CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IN THE PLAYS OF

T. S. ELIOT

APPROVED:

[Signatures]

Major Professor

George W. Linclen

Minor Professor

E. S. Clifton

Director of the Department of English

Robert B. Toulous

Dean of the Graduate School
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IN THE PLAYS

OF T. S. ELIOT

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Robert Lester Short, B. A., B. D.

Denton, Texas

August, 1962
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. ORIGINAL SIN</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Universal Nature of Original Sin&lt;br&gt;The Depth of Original Sin&lt;br&gt;Unconsciousness of Sin&lt;br&gt;Idolatry: The Manifestation of Original Sin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. GOD'S WRATH AND DAMNATION</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Death of Strange Gods&lt;br&gt;The Depth of Hell&lt;br&gt;The Rarity of the Experience of Damnation&lt;br&gt;The Necessity for the Experience of Damnation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. REDEMPTION THROUGH THE HOLY TRINITY</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Holy Spirit&lt;br&gt;The Son&lt;br&gt;The Father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Understanding Eliot's Theological Perspective

T. S. Eliot, a man passionately concerned with understanding,\textsuperscript{1} has said, in regard to understanding Dante's poetry, that "you cannot afford to ignore Dante's philosophical and theological beliefs, or to skip the passages which express them most clearly."\textsuperscript{2} This assertion that an author's work must be understood in terms of the author's beliefs is basic to any approach to Eliot's own writing, especially in the light of a further elaboration and development of the idea which Eliot proposes elsewhere:

I am not sure that we can enjoy a man's poetry while leaving wholly out of account all the things for which he cared deeply, and on behalf of which he turned his poetry into account.\textsuperscript{3}


For Eliot apparently conceives of "understanding" and "enjoyment" as very closely related, if not identical:

I must stress the point that I do not think of enjoyment and understanding as distinctive activities—one emotional and the other intellectual.\(^4\)

Thus Eliot himself suggests a basic outline for an investigation of his writings—that outline being a study of his philosophical and theological beliefs.

These beliefs have, of course, been commented on by various authorities and writers; and they have, in fact, been fairly generally defined as lying in the tradition of Christian orthodoxy.\(^5\)

It is the purpose of this thesis to explore the available evidence concerning Eliot's theological beliefs—particularly as that evidence is found in his plays—in an attempt to define with as much accuracy as possible the understanding of Eliot's theology which provides the most adequate understanding of and enjoyment of Eliot's writings.

Eliot and the Christian Tradition

One does not need to look far for evidence of the sincerity and depth of Eliot's theological presuppositions.


For example, there is much evidence available that Eliot is unable to—or refuses to—separate literary work from personal religious beliefs. In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, for instance, Eliot has said:

> We cannot be satisfied to be Christians at our devotions and merely secular reformers all the rest of the week, for there is one question that we need to ask ourselves every day and about every business. The Church has perpetually to answer this question: to what purpose were we born? What is the end of man?  

And Eliot has stated this thought even more emphatically by saying:

> What I am opposing is not merely a division of religious and secular drama into watertight compartments; what I am proposing is not merely that we need to go to a religious play or to a secular play in much the same spirit. It is an opposition to the compartmentalisation of life in general, to the sharp division between our religious and our ordinary life. . . . [In our present society] we have to adapt ourselves, every day, to the compromise of liberalism: to living among, and to maintaining common sympathy and common action (as indeed is duty as well as necessity) with, people who deny or ignore the fundamentals of Christianity. On the one hand we must accept, and on the other hand we must never accept as finality, this state of affairs. Merely to conduct our own life among ourselves, as we think right, and to abandon the task of evangelisation, would be abnegation of an essential duty.

---


However, as Eliot has pointed out, he may not be completely
innocent of any tendency on the part of critics to regard
him in "compartmentalised" categories. For in 1928 Eliot
wrote that he was "an Anglo-Catholic in religion, a classi-
cist in literature, and a royalist in politics." Eliot
since has found it necessary to clarify this statement,
and in so doing he has made completely clear the primacy
of "Faith" in his life:

I may as well admit at this point that in this
discussion of terms I have my own log to roll. Some
years ago, in the preface to a small volume of es-
says, I made a sort of summary declaration of faith
in matters religious, political and literary. The
facility with which this statement has been quoted
has helped to reveal to me that as it stands the
statement is injudicious. It may suggest that the
three subjects are of equal importance to me, which
is not so; it may suggest that I accept all three
beliefs on the same grounds, which is not so; and
it may suggest that I believe that they all hang or
fall together, which would be the most serious mis-
understanding of all. That there are connexions for
me I of course admit, but these illuminate my own
mind rather than the external world; and I see the
danger of suggesting to outsiders that the Faith is
a political principle or a literary fashion, and the
sum of all a dramatic posture. 9

8T. S. Eliot, "Preface," For Lancelot Andrewes, cited
in George K. Anderson and Eda Lou Walton, editors, This

9T. S. Eliot, After Strange Gods (New York, 1933),
p. 29.
If there is any doubt as to the depth to which Eliot's faith extends, perhaps citation of a statement Eliot made in a little book entitled *Revelation* will resolve the issue:

I take for granted that Christian revelation is the only full revelation; and that the fullness of Christian revelation resides in the essential fact of the Incarnation, in relation to which all Christian revelation is to be understood.

The division between those who accept, and those who deny, Christian revelation I take to be the most profound division between human beings. It does not merely go deeper than divisions by political faith, divisions of class or race; it is different in kind, and cannot be measured by the same scale.¹⁰

As for Eliot's "official" position relative to the Church, again a statement which Eliot made--by way of a letter in response to an inquiry regarding his religious persuasions--probably goes farthest in resolving any ambiguities:

Dear Sister:

In reply to your letter of December 1st, perhaps the simplest account that I can give is to say that I was brought up as a Unitarian of the New England variety; that for many years I was without any definite religious faith, or without any at all; that in 1927 I was baptized and confirmed into the Church of England; and that I am associated with what is called the Catholic movement in that Church,

as represented by Viscount Halifax and the English Church Union. I accordingly believe in the Creeds, the invocation of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, the Sacrament of Penance, etc.

Yours faithfully,

[Signed] T. S. Eliot

6 December 1932

The preceding quotations should define the scope and depth of Eliot's religious position. But it is important to re-emphasize that, as far as Eliot—and this thesis—are concerned, a far greater understanding into this position must somehow be brought about before the essence of his work as a literary artist can be made manifest. For, as Eliot has said:

What I do wish to affirm is that the whole of modern literature is corrupted by what I call Secularism, that it is simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of, the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life; of something which I assume to be our primary concern.\(^\text{12}\)

Eliot and Christian Existentialism

At this point it should be said that Eliot maintains a particular relationship to Christian orthodoxy by which his religious position avoids becoming "either a sentimental tune, or an emotional debauch; or in theology, a skeleton


dance of fleshless dogmas, or in ecclesiasticism, a soul-
less political club."¹³ This method of relating himself
to orthodoxy gives Eliot the peculiar stance of adhering
to the deepest and oldest traditions of the Church, while
speaking simultaneously in an extremely meaningful and
contemporaneous way to the very deepest needs of modern
man. This ability of Eliot's to "live in two worlds" is
pointed up by Nathan Scott, Jr., when he says:

But when we turn to the writer whose work is
most suggestive of the measure of flexibility and
relevance to contemporary spiritual problems that
continue to inhere in an orthodox outlook, the
selection of Eliot is, of course, inevitable, for
of all present-day writers his grasp of the Christian
tradition is perhaps most complete and yet he strikes
us as being a consummate expression of the "modern
temper."¹⁴

Following this observation the point should be made
that one of the primary forces in the history of thought
which recently has brought renewed meaningfulness to the
ancient traditions and orthodox theology of the Church,
is the force of Christian existentialism.¹⁵ One of the

¹³T. S. Eliot, "Religion without Humanism," Humanism
and America, edited by Norman Foerster (New York, 1930),
p. 111.

¹⁴Scott, Rehearsals of Discomposure, p. 200.

¹⁵Vide Daniel D. Williams, What Present-Day Theo-
logians Are Thinking (New York, 1952), pp. 30-31; and John
Dillenberger and Claude Welch, Protestant Christianity
goals of this thesis will be to show how deeply Eliot has been a part of this movement, has received influence from its leaders--more particularly from the existentialists in the main stream of the Christian tradition--and how the characteristics of this philosophy are reflected in Eliot's theology and plays and in their interrelationships. This will be, to some extent, a pioneering type of endeavor. For although many critics, especially those who write from a theological orientation, have seen the characteristics of existentialism in Eliot's work, actual explications demonstrating these characteristics in his writing are sparse and merely suggestive. But there should be no question as to the presence of these elements or as to how deeply they run. Amos Wilder, for instance, has said:

The crisis is deeper. . . . It is an existential crisis. It is a crisis of man's deepest self. As Berdyaev has said, the image of man is dissolved. We have an invasion of chaos in the soul. Dr. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., has given the title Rehearsals of Dis-composure to his studies of the modern writers, D. H. Lawrence, Kafka, Silone, and Eliot. The crisis is an existential crisis, but it is all these others also. And the point is that all these other crises, social, cultural, psychological, etc., take on their peculiar character just because the existential crisis affects them all.16

---

16 Wilder, Modern Poetry and the Christian Tradition, p. 207.
Paul Tillich, in speaking of the scope of existentialism's influence, has said:

In the twentieth century the outcry of existentialism became universal. It became the subject matter of some great philosophers, such as Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, Marcel, and many others; it became a topic of the drama; it became effective in poetry. After some predecessors like Beaudelaire and Rimbaud in the nineteenth century, it has become widespread, and men like Auden and Eliot are widely known.\(^\text{17}\)

Although there are many such references which seem to place Eliot squarely in the camp of existentialism, seldom are they more than references. Also, a further delineation of Eliot's particular type of existentialism generally has been recognized among these critics, but, again, this delineation has been spelled out only in brief sketches. This delineation is the recognition of Eliot's more particular influence from those Protestant existentialist theologians who have maintained a more orthodox position in their theologies: S. A. Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Danish theologian who is generally conceded to be the "father of existentialism,"\(^\text{18}\) and Karl Barth, a


contemporary Swiss theologian. However, this further definition of Eliot's theology is not always completely obvious, because Eliot, at this point, seems to be quite concerned to "conceal the origins." Indeed, mention of "existentialism," or of the names of Barth and Kierkegaard, is conspicuous by its absence in Eliot's writings— even though Eliot and Barth together were contributors to Revelation, a book of theological essays published in 1937. But the influence of these men and their thought is surely present in Eliot's work as can be seen from such examples as the following statement made by Amos Wilder:

This speech by Becket in Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral sounds more like the dialectical theology of today than the thought of Dante and Aquinas. We have the impression that Mr. Eliot has been reading Kierkegaard and Barth and that they here and there peer through the curtain. The terms are abstract rather than plastic and suggest a background of professional theological preoccupation.

Or, to cite an example from another source, Scott has said:

19Eliot, Poetry and Poets, p. 91.

20Karl Barth, "Chapter II," Revelation, edited by Baille and Martin, p. 42.

21Scott, Rehearsals of Discomposure, p. 252.
But now when we come to Eliot, we come upon a modern poet who knows the cosmic exile of Kafka's dry desert for what it is—namely, the exile of Hell; and thus we come full circle from the radical paganism of Lawrence to the equally radical orthodoxy of Paul and Kierkegaard, and the Catholic humanism of Dante.\textsuperscript{22}

Thus far, most of what has been said about Eliot's theology has been concerned with Eliot's doctrine rather than his plays. Thus the questions remain of the relationship between this theology and his plays, and if there are any reasons to suppose that Eliot's plays perhaps enjoy a special relationship to his theology not given to his prose and poems. The answer to this last question definitely seems to move in the direction of the affirmative: that the plays are particularly appropriate to the theology, and vice versa. There are several reasons for this conclusion.

In the first place, Eliot's theology—as he has said—is decisively Christocentric: it derives its fundamental orientation from "the essential fact of the Incarnation." E. Martin Browne, the man "of the theatre" with whom Eliot has worked most closely in the production of his plays,\textsuperscript{23} has said:

\textsuperscript{22}Scott, \textit{Rehearsals of Discomposure}, p. 252.

\textsuperscript{23}Jones, \textit{The Plays of T. S. Eliot}, p. 212.
... the most important thing of all about drama for us as Christians is: that it partakes of the nature of the Incarnation. I suppose we would agree that it is how we see the pattern of human history as Christians, that the coming of God to earth as a man, The Word made Flesh, is the climax of all human development in all fields. This is an event in history, in time and space. It is beyond history; but it is also in history, in time and space, the climax of all aspects of human development. So we see the Incarnation as God's use of the dramatic form in human history, as God's action in human life. The word drama itself simply means "doing." 24

And Eliot himself has said: "What poetry should do in the theatre is a kind of humble shadow or analogy of the Incarnation, whereby the human is taken up into the divine." 25

Also, he has said, in his essay, "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," "that drama springs from religious liturgy, and that it cannot afford to depart far from religious liturgy." 26 And he adds, in the same essay:

But we are human beings, and crave representations in which we are conscious, and critical, of these other realities. We cannot be aware solely of divine realities. We must be aware also of human realities.


26 Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 35.
And we crave some liturgy less divine, something in respect of which we shall be more spectators and less participants. Hence we want the human drama, related to the divine drama, but not the same, as well as the Mass.\textsuperscript{27}

Secondly, Eliot, because of the peculiar character of his theology, is intensely concerned with the condition or predicament of man.\textsuperscript{28} And the drama, perhaps more than any other art form, is thought to be capable of expressing --and to some extent alleviating--this condition. For instance, David E. Jones, in his book\textit{The Plays of T. S. Eliot,} has said that "the portrayal of human action can in itself induce keener emotions than any other form of art, emotions not as powerful perhaps as those induced by music but keener because focused upon the predicament of people like ourselves."\textsuperscript{29}

Thirdly, the importance of the drama in Eliot's thought is illustrated by the frequency with which he employs the theme and imagery of the drama in expressing his ideas--in his plays, his poetry, and his prose. For

\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Cochrane, The Existentialists and God}, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Jones, Plays of Eliot}, p. 1.
instance, in his play The Elder Statesman, Eliot has Lord
Claverton, the "Statesman" of the play, to say:

I've spent my life in trying to forget myself,
in trying to identify myself with the part
I had chosen to play. And the longer we pretend
The harder it becomes to drop the pretence,
Walk off the stage, change into our own clothes
And speak as ourselves. So I'd become an idol
To Monica. She worshipped the part I played:
How could I be sure that she would love the actor
If she saw him, off the stage, without his
  costume and makeup
And without his stage words. \(^{30}\)

In East Coker, one of the poems of Eliot's Four Quartets,

Eliot says:

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come
upon you
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a
theatre,
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to
be changed
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement
of darkness on darkness,
And we know that the hills and the trees, the
distant panorama
And the bold imposing facade are all being
rolled away--\(^{31}\)

And in his essay "Poetry and Drama," published in 1951,

Eliot begins by saying:

Reviewing my critical output for the last
thirty-odd years, I am surprised to find how con-
stantly I have returned to the drama, whether by

\(^{30}\) T. S. Eliot, The Elder Statesman (New York, 1959),
p. 102.

\(^{31}\) T. S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays (New York,
examining the work of the contemporaries of Shakespeare, or by reflecting on the possibilities of the future. It may be that people are weary of hearing me on this subject. But ... I find that I have been composing variations on this theme all my life. ... 32

Furthermore, Eliot's plays constitute the ideal source for an examination of his theology, as it is precisely at this point that he must become less "abstract"—and, far more "plastic"—in what he is attempting to say. For it safely can be assumed that Eliot's poems and criticism are for readers. But in his plays Eliot is dealing with an altogether different type of audience. Indeed, Eliot, at one stage in his career, has said in regard to playwrighting, "I myself should like an audience which could neither read nor write." 33 But he has inevitably been attracted to "as large and miscellaneous an audience as possible." 34 And in order to meet the demands of this attraction, Eliot necessarily had had to come to terms with the problem of making clearer—at least on one level

32 Eliot, Poetry and Poets, p. 75.


34 Ibid.
of understanding—what he would say to his theatre audi-
ences. In 1951 Eliot wrote:

I also believe that while the self-education
of a poet trying to write for theatre seems to re-
quire a long period of disciplining on his poetry,
and putting it, so to speak, on a very thin diet
in order to adapt it to the needs of the stage, he
may find that later . . . he can dare to make more
liberal use of poetry and take greater liberties
with ordinary colloquial speech. 35

This statement implies that Eliot has had no inten-
tion of reducing the "matter" or content of meaning in his
plays, which is so vital to him, but that he has intended
to "thin down" the intensely exclusive and complex language
of his poetry in order that his audiences may more readily
understand (and therefore "enjoy") what he would have them
understand. Therefore, it would seem to be with Eliot's
plays that understanding must begin, if understanding moves
from the lesser to the greater in difficulty.

Method of Approaching Material

Still remaining in this introduction is the question
concerning the proper approach to the subject of Christian
doctrine in Eliot's plays. Eliot himself can offer useful
guidance here, for the problem of finding the best approach

to a literary work of art is a problem with which he is constantly concerned in his criticism.

Eliot suggests, first of all, that his plays be allowed to speak for themselves. For instance, in regard to poetry, he has said:

One can explain a poem by investigating what it is made of and the causes that brought it about; and explanation may be a necessary preparation for understanding. But to understand a poem it is also necessary, and I should say in most instances still more necessary, that we should endeavour to grasp what the poetry is aiming to be; one might say—though it is long since I have employed such terms with any assurance—endeavouring to grasp its entelechy.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

For myself, I can only say that a knowledge of the springs which released a poem is not necessarily a help towards understanding the poem: too much information about the origins of the poem may even break my contact with it. 36

By "origins," Eliot means both biographical data concerning the author and "factual information" surrounding the poem.

Or, as he has otherwise expressed it:

We must not identify biography with criticism: biography . . . may open the way to further understanding; but it may also, in directing our attention to the poet, lead us away from the poetry. We must not confuse knowledge—factual information—about a poet's period, the conditions of the society in which he lived, the ideas current in his time implicit in his writings, the state of the language in his period—-with understanding his poetry. Such

36 Ibid., p. 122.
knowledge, as I have said, may be a necessary preparation for understanding the poetry; furthermore, it has a value of its own, as history; but for the appreciation of the poetry, it can only lead us to the door: We must find our own way in.  

"I am not defending poor scholarship," Eliot says in this regard. "But," he continues, "...it is better to be spurred to acquire scholarship because you enjoy the poetry, than to suppose that you enjoy the poetry because you have acquired the scholarship."  

Nevertheless, Eliot does recommend one source of criticism which he considers valuable: an author's own critical works. This may not be as egotistical as it can sound, for others have accepted this judgement in dealing with Eliot's work and have found it helpful. Neville Braybrooke, for instance, writes:

In his poetry and his plays, with remarkable consistency, Mr. Eliot has developed many of the religious, sociological and political themes that he has outlined in his critical essays, primers of modern heresy, and notes towards definition. "All argument is basically theological" is another maxim from another devout churchman of another century that matches his own approach. 

---

37 Ibid., p. 130.

38 Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 199.

Also, David B. Jones acknowledges his "debt to Mr. Eliot's own critical writings. He is his own most perceptive--and most severe--critic."\textsuperscript{40} For Eliot does "maintain . . . that the criticism employed by a trained and skilled writer on his own work is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism."\textsuperscript{41} In illustrating why he believes this to be true, Eliot cites Baudelaire as a good example:

For such poets, we may expect often to get much help from reading their prose works and even notes and diaries; help in deciphering the discrepancies between head and heart, means and end, material and ideals.\textsuperscript{42}

And, as a further reason for looking to the artist as his own most competent critic, Eliot says that the criticism of the artist "will be criticism, and not the satisfaction of a suppressed creative wish--which, in most other persons, is apt to interfere fatally."\textsuperscript{43}

This does not mean that in this investigation other critics will not be relied upon. But because of the particular nature of this study, it will be considered advisable

\textsuperscript{40}Jones, \textit{Plays of Eliot}, p. x.
\textsuperscript{41}Eliot, \textit{Selected Essays}, p.18.
\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Ibid.}, P. 376.
to examine more closely those critics who are—at least
to some extent—theologically trained and who write from
an explicit theological frame of reference. Again, Eliot
himself has proposed the direction of this procedure:

Literary criticism should be completed by criti-
cism from a definite ethical and theological stand-
point. . . . In ages like our own in which there
is no such common agreement, it is more necessary
for Christian readers to scrutinize their reading,
especially works of imagination, with explicit
ethical and theological standards. The "greatness"
of literature cannot be determined solely by literary
standards.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
What I believe to be incumbent upon all Christians
is the duty of maintaining consciously certain
standards and criteria of criticism over and above
those applied by the rest of the world; and that by
these criteria and standards everything that we read
must be tested.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
We shall certainly continue to read the best . . .
of what our time provides, but we must tirelessly
criticize it according to our own principles, and
not merely according to the principles admitted by
the writers and by the critics who discuss it in
the public press.44

Also, other authors have pointed out the danger of attempt-
ing to understand Eliot—particularly Eliot—without some
knowledge of the profound depths of his presuppositions.

For instance, Amos Wilder, writing in his book The Spiritual
Aspects of the New Poetry, has said:

44Eliot, Selected Essays, pp. 343-344.
For a modern artist or thinker to remand himself to the Catholic tradition is not the stultification so many of Eliot's critics have supposed. It was an act of profound humility and grew out of a momentous experience of the charities of life as anyone can recognize in reading the *Hollow Men* and *Ash Wednesday*. Some of his critics have not yet perhaps toiled all night and taken nothing or launched out into the same deep, or they would be better oriented in his accents.  

Along these same lines, Edmund Fuller has written, in his *Man in Modern Fiction*:

> Everything relevant to a man's life is relevant to a man's work, and nothing more centrally so than fundamental beliefs about life and reality.

> A few seasons ago we saw the interesting phenomenon of a front-page review, in the *New York Times Book Review*, of T. S. Eliot's then complete poems and plays, which managed to attempt a survey of his entire body of work while taking no cognizance of the fact that Eliot is a Christian, making instead a mere passing reference to the church as if in recognition of a minor eccentricity in the man. Such phenomena as this . . . are the ultimate in insular complacency. When *The Cocktail Party* was produced and subsequently published in this country, it utterly bewildered a number of critics due to the simple circumstance that it is a Christian play, requiring recognition and awareness of the fact and its implications if the work is to be intelligently received.  

**Eliot's Plays in Summary Form**

For the purposes of this study, it is necessary that the reader be familiar with at least the broadest outlines


of Eliot's plays. Between the years 1935 and 1958, Eliot wrote five complete plays. Before that time, Eliot had experimented in the drama with dramatic "fragments," Sweeney Agonistes (1926), and with choruses for a pageant play entitled The Rock (1934). However, neither of these two works comprises a complete play and both are looked upon as Eliot's preliminary excursions into drama.

Murder in the Cathedral (1935) was Eliot's first complete play. Briefly, this play, liturgical in its style, concerns the temptation and martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Becket (1118-1170). The principal characters of the play are Thomas, Thomas's four tempters and four murderers, and a chorus which is used in the traditional way of interpreting the action for the audience. Although he was murdered as a political enemy of the King of England, Thomas considered his most dangerous enemies to be spiritual, rather than secular, in nature. This is to say that the primary dramatic conflict of this play concerns the forces of spiritual temptation, as they confront Thomas, rather than any outward conflict.

47Jones, Plays of Eliot, p. 27.
48Ibid., p. 38. 49Ibid. 50Ibid., p. 50.
Beginning with The Family Reunion (1939), Eliot's plays have remained contemporary in their settings. The protagonist of The Family Reunion is a young man named Harry who returns to his home, Wishwood, after an absence of eight years, during which time his wife has been killed. There is to be a birthday celebration for Harry's dowager mother, Amy. But Harry is being pursued by "the Eumenides," or "Furies," which are visible only to Mary, his mother's ward; Agatha, one of Harry's aunts; Downing, his servant and chauffeur; and to Harry himself. To the rest of the family—which consists of Ivy and Violet, aunts of Harry's; and Gerald and Charles, Harry's uncles—Harry's behavior is quite incomprehensible. Harry upbraids his family for their lack of understanding—they misunderstand him and they misunderstand themselves. But soon Harry begins to see the Eumenides in a different light: he sees them as objects to pursue rather than objects of terror, and he announces his decision to become a missionary. As Harry leaves Wishwood, only Agatha, Mary, and Downing seem to have any insight into the reasons for his decision.

Eliot's next play was The Cocktail Party (1949). This play has been described as:

51Ibid., p. 82.  
52Ibid., p. 123.
A verse drama of spiritual failure and redemption largely in terms of British comedy of manners (but with mystical touches). An essentially shallow couple [Edward and Lavinia] is brought back together by a "psychiatrist" [Reilly] by being faced with the truth about their shallowness, and a girl [Celia] with deeper capacity for love is directed into social service and eventual martyrdom.\(^\text{53}\)

It should be added to this account, however, that Reilly's coconspirators are Julia and Alex, and that Peter Quilpe is a young male admirer of Celia's. Also, the "social service" into which Celia finally is directed is "a very austere" order of nuns.\(^\text{54}\)

The Confidential Clerk (1953)\(^\text{55}\) has the most complex plot of all of Eliot's plays. The principal character is Colby, who is replacing Eggerson as Sir Claude Mulhammer's "confidential clerk." Colby and Sir Claude share several secrets: both believe that Colby is Sir Claude's illegitimate son; both are disappointed in their vocations—Sir Claude would rather be a potter, and Colby would rather be a concert organist. Lady Elizabeth is rather disappointed too, as she lost her only child—or rather "mislaid" it—during a previous marriage. Colby soon meets Lucasta Angel


\(^{54}\)Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 380.

who confides to Colby that she is actually Sir Claude's illegitimate daughter. Also at this time, Lady Elizabeth begins to believe, for various reasons, that Colby is actually her lost son. However, when Sir Claude informs Lady Elizabeth that Colby is actually his son, Lady Elizabeth insists that Colby belongs to her. In order to settle the dispute, Colby's "aunt," Mrs. Guzzard, is called in. Mrs. Guzzard reveals, first of all, that Barnabas Kaghan, Lucasta's fiancé, is Lady Elizabeth's son, and, secondly, that Colby is actually her son, but that now he will be free and will be responsible to neither her nor Sir Claude. Colby also learns that his real father, now dead, "was an unsuccessful organist." Colby decides he "must follow [his] father." At this point, Eggerson offers Colby a job as the organist in the small country church to which Eggerson belongs. Colby accepts the job, and thus the play ends.

The Elder Statesman (1958)\(^5\) is Eliot's latest play. In this play Lord Claverton-Ferry, the "elder statesman," has recently retired from an active and prominent life in British government. Most of the action of the play takes

place at "Badgley Court," a rest home to which Lord Claverton has come, accompanied by his daughter, Monica. At this time, Federico Gomez, a prosperous businessman from Central America, calls on Lord Claverton. Claverton is embarrassed to see Gomez because he remembers Gomez as Fred Culverwell, formerly a fellow student at Oxford. Although Claverton had always been far above Culverwell in financial and social status when the two men were at Oxford, Culverwell was with Claverton when Claverton was responsible for a hit-and-run accident. As a result of the accident, Claverton had given Culverwell money, and had sent him to Central America; and now, after thirty-five years, Culverwell has returned. Meanwhile, Claverton's son, Michael, whose life has become completely frustrated as a result of being the son of a famous man, meets Culverwell and decides to go with him when Culverwell returns to Central America. There Michael hopes to begin his life anew with a clean break from the past. As the play ends, there is a new realization of happiness for Monica and her fiancé, Charles, as well as for Lord Claverton.
Method of Thesis Organization

For the purposes of this investigation Eliot's plays will not be considered in chronological order of composition. Such chronological ordering would involve a great amount of repetition since--doctrinally speaking--Eliot is largely concerned with the same themes in each play. Instead, the plays will be examined through the use of theological categories suggested by Eliot himself. For if Eliot has remained true to himself when he said "that the consummation of the drama, the perfect and ideal drama, is to be found in the ceremony of the Mass," and "that drama . . . cannot afford to depart far from religious liturgy," then the broad doctrinal categories and order of movement suggested by the "Sacrament of our Redemption" will be useful tools for the organization of this study. This structure, then, will follow the general progression of sin, judgment of sin, and redemption, as this is the basic order and movement of the Mass--"a small drama."

57 Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 35.
59 Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 35.
CHAPTER II

ORIGINAL SIN

The point of origin for this study will be Eliot's doctrine of Original Sin. Or, to use Scott's phrase, this study will begin "at the beginning," or from Eliot's "vantage point"--

... that vantage point being a profound understanding of the Church's doctrine of Original Sin. ... That is to say, Eliot simply began at the beginning, where the decay of faith had left [modern men]; and our "estrangement" became for him, basically, not from Society or even from ourselves, but from God.¹

Officially Eliot subscribes to the doctrine of Original Sin as it is set down in the "Articles of Religion" of the Book of Common Prayer of his Church:

IX Of Original or Birth-Sin.
Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary

to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world it deserveth God's wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh . . . (which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh,) is not subject to the law of God.  

There is a very real sense in which the following statement, made by Eliot in *After Strange Gods*, applies to everything he has written: "I doubt whether what I am saying can convey very much to anyone for whom the doctrine of Original Sin is not a very real and tremendous thing."  

This application appears, for instance, in Eliot's view of this doctrine as essential for his work as an artist—a view evidenced by the following statement:

I . . . suggest that with the disappearance of the idea of Original Sin, with the disappearance of the idea of intense moral struggle, the human beings presented to us both in poetry and in prose fiction today, and more patently among the serious writers than in the underworld of letters, tend to become less and less real. It is in fact in moments of moral and spiritual struggle depending upon spiritual sanctions, rather than in those "bewildering minutes" in which we are all very much alike, that men and women come nearest to being real. If you do away with this struggle, and maintain that by tolerance, benevolence, inoffensiveness and a redistribution

---


or increase of purchasing power, combined with a devotion, on the part of an elite, to art, the world will be as good as anyone could require, then you must expect human beings to become more and more vaporous.\(^4\)

The Universal Nature of Original Sin

In relation to this doctrine, Eliot would make it perfectly clear that it means what it says: it applies to "man"—"every man"—"every person." Nowhere is it easier to see this emphasis in Eliot than in his irritation with certain persons who would attempt to identify this rather pessimistic judgment of man with a passing moment in history, or who would classify it as being a peculiar characteristic of a particular generation. For Eliot the doctrine of Original Sin involves an universal theme: it applies to every man of every generation:

I dislike the word "generation," which has been a talisman for the last ten years; when I wrote a poem called The Waste Land some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the "disillusionment of a generation," which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.\(^5\)

\(^4\)Ibid., pp. 45-46.

Scott has seen this incongruity between the "disillusionment of a generation" and Original Sin when, in speaking of The Waste Land, he has said:

Indeed, it was not, as has so often been said, "the poem of this generation" but the poem about this generation, composed from a vantage point which they could not understand, that vantage point being a profound understanding of the Church's doctrine of Original Sin.⁶

But the keenest dramatic expression of this point of Eliot's is found in The Family Reunion in a speech by Mary, in which she intimates that if there is any serious problem with the "younger generation," it belongs to the universal—rather than to the particular:

IVY: The younger generation Are undoubtedly decadent.
CHARLES: The younger generation Are not what we were. Haven't the stamina, Haven't the sense of responsibility.

GERALD: Let the younger generation speak for itself: It's Mary's generation. What does she think about it?
MARY: Really, Cousin Gerald, if you want information About the younger generation, you must ask someone else.
I'm afraid I don't deserve the compliment; I don't belong to any generation.⁷

⁶Scott, Rehearsals of Discomposure, p. 222.
Eliot expressed the same sentiment when he said: "It ought to be obvious that the youth of today are not 'as a whole' more or less anything than the youth of previous generations."\(^8\) Or, as he has put it even more bluntly: "I do not mean that our times are particularly corrupt; all times are corrupt."\(^9\) "All times are corrupt"—the manifestation of this corruption may change, but it remains the same corruption. For instance, Lord Claverton, in *The Confidential Clerk*, confides to Eggerson about his son, Colby: "He's like me, Eggerson. The same disappointment / In a different form."\(^10\) And, as Becket expresses this insight in *Murder in the Cathedral*:

> We do not know very much of the future
> Except that from generation to generation
> The same things happen again and again.
> Men learn little from others' experience.\(^11\)

And thus "all times are corrupt." But this means, also, as the Prayer Book's article on Original Sin has pointed out, that all individuals are corrupt. Eliot

---


\(^9\)Tbid., p. 342.

\(^10\)T. S. Eliot, *The Confidential Clerk* (New York, 1954),

expresses this corruption of the individual in a number
of ways in his plays—perhaps the most frequent way being
through the image of bondage. For instance, in The Family
Reunion, Eliot has the Chorus say:

We all of us make the pretension
To be the uncommon exception
To the universal bondage.\textsuperscript{12}

Or, as Edward, in The Cocktail Party, suddenly realizes
about everyone, "If there is a trap, we are all in the
trap, / We have all set it for ourselves."\textsuperscript{13} And it
should be made clear that Eliot identifies this "trap,"
as it is used in this context, with the "this world" of
the "Article of Religion" on "Original Sin." For, as the
Article has expressed this thought in another way, it is
"this infection of nature [that] doth remain." In other
words, not only is every man in every generation of men
doomed to "this infection," but "this world," or "nature,"
in which men live is thoroughly infected also. And so
the Chorus can say, in Murder in the Cathedral:

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.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12}T. S. Eliot, The Family Reunion (New York, 1939),
p. 43.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 214.
And it is this same view of the world which the Chorus has alluded to earlier in the play when they spoke of "A doom on the house, a doom on yourself, a doom on the world." 15

Eliot's doctrine of Original Sin also differentiates between sin and sins. That is, for Eliot sin is never to be defined moralistically; it is not to be equated with any immoral acts or deeds, or it is not to be measured by any moral scale of values or system of law. This view of sin of Eliot's is dramatized in The Cocktail Party in a conversation between Celia and Reilly, who is ostensibly a psychiatrist—a conversation in which Celia explains that she suffers from a "sense of sin":

REILLY: Tell me what you mean by a sense of sin.
CEelia: It's much easier to tell you what I don't mean:
I don't mean sin in the ordinary sense.
REILLY: And what, in your opinion, is the ordinary sense?
CEelia: Well . . . I suppose it's being immoral—And I don't feel as if I was immoral:
In fact, aren't the people one thinks of as immoral
Just the people who we say have no moral sense?
I've never noticed that immorality
Was accompanied by a sense of sin:
At least, I have never come across it.

It's not the feeling of anything I've ever done, 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... atone—is that the word? Can you treat a patient for such a state of mind?  

The word "state," which is used in the last line of the preceding quotation, is a key word to understanding Eliot's doctrine of Original Sin. Sin is a "state" in Eliot's theology, as is the inevitable damnation which proceeds from sin. This means that sin is much deeper than the ethical concept of deeds which have been done; it is, rather, an ontological concept, a "state of being," or—to put it more precisely—who man is. This is why Eliot has called his most recent play, published in 1959 when Eliot was seventy-one, The Elder Statesman. Eliot is, of course, dealing here with the particular problems of his own older age. For, as he wrote in 1940, "maturing as a poet means maturing as the whole man, experiencing new emotions appropriate to one's age, and with the same intensity as the emotions of youth."  

But more important relative to The Elder Statesman is that the plot of this play concerns an elderly man who suddenly realizes he is in the same, 

---

16 Ibid., p. 361.

miserable "state" as always, and the revelation which this shock brings. Or, as Eliot has said regarding some of Yeat's poetry concerning old age:

... the old, unless they are stirred to something of the honesty with oneself expressed in the poetry, will be shocked by such a revelation of what a man really is and remains. They will refuse to believe that they are like that. 18

And, relative to the "state" of damnation which proceeds from this state of sin, Eliot has said in his essay on Dante:

... the Inferno is relieved from any question of pettiness or arbitrariness in Dante's selection of the damned. It reminds us that Hell is not a place but a state. 19

There is, therefore, no "pettiness" about sin as Eliot conceives of it. It is "not by what [men] do / But, by what they are" 20 that the state in which they live--and die--is determined.

These observations also imply that there is a real sense in which men are not guilty for this state of sinfulness in which they find themselves, as it is present from their birth. (And thus the Book of Common Prayer

18 Ibid., p. 302.
19 Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 211.
20 Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 196.
refers to Original Sin as "Birth-Sin.") Hamlet gives admirable expression to this idea that men often are not responsible for the reasons for their failures--

As in their birth--wherein they are not guilty, Since nature cannot choose his origin. . . . 21

And yet the paradox remains: they are not guilty, and yet they are sinful. Franz Kafka, an existentialist profoundly influenced by Kierkegaard, 22 puts it this way:

"The state in which we find ourselves is sinful, quite independent of guilt." 23 This same idea is present in many places in Eliot's plays. For instance, in The Elder Statesman, Michael speaks of an original remembrance in which

The first thing I remember
Is being blamed for something I hadn't done.
I never got over that. 24

This paradoxical character of sin without guilt evidently has been the cause of Grover Wilson's failure to understand


the sense in which Harry, in The Family Reunion, is guilty.

Wilson says, in his book T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays:

The denial of Eden to Harry has been caused by something prior to his own acts. . . . In Harry's case there is obviously no guilt for his father's sin: his father was not Adam. . . . But Harry is not guilty of his own sin, because it was determined by his father's. Harry is innocent. The play, as it issued from Eliot's hands, curiously asks the audience to sentimentalize Harry's own crime, for which he is not repentant, and to approve of Harry's expiating the curse in order to atone for his father's crime, for which he is not to blame. 25

But there is this sense in which, for Eliot, Harry's father was Adam and man is responsible for "the sins of the fathers." For although man's sin is inherited, which places the guilt elsewhere, it is, none the less, his sin, as he is held responsible for the expiation of this sin—his own sin and the sin of others as well. For Original Sin "is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam." Therefore, Original Sin for Eliot is not only to be thought of as the spiritual curse which befalls everyone who is born into the family of man, but it also can be seen in the narrower biological sense in which one

member of a family can become the source of redemption—or spiritual reunion—for that entire family. And hence all of the families in Eliot's plays can be seen in this light. For example, Agatha tells Harry, in *The Family Reunion*:

> What we have written is not a story of detection
> Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.
> ..................................................
> It is possible
> You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,
> Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.
> Indeed it is possible.26

Also, in *The Elder Statesman*, the young Michael comes to understand all of his difficulties as originating from his family. He tells his father, Lord Claverton: "It's being your son that gets me into debt. / Just because of your name they insist on giving credit."27 And so Michael decides to alleviate his situation by severing all family ties, by completely starting life anew:

*LORD CLAVERTON:* So you are ready to repudiate your family,

To throw away the whole of your inheritance?

*MICHAEL:* What is my inheritance?28


28 *Tbid.*, p. 84.
And in the act of casting off his inheritance, Michael not only achieves his own redemption, but he becomes the force of spiritual reunion for his entire family. For instance, Lord Claverton says of him:

And Michael
I love him, even for rejecting me,
For the me he rejected, I reject also.
I've been freed from the self that pretends to be someone;
And in becoming no one, I begin to live.29

In The Confidential Clerk, Lady Elizabeth unwittingly expresses, very adequately, the Christian doctrine of the inherited guilt of man, who is, nevertheless, created in the image of God:

To be able to think that one's earthly parents
Are only the means that we have to employ
To become reincarnate. And that one's real ancestry
Is one's previous existences. Of course, there's something in us,
In all of us, which isn't just heredity,
But something unique. Something we have been
From eternity. Something . . . straight from God.
That means that we are nearer to God than to anyone.30

Also in regard to Eliot's doctrine of Original Sin, it is important to remember that this Sin is man's point of origin; it is the condition in which every man comes into the world. As such, sin is the very foundation upon

29Ibid., p. 129.

30Eliot, Confidential Clerk, p. 87.
which unredeemed man builds his life; or, to use Harry's phrase in The Family Reunion, sin is man's "point of departure."31 In The Family Reunion, Agatha, acting as a Chorus, says, "A curse comes to being / As a child is formed."32 "... and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation," echos The Book of Common Prayer. This "Birth-Sin" is why Sir Claude, in The Confidential Clerk, remarks with the obvious tone of a double entendre: "With a young man, some readjustment is necessary."33 Any and every action done by a man subsequent to his birth and previous to his redemption is sinful as it is built upon the foundation of sin. Kierkegaard, writing in The Sickness Unto Death, puts it this way:

The state of being in sin is a worse sin than the particular sins, it is the sin emphatically, and thus understood it is true that the state of remaining in sin is the continuation of sin, is a new sin. Generally one understands this differently, one understands that the one sin gives birth to new sin. But this has a far deeper ground for the fact that the state of being in sin is new sin. Psychologically it is a masterly stroke of Shakespeare to

32 Ibid., p. 106.
33 Eliot, Confidential Clerk, p. 10.
let MacBeth say (Act iii, Scene 2), "things bad begun make strong themselves by ill."\textsuperscript{34}

Lord Claverton, the "elder statesman," follows Kierkegaard's view of Original Sin as the foundations for subsequent sins--rather than Original Sin being merely the first cause in a chain reaction--when he says:

\begin{quote}
I see now clearly
The many mistakes I have made
My whole life through, mistake upon mistake,
The mistaken attempts to correct mistakes
By methods which proved to be equally mistaken.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Thus understanding sin as the foundation upon which one builds, Claverton also says:

\begin{quote}
And the longer we pretend
The harder it becomes to drop the pretence,
Walk off the stage, change into our own clothes
And speak as ourselves.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

Sins, therefore, do not make one more sinful. Or, as Gomez puts it while in conversation with Claverton: "How can one corrupt those who are already corrupted?"\textsuperscript{37} All that follows the original sin is of sin. And so Mrs. Carghill, also in \textit{The Elder Statesman}, can say:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{35}Eliot, \textit{Elder Statesman}, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 102.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 31.
\end{flushright}
People sometimes say: "Make one mistake in love, you're more than likely to make another." How true that is!  

The Depth of Original Sin

All of the preceding quotations, illustrating how Original Sin is assumed by Eliot to be the foundation upon which all of man's life is originally built, also point to the aspect of the depth of this sin. For Eliot, even the so-called "inner voice" of man is no more than an expression of a far deeper state of sin. For, as he has said in his essay "The Function of Criticism":

The possessors of the inner voice ride ten in a compartment to a football match at Swansen, listening to the inner voice, which breathes the eternal message of vanity, fear, and lust.  

Indeed, Eliot refers to himself as an "Inner Deaf Mute" because he sees sin as that vacuum inside man which constantly seeks "after strange gods" for fulfillment—gods which can never plummet to this depth. Only the Christian Faith is capable of successfully reaching—and satisfying—the depth of the hollowness of men. This is why Eliot has written that

38 Ibid., p. 64.  
39 Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 16.  
40 Ibid., p. 18.
it is easier to agree with a man who differs from you in blood but less in faith, than to agree with one who is of your own blood but has different ideas. . . .41

And thus, as Eliot has said:

The division between those who accept, and those who deny, Christian revelation I take to be the most profound division between human beings. It does not merely go deeper than divisions of class or race; it is different in kind, and cannot be measured by the same scale.42

"A curse is a power / Not subject to reason,"43 says Eliot in The Family Reunion, following the Book of Common Prayer's description of sin as a "curse."44 And he means by this statement that sin is certainly deeper than reason. Also, Eliot adds in the same play:

It goes a good deal deeper
Than what people call their conscience; it is just the cancer
That eats away the self.

The contamination has reached the marrow. . . .45

41Ibid., p. 335.


43Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 130.


Unconsciousness of Sin

Relative to the depth of man's sin, Eliot has been profoundly influenced by the existentialists, who have emphasized that Original Sin is so deeply rooted in man that man is initially unconscious of its existence and of its concomitant of despair, or "dread." Actually, this insight had existed long before the advent of existentialism, and it was to be found in the Bible as well as in subsequent Christian theology; but existentialism was the first philosophical school to take seriously the depth of man's subjectivity and to use this subjectivity as a basis for its system of thought.46 But the presupposition behind the entire existentialist movement has been the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. "Dread as the presupposition of original sin and as explaining it retrogressively by going back to its origin"47 is the opening chapter heading in Kierkegaard's The Concept of Dread, first published in 1834. And it has been, since that time a major contribution of the existentialists to aid in recovering insight into the depth of this sin; and thus they have actually


probed into the deepest depths of the unconscious. For instance, in writing about unconscious despair, Kierkegaard has said:

This form of despair (i.e., unconsciousness of it) is the commonest in the world, or, to define it more exactly, what Christianity calls "the world," i.e. paganism, and the natural man in Christendom. Paganism as it historically was and is, and paganism within Christendom, is precisely this sort of despair; it is despair but does not know it. It is true that a distinction is also made in paganism, as well as by the natural man, between being in despair and not being in despair; that is to say, people talk of despair as if only certain particular individuals were in despair. But this distinction is just as deceitful as that which paganism and the natural man make between sexual love and self-love, as though this love were not essentially self-love.48

It is with this type of insight that some of Eliot's irony can be best understood, as when, for example, he has Monica, in The Elder Statesman, say of her father:

"Father is much iller than he is aware of."49 For, indeed, later in the play it is revealed that Monica's father also is "much iller" than she has been aware of—as his illness is revealed, finally, to be a spiritual illness.50 However, there is acute awareness of the unconsciousness of

48 Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, pp. 70-71.
50 Ibid., p. 21.
sin on the part of other characters in Eliot's plays.

For instance, Amy, in The Family Reunion, tells her family 
that "You none of you understand how old you are," re-
ferring, evidently, to sin's ancient origin in the tradi-
tional original sin (i.e., that of the Garden of Eden).

And Harry, in The Family Reunion, says to the same group
of people:

You are all people
To whom nothing has happened, at most a continual
impact
Of external events. You have gone through life asleep,
Never waken to the nightmare. I tell you, life would
be unendurable
If you were wide awake. . . . 51

And when Harry learns that his brother John has just re-
ceived a concussion in an automobile accident, Harry
replies:

A minor trouble like a concussion
Cannot make very much difference to John.
A brief vacation from the kind of consciousness
That John enjoys, can't make very much difference
To him or to anyone else. If he was ever really
conscious,
I should be glad for him to have a breathing spell:
But John's ordinary day isn't much more than breath-
ing.52

And so, as Heinecken has said, despair

52 Ibid., p. 84.
... is the normal condition of all men, for according to Kierkegaard, all men, even those who seem to be quite well adjusted are in despair. The fact that a man is not aware of the hidden cancer, and the fact that this is not obvious on the surface, is no guarantee that a man is well. 53

But for Eliot, as well as for Kierkegaard, man's despair will occasionally rise from its depths into the realm of the conscious to plague even the most secure individuals with a gnawing fear of the unknown. Kierkegaard puts it this way:

Unconsciousness of despair is like unconsciousness of dread . . . the dread characteristic of spiritlessness is recognizable precisely by the spiritless sense of security; but nevertheless dread is at the bottom of it, and when the enchantment of illusion is broken, when existence begins to totter, then too does despair manifest itself as that which is at bottom. 54

In The Family Reunion Eliot anticipates the central dramatic theme of The Elder Statesman when he has Charles, one of the older members of the family, say:

It's very odd,
But I am beginning to feel, just beginning to feel
That there is something I could understand, if I were told it.
But I'm not sure that I want to know. I suppose I'm getting old:
Old age came softly up to now. I felt safe enough;
And now I don't feel safe. As though the earth should open

54 Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, pp. 68-69.
Right to the centre, as I was about to cross Pall Mall. 55

This experience of unconscious despair—or sin—entering into consciousness is also described in The Family Reunion as Agatha says:

It is possible that sin may strain and struggle
In its dark instinctive birth, to come to consciousness
And so find expurgation... 56

Perhaps one of the best means of understanding the depth in man to which Original Sin reaches, as this depth is understood by Eliot, is through an examination of that "Article of Religion" which immediately follows the article on Original Sin in The Book of Common Prayer—as well as following that article in its theological implications. This is the article on freedom of the will, which makes quite clear that, as a result of Original Sin, not only is there an infinite distinction between man's faith and man's "good works," but that the will of man is "infected" also.

X Of Free-Will
The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good

55Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 123.
56Ibid., p. 101.
works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will. 57

This means, then, that no matter how good "good works" may appear in man's eyes, they issue from despair, or from a perverted will, unless they issue from faith. For it is possible to "do the right deed for the wrong reason," as Becket observes in Murder in the Cathedral. And thus, he continues, "Sin grows with doing good." 58 It was the Christian existentialists who recaptured for theology the Reformation idea of the "infinite qualitative distinction" between faith and good works and the idea of the bondage of the human will. 59 Kierkegaard sharpened these ideas for theology by saying:

Every human existence which is not conscious of itself as spirit, or conscious of itself before God as spirit . . . every such existence, whatever it accomplishes, though it be the most amazing exploit, whatever it explains, though it were the whole of existence, however intensely it enjoys life aesthetically--every such existence is after all despair. It was this the old theologians meant when they talked about the virtues of the pagans being splendid vices. 60

58 Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 196.
60 Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, p. 72.
And Barth has followed closely Kierkegaard's distinction between "Christianity" and "Christendom":

Contradictions within the deified world--Nature and Civilization, Materialism and Idealism, Capitalism and Socialism, Secularism and Ecclesiasticism, Imperialism and Democracy--are not so serious as they give themselves out to be. Such contradictions are contradictions within the world, and there is for them no paradox, no negation, no eternity. 61

Eliot agrees with these ideas; and this is why, in his plays, he frequently exhibits an almost cynical attitude towards human will and achievement. For example, Harry, in The Family Reunion, relates the following speech to "all men," or to "the world":

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. 62

In the same play, Agatha says:

Thus with most careful devotion Thus with precise attention To detail, interfering preparation Of that which is already prepared Men tighten the knot of confusion Into perfect misunderstanding . . . 63


63Ibid., p. 21.
Also in The Family Reunion as Amy prepares for Harry's return home after his absence of eight years, she demands of the rest of the family:

Please behave only
As if nothing had happened in the last eight years.
GERALD: That will be a little difficult.
VIOLET: Nonsense, Gerald!
You must see for yourself it's the only thing to do.\(^{64}\)

In The Cocktail Party there is a conversation between Edward and an "Unidentified Guest" (Reilly) which illustrates the futility of all "changes of mind" after the deeper "decision" between faith and unbelief has been made:

UNIDENTIFIED GUEST: I have come to remind you—you have made a decision.
EDWARD: Are you thinking that I may have changed my mind?
UNIDENTIFIED GUEST: No. You will not be ready to change your mind
Until you recover from having made a decision.
No. I have come to tell you that you will change your mind,
But that it will not matter. It will be too late.
EDWARD: I have half a mind to change my mind now
To show you that I am free to change it.
UNIDENTIFIED GUEST: You will change your mind, but you are not free.
Your moment of freedom was yesterday.\(^{65}\)

\(^{64}\)Ibid.

\(^{65}\)Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 329.
Idolatry: The Manifestation of Original Sin

For Eliot the outward manifestation of this extremely deep sinfulness in man is man's seeking—to use a phrase which Eliot has borrowed from the Old Testament—"after strange gods." Here again he follows the emphasis of Christian existentialists who see even the religions of man as an attempted substitute for Christianity. Man worships not only the false gods of culture, as Eliot points out in *After Strange Gods* ("... economic determinism is today a God before whom we fall down and worship with all kinds of music"), but man also seeks after false religious gods ("... man's vision is spiritual, but spiritually sick"). Eliot's most vivid dramatization of this view occurs in *The Confidential Clerk* when Sir Claude confides to Colby that he, Sir Claude, is addicted to a secret diversion—the diversion of making pottery:

> But when I am alone, and look at one thing long enough,
> I sometimes have that sense of identification
> With the maker of which I spoke—an agonising ecstasy
> Which makes life bearable. It's all I have.

---


69 Ibid., p. 65.
I suppose it takes the place of religion:
Just as my wife's investigations
Into what she calls the life of the spirit
Are a kind of substitute religion.
I dare say truly religious people--
I've never known any--can find some unity.70

Eliot believes there can be no substitute for Christianity
for either the individual or for civilization. Furthermore, any attempted substitute for Christianity can only
serve to hide the inward sickness which necessarily results
from the absence of the Christian faith. In his essay
"Arnold and Pater," Eliot illuminates this point, as well
as the preceding quotation, by saying:

The dissolution of thought in that age, the isolation
of art, philosophy, religion, ethics and literature,
is interrupted by various chimerical attempts to ef-
fect imperfect syntheses. Religion became morals,
religion became art, religion became science or philos-
ophy; various blundering attempts were made at alli-
ances between various branches of thought. Each half
prophet believed that he had the whole truth ... 
Marius is significant chiefly as a reminder that the
religion of Carlyle or that of Ruskin or that of
Arnold is not enough. It represents, and Pater repre-
sents more positively than Coleridge of whom he wrote
the words, "that inexhaustible discontent, languor,
and homesickness ... the chords of which ring all
through our modern literature."71

70Eliot, Confidential Clerk, p. 50.
71Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 393.
CHAPTER III

GOD'S WRATH AND DAMNATION

It is in his view of "God's wrath and damnation" that Eliot probably most closely parallels the thought of the Christian existentialists Barth and Kierkegaard. For one of the major insights of existentialism has been in the recovery of the sense in which Hell is not thought of as a place far removed into the future, but is, rather, thought of as an eternally present, as well as an eternally deep, reality—or, as Eliot has put it, of the sense in which "Hell is not a place but a state; that man is damned or blessed in the creatures of his imagination as well as in men who have actually lived."  

The Death of Strange Gods

Hell is understood by the existentialists and by Eliot as being that experience which occurs to man when man is completely failed by all false gods. This is the experience within a man's life which "knocks the bottom

---

out of it,"² and the yawning abyss below is found also to be bottomless. It is the experience of "the hero who has reached that point of horror at which even pride is abandoned."³ To express this experience in terms of consciousness, it is the occasion on which unconscious despair becomes "conscious of being despair."⁴ Or, in terms of the Book of Common Prayer, this is the occasion on which the "natural man" comes face to face with "God's wrath and damnation." Natural men "deserveth" this fate because of their own nature:

In hell, the torment issues from the very nature of the damned themselves, expresses their essence; they writhe in the torment of their own perpetually perverted nature.⁵

Thus the essence of the natural man is a wrong attitude towards nature. That is, the natural man worships nature—whether it is nature in a broad, general sense


³Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 113.


⁵Eliot, Selected Essays, pp. 216-217.
(i.e., the "man of the world"), or whether it is a particular part of nature (i.e., "strange gods").

I mean only that a wrong attitude towards nature implies, somewhere, a wrong attitude towards God, and that the consequence is an inevitable doom. 6

Or, as Karl Barth has put it:

Unbroken naturalness is not pure. Nor are matters improved when "naturalness" is penetrated by piety. In "naturalness" there is always secreted that which is non-natural, and, indeed, that which actually contradicts nature. This contradictory factor awaits the hour when it will break forth... by allowing nature to run its course freely and uncontradicted, God and the world have become confused with one another... 7

It is this concept of Eliot's of "inevitable doom," or Barth's concept of the "hour of breaking forth," which is now to be considered. For this doom, as conceived by Eliot and by the Christian existentialists, is the dreadful revelation of the "unreality of the actual":

The spirit for Mr. Eliot is not "self-delighting, self-appeasing, self-affrighting." It is not so easy to "drive all hatred hence." The difference between Heaven's will and the soul's own sweet will—but Mr. Eliot would put the pair the other way round—is not a gap which is really an illusion: it is a gulf the crossing of which may take a lifetime's pilgrimage, "costing not less than everything." Thus Mr. Eliot's great gift is a gift chastened, as it


were, by at first an awful sense (like Sartre's nausea and Kierkegaard's dread) of the unreality of the actual. . . .8

The theme of the death, or of the dying, of the "strange gods" is to be found throughout Eliot's plays. For instance, in The Family Reunion the Chorus expresses the dawning fear of some "dreadful disclosure" from the "cellar":

Why do we all behave as if the door might suddenly open, the curtains be drawn,  
The cellar make some dreadful disclosure, the roof disappear,  
And we should cease to be sure of what is real or unreal?  
Hold tight, hold tight, we must insist that the world is what we have always taken it to be.9

This type of unnamable fear is the experience of existential dread which Kierkegaard anatomized in The Sickness Unto Death. This experience has been characterized by the existentialists as being totally other than fear as fear is commonly thought of. Fear, say the existentialists, is to be characterized by having an object of fear, some thing of which one is afraid. On the other hand, existential anxiety is precisely the opposite: it is the

---

confrontation of mere shadows, the unknown, non-being, or—literally—nothing, which causes the overcoming of it to be so impossible.\textsuperscript{10} Kierkegaard writes:

One almost never sees the concept of dread dealt with in psychology, and I must therefore call attention to the fact that it is different from fear and similar concepts which refer to something definite, whereas dread is the reality of freedom as possibility anterior to possibility.\textsuperscript{11}

This experience of dread, as an example, is the experience of Harry, in The Family Reunion:

Now I see
I have been wounded in a war of phantoms,
Not by human beings—they have no more power than I.
The things I thought were real are shadows, and the real
Are what I thought were private shadows. O that awful privacy
Of the insane mind!\textsuperscript{12}

This is also the experience of profound disillusion or disappointment, like that found in The Confidential Clerk, which comes from the worship of—or obedience to—"facts."

Sir Claude speaks:

I am a disappointed craftsman,
And Colby is a disappointed composer.
I should have been a second rate potter,
And he should have been a second-rate organist.
We have both chosen . . . obedience to the facts.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12}Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 103.
The "inevitable doom," then, is the breaking forth of that hidden wretchedness which has its origin in sin. Or as Harry says, in *The Family Reunion*:

> Here I have been finding
> A misery long forgotten, and a new torture,
> The shadow of something behind our meagre childhood,
> Some origin of wretchedness.\(^{14}\)

Amos Wilder says of the preceding quotation that it "points to those deeper piers and ancient buttresses of inherited evil in the family and in society which first acts as a bane upon childhood; the legacy of the sins of the fathers and the forefathers. Now this is not morbidity or a special case, but an attempt to be honest with the evil in the heart."\(^{15}\)

In *Murder in the Cathedral* Eliot describes "the torment [which] issues from the very nature of the damned" in this way:

> I have seen
> Rings of light coiling downwards, leading
> To the horror of the ape. Have I not known, not known
> What was coming to be?


What is woven on the loom of fate
What is woven in the councils of princes
Is woven also in our veins, our brains,
Is woven like a pattern of living worms
In the guts of the women of Canterbury.\textsuperscript{16}

And always for Eliot this horror of "nothingness" is a
direct result of man's Original (and sustaining) Sin:
his deep and doggedly stubborn pursuit "after strange
gods."

And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say,
Wherefore doeth the Lord our God all these things
unto us? Then shalt thou answer them, like as ye
have forsaken me, and served strange gods in your
land.

This evil people, which refuse to hear my words,
which walk in the imagination of their heart, and
walk after other gods, to serve them, and to wor-
ship them, shall be . . . good for nothing.\textsuperscript{17}

Since for the existentialists the self is that center
of subjectivity which can be defined by the object to
which it relates itself most passionately,\textsuperscript{18} the self can
be said to be "dead" if the object of its worship is in-
capable of sustaining the self's life. Thus, in The Family

\textsuperscript{16}Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 208.

\textsuperscript{17}Jer. 5:19, 13:10. Neville Braybrooke, in his "Intro-
duction," T. S. Eliot: A Symposium, p. 21, points out that
"Mr. Eliot's style has been very much influenced by the
Bible, especially the Authorized Version--and it might be
added not only his style, but his entire manner of thinking."
All Biblical references in this study are to the Authorized
(King James) Version.

\textsuperscript{18}Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, p. 18.
Reunion, Mary desperately observes: "But I deceived my-
self. It takes so many years / To learn that one is dead!" 19
This is also why Lord Claverton, the "successful failure"
of The Elder Statesman, can refer to his "self" as a
"ghost":

They won't want my ghost
Walking in the City or sitting in the Lords.
And I, who recognise myself as a ghost,
Shan't want to be seen there. It makes me smile
To think that men should be frightened of ghosts.
If they only knew how frightened a ghost can be of
men! 20

This explains, then, how Eliot often uses the term "death"
in a spiritual sense, as does—for instance—Kierkegaard
in The Sickness Unto Death. The release from the self of
its objects of devotion is indeed for Eliot a kind of
death. Or, as he has Monica say, in The Elder Statesman,
"Michael, Michael, you can't abandon your family / And
your very self—it's a kind of suicide." 21 This "death of
the spirit" and its relation to physical death are also
illustrated by a speech of Edward's in The Cocktail Party:

19 Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 118.

20 T. S. Eliot, The Elder Statesman (New York, 1959),

21 Ibid., p. 117.
I once experienced the extreme of physical pain,  
And now I know there is suffering worse than that.  
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?\textsuperscript{22}

The Depth of Hell

Thus it is possible to see that for Eliot the most  

distinguishing characteristic of God's wrath and damnation  
is its depth. This is because it is God's wrath and dam-
nation, and is not to be equated with any of the so-called  
"troubles of the world." Kierkegaard outlined this dis-
tinction in \textit{The Sickness Unto Death}, a work which alone  
has brought him to be considered as "one of the fathers of  
depth psychology".\textsuperscript{23}

So then in the Christian understanding of it not even  
death is the sickness unto death, still less every-
thing which is called earthly and temporal suffering:  
want, sickness, wretchedness, affliction, adversities,  
torments, mental sufferings, sorrow, grief. And even  
if such things are so painful and hard to bear that  
we men say, or at all events the sufferer says, "This  
is worse than death"--everything of the sort which,  
if it is not a sickness, is comparable to a sickness,  
is nevertheless, in the Christian understanding of it,  
not the sickness unto death.  
So it is that Christianity has taught the Chris-
tian to think dauntlessly of everything earthly and

\textsuperscript{22}Eliot, \textit{Poems and Plays}, p. 349.

\textsuperscript{23}Robert Bretall, editor, \textit{A Kierkegaard Anthology}  
worldly, including death. It is almost as though the Christian must be puffed up because of this proud elevation above everything men commonly call the greatest evil. But then in turn Christianity has discovered an evil which man as such does not know of; this misery is the sickness unto death. What the natural man considers horrible—when he has in this wise enumerated everything and knows nothing more he can mention, this for the Christian is like a jest. Such is the relation between the natural man and the Christian; it is like the relation between a child and a man: what the child shudders at, the man regards as nothing. The child does not know what the dreadful is; this the man knows and he shudders at it. The child's imperfection consists, first of all, in not knowing what the dreadful is; and then again, as an implication of this, in shuddering at that which is not dreadful. And so it is with the natural man, he is ignorant of what the dreadful truly is, yet he is not thereby exempted from shuddering; no, he shudders at that which is not the dreadful: he does not know the true God, but that is not the whole of it, he worships an idol as God.24

Between the sufferings of the natural man and the suffering that is the "sickness unto death," there is, again, as the existentialists are wont to express it, an "infinite qualitative distinction." Or, to use Eliot's words, this depth "is different in kind and cannot be measured by the same scale."25 Celia, in The Cocktail Party, expresses this distinction as she attempts to describe her suffering to Reilly:

I don't mean simply
That there's been a crash: though indeed there has
been,
It isn't simply the end of an illusion
In the ordinary way, or being ditched.
Of course that's something that's always happening
To all sorts of people, and they get over it
More or less, or at least they carry on.
No. I mean that what has happened has made me aware
That I've always been alone. 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 everybody. . . . 26

Eliot would point out, however, that this infinitely
deeper kind of suffering does not preclude the existence
of the more worldly types of suffering. Indeed, because
of the greater consciousness brought about by eternal
despair, all earthly suffering is sharpened. This point
is brought out as Reilly explains the circumstances of
the death of Celia, who was "crucified / Very near an ant-
hill": 27

EDWARD: Do you mean that having chosen this form of
death
She did not suffer as ordinary people suffer?
REILLY: Not at all what I mean. Rather the contrary.
I'd say that she suffered all that we should
suffer
In fear and pain and loathing--all these to-
gether--
And reluctance of the body to become a thing.

27Ibid., p. 381.
I'd say she suffered more, because more conscious
Than the rest of us. She paid the highest price
In suffering. That is part of the design.

LAVINIA: Perhaps she had been through greater agony
beforehand.
I mean—I know nothing of her last two years.
REILLY: That shows some insight on your part, Mrs.
Chamberlayne. ... 28

And it is this "greater agony" that the Chorus in Murder
in the Cathedral speaks of when they say:

Still the horror, but more horror
Than when tearing in the belly.

Still the horror, but more horror
Than when twisting in the fingers,
Than when splitting in the skull. 29

Thus it becomes evident that for Eliot God's wrath
and damnation is an infinitely deep and horrible anxiety
inside of man, the manifestation of which is precipitated
by the death of the old goel—or "gods"—of Original Sin.
But this is the type of conclusion which can lead to easy
dismissals, vague notions, and dangerous oversimplifications—
especially if the word "infinitely" is not taken seriously.
Indeed, Eliot himself has expressed a cautious attitude
towards any "neat and dangerous generalisation." 30 "God's
wrath and damnation," therefore, should bear further exam-
ination.

30Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 40.
Nonbeing and the irrational.—It has been said that the decisive characteristic of this damnation is its depth. But this dimension also needs to be spelled out more fully in order to understand Eliot’s use of the theme of damnation in his plays. For instance, for the existentialists, as well as for Eliot, the depth to which despair reaches is the depth of nonbeing.31 Men basically are "hollow men," hollow at the very core of their being. This anxiety, then, penetrating to the core of man's inmost self, is usually expressed by the existentialists in terms of "nothingness," "nonbeing," "emptiness," or "meaninglessness."32 In more theological terms, this is the vacuum in man's soul which is the capacity and basic desire for the God-relationship, but the vacuum which yet remains unfulfilled by that relationship. And the characteristic of this depth which gives it its peculiar quality of nothingness, is precisely its ability to cut through all sure bases of decision, action, or thought. All that was heretofore presupposed or taken for granted is now radically called into question. The problem becomes one of having

31 Tillich, Courage to Be, pp. 142-143.
32 Ibid., pp. 40-51.
no sure objective foundation from which to attempt to solve any of one's problems. This is why Kierkegaard could say that all worldly problems become "a jest" when compared to this problem which is "the sickness unto death."

This is "the shaking of the foundations" of which Paul Tillich has written. For everything is shaken and unsure: reason, ethics, morality, philosophy, conscience, the "inner light"—all are seriously called into question. This is also the basis for the quality of irrationality in existentialist literature, and is the basis also for this quality, which will now be examined, in Eliot's plays. The "shaking of the foundations" is the human experience in which the subject alone remains, now completely and horribly aware of itself, and surrounded only by "broken fragments of systems"—or objectivity. Up to this point there has been only an innate and hidden horror in objectivity, but in the experience of "the sickness unto death" this horror breaks through all objectivity in the form of the purely irrational. Or, as Eliot himself has said:

We move outside the Christian faith, between the terror of the purely irrational and the horror of the purely rational.\(^{34}\)

\(^{33}\)Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 118.

\(^{34}\)Eliot, Chapter I, "Revelation, p. 32."
This experience of emptiness, meaninglessness, and nothingness is a major theme running throughout all of Eliot's plays. Starting with *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot's first play, Eliot again would have us realize that fears which can be objectified are not to be equated with this "great fear" which shatters all understanding. The Chorus speaks:

We have all had our private terrors,  
Our particular shadows, our secret fears.  
But now a great fear is upon us, a fear not of one but of many,  
A fear like birth and death, when we see birth and death alone  
In a void apart. We  
Are afraid in a fear which we cannot know, which we cannot face, which none understands,  
And our hearts are torn from us, our brains unskinned like the layers of an onion, our selves are lost  
In a final fear which none understands.  

This is the same experience which was just beginning to dawn on Charles, in *The Family Reunion*, when he said he felt "as if the earth should open / Right to the centre, as I was about to cross Pall Mall."  

In his book on Kierkegaard, Heinecken pinpoints this sensation of Charles's,

---


as Charles was, indeed, a man for whom there were few outward difficulties in life:

A man does not actually have to lose everything and to undergo every possible misfortune so long as he does so in his imagination, recognizing that he has nothing which he has not received and which, therefore, could not be taken from him at any moment. He does actually find himself, as Kierkegaard says, suspended over the seventy thousand fathoms, over the abyss of nothingness. He does not rest on his own feet. Not only the rug, but the very bottom itself has been pulled out from under him. He, therefore, does not have any security anywhere, he knows only the anguish of absolute insecurity.37

In The Elder Statesman, Lord Claverton, after his retirement, finds himself up against this same problem—the problem of "nothingness":

MONICA: You know what the doctors said: complete relaxation
And to think about nothing. Though that won't be easy.

LORD CLAVERTON: That is just what I was doing.
MONICA: Thinking of nothing?
LORD CLAVERTON: Contemplating nothingness....

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
No, I've not the slightest longing for the life I've left—
Only fear of the emptiness before me.
If I had the energy to work myself to death
How gladly would I face death! But waiting, simply waiting,
With no desire to act, yet a loathing of inaction.
A fear of the vacuum, and no desire to fill it.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

What am I waiting for
In a cold empty room before an empty grate?
For no one. For nothing. 38

In The Cocktail Party, Edward expresses this situation
quite simply by saying, "I wish I understood anything. /
I'm completely in the dark." Also in The Cocktail Party,
it is the irrational which drives Celia to seek Reilly's
"professional opinion":

I suppose most people, when they come to see you,
Are obviously ill, or can give good reasons
For wanting to see you. Well, I can't.
I just came in desperation. 39

And in the same play, Peter Quilpe's learning of Celia's
tragic death is the experience for him "that knocks the
bottom out of it." 40 Or, as Peter explains later, "I
understand nothing" 41—a sentence which significantly
resembles a statement made by Sir Claude, in The Confiden-
tial Clerk: "I'm not sure of anything." 42 In The Family
Reunion the Chorus intones, "We have suffered far more
than a personal loss--/We have lost our way in the dark."

This confession is then elucidated by Agatha, who relates

40 Ibid., p. 380. 41 Ibid., p. 381.
42 Eliot, Confidential Clerk, p. 119.
the "curse" of Original Sin to this "darkness" and its irrationality:

A curse is a power
Not subject to reason
Each curse has its course
Its own way of expiation

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

A curse is written
On the under side of things
Behind the smiling mirror
And behind the smiling moon

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

And the curse be ended
By intercession
By pilgrimage
By those who depart
In several directions
For their own redemption
And that of the departed--

May they rest in peace.43

Perhaps that quality within despair of the shattered basis for all decision and action, is best summed up by the following speech of Harry, in The Family Reunion:

The sudden solitude in a crowded desert
In a thick smoke, many creatures moving
Without direction, for no direction
Leads anywhere but round and round in that vapour--
Without purpose, and without principle of conduct.44

It is relevant to note that this encounter with the incomprehensible, which Eliot sees as dissolving every 'principle of conduct,' is also the reason Eliot gives for Hamlet's

44Ibid., pp. 28-29.
strange inability to act. Eliot puts it this way in his famous essay "Hamlet":

Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it. . . .

Despair and the demonic.--Eliot's treatment of the irrational, which he sees as originating from the experience of damnation, also, at times, touches on the demonic, which is often an expression in existentialist literature of the irrational. Karl Barth points to this relationship when he says:

Death is the meaning of religion; for when we are pressed to the boundary of religion, death pronounces the inner calm of simple and harmless relativity to be at an end. Religion is not at all to be "in tune with the infinite" or to be at "peace with oneself." It has no place for refined sensibility or mature humanity. . . . But religion is an abyss: it is terror. There demons appear (Ivan Karamazov and Luther!). There the old enemy of man is strangely near.

It is at this very same boundary of death and terror that Harry, in The Family Reunion, meets the demonic:

\[45\] Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 125.

\[46\] Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 253.
This last year, I have been in flight
But always in ignorance of invisible pursuers.
Now I know that all my life has been a flight
And phantoms fed upon me while I fled. Now I know
That the last apparent refuge, the safe shelter,
That is where one meets them. That is the way of
spectres...47

Another existentialist whose name is conspicuously absent
in Eliot's prose works and yet has been associated with
Eliot because of a similar orientation to literature,48
is Franz Kafka. However, Eliot does seem to exhibit some
knowledge of Kafka, at least at one point, through a
striking similarity to one of Kafka's most famous literary
images. The image of "a beetle the size of a man" which
Celia applies to Edward, in The Cocktail Party, is identi-
cal to the image of Kafka's protagonist in The Metamorpho-
sis.49 Grover Smith has also noticed this similarity.50
Nevertheless, Eliot's use of this image is illustrative
of the relationship between the demonic and the despair
of emptiness:

47 Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 110.
I listened to your voice, that had always thrilled me,
And it became another voice--no, not a voice:
What I heard was only the noise of an insect,
Dry, endless, meaningless, inhuman--
You might have made it by scraping your legs together
Or however grasshoppers do it. I looked,
And listened for your heart, your blood;
And saw only a beetle the size of a man
With nothing more inside it than what comes out
When you tread on a beetle.\footnote{Eliot, Poems and Plays, pp. 326-327.}

In \textit{Murder in the Cathedral} the element of the demonic is

\textit{dramatized in the form of "the Tempters" who appear to
Becket. And through "the Tempters" it is possible to see
that for Eliot the demonic is an objectification of those
shadows in the heart's depth which plague man as a result
of his "first act" (\textit{i.e.}, Original Sin):}

\begin{quote}
End will be simple, sudden, God-given.
Meanwhile the substance of our first act
Will be shadows, and the strife with shadows.
Heavier the interval than the consummation.
All things prepare the event. Watch.
\[ \text{Enter FIRST TEMPTER} \] \footnote{Ibid., p. 183.}
\end{quote}

\textit{The inability to escape from despair.--In common with
the existentialists, Eliot would emphasize another peculiar
expression for "the final utter uttermost death of spirit."\footnote{Ibid., p. 208.}
This is that expression of despair in which despair is
seen as an inability to escape from itself, especially}
after despair has become apparent to consciousness. There are, of course, theological foundations in the Bible for this view in which "all men" are said to be "without ex- cuse" for their sinfulness and without "escape from the judgment of God."\textsuperscript{54} However, in contemporary existential- ist literature this theme of there being no escape from despair has become a dominant emphasis. It is the theme of Jean-Paul Sartre's play \textit{No Exit},\textsuperscript{55} the title of which Tillich calls "a classical formula for the situation of despair."\textsuperscript{56} The central crisis of Kafka's short story \textit{A Report to an Academy}, is that the protagonist can find "no way out."\textsuperscript{57} Karl Barth has said of his own theological point of view: "We have seen the old world as a completely closed circle from which we have no means of escape."\textsuperscript{58} According to Kierkegaard, man's inability to escape from despair

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54}Rom. 5:12, 1:20, 2:3.
\item \textsuperscript{55}Jean-Paul Sartre, \textit{No Exit and the Flies}, translated by Stuart Gilbert (New York, 1954), pp. 3-62.
\item \textsuperscript{56}Tillich, \textit{Courage to Be}, p. 143.
\item \textsuperscript{57}Kafka, "A Report to an Academy," \textit{Selected Short Stories}, pp. 171-173.
\item \textsuperscript{58}Barth, \textit{Epistle to the Romans}, p. 187.
\end{itemize}
comes from the fact that despair is a qualification of spirit, that it is related to the eternal in man. But the eternal he cannot get rid of, no, not to all eternity; he cannot cast it from him once for all, nothing is more impossible; every instant he does not possess it he must have cast it or be casting it from him—but it comes back, every instant he is in despair he contracts despair. 59

This theme also is for Eliot a means of expressing the complete and utter hopelessness of man's situation under the judgment of God; and it is a theme important enough for Eliot that it becomes a note sounded throughout all of his plays.

In Murder in the Cathedral, for instance, Eliot would again emphasize that in despair there is no objectivity which one can look to as a possible means of escape. The Chorus speaks:

The agents of hell disappear, the human, they shrink and dissolve
Into dust on the wind, forgotten unmemorable; only is here
The white flat face of Death, God's silent servant,
And behind the face of Death the Judgement
And behind the Judgement the Void, more horrid than active shapes of hell;
Emptiness, absence, separation from God;
The horror of the effortless journey, to the empty land
Which is no land, only emptiness, absence, the Void,
Where those who were men can no longer turn the mind

To distraction, delusion, escape into dream, pretence, Where the soul is no longer deceived, for there are no objects, no tones, No colours, no forms to distract, to divert the soul From seeing itself, foully united forever, nothing with nothing, Not what we call death, but what beyond death is not death, We fear, we fear. 60

And again the Chorus in Murder in the Cathedral expresses this attitude when it says, "God gave us always some reason, some hope; but now a new terror has soiled us, which none can avert, none can avoid, flowing under our feet and over the sky . . ." 61 In The Cocktail Party Eliot presents a strikingly similar picture of hell to the one found in Sartre's No Exit. In Sartre's hell there is a door through which the three characters of the play all are free to escape, but they all choose, rather, to remain in the room in which they can torment each other "for ever, and ever, and ever."

In The Cocktail Party Edward says:

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;

61 Ibid., p. 195.
62 Sartre, No Exit and The Flies, p. 61.
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.63

In the same play Reilly describes to Celia a
final desolation
Of solitude in the phantasmal world
Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires.

CEILIA: That is the hell I have been in.
REILLY: It isn't hell
Till you become incapable of anything else.64

In The Family Reunion Harry's inability to "get rid of
nothing" is an echo of Kierkegaard's man in despair of
whom Kierkegaard said, "the eternal he cannot get rid of
...
"

It seems I shall get rid of nothing,
Of none of the shadows that I wanted to escape;
And at the same time, other memories,
Earlier, forgotten, begin to return
Out of my childhood. I can't explain.
But I thought I might escape from one life to another,
And it may be all one life, with no escape.65

And it is interesting to note that this expression used--
in connection with sin--by Harry and Kierkegaard, "to get
rid of," is precisely the expression used by Celia as she

63Elliot, Poems and Plays, p. 342.
64Ibid., p. 365.
65Elliot, Family Reunion, p. 51.
describes her "sense of sin" as not being "anything in me / I could get rid of . . . ."66 "Neither back nor forward,"67 as Lavinia says in The Cocktail Party, there is no escape from the existential anxiety which finds its origin within the very deepest nature of man itself. All that can be done, Edward concludes, is to "make the best of a bad job"—a phrase also figuring prominently in The Family Reunion.68

LAVINIA: Then what can we do
   When we can go neither back nor forward?
   Edward!
   what can we do?
REILLY: You have answered your own question,
   Though you do not know the meaning of what you have said.
EDWARD: Lavinia, we must make the best of a bad job.
   That is what he means.69

"No escape" means, then, the "sudden extinction of every alternative," a situation in which there is no hope, no way out.

One thing you cannot know:
The sudden extinction of every alternative,
The unexpected crash of the iron cataract.
You do not know what hope is, until you have lost it.70

66Elliot, Poems and Plays, p. 362.
67Ibid., p. 356.
68Elliot, Family Reunion, p. 94.
69Elliot, Poems and Plays, p. 356.
70Elliot, Family Reunion, p. 54.
This is the situation when, as Lucasta says in The Confidential Clerk, "you know at last that there's no escape."\(^{71}\) "What I want to escape from / Is myself, is the past,"\(^{72}\) says Lord Claverton in The Elder Statesman. Also in The Elder Statesman Eliot uses a phrase from St. Mark, "where . . . the fire is not quenched,"\(^{73}\) to express this concept of dread in which there is no escape. Lord Claverton's old friend, Mrs. Carghill, is saying to him:

> It's frightening to think that we're still together
> And more frightening to think that we may always be together.
> There's a phrase I seem to remember reading somewhere:
> Where their fires are not quenched.\(^{74}\)

Attempts to escape from despair.--However, it should be understood that it is the eternal depth, terror, and inability to escape from this situation which drives man to seek escape by returning to the temporal. In the experience of the abyss, man has looked into the very depths of reality--and this is the meaning of "reality" for Eliot. But because of the intense horror of this vision, man will

---

\(^{71}\) Eliot, Confidential Clerk, p. 73.
\(^{72}\) Eliot, Elder Statesman, p. 96.
\(^{73}\) Mk. 9:45, 9:48.
\(^{74}\) Eliot, Elder Statesman, p. 70.
seek any way out open to him—even the way out of insanity or of again losing himself in the temporal—in order to forget the vision he has seen. This emphasis in Eliot's thought, of the terror of "reality" and man's desperate need to escape from it, is illustrated by a single line of poetry found in Murder in the Cathedral which is repeated word for word in Burnt Norton:

Human kind cannot bear very much reality.75

Karl Barth has expressed the same aspect of the unendur-
ability of reality by saying: "From time to time this bare relic of the Unknown reasserts itself in the presenti-
ment of awe. But even this can cease. The damaged eye may become blind."76 But perhaps the definitive explana-
tion of Eliot's preceding statement was made by Kierke-
gaard:

... one ingredient in the lowliness of a human being is that he is temporal, and cannot endure to lead uninterruptedly the life of the eternal in time. And if his life is in time, then it is eo ipso piecemeal; and if it is piecemeal, it is sprinkled with diver-
sions and distractions. ... 77

75Eliot, Poems and Plays, pp. 118, 209.
76Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 53.
77S. A. Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Post-
It is this vision of reality which is so difficult to bear, and the attempts to escape from it by refuge in distractions, which Eliot is speaking of when he has Reilly say to Celia:

If that is what you wish
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,
Learn to avoid excessive expectation,
Become tolerant of themselves and others,
Giving and taking, in the usual actions
What there is to give and take.\textsuperscript{78}

And in his prose Eliot has expressed this thought in this way: "The intense feeling, ecstatic or terrible, without an object or exceeding its object, is something which every person of sensibility has known. . . the ordinary person puts these feelings to sleep, or trims down his feelings to fit the business world. . . ."\textsuperscript{79} Kierkegaard's description of the man who attempts to escape from despair through activity is remarkably similar to those descriptions of the same situation which Eliot has just outlined. Says Kierkegaard:

\textsuperscript{78}Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 363.
\textsuperscript{79}Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 126.
He swings away entirely from the inward direction which is the path he ought to have followed in order to become truly a self. The whole problem of the self in a deeper sense becomes a sort of blind door in the background of his soul behind which there is nothing. He accepts . . . the outward direction toward what is called life, the real, the active life; he treats with great precaution the bit of self-reflection which he has in himself, he is afraid that this thing in the background might again emerge. So little by little he succeeds in forgetting it; in the course of years he finds it almost ludicrous, especially when he is in good company with other capable and active men who have a sense and capacity for real life.\textsuperscript{80}

Corresponding to Eliot's statement about the man who "trims down his feelings to fit the business world," Kierkegaard has said: "This form of despair is hardly ever noticed in the world. Such a man, precisely by losing his self in this way, has gained perfectibility in adjusting himself to business, yea, in making a success in the world."\textsuperscript{81}

Eliot's plays are filled with men and women who are trying to put to sleep "the vision they have had." These are the people who are "distracted from distraction by distraction," as Eliot describes them in \textit{Burnt Norton}.\textsuperscript{82} For instance, in \textit{The Elder Statesman}, Mrs. Carghill says,

\textsuperscript{80}Kierkegaard, \textit{Sickness Unto Death}, pp. 89-90.

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid., p. 51.

\textsuperscript{82}Eliot, \textit{Poems and Plays}, p. 120.
defensively, "one starts an action / Simply because one must do something."\(^{83}\) And in the same play Mrs. Piggott, the manager of Badgley Court ("that very expensive hotel for convalescents"), tells Lord Claverton: "And remember, when you want to be very quiet / There's the Silence Room. With a television set."\(^{84}\) Distraction, in one manner of speaking, is, then, for Eliot as well as for Barth and Kierkegaard, the attempt to put a mask over the nothingness one has seen in one's own face. This is why Eliot can say in The Family Reunion:

A curse is written
On the under side of things
Behind the smiling mirror\(^ {85}\)

Or, as Gomez confronts Lord Claverton in The Elder Statesman:

What do I call failure?
The worst kind of failure, in my opinion,
Is the man who has to keep on pretending to himself
That he's a success--the man who in the morning
Has to make up his face before he looks in the mirror.\(^ {86}\)

And Gomez here has put his finger on Claverton, as Claverton indicates later in the play, by saying to Monica:

"I've had your love under false pretenses. / Now, I'm

\(^{83}\)Eliot, Elder Statesman, p. 67.
\(^{84}\)Ibid., p. 51.
\(^{85}\)Eliot, Family Reunion, pp. 130-131.
\(^{86}\)Eliot, Elder Statesman, p. 43.
tired of keeping up those pretences. . . ."\textsuperscript{87} The category of "pretending" also is used in the same way in \textit{The Cocktail Party}, as Edward says:

\begin{quote}
I see that my life was determined long ago  
And that the struggle to escape from it  
Is only a make-believe, a pretence  
That what is, is not, or could be changed.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

And the category of "make-believe" is extended into \textit{The Confidential Clerk}, as when Sir Claude tells Colby:

\begin{quote}
I dare say truly religious people--  
I've never known any--can find some unity.  
Then there are also the men of genius.  
There are others, it seems to me, who have at best to live  
\textit{In two worlds--each a kind of make-believe.}  
That's you and me.\textsuperscript{89}
\end{quote}

The categories of "masks," "pretences," and "make-believe" are, then, all used by Eliot for the same purpose: to illustrate man's desperate attempts to escape, through diversions and distractions, from the reality which he cannot bear--and yet the reality from which there is no escape. Kierkegaard has pointed out that it is the infinite depths of despair in the face of which "one does everything possible by way of diversions and the Janizary

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., pp. 102-103.  
\textsuperscript{88}Eliot, \textit{Poems and Plays}, p. 326.  
\textsuperscript{89}Eliot, \textit{Confidential Clerk}, p. 50.
music of loud-voiced enterprises to keep lonely thoughts away." But the wages of Original Sin are spiritual death, maintains Kierkegaard, and payment of these wages is an inevitability which cannot be diverted:

No Grand Inquisitor has in readiness such terrible tortures as has anxiety, ... and no sharp witted judge knows how to interrogate, to examine the accused, as anxiety does, which never lets him escape, neither by diversion nor by noise, neither at work or at play, neither by day nor by night.  

In The Family Reunion, the Chorus--consisting of Ivy, Gerald, Charles, and Violet--personifies the men and women in Eliot's plays who have felt the "terrible tortures" of anxiety, would force these tortures back into their depths by "diversion and noise," and yet have found this to be impossible:

The chopping of wood in autumn  
And the singing in the kitchen  
And the steps at night in the corridor  
The moment of sudden loathing  
The season of stifled sorrow  
The whisper, the transparent deception  
The keeping up of appearance,  
The making the most of a bad job  
All twined and tangled together, all are recorded.  
There is no avoiding these things  
And we know nothing of exorcism  
And whether in Argos or England  
There are certain inflexible laws

\[90\] S. A. Kierkegaard, cited in "The Anatomy of Angst,"
Time, March 31, 1961, p. 44.  
\[91\] Ibid.
Unalterable, in the nature of music. 
There is nothing at all to be done about it, 
There is nothing to be done about anything, 
And now it is nearly time for the news 
We must listen to the weather report 
And the international catastrophes. 92

There is "no escape," as Agatha and Mary testify in the final scene of The Family Reunion:

AGATHA: A curse is slow in coming 
To complete fruition 
It cannot be hurried 
And it cannot be delayed 
MARY: It cannot be diverted 
An attempt to divert it 
Only implicates others 
At the day of consummation. 93

Eliot follows Kierkegaard closely in pointing up one of the most subtle means of attempting to escape from despair: taking refuge in despair itself. This is the category of "defiance" for Kierkegaard, and he describes its "genesis" in this way:

Precisely upon this torment [despair] the man directs his whole passion, which at last becomes a diabolical rage. Even if at this point God in heaven and all his angels were to offer to help him out of it—no, now he doesn't want it, now it is too late, he once would have given everything to be rid of this torment but was made to wait, now that's all past, now he would rather rage against everything, he, the one man... to whom it is especially important to have his torment

92 Eliot, Family Reunion, pp. 93-94. 
93 Ibid., p.129.
at hand, important that no one should take it from him. . . . 94

This despair of defiance is dramatized by Eliot through Harry, in The Family Reunion, who has just made a furious speech, lashing out at his entire family for their inability to understand his suffering, after which Agatha says to him:

Whatever you have learned, Harry, you must remember
That there is always more: we cannot rest in being
The impatient spectators of malice or stupidity.
We must try to penetrate the other private worlds
Of make-believe and fear. To rest in our own suf
fering
Is evasion of suffering. We must learn to suffer
more. 95

And Mary says to Harry concerning his impatience:

. . . you attach yourself to loathing
As others do to loving: an infatuation
That's wrong, a good that's misdirected . . . 96

Likewise, Reilly tells Celia, in The Cocktail Party:

"Disillusion can become itself an illusion / If we rest in it." 97

The advantage of despair.--Another one of the impor
tant ways in which Eliot follows the existentialists

94Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, p. 115.
95Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 89.
96Ibid., p. 57.
(especially Kierkegaard) is in his insight that the man for whom despair has become conscious is far closer to finding true relief from that despair than is a man for whom sin or despair never has become a conscious reality. Furthermore, Eliot continues to follow the existentialists by maintaining that a man who has made a conscious decision in the face of despair concerning the means he will take to save himself from it, again, "is far nearer the truth"—even if this decision has not been a Christian decision—than the man who is in despair but does not realize it. In other words, for Eliot men stand a better chance of being healed if they know they are sick—even if they are attempting to find help by means of the wrong medicine—than do men who are equally as sick but are not aware of their sickness. This is why Eliot has said that it is "better to worship a Golden Calf than to worship nothing."

Also for the existentialists the individual—or man—is defined precisely by the existence of this deepest, inmost self which alone is capable of man's greatest passion—whether this passion is directed toward belief, or unbelief. Therefore, it can be said that if a "man" is unconscious

---

of this inwardness which defines his existence, there is
a very real sense in which this man, or self, does not
exist. This is why Kierkegaard can say:

Let others complain that the age is wicked;
my complaint is that it is wretched; for it lacks
passion. Men's thoughts are thin and flimsy like
lace, they are themselves pitiable like the lace-
makers. The thoughts of their hearts are too paltry
to be sinful. For a worm it might be regarded as a
sin to harbor such thoughts, but not for a being
made in the image of God. Their lusts are dull and
sluggish, their passions sleepy. They do their duty
these shopkeeping souls, but they clip the coin a
trifle, like the Jews; they think that even if the
Lord keeps ever so careful a set of books, they may
still cheat him a little. Out upon them! This is
the reason my soul always turns back to the Old
Testament and to Shakespeare. I feel that those who
speak there are at least human beings, they hate,
they love, they murder their enemies, and curse their
descendants throughout all generations, they sin.99

Furthermore, Kierkegaard adds that

What is called worldliness is made up of just such
men, who . . . pawn themselves to the world. They
use their talents, accumulate money, carry on worldly
affairs, calculate shrewdly, etc., etc., are perhaps
mentioned in history, but themselves they are not;
spiritually understood, they have no self, no self
for whose sake they could venture everything, no
self before God--however selfish they may be for all
that.100

"The misfortune," says Kierkegaard, "is that the man did
not become aware of himself, aware that the self he is,
is a perfectly definite something. . . ."101

99 Kierkegaard, Either--Or, Vol. I, p. 20, cited in
Heinecken, Moment Before God, p. 249.
100 Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, p. 53.
101 Ibid., p. 56.
Eliot could not agree more with Kierkegaard's definition of what it means to be "human." For instance, in his essay "Baudelaire," Eliot says:

So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least we exist. It is true to say that the glory of man is his capacity for salvation; it is also true that his glory is his capacity for damnation. The worst that can be said of most of our malefactors, from statesmen to thieves, is that they are not men enough to be damned. \(^{102}\)

This attitude, incidentally, also explains Eliot's great admiration for D. H. Lawrence, of whom Eliot has written:

If (I think he would have said) you find you can only accept an "evil" religion, then for God's sake do, for that is far nearer the truth than not having any. For what the evil religion has in common with the good is more important than the differences; and it is more important really to feel terror than to sing comminatory psalms. \(^{103}\)

Therefore, for Eliot as well as for Kierkegaard there are several stages in man's self-awareness: the first is complete unconsciousness of the self when the self is literally "enveloped in a fog" and hidden from itself; the second stage is the self who has seen the terrible vision of the depths of reality but ignores this vision, losing

\(^{102}\) Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 380.

\(^{103}\) Eliot, "Chapter I," Revelation, p. 33.
itself again in diversions and distractions; and the third stage is when—in fear and trembling—a man leaps over the yawning abyss of nothingness onto the "far side of despair"—as Sartre has expressed it in *The Flies*.\(^{104}\) And it is at this point that the existentialists "choose sides."

This is to say, that differing schools within existentialism disagree as to which point on "the far side of despair" is finally capable of providing ultimate security from that despair. For Sartre it is an atheistic solution which is man's only answer; and although Eliot and Kierkegaard would disagree with Sartre on this "point," they, nevertheless, would agree that anyone who had made this leap was "at least" a self, having made this particular kind of decision and thus existing in the sense that they were aware of that self which sought—with infinite passion—this particular answer for its existence. Eliot has expressed the relation of these three stages in man's life in this way:

Many people live on an unmarked frontier enveloped in a dense fog; and those who dwell beyond it are more numerous in the dark waste of ignorance and

\(^{104}\)Sartre, *No Exit and The Flies*, p. 160.
indifference, than in the well-lighted desert of atheism.\textsuperscript{105}

None of Eliot's plays elucidate this statement with the same aptness that is found in The Family Reunion. For instance, concerning the "many people \[who\] live on an unmarked frontier enveloped in a dense fog," Eliot says in The Family Reunion:

\begin{quote}
The sudden solitude in a crowded desert
In a thick smoke, many creatures moving
Without direction, for no direction
Leads anywhere but round and round in that vapour . . . 106
\end{quote}

As for the second stage (those who have been confronted by the eternal but seek to ignore it through loss of the self in worldly activity, or, as Eliot put it, those who "dwell beyond \[the fog\] . . . in the dark waste of ignorance and indifference"), Eliot uses the Chorus of The Family Reunion to represent this group:

\begin{quote}
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.
\textellipsis
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{105}Eliot, Christianity and Culture, p. 147.
\textsuperscript{106}Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 28.
\end{flushright}
But the circle of our understanding
Is a very restricted area.
Except for a limited number
Of strictly practical purposes
We do not know what we are doing;

And what is being done to us?
And what are we . . . ?
To each and all of these questions
There is no conceivable answer.
We have suffered far more than a personal loss--
We have lost our way in the dark.107

And as for the third group, those who have made a leap
of faith but have leaped to a non-Christian faith (those
in "the well-lighted desert of atheism"), Eliot says,
also in The Family Reunion:

One thinks to escape
By violence, but one is still alone
In an over-crowded desert, jostled by ghosts.108

These ideas are dramatized further throughout Eliot's
plays. For instance, relative to Eliot's idea of the value
of self-awareness—whether the understanding of the self
is right or wrong—Julia, in The Cocktail Party, says of
Edward and Lavinia after Reilly has confronted them with
a "mirror":

We must take the risk.
All we could do was to give them the chance
And now, when they are stripped naked to their souls
And can choose, whether to put on proper costumes

107Ibid., pp. 127-128. 108Ibid., p. 28.
Or huddle quickly into new disguises,
They have, for the first time, somewhere to start
from.

Thus it would be true for Eliot that Lord Claverton, who
is painfully aware of his unhappiness, is closer to true
happiness than one who is "happy" but does not "know" he
is happy. Lord Claverton describes this situation by
saying:

Perhaps I've really never enjoyed living
As much as most people. At least, as they seem to
do.
Without knowing that they enjoy it. Whereas I've
often known
That I didn't enjoy it.

And closely related to this view is Eliot's concern for
the loss of the self, or of one's own existence. Eliot's
statement in Christianity and Culture that "it is only by
unremitting effort that we can persist in being individuals
in a society, instead of merely members of a disciplined
crowd," is an echo of Kierkegaard's earlier diagnosis
of the same cultural situation:

By seeing the multitude of men about it engaging in
all sorts of worldly affairs, by becoming wise about
how things go in this world, such a man forgets him-
self, forgets what his name is (in the divine under-
standing of it), does not dare to believe in himself,

---

110 Eliot, Elder Statesman, p. 54.
111 Eliot, Christianity and Culture, p. 142.
finds it too venturesome a thing to be himself, far easier and safer to be like the others, to become an imitation, a number, a cipher in the crowd.\(^{112}\)

The loss of the self to the crowd is exemplified by Lucasta, in *The Confidential Clerk*, when she wished for a "garden" in which she could "lock the gate" and be alone from "the outer world":

> If I could find it!
> No, my only garden is . . . a dirty public square
> In a shabby part of London . . .
> . . . I've no garden.
> I hardly feel that I'm even a person . . .\(^{113}\)

However, it should be made clear that for Eliot this loss of the self is not the fault of "the crowd." The self can be lost as deeply in its loneliness as in its diversions. In *The Elder Statesman*, for instance, Charles says of Lord Claverton:

> His privacy has been so well preserved
> That I've sometimes wondered whether there was any . . .
> Private self to preserve.\(^{114}\)

And in the same play, Gomez tells Lord Claverton:

> Your loneliness--so cosy, warm and padded:
> You're not isolated--merely insulated.
> It's only when you come to see that you have lost yourself
> That you are quite alone.\(^{115}\)

\(^{112}\)Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, p. 51.
\(^{113}\)Eliot, *Confidential Clerk*, p. 63.
\(^{115}\)Ibid., p. 36.
The Rarity of the Experience of Damnation

Another important aspect of Eliot's view of the wrath and damnation of God is that this experience in which a man becomes totally aware of the depths of his own hollowness, is essentially an extremely rare experience as it occurs among men. And again Eliot follows the existentialists in this opinion. For, as Kierkegaard put it: "Most frequently, no doubt, the condition of the despairing man, though characterized by multiform nuances, is that of half obscurity about his own condition." 116 But it is important to note that the despairing man's "obscurity about his own condition" does not mean that that man is any less in despair. It simply means that there is less conscious awareness of this despair on his part. For even if one should go entirely through life with "a feminine youthfulness which is sheer peace and harmony and joy . . . ," says Kierkegaard, "it would be of little help for it is despair." 117 And this is precisely how Harry addresses the "feminine youthfulness" of Mary, in The Family Reunion. He tells her that her world

116 Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, p. 75.
117 Ibid., p. 39.
is "no better" because of her unconsciousness of the tormenting "Furies" which, nevertheless, exist inside her:

They are much too clever
To admit you into our world. Yours is no better.
They have seen to that: it is part of the torment. 118

Heinecken, in writing on this aspect of Kierkegaard's theology, has said:

... despair may be hidden in tranquility and happiness or it may be hidden by the greatest consternation over misfortune and loses. In each case a man may not be aware of the fact that he is a self. In fact, Kierkegaard considers this to be the condition of the majority of men... 119

And so it is with Eliot.

The majority of mankind is lazy-minded, incurious, absorbed in vanities, and tepid in emotion, and is therefore incapable of either much doubt or much faith; and when the ordinary man calls himself a sceptic or an unbeliever, that is an ordinarily simple pose, cloaking a disinclination to think anything out to a conclusion. 120

Or, as Eliot also has expressed the same thought, "evil is rare, bad is common. Evil cannot even be perceived but by a very few." 121 Also, "the capacity for religious

118 Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 56.
119 Heinecken, Moment Before God, p. 191.
120 Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 364.
emotion of the first intensity is rare..." And
Eliot almost has paraphrased Kierkegaard's remark concern-
ing this "most frequent" condition of "half obscurity" by
saying: "The number of people in possession of any cri-
teria for discriminating between good and evil is very
small; the number of the half-alive hungry for any form
of spiritual experience, or what offers itself as spiritual
experience, high or low, good or bad, is considerable." Furthermore, Eliot permeates his plays with this sense of
the rarity of the experience of complete awareness. In-
deed, this is one of the major themes of The Cocktail
Party in which much of the play's development is concerned
with the investigation of which of certain characters meet
a particular "condition"--that condition being the rare
experience of eternal depth. In the guise of a psychi-
atrist, Reilly examines a married couple, Edward and
Lavinia, relative to this condition and finds them wanting.
Celia, however, convinces Reilly that she has met this con-
dition, and it is for this reason that he sends her "to
the sanatorium"--a place to which "not very many go."

123 Ibid.
Eliot illustrates a peculiar quality of this condition, as well as the condition's rarity, when he has Reilly say to Celia, "you suffer from a sense of sin, Miss Coplestone? / This is most unusual." And Celia further underscores Eliot's point by replying, "it seemed to me abnormal." Indeed, Reilly's search for what he considers the proper "condition" is given a touch of irony when he mentions casually to Celia: "There are different types. Some are rarer than others." And it is the role of Edward and Lavinia to represent one of the less rare types. Their difficulty in meeting Reilly's condition is that they simply lack the experience of complete humiliation; they are still hanging back from the abyss's edge by cleaving to whatever vestiges may remain of their "strange gods." This stubborn idolatry manifests itself in Edward and Lavinia by their inability to trust Reilly completely and, hence, by their suggesting their "own cure" for him to give them. At this point, Reilly tells them:

I do not trouble myself with the common cheat,  
Or with the insuperably, innocently dull:  
My patients such as you are the self-deceivers

125 Ibid., p. 361.  
126 Ibid., p. 362.
Taking infinite pains, exhausting their energy,
Yet never quite successful. You have both of you pretended
To be consulting me; both tried to impose upon me
Your own diagnosis, and prescribe your own cure.\textsuperscript{127}

It is interesting to note, again, how closely Eliot is
following Kierkegaard's "anatomy of melancholy." For, as
Kierkegaard writes in \textit{The Sickness Unto Death}:

\textit{The situation is this. A sufferer has one or more ways}
\textit{in which he would be glad to be helped. If he is helped thus, he is}
\textit{willing to be helped. But when in a deeper sense it becomes}
\textit{seriousness with this thing of needing help, especially from a higher or}
\textit{from the highest source--this humiliation of having to accept help}
\textit{unconditionally and in any way, the humiliation of becoming nothing in}
\textit{the hand of the Helper . . . ah, there are doubtless many sufferings, at}
\textit{which the self does not wince to this extent, and which therefore at bottom it}
\textit{prefers to retain and to be itself.}\textsuperscript{128}

For in contrast to Edward and Lavinia, Celia "could do
without everything, / Put up with anything,"\textsuperscript{129} in order
to find relief from her suffering. And when she asks
Reilly what she needs to take with her to the sanatorium,
Reilly simply replies, "nothing,"\textsuperscript{130} thus adhering to
Kierkegaard's formula that the patient must become "nothing

\textsuperscript{127}Ibid., p. 352.
\textsuperscript{128}Kierkegaard, \textit{Sickness Unto Death}, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{129}Eliot, \textit{Poems and Plays}, p. 364.
\textsuperscript{130}Ibid., p. 366.
in the hand of the Helper." Or, as Reilly put it to Edward and Lavinia, "But when you put yourselves into hands like mine / You surrender a great deal more than you meant to."131

This theme of the rarity of "religious emotion of the first intensity" also appears elsewhere in Eliot's plays. For example, in The Family Reunion, it provides the key to understanding the following bit of dialogue between Agatha and Gerald:

AGATHA: When the loop in time comes—and it does not come for everybody—The hidden is revealed, and the spectres show themselves.
GERALD: I don't in the least know what you're talking about.
You seem to be wanting to give us all the hump.132

And as Lord Claverton says, in The Elder Statesman:

I've only just now had the illumination Of knowing what love is. We all think we know,
But how few of us do!133

In the following statement, Kierkegaard brings this emphasis of Eliot's into focus and points the way to another major theme within Eliot's concept of the wrath and damnation of God:

131Ibid., p. 353.
... this proves that most men have not become very deep even in despair; it by no means proves, however, that they are not in despair. There are very few men who live even only passably in the category of spirit; yea, there are not many even who merely make an attempt at this life, and most of those who do so, shy away. They have not learned to fear, they have not learned what "must" means. ... 134

The Necessity for the Experience of Damnation

By "must," Kierkegaard is referring to that aspect of his theology which maintains that one must pass through this deep experience of personal crisis in order to obtain true security of the self. It is largely for this reason that theological existentialism, which originated with Kierkegaard, has come to be known as "the Theology of Crisis." 135 Also, it should be noted that this emphasis is a necessary derivative of the doctrine of Original Sin. For if, as the doctrine of Original Sin maintains, all men are born in sin, and sin means that men passionately cling to the temporal--rather than to the eternal--for the answer to their existence, then it follows that all men "must be born again." 136 And this means that man

134 Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, pp. 90-91.
136 Jn. 3:7.
first must "die" to the strange gods of his life before
the rebirth of his spirit can take place; and the total
relinquishing of one's god is, by definition, a terrify-
ing experience--remembering that one's "god" is defined
as the very center of meaning for one's existence.

This point is extremely important for Eliot and is
found throughout his work. He was alluding to this point
when he wrote, "One of the unhappy necessities of human
existence is that we have to 'find things out for our-
selves.'"\textsuperscript{137} And in speaking of the discipline which "is
only attainable through dogmatic religion," Eliot has
said, "Only those have the right to talk of discipline
who have looked into the Abyss."\textsuperscript{138} "The Kingdom of God
is for none but the thoroughly dead,"\textsuperscript{139} Eliot has said;
and he means by this--as he has elsewhere written--that
"only in humility, charity and purity--and most of all
perhaps humility--can we be prepared to receive the grace
of God without which human operations are vain."\textsuperscript{140} Or,

\textsuperscript{137}Eliot, \textit{Selected Essays}, p. 379.

\textsuperscript{138}Eliot, "Religion without Humanism," \textit{Humanism and

\textsuperscript{139}Eliot, cited in Scott, \textit{Rehearsals of Discomposure},
p. 253.

\textsuperscript{140}Eliot, \textit{Christianity and Culture}, p. 75.
as Eliot has pointed up this necessity quite simply, illustrating at the same time the reason for his entire unyielding emphasis of God's terrible wrath and damnation:

We need to recover the sense of religious fear, so that it may be overcome by religious hope.\textsuperscript{141}

"There is another way, if you have the courage," Reilly tells Celia in The Cocktail Party; it is the way of the "unknown, and so requires faith-- / The kind of faith that issues from despair."\textsuperscript{142} Despair, then, for Eliot is the necessary prerequisite for faith. Or, as Eliot also has Reilly say:

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.\textsuperscript{143}

Therefore, there is great value for Eliot, as there is for Kierkegaard, in a man's being pushed to this extreme and, thus, into the dark. And so Agatha can say, "Love compels cruelty / To those who do not understand love."\textsuperscript{144}

The reason, then, for this cruelty, as Kierkegaard has

\begin{footnotes}
\item[141] Ibid., p. 49.
\item[142] Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 364.
\item[143] Ibid., p. 309.
\item[144] Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 107.
\end{footnotes}
put it, is that "what really is lacking is the power to obey, to submit to the necessary in oneself, to what may be called one's limit." And so, in The Family Reunion, when Amy suggests a medical doctor for Harry when his illness is obviously spiritual, Agatha says:

It seems a necessary move
In an unnecessary action,
Not for the good it will do
But that nothing may be left undone
On the margin of the impossible.

For consciousness of despair, or knowledge of sin, is the necessary first step in Christian revelation:

... Christianity ... assumes that there must be a revelation from God to make manifest what sin is. For it is not true, as a superficial view assumes, that the doctrine of the atonement is the qualitative difference between paganism and Christianity. No, the beginning must be made far deeper, with sin, with the doctrine of sin, as Christianity also does.

And this is precisely what Agatha means as she says to Harry concerning "sin and expiation": "It is certain / That the knowledge of [sin] must precede the expiation.148

145 Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, p. 56.
146 Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 33.
147 Kierkegaard, Sickness Unto Death, p. 144.
Kierkegaard, in stressing the initial necessity of a revelation of sin, said that this revelation is something which first must "happen" to a man before he reaches the solution of faith. And thus Kierkegaard used the category of "happening" to draw together the peculiar qualities which he assigned to the event of conscious despair\textsuperscript{149}--those qualities being that this despair was providential, extremely rare, necessary, infinitely deep in its dreadfulness, and completely distinct from all other events in a man's life. Eliot uses this Kierkegaardian category, especially in \textit{The Family Reunion}, as he asks most poignantly in that play, "What is the meaning of happening?"\textsuperscript{150} The answer to this question is suggested in the following dialogue in which Harry says to his family:

\begin{quote}
HARRY: But how can I explain, how can I explain to you?
You will understand less after I have explained it.
All that I could hope to make you understand is only events: not what has happened. And people to whom nothing has ever happened cannot understand the unimportance of events.
GERALD: Well, you can't say that nothing has happened to me. I started as a youngster on the North West Frontier--
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{149}Kierkegaard, \textit{Sickness Unto Death}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{150}Eliot, \textit{Family Reunion}, p. 128.
Been in tight corners most of my life
And some pretty nasty messes.
CHARLES: And there isn't much would surprise me,
Harry;
Or shock me either.
HARRY: 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.\textsuperscript{151}

And it is interesting to note how similarly Barth and
Eliot, both of whom have been greatly influenced by
Kierkegaard, each use this Kierkegaardian category of
the moment which must "happen," relative to their respec-
tive fields of concern--Barth, the great Christian preacher
and theologian, and Eliot, the Christian dramatist. For
instance, Barth has said:

\begin{quote}
On Sunday morning when the bells ring to call
the congregation and minister to church, there is
in the air an \textit{expectancy} that something great,
crucial, and even \textit{momentous} is to happen.\textsuperscript{152}
\end{quote}

And Eliot has said:

\begin{quote}
When the curtain rises . . . the audience is ex-
pecting, as it has a right to expect, that something
is going to happen.\textsuperscript{153}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{151}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 27-28.
\textsuperscript{152}\textit{Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man},
\textsuperscript{153}\textit{Eliot, Poetry and Poets}, p. 90.
For Eliot, the wrath and damnation of God cannot be taken too seriously. And in this emphasis Eliot reveals himself to be in complete agreement with the Christian existentialists, who first drew to the attention of modern Christian theology that "the fundamental error of modern times . . . lies in the fact that the yawning abyss of quality in the difference between God and man has been removed."\(^{154}\)

CHAPTER IV

REDEMPTION THROUGH THE HOLY TRINITY

As an Anglican Eliot is a trinitarian. But it would be incorrect to assume from this that Eliot is a trinitarian only because he is an Anglican. Every person of the Trinity is represented in all of Eliot's plays, and they are obviously all--along with their respective interrelations--extremely meaningful to him. Furthermore, it is doubtful if any of Eliot's work can be understood apart from this very important premise, although Eliot's trinitarianism seems to find its most formal expression through the doctrine of the Incarnation. The Incarnation seems to be that "half guessed" hint Eliot has given all of his readers and auditors as the key for unlocking the mystery of his entire work:

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.  

---


And especially when one considers the evident influence of Christian existentialism upon Eliot, along with his own primary concern for "dogmatic religion,"⁴ is one enabled to see the vitality of his trinitarianism. For certainly one of the major accomplishments of Christian existentialism has been the restoration of meaning and vitality to traditional Christian concepts—particularly the doctrine of the Trinity.⁵ However, since the direction of this study is from a doctrine of man towards a doctrine of God, it is consistent with this purpose that Eliot's use of the Trinity be approached through an inversion of its traditional order (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

The Holy Spirit

In Eliot's essay on Pascal he mentions the "despair which was a necessary prelude to, and element in, the joy of faith."⁶ In the preceding chapter despair has been considered as the "necessary prelude to . . . faith." But


relative to Eliot's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, or Holy
Ghost, it is appropriate to talk of despair as an "element
in the joy of faith." Because for Eliot the Holy Spirit
is the Christian's "guide";⁷ and the same is true for the
frequently is spoken of as a "fire"⁹ or "flame."¹⁰ There
is a dual nature of this fire: it purges men of their
sin and, hence, is a fire of great pain, always to be
feared and avoided;¹¹ but having accomplished this initial
function, it then is considered a great blessing as it
"leads"¹² man on to become a "son of God," and guides him--
by its alternating ability to produce the greatest spiritual
pain or joy--as it "beareth witness with our spirit"¹³ by
its absence or presence. This also is precisely Eliot's
view of the Holy Spirit. Man's Spirit is complete despair
apart from the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes,
it comes as "the Comforter."¹⁴ But when faith is broken,
then spiritual "death" comes again¹⁵ into the heart; for

⁷Ibid., p. 330.
⁸Rom. 8:14
⁹Heb. 12:29.
¹⁰Heb. 1:7.
¹¹I Cor. 3:13.
¹²Gal. 5:18.
¹³Rom. 8:16
¹⁴Jn. 15:26
¹⁵Rom. 6:23.
"our God is a consuming fire."\textsuperscript{16} And thus the Holy Spirit, by its power to bring comfort to the midst of despair, "shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."\textsuperscript{17} This is the basis for Kierkegaard's famous dictum that "truth is subjectivity,"\textsuperscript{18} and it is why Eliot can say that a certain thing is true "because our heart tells us it corresponds exactly to the facts . . . ."\textsuperscript{19}--a strange way to speak of "facts."

The paradoxical nature of the Holy Spirit.--It is this paradoxical nature of despair and of the Holy Spirit--both being the source of great terror as well as the source of great comfort--which Eliot dramatizes most emphatically in his plays. Scott remarks of this paradoxical relationship in Eliot's theology when he says:

And Eliot too does not allow his sharp sense of the existential human fact to force upon him the supposition that there is no other role for the human spirit than that of the "isolato." He would rather . . . have us apprehend our estrangement . . . . in

\textsuperscript{16}Heb. 12:29. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{17}Jn. 14:26.


\textsuperscript{19}Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 364.
order that the self's dissociation may yield the
tuition of the presence in the self of Something
which, though transcending it, is yet the constitutive Power of the self and the hidden possibility
of its reconciliation.\textsuperscript{20}

Also, it is this same paradoxical quality of conscious
despair to which Kierkegaard refers when he uses the
term "dialectical" in the following statement:

Despair, just because it is wholly dialectical,
is in fact the sickness of which it holds that
it is the greatest misfortune not to have had
it—the true good hap to get it, although it is the
most dangerous sickness of all, if one does not wish
to be healed of it.\textsuperscript{21}

And, again, in speaking of the paradox within conscious
despair, Kierkegaard has said that "only the consciousness
of sin can force one into this dreadful situation—the
power on the other side being grace. . . . Only through
the consciousness of sin is there entrance to . . . Christ-
tianity."\textsuperscript{22} Or, as Eliot has put it, "the recognition of
the reality of sin is a New Life. . . ."\textsuperscript{23}

In relation to the doctrine of Original Sin, the Holy
Spirit is that incisive force which breaks through, or

\textsuperscript{20}Scott, \textit{Rehearsals of Discomposure}, p. 256.

\textsuperscript{21}S. A. Kierkegaard, \textit{The Sickness Unto Death}, translated

\textsuperscript{22}S. A. Kierkegaard, \textit{Training in Christianity}, translated

opens, the "hardness of [man's] heart" (this hardness being sin or that which is "next" to one's heart), reveals the hidden hollowness within the heart, proceeds to fulfill this "vessel of wrath" with its own spirit of communion with the other two persons of the Trinity, the Son and the Father, and thus, finally, transforms the heart into a "vessel of mercy." But perhaps the function of the Holy Spirit in relation to sin is expressed best by the collect for Holy Communion in The Book of Common Prayer:

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The paradoxical ability of the Holy Spirit to bring man from the death of damnation to "the other side of despair" and to the redemption of his life, is an important theme in Eliot's plays. "And war among men defiles this world, but death in the Lord renews it," says Eliot

24 Mk. 16:14.  
27 Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 201.
in Murder in the Cathedral. In The Family Reunion Agatha expresses this paradoxical nature of suffering as she explains to Mary why Harry cannot remain "on this side," but must follow the course dictated by his torments:

Here the danger, here the death, here, not elsewhere;
Elsewhere no doubt is agony, renunciation,
But birth and life. Harry has crossed the frontier
Beyond which safety and danger have a different meaning.28

And in speaking of the "different meaning" which Eliot here has assigned to Harry's "safety and danger," Scott says:

... Eliot's meaning ... is a Christian meaning, invoking the orthodox Christian conception of the dialectical relation of the "old life" to the "new life" which is born out of the former's demise. The despair, in other words, which Harry chooses has, as Kierkegaard said of the despair which he discovered to be basic to the Christian experience of grace, "something of the eternal in its dialectic." In "the awful daring of a moment's surrender," Harry chooses the "sickness unto death," and this "awful evacuation" cleanses and purifies.29

Colby, in The Confidential Clerk, says, "Now that I've abandoned my illusions and ambitions / All that's left is love,"30 and thus carries further Scott's point concerning despair being "basic to the Christian experience of

29Scott, Rehearsals of Discomposure, p. 237.
Grace." And in *The Elder Statesman*, the Holy Spirit's office of teaching through the humiliation of man's spirit is dramatized by Lord Claverton when he says:

... Come, I'll start to learn again.
Michael and I shall go to school together.
We'll sit side by side, at little desks
And suffer the same humiliations
At the hands of the same master ... 31

For Claverton has truly come to grips with the paradox of learning through dying when he says, "in becoming no one, I begin to live. / It is worth while dying, to find out what life is." 32

Two other categories which assume a dialectical relationship because of the paradoxical nature of the Holy Spirit, are the categories of "health" and "sickness." Kierkegaard expressed this relationship in this way:

... Christianly understood death is by no means the last thing of all, hence it is only a little event within that which is all, and eternal life; and Christianly understood there is in death infinitely much more hope than merely humanly speaking there is when there not only is life but this life exhibits the fullest health and vigor. 33

---

32 Ibid., p. 129.
And so it is with Eliot that despair, which considered
from a worldly point of view is a weakness or sickness,
is actually a manifestation of spiritual health. For
instance, in speaking of Pascal, Eliot has said:

His despair, his disillusion, are . . . no illustra-
tion of personal weakness; they are perfectly objec-
tive because they are . . . the analogue of the
drought, the dark night, which is an essential stage
in the progress of the Christian mystic.34

And, indeed, Kierkegaard has said: "the greater the
dread, the greater the man."35 Scott refers to this ele-
ment in Eliot's thought by saying:

The degradation and despair. . . . when humbly and
penitently borne by man as the consequence of his
sin, are thus understood as being not utterly spend-
thrift of life but as being actually restorative of
health and order. It was indeed this . . . by which
the natural order is redeemed by grace that impelled
Kierkegaard to declare: "... Had I not died I
should have died indeed."36

Eliot expresses this paradox in The Elder Statesman when
he has Lord Claverton say:

... I know what you think.
You think that I suffer from a morbid conscience,
From brooding over faults I might well have forgotten.
You think that I'm sickening, when I'm just recover-
ing!37

34Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 364.
35S. A. Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, translated
36Scott, Rehearsals of Discomposure, p. 241.
And in *The Family Reunion* when Ivy mentions that Harry expected that he "would never get well" from the "children's epidemics," Harry replies:

> Not, I think, without some justification; 
> For what you call restoration to health 
> Is only incubation of another malady.  

Dr. Warburton adds, evidently with some insight into what Harry has said:

> We're all of us ill in one way or another: 
> We call it health when we find no symptom 
> Of illness. Health is a relative term.  

And hence Eliot considers the man who has been brought face to face with his despair to be in a much healthier condition, as far as the possibility of that despair being healed is concerned, than the man for whom despair remains hidden. This is why, in *The Cocktail Party*, Reilly tells Edward and Lavinia that they are "much too ill" for his "sanatorium":

> I say you are both too ill. There are several symptoms Which must occur together, and to a marked degree, To qualify a patient for my sanatorium: And one of them is an honest mind. That is one of the causes of their suffering.  

---

38 Eliot, *Family Reunion*, p. 64.

39 Ibid.

The Cross.--The Cross is another symbol used by Eliot which has a paradoxical quality given to it by Eliot's doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This is a traditionally Christian view of the Cross in which that which was first a symbol of death becomes a symbol of life. Murder in the Cathedral best expresses in explicit terms the Church's view of the Cross when Thomas says:

... We have only to conquer
Now by suffering. This is the easier victory.
Now is the triumph of the Cross...\(^4^1\)

The Cross, then, is not only for Eliot the instrument of Christ's death and passion, but it is also the symbol of the suffering which is necessary for every individual Christian:

... For the Church is stronger for this [Thomas's martyrdom] action,
Triumphant in adversity. It is fortified
By persecution: supreme so long as men will die for it.\(^4^2\)

However, in his plays of contemporary settings Eliot is not disposed to make use of such explicitly Christian symbols. But since he is also not disposed to omit that idea to which the Cross points, he does use the less explicit symbol of the tree in place of the Cross. And even

\(^4^1\)Ibid., p. 212. \(^4^2\)Ibid., p. 219.
here he is using a traditional representation of the
Cross. Eliot uses trees in this way especially in The
Family Reunion and The Elder Statesman. And, always,
these trees have the same paradoxical quality about them
that is found in the symbol of the Cross: the trees are
seen to be the origin of suffering (as is the "tree of
life" of the Garden of Eden), as well as to be the source
of overcoming that suffering through finding meaning in
the midst of suffering (as is the "tree of death" on which
Christ was crucified). This use of the tree to relate
Eliot's idea of the Cross to his doctrine of Original Sin
is further illustrated by Neville Braybrooke when he says:

... it may simply be that there is in man a memory
so strong that the branches of a tree, however faintly,
cannot fail to stir with the voices of Eden, or with
the scene enacted upon a small hill in Palestine some
nineteen hundred years ago.

And it should be remembered in this connection that one of
the functions of the Holy Spirit is "to bring all things to
your remembrance."

43 George Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art
44 Eliot, Family Reunion, pp. 52-53.
46 Neville Braybrooke, "Introduction," T. S. Eliot: A
Symposium for His Seventieth Birthday (New York, 1958),
p. 16.
Christian Baptism.--Eliot's naming of the characters of his plays should be mentioned in the context of his doctrine of the Holy Spirit because of the name's close relation to Christian baptism, which also is an office of the Spirit. For instance, the giving of the Christian name in baptism is, as The Book of Common Prayer instructs, "not only a . . . mark of difference whereby Christian men are discerned from others . . . , but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New Birth . . . and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost. . . ." 47 Braybrooke says of Eliot's use of names that "Mr. Eliot may write humorously on 'the Naming of Cats,' but the choosing of any name has always been for him a most careful procedure. . . ." 48 Indeed, no doubt an entire study alone could be made on the individual names in Eliot's plays, but for the purposes of this investigation a single example of the significance given by Eliot to names in general should be sufficient. For it is in The Elder Statesman that Eliot seems to concentrate on the question of what it "means--/

To take another name." Since Christian baptism means "New

47 Book of Common Prayer, p. 608.

Birth" (and hence the acquisition of a new name), there is also implied in baptism the dying of the old self, or the leaping over the abyss, and thus leaving all behind. This is brought out most clearly by Eliot as he has Gomez confront Lord Claverton-Ferry by saying:

... Think what that means--
To take another name. But of course you know!
Just enough to think you know more than you do.
You've changed your name twice--by easy stages,
And each step was merely a step up the ladder,
So you weren't aware of becoming a different person:
But where I changed my name there was no social ladder.
It was jumping a gap--and you can't jump back again.
I parted from myself by a sudden effort
You, so slowly and sweetly, that you've never woken up
To the fact that Dick Ferry died long ago.49

And in the same play Michael's "regeneration" is marked by his desire to go "where, if I took a different name--and I might choose to--/ No one would know or care what my name had been."50

"The Furies."--Perhaps the largest and most dramatic role given to the person of the Holy Spirit in Eliot's plays, is in The Family Reunion. In this play the "Eumenides," or "Furies," are essential to the dramatic action.

49 Eliot, Elder Statesman, p. 35.
50 Ibid., p. 83.
Harry is pursued to Wishwood by these "spectres," and, conversely, his motive for leaving Wishwood is that he is then "pursuing," or "following," them. Again, this is precisely the nature of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit first is interpreted by man as being his greatest enemy, as being the most vicious type of "hound" in its relentless and terrifying pursuit. However, once man has reached his limit, can go no further, and subsequently is "caught" by his pursuer, the Spirit—which first was seen only as "the hound"—then reveals itself as the "hound of heaven" and as man's greatest friend. Eliot actually uses this metaphor of the "hound" in his own commentary on this paradoxical role of the Furies:

The attraction [Harry's attraction for Mary] glimmers for a moment in his mind, half-consciously as a possible "way of escape," and the Furies (for the Furies are divine instruments, not simple hell-hounds) come in the nick of time to warn him away from this evasion—though at that moment he misunderstands their function. . . . The second appearance of the Furies, more patently in their role of divine messengers, . . . let him know clearly that the only way out is purgation and holiness. They become exactly "hounds of heaven." And agatha understands this clearly, though Harry only understands it yet in flashes.51

Indeed, this dual role of the Furies is such an important element in *The Family Reunion* that Eliot, at one time, considered calling the play "Follow the Furies."\(^{52}\)

One of many interesting examples of how closely Eliot seems to follow Kierkegaard, and not only Kierkegaard's thought but the practical implications of that thought, is in the difficulty which Eliot has had in his use of the Furies of *The Family Reunion* as a dramatic device. It is almost as though Kierkegaard had anticipated Eliot at this point. Eliot has explained this difficulty by saying:

One evidence of this ["the deepest flaw of all" of the play] is the appearance of those ill-fated figures, the Furies. They must, in future, be omitted from the cast, and be understood to be visible only to certain of my characters, and not to the audience. We tried every possible means of presenting them. We put them on the stage, and they looked like uninvited guests who had strayed in from a fancy dress ball. We concealed them behind gauze, and they suggested a still out of a Walt Disney film. . . . I have seen other expedients tried . . . and they are never right. They never succeed in being either Greek goddesses or modern spooks. But their failure is merely a symptom of the failure to adjust the ancient with the modern.\(^{53}\)

---


Kierkegaard pointed out the danger of objectively dramatizing an eternal reality, in his examination of the Greek "aesthetic-metaphysical conception of nemesis":

So it is with the consciousness of guilt: inwardness becomes externality. Hence one could see the Furies; but precisely this visibility of their makes the inwardness less terrible. . . . On the other hand, when one conceives the consciousness of guilt as remorse, . . . this guiltiness is precisely the terrible experience, for remorse no one can see, and remorse accompanies one across every threshold. But the visibility of the Furies expresses symbolically the commensurability between the inward and the outward, whereby the consciousness of guilt is finitized . . . and there is no eternal guilt.54

In The Elder Statesman Eliot again finds occasion for use of the Furies, or the "spectres" as they are called in this play. However, in this case Eliot follows his own counsel, as well as that of Kierkegaard, as the "spectres" are "omitted from the cast." It is true that in The Elder Statesman the "spectres" do have "objective correlatives" in the characters of Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, but the "spectres" themselves are quite different from the Furies of The Family Reunion as the "spectres" are invisible and as they accompany Claverton "across every threshold." For instance, Charles asks Claverton why he does not "leave

54Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 482.
Badgley and escape from them [Gomez and Mrs. Carghill]?"

Claverton answers:

Because they are not real, Charles. They are merely ghosts:
Spectres from my past. They've always been with me
Though it was not till lately that I found the living persons
Whose ghosts tormented me, to be only human beings,
Malicious, petty, and I see myself emerging
From my spectral existence into something like reality.\textsuperscript{55}

However, the spectres of \textit{The Elder Statesman}, just as the spectres in \textit{The Family Reunion}, ultimately reveal themselves to be "\textit{divine instruments}";\textsuperscript{56} and hence both "spectres" and "Furies" can be seen to be Eliot's representation of the dual role of the Holy Spirit as "hell-hound" and "hound of heaven."

\textit{Fear}.—Eliot's use of the concept of \textit{fear} in his plays is an important one that should not be overlooked. Again, however, it should be pointed out that the type of fear with which Eliot is so preoccupied is a holy terror rather than a fear of anything finite. As such, this fear also takes on the dual nature of the Holy Spirit in its

\textsuperscript{55}Eliot, \textit{Elder Statesman}, p. 104.

\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 110.
roles of scourge and minister. Kierkegaard described the dialectical nature of this "more dreadful" fear when he said:

Only the Christian knows what is meant by the sickness unto death. He acquires as a Christian a courage which the natural man does not know—this courage he acquires by learning fear for the still more dreadful. Such is the way a man always acquires courage; when one fears a greater danger, it is as though the other did not exist. But the dreadful thing the Christian learned to know is "the sickness unto death." 57

Kierkegaard is thus following the tradition of Job who came to understand that "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." 58 Eliot often makes use of this paradoxical concept of fear in his plays. For instance, in The Elder Statesman, just as Michael finally obtains the courage to make a complete break with the past, Eliot has him protest:

What is there to say?
I want to leave England, and make my own career:
And Father simply calls me a coward. 59

For Lord Claverton, who has referred to Michael as "only a fugitive from reality," has said to his son:

... I shouldn't like to think
That what inspired you was no positive ambition
But only the desire to escape.60

But in The Family Reunion Agatha adds an interesting
commentary to the preceding problem of The Elder States-
man when she says of Harry:

In a world of fugitives
The person taking the opposite direction
will appear to run away.61

And Harry further suggests the dual nature of his fear
by saying that "it is love and terror / Of what waits
and wants me, and will not let me fall."62 In Murder in
the Cathedral Eliot illustrates forcefully not only the
fearfulness of "the love of God," but also illustrates
how much more dreadful this type of fear is than fear
commonly is thought of:

Forgive us, O Lord, we acknowledge ourselves as a
type of the common man,
Of the men and women who shut the door and sit by
the fire;
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.63

60Ibid., p. 86.
63Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 221.
Eliot's original title for *Murder in the Cathedral* was "Fear in the Way"; and as Jones points out, this title is itself indicative of Eliot's emphasis of the "revulsion and fear that attend Christian witness." Kierkegaard's paradoxical dialectic in which courage is acquired "by learning fear for the still more dreadful," is illustrated further in *The Confidential Clerk* when Colby tells Lucasta that "you jump--because you're afraid of being pushed. / I think that you're brave--and I think that you're frightened." And in *The Cocktail Party* Eliot shows how this fear has its origin in sin when Celia says:

> But I don't see why mistakes should make one feel sinful!
> And yet I can't find any other word for it. It must be some kind of hallucination; Yet, at the same time, I'm frightened by the fear That is more real than anything I believed in.

Eliot also relates this most realistic fear to the image of man made hollow by Original Sin when he has Mrs. Carghill repeat a remark she has heard concerning Lord Claverton:

> "That man is hollow." That's what she said. / Or did she say 'yellow'? I'm not quite sure."

---

65 Eliot, *Confidential Clerk*, p. 61.
Other symbols for the Holy Spirit.--Eliot also employs the more traditional symbols of birds and fire for his representations of the Holy Spirit. And although the symbol of water as it is used in Christian baptism is found more often in his poems, especially in The Wasteland and Four Quartets, Eliot also uses this symbol in his plays.

It should be pointed out, at the same time, that both fire and water are fitting symbols for Eliot's conception of the Holy Spirit as they are both capable of sustaining the imagery of the Spirit's paradoxical function of producing spiritual restoration in and through spiritual purgation.

But perhaps Eliot's most unique dramatic symbol for the Holy Spirit is the symbol of "the Guardians." Eliot first uses a "guardian" as Thomas' "good Angel" in Murder in the Cathedral. In The Family Reunion Thomas' "good Angel" becomes "the bright angels"--or the Furies. But in The Cocktail Party "the Guardians" play their largest

---

68Eliot, Ibid., p. 128; Confidential Clerk, p. 12; Family Reunion, p. 101.
70Eliot, Poems and Plays, pp. 304, 379.
71Ibid., p. 197.
72Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 111.
role. This role is as important as the role of the Furies in Eliot's representations of the Holy Spirit.

Inwardly, the Guardians are the silent, "stronger partners," as they are described by Edward in the following speech:

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.
The willing self can contrive the disaster
Of this unwilling partnership--but can only flourish
In submission to the rule of the stronger partner.73

And although this "guardian," as such, is never mentioned in The Elder Statesman, a comparison of Edward's preceding speech with the following speech by Lord Claverton can leave little doubt that Eliot had the same concept in mind:

... Some dissatisfaction
With myself, I suspect, very deep within myself
Has impelled me all my life to find justification
Not so much to the world--first of all to myself.
What is this self inside us, this silent observer,
Severe and speechless critic, who can terrorise us
And urge us on to futile activity,
And in the end, judge us still more severely

---

73 Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 326.
For the error into which his own reproaches drove us? 74

The Guardians also are represented outwardly in a very important way, and in this they strongly resemble the Furies of The Family Reunion. That is, both the Furies and the Guardians are important dramatic elements in their respective plays, and both have their objective and subjective aspects. For instance, in The Family Reunion Harry says of the Furies:

I have a private puzzle. Were they simply outside, I might escape somewhere, perhaps. Were they simply inside
I could cheat them perhaps with the aid of Dr. Warburton
Or any other doctor . . . 75

But the Guardians, like the "spectres" in The Elder Statesman, are never seen as themselves as the Furies are.

Instead, they are represented by Reilly, Julia, and Alex. Several critics have seen these three members of the cast as more symbolic of the Church than of the Holy Spirit. 76

This view would seem to be supported by the fact that both

---

74 Eliot, Elder Statesman, p. 54.

75 Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 90.

76 Jones, Plays of T. S. Eliot, p. 152.
Julia and Reilly are given a truly symbolic "one-eyed" vision—Reilly as "the One-Eyed Riley" and Julia with "one lens . . . missing" from her "glasses." Eliot probably is here alluding to St. Matthew's Gospel which states: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." And later in the play more is said of this singleness of vision which supports its interpretation as the special perception of the Christian vision. However, the fact that Julia, Alex, and Reilly evidently possess this vision does not mean in itself that they are Christians as opposed to representations of the Holy Spirit. It is generally conceded that these members of the cast do represent the Guardians, however, as this is borne out by the play's text. The strongest evidence for the belief that they are symbols for the Holy Spirit comes from indications in the play that they are not actually human beings. It is quite evident from Eliot's

77 Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 309.

78 Mt. 6:22.


80 Ibid., p. 367.
doctrine of Original Sin that he assumes all men must undergo the "terrifying journey," as Reilly calls it, of "religious fear" before they can reach the stage of true religious devotion. And in The Cocktail Party the three "Guardians" seem to have been exempted from this journey. For as Julia says to Reilly concerning Celia's being sent to "the sanatorium":

Oh yes, she will go far. And we know where she is going.
But what do we know of the terrors of the journey?
You and I don't know the process by which the human is
Transhumanized: what do we know
Of the kind of suffering they must undergo
On the way of illumination?81

Furthermore, Alex, Julia, and Reilly, for all of their activity in watching over and acting as guardians for the other members of the cast, maintain the same paradoxical nature of the Holy Spirit in that they also act as tormentors. And, as Jones points out, this aspect of their "guardianship" also "gives Eliot good warrant for making excellent comedy out of them."82 Furthermore, in addition to their inhuman natures, the three Guardians seem to possess certain supernatural powers. For instance, Reilly

81Ibid., p. 367.

82Jones, Plays of T. S. Eliot, p. 150.
is capable of seeing invisible "images," and Alex certainly suggests the miracle of Christ feeding "the multitudes" with "five barley loaves and two small fishes" when he says to Edward and Peter:

... that's my special gift--
Concocting a toothsome meal out of nothing.
Any scraps you have will do. I learned that in the East.
With a handful of rice and a little dried fish
I can make a half a dozen dishes.

Indeed, Alex's statement that "of all my triumphs / This is the greatest. To make something out of nothing!" is instructive as to Eliot's entire idea concerning the miracle of Christian rebirth: that men first must become nothing before they can become truly something--or, more particularly, before they can become Christians, as in the case of Celia. Kierkegaard echoes this thought when he says: "God creates everything out of nothing--and everything which God is to use he first reduces to nothing."

---

84 Jn. 6:9.
85 Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 313.
The Guardians, then, both inward and outward, should be interpreted as another one of Eliot's symbols for the Holy Spirit. They are the same "divine instruments" in The Cocktail Party that the Furies were seen to be in The Family Reunion.

Appearance and reality.—The paradoxical, a central characteristic of the Holy Spirit, can best be understood as an aspect of the entire Christian revelation. It was Kierkegaard who first recovered the insight for theology that all "truth is paradoxical," and Eliot is a close follower of Kierkegaard's at this point. "Everything is true in a different sense," Eliot has Harry say in The Family Reunion. The primary reason behind the paradoxical nature of the Christian faith, is that in the event of Christian revelation that which was real is now seen to be unreal, and that which was unreal is now seen to be real. This thought is expressed throughout Eliot's plays, but perhaps its most apt dramatization occurs in relation to the situation which Sir Claude, in The Confidential Clerk, has "always longed for"—a situation realized in

---

87Cochrane, Existentialists and God, p. 28.
Christian revelation: "I want a world where the form is the reality, / Of which the substantial is only a shadow." And Celia, in The Cocktail Party, was at one time so happy, that her life was like "a dream" -- "or so it seemed," as she says to Edward:

... then I suddenly discovered That the dream was not enough; that I wanted something more And I waited, and wanted to run to tell you. Perhaps the dream was better. It seemed like the real reality, And if this is reality, it is very like a dream.

Later in the play Celia confides to Reilly:

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. I want to live with it... 

Eliot comments on this discrepancy between "dreams" and "visions" in his essay on Dante:

We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions -- a practice now relegated to the aberrant and uneducated -- was once a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming. We take it for granted that our dreams spring from below: possibly the quality of our dreams suffers in consequence.

89Eliot, Confidential Clerk, p. 47.
90Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 324.
91Ibid., p. 364.
92Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 204.
Therefore, Eliot's attitude towards natural man's vision is very much like an attitude found in the gospels: "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because seeing they see not."\(^{93}\) Or, as Harry says in *The Family Reunion*:

> Explaining would only set me farther away from you. There is only one way for you to understand And that is by seeing. . . .\(^{94}\)

For Eliot, men must learn to "see" in another way; and hence they are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to open their eyes as well as their hearts. And Eliot certainly considers this paradoxical "vision" essential to his own work:

> The essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal; it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory.\(^{95}\)

**The Son**

Eliot's Christology is an extremely high one. It is not enough to say that the Incarnation is central to his theology, for even this term can be misused in denoting

---

\(^{93}\) Mt. 13:13.

\(^{94}\) Eliot, *Family Reunion*, p. 56.

the extremely precise definition he would assign to the
person of Jesus Christ. For Eliot, Jesus Christ is the
only point in all history through which man's salvation
can—and must—come. As such, Jesus Christ is to be be-
lieved in in and for himself. Any reason for believing
in Jesus—the historical Jesus of Nazareth—as the Christ,
other than the witness of the Holy Spirit to the broken
heart of man, is rejected firmly by Eliot. Jesus is the
actual point in history in which the eternal was united
with the temporal

so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is
to say, the God head and Manhood, were joined to-
gether in one Person, never to be divided, whereof
is one Christ, very God, and very Man; who truly
suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to recon-
cile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not
only for original guilt, but also for actual sins
of man.96

This is precisely the basis for the dogmatic nature of
Eliot's theology. The truth is the truth because it is
so, and not because any objective standard of proof proves
that it is so. If the latter were the case, then it would
be obvious that the "objective standard" would have usurped
the place of the truth. And thus Eliot can say:

The difficult discipline is the discipline and
training of emotion . . . and this I have found

96Book of Common Prayer, p. 603.
is only attainable through dogmatic religion. I do not say that dogmatic religion is justified because it supplies this need—that is just the psychologism and the anthropocentrism that I wish to avoid—but merely state my belief that in no other way can the need be supplied. 97

And Jesus Christ is the truth for Eliot just as He is for the New Testament. 98 This Eliot "believes" to be so—"belief" being that type of knowledge which has no objective proof. For instance, in regard to miracles as verification of truth, Eliot has said:

It would seem fantastic to accept Christianity because we first believe the Gospel miracles to be true, and it would seem impious to accept it primarily because we believe more recent miracles to be true; we accept the miracles, or some miracles, to be true because we believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ: we found our belief in the miracles on the Gospel, not our belief in the Gospel on the miracles. 99

And, in a similar way, Eliot rejects the "imitation of Christ" as the "fundamental truth" for Christians. 100 For Eliot, only the most radical subjectivity is that which may be regarded as a "proof" for the ultimate truth. This is also the meaning behind the doctrine of Justification by Faith,
which asserts "that we are justified by Faith only, ... a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort. ..."\(^{101}\)

It is, then, according to this doctrine, only by the presence of "comfort" that man "knows" the truth. This is why in the New Testament the Holy Spirit was called "the Comforter," and why it was said that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."\(^{102}\) Eliot has provided an adequate description of these elements in his own position as he describes "the process of the mind of the intelligent believer":

He finds the world to be so and so; he finds its character to be inexplicable by any non-religious theory: among religions he finds Christianity, and Catholic Christianity, to account most satisfactorily for the world and especially for the moral world within; and thus, by what Newman calls "powerful and concurrent" reasons, he finds himself inexorably committed to the dogma of the Incarnation.\(^{103}\)

In dramatizing Christ as the only historical point through which faith can originate, Eliot has used the New Testament symbol of Christ as "the door"\(^{104}\) in all of

\(^{101}\) *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 605.

\(^{102}\) I Cor. 12:3.


\(^{104}\) Jn. 10:9.
his plays except *The Cocktail Party*.\(^{105}\) However, in *The Cocktail Party* there is a particularly unique allusion to Christ which does not seem to occur in the other plays. This suggestion of Christ is an allusion to that aspect of Christology which has Christ descending into Hell: "As Christ died for us, and was buried; so also is it to be believed, that He went down into Hell."\(^{106}\) Eliot uses this "Article of Religion" to illustrate that it is precisely in Hell—and only in Hell—that man can find reconciliation. And since this is the condition of all men, as the doctrine of Original Sin points out, then it is necessary for Christ to "go down into Hell" in order to save men. In *The Cocktail Party* Edward says in complete despair: "It would need someone greater than the greatest doctor / To cure this illness."\(^{107}\) And later he adds: "I am simply in hell. Where there are no doctors-- / At least, not in a professional capacity."\(^{108}\) And thus it is Christ who, as a doctor in the midst of Hell, does not work""in a

\(^{105}\)Eliot, *Poems and Plays*, p. 212; *Family Reunion*, pp. 103-105; *Confidential Clerk*, p. 63; *Elder Statesman*, pp. 120, 130.

\(^{106}\)Book of Common Prayer, p. 603.


\(^{108}\)Ibid., p. 342.
professional capacity," but offers the "free gift"$^{109}$ of salvation to those who accept it.

Eliot has concentrated most heavily on his doctrine of the Incarnation in *Four Quartets*. $^{110}$ Christ is seen here as "the point of intersection of the timeless / With time"$^{111}$ and as "The still point of the turning world."$^{112}$ But there is a suggestion in *Murder in the Cathedral* of the way in which Eliot has represented the Incarnation in *Four Quartets*. For one of the Tempters says to Thomas:

... Neither does the actor suffer
Nor the patient act. But 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, that the wheel may turn and still
Be forever still.$^{113}$

The offensiveness of Christ.--Eliot also uses the Kierkegaardian category of "the offense" in his doctrine of Christ. In this category, Kierkegaard emphasized the

$^{109}$Rom. 5:15.


$^{112}$Ibid., p. 121.

$^{113}$Ibid., p. 193.
offense, or "stumbling block," imposed upon man's reason in being required to believe that this particular man, this lowly, humble servant, the historical Jesus of Nazareth, was actually God and, therefore, is to be worshiped as God.\textsuperscript{114} Kierkegaard maintained that it is, as far as the world is concerned, absurd enough to "base an eternal happiness upon historical knowledge,\textsuperscript{115} but that it is the height of absurdity to base an eternal happiness upon this "historical point of departure"—Jesus of Nazareth. As far as history is concerned Jesus is, at best, a strange, obscure, religious enthusiast, almost an unknown quantity, and, evidently, was very little more than this during his own lifetime. As Heinecken says in his book on Kierkegaard:

Kierkegaard cites . . . John 6:61, where Christ says of himself that he is the living bread and, "he that eateth of this bread shall live forever." This offends even his so-called disciples and many of them walk no more with him. This is too much, this demand of absolute dependence upon him, who after all is a man just like everyone else.\textsuperscript{116}

In The Confidential Clerk Colby, who at the end of the play evidently is destined to soon be "reading for orders,"\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{114}Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{115}S. A. Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, translated by David F. Swenson (Princeton, 1936), p. iii.


\textsuperscript{117}Eliot, Confidential Clerk, p. 156.
finds himself in the peculiar position of being able to choose the type of father he would like to have—having "never had a father." Colby's choice is extremely similar to that choice which Kierkegaard maintains a man must make concerning Christ in order to become a Christian:

COLBY: 
... I should like a father
Whom I had never known and couldn't know now,
Because he would have died before I was born
Or before I could remember; whom I could get to know
Only by report, by documents;
The story of his life, of his success or failure...
Perhaps his failure more than his success...
By objects that belonged to him, and faded photographs
In which I should try to decipher a likeness;
Whose image I could create in my own mind,
To live with that image. An ordinary man
Whose life I could in some way perpetuate
By being the person he would have liked to be,
And by doing the things he had wanted to do.

MRS. GUZZARD: Whose son would you wish to be, Colby:
Sir Claude's—or the son of some other man
Obscure and silent? A dead man, Colby.
Be careful what you say.

COLBY: A dead obscure man.

MRS. GUZZARD: You shall have your wish. And when you have your wish
You will have to come to terms with it. You shall have a father
Dead, and unknown to you.\textsuperscript{118}

Jones also sees this father figure of Colby's as Christ.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{118}Ibid., pp. 147-148.

\textsuperscript{119}Jones, The Plays of T. S. Eliot, p. 166.
Michael, in *The Elder Statesman*, is confronted with a choice similar to Colby's: he must decide if he is to leave his father and start his life anew by going to Central America with Gomez, a man whom he hardly knows, or if he is to stay in England and continue to be dominated by his father. Charles attempts to advise Michael by telling him:

> Remember, you put yourself completely in the power of a man you don't know, of the nature of whose business. You know nothing. All you can be sure of is that he served a prison sentence for forgery.  

This statement also reflects precisely the Kierkegaardian concept of the offense: it is to "put yourself completely in the power / Of a man you don't know." For very little more is known of the historical point of Jesus of Nazareth than the fact that he was a man who was crucified for the act of forgery (*i.e.*, he called himself "the King of the Jews"). Kierkegaard is quite emphatic in pointing out why anyone would make such a blind leap of faith to such a precarious point: they are "desperate men who follow Him,

---


desperate men who have nothing to lose."  

Likewise, Eliot is quite emphatic in pointing out the reason behind the crucial decisions of several of his dramatic protagonists. For instance, when Harry decides to "follow the Furies" he says:

I would not have chosen this way, had there been any other!
It is at once the hardest thing, and the only thing possible.
Now they will lead me. I shall be safe with them;
I am not safe here.  

And when Celia decides to "go to the sanatorium," she tells Reilly:

I don't in the least know what I am doing
Or why I am doing it. There is nothing else to do:
That is the only reason.  

"It is the best reason," replies Reilly. And Reilly, like Kierkegaard, is fully aware that to seek the "stranger's" help is not only offensive in itself, but that the "help" forthcoming may be even more offensive. Kierkegaard says of the help Christ offers:

And even these [desperate] men--how does he help them? One must be mad to want to be helped in that

---

122 Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 54.
123 Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 110.
fashion. It is true, even with regard to the poorest beggars, that He helps them out of the frying-pan into the fire, helps them into a new misery which the beggar could have avoided by remaining what he was, a mere beggar.125

Thus when Edward seeks out Reilly for "an intimate disclosure to a stranger," Edward finally comes around to saying:

I know I invited this conversation:
But I don't know who you are. This is not what I expected.

I think your speculations rather offensive.

And Reilly replies:

. . . I know that all you wanted was the luxury
Of an intimate disclosure to a stranger.
Let me, therefore, remain the stranger.
But let me tell you, that to approach the stranger
Is to invite the unexpected, release a new force,
Or let the genie out of the bottle.
It is to start a train of events
Beyond your control. . . .126

Scott, in commenting on Eliot's doctrine of the Church, has said: "it is within its fold that we come to know ourselves and each other and that Stranger who, when he is encountered here, ceases to be a stranger and becomes known as Lord and Savior."127

125Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 54.
127Scott, Rehearsals of Discomposure, p. 226.
The Church as the Body of Christ.--Eliot's doctrine of the Incarnation, which includes the necessity of faith's cleaving to the actual, historical Jesus as its object of worship, is crucial in understanding Eliot's doctrine of the Church. For Eliot the Church is a synthesis of an historical instrument, through which the remembrance of the original biblical witness and tradition is preserved, and the inward presence of the Holy Spirit, which quickens this remembrance and relates it existentially to the individual Christian. Or, as The Book of Common Prayer puts it, "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance. . . ."\(^{128}\) Thus it is also possible to see the important role tradition plays in Eliot's theology. Historical tradition is the only means given to men for preserving the knowledge which they must retain if faith is to remain possible—the knowledge of the historical Jesus. But the presence of the Holy Spirit is also a necessary part of the synthesis of faith. It is for these reasons that Eliot believes there is danger in a strict Protestantism

\(^{128}\)Book of Common Prayer, 606.
which has the tendency to emphasize spiritual enthusiasm to the exclusion of historical tradition, but that there is also danger in a narrow Catholicism which tends to usurp the fundamental authority of the Holy Spirit by its own traditional authority. Consequently, Eliot is a member of the Anglican Communion, the church which he believes to maintain "the right balance" between the two elements of the synthesis of faith: complete subjective devotion to the objective Jesus Christ. The Anglican Church, then, is for Eliot the via media, "and," says Eliot, "the via media is of all ways the most difficult to follow. It requires discipline and self-control, it requires both imagination and hold on reality." And because the Church represents a synthesis of the eternal and the temporal, it is regarded by Eliot as "the real extension of the Incarnation" (i.e., "the body of Christ"). Eliot's doctrine of the Church, perhaps more than any other single doctrine, is capable of giving unity to a Christian interpretation of all of his work. Scott has said of Eliot's work that

130 Ibid., p. 332.
131 Ibid., p. 316.
132 Scott, Rehearsals of Discomposure, p. 226.
the stress is upon the necessity of a "leap in the
dark," of sacrifice, of "despair" and travail, of
the coordination of contraries, of the submission
of the order of nature to that divine grace, of Christ
the Redeemer, of Resurrection—all of which belongs
to that "strange world within the Bible." And always
in the background there is the Church itself, for the
sake of whose gifts the tremendous cost of the spirit-
ual life is seen to be infinitely worth while and
into the anonymous accent of whose language the poet's
own speech frequently falls. . . .133

Braybrooke has said of Eliot that "the drama of the Church
he has interpreted through the stage."134 But the specific
allusions to the Church itself within Eliot's plays also
can be quite instructive as to Eliot's doctrine of the
Church. For instance, in Murder in the Cathedral Eliot's
emphasis upon tradition in relation to the Church is quite
evolved in Thomas' final speech before his death:

Now to Almighty God, to the Blessed Mary ever Virgin,
to the blessed John the Baptist, the holy apostles
Peter and Paul, to the blessed martyr Denys, and to
all the Saints, I commend my cause and that of the
Church.135

The "sanatorium" of The Cocktail Party is Eliot's repre-
sentation of the Church in that play. It is a sanatorium
that "sounds like a prison" and to which "not very many
go"; but it is also a place at which everything is provided

133Ibid., p. 245.
135Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 213.
and there are "no expenses at the Sanatorium." Celia
asks what becomes of those who do go to the sanatorium,
and Reilly answers:

They choose, Miss Coplestone. Nothing is forced
on them.
Some of them return, in a physical sense;
No one disappears. They lead very active lives
Very often in the world.\textsuperscript{136}

And earlier in the play Reilly has told Edward:

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 . . . \textsuperscript{137}

In \textit{The Elder Statesman} the Church as "a congregation
of faithful men" is represented by Gomez, a man who has
"a gift for friendship"\textsuperscript{136} and has had to change his name
by "jumping a gap." And it is also through the influence
of Gomez that Michael is led to a new life and that Lord
Claverton finally passes "through some door unseen by"
Charles and Monica.\textsuperscript{139}

The rose.--The "rose" and the "rose garden" are fig-
ures used throughout Eliot's poems but more particularly

\textsuperscript{136}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 366. \hfill \textsuperscript{137}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 356.

\textsuperscript{138}Eliot, \textit{Elder Statesman}, p. 41. Eliot probably is
here alluding to Jn. 15:15 in which Christ says to the
Disciples: "... I have called you friends: for all
things that I have heard of my Father I have made known
to you."

\textsuperscript{139}Eliot, \textit{Elder Statesman}, p. 130.
in Ash Wednesday and Four Quartets. The rose is also a traditional symbol for Christ.\(^\text{140}\) In Ash Wednesday Eliot says, "The single rose / Is now the garden."\(^\text{141}\) Assuming that for Eliot the Church is the extension of the Incarnation and that "the single rose" represents Christ, as critics have guessed,\(^\text{142}\) then it would seem to follow that the rose garden is a symbol of the Church for Eliot. This would be a fitting symbol as the rose garden would then be that area in which roses, or Christians, take root, are nourished, and are cared for. In The Family Reunion Eliot is evidently using the "rose garden" in this way along with Christ as "the little door" to that garden.\(^\text{143}\) In The Confidential Clerk Colby confides to Lucasta that he has a "secret garden" to which he retires, but here there is no mention of roses. Perhaps this explains why he finds his garden to be lonely and "unrelated" to the "world outside." For Colby does admire Eggerson's garden:

What I mean is, my garden's no less unreal to me Than the world outside it. If you have two lives

\(^{140}\)Ferguson, Signs and Symbols, p. 20.

\(^{141}\)Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 62.


\(^{143}\)Eliot, Family Reunion, pp. 103-105.
Which have nothing whatever to do with each other—
Well, they're both unreal. But for Eggerson
His garden is a part of one single world.

And when Lucasta asks Colby what he wants for his garden,

Colby replies:

Not to be alone there.
If I were religious, God would walk in my garden
And that would make the world outside it real
And acceptable, I think.144

It is also interesting to note in this connection that

Eliot has said that "Eggerson is the only developed Chris-
tian in the play."145

"The Moment."--A concept extremely important to Eliot
which is related to his doctrine of the Incarnation is
the concept of "the moment." This is also one of the
points at which Eliot seems to exhibit a great influence
from Kierkegaard. As Christ is seen by Eliot to be the
"still point of the turning world" at which the eternal
has intersected history, so "the moment" is the concept
used by Eliot to designate the extension of this point at
which the eternal, through Christ, intersects the life of
certain individuals. In his book on Kierkegaard, The Moment

144 Eliot, Confidential Clerk, pp. 64-65.
Before God, Heinecken describes Kierkegaard's conception of "the moment" by saying:

Here in this moment when God encounters man, not in an instant of recollection, but in the begetting of the truth in him, there is compressed all eternity. Here a man does not sink back into the eternity which is his possession, but eternity enters time. Here a man's eternal destiny is decided. . . . Here, therefore, is the one crucial moment of opportunity which is decisive. At a time and place God comes to man and calls to decision. 146

Kierkegaard simply says of "the moment":

Such a moment has a peculiar character. It is brief and temporal indeed, like every moment; it is transient as all moments are; it is past, like every moment in the next moment. And yet it is decisive, and filled with the eternal. 147

Eliot's own thought concerning "the moment" is expressed most clearly as he thinks through the problems of poetry--as in his essay on Dante:

The experience of a poem is the experience both of a moment and a lifetime. It is very much like our intenser experiences of other human beings. There is first, or an early moment which is unique, of shock and surprise, even of terror . . . a moment which is never repeated integrally; and yet which would become destitute of significance if it did not survive in a larger whole of experience; which survives inside a deeper and calmer feeling. 148

146 Heinecken, Moment Before God, p. 104.
147 Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, p. 73.
At the conclusion of the same essay, Eliot says concerning Dante's forms "of thought and feeling": "We must learn to accept these forms; and this acceptance is more important than anything that can be called belief. There is almost a definite moment of acceptance at which the New Life begins."\(^{149}\) Wilder has noticed this Kierkegaardian concept in Eliot while examining Eliot's idea of revelation:

It is only when time is intersected by revelation—"The point of intersection of the timeless with time,"—where we have a moment "outside of time," that meaning or grace is acknowledged. In other words Eliot employs an extreme Kierkegaardian antithesis. . . . Here the experience . . . of the eternal moment, is in effect the sole good and the chief end of life from the religious viewpoint.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Eliot follows a thorough-going Catholic distinction of natural and supernatural, and sometimes compounds it with a Kierkegaardian conception of "the moment" which further evacuates time of real meaning. Even Catholic theology has its way of avoiding Eliot's position here. Protestant theology (apart from the dialectical tradition reaching from Kierkegaard to Barth) would make it clearer . . . that it is sin which is evil and not existence itself. . . .\(^{150}\)

And Barth adds interesting insight into Eliot's concept of "the moment" as he comments on the same idea as it is found in Romans of the New Testament:

\(^{149}\)Ibid., p. 237.

\(^{150}\)Wilder, Modern Poetry, pp. 276-277.
... the "now" of divine revelation is altogether submerged but remains, nevertheless, intact, in spite of its shallow covering of observable things. This "now," this "moment" beyond all time, when men stand before God, this "point" from which we come, but which is no point in the midst of other points, Jesus Christ crucified and risen,—is the Truth. All that is before and after this "Moment of moments," everything which encircles, like a plane, this "Point" which cannot be produced—is time.\textsuperscript{151}

"The moment" is a concept which almost saturates Eliot's plays. In The Family Reunion the "terror" of "the moment" is expressed by Agatha who says:

There are hours when there seems to be no past or future,
Only a present moment of pointed light
When you want to burn. When you stretch out your hand
To the flames. They only come once,
Thank God, that kind.\textsuperscript{152}

But the "deeper and calmer feeling" which Eliot also associates with "the moment," also is found in The Family Reunion, as when Harry says in the final scene of the play:

Look, I do not know why,
I feel happy for a moment, as if I had come home.
It is quite irrational ...\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{151} Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, translated by E. C. Hoskyns (London, 1933), p. 304.

\textsuperscript{152} Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 99.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., p. 102.
Sir Claude, in The Confidential Clerk, says concerning his frustrated ambition to create:

... I came to see
That I had always known, at the secret moments,
That I didn't have it in me.\(^{154}\)

The concept of "the moment" is one of the most important elements in The Cocktail Party. For instance, Peter, in describing to Edward his unrequited love for Celia, mentions

... those moments in which we seemed to share some perception,
Some feeling, some indefinable experience
In which we were both unaware of ourselves.\(^{155}\)

But Edward has troubles of his own which he, in turn, describes to Celia:

I have met myself as a middle-aged man
Beginning to know what it is to feel old.
That is the worst moment, when you feel that you have lost
The desire for all that was most desirable,
And before you are contented with what you can desire ... \(^{156}\)

And evidently this was the moment of crucial choice for Edward. For the next day, in the scene following the preceding speech, Reilly tells Edward, "Your moment of freedom

---

\(^{154}\) Eliot, Confidential Clerk, p. 48.

\(^{155}\) Eliot, Poems and Plays, p. 315.

\(^{156}\) Ibid., p. 325.
was yesterday."\textsuperscript{157} And Edward says at the close of this scene, "O God, O God, if I could return to yesterday / Before I thought I had made a decision."\textsuperscript{158} At the end of the play Edward realizes "that every moment is a fresh beginning"; "And the time of death is every moment," says Eliot in \textit{Four Quartets}. Taken together, these two statements illustrate how the moment of spiritual death is for Eliot precisely the opportune moment for spiritual rebirth; and, as Barth has pointed out, this moment is always "now," even though it may exist under a "shallow covering of observable things." In one of the final speeches of \textit{The Elder Statesman}, Monica says of Lord Claverton:

\begin{quote}
In becoming no one, he has become himself.  
He is only my father now, and Michael's.  
And I am happy. Isn't it strange, Charles,  
To be happy at this moment?\textsuperscript{159}
\end{quote}

In \textit{Murder in the Cathedral} the Chorus has encountered the dreadful aspect of "the moment" as the following speech clearly shows:

\begin{quote}
Every horror had its definition,  
Every sorrow had a kind of end:  
In life there is not time to grieve long.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{157}Ibid., p. 329. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{158}Ibid., p. 343.  
\textsuperscript{159}Eliot, \textit{Elder Statesman}, p. 131.
But this, this is out of life, this is out of time, 
An instant eternity of evil and wrong.\textsuperscript{160}

But Thomas understands this horrible "instant" with its opportunity for rebirth, and he tells the Chorus:

Peace, and be at peace with your thoughts and visions. 
These things had to come to you and you to accept them. 
This is your share of the eternal burden, 
The perpetual glory. This is one moment, 
But know that another Shall pierce you with a sudden painful joy 
When the figure of God's purpose is made complete.\textsuperscript{161}

It should be added for the sake of clarity that "the moment" for Eliot, as well as for Kierkegaard, is not a single instant of time through which the Christian passes and then is free of. Or, as Harry says to his incredulous family:

\ldots I knew how you would take it. 
First of all you isolate the single event 
As something so dreadful that it couldn't have happened, 
Because you could not bear it. \ldots \textsuperscript{162}

For "the moment" is the constant concomitant of the Christian life. It is the perpetual leadership of the fire and comfort of the Holy Spirit as it proceeds "from the Father and the Son." Or, as Kierkegaard puts it: "the

\textsuperscript{160}Eliot, \textit{Poems and Plays}, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{161}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 208.
\textsuperscript{162}Eliot, \textit{Family Reunion}, p. 30.
martyrdom of faith . . . is not a martyrdom of the instant but precisely the martyrdom of endurance." 163 This thought is echoed in the final scene of The Cocktail Party as Edward says:

O, it isn't much
That I understand yet! But Sir Henry Reilly has been saying,
I think, that every moment is a fresh beginning;
And Julia, that life is only keeping on;
And somehow, the two ideas seem to fit together. 164

The Father

Eliot's doctrine of God seems to be the least developed element of the Trinitarian formula. There are several possible reasons for this. In the first place, Eliot's theology seems to be so Christologically oriented that it is probably difficult for him to say very much about the person of the Father except as He is revealed in Jesus Christ and meets man existentially through the person of the Holy Spirit. This, then, would also seem to indicate that there is a sense in which the Son and the Holy Spirit are the more dramatic elements of the Trinity, or are, at least, more capable of sustaining a dramatic imagery. But

163Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 496.
perhaps the basic reason for the "hiddenness" of God in Eliot's plays is the "hiddenness" of God in existential theology, in which "God is not an object of knowledge." Both Barth and Kierkegaard, for example, refused to identify God and his revelation with anything human, with nature, history, or experience. "Consequently [they] wrote in tantalizing paradoxes. God touches our world without touching it, as a tangent touches a circle. God is the wholly Other, totaliter aliter."\textsuperscript{165}

\textbf{God's sovereignty.---}However, whenever Eliot does allude to God as such, it is usually in terms of God's sovereignty. This means that Eliot continues to follow an emphasis of Barth and Kierkegaard\textsuperscript{166} as well as an emphasis within the reformed tradition of his own church, which adheres to an article "of Predestination and Election."\textsuperscript{167} In The Elder Statesman, for instance, Lord Claverton, when asked by Charles how long he intends to endure the persecution of being rejected by his friends

\textsuperscript{165} Cochrane, \textit{Existentialists and God}, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Book of Common Prayer}, p. 606.
and family, answers: "To the end. The place and time of liberation / Are, I think, determined." And in the final scene of the same play, Monica's love for Charles sounds very much like the love of "the Father," which existed "before the foundations of the world were laid," \(^{168}\) when she says to Charles:

I've loved you from the beginning of the world.
Before you and I were born, the love was always there
That brought us together.
Oh Father, Father! \(^{169}\)

Towards the resolution of the play Gomez says:

Not that I deserve any credit for it.
We can only regard it as a stroke of good fortune
That I came to England at the very moment
When I could be helpful.

And Mrs. Carghill adds: "It's truly providential!"--an echo of Violet's "I call it providential," \(^{170}\) in The Family Reunion.

God's election.--The concept of election is also very important in Eliot's plays. Jones has said that "throughout most of his career as a dramatist, Eliot has been

\(^{168}\) Eliot, Elder Statesman, p. 131.

\(^{169}\) Ibid., pp. 124-125.

preoccupied with the theme of spiritual election..."\textsuperscript{171}

Thomas touches on this theme in \textit{Murder in the Cathedral} when he says in his Christmas sermon:

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... A martyr, a saint is always made by the design of God...\textsuperscript{172}

And in \textit{The Family Reunion} Harry says, "Why I have this election / I do not understand. It must have been preparing always..."\textsuperscript{173}

In \textit{The Cocktail Party} the term "destiny" plays an important role, as it is used again and again. For instance, Julia and Reilly agree that it is their "destiny" to "always take risks";\textsuperscript{174} Lavinia and Edward "accept their destiny";\textsuperscript{175} and Celia "was a woman under the sentence of death. / That was her destiny."\textsuperscript{176} Eliot provides some insight into his use of this term, and its relation to the doctrine of divine election, when he says in an essay on Virgil:

\textsuperscript{171}Jones, \textit{Plays of T. S. Eliot}, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{172}Eliot, \textit{Poems and Plays}, p. 199.
\textsuperscript{173}Eliot, \textit{Family Reunion}, p. 111.
\textsuperscript{175}Ibid., p. 368. \textsuperscript{176}Ibid., p. 384.
"destiny" is a word which means more than we can find any definitions for. It is a word which can have no meaning in a mechanical universe: If that which is wound up must run down, what destiny is there in that? Destiny is not necessitarianism. But [destiny] is an election which cannot be explained, a burden and responsibility rather than a reason for self-glorification. ... The concept of destiny leaves us with a mystery, but it is a mystery not contrary to reason, for it implies that the world, and the course of human history, have meaning.177

Eliot's concept of "destiny" is, therefore, closely related to The Book of Common Prayer's doctrine of God's sovereign election, in which certain men are called according to God's purpose by his Spirit ... they through Grace obey the calling: they be justified freely: they be made sons of God by adoption ... they walk religiously in good works. ... 178

Colby, in The Confidential Clerk, says that if he "were religious, God would walk in [his] garden," and that then he would not have to be alone there. And when Lucasta asks him if there is no way anyone can enter, Colby's reply sounds very much like the yearning for divine grace:

It can't be done by issuing invitations:
They would just have to come. And I should not see them coming.
I should not hear the opening of the gate.
They would simply ... be there suddenly,

177 Eliot, Poetry and Poets, p. 144.
Unexpectedly. Walking down an alley
I should become aware of someone walking with me.
That's the only way I can think of putting it. 179

It is true, then, for Eliot that even in the realm of
Christian decision, man is totally dependent upon God's
gracious election and sovereignty. Or, as Agatha tells
Mary, in The Family Reunion:

At this moment, there is no decision to be made;
The decision will be made by powers beyond us
Which now and then emerge. 180

179 Eliot, Confidential Clerk, p. 65.
180 Eliot, Family Reunion, p. 49.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

According to Nathan Scott, Jr., "the indispensable clue to the whole of [Eliot's] work is contained in the structure of classical Christian thought."\(^1\) And he adds:

Eliot's preoccupation with Original Sin and the related Christian ideas of atonement and redemption places him, in other words, in the very center of the Christian tradition. . . . The recognition of Eliot's dependence on Christian thought by no means solves all the critical problems. But it is nevertheless true that at the present time the reassessment of the meaning of his work can proceed from no other starting point, whether we deal with the phase which falls prior to Ash Wednesday or with the emphatically Christian writing of his later period.\(^2\)

The results of this investigation would tend to substantiate this statement of Scott's. Indeed, Eliot himself has practically substantiated this conclusion.\(^3\) And relative to Eliot's plays alone, every one of them is applicable to a statement made by Agatha in *The Family Reunion*:


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 203.

What we have written is not a story of detection, of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.\(^4\)

In *Murder in the Cathedral* Thomas finds personal expiation through the death of martyrdom for the sake of Christ and His Church. In *The Family Reunion* Harry's family is brought into reunification with the eternal through Harry's own submission to the tormenting, yet loving, Furies. In *The Cocktail Party* Celias is brought into the Church through the ministrations of the tormenting, yet loving, Guardians.

In *The Confidential Clerk* Colby, through faith (or "confidence") and through the help of Eggerson (another "confidential clerk"), is finally—after losing two fathers—"made [a son] of God by adoption"\(^5\) into the Church as a "clerk" (*i.e.*, clergyman). And in *The Elder Statesman*, Lord Claverton, Michael, Charles, and Monica all are united in a transcendent love through the visitation of the symbolic "spectre" of Gomez. Thus the tripartite pattern of Eliot's plays is always the same: sin, judgment, and redemption through the Holy Trinity.

---


Eliot's plays, then, are thoroughly saturated with Christian theology. Indeed, for those who are interested in finding fault, this is probably the essential weakness of Eliot's plays— as plays. Dramaturgically speaking, they probably are in need of less matter, with more art. The plots of Eliot's plays almost seem too weak to bear the huge amount of Christian doctrine which they are called upon to carry. Jones mentions this criticism of Eliot's plays by saying:

Eliot's concern with the spiritual life has been his great strength and his great weakness as a dramatist. It has been his strength in that it has led him to write passages of spiritual exploration and communion such as we have hardly known in English drama outside a few moments in Shakespeare. It has been his weakness in that such passages tend to be static and do not in themselves fulfil our expectations of a play.⁶

An interesting hypothesis would be that, since Eliot's thought seems to move inevitably in the direction of the abstract, the style of his plays should have followed this direction also, rather than moving more and more towards naturalism.

An important question which would seem to arise naturally from this investigation is a question which

concerns Eliot's relation to the existentialists—more particularly to Kierkegaard: if Eliot, as this study has contended, has been influenced so strongly in his theology by Kierkegaard, then why does Eliot never seem to acknowledge openly this influence? This question must be answered by pointing again to the strength of Kierkegaard's influence. Paradoxically (and thus again being consistent with the nature of Kierkegaard's theology), the very fact that Eliot exhibits such a great influence from Kierkegaard and yet, at the same time, never recognizes this influence, can be, in itself, an indication of how close a follower of Kierkegaard's Eliot actually is. One of the most important elements in Kierkegaard's theology is the concept of "indirect communication." This concept probably can best be characterized as it relates to Eliot's plays by a statement made on the subject by E. Martin Browne, the man who has worked most closely with Eliot on his plays. Browne says:

I attach great significance to the indirect approach, the approach which reveals through a secular story that without God there can be no hope, there can be no satisfaction, there can be no completion of human life. T. S. Eliot moved from Murder in the Cathedral, an overtly Christian play, to The Cocktail Party, in which an entirely different approach is made. His group of characters are imbedded in an intolerable
frustration; they have, in fact, got to the point at which they know no answers to the question, "Who am I?" "Who or what am I that has any significance other than dust?" . . . What they have got to go through in the process of . . . discovery is a stripping of themselves, an emptying, a self-knowledge through suffering which is the essence of the Christian experience for those to whom the language of Christianity is no longer known. There is a residual Christianity in our civilization, but the great majority of people don't in fact understand the Christian language and we have got to bring understanding of Christian truth through the language which they do know.7

It was Kierkegaard who laid the foundations for this type of Christian communication,8 as it was a logical ramification of his theological presuppositions. For this reason Kierkegaard said of himself: "I am really an author for authors; I have no direct relation to the public; no, as an author I make others productive."9 This is also why Kierkegaard realized that the "authors" who followed him and truly understood him would need to deny being his followers and "conceal the origins," as Eliot puts it, in


order to be able "to deceive" men "into the truth"\textsuperscript{10} through indirect communication. "It is a dubious honor, therefore, to be counted a 'Kierkegaardian,'" says Heinecken.\textsuperscript{11} And Eliot is certainly a member of the school of indirect communication. For instance, in speaking of the explicitly religious work of G. K. Chesterton, Eliot has said that

\begin{quote}
\ldots such writings do not enter into any serious consideration of the relation of Religion and Literature: because they are conscious operations in a world in which it is assumed that Religion and Literature are not related. It is a conscious and limited relating. What I want is a literature which should be \textit{unconsciously,} rather than deliberately and defiantly, Christian: because the work of Mr. Chesterton has its point from appearing in a world which is definitely not Christian.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Kierkegaard anticipated what he called "my poet," who would come after him.\textsuperscript{13} And Elizabeth Drew, in her book, \textit{T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry}, quotes the following passage from Kierkegaard's \textit{Fear and Trembling}, finding it appropriate in her study of Eliot:

\begin{quote}

\textsuperscript{11}Martin J. Heinecken, \textit{The Moment Before God} (Philadelphia, 1956), p. 1


\textsuperscript{13}Kierkegaard, \textit{Point of View}, p. 100.
\end{quote}
Love has her priests in the poets, and sometimes you will hear a voice which knows how to do her honor: but not a word will you hear about faith. Who is there who can speak in honour of this passion?  

This investigation has shown there is evidence for believing that Eliot, perhaps far more than any other man, has become "the poet" which Kierkegaard looked for. At least this much is certain: they are in agreement on what it means to be a poet. For Kierkegaard has said:

What is a poet? A poet is an unhappy creature, whose heart is tortured by deepest suffering, but whose lips are so formed that when his sighs and cries stream out over them, their sound becomes like the sound of beautiful music.

And Eliot defines a poet in terms of

the struggle—which alone constitutes life for a poet—to transmute his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and impersonal.

The profound understanding of Christian doctrine in Eliot's plays certainly has caused these plays to be "rich and strange . . . universal and impersonal." For indeed Eliot, perhaps more than any other author in contemporary


\[16\] Eliot, Selected Essays, p. 117.
literature, has, as Eliot himself has said of Baudelaire, "in . . . an age of bustle, programs, platforms, scientific progress, humanitarianism, and revolutions which [improve] nothing, an age of progressive degradation . . . perceived that what really matters is Sin and Redemption.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 378.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Barth, Karl, The Epistle to the Romans, London, Oxford University Press, 1933.


______________, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1933.


__________, The Spiritual Aspects of the New Poetry, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1940.


Articles


Unpublished Material