity of the penalty which sin places upon man. Celia, too, then has worked out her own salvation. Wilbur Dwight Dunkel in his article in Theology Today says in relation to the problem of the nebulous presentation of many concepts in The Cocktail Party: "...such words as atone, crucified, and saint, are not used by a poet of Eliot's stature without meaning."[1]

The play ends with Peter resigned to a world without Celia, leaving to fulfill his mission in life as a playwright. Sir Henry, Alex and Julia depart for an engagement at another cocktail party, and Lavinia and Edward await their other guests. As the doorbell rings the play closes with Lavinia's words: "Oh, I'm glad. It's begun."[2]

Through Celia, Edward and Lavinia, Eliot manifests his comprehension of basic need of secular man in a secular world. Eliot fails to make redemption equally appealing on both levels of experience because he makes Celia's redemption on the level of the saint far more attractive than the conciliatory redemption of Edward and Lavinia. He does, however, indicate through the experience of each the reality

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1. Wilbur Dwight Dunkel: "T.S. Eliot's Quest for Certitude," Theology Today, Vol. VII, July 1950, p. 229.
2. Eliot: The Cocktail Party, p. 189.

of sin and the need for redemption.

## F. Summary

This chapter considered the religious concepts in the dramatic works of T. S. Eliot by discussing the various concepts as they appeared in the development of each play. Outstanding in all four plays were Eliot's theories of man and of sin. Eliot's doctrine of man as revealed through his plays is that man is a created being capable of having the spiritual experience of reality or relationship with God. Despite this capacity man is, according to Eliot, too often in a state of unawareness and alienation. In The Rock Eliot's concept of man is clarified by identifying those who sought to build the church of God and those who in their blindness sought to oppose the building for selfish reasons. Man's condition is decried as farther from God in spite of the centuries of scientific and intellectual progress: man's hope is in following the Light of God. In Murder in the Cathedral spiritual man is represented by Thomas, accosted by temptations yet victorious through faith in Christ; and carnal man is exemplified by the knights who murder Thomas and justify their deed through rationalization. Eliot's concept of man as developed in The Family Reunion illustrates in a contemporary setting the man who sees his alienation and seeks reconciliation and those who neither see nor seek.

Harry, who is aware of his spiritual condition, and Agatha and Mary who help him on his spiritual journey are Eliot's perceptive people in The Family Reunion. The uncles and aunts, however, portray individuals who are blind to spiritual realities. In The Cocktail Party Eliot's concept of man reaches a new depth as he has Edward and Lavinia, representing the common individual, experience a partial spiritual awakening and rehabilitation. Celia, moreover, exemplifies Eliot's concept of man who comes to the realization of his condition, enters upon and completes the spiritual pilgrimage.

Eliot's beliefs concerning sin include an understanding of the part temptation plays in sin and a significant comprehension of the reality of sin. Eliot also presents the continual struggle between good and evil on the supernatural level. In The Rock the struggle between good and evil is vividly portrayed in various historical settings in which the church has been opposed. The power of sin is illustrated in Murder in the Cathedral not only by the temptations which accost Thomas, but also by the act of his murder in which evil had a momentary victory. Eliot's understanding of the mushrooming effects of sin is also illustrated in Murder in the Cathedral. In their reactions the Chorus, representing humanity in general, demonstrates spiritual and physical suffering because of the evil wrought about them. In The Family Reunion sin takes its toll a

generation later, and Harry's sin is in part his father's sin. The Eumenides which haunt Harry are constant reminders that the consequences of sin are not easily shrugged off: the discovery that Harry may not have committed the sin in actual action reveals Eliot's concept of the supernatural element involving the soul of the individual. In The Cocktail Party Eliot's concept of sin is illustrated on two levels; the actual breaking of the law which Celia herself describes as ordinary sin or immorality, and the spiritual level on which Edward is aware of a disease of the spirit and on which Celia craves a return to "normality." On the first level sin was destroying Edward and Lavinia's marriage and on the second level it was destroying their personalities, and Celia's as well.

Throughout the plays there are indications of Eliot's comprehension of the doctrines of atonement, redemption, expiation and reconciliation. In The Rock direct mention is made of Christ's sacrifice and atonement; and there is a strong emphasis upon the necessity for reconciliation between man and God. In Murder in the Cathedral Thomas states his faith in the atonement of Christ. Eliot's doctrine of atonement in which man's whole life is dedicated toward atonement is revealed by the martyrdom of Thomas. In The Family Reunion the whole development of the play concerns "sin and expiation" and the expiation is partially culminated when Harry understands his alienation

and sets out toward reconciliation. In Harry's departure there is also inherent substantiation of Eliot's theory of martyrdom, for Harry goes forth as his family's representative. In The Cocktail Party reconciliation becomes the chief motivation in the lives of Edward, Lavinia and Celia. In Celia's desire to atone Eliot illustrates further his concept of self-dedication and martyrdom and suggests a belief in salvation through works.

Eliot's belief in God was discovered to be clearly evident in the first two plays and inherent perhaps in the second two. In The Rock God is seen as Creator and Participant in history. Evil is linked with neglect of the Word of God and God's sovereignty is indicated by the continuation of His church despite tremendous opposition. In Murder in the Cathedral the Sovereignty of God is declared both by Thomas and by the Chorus throughout the play; and Thomas upholds the law of God above the law of man. In The Family Reunion and The Cocktail Party, although God is not mentioned, the need for reconciliation to reality is stressed and it may be assumed that God is the Ultimate Reality.

Eliot propounds a doctrine of Christ in The Rock in which he indicates that Christ is the cornerstone of the church and that the coming of Christ gave time its meaning. In Murder in the Cathedral Thomas clearly indicates his belief in the efficacy of Christ's atonement and his

commitment to the service of Christ. Although Christ is mentioned neither in The Family Reunion nor in The Cocktail Party, in the latter the fact that Celia was crucified has certain Christian connotations even to the modern mind.

Eliot's concept of the Church as the instrument of God, the mediator of truth whose function is primarily spiritual, was indicated in The Rock and in Murder in the Cathedral. In the former, special emphasis was given to the continuing work and life of the church and in Murder in the Cathedral the authority of the church was emphasized.

Through an analysis of these plays other religious concepts were also found. Eliot was discovered to be frequently preoccupied with the theological and philosophical aspects of the concept of time and eternity. Thoughts on suffering and immortality were also apparent. Faith, baptism, communion, conversion and prayer were all mentioned. His opinions on church architecture and iconoclasm appeared in The Rock. Finally, there were throughout the plays indications of Eliot's reverence for the Bible.

# CHAPTER IV

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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## A. Restatement of Problem and Procedure

Because Thomas Stearns Eliot is internationally recognized as one of the outstanding men in the field of contemporary literature and because he is also recognized as a proponent of religious problems, this study undertook to discover the religious concepts in his writings, especially in his dramatic works. In the first chapter a brief biographical sketch of Eliot was given and his literary development was reviewed. The second chapter surveyed his three major fields of literary expression, poetry, essay and drama; and pointed out certain religious concepts found in specific works. In the third chapter Eliot's four major plays, The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral, The Family Reunion, and The Cocktail Party were analyzed for the religious concepts revealed in them.

## B. Summary of Predominant Religious Concepts

In the study of writings of T. S. Eliot with a special emphasis on his dramatic works the following religious concepts were found to be predominant.

### 1. Man

Eliot's concept of man finds frequent expression

in both his poetry and his drama; throughout man is pictured as a created being. Man's condition of unawareness and emptiness is vividly portrayed in his early poetry, such as The Waste Land and The Hollow Men, and in his plays by those characters who are incapable of a spiritual experience. In his essays Eliot speaks of man's state in society. In "Thoughts After Lambeth" and in The Idea of a Christian Society he indicates his belief in the division in society between pagan and Christian. Some men have the capacity for a vital spiritual experience according to Eliot, although he delegates common men to lives beyond the hope of revitalization. In his later poetry, Ash Wednesday and Four Quartets, this spiritual experience includes self-surrender, and consecration. In his plays the spiritual man perceives realities and suffers, but his end is victory, not physical victory perhaps, but the truer victory which is in the realm of the supernatural.

2. Good and Evil

The basic conflict of good and evil is one of Eliot's primary religious concepts. Throughout his writings the reality of sin is illustrated. In The Waste Land and The Hollow Men the devasting effects of sin are pictured in the ruins of humanity. In his plays both the spiritual and the common man suffer from the results of sin and alienation in society and in personality. In his essays on sociology and church politics the division between the

forces for good and the forces for evil is clearly defined. Eliot suggests the conflict and reality of the forces of good and evil not only on the level of the individual and society, but also on the level of the supernatural. Suffering is presented as a part of the order of the universe throughout the plays and the ultimate triumph of good and the hope of final justice are indicated.

3. Atonement

Eliot's concept of atonement includes an understanding of the doctrines of redemption, and reconciliation. His poetry reveals a growing comprehension of the meaning of redemption, from The Waste Land in which there is little hope for man to Four Quartets in which there is understanding of the power of redemption. In his essays concerned with church politics Eliot suggests that the salvation of the world will come about through the instrument of the church. Each of Eliot's four plays is concretely concerned with the idea of atonement and reconciliation, the reconciliation of the individual to God and the atonement for sin by self-sacrifice. Both salvation by works and vicarious atonement are indicated in the plays.

4. The Church

Although Eliot's concept of the church is not directly indicated in his poetry, his first religious poem, Ash Wednesday, takes its title from the church

calendar. In his essays Eliot asserts his conviction of the essential position held by the church in society, and the supremacy of the church over the state. Of his plays, The Rock and Murder in the Cathedral, are strongest in setting forth Eliot's concept of the church. In both he affirms the authority and stability of the church as well as the reality of its spiritual function in society.

5. Time and Eternity

In his poetry Eliot's concept of time and eternity finds greatest expression in Four Quartets. Even in his poetry the mark of the saint includes the understanding of eternity in a point of time. In The Rock Eliot indicates that time was given meaning through Christ, and that the Christian must see eternity in time. In The Family Reunion a preoccupation with time is characteristic of those who do not perceive reality, whereas an understanding of a broader scope is indicative of the spiritually aware.

C. Summary of Other Religious Concepts

Some of the other religious concepts which were discovered throughout the writings of Eliot, but to a lesser degree than those mentioned in the previous section are as follows.

1. God

In his poetry Eliot's belief in the mercy of God and the validity of prayer is indicated. In The Rock and

Murder in the Cathedral he expresses faith in God as Creator as well as in the sovereignty of God. The reconciliation mentioned in The Family Reunion and The Cocktail Party suggests reconciliation to God necessitated by alienation.

2. Christ

Eliot gives expression to his concept of Christ in The Rock and in Murder in the Cathedral in which Christ's essential place in history and the efficacy of His sacrifice are upheld. He also evidences an understanding of the doctrine of the person of Christ in the sermons of Mellitus and Thomas.

3. Saints and Martyrs

In his poetry Eliot gives sainthood recognition as real and vital experience. In Four Quartets he speaks of the saints' unique position on a different plane from common man. In each of his plays there is martyrdom in which the spiritual triumph of the martyr surpasses the material defeat.

4. Temptation

In Murder in the Cathedral Eliot presents a detailed account of the temptations of Thomas which parallel the temptations of Christ and indicate Eliot's comprehension of the various facets of temptation. Sensuous pleasure, temporal power and spiritual power were among the temptations of Thomas. These culminated in the temptation to do

"the right thing for the wrong reason."

5. Bible

Eliot's respect for and appreciation of the Bible is shown throughout his writings. Even in his earlier poetry he uses Biblical phraseology. In The Rock he uses a portion of Biblical history in conjunction with church history indicating his acceptance of its historicity. Another indication of Eliot's concept of the Bible as found in The Rock is that evil is implemented by the neglect of the Bible.

## D. Conclusion

In conclusion, the life and literary works of Thomas Stearns Eliot are indicative of a spiritual pilgrimage from despair to faith. His plays are especially significant in their revelation of his religious concepts. Eliot's almost unrivaled position as the outstanding man in contemporary English literature makes his expression of Christian theology the more appreciable; and the study of his plays has unveiled a rich comprehension of the basic truths in Christianity.

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