‘Anglo-Catholic in Religion’
T.S. Eliot and Christianity

Barry Spurr

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‘Anglo-Catholic in Religion’

T.S. Eliot and Christianity

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Preface

T.S. Eliot's declaration of his Anglo-Catholicism was made in the 'Preface' to *For Lancelot Andrewes* (1928):

> To make my present position clear.… I have made bold to unite these occasional essays.… The general point of view may be described as classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion. I am quite aware that the first term is completely vague, and easily lends itself to clap-trap; I am aware that the second term is at present without definition, and easily lends itself to what is almost worse than clap-trap, I mean temperate conservatism; the third term does not rest with me to define.[1]

His formulation was based on the description, fifteen years earlier, of Charles Maurras' counterrevolutionary convictions – '*classique*, *catholique*, *monarchique*' – in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (March, 1913), to which Eliot was then a subscriber,[2] and may also have been inspired by a similar triplicity of convictions uttered by the philosopher, T.E. Hulme (whose thought exercised considerable influence on Eliot), who, in 1912, intended to explain 'why I believe in original sin, why I can't stand romanticism, and why I am a certain kind of Tory'.[3]

The announcement had been born of genial provocation, as Eliot explained, many years after he had made it, in 'To Criticize the Critic' (1961). His 'old teacher and master' from Harvard, the Humanist, Irving Babbitt, had passed through London in the year (1927) of Eliot's baptism and confirmation. Eliot 'knew that it would come as a shock to him to learn that any disciple of his had so turned his coat' by defecting from Humanism to Christianity,

> but all Babbitt said was: 'I think you should come out into the open'. I may have been a little nettled by this remark;

> the quotable sentence turned up in the preface to the book of essays I had in preparation, swung into orbit, and has been circling my little world ever since.[4]

By the 1960s, Eliot found himself

> constantly irritated by having my words, perhaps written thirty or forty years ago, quoted as if I had uttered them yesterday.[5]

Nonetheless, he points out that the description of his religious beliefs, in the quotable sentence of 1928, remained accurate. Virginia Woolf's acerbic speculation that Eliot would 'drop Christianity with his wife, as one might empty the fishbones after the herring', was premature.[6] Those beliefs and, hence, that allegiance persisted 'unchanged'.[7] In his essay of 1955, 'Goethe as the Sage', Eliot (in another self-portrait) varied the tripartite formula, but retained the Catholicism, noting that he possessed

> a Catholic cast of mind, a Calvinistic heritage, and a Puritanical temperament.[8]

Although she had been a friend and generous supporter, Woolf remained cynical about Eliot's declared allegiance. Such critics of his conversion, he wrote (in 1929) to Paul Elmer More (a fellow-American whose religious journey was similar to Eliot's and who described Eliot as his 'intimate acquaintance'[9]), interpreted it as 'an escape or an evasion, certainly a defeat'.[10] Even More was guarded in his support. He had written to his sister, late in 1928:

> Eliot himself, in the preface of a new book of essays which he has sent me, comes out clearly on his new platform: classicism, royalism, and Anglo-Catholicism. This is the sort of thing that is going on in England. There is some claptrap mixed up in it, but they mean something serious too – at least there are elements of a wholesome reaction from the maelstrom of follies that has almost engulfed the world. With their classicism they contrive to mix the freest of free verse, with their royalism an ultra democracy, and with their Anglo-Catholicism a good dose of skepticism plus bravado; but they may come to terms with themselves later on.[11]

A year later, in a letter to Austin Warren, the New England critic, More focuses explicitly on the implications of Eliot's conversion for

his poetry – a matter of much concern to those who saw Eliot as the leader of the new movement in verse and who feared that his religious commitment would stifle that creativity:

> I remember that last summer after reading his *Andrewes* with its prefatial program of classicism, royalism (the divine right of kings!) and Anglo-Catholicism, I asked him whether, when he returned to verse, he would write the same sort of stuff that he once called poetry, or whether he had seen a new light. His answer was: 'I am absolutely unconverted'…. He is avowedly and, no doubt, sincerely religious; but just what his religion means to him, I do not know.[12]

Eliot's fidelity not only to Christianity but to a particular variety of it, over a period of nearly forty years until his death in 1965, is the dominant element in his life and work, through those several decades. It

> ultimately affected his imagination, his writing, and all the other categories that his life comprised. It gave Eliot the great relation, and the grand poetic, he had always sought.[13]

Yet, a third of a century ago, when I first undertook research, at Oxford, into Eliot's Christianity and proposed the title which this book bears for the subject of my thesis, my supervisor, Helen Gardner, *doyenne* of Eliot scholars, immediately objected to my use of Eliot's phrase. She complained that it conveyed an impression of his Christianity that was too narrow. Accordingly, I accepted her broader but blander proposal: 'Christian Faith and Practice in the later Life and Work of T.S. Eliot'. By the time we had finished working on my dissertation, however, Dame Helen conceded that Eliot was more of an Anglo-Catholic than she had supposed and that his own early description of his faith was accurate.

Over the period since I completed my initial, unpublished study there have been numerous biographical and literary-critical accounts of Eliot and his poetry and prose. All of them, in one way or another, have inevitably mentioned his Christianity. None of them has revealed an informed understanding of Anglo-Catholicism in general; of its character in the first half of the twentieth century when Eliot was drawn to it and became one of its best-known lay representatives; of the details of Eliot's adaptation of its beliefs and practices to his own circumstances; of how his formal adoption of it was the culmination of his intellectual, cultural, artistic, spiritual and personal develop-

ment to that point, and how it continued to shape his life and work until his death; or of its special influence on his poetry – for example, in detailed analysis of his appropriation of liturgical language and of his incorporation into his poetry of what he regarded as crucial doctrinal principles. As Edwin Muir has written, 'the first condition of any genuine criticism of Mr. Eliot's religion is that it should be understood'.[14]

Moreover, such information that has been supplied about his Anglo-Catholicism has been usually ill-informed and cursory, and, often, simply erroneous. Observing that 'Eliot's considerable influence in Anglo-Catholic thinking has been underestimated by his biographers', Michael Yelton further remarked that they 'do not appear fully to understand the various groupings in the Church of England'.[15] Indeed, they do not always understand the 'various groupings' in Christianity at large and they can be all at sea in commentary on particular articles of belief which were vital for Eliot. In an essay on 'religion' in Eliot, 'the intercession of the Virgin' is called one of the 'articles of the Anglican creed'[16] when it is nothing of the kind, but, rather, an Anglo-Catholic (and, of course, Roman Catholic) belief, to which Eliot gives expression in *Ash-Wednesday* and in 'The Dry Salvages', IV.

Then, commentators on Eliot's faith confuse Anglo-Catholicism with Roman Catholicism (or, just, 'Catholicism'); present it as if it were another term for High Church Anglicanism, and, generally, shy away from coming to grips with what precisely it was.[17] Even otherwise reliable commentators can be misleading when they turn to Eliot's religion. One of them states, for example, that the dominant linguistic forms in *Ash-Wednesday* (Eliot's most liturgical poem) derive 'from the Catholic liturgy'.[18] In a general sense, this is true, to the extent that Anglo-Catholic liturgy derives from the liturgical usages of Latin Christianity. But most readers would assume, from this phrase, that Eliot's direct sources were the Roman Catholic liturgy (such as his contemporary, David Jones, uses in his richly liturgical poems), in its pre-conciliar Latin form. And this is wide of the mark, as they come, precisely, from the Anglo-Catholic liturgy (in English), from Anglo-Catholic prayer manuals and from such quintessentially English sources as the Authorized Version of the Bible, as in the use of the phrase 'the cool of the day' (Genesis 3:8; *Ash-Wednesday*, II).[19] David Moody states – as an example of Eliot's alleged biblical orientation – that the poet was drawn to the 'classic statement of the Incarnation, at the beginning of the Gospel according to John'. But, again, while this is based in truth, it is

misleading with regard to Eliot's Christianity. It was the liturgical presentation of this biblical material, in the 'Last Gospel' at the end of Mass, to which Eliot was 'drawn' and which (very importantly, for Anglo-Catholics) presented the doctrine of the Incarnation in the context of the offering of the sacrament of the altar. Moody is puzzled by the capitalisation of 'Word', in reference to that gospel, in *Ash-Wednesday*, V. 'Is the capital a typographical convention, or theological?' he wonders.[20] Had he consulted The English Missal, used in the Anglo-Catholic liturgy at Eliot's parish church, he would have found the answer to this mystery, where the capitalisation is plainly there: 'In the beginning was the Word…', as indeed it is in the Authorized Version from which the Missal translation is directly taken. And when Moody tells the uninformed reader that Eliot used the prayer 'to the Virgin after the Catholic Mass'[21] in the phrase, 'And after this our exile', that reader may then be led to assume that Eliot, as an Anglican, drew from prayers from another communion, not his own, when the source, precisely, is the prayer to the Virgin, *Salve Regina*, as he would have regularly encountered it in public and private Anglo-Catholic devotions (and not necessarily, or even usually 'after…Mass'). Such are the errors into which ignorance of Anglo-Catholicism can lead even an otherwise meticulous scholar of Eliot's work.

This imprecision is especially ironic in the cases both of Anglo-Catholicism and T.S. Eliot himself. For what distinguishes that system of belief and practice, within Anglicanism (*just* within it), and what characterises Eliot, temperamentally (and especially when it came to matters of doctrine and spiritual observance), was precision. Indeed, this is one of the main reasons why Eliot was drawn to, and announced his allegiance to (precisely) Anglo-Catholicism, when the declaration that his position was that of an 'Anglican in religion' (or even a 'Christian in religion', for that matter) might otherwise have been considered sufficiently descriptive and provocative in the circumstances. And we note that he did not say 'Catholic in religion', which would have been true (doctrinally-speaking, from his perspective), but, again, not sufficiently precise. The Anglo-Catholicism to which he adhered was nothing if not dogmatic in its keenness to affirm its Catholic credentials in the non-ecumenical, absolutist climate of international, pre-conciliar Roman Catholicism – but also, as the coinage suggests, it was conscious of its Englishness. The characteristics of a crusade – with rallies and battle-cries, heroic exemplars and victories for the faith – mark the optimistic Anglo-Catholicism of the period *'entre deux guerres*', and differentiate it

sharply from the doctrinally evasive, morally defensive (some would say, chaotic) and numerically declining Anglo-Catholicism of today. It was comparably stringent in matters of moral behaviour and religious observance and, even, in nurturing and insisting upon seemingly trivial pious customs and mannerisms. Eliot was scrupulous with regard to the observance of all of these requirements and expectations of his religion (which responded to deep-seated characteristics of his personality) and we should at least pay him the compliment of being similarly precise in our presentation of it and in commentary on its role in his life and work.[22]

He also regarded the correct understanding of a writer's religious position as being an essential component in the process of the appreciation of his art. Obviously this is especially the case when the writer focuses on religious matters in his work. Summarising the biography of David Jones, his friend and fellow-poet, Eliot wrote

> he is a Londoner of Welsh and English descent. He is decidedly a Briton. He is also a Roman Catholic, and he is a painter who has painted some beautiful pictures and designed some beautiful lettering. All these facts about him are important.[23]

The fact of Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism is similarly important, for the same reasons of interpretation and appreciation. Russell Kirk (who knew Eliot well over many years, and has written one of the best books about him and his achievement) has argued that leaving Christianity out of the discussion of Eliot's poetry and prose 'would be very like omitting any mention of Stoic philosophy from a criticism of Seneca … or taking the gods away from the classical authors':

> Life and letters cannot endure in little coffin-like compartments. How could one criticize Pascal or Coleridge, say, without taking into account their religion? How, then, Eliot?[24]

And in taking it into account, as we must, we also need to get it right.

It is the purpose of this book to explore and explain the genesis, development and character of Eliot's Christianity – the faith which, for forty years, was central to his life and a seminal influence in his work throughout that period. His widow, Mrs Valerie Eliot, has told me that her 'husband's religious side has been neglected by most writers, and a major book is badly needed'.[25] It is time that Eliot's challenge for the term 'Anglo-Catholic' to be defined, in relation to his own life and work, was met.

*

I am grateful for advice about Eliot's faith and its practice to the late Dame Helen Gardner, who initially challenged me to probe and prove the Anglo-Catholic character of Eliot's Christianity, and to several other friends and associates of Eliot, clerical and lay, who are also now deceased. My indebtedness to them is revealed at the various points in the book where they are mentioned and their information is recorded. My particular gratitude to the late Mary Trevelyan, Eliot's fellow-worshipper at St Stephen's Gloucester Road in the 1940s and 50s and the late George Every (one-time Brother of the Society of the Sacred Mission, Kelham, which Eliot visited) is explained in the first two appendices. I also record my thanks to the late Professor Nigel Yates, who, a few months before his death in January, 2009, sent me his unpublished article, 'Walsingham and Inter-War Anglo-Catholicism'.

I am indebted to the Revd Dr Nicholas Cranfield, who sent me a copy of the anniversary issue (devoted to Eliot) of *The Southern Review* (Autumn, 1985); to my former student, Dr Stephen McInerney, who alerted me to some important references during my research and writing, and the Revd Richard Waddell, OGS, who carefully perused the typescript, with particular attention to matters of liturgy and theology, and made several valuable suggestions. Mr David Anderson, AO, assisted with proof-reading, with particular attention to quotations in French. At the Lutterworth Press, my publisher, Mr Adrian Brink has been encouraging throughout, and brought his own considerable knowledge of English religious history to an informed commentary on drafts of my chapters. I want also to thank Mr Ian Bignall, at Lutterworth, for his editorial work and suggestions. Mr Michael Yelton and Dr John Salmon (who took the photograph for the cover) provided invaluable assistance with illustrations. I am indebted to Professors Denis Donoghue, Manju Jain, and Ronald Schuchard, and Dr Jason Harding for their generous comments. Any imperfections that remain are entirely my responsibility.

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations of titles of works by T.S. Eliot are used in endnote references:

ASG	After Strange Gods
CPP	The Collected Poems and Plays
FLA	For Lancelot Andrewes
GH	George Herbert
ICS	The Idea of a Christian Society
NTDC	Notes towards the Definition of Culture
OPP	On Poetry and Poets
RD	Reunion by Destruction
SE	Selected Essays
SW	The Sacred Wood
TCTC	To Criticize the Critic
TR	The Rock
UPUC	The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism

Chapter One

The Sources of Faith: Familial and Philosophical (1888-1917)

> I found no discipline in humanism; only a little intellectual discipline from a little study of philosophy. But the difficult discipline is the discipline and training of emotion; this the world has great need of, so great need that it hardly understands what the word means; and this I have found is only attainable through dogmatic religion…. Only those have the right to talk of discipline who have looked into the Abyss.
>
> (Eliot, 'Religion without Humanism', 1930[1])

A favourite pilgrimage destination for Eliot's devotees is the small church of St Michael in the Somerset village of East Coker (which gives the title to the second of Eliot's *Four Quartets*). Eliot had visited East Coker in August, 1937 and in 1940 he completed and sent the poem, 'East Coker', to press.[2] The poet's ashes are interred in the church, with the inscription (from the first line of 'East Coker'), 'In my beginning is my end …', a reversal of Mary Stuart's motto, '*En ma fin est mon commencement'*. This is inscribed on an appropriately oval-shaped stone which represents the circularity of the idea and could remind us of the circular imagery in the poem, where its speaker communes with his rural ancestors and a literary predecessor of the sixteenth century, Sir Thomas Elyot. Eliot's language modulates briefly to that of Elyot's *Boke Named the Governour*:

> In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie –
> A dignified and commodious sacrament….
> Round and round the fire
> Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles….[3]

Among these folk, in this mystic communion with the dead, may be Andrew Eliot, a cordwainer (or shoemaker), who set out from East Coker in 1668, after the Restoration of the monarchy and episcopacy, for the Massachusetts Bay Colony in New England. This was

a Puritan theocracy where his Calvinistic Christianity would be free from persecution. (Similarly, on Eliot's mother's side, the Stearns, one of her ancestors had been amongst the original settlers of the Bay Colony.) To the extent that Eliot recalls his seventeenth-century East Coker family here, he sets them, ironically (through the words of Sir Thomas Elyot's courtesy book) in a sacramental context which, regarding matrimony, such strict Protestants would have firmly repudiated – only two sacraments being acknowledged at the Reformation as being of divine institution (Baptism and the Lord's Supper), while Catholic theology affirms seven (including, of course, marriage), and so, therefore, does Anglo-Catholicism.

The original Calvinism of those religious emigrants was theologically diluted by their descendants over the centuries into Unitarianism, while elements of the original Puritan spirit, in matters of moral principle and temperament, were retained. As the Anglo-Catholic novelist, Rose Macaulay put it, succinctly: 'the weaker they got on religion the stronger they got on morals'.[4] Eliot was highly critical of a religious system which had jettisoned theology and prioritised morality, which could not survive (he believed) in a vacuum. He came to see this as the antithesis of the Anglo-Catholic understanding of moral issues and conduct:

> there is no such thing as just Morality … for any man who thinks clearly, as his Faith is so will his Morals be…. I am sure in my own mind that I have not adopted my faith in order to defend my views of conduct, but have modified my views of conduct to conform with what seem to me the implications of my beliefs. The real conflict is not between one set of moral prejudices and another, but between the theistic and the atheistic faith; and it is all for the best that the division should be sharply drawn.[5]

To the liberal Christian and the Humanist, such dogmatism in moral theology is one of the least digestible of the precepts of orthodoxy, and simply anathema to Unitarianism:

> The Unitarian knows that the story of his faith in modern times is an unbroken record of the removal from religion of all those creeds and dogmas which are based on fear and which bring gloom to the human heart.[6]

But, as Eliot commented,

> the question of the repugnance of a doctrine is not the same as that of its truth[7]

and he contended that, without a dogmatic framework, morality cannot survive, because it then becomes merely personalised (in the subjective, Romantic way):

> when morals cease to be a matter of tradition and orthodoxy – that is, the habits of the community formulated, corrected, and elevated by the continuous thought and direction of the Church – and when each man is to elaborate his own, then *personality* becomes a thing of alarming importance.[8]

The philosopher T.E. Hulme (praised by Eliot for his theological perception[9]) put the matter even more forcefully, identifying the 'fundamental error … of placing Perfection in *humanity*',

> thus giving rise to that bastard thing Personality, and all the bunkum that follows from it.[10]

1

By the later nineteenth century, in the earliest period of Eliot's life, which he was later to recall as a 'struggle', 'over many years so blindly and errantly',[11] he was dominated by his family's well-established Unitarian heritage. This is the most significant of the formative influences comprising what Eric Sigg has called his 'deep American past, extending far back in time before his birth',[12] in opposition to which Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism was, much later, to emerge. Yet the degree to which Eliot negated and disposed of the legacy of New England Puritanism (to the extent that it was preserved in his family's Unitarianism) is questionable. Reflecting late in his life, he wrote

> no man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree of culture which he acquired from his early environment[13]

– and by 'culture', Eliot means deep-seated formative convictions, including religious ideas. Austin Warren, for example, argues that the source of the poet's abiding asceticism (which could be accommodated to aspects of Anglo-Catholicism, such as its emphasis on the monastic life, to which Eliot was strongly drawn, and to such disciplines as fasting, which he rigorously observed) derived from that heritage.[14] And, indeed, some aspects of Calvinist theology that are central, too, to Catholic teaching – such as the doctrine of Original Sin (utterly repudiated by Unitarianism) – were at the very heart of

his Anglo-Catholic faith. The first sin in the New England Primer is, appropriately enough, Original Sin.[15]

Formidable amongst Eliot's Unitarian progenitors was the poet's grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, notable for his 'energy, cheer, light, and liberalism' and for a character 'as virtuous as his achievements were legion'.[16] He was 'all New England conscience'.[17] The first sermon he delivered in his Cambridge Divinity School course was on 'Philanthropy', and it was as a Unitarian philanthropist that he dominated 'the religious life of St Louis until his death in 1887'.[18] Eliot's mother wrote a biography of her father-in-law subtitled *Minister, Educator, Philanthropist* (1904) and Eliot remembered that the family's idea of 'the Great Man' was his grandfather whose eminence he could not hope to attain.[19]

The faith and practice of Unitarianism, epitomised by William as 'a joy-giving, health-bestowing and saving religion'[20] – and characterised by his grandson, in his mockery of it to Ezra Pound, as a matter of 'social helpfulness and sermons'[21] – was satirically summarised by Henry Adams ('a cousin of ours', Eliot had reminded his mother[22]):

> Nothing quieted doubt so completely as the mental calm of the Unitarian clergy. In uniform excellence of life and character, moral and intellectual, the score of Unitarian clergymen about Boston, who controlled society and Harvard College, were never excelled. They proclaimed as their merit that they insisted on no doctrine, but taught, or tried to teach, the means of leading a virtuous, useful, unselfish life, which they held to be sufficient for salvation. For them, difficulties might be ignored; doubts were waste of thought; nothing exacted solution. Boston had solved the universe; or had offered and realized the best solution yet tried. The problem was worked out.[23]

Unitarianism, it was quipped, had its own trinitarianism (having rejected the orthodox belief in Father, Son and Spirit as consubstantial, coeternal): affirming the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the neighbourhood of Boston.

Eliot was to travel as far from these religious principles (which he mocked, in his own mischievous triplet, as 'the religion of the blue sky, the grass and flowers'[24]) as the Unitarians had removed themselves, doctrinally, from their Calvinist forbears: for them, 'the men who wrote the Bible and the early Christians were liberals'; it was a 'creedless rational faith'.[25] Eliot's dissociation from this happy heterodoxy, which he termed the 'Boston Doubt', a belief

in 'nothing',[26] may have been initiated by his father who eschewed the Unitarian ministry, reflecting that 'too much pudding choked the dog',[27] although his older brother, Thomas Lamb Eliot, Eliot's uncle, became, like their revered father, a distinguished pastor.

Every article of the Unitarian creed – wherein (as Sigg notes) 'rational opposition to Original Sin amounted to Unitarian dogma': it was 'one of the most pernicious tenets of the Calvinism that Unitarianism intended to overthrow'[28] – was contradicted by Eliot's later Anglo-Catholicism. Charles William Eliot, a distant relative who became President of Harvard, had proposed the 'religion of the future', the tenets of which amounted to an antithesis of orthodox Christianity in general and Catholic doctrine in particular:

> (1) 'the religion of the future will not be based on authority, either spiritual or temporal'…
> (2) 'no personifications of the primitive forces of nature';
> (3) 'no worship, express or implied, of dead ancestors, teachers, or rulers';
> (4) 'the primary object will not be the personal welfare or safety of the individual in this world or the other … but … service to others, and … contributions to the common good';
> (5) It 'will not be propitiatory, sacrificial, or expiatory';
> (6) It 'will not perpetuate the Hebrew anthropomorphic representations of God';
> (7) It 'will not be gloomy, ascetic, or maledictory'.[29]

These liberating principles had their contemporary transatlantic counterpart in Francis Abbot's 'fifty pungent propositions' for 'the extinction of faith in the Christian Confession' and the development of a humanistic 'Free Religion', promulgated on behalf of the Free Religion Association which had sprung from British Unitarianism and spurned 'deference to the authority of the Bible, the Church, or the Christ'.[30]

Not surprisingly, President Eliot was an undiscriminating ecumenist, promoting a 'new ideal of God' which would comprehend

> the Jewish Jehovah, the Christian Universal father, the modern physicist's omnipresent and exhaustless Energy, and the biological conception of a Vital Force.[31]

The Unitarian commentator, L.A. Garrard, argued that 'the ideal religion is an eclecticism, combining the best out of all the historical religions and omitting whatever seems false or outmoded'.[32] That T.S. Eliot was later to describe even the reunification of Anglicans

and Methodists as a 'mass movement of licentious oecumenicity'[33] shows how far he had removed himself from his Unitarian background. He scorned 'universalists'

> who maintain that the ultimate and esoteric truth is one… that it is a matter of indifference to which one of the great religions we adhere.[34]

Ecumenism meant 'substituting a vague Christianity which the modern mind despises, for a precise Christianity which it may hate but must respect'.[35] As David Edwards writes, with authority and finality, Eliot 'was no ecumenist'.[36]

2

That President Eliot's 'optimistic faith in the natural goodness of the human will' – rejecting the outmoded teaching of Original Sin – was, in turn, rejected by the poet[37] was due to various potent influences, including the philosophy of Hulme (who was killed in Flanders in 1917) who had indicted Romantics as 'all those who do not believe in the Fall of Man'.[38] Evelyn Waugh (perhaps, indeed, deriving his Hulmean philosophy from Eliot, whose outspoken opposition to Humanism he admired) put the anti-Romantic position, with regard to this doctrine, bluntly:

> The children of Adam are not a race of noble savages who need only a divine spark to perfect them. They are aboriginally corrupt.[39]

As Ronald Schuchard has noted, Hulme's writings 'showed Eliot that Original Sin was the basic element in the classical compound'.[40] Crucial, too, for Eliot, was the influence of the French poet, Charles Baudelaire, whom he had read while at Harvard and in Paris (in 1910). Jacques Rivière contended that Baudelaire was, for Eliot, '*le merveilleux introducteur au christianisme'*.[41] The Frenchman had argued, in his *Journaux Intimes*, regarding the '*théorie de la vraie civilisation'*,

> *elle n'est pas dans le gaz, ni dans la vapeur, ni dans les tables tournantes, elle est dans la diminution des traces du péché originel*.[42]

Compellingly, for Eliot, these ideas were given expression in Baudelaire's revolutionary poetry, in *Les Fleurs du Mal*:

> I think that from Baudelaire I learned first, a precedent for the poetical possibilities, never developed by any poet writing in my own language, of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric.[43]

For Eliot, such convictions (and their artistic realisation), combined with his intense suffering during the period of his first marriage from 1915, in the midst (what is more) of the harrowing circumstances of life in London during the First World War, would have been sufficient to put paid forever to President Eliot's cheery optimism based on the Unitarian conviction that the world was 'essentially friendly' under an 'infinitely loving' God, who

> looks on the universe in the same spirit as Jesus beheld the lilies of Galilee. Life is good.[44]

Alfred Hall concludes his 'Introduction' to *Aspects of Modern Unitarianism* with a telling quotation from Browning's 'Fra Lippo Lippi':

> This world's no blot for us,
> Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good.[45]

No one was less likely than Eliot, once he had attained years of discernment about the human condition, to be susceptible to the Positivist and Unitarian 'Religion of Humanity' to which so many disaffected Evangelicals of the later nineteenth century subscribed (Unitarianism was, in Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus's provocative phrase, 'a feather bed to catch a falling Christian'[46]) and which Eliot's mother encapsulated in her ecumenical poem, 'Saint Barnabas: A Missionary Hymn':

> No longer shall the law thy tribes divide,
> Through faith and love all shall be justified.
> Let me go forth, O Lord![47]

'What faith in life may be I know not', Eliot was to write in the *Criterion* in 1933. 'For the Christian, faith in death is what matters'.[48] Paul Elmer More, Eliot's friend and fellow-convert, dismissed the poet's family's faith as 'about the poorest sham in the whole field of pseudo-religion'.[49]

The critique of 'faith in life' which is the doctrine of Original Sin was, for Eliot, not only a Calvinist and Catholic teaching. He argued that 'the classicist point of view', the antithesis of the 'vague emotionality' of Romantic individualism, is 'essentially a belief in Original

Sin', implying 'the necessity for austere discipline'.[50] The appeal of orthodox Christianity was that it proposed the only plausible remedy to the 'aboriginal' problem:

> It is after these moments, alone with God and awareness of our worthiness, but for Grace, of nothing but damnation, that we turn with most thankfulness and appreciation to our awareness of our membership [of the Body of Christ].[51]

He recognised 'the evil which is present in human nature at all times and in all circumstances'[52] – including the time and circumstance of birth. The 'perception of Good and Evil,' he declared, ' – whatever choice we may make – is the first requisite of the spiritual life'.[53] Reflecting on Eliot's poetry, Kathleen Raine observed:

> Mr Eliot gave hell back to us.… The shallow progressive philosophies both religious and secular of our parents' generation sought to eliminate evil from the world. Mr Eliot's visions of hell restored a necessary dimension to our universe.[54]

Eliot's interest, too, in the writings of Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century French theologian drawn to the Jansenism of Port-Royal des Champs (where his sister had become a nun), reflects his profound sense of the corrupt character of human nature and the concomitant necessity for God's grace. This, for Pascal, was combined with a deep-seated scepticism in the faith, adding to his appeal for Eliot. Pascal, he wrote, was

> the type of one kind of religious believer, which is highly passionate and ardent, but passionate only through a powerful and regulated intellect… facing unflinchingly the demon of doubt which is inseparable from the spirit of belief.[55]

In affirming the teachings of such advocates of the doctrine of Original Sin, Eliot never underestimated the difficulty of acceding to these principles, especially as 'every man who thinks and lives by thought must have his own scepticism, that which stops at the question, that which ends in denial, or that which leads to faith and which is somehow integrated into the faith which transcends it'.[56]

Certainly, in the way of scepticism leading to denial, Eliot's doubt about Unitarian theology was complete. 'All that concerned my family', he told an American friend, 'was "right and wrong", what was "done and not done"'.[57] The Eliots' religion, George Every has written, was 'morality, not belief'.[58] Two years before

his baptism and confirmation, admonishing the Humanist, John Middleton Murry, Eliot pointed out that

> I happened to be brought up in the most 'liberal' of 'Christian' creeds – Unitarianism.… If one discards dogma, it should be for a more celestial garment, not for nakedness.[59]

He wrote to Herbert Read that 'one ought to have as precise and clear a creed as possible, when one thinks at all'. So, far from discarding articles of faith, 'we need more dogma'.[60]

The dogma that was to become central to Eliot's Anglo-Catholic faith, that of the Incarnation (of God becoming man in Jesus), may have been less repugnant to Unitarians than Original Sin, but they had rejected it, too, as contradicting their teaching about man becoming more God-like, rather than the reverse. For the Unitarian, Jesus was only an historical personage – ' "the first-born among many brethren" rather than the "only-begotten" Son of God'[61] – who had 'realized his own moral nature perfectly and completely'. And, so, the Atonement was 'purposeless or repulsive', the Resurrection a 'legend'[62] and predestination an illusion. Essentially, 'a person's task lay in cultivating the conscience'[63] and fostering community:

> discipleship, not assent to dogmas, is the hallmark of the Christian.… The relationship of human beings to one another is of paramount importance for any religion.[64]

3

In addition to the formidable heritage on his father's side, Eliot encountered the same principles, at least as strenuously held and advocated by his mother, Charlotte Champe Stearns, who addressed religious concerns in accomplished, if undistinguished verse. She had progressed, doctrinally, from orthodox Calvinist origins, through associations with Quakerism to Unitarianism. Her story resembles that of her near contemporary, George Eliot, who similarly evolved from an adolescent Evangelicalism to the radicalism of English Unitarianism. T.S. Eliot remembered that

> I was brought up in an environment of that intellectual and puritanical rationalism which is found in the novels of George Eliot – an author greatly admired in my family.[65]

Both George Eliot and Eliot's mother were attracted to Savonarola, the fifteenth-century Dominican reformer. He is the hero of Charlotte Eliot's eponymous dramatic poem (dedicated 'To My Children') and

she and her family had encountered him in George Eliot's *Romola* (1862-3). Savonarola expressed their residual Puritanism combined with a passion for social reform. For 'the Yankees', Van Wyck Brooks has written, Savonarola was a 'culture hero … the Italian Cromwellian Puritan … who tried to restore the liberty of the Florentine people'.[66]

Yet Charlotte (like George, who attended Anglo-Catholic services and delighted in the artistic heritage of Spanish Catholicism) was not bigoted towards the Catholic faith, allowing the young Eliot to be taken to Mass by his devout Irish nurse, Annie Dunne. When it is remembered that this was in an era when advertisements for such positions in Protestant households regularly carried the warning: 'Catholics [or 'Irish', implying the same thing] should not apply', this appointment and Annie's religious freedom with the child was a definite sign of that liberalism on which Unitarians prided themselves and, in this case at least, it proved spiritually advantageous. Eliot described Annie as 'the earliest personal influence' on him,[67] and in a witty review of Bertrand Russell's 'Why I Am Not a Christian', in 1927, Eliot recalled that Russell's 'argument of the First Cause (as put to J. Stuart Mill by James Mill) was put to me, at the age of six, by a devoutly Catholic Irish nursemaid'.[68] What Annie introduced him to, in Catholicism, was by no means confined to philosophy:

> My nanny (when I was at an age when a nanny, especially to the much-the-youngest child of a large family, is more important than anybody else) was an Irish girl from County Cork, and I was devoted to her – she sometimes took me into the local Catholic Church when she went to say her prayers, and I liked it very much: the lights, the coloured statues and paper flowers, the lived-in atmosphere, and the fact that the pews had little gates that I could swing on.[69]

Peter Ackroyd imagines the sensual impact of the experience on the infant Eliot:

> He was always susceptible to smells and noises, with an intensity which suggests hypersensitivity, and the entrance into a Roman church no doubt inspired a passage which he once wrote in an essay on Arthur Symons – how the sensitive child may be entranced by the effigies, the candles and the incense.[70]

Eliot repeatedly emphasises, both in poetry and prose, the importance of the influence of our earliest experiences. A writer's art, he argues, 'must be based on the accumulated sensations of the first twenty-one

years'.[71] He placed particular stress on an author's 'sensitive life since early childhood . . . the faded poor souvenirs of passionate moments',[72] while also remarking that 'I am quite well aware how unpleasant early youth can be or how few sensitive men were happy in it'.[73] What was true of the influence of childhood and youth on artistry could well have been true with regard to later religious beliefs too, especially if they were recalled with delight (as Eliot's Irish-Catholic nanny was) in the midst of more general unhappiness. That would add to their appeal.

There is whimsy in this recollection of early church-going too, as the grown man remembers his childhood self swinging on the pew-doors. As we shall see, one of the elements of the Anglo-Catholicism which Eliot was much later to embrace was – amidst all the solemnity and disciplined mortification – a robust and leavening enjoyment of the humorous, even ridiculous aspects of religion and of life itself.

This initiation, in his childhood, into the sensual appeal of the Catholic tradition in Christianity may be the most important early explanation of Eliot's eventual attraction to Anglo-Catholicism. What he experienced in St Louis with Annie Dunne was replicated, many years later, on his entrance into the Anglo-Catholic City churches, such as St Magnus the Martyr, London Bridge – the fishermen's church – of which John Betjeman writes:

> the whole district smells of fish, but inside the church there
> is the abrupt change to a smell of incense. . . .[74]

There was its visual beauty, too, which Eliot commemorated in the midst of the squalor of Jazz-Age London: 'where the walls of Magnus Martyr hold / Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold' (in the third section of *The Waste Land*, 1922).[75] Such beauty of holiness was deliberately cultivated in specifically Anglo-Catholic churches as the appropriate setting for the 'Real Presence' of the Lord as confected in the Mass and 'reserved' in the tabernacle.

Indeed, Mrs Eliot's Savonarola enunciates an interpretation of the Eucharistic Presence true to the teachings her son was later to embrace:

> For though the heaven itself cannot contain
> Its own Creator, He doth humbly deign
> In bread and wine to manifest again
> His presence to our senses.[76]

She hung an engraving of the Immaculate Conception by Murillo in her own bedroom, as well as a portrayal of St Ambrose, an upholder of

orthodoxy in the Latin Church,[77] as Unitarianism, scorning dogmatic religion, was ecumenical a century before the concept became fashionable. Although at the disadvantage of distance from Europe, Charlotte Eliot revealed a breadth of outlook, poetically expressed, that cannot have failed to have made an impression on her literary son, introducing him to aspects of Catholic cult and culture, although he was destined to criticise sharply the theological imprecision that had made such an introduction possible. Eliot's publication of *Savonarola* in 1926, at a time when his formal adherence to Anglicanism was imminent, was not only an act of filial piety, but the expression of a broader indebtedness, reflected two years later in his dedication of *For Lancelot Andrewes* (with its essays on such as Niccolo Machiavelli and Richard Crashaw) 'For My Mother'.

In the Portland home of Eliot's uncle (his father's elder brother who had entered the Unitarian ministry), moreover, the feasts of the Church's year were regularly observed, being associated with some quaint customs and a form of ceremony. Herbert Howarth has likened the rule of life in Thomas Lamb Eliot's home to the devoutly, quasi-conventual familial arrangement of the Ferrars at Little Gidding,[78] which, through the centuries, has held such strong appeal for Catholic-minded Anglicans and which is the subject of Eliot's last great poem. George Herbert, who was a friend of the community at Little Gidding and bequeathed his poems to Nicholas Ferrar, is the subject of Eliot's last prose work, his essay on the poet of 1962.

4

Eliot became completely hostile to liberal Christianity's watered-down doctrine, but in the Unitarian dedication to social action and education we can see an abiding influence in his later educational theory and in his works of social criticism, such as *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. Eliot's grandfather was a powerful influence for social consciousness, across the generations. Writing from St Louis in 1852, Emerson noted that

> Mr Eliot, the Unitarian minister, is the Saint of the West, and has a sumptuous church, and crowds to hear his really good sermons.[79]

Perhaps because he had heard so many of them, sermons and sermonising were not to Eliot's taste. He is on record as having preached only one himself, in the rarefied context of the chapel of the Cambridge

college, Magdalene, where he was Honorary Fellow, and there is just one in his creative work, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, preached by the archbishop. 'Yes, the sermon in *Murder* is a good one', he told Mary Trevelyan, but added: 'I shall never write another'.[80]

His qualified commendation of the Coleridgean theory of the 'clerisy' – 'instruments in the great and indispensable work of perpetuating, promoting, and increasing the civilization of the nation'[81] – in the course of his presentation of his theory of the 'Community of Christians',[82] approximates to the Unitarians' role as arbiters of social morality (in which pulpit oratory would have played its part) and their significant contributions to education. The Unitarian 'public service' of his family, Eliot recalled, was expressed in three domains: 'the Church, the City, and the University':

> The Church meant, for us, the Unitarian Church of the Messiah, then situated in Locust Street, a few blocks west of my father's house … the City was St. Louis … the University was Washington University.… These were the symbols of Religion, the Community and Education.

Speaking at that university in 1953, Eliot affirmed that 'reverence' for such institutions is 'a very good beginning for any child', for it taught

> that personal and selfish aims should be subordinated to the general good which they represent.[83]

In a private and confidential letter to Mary Trevelyan, in 1942, Eliot identified in himself an hereditary taint which expressed itself in an irresistible tendency to serve on committees. All members of the family suffer from this, he notes, with the exception of his sister who prefers to stay indoors and write letters to the newspapers. In his own case, the inheritance explained his involvement in several publications and organisations at this time, such as the *Christian News-Letter*, the Christian Frontier Council, as well as through various 'good works' such as a dinner with an old Cheshire acquaintance in financial decline after a career as a portrait-painter of horses; a request from Storm Jameson for a poem for her *Red Cross Book*; the winding-up of an estate; a summons to testify in a divorce case – and many more things besides.[84]

Eliot could admire the Unitarians' 'emotional reserve and intellectual integrity' too.[85] He bore witness, in his own temperament, to their Puritanism, identifying a 'native Calvinism' in himself which he could not suppress,[86] while in a lecture in 1953 (glancing at contemporary McCarthyism), he claimed that Nathaniel Hawthorne – whom

he describes as the 'greatest' of nineteenth-century New England authors – contained 'something' in his works

> that can best be appreciated by the reader with Calvinism in his bones and witch-hanging (not witch-hunting) on his conscience.[87]

But he had much earlier criticised 'the family Fear and Conscience' which was stifling his sister Marian – the 'family temperament' will 'always put the little things in front of the big'.[88] And he had held up the drawing-room provinciality of Unitarian *mores* to scorn in a letter to Eleanor Hinkley, from Oxford in 1915, in a 'scene' he had composed on the occasion of the announcement of the engagement of his cousin, the Revd Frederick May Eliot, a future President of the American Unitarian Association, to Elizabeth Berkeley Lee.

> F: (on one knee) My Elizabeth!
> (Sensation among the old ladies in the front row)
> He rises, his boots creaking as he does so. 'There, that's settled'. Looks at his watch. 'Now I must be off to address a meeting of the Church Lads Brigade in Arlington'. Starts to put on his rubbers. 'Oh, I forgot'. Advances f.c. 'Permit me'. Kisses her decorously in exact centre of left cheek.
> CURTAIN[89]

Valerie Eliot calls this a '*jeu d'esprit'*, in her footnote to the letter, but its comedy is contemptuous. The tone is similar to Eliot's mockery, a few months before, of a Thanksgiving Day sermon: ' "And what are we, the young men of America, doing to help build the city of God? …" (Silence, followed by breathing)'.[90]

Eliot's dissociation from the liberal theology and parochialism, if not vestiges of the social responsibility and something of the temperamental character of his Unitarian forebears, was complete by the time he had finally left Harvard for Europe in 1914.[91] Once he had become an Anglo-Catholic, he could be savage in his repudiation of

> that isolated, cantankerous, often narrow, bigoted and heretical society.[92]

5

The young Eliot inevitably knew Episcopalians – the American version of Anglicans. They lived within the same social class. Yet the influence on him of Episcopalianism (which we might have supposed

would have drawn him towards Anglicanism) is almost imperceptible, although many Unitarians – as Eric Sigg has pointed out – 'headed for Canterbury' by this route,[93] acquiring the high theology and liturgy of the Episcopalian Church after the all-but-non-existent doctrine and spirituality of a Unitarianism dedicated to their negation. Culturally, in New England, the adjustment from Unitarianism to Episcopalianism would have been painless, whereas conversion to the other Western Catholic alternative, Romanism (which, particularly in Boston, had predominantly Irish, working-class origins) would have been social suicide.

Eliot attended Milton Academy and Harvard with Harrison Bird Child (1889-1944) who became an Episcopalian priest. Jean Verdenal called him Eliot's '*grand ami Child*', indicating that Eliot had talked warmly of him to his French friend and Eliot had written to Eleanor Hinkley in 1914 asking her 'if you have seen Harry [Child] let me know how he is' (8th September), envisaging Child at the centre of a circle of 'very attractive' friends (again to Hinkley; 21st March, 1915).[94] In November, 1914, writing from Oxford, he had referred specifically to Child's vocation, indicating his detachment from such a commitment, but his 'particular sympathy' for the motivation behind it. The language of this long passage is unusually convoluted – so much so that Eliot has written 'What syntax' in the margin. The syntactic awkwardness could be expressive of the perplexities of Eliot's own religious convictions (or lack of them) in the face of Child's certitude. We notice the slipperiness of his thinking in the course of it: 'poor' Harry's enterprise is 'strained and forced', yet principled; he is 'appealing', yet 'pathetic'. And very noticeable is Eliot's reluctance to name the 'thing', the 'programme', 'something', 'anything' to which Child has committed himself. Eliot could have vaguely 'drifted' into a similar state, he surmises, but that – decisively – would have been to 'err', wittily varying the usual connotation of that verb as a movement from faith to doubt. But now he is too wise to possess 'strong convictions in any theory'. One should have theories, he notes, with a Wildean flippancy, but 'one need not believe in them'. And for all his compliments to Harry on his unnamed undertaking, he entertains the notion that these will only be 'two or three merely wasted years', spent in testing his priestly vocation, although such wastage may be the cause of subsequent embittered regret. With its contradictions and evasions, this important passage is one of those moments in his letters where Eliot appears to be talking less to his correspondent and about his ostensible subject, than to himself and about himself.

Later, in 1916, Eliot asked Eleanor Hinkley to 'give my affection to Harry Child, if you see him',[95] and at just this period when Eliot's progress towards his classmate's religious position was beginning to be clarified, Child and, with him, Episcopalianism, disappear from Eliot's life for many years. Child died in 1944. Later in the 1940s, Eliot's first sustained association with the Episcopalian clergy began in the form of his twenty-year-long friendship with the American priest, William Turner Levy.[96] Had Eliot remained in America (which he was still contemplating, as late as 1915 – 'whether I want to get married, and have a family, and live in America all my life[97]) and been drawn to Catholic faith and practice there, it is unlikely that he would have found his spiritual home in Episcopalianism. For whereas the Church of England was for him 'the English Catholic Church'[98] (being, then, the faith of the majority of the Christian people in Britain and inextricably bound up with the history and culture of the populace in general) no-one could claim the same for Episcopalianism in the United States, with its very small membership in terms of the total population, in spite of exercising an influence well beyond its size due to the membership of socially prominent families.

6

More important over the course of Eliot's early years than the influences – encouraging or otherwise – of the many various forms of Christianity in the process of his dissociation from Unitarianism and movement towards Anglo-Catholicism, was his exploration of contending contemporary philosophical theories during his graduate study at Harvard from 1909 to 1914 – in spite of the fact that the University, as he described it in retrospect, in 1926, was still, in those days, a 'stronghold of Unitarianism'.[99]

Philosophy at Harvard, during the period of Eliot's studies, was dominated by the 'science versus religion controversy', the debate between 'idealism and scientific materialism', and the attempt (as Manju Jain encapsulates it) to defend 'religious truths and spiritual values against the challenge of Darwinism'.[100] The school was led by William James, Josiah Royce and George Santayana, the last of whom, a Spanish-Catholic aesthete, was not as attractive to Eliot as we might have expected. He disapproved of Santayana's 'essentially feminine' attitude, Jain argues, and so his influence on Eliot is 'difficult to estimate'.[101] In Royce's seminars, however, Eliot grappled with philosophical problems which 'were to be his major preoccupations over a prolonged period of time':

> Eliot's serious concern [was] with the whole question of the foundation of religious belief and its place in a scientific, secular society.[102]

Royce's theory of the 'organic nature' of the Christian community (in *The Problem of Christianity*), based on tradition, may have influenced Eliot's social thinking, but his 'paradigmatic community was the scientific one', seeking 'to establish the kingdom of God on earth'.[103]

Irving Babbitt, who taught Eliot in 1909-10 and whose defence of classicism was opposed to the liberal, forward-looking inclination of Harvard philosophy in these years, was another compelling influence. Eliot described him, along with Paul Elmer More, as 'the two wisest men that I have known',[104] and was still arguing, as late as 1955, with regard again to Babbitt and More, that it was necessary that the

> views of such writers become more widely diffused and translated, modified, adapted, even adulterated, into action.[105]

The 'views' of Babbitt that Eliot had explicitly in mind were his social, rather than his theological theories. The authoritarianism of Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership* originated in his desire for that order in society which had also informed Eliot's appreciation of the *camelots du roi* of the *Action Française* and of Machiavelli.

But Eliot did not accept Babbitt's theory that Humanism, however orderly, might serve as a substitute for religion. It sounded 'alarmingly like very liberal Protestant theology of the nineteenth century ... Protestant theology in its last agonies', Eliot was to write in *For Lancelot Andrewes*[106] – like Unitarianism, in other words. In the *Criterion*, Eliot accused Babbitt of possessing no 'coherent system', no 'philosophical technique',[107] while at the Malvern Conference in 1941, he described the Humanism of 'Babbitt and his disciples' as

> an attempt to devise a philosophy of life without a metaphysic ... humanism of its nature stops short of a philosophy.[108]

He had already said that

> Professor Babbitt knows too much ... he knows too many religions and philosophies, has assimilated their spirit too thoroughly ... to be able to give himself to any.[109]

All this religious knowledge had led to a disabling intellectual pride, preventing a personal commitment. Paul Elmer More made an assessment which could as easily have been Eliot's:

> A certain final lack of humility I must find in Babbitt's attempt to cut out for himself an individual path in religion, rather than submit to the great institutional experience of the race.[110]

Yet, as we have seen, Eliot began 'as a disciple of Mr. Babbitt'[111] and retained his respect for him as a magus, but within the restricted dimension of his learned speculation on the theory of society and of particular ideas about the articulate man's place in it. To this extent, Babbitt's organic conception of the social order influenced the later development of Eliot's idea of a Christian state. And, most importantly, for all Babbitt's theological shortcomings – just becoming apparent to the young graduate student emerging from Unitarianism – he had developed a classical response to what Eliot regarded as the chaotic individuality of Romanticism. His mistake was to imagine that Humanism would be a sufficiently stringent and authoritative corrective of such excesses. Babbitt had denounced Rousseau, in his *Masters of Modern French Criticism* – as Eliot did some years later, in his London lecture course – and expressed qualified approval for Charles Maurras' classicism, which Eliot was to encounter in Paris in 1910-11. But the crucial difference between Babbitt and Maurras was that the Frenchman, although an unbeliever, recognised (as Eliot was to put it in his essay on Babbitt) that the Catholic Church 'may perhaps be the only institution left in the Occident that can be counted upon to uphold civilised standards'.[112]

Also, in Paris, Eliot attended the weekly lectures of Henri Bergson at the Collège de France, to the point of 'conversion'. Bergson was concerned to restate the problems of metaphysics in terms of the non-mathematical sciences. In 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' (written in Paris in March, 1911), Eliot poeticises the Bergsonian idea of time in perpetual flux and a disciple of Bergson appears in Eliot's 'Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry' (1928). Bergson taught that it was possible to transcend sense data and fragmented memories through immediate intuition or an act of pure perception. But, as Jain argues, 'Rhapsody' ultimately denies this – 'perception remains fragmented in the poem' – suggesting the ephemeral character of Eliot's appropriation of Bergsonism.[113] 'My only conversion', Eliot reflected, in 1948, 'by the deliberate influence of any individual, was a temporary conversion to Bergsonism'.[114]

It would seem, indeed, from the 'Dialogue', that a more lasting Parisian impression was made on Eliot by another kind of transcendental experience – High Mass at the Madeleine. For 'B' addresses 'E', there, telling him of a man who 'was not a believer, but a Bergsonian' who nonetheless

> went to High Mass every Sunday.… I can testify that the Mass gave him extreme, I may even say immoderate satisfaction.… His dramatic desires were satisfied by the Mass.[115]

And this is in response to the views of 'E' himself (whom we may assume to be Eliot at thirty-nine, baptised and confirmed, while 'B' is the aesthetic Eliot of his much earlier Bergsonian phase):[116]

> I say that the consummation of the drama, the perfect and ideal drama, is to be found in the ceremony of the Mass.… The only dramatic satisfaction that I find now is in a High Mass well performed.[117]

Earlier, in 1925, Eliot remembered the Roman rite during his Paris sojourn, with a similar vocabulary of aesthetic appreciation of its performance:

> Is not the High Mass – as performed, for instance, at the Madeleine in Paris – one of the highest developments of dancing?[118]

Also in Paris, at that time, his friend, Jean Verdenal, to whom Eliot was to dedicate *Prufruck and Other Observations* in 1917 (Verdenal having died in the Dardanelles two years before), was alerting him to a contemporary tendency in Parisian thought towards a recovery of '*croyance catholique et littérale du dogme'*.[119] By 1917, reviewing Peter Coffey's Thomistic work, *Epistemology*, Eliot was writing that the Catholic Church was 'the only Church which can even pretend to maintain a philosophy of its own'.[120]

George Every, whom Eliot knew for many years as a professed brother in the Anglican Society of the Sacred Mission, told me that Eliot frequented the High Mass at the City church of St Magnus the Martyr after the First World War, and Every commented that 'the influence of the liturgy on the drama was indeed apparent to him before he was a believer. Images out of *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* belong to this time'.[121]

A decade later, Eliot had found a church in London, St Stephen's, Gloucester Road in South Kensington which was to satisfy his worshipping requirements for the rest of his life. He had the singular good fortune there to encounter Father Eric Cheetham, its vicar, who, in addition to profound spiritual qualities (to which we shall refer later and which made a deep impression on Eliot) had also, in a way familiar in Anglo-Catholicism, a remarkable theatrical flair

which he applied to the liturgy. One of Cheetham's altar servers during Eliot's time as a parishioner was the screen actor, Christopher Lee. He remembered the priest 'drawing parallels between [the Church's] deep need for ritual and the ritual framework of the theatre'.[122]

What Eliot had experienced as a child, with Annie Dunne in St Louis, recaptured at the Madeleine in 1910 and at Magnus Martyr in Lower Thames Street in 1922 proved to be of more profound and enduring influence than Bergsonism or Babbitt's Humanism.

7

Eliot's study of Eastern languages and religions at Harvard also needs consideration in surveying the process of elimination (as it turned out) that brought him eventually to orthodox Christianity. Returning from Paris to Harvard in later 1911, taking a room in Ash Street, in which (Conrad Aiken recalled) he hung 'a Gauguin Crucifixion, brought from Paris',[123] Eliot took the course in Sanskrit and read the *Bhagavad Gita*. The next year, he studied the sacred books of Buddhism and was given, by his instructor, Charles Rockwell Lanman, the 'Fable of the Thunder', containing the 'da da da' passage which he was to use in the final section of *The Waste Land*, 'What the Thunder Said'. Some traces of these studies are to be found as late as *Four Quartets* ('Eliot's fusion of ideas from Hinduism and Buddhism, with a nod to the fortuitous parallels in Heraclitus, has an almost ironic use' in 'The Dry Salvages', the third Quartet, according to Grover Smith[124]), but for Marja Palmer to claim that 'Buddhist beliefs' are 'consistently worked out' in *Four Quartets*[125] overstates the case. Insofar as any 'beliefs' are explored there, they are Christian ones. Eliot wrote the poem as a well-known Anglo-Catholic of more than a decade's standing. He was never a Buddhist. Manju Jain puts the matter succinctly when, in referring to Eliot's study of eastern religions at Harvard, she observes that it 'gave him an alternative world view but it did not provide him with a mainstay in his search for a defining belief'. He found that in Christian theology, which revealed to him the 'inferiority' of oriental philosophy and religion.[126] 'Wisdom that is not Christian', Eliot reflected in 1940 (when he was in the midst of writing *Four Quartets*), 'turns to folly'.[127]

While studying Eastern thought, Eliot continued the pursuit of theories in the Western tradition. In an essay, 'The Relationship between Politics and Metaphysics' (written some time in 1913-14),