

CHAPTER 5: LITURGICAL READINGS OF THE LATER POETRY AND *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL*

In previous chapters, I traced Eliot's development personally and biographically, critically and intellectually, and spiritually and creatively. After a brief introduction, I summarized Eliot's religious background in the context of, and in comparison with, the development of the Church of England. Then, following a consideration of Eliot's critical writings as a means of looking at Eliot's intellectual and critical development, I turned to an analysis of his spiritual journey in the context of his creative writing, specifically in regards to *The Waste Land*, since that work came at a time leading up to his formal conversion. And that spiritual development continues into Eliot's later creative works. Indeed, besides *The Waste Land*, there were other works that indicated the beginnings of Eliot's spiritual journey. But after his formal conversion and baptism in 1927, Eliot's poetry becomes more overtly Christian. So having traced his development through those earlier stages, this chapter turns to a discussion of representative works during and after Eliot's formal conversion, and these works show definite patterns of liturgical symbolism or structure.

First, I will discuss the poem "Gerontion," which was composed in 1919, around the time of parts of *The Waste Land*, and which contains further insights into the beginnings of Eliot's spiritual development leading up to his conversion. Coming in 1930 after Eliot's formal conversion, but continuing the theme of conversion, is *Ash-Wednesday*. Even though it will be slightly out of chronological order, it is thematically related to the time of Eliot's conversion and will be covered next. Discussion of the Ariel poems of 1927-1930 will follow discussion of *Ash-Wednesday*. These four poems just follow Eliot's conversion, so they have been analyzed especially in relation to Eliot's faith. My presentation of them will center primarily on *Journey of the Magi*, written in 1927, immediately following Eliot's baptism, and "A Song for Simeon," written the following year. I will include brief comments on "Animula," written in 1929, and "Marina," written in 1930. Next will follow a discussion of the play *Murder in the Cathedral*, written in

1935 and set in the same time of year as *Journey of the Magi*. Finally, I will discuss *Four Quartets* as continuing Eliot's religious journey, even in circular fashion, as well as furthering his personal quest for a clearer identity. These four works, written between 1936 and 1942, are also the culmination and high point of Eliot's poetic career, and they show the effect of his conversion to liturgical concerns.

Considering that these works are more overtly Christian, many critics have already written on them, analyzing them for their religious and even liturgical content and orientation. In my consideration of these works, I do not want simply to repeat what has already been said, nor am I interested, for the purposes of this study, to delve into broader interpretations of these works. Instead, I shall offer my own brief summary and provide a liturgical reading of these later works of Eliot, hoping to add a few insights of my own along the way. Then, I shall briefly summarize some of the more important and insightful critical essays as they focus on the religious nature of these works. Given the work that has already been done on these works along religious and liturgical lines, this chapter need not offer very long or detailed analyses of each of Eliot's works, serving primarily to point the reader to what has already been done, to add a few additional insights, to reveal the obvious Christian development in Eliot's later life and later creative work, and to back up my own approach to Eliot's career and life of faith. As for Eliot's other later works not discussed here, those works contain a few references to Eliot's high-church Anglicanism. However, those works do not demonstrate the liturgical orientation of Eliot's Christianity as fully and clearly as the list of works to be discussed here, the current list being the most characteristic of Eliot's Anglo-Catholic leanings.

Eliot's identity as an Anglo-Catholic comes from his own pen, as is well known. He was direct and clear about his formal conversion, asserting this most significant change in his faith perspective. Born and raised in America, under strong Protestant, Puritan, and Unitarian influences, Eliot made a thorough and strong shift to Anglo-Catholicism. That shift brought with it a change of national identity and a renewed intellectual and religious perspective. It colored not only Eliot's writings about religious issues, *per se*, but it colored all of his work, prose, poetry,

and drama, from his conversion on. As discussed in chapter four on *The Waste Land*, Eliot's long process of conversion also contributed to his religious thinking in the years leading up to his formal conversion and baptism. Given the specificity of Anglo-Catholicism as a more creedal, doctrinal, sacramental, historical, traditional, intellectual, and high-church orientation — characteristics which I attempted to identify in the second chapter — those are the qualities I have sought to trace in Eliot's life and work. Given that some, if not all, of those qualities are characteristic of Eliot's personality as well as his new faith perspective, both Eliot's identity and his writings throughout his career become more understandable. Indeed, that has been the approach of some critics and biographers, such as Kristian Smidt and Lyndall Gordon, in particular. Like them, I have sought to place Eliot's conversion into perspective, looking at its effect on his life and work, both in the time leading up to his baptism and the time following. However, I have concentrated on the Anglo-Catholic qualities of that conversion, instead of focusing more simply on Eliot's faith, as Kristian Smidt has done, or on his biographical development, as Lyndall Gordon has done. Thus, having touched on Eliot's life and formal conversion to Anglicanism, having briefly summarized the history of the English Church and Eliot's own religious background, having discussed some of Eliot's critical essays, and having analyzed *The Waste Land* from the perspective of Eliot's developing faith and conversion, I turn now to a consideration of some representative works of Eliot's later creative output. In the process, I hope to demonstrate that Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism becomes an integral part of those later works, inseparable from Eliot's identity and style. Along the way, I shall point out that Eliot's professed Anglo-Catholicism is so characteristic of his personality, and so much a part of his personal spiritual quest, that his personality and his Anglo-Catholic identity merge into one. Thus, as I discuss these later creative works, I do so in the light of Eliot's overall spiritual development.

Before moving on to Eliot's later creative works, specifically the Ariel poems, *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *Four Quartets*, I shall look at an earlier work, "Gerontion," as containing a hint of Eliot's later spiritual development, as well as some material he would use in his later works. Eliot wrote his short poem "Gerontion" in 1919, around the time he was writing the poetic frag-

ments of what was to become *The Waste Land*. Following Ezra Pound's advice, Eliot did not include "Gerontion" in *The Waste Land*, even though, as Lyndall Gordon notes, "Gerontion" "contains all its [*The Waste Land*'s] crucial organizing ideas" — and I have discussed *The Waste Land* in terms of its place in Eliot's spiritual development in the previous chapter. Gordon goes on to note that as early as May-June 1919, "In the figure of Gerontion, Eliot brought back the disappointed religious candidate but made him into a contemporary, postwar character." She adds, regarding this time in Eliot's own life while writing "Gerontion," that "Gerontion's theological position recalls that of the American Puritan who sees himself without spiritual agency, abject, wholly at the mercy of divine omnipotence." At a time when Eliot was writing fragments to be assembled into the longer poem he was planning to write, Gordon and others see Eliot presenting ideas similar to those contained in *The Waste Land* — alienation, failure, inaction, lack of communication, and lack of enlightenment, added to his personal anxiety and self-absorption.¹ Thus, it seems appropriate to pause for a look at this poem before moving on to the later works of a formally converted Eliot.

Eliot's "Gerontion"

In the third chapter, I traced Eliot's faith development in the context of his prose and criticism. And in the fourth chapter, I have already noted Eliot's preoccupation with sin and forgiveness, with his faith background, and with his development during these years. The focus was on *The Waste Land* as containing most of the evidence and poetic fragments that bespeak Eliot's faith development during this time. Here, "Gerontion" offers another strong confirmation of Eliot's preoccupation with these themes and issues in his life, faith, and art. The poem opens with the speaker identifying himself as "an old man in a dry month, / ... waiting for rain."² The speaker being an old man suggests a time when one's values shift, due to age and the nearing end of life. Already, the terms are of spirituality and faith. And the dryness and the waiting for rain

1. Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* (New York: Farrar-Noonday, 1977) 100-101.

2. T. S. Eliot, "Gerontion," 1919, *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1952) 1-2.

echo the waiting for faith in *The Waste Land* discussed in the fourth chapter. Further, the waiting connotes anticipation, which is an important theme in Christianity, and one which will be discussed below in relation to *Journey of the Magi* and *Murder in the Cathedral*.

The religious sense of "Gerontion" is strongly confirmed by

Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a sign!"
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
Swaddled with darkness. In the juvescence of the year
Came Christ the tiger.³

First, whenever we encounter reference to "signs" and "wonders," we know we are in a religious domain, especially with the request, "We would see a sign!" Signs and wonders and the request for a sign were a part of what was expected from Christ in the Gospels. When the people ask to see a sign, it is to prompt or confirm faith in a world of uncertainty. The response comes in the next line with a pun on the Incarnation: The "word within a word, unable to speak a word, / Swaddled with darkness" refers to the coming of the Christ child at Christmas, at night, on one of the shortest days of the year, or in the darkest time of the year. The Word of God made flesh (from John 1) comes in the form of an infant, the word literally meaning "unable to speak." Further, as noted in the third chapter's discussion of Eliot's essay "Lancelot Andrewes," this is a direct quotation from a Christmas sermon of Andrewes, the seventeenth-century divine, and it will show up again in *Journey of the Magi*, to be discussed below. The coming of this Word made flesh literally embodies God's Word, which in turn prompts faith. Thus, in the juvescence or beginning of the year, Christ comes, both that first Christmas and today in faith, to enliven the Body of Christ, the Church. For Gerontion, Christ comes as a tiger, a traditional, if not necessarily familiar image for Christ, with perhaps overtones of Christ's Second Coming.

After a section which ends with three lines containing three references to wind — a traditional symbol for the Holy Spirit, which moves where it wills, like the wind — the speaker turns to ask about "knowledge" and "forgiveness," and to ask "What's not believed," concluding that "Neither fear nor courage saves us."⁴ These are more strong references to faith and the desire for

3. Eliot, "Gerontion" (1919) 16-19.

4. Eliot, "Gerontion" (1919) 29-31, 32, 39, 43.

salvation coming at this early time in Eliot's faith development. *Gerontion* laments "not [having] reached conclusion," and he "[stiffens] in a rented house," having lost "beauty" and "passion." As he has also lost "sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch," he wishes to look "upon this honestly," as much as he is able, and make "closer contact."⁵ The poem concludes with a return to the image of wind, as well as the image of dryness.⁶ The overall feeling of the poem is one of loss of senses, loss of hope, and loss of contact with others. This is certainly in concert with other works of this time in Eliot's life, especially *The Waste Land*, which show a poet searching for faith and reassurance. Kristian Smidt, in his study of all of Eliot's works, concurs: "In *Gerontion* disbelief in the Christian faith is a central theme." Yet, Smidt adds, "One of the deepest needs of human nature is for society and communion."⁷ Smidt links the themes and ideas of both "Gerontion" and *The Waste Land* in his discussion at this point, leaving room for a later resolution, perhaps in faith. In a traditional Christian context, such spiritual searching often leads to alienation, separation, and wilderness experiences before it resolves itself in faith.

Other critics have also looked at this poem in much the same way. In discussing "Gerontion," both Ronald Bush and Lyndall Gordon make reference to an essay Eliot wrote at the same time, "A Sceptical Patrician," which was a review of *The Education of Henry Adams* and appeared in the 23 May 1919 edition of *Athenaeum*. It appears that Eliot then sent the manuscript of "Gerontion" to John Quinn on 9 July 1919, enclosed in a letter.⁸ Coming so close together, the two works reflect each other, and Bush sees the speaker of the poem sharing "a sensibility like the Adams Eliot describes," thus "[providing] 'a remarkable confession of' the New England mind," with both Adams and the speaker of the poem "caught between conscience and the Boston doubt," unable to believe in anything, both living in a "prison" of "egotism." Bush

5. Eliot, "Gerontion" (1919) 48-59, esp. 48, 49, 55-56, 58, 53, 59.

6. Eliot, "Gerontion" (1919) 68-73.

7. Kristian Smidt, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949) 138, 139.

8. Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style* (New York: Oxford UP, 1984) 244, n. 1. Bush cites *Athenaeum* 4647 (23 May 1919), pages 361-362.

adds that “in ‘Gerontion,’ man is dissociated from his own sensory world.”⁹ Noting the poem’s allusions to Dante’s *Inferno*, Bush notes the prominence of wind, as against water — “a Dantesque cold wind that blows in the vacuum between self-consciousness and the inner life,” which “embodies a ceaseless randomness.”¹⁰ Bush cites line 43 of the poem, “Neither fear nor courage saves us,” saying that Gerontion “knows” that “he has turned his back on the possibility of salvation.”¹¹ Of course, as Bush has also noted, eleven lines earlier in the poem the speaker has mentioned “knowledge” and “forgiveness,” which serves to reinforce the point about Gerontion’s lack of salvation. Finally, at the end of his discussion of this poem, Bush says of the poem’s conclusion, “In the silence of the space that precedes the poem’s final lines throbs Gerontion’s version of Prufrock’s ‘overwhelming question’ along with the terrifying answer the question would require were Gerontion ever brave enough to ask it: What end would my conversion serve? None.”¹²

Lyndall Gordon concurs with Bush and clarifies some points further. As noted above, both Gordon and Bush mention Eliot’s concurrent essay on *The Education of Henry Adams*. Adding to Bush’s comments above, Gordon clarifies line 19 of Eliot’s poem: “‘Came Christ the tiger,’ Gerontion muses — necessarily a ‘tiger’ to the loner unsupported by an institutionalized tradition of mysticism. Gerontion’s theological position recalls that of the American Puritan who sees himself without spiritual agency, abject, wholly at the mercy of divine omnipotence.” Gordon then discusses Eliot’s essay “A Sceptical Patrician” in this context, clarifying “the Boston doubt,” to which Bush alludes: “His [Eliot’s] native curiosity was balanced by a scepticism which Eliot called ‘the Boston doubt.’ The Boston variety was not a solid scepticism but quirky, dissolvent rather than destructive, a kind of vulnerability ‘to all suggestions which dampen enthusiasm or dispel conviction.’”¹³

9. Bush 32, 33.

10. Bush 33-34, esp. 33.

11. Bush 36, emphasis is Bush’s.

12. Bush 39.

13. Gordon, *Eliot’s Early Years* 101.

In the third chapter, I discussed Eliot's essay "Lancelot Andrewes," the title essay of *For Lancelot Andrewes*, which was written in 1926. In that essay, Eliot quotes from Andrewes' sermons, especially from his Christmas sermons, and includes a slight misquotation of the same line which he uses here in "Gerontion," discussed above. As mentioned in the third chapter, William Force Stead recommended those sermons to Eliot, but it might be surprising to see Eliot quoting from them as early as 1919. Lyndall Gordon clarifies Andrewes' influence at this early time and adds further support to the sense of the religious nature of this poem and of this time in Eliot's life: "During 1919 Eliot ... became interested in the sermon as 'a form of literary art.' It is a form that merges readily with Eliot's confessional-instructive mode. Gerontion, in making his personal statement, uses preacher's terms of 'forgiveness', 'vanities', 'unnatural vices', virtues', 'our impudent crimes', and 'the backward devils.'" She notes further that at a time when others were moving away from the Church after the war, "Eliot moved in the opposite direction. The moderns rebelled against a Victorian version of faith, full of cant and hypocrisy. Eliot held on to an older faith—devouring, passionate, and mystical." This statement links Eliot's personal faith development with the character of Gerontion. Gordon continues to link Gerontion also with "the nameless pilgrim in *The Waste Land*, ... poised at the extremity of a dry season, waiting for rain, the traditional symbol of grace or fertility." She sees Gerontion's request for a miracle "fulfilled by the thunder's message and its promise of rain at the end of *The Waste Land*. Gerontion knows he may yet be saved from withering and decay if only he can recover some passion.¹⁴ There is thus a strong sense that what Gerontion seeks from his position of dryness, loss of senses, and loss of passion is ultimately salvation. While the tone of the poem may be one of hopelessness, yet there is a sense of the possibility of fulfillment, which finally comes later in *The Waste Land*, as Gordon suggests. This view of "Gerontion" coincides nicely with my liturgical reading of *The Waste Land*, and it also reinforces the sense of Eliot's own personal spiritual questioning and development.

Again, all the religious allusions discussed above pertain to a more liturgical orientation —

14. Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* 103.

the allusions to the Incarnation, the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes, forgiveness and the possibility of salvation, the desire for miracles and signs, dryness and rain, and the older mystical faith Gordon says Eliot himself was seeking. In addition to these themes, clarified in earlier chapters, there is also an allusion to Newman, one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement who later converted to Roman Catholicism. Specific mention of Newman's influence on Eliot was noted towards the end of the third chapter. Here, there is another link between "Gerontion" and a work by Newman, forging another direct link between Eliot and the Oxford Movement. Lyndall Gordon sees in Eliot's words in his poem, "I have lost my passion ... I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch" what she notes is "an allusion to Newman's sermon on Divine Calls, quoted in the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* ... : 'Let us beg and pray Him day by day to reveal Himself to our souls more fully, to quicken our senses, to give us sight and hearing, taste and touch of the world to come.'"¹⁵ While Newman's language here is rather commonplace and traditional, it may well serve as the source of Eliot's allusion, given the other evidence of Newman's influence in my third chapter. Further, such an appeal to *all* the senses is very much the concern of liturgical churches — the sight of colored vestments and paraments and the use of candles for light; the smell of incense, of candles and of eucharistic elements; the aural experience of the proclamation of the Word and of music; the taste of the eucharistic bread and wine; and the tactile impact of worship leaders in the administration of the sacraments and of fellow worshipers in greeting and sharing of the peace. These are all means to a deeper experience of religious worship that both Eliot and Newman understood and which Eliot may well have derived from Newman's sermon. The loss of such senses would certainly be an experience of emptiness and dryness.

Yet a further link between Eliot and Newman exists here, specifically to Newman's poem entitled *The Dream of Gerontius*; another essay on Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*. As noted in the third chapter, and as might easily be concluded here from the similarity of Gerontius to Gerontion, despite the simple linguistic derivation of the name, it appears Eliot again took a title from Newman, this time from a poem for a poem. In addition, the character, subject, and theme

15. Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* 103 n.

of Newman's poem parallel those of Eliot's. Newman's poem, written in 1865, "is a dramatic poem of approximately 900 lines telling of the death of Gerontius, the escort of his separated soul by its guardian angel to the judgment seat of God, and its consignment temporarily to Purgatory, there to be cleansed of every stain of sin before Gerontius is worthy to experience the eternal joys of Heaven." In discussing the work, John Stasny and Byron Nelson begin by focusing on the matter of Purgatory and its absence from official Anglican theology, citing Article XXII of the Anglican Church's Thirty-Nine Articles, which prohibits it.¹⁶ The authors then go on to compare the poem to Edward Elgar's oratorio of the same name, which was based on Newman's poem and which was composed in 1903 and "[performed] at the royal mausoleum on the anniversary of Queen Victoria's death, January 22, 1910."¹⁷ Hence, Newman's poem would have been available to Eliot and others of the early twentieth century in two forms.

As for the matter of Purgatory, Newman's formal conversion to Roman Catholicism must be remembered. Father Marvin O'Connell's essay relates that Newman and the Oxford Movement leaders began writing their famous tracts on 9 September 1833 and that Newman wrote most of them, often anonymously. At the time, those leaders, who were very much Oxford men, preferred to call themselves "apostolicals," since "their bedrock principle was the apostolic succession of the Anglican bishops." Yet, Father O'Connell states that the group "disdained that high church tradition which was hardly more, they said, than a *political* alliance of parsons and squires, 'the Tory Party at prayer.'" However, Father O'Connell adds that "they poured even more scorn upon the low church amalgam of latitudinarians and protestants, enemies of settled dogma and sacramental liturgy in either case, scarcely to be preferred to Unitarians or ranting Methodists."¹⁸ As has always been the case in the Church, there are not simply two opposing

16. John Stasny and Byron Nelson, "From Dream to Drama: *The Dream of Gerontius* By John Henry Newman and Edward Elgar," *Renascence* XLIII.1-2 (Fall 1990/Winter 1991) 121. This double edition of *Renascence* was dedicated to "John Henry Cardinal Newman: 1890-1990," on the centenary of his death.

17. Ina Rae Hark, "Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*: Beyond Time and Sense," *Renascence* XXVIII.1 (Autumn 1975) 15; Stasny and Nelson 122. Hark is the critic who dates the actual writing of Newman's poem in 1865, while Stasny and Nelson talk about Newman's 1836 sermon as thirty years prior to the poem.

18. Fr. Marvin O'Connell, "The Beginning of the End, The End of the Beginning: Newman and Tract XC," *Renascence* XLIII.1-2 (Fall 1990/Winter 1991): 4.

sides of any given set of issues, but rather a spectrum of positions, as noted in chapter two. While the “Apostolics” “disdained” the high-church tradition, it was more for their political identification rather than their religious positions. The “Apostolics” were much more on the high-church side in their concerns about theology and liturgy. And as discussed in the second chapter, Apostolic Succession is definitely a concern of those in the Church of more catholic, or high-church, sentiment. O’Connell continues, “The tractarians — the label which quickly attached itself to them — nevertheless persisted, with all the verve and dedication commonly associated with young people who have discovered a cause, in identifying the catholicity they discerned in the ancient Christian community with the Church of England of their own day.”¹⁹ As discussed earlier, in the second chapter, the Tractarians developed along these traditional creed-based, historical high-church lines. But when Newman produced Tract XC, the general public’s response was to expect him to defect to Rome, which he subsequently did in 1841.²⁰ His poem appeared some twenty-five years later, as noted above.

Thus, as Stasny and Nelson suggest, “Gerontius is probably Newman himself,” on his own spiritual quest. The authors’ evidence for that is Newman’s own identification in a letter of 1865. More to the point, as Stasny and Nelson also assert, “The Newman revealed in Gerontius is a safely corporate representative member of the communion of saints: a member of the Church militant, becoming a member of the Church suffering, and awaiting the time when he will become a member of the Church triumphant.” Stasny and Nelson say of the poem’s structure, “Whatever drama Newman’s poem possesses lies in the solemn drama of formal liturgical ritual — the ministration of the attending Priests with their chants and litanies, which are a part of the Office of the Dead — and in the grandeur of the theological vision — the ministrations and expositions of the guardian angel.” Further, the authors note two passages in Newman’s poem that possess a mood of despair in the face of death and oblivion.²¹ Thus, *Dream of Gerontius* is a poetic reflection on Purgatory from a mature, Roman Catholic theologian and writer, as well as a

19. O’Connell 4.

20. O’Connell 3.

21. Stasny and Nelson 123-125; see also Hark 16-17, 23.

reflective poem about end-of-life spiritual concerns. More to my own point about the liturgical emphases of the Oxford Movement, it is also a liturgical poem, making use of chants and offices from the prayer book. Given Eliot's extensive reading in sermons and nineteenth-century prose at this time in his life, as noted above and elsewhere in this dissertation, Eliot might well be expected to have been familiar with this work of Newman's, to have borrowed the title and name of the speaker, and also to have made use of the theme and mood of Newman's poem. Eliot's awareness of Newman's work is the more likely given Elgar's oratorio. This links Eliot a little more closely with Newman, although with the limitation that Eliot never became a Roman Catholic, as discussed in the third chapter. Such a connection also further ties Eliot to the Oxford Movement and its ideals. And such a set of similarities between the two poems helps to shed a little more light on Eliot's poem. Like Newman, Eliot is expressing his own religious concerns. Those concerns, while the poem exhibits some despair, indicate a speaker on a spiritual quest, as discussed in the fourth chapter on *The Waste Land*.

Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday*

First, in a return to Eliot's sermon-reading, mentioned above, *Ash-Wednesday* contains an allusion to a 1619 Ash Wednesday sermon by Andrewes entitled "Of Repentance." Lyndall Gordon summarizes: "Eliot's penitent in 'Ash Wednesday' [*sic*], turning and turning on the winding stair, acts out the two mental 'turns' Andrewes prescribed for conversion: a turn that looks forward to God and a turn that looks backward to one's sins, sentencing oneself for the past."²² Of course, during 1919 Eliot had read the sermons of Andrewes, Donne, and others and had written on preaching as art. Later, he had been encouraged in 1925 by William Force Stead to read especially the sermons of Andrewes in preparation for his conversion. It is not surprising to find another quotation of one of Andrewes' sermons again here, as in "Gerontion" and in Eliot's essays on Andrewes and preaching, and as will again be the case in *Journey of the Magi*. But there is much more present in this poem than a few sermon quotations and a rehearsal of

22. Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* 131.

Eliot's own conversion.

Liturgically, Ash Wednesday is the most solemn day of the Church Year, on which Christians reflect on mortality, sinfulness, and repentance. The day marks the beginning Lent, which is a forty-day season of reflection (six weeks, not counting Sundays), a season discussed in the fourth chapter in relation to *The Waste Land*. Protestants traditionally focus primarily on Easter and to some extent on Good Friday and perhaps Holy Week. But Lent, and especially Ash Wednesday, have not been as prominent among Protestants as among high-church believers. Hence, simply Eliot's awareness of and writing about such a day and theme in the church year lends it importance and suggests a centrality for him. Indeed, from what we know of Eliot's conversion, confession, which is a major theme of Ash Wednesday liturgies, was crucial to Eliot's sense of completion of his formal conversion.

The poem, in six sections, opens with the speaker's lack of "hope" and the "turn" from sin to repentance. In the beginning of the first section of the poem, the sense of hope expresses the anticipatory nature of conversion. (Incidentally, hope is also a major part of the Church's season of Advent, which is a time of the anticipation of the coming of the Word made flesh. Advent is another, similar season of preparation often overlooked by Protestants. Advent will come up in the discussion of the Ariel poems below.) The fourth line of *Ash-Wednesday* quotes the seventh line from Shakespeare's familiar Sonnet 29, "[When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes]," in which Shakespeare's speaker laments his "outcast state" with which he "[troubles] deaf heaven." In this condition, the speaker "[Desires] this man's art, and that man's scope," which is the line Eliot uses, with a slight change of the word "art" to the more typically Christian word "gift." Shakespeare's poem ends with "Yet, ... / Haply I think on thee, and then my state / ... sings hymns at heaven's gates / ... That then I scorn to change my state with kings." Despite the hopelessness with which Shakespeare's poem begins, the end result is hope and confidence. Such is the case with Eliot's poem as well, buttressed by this allusion as well as by Lancelot Andrewes' double turning in his 1619 Ash Wednesday sermon. Then the first section of Eliot's poem concludes with the desire to be taught "to care and not to care" and "to sit still," ending

with a quotation from the "Hail Mary," which is "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death" and is partially repeated in the poem. Obviously, the "Hail Mary" is traditionally understood to be a very traditionally (Roman) Catholic element of worship and prayer life. However, it is not reserved for Roman Catholics but is used by many liturgical Churches at times, and it was a part of the Eucharistic liturgy of St. Michael and All Angels that I attended on 29 September 1995 at St. Magnus the Martyr Anglican Church in London. So already, more than just a poem about faith and conversion, we have strongly liturgical, Anglo-Catholic elements at the beginning of the poem.²³

The second section echoes Ezekiel 37 and the vision of the valley of the dry bones, with the hope of the bones being knit together again in resurrection. This allusion to Ezekiel 37 occurs also in *The Waste Land*. In the current American Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* and its revised three-year lectionary, Ezekiel 37 is the appointed Old Testament lesson for the fifth Sunday in Lent, year A, and an option for the vigil of Pentecost, all three years. In a more traditional one-year lectionary, Ezekiel 37 appears on the second Sunday of Easter. More importantly, Ezekiel 37 is one of the lessons read at the Easter vigil. In the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*, it is the eighth lesson of nine in the liturgy of the Word, which follows the lighting of the Paschal Candle and the *Exsultet* and precedes the renewal of baptismal vows and the Eucharist proper. In the Roman Catholic tradition, Ezekiel 37 is not used as one of their seven lessons. But in the Lutheran tradition, which follows ancient liturgical precedent, Ezekiel 37 is the seventh lesson of twelve, and if fewer lessons than twelve are used, namely seven or four, it is recommended as one of the seven, but is not necessary as one of the four in abbreviated liturgies.²⁴ The text has always served as a strong image for Easter resurrection as well as the wind

23. T. S. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday*, 1930, *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1952) 1-3, 23, 30, 4, 38-39, 40-41. See also William Shakespeare, Sonnet 29, "[When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes]," *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974) p. 1755, ll. 1-3, 7, 9-14.

24. *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church Together with The Psalter or Psalms of David According to the use of The Episcopal Church* (New York: Seabury, 1977) 892, 896, 906, 917, 283-295; *Sacramentary: The Roman Missal* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1974) 291-323; *Lutheran Book of Worship: Ministers Desk Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 500, 143-153; Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy, Lutheran Book of*

of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In the poem, the image of the wind returns, also, as the enlivening force for the bones, and the image implies the same hope of salvation in the poem as in Ezekiel's original context in which he hoped to speak a word of hope to the exiles.

Additional elements in the poem include the color rose, which is the traditional color for the fourth Sunday in Lent. While violet is the color of the season, by the fourth Sunday a hint of the Easter joy begins to creep into the Lenten mood, lightening the violet with Easter white to produce rose. Hence, the fourth Sunday in Lent is also called Rose Sunday — one of two Rose Sundays, the other being the third Sunday in Advent for the same reason. In lines eighty-four and eighty-five of the poem, there is another allusion to Lancelot Andrewes' famous Christmas infant-Word image, about which I have commented before. The second section ends with an allusion to Numbers 26:55, in which the LORD tells Moses that the land is to be divided by lot among the tribes of Israel as an inheritance.²⁵

In the short third section, the speaker works his way up past "the first turning of the second stair," "the second turning of the second stair," and "the first turning of the third stair," again reminding the reader of Lancelot Andrewes' Ash Wednesday sermon, mentioned above. The third section ends with the words from the Gospel story of Jesus healing the centurion's slave, recorded in St. Matthew 8:5-13 and St. Luke 7:1-10.²⁶ In that Gospel story, a centurion has sent to Jesus to heal the centurion's slave. Jesus is on the way to the centurion's house when the centurion's humble faith is such that he does not expect Jesus to come into his home, under his humble roof, but he believes Jesus can heal from a distance. The statement the centurion makes has always been treated as exemplifying humility and profound faith. As such, the line has found its way into the prayers of the eucharistic liturgy. It is a response the people may say following the eucharistic prayer and the breaking of bread, just before reception. It is a prayer of humility as well as a prayer of faith.²⁷

Worship (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979) 331-333.

25. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) 46-48, 59, 63-64, 89, 69, 84-85, 92-95.

26. Compare the similar story recorded in St. John 4:46-53.

27. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) 96, 102, 107, 117-118; *Sacramentary* 681.

The fourth section begins with colors — the violet of Lent, then green, then the white and blue, or light blue, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, mentioned three times. The request is also made to “Redeem the time,” which is a perspective of the Church towards the daily prayer offices, making time sacred again.²⁸ Section five opens with the word and the Word, punning on “unspoken,” “unheard,” “Word without a word,” “Word within,” and “silent Word,” linked to the “light [that] shone in darkness.” These lines are an expansion of, and a playing with, Lancelot Andrewes’ “Word unable to speak a word,” discussed above — obviously a favorite line and image for Eliot. And the images are from the prologue of St. John’s Gospel and are strongly incarnational as well, which is also a more high-church emphasis. Eliot continues to develop the word’s impact for another eight lines, after an interruption of “O my people, what have I done unto thee,” a line quoted a second time and begun a third time at the end of the section.²⁹

In section six, the opening lines of the poem return, with the speaker’s fear of turning. He is caught in “The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying.” The next line begins with a parenthetical “(Bless me father),” which is the beginning of a confession before a priest. Obviously, the subject is about turning in the sense of the whole process of repentance, and Lancelot Andrewes’ sense of a double turning in conversion serves well here, as quoted above from Lyncall Gordon — “a turn that looks forward to God and a turn that looks backward to one’s sins, sentencing oneself for the past.” This is not to imply doubt so much as humility, since an honest look at one’s sins causes one to hesitate to hope for forgiveness at a time of confession. Confession is an important and difficult thing, when practiced in sincerity. Eliot’s conversion process has been discussed, in which baptism was followed a few months later by confession to a priest, which Eliot felt completed his conversion process. The confession, like baptism, promises new life out of the old, which carries with it the threat, if not the reality of the renewal, of the death of the old life of sin. Hence, Eliot’s speaker is in a “twilight between [new] birth [or rebirth] and dying” in the process of confession in the next line’s “(Bless me father).” Thus, as the speaker

28. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) 120-123, 129, 137-138, 145.

29. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) 149-156, 159-167, 158, 176, 184.

passes through the process of confession, “the lost heart stiffens and rejoices,” while at the same time “the weak spirit quickens to rebel,” as the old self fights for its very life. The speaker again says, reversing the order of birth and dying from the earlier line, “This is the time of tension between dying and birth,” continuing with “The place of solitude where three dreams cross / Between blue rocks.” The next two lines contain mention of yew trees, traditional symbols for death. The final part of section six again addresses the Lady of silences: “Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden, / Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood / teach us to care and not to care / Teach us to sit still.” These last two lines repeat the lines from the first section of the poem. The first of these lines addresses the Lady of silences, addressed earlier, also, with overtones of names for the Blessed Virgin Mary. The second of these lines is an important part of confession, urging honesty and sincerity as essential to confession. In some worship books, the confession opens with “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us,” which is a quotation of 1 John 1:8. Honesty is required, painful as that might be, which might make the believer uncertain of his or her worthiness. But ultimately, the confession and absolution result in peace.³⁰

The final line of the poem is another quotation from the Psalms, specifically Psalm 102:1. In some Bibles, this is listed as a “Prayer for healing in sickness” and has a strongly penitential opening. Using a slightly newer translation, the Revised Standard Version, we find in Psalm 102:1-6, 9-10, 12, 28:

Hear my prayer, O LORD;
 let my cry come to thee!
 Do not hide thy face from me
 in the day of my distress!
 Incline thy ear to me;
 answer me speedily in the day when I call!
 For my days pass away like smoke,
 and my bones burn like a furnace.
 My heart is smitten like grass, and withered;
 I forget to eat my bread.
 Because of my loud groaning

30. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) 185-187, 190, 191, 195, 197, 204, 205-206, 207-208, 209-212, 38-39, 214. See also *Book of Common Prayer* (1977) 320 or 352. And see *Lutheran Book of Worship: Ministers Desk Edition* 195, 233, or 269.

my bones cleave to my flesh.
 I am like a vulture of the wilderness,
 like an owl of the waste places; ...
 For I eat ashes like bread,
 and mingle tears with my drink;
 because of thy indignation and anger;
 for thou hast taken me up and thrown me away. ...
 But thou, O Lord, art enthroned for ever;
 thy name endures to all generations. ...
 The children of thy servants shall dwell secure;
 their posterity shall be established before thee.

Psalm 102 is listed as one of the optional psalms for Ash Wednesday in the Daily Office Lectionary in the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*. On its own, the line that Eliot quotes from this psalm has an obvious penitential and humbly pleading tone. As an allusion calling up the entire psalm, the line carries much more weight. It reinforces the Ash Wednesday penitential nature of both psalm and poem, but it also reinforces the penitent's confidence. As noted above, the poem does not end on a hopeless note, as some have suggested, but rather on a confident one, trusting in the God to whom the penitent makes confession. The psalm turns in its mood about halfway through, asserting the confidence of those who follow the Lord. Hence, like the psalm, the poem focuses on confession but ends with assurance.³¹ Further, the image of bones burning and cleaving to flesh reinforce the image from Ezekiel with the same hopefulness.

These are all obviously liturgically oriented allusions, quotations, and themes. They serve to reinforce Eliot's high-church approach to the topic of confession and Ash Wednesday. Such a topic has led a few critics to analyze the poem from a Catholic and liturgical perspective, which is my own orientation toward Eliot's poetry, especially the poetry of this post-conversion period in his life. First, commenting on the confessional nature of the poem, Ronald Bush says: "his [Eliot's] verse had contracted to a confessional sincerity which could acknowledge guilt, sin and error but not transcend them. Invoke as he might the redemptive vision of the *Vita Nuova*, he could not effectively conjure up the experience of rebirth."³² I disagree, as noted above, given Eliot's completed conversion process by this time in his life. Of course, I must also admit to Eliot's continuing personal emotional uncertainty. Nonetheless, *Ash-Wednesday* holds out hope,

31. Eliot, *Ash-Wednesday* (1930) 219. See also *Book of Common Prayer* (1977) 950 or 951.

32. Bush 164.

despite the speaker's not daring to hope to turn and the sense that some critics have of the poem's negative, doubting, "agonized, world-rejecting," and hopeless overall impact. I have already noted some of the references and lines in the poem that support a more hopeful reading.³³

So far, I have noted this clearer understanding of Eliot's poem, discussing individual lines as they present the overall theme of the work. However, I have not yet discussed the overall structure of the work, as many critics have. There are obvious difficulties with the work, as some honest critics have commented: "One can hardly explain why Eliot made *Ash Wednesday* so cryptic or why he did not give it a more readily apprehensible structure."³⁴ I might well agree that the poem is not immediately accessible, except by a slow unpacking of the various allusions and references, which I have presented briefly above. As for an analysis of the larger structure of the poem, I would certainly set it into the context of Ash Wednesday and Lent, as part of the penitential theme of that season. I would also assert the poem's use of references and allusions to the Eucharist. Thus, I would again affirm the poem's liturgical orientation and the poet's obvious awareness of, and use of, liturgical seasons, eucharistic references, and worship language, over and against a simply scriptural and generally Christian interpretation. And I would, of course, argue with many of the critics who have missed those elements in this poem.

Kristian Smidt makes several interesting comments about the religious content of the poem, both about its Christian and Anglo-Catholic elements and about its more general religious content. He acknowledges the definite Anglo-Catholic content of the poem. As for the uncertainties of the speaker's faith as expressed in the poem, Smidt sees that uncertainty undergirded by "the 'Catholic philosophy of disillusion,' which Eliot found exemplified in Dante's *Vita Nuova*, and which may be summed up in the precepts: 'not to expect more from *life* than it can give or more from *human* beings than they can give; to look to *death* for what life cannot give.'" Smidt quickly adds that this "Catholic philosophy of disillusion is connected, of course, with the doctrine of sin" — by which he means "original sin, the heritage of mankind." But he says about

33. Gwenn R. Boardman, "Ash Wednesday: Eliot's Lenten Mass Sequence," *Renascence* XV.1 (Fall 1962): 29.

34. Grover Smith, Jr., *T. S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1956) 151, qtd. in Boardman 29.

Original Sin that it helped make the depressing reality of a fragmented modern civilization easier for Eliot to bear. This may be true, personally and poetically, for Eliot but seems to me an incomplete statement about Original Sin and Eliot's use of it in his poetry, which I believe runs deeper than Smidt suggests here. Smidt returns to a more theological and doctrinal understanding of Original Sin when he talks about Grace being "made manifest in the Incarnation of Christ."

Mr H. R. Williamson approves of the *Catholic emphasis on the doctrine of the Incarnation* and thinks that *Protestants stress the Atonement to a dangerous extent*. As far as Eliot is concerned, there is, of course, no exclusion of the Atonement. ... But it is *true that the Incarnation seems to mean much more to him*. This is partly, we may suppose, because the doctrine of the Incarnation attaches a greater value to human life than does that of the Atonement.³⁵

Aside from attributing Eliot's use of the Incarnation to his sense of reality and time, in the sense in which that might coincide with Bradley's philosophy, Eliot's stressing of the Incarnation is certainly in line with Eliot's sense of humanity and of sin. It is also definitely more Catholic in its emphasis than the more traditional Protestant stress on the Atonement — I would concur with Williamson and am pleased that Smidt has noted this Catholic-Protestant theological distinction.

Of the more insightful critical analyses, along the lines of a high-church analysis of Eliot's poetry and prose, have been several essays discussing *Ash-Wednesday* as being largely based on the Mass, the Lenten season, or both. Each of the following four critics has come at the poem from a slightly different angle within that liturgical-interpretive approach. Working from the more recent to the older, Karen T. Romer's essay looks at the liturgical language used in the poem. Romer begins by calling the period after Eliot's conversion the "middle period of [his] poetry." Distinguishing between a more generally Christian, more Protestant expression of his new-found faith and what I have been discussing as a more liturgical, high-church orientation, Romer notes Eliot's "preoccupation not with the Bible as the authority or doctrine *per se*, nor with the declaration of a new-found personal faith, but rather with Christianity as expressed through the Anglican liturgy."³⁶ This is precisely what we have been asserting throughout this

35. Smidt 96-97, 193 [*sic*], 194, 197, 205 (emphasis added).

36. Romer 120.

dissertation as the primary distinguishing trait of any religious analysis of Eliot's works. In these middle and later works from a formally converted and mature Christian Eliot, the distinction becomes even clearer.

Romer sees liturgy as a language of metaphor, symbol, and association. From here, then, she embarks on an analysis of Eliot's middle poetry as basing itself on that language. Romer begins with a discussion of the liturgy, with Christ as the Incarnation of God's Word, "commemorated in the liturgy as an eternal symbol of God's love," and adds a brief discussion of the liturgical calendar, which celebrates the events of Christ's life. She adds an explanation of the Mass of the catechumens and the Mass of the faithful, touches on the liturgical revival of the twentieth century, and notes the liturgical changes made in the 1928 English prayer book. As she discusses Eliot himself against this background of Anglican liturgical development, she asserts that it would have been difficult for an intellectual and an Anglican like Eliot not to have been involved with or interested in these liturgical issues. Then, she turns to a discussion of Lent as a "season of awakening." Finally, before starting on the poetry, she adds that "the significance of the liturgy is not commonly understood," thus justifying her opening discussion on the liturgy itself.³⁷ These are all points I have made in earlier chapters.

Having clarified the liturgical background, Romer begins by asserting that the form of the poem is a variation of the "collect" or principal prayer of the Mass and of prayer offices, having "five parts, [consisting of] the invocation, the relative clause, the petition, the statement of purpose, and the conclusion or doxology," giving the collect for Ash Wednesday as an example.³⁸ Moving through a comparison of the poem to the liturgical service itself, and even more to the less strictly structured hours or prayer offices, Romer pauses on a discussion of the Ariel poems and of "The Hollow Men" before concluding with her main points about *Ash-Wednesday*. She notes that "the movement of this poem ... corresponds exactly to what different writers describe as the experience of liturgy." She also notes "marked parallels between the movement of the

37. Romer 120-125, esp. 120, 121, 122, 123, 124.

38. Romer 125-126.

poem and the progress of Lent," looking at the themes of Ash Wednesday and the six Sundays in Lent. After considering especially the collects of those days, she adds, "There is, in fact, evidence in several studies that Eliot modelled his poem specifically on the Mass. Following her presentation of the correspondence of the collects with each section of the poem, she next moves to consider the influence of the Mass itself. For this, she turns to a work by von Ogden Vogt in *Modern Worship* which presents the "pattern [of worship as consisting] of the following movements: Vision, Humility, Vitality, Recollection, Illumination, Dedication, and Peace." These seven elements she sees as corresponding to seeing God, thus being humbled, next being inspired, in turn reflecting and relating the worship experience to everyday life, gaining enlightenment, recommitting oneself, and finally arriving at the peace of "an integrity of being." These experiences of the worshiper in turn correspond to seven parts of the Mass: Introit, Confession, Gloria, Sermon and Prayers, Eucharist, Offering, and Peace.³⁹ As she admits, these correspondences are not exact, complete, or consistent, admitting gaps in the one-to-one correspondences. She stays, however, with the overall structure as exemplary and largely, if loosely, fitting.

While it sounds as if she is onto something here, it appears more a good summary of the liturgical aspects of worship and of the attempts of other scholars to apply them to Eliot's poem. In attempt to differentiate her approach from those of other scholars, Romer tries too hard, in my estimation, especially in her use of Vogt's material. Vogt's seven-fold analysis of liturgy seems to me be largely arbitrary, not lining up cleanly enough with the traditional Mass. In response to that, I would recommend instead Dom Gregory Dix's book, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, which I have cited elsewhere in this dissertation. Dix's 1945 book still holds sway today, presenting the basic Mass structure as largely based on the New Testament accounts of the Eucharist, which gave us a "seven-action scheme" of the rite, namely "Our Lord (1) took bread; (2) 'gave thanks' over it; (3) broke it; (4) distributed it, saying certain words. Later He (5) took a cup; (6) 'gave thanks' over that; (7) handed it to His disciples, saying certain words." This seven-fold shape was compressed, presented, and unanimously accepted as a four-fold shape, that is "(1) The

39. Romer 132-135, esp. 132, 133, 135.

offertory; bread and wine are 'taken' and placed on the table together. (2) The prayer; the president gives thanks to God over bread and wine together. (3) The fraction; the bread is broken. (4) The communion; the bread and wine are distributed together" — or taken, blessed, broken, and given. Dix adds, "In that form and in that order these four actions constituted the absolutely invariable nucleus of every eucharistic rite known to us."⁴⁰ This is obviously the safest and most traditional structure to work with as regards the Mass. Otherwise, one is forced to list the action of each part, from the greeting, through the lessons, to the meal, and closing with the dismissal. In fact, some more recent worship materials summarize the action as "Gathering, Word, Meal, Sending,"⁴¹ to correspond with Dix's "took, blessed, broke, and gave." Trying to define the liturgy according to von Ogden Vogt's seven-action scheme seems difficult, even rather arbitrary and inconclusive, not to mention unnecessary. Further, von Ogden Vogt's scheme does not follow the action of the Mass in any structured order.

A better approach is that of Paul J. Dolan from a 1967 issue of *Renascence*, which Romer cites in her essay of five years later. Dolan's approach is to compare the poem to the Mass of the catechumens, which precedes the full Mass of the faithful. Citing Roy Harvey Pearce's view of *Ash-Wednesday* as "an acolyte's poem," Dolan unpacks its liturgical structure as being "catechumenical," seeing the poem as not concerned with someone in the religious state but on the way. Thus, he draws on the Mass of the catechumens and on Lent as the season of preparation for conversion. The speaker, he feels, is a catechumen, engaged in penance in preparation for Easter and baptism, "[proceeding] only to the foot of the altar, the threshold of such a communion [with God]." Thus, as many critics do, Dolan sees the speaker as "an exile from two worlds, since as a catechumen he has not yet entered the spiritual world." Citing Shakespeare's Sonnet 29, about which I commented above, Dolan feels the positive tone of affirmation in Shakespeare's sonnet "is not achieved in *Ash Wednesday*," since the catechumen has not yet

40. Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 1945 (New York: Seabury, 1982) 48.

41. *With One Voice: A Lutheran Resource for Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995) 8-9.

arrived spiritually.⁴² I have already commented on this above, citing Lancelot Andrewes' two-fold turning and Eliot's already having become a Christian three years prior. While Dolan and others leave the speaker in a "doubtful movement toward a new life," I see the positive results together with the penitential mood as not being mutually exclusive, as I have already asserted above.

Dolan makes a very good point about the *Ave Maria*, or Hail Mary, noting that there are two parts, the first being scriptural and the second liturgical, with the line, "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death" coming from the liturgical part of the prayer.⁴³ Again, this squares with what I have been saying about Eliot's use of faith and scripture, that he works more with liturgical issues, texts, and themes than with more generally Christian or simply scriptural issues. As he proceeds to consider the poem's Ezekiel 37 imagery, Dolan notes, as I did above, the text's liturgical use as "the seventh of the twelve prophecies read in the service for Holy Saturday," adding that this is the midpoint of the lessons, and that Holy Saturday is the last day of Lent.⁴⁴ Again, these are good points, reaffirming the liturgical structure and orientation of the poem. However, when Dolan discusses the line, "I am not worthy,"⁴⁵ which he traces correctly as I discussed above, his argument runs into trouble. This line is in the Mass of the faithful, just before reception of the Sacrament, as I noted. However, Dolan's intent is to make the poem the words of a catechumen admitted to the Mass of the catechumens but dismissed before the Mass of the faithful. This dismissal would not allow the catechumen to receive the Sacrament yet, until he is finished with his time of preparation culminating at Easter. Dolan adds towards the end of his essay, "At the end of the poem the speaker is still a catechumen and the poem stops short of communion with God." This is a logical conclusion to his argument, but it is an argument that is weakened by a negative reading of the poem as a poem of hopelessness and rein-

42. Paul J. Dolan, "Ash Wednesday: A Catechumenical Poem," *Renascence* XIX.4 (Summer 1967): 198-202, esp. 199, 200, 201.

43. Dolan 202.

44. Dolan 203.

45. Dolan 205.

forced by too stringent a Mass structure imposed on the poem. Thus, while he makes some good points and is indeed correct in placing the poem into a liturgical framework, Dolan's argument ultimately is injured by his missing or denying the ultimate hope of the poem.

In passing, Dolan states: "In all of Eliot's poetry the Christian theme is always presented in some kind of tension. A theme in his work is the difficulty of *maintaining* a religious sense in the modern world."⁴⁶ This may, of course, be true about Eliot, and it is most likely true for any honest intelligent believer. The danger here, of course, is seeing the tension resulting in hopelessness, which has already been discussed. An additional point Dolan makes is that the poem becomes "essentially a Purgatorial ascent, [in which] hope and despair are temptations."⁴⁷ Given the Anglican Church's proscription regarding belief in Purgatory in Article XXII of the Thirty-Nine Articles, this may not be the case. However, Eliot would, of course, be free to dabble in such a notion in his poetry, and it is not far beyond the domain of an Anglo-Catholic believer. It does suggest, however, that Dolan is approaching Eliot's poem from a *Roman Catholic* perspective instead of an Anglo-Catholic one, allowing for some of his points to be a bit overstated, as I have noted.

Gwenn R. Boardman's essay also looks at *Ash-Wednesday* from the perspective of a Lenten Mass. She traces Eliot's spiritual development from "the spiritual desert of the modern world" in *The Waste Land* in 1922, which was discussed at length in my fourth chapter; through "the 1927-28 *Ariel Poems* [which] include many of the images found in *Ash Wednesday*," which will be discussed next; and "Some scholars have extended such hints to their reading of *Four Quartets* (1943)," which will be discussed last in this chapter. She admits the poem's lack of immediate clarity, noting the often recognized allusions, by other critics, to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Beatrice, Eliot's essay on Lancelot Andrewes, and St. John of the Cross' *Dark Night of the Soul*. Boardman warns against any "attempt to fit all of its 'meaning' into some arbitrary religious framework" or being too facile with allusions from Eliot's other writings. Nonetheless, she

46. Dolan 204.

47. Dolan 204-205.

looks for the key to the poem's "structure in the Roman Catholic Mass" and relates the six parts of the poem to the "six Masses of rising hope, in a sequence appropriate to Lent." She sees Eliot using not only the themes of the six Sundays in Lent, but also making use of "two series of 'six' found in every Mass." Further, the six sections also "parallel the six Remembrances (Church and clergy, friends, saints and the living, the dead in Purgatory, sinners, all Nature), and the six Acts (contrition, faith, hope and surrender, petition to the Lamb of God, love, gratitude, with an added plea for perseverance)." Her rationale for this approach comes not only from the poem and its subject matter and themes, but also from a quotation from Eliot's 1928 "Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," in which he says, "The only dramatic satisfaction I find now is in a High Mass well performed." Finally, Boardman adds that she sees the poem as being in "an optimistic mood, not the agonized, world-rejecting cry so often 'discovered' in this poem." She adds, "The 'turning' images do not express ambivalence of feeling, but the alternating striving and submission of the Mass."⁴⁸

There is certainly much to agree with, here. First, I agree, as already stated elsewhere, that one can indeed trace elements of Eliot's spiritual development in his poetry, looking at the themes, images, subject matter, and speaker. Second, I would affirm a solid look at the structure of the poem in terms of the Mass and of Lent, while agreeing about too facile a religious interpretation. Such was the attempt of Romer, discussed above, in aligning the poem's structure with a rather arbitrary flow of movement in the Mass. Such was also the case, though to a lesser extent, in Dolan's restriction of the poem's structure to the Mass of the catechumens, with the necessary negative and hopeless final interpretation. Boardman, on the other hand, has a stronger rationale for her approach, including a solid understanding of Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism and citing his statement about the pleasure he derives from a "High Mass." Also, Boardman appears to have a richer understanding of the ups and downs of mood in the Mass and in confession, allowing her to assert the poem's overall optimistic mood. I have also asserted the poem's hopefulness, based on my own understanding of the liturgy as well as the quotation of Lancelot

⁴⁸. Boardman 28, 29.

Andrewes' sermon on Ash Wednesday confession and "turning," cited above.

Boardman also notes the influence of Elizabethan and Jacobean poets and dramatists whom Eliot was studying at the time he wrote *Ash-Wednesday*. She especially notes their "emblematic expression and [use of] the language of human passion to express a mystical union with God." She especially cites the Roman Catholic poet Richard Crashaw and his use of such language and images in what have come to be called his "Weeper Poems." From here, then, Boardman marches through the six sections of Eliot's poem, linking each section to one of the Sundays in Lent, to each set of the texts prescribed for each of those Sundays, and to each of the six acts of the Mass.⁴⁹ Her argument is logical, structured, thorough, systematic, and cogent. Despite her use of the Roman Catholic Mass, which has elements not necessarily present in the Anglican Mass of the day, such as the six acts of the Mass, her argument still works, as well it should, given the overall similarities of the Mass between the two traditions. Even if one were to delete those references to the six acts of the Mass, her presentation remains persuasive, and those references add an interesting reinforcement. Perhaps the larger issue, here, is as I noted about *The Waste Land* in my fourth chapter, that Lent is meant to be a season of preparation for Easter, and as such it forms a perfect time for preparation for baptism and conversion. As a season doing double duty — strengthening the faith of the faithful through reflection, penance, and preparation for Easter, and preparing the catechumens through reflection, penance, and preparation for baptism and conversion — the season is more than just an arbitrary pattern of Sundays, lessons, and themes. Undergirding the structure of Lent, therefore, must be a deeper sense of the overall process of human conversion, preparation, journey, enlightenment, and rebirth. As such, a Lenten analysis of Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* cannot be limited too much, although it must be as precise and systematic as possible. Boardman has met those criteria in her analysis of Eliot's poem.

Interestingly enough, Carl Wooton, like Boardman, also notes the traditional view of "'Ash Wednesday' [as] considered generally to be T. S. Eliot's formula for escaping from 'The Waste

49. Boardman 30-36, esp. 30.

Land' [*sic*] of modern society and a poem of religious affirmation." Like Boardman, Wooton notes critics' citations of Dante's *Purgatorio* and St. John of the Cross' "Dark Night of the Soul." Wooton also acknowledges the critics who have noted liturgical elements, allusions to the Mass, and liturgical themes and phrases in the poem, just as above in my own comments. Wooton goes on to note that these same critics have failed to see the overall liturgical structure of the poem as following that of the Mass.⁵⁰ That criticism is a fair one as regards my own comments above, for while I noted the liturgical language and images, I did not go the next step, as the above four critics have, especially Boardman and Wooton, of drawing a direct parallel with one-to-one correspondences between Eliot's poem and the Mass or Lent. I did just that in my fourth chapter with regards to *The Waste Land*, since it came at a point in Eliot's personal life and spiritual quest that it typified the process of conversion generally, and for Eliot personally. Here, I have only been noting the continuation of a high-church and liturgical influence in Eliot's work, and I am thankful to Wooton, Boardman, and others who have taken the next step, liturgically, thus reinforcing my overall theme and presentation of Eliot's later poetry, and also of Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

Wooton's outline of the poem in relation to the Mass is equally as logical, structured, thorough, systematic, and cogent as Boardman's. I quote Wooton's own preliminary summary at the beginning of his argument:

Part I [of the poem] is parallel to the Mass of the Catechumens. Within it are an expression of contrition, a prayer for mercy, and the lesson for the day. The three main actions of the Mass of the Faithful are paralleled in Parts II and III. Part II contains the Offertory, including the offering of both self and worldly possessions, purification by the Washing of the Fingers, and the Consecration of the bread and wine. Eliot indicates that the Consecration is the pivotal point of the sacrifice. ... After this reconciliation of opposites in the Consecration, the Eucharistic Feast is prepared for consumption. Part III of the poem ends with a specific allusion to the celebrant's communion, and the ensuing Part IV seems to parallel the people's communion.

Part V of the poem is clearly a reference to the Last Gospel of the Mass with an added admonition to modern man for his mediocre Christianity. The Last Gospel actually ends the Mass, but, in Part VI, the penitent offers a Thanksgiving for the sacrifice and reaffirms the need to make a total sacrifice of self to the

50. Carl Wooton, "The Mass: 'Ash-Wednesday's' Objective Correlative," *Arizona Quarterly* 17.1 (Spring 1961): 31. See also Boardman 28, n. 1.

Redeemer. It is also a restatement of the fact that salvation comes from without and that the need for the sacrifice is constant.⁵¹

Following this brief presentation of his argument, Wooton goes into more detail, citing specific images, lines, and allusions. This is a credible organizational scheme, at least equal to Boardman's. Wooton's essay also takes into consideration the flow from the Mass of the catechumens to the Mass of the faithful, which keeps the eucharistic references with which Dolan had difficulty. The last two sections, however, are less familiar parts of the Mass — the last Gospel of the Mass and the thanksgiving for the sacrifice. However, given a larger liturgical orientation, this structure seems to work, even if the last two elements are more from the Roman Catholic Mass than from the Anglican liturgy. Nonetheless, these two elements are not outside the Anglican tradition. A thanksgiving for the Mass is certainly a reasonable addition, whether formally structured or not, which also makes Wooton's analysis of the poem work. As for the last Gospel of the Mass, a less familiar element for many, there is need to turn to the 1928 structure of the Anglican or Episcopal liturgy.

The general flow of the Mass, to which some may be accustomed today in liturgical churches has changed somewhat over the years. This applies not only to the lessons, prayers, and language of the liturgy, but also to the flow of elements in a regular Sunday worship experience. Today, there is a confession/absolution of some sort preceding the liturgy, followed by the entrance rite, lessons and Gospel, sermon, creed, prayers, Eucharist, benediction, and dismissal. Turning to the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church in America, one finds some variations on the general and ancient structure. That 1928 prayer book's order of worship begins with the Lord's Prayer, a collect for confession, the Ten Commandments or the *Kyrie Eleison*, and a prayer for forgiveness. This is a longer confessional opening than many churches may use today, including recitation of all or part of the Decalogue, having a solidly confessional and instructional feel. Then comes the collect for the day, the epistle, a hymn or anthem, the Gospel, the creed, announcements, bidding prayer or other prayers, and the sermon. This is a very common order of the service of the Word portion of the service, if abbreviated according to

51. Wooton 32-33.

today's structure by the omission of Old Testament lesson and Psalm. The next part of the service includes the offertory sentences, offering, a hymn or offertory anthem, intercessions and prayer "for the whole state of Christ's Church," general confession, absolution, some comfortable words of Jesus from scripture, the *Sursum corda*, proper preface for the season, *Sanctus*, consecration, oblation, invocation, Lord's Prayer, prayer of humble access, a hymn, priest's communion, people's communion, post-communion prayer, the *Gloria*, and the blessing. Aside from the insertion of the general confession, a slightly shortened *Sursum corda*, and the prayer of humble access, as well as some wording, this part of the service is also very similar to the eucharistic portion of the liturgy, according today's general practice among western liturgical churches. These are minor differences, especially considering that if a confession was not offered earlier in the service, at least a short prayer of confession should be offered at this point in the service, according to modern practice. Finally, at the end of the service as printed in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, we find the exhortations, which may be inserted in the service before Communion after the prayer "for the whole state of Christ's Church." A special note in the rubrics says, "That the Exhortation shall be said on the First Sunday in Advent, the First Sunday in Lent, and Trinity Sunday." This is a "warning for the Celebration of Holy Communion," according to the rubrics. Two additional exhortations follow to be used at the Priest's discretion on different occasions.⁵² The second exhortation uses thankful language, which would align with Wooton's thanksgiving for worship. Wooton adds that this last Gospel of the Mass is St. John's Prologue, with its references to the Word, light, darkness, and the world not understanding.⁵³ I have already noted that above in my own discussion. Given similar themes between Wooton's last Gospel of the Mass from St. John's Prologue and the thanksgiving for worship, compared to the exhortations of the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* with its warnings and thankful language, I can agree with Wooton's final two sections in his analysis of *Ash-Wednesday*.

52. *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church According to the Use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America Together with The Psalter or Psalms of David* (New York: Oxford UP, 1928) 67-89, esp. 74, 85, 86.

53. Wooton 40.

All of this material from the above four critics is the same understanding I have been presenting throughout this dissertation, in order to make much the same kind of analyses of all of Eliot's works. While these four authors have taken much the same approach to *Ash-Wednesday* as I have to *The Waste Land* and all of Eliot's works, it is, perhaps, a slightly easier point to make when dealing with a poem like *Ash-Wednesday* that is so obviously Christian in tone and so obviously Lenten in content. Having said that, I turn to a discussion of the Ariel poem, especially *Journey of the Magi* and "A Song for Simeon," followed by discussions of *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Four Quartets*, to present the continuation of this liturgical approach. These works are also obviously Christian in content, but they fall at a different time in the Christian year, that of Advent and Christmas. In them, the focus shifts somewhat from the preoccupations of confession and Lent to different liturgical themes in keeping with the mood of the Advent and Christmas seasons. Nonetheless, while presenting these themes of another season in the Church year, they also continue some of the mood of Lent and sacrifice, as well, thus demonstrating the Church's deeper understanding of both times of year and of their theological connectedness.

Eliot's Ariel Poems

Having discussed *Ash-Wednesday*, which was written in 1930, we take a small step back, chronologically, to the Ariel poems of 1927-1930. *Journey of the Magi*, from August 1927, and "A Song for Simeon," from November 1928,⁵⁴ are not just Christmas poems, but again strongly liturgical poems. The first two lines of *Journey of the Magi* set the scene and time of year. It is the end of the year, but also the beginning, a time of the shortest days. One of the magi of the Epiphany is reflecting on his long difficult journey long ago, in the cold. The effort was so great that he remembers it as "folly." As part of the remembrance, he sees "three trees on the low sky," which is an obvious reference to the crucifixion. The reference to the thirty pieces of silver recalls Judas' price of betrayal of Jesus, setting up the crucifixion, and the "empty wine-skins" recall old wine-skins not ready for the "new wine" that would come as a result of Christ's sacri-

54. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 37, 185.

fice.⁵⁵ All of this is the magus' reflection on the event of the Epiphany, the festival twelve days after Christmas, commemorating the arrival of the magi, traditionally assumed to have been three for the three gifts they brought the Christ child. They brought gold, befitting a king, frankincense, befitting a god, and myrrh, a burial spice. So in the story of the magi at Epiphany is the new epiphany of Christ, the new revelation of him, as more than just a child, and a prophetic foretelling of his identity and his death. Thus, the gifts are not just appropriate, but they reveal Christ's person and work, and at this time of celebration of the birth of the Christ child, we have a prediction of the death of the savior. To add a dogmatic aspect to the Incarnation, the birth of Christ is meaningless except in the context of his entire life and especially of his death and resurrection. Thus, for the birth to have a life-changing significance for the magus, he must also see its meaning together with the crucifixion by seeing the three trees on the hill — that is, he must experience a death in the context of celebrating the birth.

Thus, in the third and final stanza of the poem, the magus juxtaposes birth and death in a way that is new for him. So many years later, he is still reflecting on their relationship — and such reflection, like baptism, needs to be renewed every day and cannot be understood just once. Thus, with his new insight, the magus is “no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation.” According to old dispensationalist tradition, God has been perceived as dispensing first the law of nature for two thousand years, then the law for two thousand years of Israel's history, and finally two thousand years of the dispensation of grace in the Christian Church, ultimately culminating in the seventh thousand-year period as a reign of peace. Having come to understand, then, the magus' experience has made for a new birth of faith, which has brought with it a death of the old self, the old ways, and the old faith. Thus, not only has the magus moved on in faith by this experience of vision and insight, but his faith is becoming radically changed. Therefore, he “should be glad of another death,” for the renewal of faith and rebirth that it promises. If he is an old and tired magus looking forward to physical death, then that will bring with it the fullness of

55. T. S. Eliot, *Journey of the Magi*, 1927, *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1952), pp. 68-69, ll. 1-2, 32, 3-5, 8, 20, 24, 27, 28, 31, .

the kingdom of God promised in baptism and by this new revelation — as St. Paul says, “for me, to live is Christ, to die is gain.” Further, if such a transformation of faith has taken place, then not only are his people alien in their faith, but he is now alien in this world, with his citizenship now in heaven. So in the final line of the second stanza, when the magus talks of arriving at the place, he finds it “satisfactory.”⁵⁶ While use of that word may cause wonder, it suggests at least a sense of being comfortable enough in such a new situation, or even the merely satisfactory nature of the Christmas stable. But more to the point, “satisfaction” may be a pun here by Eliot, referring to the satisfaction Christ offers for our sins in the older and fuller theological sense of the word.

Simply writing a poem on an Incarnation theme is, as discussed in the second chapter and as cited above, of interest more to an Anglo-Catholic than to a Protestant, at least with these richer theological reflections. And while high-church believers tend to stress the Incarnation for a number of theological reasons, as discussed elsewhere, especially in my second chapter, they also tend to stress festivals like Epiphany more than Protestants do. Epiphany offers a fuller understanding of who Christ really is. The gifts force us to deal with death at the same time we are celebrating birth. Further, Epiphany forces a reconsideration of the deeper theological relationship between birth and death, as well as the dogmatic teachings about birth, death, and rebirth. For Christians, especially through baptism, that birth and rebirth in the waters of baptism also signal death of the old Adam or Eve, of the old self of Original Sin. It means washing away the old sinful self, dying to sin, and celebrating new life — the new wine that cannot go into the old wine-skins. An additional theme of Epiphany is darkness and light, Christ being the light that shines in the darkness. That also relates to the enlightenment of new faith, as well as connecting to the changing of physical darkness to the increasing light during this time of year. And from a high-church perspective, all this is looked at more directly and more dogmatically, with images of art, light, enlightenment, and Incarnation, which are more high-church concerns than Protestant themes.

56. Eliot, *Journey of the Magi* (1927) 35-39, 41-42, 43, 31.

"A Song for Simeon" carries this Incarnation theme forward and also again stresses the liturgical emphases of Eliot's poetry of this period. Simeon was an old man waiting and hoping to see the salvation of Israel before his death, according to St. Luke 2:25-35. As he waited at the temple, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple where Simeon was waiting. When he saw the child, he sang the famous song, which Eliot uses as the basis for his poem and which has found its way into the Christian liturgy as a post-communion canticle, sung after all have received the Eucharist and are preparing to conclude worship. Thus, the text of Simeon's song enjoys a special liturgical position. Even though it does not appear in the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer's* order of service, it is a traditional liturgical element, known by its Latin opening words, *Nunc dimittis*.

Eliot entitles his poem "A Song *for* Simeon," not "The Song *of* Simeon." Published in November 1928, as noted above, this poem comes one and one-half years after his formal conversion. Again, as in *Journey of the Magi*, the speaker sets the time of year as winter and alludes to images of light and darkness, as well as waiting. These are all images employed in the *Nunc dimittis*, as well. The speaker is obviously Simeon, whose "life is light, waiting for the death wind." The second stanza opens, "Grant us thy peace," which is a prominent line in the *Nunc dimittis*, as well as the concluding line of the *Agnus Dei* sung immediately after the eucharistic prayer and before communion. As such, it has a strongly eucharistic impact, linking God's peace with worship and the Eucharist. In the poem, the speaker Simeon goes on to say how he has lived an exemplary life of faith and good deeds. In the eighteenth line, the second line of the third stanza, he again says, "Grant us thy peace." The twentieth line makes reference to "maternal sorrow," referring to the premonition of Jesus' suffering and death and the Virgin's sorrow. This comes from the addendum to Simeon's Song in the verses immediately following the traditional *Nunc dimittis* text in Luke 2. These added lines refer to the impending suffering and death, to the spear that shall pierce the Virgin's heart, also, but they are lines that mark a shift from the imagery and theme of the traditional *Nunc dimittis*, so they are lines that are separated in the scriptural text, and therefore they are lines that are not included in the liturgical text for its

context in the service. Line twenty-two yet again quotes the Lancelot Andrewes image of the “unspeaking and unspoken Word” of the “Infant.” The final two lines of the third stanza close with Simeon’s identity as an eighty-year-old man with “no to-morrow,” who has indeed been granted the privilege of seeing “Israel’s consolation.” The fourth stanza opens with another line quoted from the *Nunc dimittis*, “According to thy word.” Then three lines refer again to light and to climbing the stair of the saints. The speaker affirms that martyrdom is not for him, nor is the “ultimate vision” — a point that will arise again in *Four Quartets*, discussed below. Line thirty-one repeats for the third time the important line, but this time with one important change, with Simeon saying this time, in the context of his spiritual quest and limitations, “Grant *me* thy peace.” The next two lines again refer to the added prophecy about Jesus’ suffering and Mary’s pain, although parenthetically, “(And a sword shall pierce thy heart, / Thine also)” The next two lines confess Simeon’s tiredness and approaching death, with reference to those who come after him — an awareness of his place in the longer history of believers. And the final two lines are direct quotations from the *Nunc dimittis*, Simeon’s song, although they are slightly truncated, “Let thy servant depart, / Having seen thy salvation.”⁵⁷

There is an honesty about Simeon’s place in all this — about his rôle in the drama of salvation, about his privilege of seeing the salvation of Israel, about his faith, about his not being a martyr, and about his place in the longer history of the Church (a Church just coming into birth at this time). There is also a strong statement of faith — in the Christ Child, in God’s graciousness, in God’s prophecy, and in the completion of the process of coming to understand. There is a sense of closure here, which makes this a perfect text for a canticle at the end of worship and following the reception of the Sacrament. As such, Eliot’s “Song” is not only Simeon’s own song from scripture, but also a song commemorating Simeon, his faith, and his rôle in the history of salvation. As such, it also serves as a song marking Eliot’s closure on his entire conversion process. If *Ash-Wednesday* reveals Eliot’s spiritual doubts in the context of confession, then this

57. T. S. Eliot, “A Song for Simeon,” 1928, *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1952) pp. 69-70, ll. 1-3, 4, 8, 9-16, 18, 20, 22, 23-24, 25, 28-30, 31 (emphasis added), 32-33, 34-35, 36-37.

poem reveals Eliot's confidence in the context of the words of Simeon's song. Further, in the context of the Mass, the confessional aspect of *Ash-Wednesday* coincides with the confessional beginning of the Mass, and Simeon's song, which comes after communion, coincides with the assurance a worshiper feels at the end of the Mass.

A reinforcement of that sense of closure comes in "Animula," the third of the Ariel poems, in lines thirty-one and thirty-seven. The title itself refers to the spirit. Line thirty-one reads, "Living first in the silence after the viaticum." The *viaticum* is the "meal for the journey," referring to the Eucharist given to someone near death. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, the *viaticum* is from the Latin meaning "provision for the journey," referring to "The Holy Communion given to those in likelihood of immediate death to strengthen them with grace for their journey into eternity." The *viaticum* is something with which most Protestants would have no familiarity, and it refers to the Sacrament given at the end of life, which is so important to those of a more Catholic persuasion. Imagery used earlier in the poem, imagery of light and darkness, the image of the Christmas tree, and images of life and death, link this poem to the other Ariel poems and their Incarnation and Epiphany emphases. This reference to the *viaticum* does even more so, with a stress on the continuing presence of the Incarnate Christ in the Eucharist for believers. Also, if this Sacrament is to be given to those near death, then it signals not only death but also spiritual birth — spiritual rebirth and birth into heaven — hence, the final line, line thirty-seven, which is an interesting slight variation on the line from the Hail Mary, "Pray for us now and at the hour of our *birth*."⁵⁸ This line having been used twice in *Ash-Wednesday* makes an interesting further connection to that poem in a strongly liturgical way, and also in a way that suggests completion of spiritual journey and completion of understanding death and birth.

"Marina," the final poem of the four, uses water imagery, which can easily be linked with baptism. That is also the significance of the title of the poem. Add to that the imagery of a boat,

58. T. S. Eliot, "Animula," 1929, *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1952) pp. 70-71, ll. 31, 37 (emphasis added). See also F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974) 1436.

and we have a strengthening of the baptismal theme, given that the boat is an image of the Church through history. The Church uses plenty of naval terms, such as the nave for the main part of the building where the worshipers sit. This refers to the shape of an upside-down ship, which certain theologians, like the proponents the Theology of Hope, see as the symbol of a ship of passage taking the body of believers through the waters of life, ultimately to the kingdom of God. The poem also contains four one-word lines, "Death," further linking this theme of birth and death to the waters of baptism, which form the Church and which signal the death of the old and birth of the new believer. A further reference to the old familiar line from Lancelot Andrewes also strengthens the Incarnation theme and further relates the poem to the other three.⁵⁹

Given the very recent formal conversion and baptism of T. S. Eliot just one month prior to the publication of *Journey of the Magi*, the poem's title and theme may also be representative of, and significant to, Eliot's own life. There may well be more identification between the poet and the speaker of the poem than one may usually dare assert. But since Eliot's life situation reveals a slow and constant development of his faith up to the point of his formal conversion, this poem may be a personal reflection on his own process, or *journey* of faith. In addition, the speaker reflects from a time later in his life, which could be precisely what Eliot is doing with regards to his own conversion and newly established faith. And if *Journey of the Magi* chronicles Eliot's own reflection on his own spiritual journey, in addition to the poem's impact on its own merits, then, we might venture to add that "A Song for Simeon" marks the closure of that process of conversion one and one-half years later, given the rôle of the *Nunc dimittis* and its position in the liturgy. The later two poems add further reflections on the same themes, but they seem to be growing out of an enlarged perspective on the part of the poet.

In his assessment of *Journey of the Magi*, Kristian Smidt notes the "traditional" main symbols of "running water, crosses, vine-leaves, pieces of silver." In contrast to some of Eliot's

59. T. S. Eliot, "Marina," 1930, *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1952) pp. 72-73, ll. 1-2, 7, 9, 11, 13, 31.

other symbols, which some critics feel are more ancient or more related to anthropology and depth psychology, Smidt sees Eliot using symbols that he has used before in previous poems, symbols that begin to take on personal significance. But given Eliot's conversion and its influence, as we have been discussing, these personal symbols can easily express traditional Christian as well as personal ideals. In *Journey of the Magi* and "A Song for Simeon," Smidt again notes the presence of Original Sin, asserting that neither Simeon nor the magus are consciously aware of their inherent sinfulness. Nonetheless, he feels that the magus "realizes subconsciously how worthless he is in comparison with the perfection he has seen," and he feels that Simeon, despite his assertion of his righteousness, also "has some such realization too." Smidt also notes the "cost of seeking Christ" for both speakers in both poems. He further links this to the sense of meritorious suffering here, and in *Murder in the Cathedral* — where Becket says, "action is suffering / And suffering is action" — finding the culmination in *The Rock's* "call to martyrdom."⁶⁰

In the context of his discussion of the Ariel poems, Smidt includes an interesting reflection on the issue of Original Sin as it relates to Eliot and his childhood. In *Journey of the Magi* and "A Song for Simeon," as noted above, he notes the presence of the doctrine of Original Sin as a background for the two poems. Smidt says of Eliot, "In his younger days he may also have inclined to the Romantic notion that man is essentially good and only corrupted by his environment. But as far back as his poetry takes us he was obviously drawn much more strongly to the opposite view, that man is fundamentally imperfect but can be improved and civilised." This latter view is within the domain of Original Sin and is reflected in *Journey of the Magi* and "A Song for Simeon." But in "Animula," Smidt sees a different perspective presented, that being the former view of "childhood [being] a period of innocence, when the soul which has issued from the hand of God retains its purity and simplicity — whereas experience of this life and adult age bring corruption." This view corresponds to the Neoplatonism and Hermeticism of various seventeenth-century poets like Henry Vaughan (1621-1695) and Thomas Traherne (1637-1674) and Traherne's *Centuries*. From within this childhood innocence in "Animula,"

60. Smidt 111, 194, 199.

Smidt sees “the child, in its first contacts with the world, taking pleasure ‘In the fragrant brilliance of the Christmas tree, / Pleasure in the wind, the sunlight and the sea,’” and other items listed in subsequent lines of the poem. Smidt further sees “a correspondence between the pleasure of the child and the cult of fertility symbols in the childhood in the race.” About this, Smidt reflects further on Eliot’s childhood and development: “It is possible that Eliot’s delicate sensibility, too often hurt in an insensitive world, sought refuge in a certain aloofness. Mr. Edmund Wilson suggests that like Henry James and several other New England writers, Eliot spent much of his maturity ‘regretting an emotionally undernourished youth,’ the main cause of which was the Puritanism of his environment and upbringing.”⁶¹ While much of Smidt’s information and many of his reflections are of a more general religious interest, Smidt does note two important elements of Eliot’s theological and personal development — Eliot’s theological development away from believing the hermeticism of his youth to his embracing the dogma of Original Sin in his adult life; and his “emotionally undernourished youth” being blamed, at least by Wilson, on what he calls his Puritan upbringing. These two elements more strongly reflect Eliot’s development in the direction of high-church theology and ideology, in tune with my overall approach.

In her essay on *Ash-Wednesday*, cited above, Karen Romer discusses the larger issue of the liturgy in relation to the poems of this period in Eliot’s life. She also mentions the “great Liturgical Revival in the early years of this century” and the major liturgical revisions of the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1928. And this renewed emphasis and understanding produced not only specific liturgical changes, but also changes in the overall conception of liturgy, as Romer also adds. Further, the importance of the Incarnation is stressed in terms of the liturgy playing out the experience of Christ’s incarnation, not only two thousand years ago, but also again today *in* the liturgy. From this understanding of the rôle of the liturgy and its symbolism, Romer goes on to analyze Eliot’s middle period poetry. She says in passing about these Ariel poems, that literary critics have already noted the “borrowings from liturgical texts.” She cites specifically the *Nunc dimittis* as used in “A Song for Simeon,” the “theme of beginning and end,” the “turning point

61. Smidt 194, 190, 6.

between the past and the future," the prophecy from Isaiah 49:6, the "ceremony of the purification and circumcision," the use of Simeon's song in the liturgy, and the death and birth imagery tied to Christ's saving death. Thus, she says, "In this way Eliot uses a specific liturgical passage as the principle for his thematic development."⁶² This is just the point I have been making.

As she continues her discussion of *Ash-Wednesday*, Romer pauses to add a few comments specifically about the Ariel poems. Writing about "Marina," she says it has been theologically related to the other three Ariel poems, adding, "It is seen therefore to be symbolic of the resurrection, which is logically at the end of the series as 'Journey of the Magi,' representing the Birth, is at the beginning." She continues, saying that no commentators have seen "Marina" as being based on any specific liturgical texts, as is the case with the first two. Nonetheless, as I also have noted above, "Marina" does continue images of rebirth, the Church, and baptism. At this point, Romer departs to discuss Shakespeare's *Pericles*, in which Pericles believes his wife and daughter are dead. His wife revives and worships at Diana's shrine, and his daughter Marina is also alive and taken by pirates to Metylene to be sold. This Romer associates with "Acts 27-28, which describes the great storm at sea ... when Paul is on his way to Rome. Wreck is averted by God's providence and the ship comes safely to shelter in an island called Melita or Melitene (the closeness to Metylene is at least intriguing)." She continues, "Further strength is given to the interpretation of Marina as the young Church when one relates Acts 19, containing the narrative of the victory of the Faith at Ephesus. ... It is at Ephesus that Thaisa is washed ashore, where, without faith that she will ever see her lord again, she worships Diana." Further, given that Paul's Letter to the Ephesians is about the unity of the Church, so then, Marina becomes a symbol of the Church and a "symbol of rebirth. She [Marina] is the new Church, the bride of Christ."⁶³ On the other hand, Kristian Smidt feels the "I" in "Marina" is "only very vaguely" identified with Shakespeare's Pericles.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, Romer makes a strong case, over and against Smidt's misgivings, using as her support a comment Eliot once made about the

62. Romer 121-122, 125.

63. Romer 127, 128, 129.

64. Smidt 82.

recognition scene in *Pericles*, indicating knowledge of, and respect for, this Shakespeare play.

Moving to consider the four Ariel poems together, Romer agrees with what I have said above about the juxtaposition of the birth and death of Christ in *Journey of the Magi*. She also mentions the *Nunc dimittis* as providing the framework for "A Song for Simeon." Of the last two poems, she says:

"Animula" may perhaps suggest a connective between "A Song for Simeon" and "Marina," although the substance is less clear. If Simeon is the end of the old era, born to die before the era of Christ's salvation, "Animula" is the birth of the soul which can be reborn in the "viaticum." If Simeon represents the death of the old order, "Animula" represents the birth of the Church, and yet, as the sequence in "Animula" suggests, the one grows out of the other. ... The relationship then between "Animula" and "Marina" follows logically. If "Animula" is the birth of the soul in the new era, "Marina" is the redemption of that soul; if "Animula" is the birth of the Church in historical time, "Marina" is the birth of the Church into eternity, or the triumph of the Church over death through redemption.⁶⁵

These are all very helpful insights. They not only add to a deeper understanding of each poem, but they help reveal a stronger thematic and liturgical link among them. Romer's pulling together of both Ephesians and *Pericles* to elucidate "Marina" seems to be right on target, and her way of then seeing the transitions from *Journey of the Magi* through to "Marina" is also accurate. And her insights certainly fit with my own comments above and take these poems in the same liturgical direction that I do.

R. D. Brown begins his comments specifically on *Journey of the Magi* with a very Arnoldian statement, saying that in the modern age religious writers like Eliot are writing to an audience for whom literature has replaced religion. Therefore, he sees critics as having written on Eliot's poem, noting the allusions to Shakespeare's *Othello*, to Lancelot Andrewes' sermon, to St. John Perse's *Anabase*, and other works, while completely missing the deeper, revelatory, and central action and sources. While most critics note the "weariness and disillusionment" in the poem, they miss the deeper theological insights. He includes Grover Smith in this group, centering on his misunderstanding of the word "satisfactory," seeing it as a comment on the bare adequacy of the event suggesting that the magus does not understand. Brown clarifies, along the lines I noted

65. Romer 129-130.

earlier, that the word "satisfactory" has a much deeper theological use, referring to the satisfaction of Christ's death on the cross. Citing Article XXXI of the Anglican Church's Thirty-Nine Articles, Brown explains the word's theological and ecclesiastical use, meaning "expiatory." Brown also notes use of the term in this deeper theological way by Lancelot Andrewes in one of his sermons.

Such an event as the magus experiences in the poem changes him by bringing about the death of his old beliefs. All this comes about by the revelation of the meaning of the event for the magus, who comes to understand the death and satisfaction contained in the birth. And this revelation becomes available to the reader, as well as to the magus, in that we witness the change in the magus. Of this connection between the speaker and the reader, Brown says, "The placid scene, so familiar on Christmas cards, is suddenly transformed into the experience of a man and not an abstraction, a man as capable of sudden shifts of feeling as we." Thus, Brown continues, in the poem Eliot sets forth "a pattern analogous to that of revelation itself: paradox-intuition-revelation." Brown feels that this is the structure of the poem, the way the event works on the speaker, and the way the poem can in turn work on the reader.⁶⁶

Brown goes on to comment on the troublesome three lines about the tavern, the dicing for silver, and the wine skins. Understanding the context of the poem to include not just the birth of the Christ child but also a prophecy of the crucifixion as two parts of the whole, Brown interprets these three lines from the perspective of the sacrificial death of Christ, citing Exodus 12:1-24, St. John 1:29, and St. John 4:1-5. The first text relates the story of the original Passover, which Christ celebrated with his disciples the night before the crucifixion. The original Passover involved sacrificing a lamb, eating it in haste along with unleavened bread, and smearing the blood of the lamb on the lintel of the house. This was to prevent the angel of death striking the firstborn of the household dead and led to the escape of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Thus, the blood on the lintel has a saving power. So, too, with Christ's blood, since he is known

66. R. D. Brown, "Revelation in Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi,'" *Renascence* XXIV.3 (Spring 1972): 136-137, 137-138.

as the Lamb of God, according to the St. John 1:29 text. Christ is also known as the vine, according to the St. John 4:1-5 text, which links Christ's blood with the image of the vine leaf. So Christ's sacrifice for the world is like putting the blood of the Lamb of God, symbolized by the vine leaf, on the lintel of the door. Then, if "tavern" comes from the same root, *taberna*, as "tabernacle" — where the consecrated eucharistic elements are kept — Brown sees the first image reinforced. Going further, Brown cites Anglo-Catholic tradition as seeing "three effective causes for the Crucifixion — the Romans who released Christ to the Jewish high priests, the high priests, and Judas"; thus, the "six hands" represent the three agents of the Crucifixion. The "pieces of silver" constitute the bribe given to Judas for turning in Christ to be arrested in the Garden, "dicing" refers to what the Roman guards did over Jesus' clothes at the foot of the cross, and the "open door" refers to the climax of the Passover meal in which the door is open to let in Elijah so he can announce the Messiah. Finally, the "feet kicking the empty wine skins" refers to Israel's rejection of Christ as the Messiah.⁶⁷

This is an excellent explication of those three problematic lines. I would certainly concur, adding these insights to my own about the wine skins being empty waiting for the new wine of the new order. These have been very helpful interpretations of the less obvious elements of the poem, and they certainly fit with the rest of the images and overall sense of the *Journey of the Magi*. There are two further notes I would add to Brown's comments involve the vine leaf on the lintel. First, in addition to the identification of Christ as the vine from St. John 4:1-5, the vine is also a symbol for the fruit of the vine, wine, used for Communion. At the same time, that wine *is* the Blood of Christ, especially to a more high-church understanding of the sacrament, as against merely *symbolizing* the Blood of Christ, as is the case with some Protestant understandings. As such, a vine leaf is the same as putting the blood of the Lamb of God on the lintel and works the same as the lamb's blood in the Exodus story. Second, if the blood or vine on the lintel can protect the firstborn inside the house in the case of the Exodus, it can also cover the sins of those three agents of the crucifixion in the following line of Eliot's poem. This is a strong

67. Brown 138-140.

affirmation of the forgiveness Eliot experienced in his conversion, reaffirming the more positive interpretation. This is certainly a further meaning of this line that can be offered, given the theme and Brown's analysis. And this sense of confession, this use of the Passover, and this linking of the birth of Christ with the death of Christ and the Passover is again very theologically sophisticated, growing out of a more doctrinally aware and liturgically oriented poet.

Brian Barbour also discusses *Journey of the Magi*. However, he comes at the poem from a slightly different angle, that of poetic form. Seeing *Journey of the Magi* as Eliot's most accessible poem, but seeing most of its criticism as focusing on biographical details referring to Eliot's conversion, he sums up the usual approaches as four: the opening five lines coming from Lancelot Andrewes' 1622 Nativity Sermon, the Christian import of the imagery of the second part not yet a reality, the magus as anguished and confused, and with "A Song for Simeon" marking Eliot's own conversion. Instead, Barbour wants to discuss the poem's form as that of a dramatic monologue, but seeks to establish the "audience" and "occasion" for that monologue. First, he asserts that the "you" of line thirty-one is the evangelist, St. Matthew, and the occasion is the evangelist's search for more information about the events of the birth of Christ. Thus, the dramatic monologue of the poem is crystallized by the magus' reading or listening to another account, perhaps from St. Matthew, in the first five lines of the poem, which are put in the words of Lancelot Andrewes 1622 Christmas Sermon and placed within single quotation marks. The "poem develops as the magus responds to this earlier version; and ... the *theme* of conversion emerges because the evangelist's presence generates a profound irony of situation," Barbour feels. From this, he concludes that "the old magus's real journey has not ended, that his ultimate destination was not the manger but the cross."⁶⁸

Five details support this, according to Barbour's argument:

First ... is ... the time scheme, the poem's historicity. Line 32 tells us that the journey took place "a long time ago." ... But what is really important, central in fact, is that the Crucifixion and Resurrection have occurred without the magus's knowing about them. ... A second detail is the parenthetical "you may say" of line 31. This ... seems to authorize the listener to repeat, interpret, or in some

68. Brian M. Barbour, "Poetic Form in 'Journey of the Magi,'" *Renascence* XL.3 (Spring 1988): 189-190, 190 [sic].

way use the magus's recollections. Third, ... the peculiarly forceful urgency of lines 33-35 ... clearly indicates that the auditor is taking down, and being invited to interpret, the old man's memories. ... These three details together clearly point to a scribe. ...

... The last two ... are the matter of the single quotation marks around the first five lines and the marked poetic shift that occurs at line 6.⁶⁹

Of the fourth detail, Barbour goes on to remind his readers of how "Eliot lifts words, phrases, and lines," but "generally he does not signal this by use of quotation marks." In the case of the first five lines, very few would have caught the source as Lancelot Andrewes, at least until F. O. Matthiessen located it in 1947, Barbour asserts. But the question of the quotation marks persists, and Barbour suggests they may indicate the different voice of another character — either the speaker is reading this or another person is saying it to the speaker. Either way, Barbour notes the shift in voice at line six as his fifth detail, suggesting Eliot's intention of hearing a different voice for the first five lines. This provides the occasion for the magus' reflections, whether the other is St. Matthew, another magus, or someone else, and as the voice shifts at line six, it shifts from impersonal account to personal experience.⁷⁰

Barbour feels that the poem then presents two journeys, the first being the physical, historical journey and the second being the spiritual journey. The first journey is from uncertainty to certainty, moving from darkness ("travel all night") to light ("at dawn we came down") — Epiphany themes — to the "ambiguity of 'satisfactory.'" The second, spiritual journey "leads to the deepest perplexity and, indeed, alienation." The Magus, Barbour adds, is "haunted by the question, What did it all mean? The physical imagery embodies his spiritual condition: it is there, but its significance is hidden from him."⁷¹ Barbour's theory is that the magus was present at the birth of the Christ child, but absent from the events of the crucifixion and resurrection. Thus, he needs the proclamation of an evangelist like St. Matthew to fill in the details that the magus only partially grasped. For this he centers on "no information" in line 29 as being the information that must be filled in by the evangelist, who himself has come for information about the birth. The magus has information for the evangelist but does not understand its meaning.

69. Barbour 190-191.

70. Barbour 191-193, esp. 191, 192.

71. Barbour 193-194, esp. 193.

The evangelist has complementary information about the crucifixion and resurrection and understands the meaning, but needs more information about the birth. The second word Barbour uses to support his point is “satisfactory” — because of its ambiguity. However, having read Brown’s essay, he is aware of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the expiatory sense of the word for us readers. But he capitalizes on the ambiguity of the word to demonstrate the deeper knowledge and understanding of the evangelist and the hiddenness of the meaning from the magus. This sets up the need for a preacher, as in the quotation of Romans 10:14, which Barbour includes.⁷²

Barbour sees the issue of birth and death related in the same theological way noted above. The magus asks what it is all about, blending birth and death in a way that indicates bafflement, according to Barbour. The magus’ senses have enabled him to see the birth, but his understanding of the death lacks “the compensating certainty of faith,” leaving the magus “fixed in a painful middle state, between birth and death, between Death and Birth.” Thus, the magus longs for another death — physical death for release, but also the theological, “Redemptive Death.” This necessitates what Barbour feels will be another dialogue, with the entry of a third voice to begin the drama of conversion with and for the magus. This is why he has asserted the need for a preacher.⁷³ Unlike in *Ash-Wednesday*, I cannot argue with this sense of doubt on the part of the magus in terms of coming to faith. The speaker in *Ash-Wednesday* is indeed in the process of confession, and, as discussed above, is in the middle ground of confession waiting for absolution — not in the rôle of the catechumen coming to faith and not yet there, and thus lacking assurance and positive expectation. That poem was written in 1930, well after Eliot’s conversion, and the poem’s use of a more complex sense of faith allows for this stronger sense of the faith of the speaker. Here, however, we have a poem written very close to the time of Eliot’s own conversion, and from that perspective it may well be a poem expressing the doubt of someone who has not yet come to a full, mature, confident faith. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to allow for that same larger sense of faith which incorporates doubt. But Barbour makes a good case for the

72. Barbour 194, 195-196.

73. Barbour 195, 196.

original setting of the poem. The magus would certainly have been present for the Epiphany after the birth of Christ, but he would not necessarily have known the outcome in crucifixion and resurrection. Yet, having been a part of such a profound event, even in the ancient world, he might well have kept interested and received some sort of information over the years. But in the absence of evidence, Barbour makes a strong argument for another voice at the beginning of the poem, thus setting up a dialogue. The question remains, however, whether the dialogue is with someone else, is a written account, or is even with the speaker himself. The first two options sound more plausible, and indeed Barbour's occasion for the speaker's reflection is as good as any. Either way, the sense of doubt, even or especially the kind naturally embedded in faith, is appropriate, even if the magus understood what he had experienced at the birth.

One of the stronger background points Barbour makes to support his point is a parenthetical comment about the theological strides being made in the early part of this century with regards to the interpretation of scripture. Citing the work of Dibelius in 1919 and of Rudolph Bultmann in 1921 in their form critical approach to scripture, Barbour believes this mood present in theological circles would have been known to others and would definitely have generated "a new interest in what lies behind scripture."⁷⁴ This is the approach Eliot uses in his poem, that of getting behind the scriptural account to see the workings of the evangelist, editors, and other information providers, and tracing the process of assembling a scriptural account or narrative. This makes Barbour's analysis an even more believable possibility — at least one way the account could have come into being, using probable, rational, and human methods in the assembly of the Gospel narrative. More importantly, for the concern of this study, this squares with the Oxford Movement's emphasis on more academic approaches to scripture, doctrine, and theology, as discussed in my second chapter. Such an approach on the part of Eliot, in line with this new approach to scriptural studies, would indicate a more theologically informed, solidly scholarly understanding and approach that would affirm the more human context of the production of the scriptural texts. It is also an approach with which more Protestant writers and thinkers of the day

74. Barbour 193.

would have been less comfortable.

Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral

Set in December 1170, the same time of year and season of the church year as *Journey of the Magi* and "A Song for Simeon," discussed above, is Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. The plot of the play involves the well-known dispute between Henry II and Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas à Becket. Church historian Williston Walker summarizes the story in his ubiquitous *A History of the Christian Church*. Henry II, "one of the ablest of English Kings," wanted "to strengthen his hold over the English church" and had Becket made Archbishop of Canterbury. Becket subsequently became a strong supporter of the Church's interests. In 1164, when Henry had the Constitutions of Clarendon enacted, "limiting the right of appeal to Rome in ecclesiastical cases, restricting the power of excommunication, subjecting the clergy to civil courts, and putting the election of bishops under the control of the King, to whom they must do homage," he and Becket fell to their dispute. Finally, "a hasty expression of anger on the part of Henry led to Becket's murder at the hands of Norman knights just at the close of the year." Shortly after Becket's assassination, Becket was canonized a saint in 1172. Until the Reformation, Becket was "one of the most popular of English saints," and "Henry was forced to abandon the Constitutions of Clarendon, and do penance at Becket's grave."⁷⁵ Cross and Livingstone add further details, especially about the time intervening between the dispute of the Constitutions of Clarendon in 1164 and Becket's subsequent assassination in 1170. In the process of the dispute with Henry II following the disagreement over the Constitutions of Clarendon, Becket fled to France and appealed to Pope Alexander III — precisely the kind of action the document in dispute had attempted to prohibit. Then, on his return from France, Becket refused to absolve the Archbishop of York and other participating bishops, whom Becket had suspended for taking part in the coronation of Henry's son.⁷⁶ It is evident from reading Eliot's play that he was well

75. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1970) 258.

76. Cross and Livingstone 148-149.

informed about the details of the event and made good use of them.

As to my purpose of looking for the more liturgical aspects of the play, I note the subject matter, the setting, the language, and the use of the church year. The first and last items of the list occur together, since the subject matter is about saints and martyrs, who are commemorated on the liturgical calendar. The subject of the martyrdom of a saint is of particular interest to liturgically oriented Christians, who follow the calendar of the church year, but not of so much interest to more Protestant Christians. On that calendar, not only is the year divided up into days and seasons that coincide with events in the life of Christ, but there are also commemorations of various saints and martyrs who are remembered on specific dates coinciding with their dates of death, which is also their birth into the kingdom of God. In this regard and looking at the events in the play, it is interesting to note that, according to Cross and Livingstone's brief account in their *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Becket returned from France on 30 November 1170, which is also St. Andrew's day. Also according to Cross and Livingstone, "In the Anglican Communion, St. Andrew's day is widely observed by intercession for foreign missions."⁷⁷ In addition, the day is also generally acknowledged as the pivotal feast day of the church year — the first Sunday in Advent traditionally falls on the Sunday closest to 30 November, which then allows four Sundays before Christmas. Part I of the play itself begins on 2 December 1170, obviously a day in Advent. The end of the play is of even more importance along these lines. Following the Interlude of Becket's Christmas sermon, in which he reflects on martyrdom and thus sets up the final action of the play, Part II takes place on 29 December 1170, the day of Becket's assassination. Between Christmas Day and 29 December are the Commemorations of St. Stephen, St. John, and the Holy Innocents, on 26, 27, and 28 December, respectively. Those days are given focus by the priests in the play who also carry banners with the days inscribed. St. Stephen was the Church's first martyr, and his day on the calendar is red; St. John was an evangelist, and his day is white; and the Holy Innocents were the infants slaughtered when Herod was trying to find Jesus shortly after his birth, so their day is also red. These are all events and

77. Cross and Livingstone 149, 51.

observances of which all Christians would be aware, but which only liturgical Christians would observe on the given dates on the calendar of the church year, especially giving attention to saints as such. Now admittedly, at the time in history in which the play is set, it is prior to the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church was the only Church in the west, meaning a traditionally liturgical orientation. Nonetheless, Eliot writes about the events in the twentieth century, and he did not need to maintain or insert the details as he did, especially as regards the liturgical elements and the banners. But the fact that he does indicates that, more than just in the interest of historical accuracy, Eliot himself understands and observes, in some fashion, the liturgical calendar.

As for the language, the themes and characteristic words of Advent are presented strongly throughout Part I of the play — come, wait, birth, death, watch, prepare, expect, darkness, hope, peace, watchman, lamps, remember, and apples, to name a few in no particular order. Many of these words and images are also a part of *Journey of the Magi* and “A Song for Simeon.” In addition, there are subtle allusions to *Ash-Wednesday*, the most obvious being references to stairs. Throughout Part I there are words and references that echo themes and language from the other works we are discussing, suggesting their use as allusions to those other works. Lines like “I think that this peace / Is nothing like an end or like a beginning,” remind us of the theme of the circularity of beginning and end in *Four Quartets*, discussed below, and peace reminds us of “A Song for Simeon” and the *Nunc dimittis*. Juxtaposition of birth and death in “We have seen births, death, and marriages” and “A fear like birth and death, when we see birth and death alone” alludes to *Journey of the Magi*. Additional, lines like “The rock of God is beneath our feet,” meaning the Church, and “Sometimes hesitating at the angles of the stairs,” refer us to “Choruses from ‘The Rock’” and *Ash-Wednesday*, respectively. The ambiguities of spiritual awareness and spiritual direction in “You know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer” are clearly echoed in *Four Quartets*.⁷⁸ There are, of course, many other references and allusions that link to similar themes in other poetic works by Eliot, some of which are discussed elsewhere in

78. T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, 1935 (San Diego: Harcourt-Harvest, 1935) 16, 20, 18, 38, 40.

relation to the respective poems.

As for the setting of the play, all the action takes place within the Cathedral, around vespers, worship, and mealtime, which all serve to maintain the ecclesiastical imagery relating to birth, death, baptism, Eucharist, prayer offices, liturgical worship elements, and the combination of paradoxical themes. In the action of the play, the Chorus provides comment and interacts somewhat with the priests. The Chorus fills in details leading up to the present situation, including mention of the archbishop's seven-year absence and return from France.⁷⁹ Three priests reflect on Becket, comment on the events and issues, and interact with the Chorus. Also, a messenger, the biblical and Greek word being angel, announces the coming of Becket, who then arrives to interact with the priests and tempters. Four tempters challenge Becket with temptations to food, ease, power, reconciliation with the king, and the glory of martyrdom,⁸⁰ somewhat echoing Christ's temptation in the wilderness after his baptism, traditionally remembered on the first Sunday in Lent. In the speeches of the tempters, there are references to the seven deadly sins, with an eighth added — the same list of seven plus one enumerated in "Choruses from 'The Rock.'" In addition, there are references to Original Sin, especially in "Man oppressed by sin, since Adam fell" and "The natural vigour in the venial sin / Is the way in which our lives begin."⁸¹ These not only stress a basic theme of the Christian Church, including the need for confession and absolution, they do so in a strongly doctrinal way. In the plot of the play itself, these references further connect with Becket's power to forgive, since he possess the Office of the Keys — "You hold the keys of heaven and hell"⁸² — and his unwillingness to absolve the bishops who assisted King Henry II. They also connect with Becket's unwillingness to reconcile with the king. Thus, the action of the play is prompted not just by personal interaction between Henry and Thomas, but such theological doctrines and ecclesiastical powers as Original Sin, confession and absolution, and excommunication serve the ends of the play's plot.

79. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 12.

80. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 25, 28-29, 32-33, 36-40.

81. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 36, 44.

82. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 36.

Also for Eliot, as noted in *Journey of the Magi*, the Incarnation is meaningless without the death and resurrection of Christ; Eliot includes a vision of the trees of the crucifixion on the hill in *Journey of the Magi*, to which he alludes in this play with the “withered tree.” A few pages later, the Chorus asks Thomas to save himself and to save them, echoing the words of the thieves on the crosses flanking Christ at the crucifixion. This serves to link Advent with Lent, since the two are similar preparatory seasons for the two major feasts of the Christian year. If one cannot have meaning without the other, then the two necessarily are part of a whole — the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as a unified act or process of salvation. Further, as Christ became Incarnate at the time of year in which the play is set, it was for the ultimate purpose revealed in Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. The Incarnation makes possible forgiveness. When, in the lectionary texts for Easter evening or the second Sunday of Easter, the resurrected Christ enters the room with the apostles, breathes on them, invites them to receive the Holy Spirit, and gives them power to forgive or not to forgive sins, it is to pass on the power of forgiveness, otherwise known as the Office of the Keys. Thus, Christ becomes Incarnate again in the Church, as well as in the persons of the apostles and of priests, in order to carry on this work of forgiveness, which in turn identifies the Church. This identification of the archbishop with the Church is reinforced by the priests when the Second Priest says:

Yet our lord is returned. Our Lord has come back to his own again.
 We have had enough of waiting, from December to dismal December.
 The Archbishop shall be at our head, dispelling dismay and doubt.
 He will tell us what we are to do, he will give us our orders, instruct us.
 Our Lord is at one with the Pope.⁸³

So Incarnation is linked with the Church, with the pope or vicar of Christ, with the archbishop as the pope’s or Christ’s representative, and with the power to forgive sins.

In keeping with the major theme of the season of Advent, that of waiting and preparing for the coming of the Christ child, some form of the word “wait” is used twenty-four times, and some form of “come” is used twenty-five times. These words, together with the fact that the audience knows the story of Becket, at least in part, serve to give the audience a strong sense of

83. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 17.

waiting and anticipation for what it already knows is about to happen. The effect is further enhanced by frequency of the word “doom” at points, foreshadowing the events of Part II.⁸⁴ A sense of doom is also an important part of the Advent season, since during that season the Church waits anew for the first coming of Christ, for Christ’s coming to believers, and for Christ’s second coming. This sense of the second coming carries with it a sense of awe and danger — the end of the world — a sense that pervades the last Sundays leading up to Advent and is still present in Advent itself. This all works together to reinforce the sense of the archbishop as Christ’s representative. The Chorus waits for the return of the archbishop, just as the Church awaits the return of Christ during the season of Advent. In both cases, there is an underlying sense of doom, both in the waiting and at the return. Also, when the archbishop finally returns, there is a noticeable shift from “waiting” and “coming” to “now” in the last three lines of Part I, which read, “I shall no longer act or suffer, to the sword’s end. / Now my good Angel, whom God appoints / To be my guardian, hover over the swords’ points.”⁸⁵ This “now” emphasis will appear again in Part II, but at this point, it signals the end of the first part and the transition to the Interlude, which is Thomas’ sermon.

The anticipation of “wait” and “come” moving to “now” in the play serves to reveal an important aspect of the play’s structure. The opening half of the play revolves around foreshadowing, which will come to fruition in the second half. It also revolves around waiting and coming, which I have already discussed as a theme of Advent — the waiting for the coming or return of Christ. Here, however, as the first half ends with this subtle mention of “Now,” the audience is prepared for Thomas’ sermon. This suggests that the first half of the play is doing double duty; that is, it sets the theme of Advent while it foreshadows the action of the play to come, and it also prepares the audience for Thomas’ sermon. In liturgical terms, the first half of the play is identical with the entrance rite or opening liturgy of the Mass. The congregation gathers expectantly, prepares itself to receive the Word and Sacrament, and the Word comes embod-

84. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 9-46, esp. 38, 43, 41, 44, 19-21.

85. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 46.

ied first in the lessons and sermon. Thus, while Christ is Incarnate in the Church, in the gathered people of God, Christ becomes again Incarnate in the proclaimed Word, in the form of scripture readings and sermon. The archbishop embodies just what has been waited for in the first half of the play, that is, the Incarnate Word. Christ becomes Incarnate again in the gathering of the people, in the person of the archbishop, and in the archbishop's sermon. The archbishop's sermon further explains that the Incarnation, indeed the very faith and salvation of the Church, centers on Christ's passion and death — Christ's sacrifice for us — which in turn sets up the audience's sacrifice, even martyrdom in some cases, which has again in turn maintained the life and faith of the Church through the centuries. Thus, the opening of the play has focused on waiting for Christ, which now occurs in the form of a servant, which will in turn result in the sacrifice of Thomas. This gives the play a structure like that of the Mass, in which Christ comes in Word and Sacrament. Part I would then become the entrance rite or first part of the Mass, containing preparation, confession, absolution, and the coming of the Word. The Interlude is the sermon. And Part II carries out the sacrifice of the Mass, which becomes embodied in the persons of the priests and servants of the Church. This is most strongly reinforced in the sermon when Thomas states very clearly, "For whenever Mass is said, we re-enact the Passion and Death of Our Lord; and on this Christmas Day we do this in celebration of his Birth. So that at the same moment we rejoice in His coming for the salvation of men, and offer again to God His Body and Blood in sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the world."⁸⁶

The Interlude begins with a traditional liturgical introduction to the text in the name of the Trinity. Thomas then speaks of the "mystery of our masses of Christmas Day," and the sermon focuses on the martyrdom to come, setting it in terms of Christ's sacrifice. Thomas takes pains in his sermon to make very clear that Christ's birth, passion and death, and resurrection are celebrated together — "we celebrate at once the Birth of Our Lord and His Passion and Death upon the Cross." As such, then, the Church both mourns and rejoices "at once and for the same reason," which translates into *felix culpa*, or the "happy fault" of the sinner that has caused the sac-

86. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 47.

rifice that results in salvation. Then, with a strong nod to Lancelot Andrewes and his sermons on the Incarnation, the preacher attempts to define the “peace” offered in this season. From here, he reminds his hearers of Christ’s gift of peace to his disciples, which is a reference to the same passage in which Christ gives the power to forgive sins or withhold forgiveness of sins — the Office of the Keys, which was mentioned above. This peace is also different from that which the world gives; it is rather a peace defined by sacrifice and spiritual struggle. It is from the scriptural passage of the angels’ promise of peace at the birth of Christ, which becomes part of the *Gloria in excelsis*; that passage is the text of the sermon and the text of Lancelot Andrewes’ sermon, as well. At this point, the sermon goes on to note the liturgical days following Christmas, already noted above. Martyrdom, “never an accident” and “always the design of God,” necessarily engenders both mourning and rejoicing in the Church. The sermon concludes with mention of one later martyr, “our martyr of Canterbury, the blessed Archbishop Elphege,” followed by a very brief anticipation of Thomas’ own martyrdom.⁸⁷

At this point let me add a short note about Elphege from the *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. Alphege, also spelled Ælfheah or Elphege (c. 953-1012), became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1005, succeeding the famous Aelfric. Alphege was killed in 1012 by invading Danes, who had been aided by Anglo-Saxon archdeacon Ælfmaer. Alphege’s bravery and his refusal to pay a ransom to the Danes made him a national hero. His remains were translated in 1023 from St. Paul’s Cathedral in London to Canterbury Cathedral, where they are buried to the north of the high altar. The monks venerated him each day until Archbishop Lanfranc (1070-1089) questioned the appropriateness of such veneration, until the issue was concluded by Anselm that this was good, since Alphege was said to be a martyr for justice. Evidently, it is true that Becket mentioned Alphege in his final sermon and commended himself to God and to Alphege at his assassination. Alphege’s feast day is April 19, but it became overshadowed by Becket’s martyrdom.⁸⁸ Besides the similarities between Alphege and Becket and besides Alphege’s martyrdom,

87. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 47-50, esp. 47, 48, 49-50.

88. David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982) 13-14.

the reference seems to reflect the accuracy of Eliot's research and information and sets Alphege up as a recent model for Becket — a continuation of the sacrificial martyrdom that sustains the Church. Thus, the audience is prepared for the martyrdom which follows in the play and understands it further as part of the tradition of the Church and a living out of the eucharistic sacrifice.

In Part II, the eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass is being "re-enacted" in the martyrdom of Thomas, thus completing the Mass structure of the play. At the opening, there is reference to the spring, which was the time of Alphege's martyrdom as well as of the crucifixion. This opening contains allusions to *The Waste Land*, as well, whether intentional or not, in references to spring, death, and renewal, like "bitter spring" and "A sour spring, parched summer, and empty harvest. / Between Christmas and Easter what work shall be done?" Carrying out the liturgical references to the intervening days between Christmas and Thomas' martyrdom on 29 December, the priests enter each with a banner for St. Stephen, St. John, and the Holy Innocents. This has the feel of a liturgical procession, which reminds us of the offertory procession. In addition, often certain saints are listed and commemorated in the canon of the Mass, and this seems to serve that purpose, as well. In further allusions to other Eliot poems, as well as scriptural allusions, this part of the play presents the relation between death and new life, with Thomas saying:

All my life
I have waited. Death will come only when I am worthy,
And if I am worthy, there is no danger ...
I am not in danger: only near to death ...
All things
Proceed to a joyful consummation.

Nonetheless, in the background a *Dies irae* is sung while the Chorus laments the "horror" of the impending event, especially stressing the "Emptiness, absence, separation from God; / The horror of the effortless journey, to the empty land / Which is no land, only emptiness, absence, the Void." Death and dust are stressed, reminding us of Ash Wednesday and of the emptiness of Christ's sacrifice at the other end of Lent. Finally, Thomas is in the cathedral and stands ready to face the four knights. As he opens the door, he asserts, "We have only to conquer / Now, by suffering. This is the easier victory. / Now is the triumph of the Cross, now / Open the door! I

command it. OPEN THE DOOR!"⁸⁹ This stronger, three-fold, or trinitarian, "now" stresses the arrival of the promised Incarnation in the form of sacrifice and shedding of blood, this time in the person of Thomas, after the model of Christ. It is also the kind of trinitarian response typical of those preparing to receive the Sacrament. The first arrival of Thomas was accompanied by a single "now" and appeared just before the sermon, as discussed above.

After the assassination of Thomas, the four knights step forward to address the audience to explain their actions. An important part of this is when the Fourth Knight reminds the audience, "you have been eyewitnesses of this lamentable scene." Such is the understanding of the Church, in that, as the gathered congregation celebrates the Mass in Word and Sacrament, it re-encounters Christ in the Church, in the Word, and in the Sacrament. Thus, the Church becomes eyewitness to the Incarnation, to the Eucharist, and to the events of salvation, much in the same way as those first eyewitnesses of the first century. Also, the word "martyr" literally means witness, linking audience/congregation with martyrdom/witnessing and with the Eucharist. Thus, in the re-enactment of the drama of St. Thomas à Becket, the members of the audience have become direct eyewitnesses to the events, just as the members of the congregation become eyewitnesses to the events of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ in the re-enactment of the Mass, just as Becket says in his sermon, discussed above. Thus, more than just audience to the play, those present become participants, much like participants in the Mass, which further strengthens the overall Mass structure of the play.

But after the comments and questions of the knights, in which they justify their actions, the priests have the last word — affirming the traditional paradox, that persecution fortifies the Church in triumph, strengthens it, and keeps it supreme. The priests then thank God for the blood of the martyrs, which they link to Christ's blood, adding, "wherever a martyr has given his blood for the blood of Christ, / There is holy ground." During this thankful interlude, a choir sings a *Te Deum* in the background. Finally, the play concludes with the priests identifying with common humanity, fearing the blessing, the justice, and the love of God, and turning to acknowl-

89. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 53-54, 69-70, 71, 74.

edge their sin and to pray for forgiveness:

We acknowledge our trespass, our weakness, our fault;
 we acknowledge
 That the sin of the world is upon our heads; that the
 blood of the martyrs and the agony of the saints
 Is upon our heads.
 Lord, have mercy upon us.
 Christ, have mercy upon us.
 Lord, have mercy upon us.
 Blessed Thomas, pray for us.⁹⁰

In response to the events they have witnessed, the priests take on some human responsibility as they understand their rôle in the martyrdom. This is the same way as the Church understands its complicity in Christ's sacrifice, and therefore sees its need for salvation.

Reinforcing the Mass structure of the play, the *Dies irae* and *Te Deum* stand as liturgical background and undergirding for the action. First, the *Dies irae*, or "Day of Wrath" was part of the Mass for the Dead. It was not in use at the time of Becket, coming later in the thirteenth century, first printed in a Missal in 1485, and then used until 1969, according to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Nonetheless, Eliot incorporates it for its recognizability to a modern audience and for its liturgical force. More importantly, Eliot closes with a *Te Deum*. Also according to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, the *Te Deum* is "A Latin hymn to the Father and Son, in rhythmical prose." Some scholars "[emphasize] its liturgical character and [argue] that it derives from the text of a Paschal Vigil Service." It is an "integral part of Mattins," which is its place also in the Lutheran worship book. In the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the *Te Deum* is part of the paschal blessing at the end of morning prayer. It can be used to conclude the regular Sunday liturgy, but its usual place is in Matins. As part of the paschal blessing of morning prayer, Pfatteicher and Messerli recommend that it not be used during Advent or Lent. In the play, of course, the time of Part II is the Christmas season. The content of it is praise to God, including such appropriate lines for Eliot's play as "The noble army of Martyrs praise thee." The *Lutheran Book of Worship* further recommends that the paschal blessing especially be used in remembrance of baptism. Since baptism is into the death and resurrec-

90. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 78-84, 84-88, esp. 83, 84, 87, 88.

tion of Christ and anticipates our own death and birth into the kingdom of God, it nicely coincides with martyrdom in the play. Further, the *Te Deum* has traditionally ended with the *capitella*, which consists of “certain verses from the Psalms sung in the form of versicles and responses.” The 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* contains these verses, which take the *Te Deum* more in the direction of a confessional conclusion, just as in the play.⁹¹

Further directions about the use of the *Te Deum* come from Marion J. Hatchett’s book on the current American *Book of Common Prayer*, that “In structure and content it is very like a eucharistic prayer.” Nonetheless, the canticle was used primarily in daily prayer offices. In the 1549 *Prayer Book*, which did not keep the Easter vigil, the *Te Deum* follows Matins and precedes the Easter baptisms, in turn leading into the Eucharist. In the current *Book of Common Prayer*, after the baptisms or the renewal of baptismal vows at the Easter vigil, the opening canticle preceding the prayer of the day can be either the *Gloria in excelsis*, the *Te Deum*, or the *Pascha nostrum*, indicating the canticle’s similarity to the *Gloria in excelsis* as well as its eucharistic structure and content. Finally, Hatchett adds another important use of the *Te Deum*, that “An additional direction [or liturgical rubric] allows the singing of a hymn of praise after the blessing and dismissal at the ordination of a bishop (see p. 553 [in the *Book of Common Prayer*]). It is traditional to sing the *Te Deum laudamus* to a familiar setting.” The *Book of Common Prayer* simply states in its rubrics, “After the pontifical blessing and the dismissal, a hymn of praise may be sung.”⁹² Very much like the end of the play quoted above, the *Te Deum* ends:

THOU art the King of Glory, O Christ. ...
 When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. ...
 We therefore pray thee, help thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.
 Make them to be numbered with thy Saints, in glory everlasting.

O LORD, save thy people, and bless thine heritage.
 Govern them, and lift them up forever.

91. Cross and Livingstone 402, 1343. See also *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 131-141, esp. 138, 139-141; *Ministers Desk Edition* 46-57, esp. 53, 54-57; 16; *Book of Common Prayer* (1928) 10-11; Pfatteicher and Messerli 261, 293, 295.

92. Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: Seabury, 1980) 117, 242, 249, 530; see also *Book of Common Prayer* (1977) 294-295, 553.

Day by day we magnify thee;
 And we worship thy Name ever, world without end.
 Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.
 O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.
 O Lord, let thy mercy be upon us, as our trust is in thee.
 O Lord, in thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded.⁹³

With its connection to baptism and the liturgy, the *Te Deum*, then, is a most appropriate way for Eliot to have ended his play, especially while maintaining a strong liturgical structure and strong theological references to a proper and doctrinal understanding of baptism and martyrdom and their place in the Church. Further, in this culminating act of Thomas', to which he refers as a consummation, the *Te Deum* is the more appropriate for its use in the service of ordination of a bishop — it means that this is Thomas' true ordination as bishop, in his self-sacrifice and shedding of blood for the Church.

As a final note, I might add that for Eliot, a self-proclaimed royalist as well as an Anglo-Catholic, this play must have presented some interesting difficulties, since its basis is the dispute between king and archbishop. However, given what I have already discussed, that is, that Eliot's religious perspective took precedence over his political ideas, this was probably less of a problem than it might have been. In Part I, in the interaction between Thomas and one of his tempters, Thomas says, "And if the Archbishop cannot trust the King, / How can he trust those who work for the King's undoing?" The Tempter responds, "Kings will allow no power but their own; / Church and people have good cause against the throne," to which Thomas replies, "If the Archbishop cannot trust the Throne, / He has good cause to trust none but God alone." This is where the idea centers for Eliot, with the primacy of God over and against any earthly temporal authority. This is resolved in Part II when the First Priest says, towards the very end of the play, "O my lord / The glory of whose new state is hidden from us, / Pray for us of your charity."⁹⁴ The priests understand that by faith, believers are part of a new kingdom, the kingdom of God, which is to come in its fullness, and which is in our midst in the form of Christ's presence through the Incarnation in the Church, in the Word, and in the Sacraments. Further, Becket's

93. *Book of Common Prayer* (1928) 10-11.

94. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) 34, 85.

conflict with earthly authority is much the same as Christ's conflict with the earthly authority of his day, situations in which both asserted the primacy of the spiritual authority.

There are many more details and similarities between the play and the Mass to pursue here. I am only demonstrating the continuing Anglo-Catholic orientation of Eliot as he uses liturgical elements not common in more Protestant writers. His knowledge and understanding of the Mass, of liturgy, and of ecclesiastical history and theology continue to impress as they continue to reveal the strength of Eliot's orientation. In addition to the liturgical language, the ecclesiastical setting, and the Mass structure of the play, the basis of the play feels like a modern example of a medieval mystery play, a morality play revolving around the life and growth of a saint. This would be another strong liturgical nod, as well as a strong literary one, both based in medieval theology and hagiography. Further, Eliot's continuing presentation of themes basic to a historical and theological faith indicate someone who has taken this into his life as a part of his identity, grown in understanding and knowledge, and incorporated the themes into his creative work. There is no mistaking the depth and inclusivity of liturgical and sacramental themes in *Murder in the Cathedral*. This allows for a variety of critical approaches, some focusing on the purely dramatic elements and literary allusions, and others focusing on the liturgical elements.

There is much to say about this play from the standpoint of character, theme, staging, dramaturgy, poetic structure, and language, and various critics have analyzed a variety of those matters. Other critics have approached the play, as already noted, from a theological perspective, for obvious reasons. Kristian Smidt relates Eliot's statement that he wrote *Murder in the Cathedral* because he was asked to produce one for the festival at Canterbury Cathedral. Nonetheless, from another statement of Eliot's about the social usefulness of poetry, Smidt sees "The Rock" and *Murder in the Cathedral* as "getting a message across," even though Eliot would deny that intent. Just the same, given the original audience and purpose of both of those plays, "written for special Church occasions," Smidt is right to assert their "more distinct devotional character." Thus, Smidt finds various religious images, such as the "shaft of sunlight" as "an almost permanent symbol of such moments of illumination." Smidt also notes broader religious references to

the wheel of Hinduism and Buddhism, for example. But the majority of religious references in the poem are to Christian images, like “predestination,” “striving for perfection,” “ascetic discipline,” and reference to Christian mystics.⁹⁵ In all this, however, Smidt does not go the distance, liturgically, that other critics do. And while Smidt may have a good understanding and a good assessment of the play, he has missed the stronger liturgical elements and structure, even though he obviously knows the original setting and audience. Those stronger liturgical elements will be discussed below, in looking at some critical essays that focus more specifically on them as elements within the play and as the structural principle of the entire play.

Kristian Smidt approaches Eliot’s works from a religious perspective, to be sure, as the title of his book suggests. However he deals more with issues of piety and belief in a more generally Christian way — either Protestant or Catholic at times, but missing the nuances of the blend of both in Anglo-Catholicism, and usually without addressing the more liturgical elements or structure of Eliot’s work. On the other hand, Lyndall Gordon addresses more of the liturgical underpinnings of Eliot’s Anglo-Catholicism, but she does so within the context of her two-volume biography of Eliot. Hence, Lyndall Gordon’s analysis of *Murder in the Cathedral* offers a broad view of the play as she looks at the process of its composition and at reviews of performances. But along the way, her analysis also reveals a deeper grasp of the more liturgical religious elements involved, albeit as they pertain more to Eliot’s life of faith and personal religious struggles than to the literary work *per se*.

Lyndall Gordon starts by seeing in Becket a model for Eliot — a man of the world not necessarily cut out for sainthood. Further, Becket’s struggle was similar to Eliot’s own, such that Eliot could himself acknowledge the similarities. Thus, the minimal action of the play gives way to the inward struggle. In fact, some critics, such as F. O. Matthiessen and Virginia Woolf, saw strong Puritan morality behind the play’s action and point. But the main struggle for Eliot was with pride. Thus, the Fourth Tempter is the most difficult for Becket in the play, with the first three tempters receding in impact and influence. This was Eliot’s struggle, too. Eliot’s own

95. Smidt 32, 98, 228, 175, 186, 198-199.

fears of damnation and need for spiritual reassurance prompted him to seek the same confidence of faith to which Becket ascended by the end of the play. Such a pursuit forced him to look honestly at the possibility of his own spirituality.⁹⁶ From the way of the martyr, Becket, Eliot reflects further, as will be seen in *Four Quartets*, on the way of the spiritual perfection of a martyr versus the way of spiritual growth open to the rest of humanity. Having dealt with Becket's martyrdom, Eliot is free to reflect differently as he works his way through *Four Quartets*.

Gordon also comments on the source of the four tempters in the play. Looking at Eliot's eighteen pages of notes on the play, Gordon discovered on the back of the fourth page a list of four contemporary authors numbered from one to four. The first is Bertrand Russell, numbered two, coinciding with "the Tempter to power who speaks with persuasive reason." Lyndall Gordon reminds her readers at this point of Eliot's attack on Russell in a 1927 review in *Criterion* of Russell's book *Why I Am Not a Christian*. In his review, Eliot calls Russell's "non-Christianity ... merely a variety of Low Church sentiment" and says he "preached 'the enervate *gospel of happiness*.'" The second writer on the list was H. G. Wells, numbered one. Wells, Gordon tells us, was a "noted philanderer, and coincides with the First Tempter, who offers "the facile charms of the senses and good-fellowship" and is most easily dismissed. The third was D. H. Lawrence, the Third Tempter, a "blustering boor," a "restive baron," and a threat to the social class system by virtue of his rebellious nature. And in the place of the most dangerous Fourth Tempter are Huxley and Babbitt. Eliot felt that the humanism of Babbitt pretended to be a "substitute religion," and in the *Criterion* he called Babbitt "a 'real' atheist," in contradistinction to Bertrand Russell. About these four, it is interesting to note Eliot's differentiating his own high-church Anglo-Catholicism from Russell's "non-Christianity" in terms of the latter being "merely a variety of Low Church sentiment." As for Lawrence, Gordon reminds us that Eliot had distinguished him as "arch-heretic" in *Primer of Modern Heresy*, for Lawrence's "intrusion of the *diabolic* into modern literature."⁹⁷

96. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 28-30.

97. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 30-31.

Embedded in the political struggle of the play is also the spiritual struggle, not only of Becket, but also of systems of morality and of political power. Gordon sees Eliot “[attacking] all forms of political power and rhetoric.” She also sees Eliot “[implying] that the only way the business of the world might be conducted with any safety is on the basis of moral principles that derive from strict belief. For the mass of people, voluntary altruism, the humanist dream of the nineteenth century, will not work, for altruism is, alas, not built into human nature.” Here, Gordon likens Eliot’s perspective on the depravity of human nature to Hawthorne’s, assessing it as Puritan New England and Calvinist.⁹⁸ While Gordon’s assessment may be true, thus linking Eliot’s American roots to his theology, it is also true that the Church’s doctrine of Original Sin is very similar, from which arises the Calvinist and Puritan understanding. Taking this accusation of Calvinism a step further, Gordon describes a disagreement between Paul Elmer More and Eliot on the related issue of the “cruelties of hell”: “More, in the friendliest way, accused Eliot of Calvinism, and Eliot, equally friendly, accused More of heresy. More had declared that God did not make hell. This shocked Eliot. ... More thought eternal damnation too cruel to be a divine plan. Is your God Santa Claus? Eliot demanded.”⁹⁹ While Gordon reports this in the context of Eliot’s own feelings of guilt and his personal search for God’s blessing, she also shows Eliot standing firmly on the ground of accepted Church dogma.

Among those critics who have taken a more specifically theological approach to their analysis of the play itself, Michael T. Beehler has called it a “Countersacramental Play of Signs.” He opens with a citation of William Spanos’ *The Christian Tradition in Modern Verse Drama*, in which Spanos states, “the Christian verse drama movement has definitively, if only broadly, established the sacramental aesthetic as its operative principle,” and Beehler adds, “the sacramental vision presented by Christian verse drama ‘reconciles the concrete reality and value that the empirical world dichotomizes.’” From this, Beehler concludes that “the sacramental principle seeks to redeem the signs of history and to present them as having an extra-historical value

98. Gordon, *Eliot’s New Life* 32.

99. Gordon, *Eliot’s New Life* 38-39.

and significance." In short, "Eliot must replace this historical perspective with a sacramental one." Thus, for Beehler, "Becket decides to allow the 'right deed' to happen for the right 'reason.' ... [It] is by this decision, and not simply by his death, ... that Becket qualifies himself for sainthood. This is, for Eliot, the moment that authorizes Becket's death; a moment which reenacts the full presence of the Incarnation."¹⁰⁰ Using the sacramental elements and theme of the play, Beehler looks for the Christian paradox to extend into what he calls the countersacramental as he looks at the paradox of history and meaning.

In writing about this play in 1949, another critic, Francis Fergusson, approached it partly in comparison to modern drama by Cocteau and Obey, and partly in terms of the play's theological underpinnings, entitling his study "*Murder in the Cathedral: The Theological Scene*." He reminds us, at the outset, of the play's original audience. Written for the Canterbury Festival in June of 1935, the audience was presumably "officially Christian." That makes the play's purpose, then, "a demonstration and expression of the 'right reason' for martyrdom and, behind that, of the right doctrine of human life in general — orthodoxy. It is thus theology, a work of the intellect." Fergusson adds, "In this play Eliot is not so much a poet of the theater as a poet and theologian who uses the stage for his own purposes." Fergusson sees the purpose, or final cause, of the play [as] the demonstration of a particular theological idea which one must attempt to grasp if the play is to be understood." He would agree with my assessment above of Eliot's continued Anglo-Catholic emphasis on doctrine, orthodoxy, and intellectual theology.¹⁰¹

Fergusson goes on to note that the structure of the play "appears to be derived from the ritual form of ancient tragedy." Adding an analysis of the four tempters and their interaction with Thomas, as they offer him "pleasure," "secular power," "acceptance by the best people," and finally "spiritual power," he sees Thomas dealing easily with the first three temptations, the fourth offering the only real temptation. This sets up the end of Part I as the climax of the play for Fergus-

100. Michael T. Beehler, "*Murder in the Cathedral: The Countersacramental Play of Signs*," *T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral*, ed. Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretations* (New York: Chelsea, 1988) 95-103, esp. 95, 99.

101. Francis Fergusson, "*Murder in the Cathedral: The Theological Scene*," *T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral*, ed. Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretations* (New York: Chelsea, 1988) 5, 6, 11.

son, at which point Thomas must struggle with the “‘right reason’ for suffering martyrdom.” Then, in his Christmas sermon, Thomas reflects on the paradox of martyrdom in an address directly to the audience. In Part II, knights replace the tempters, kill Thomas, then rationalize to the audience about it, all preceded by priests carrying in banners for the Saints’ days intervening, and all taking place during the singing of a *Dies irae* and the *Te Deum*. At this point, having thus summarized Part II, Fergusson notes that Christian ritual is a basis for the play as well, as the play “represents ... a type of *the* myth, the central, the basic myth of the whole culture.” Thus, the scene is “neither Canterbury in 1935 nor Canterbury in 1170 but a scheme referring to both and also to social order,” in which “the dramatis personae are ... not so much individuals as roles in the life of the schematic community.” This helps to set up what I and others see as the Christian liturgical structure of the play, in which the play itself, and its very setting in the theater, mimics the Christian Eucharist in structure. Fergusson concludes his theological comments about the play: “The play ... rests upon revealed truth, which can only reach us here below in the form of the paradoxical formulas of theology, at once reasoned and beyond reason.”¹⁰² Such a paradox is at the center of a doctrinally oriented theology, necessitating a balance between opposites while at the same time allowing for the mystery and paradox of revealed truth — *revealed* truth, so a form of truth simply not available to, and certainly not exhaustible by, the limitations of reasoned understanding. This assessment also helps to set up the theme of the paradoxical nature of spirituality that will be encountered in *Four Quartets*, below.

At least two more critics have analyzed *Murder in the Cathedral* from the perspective of its close association with, and similarity to, the Mass. Robert W. Ayers goes into great detail to show how Eliot’s play coincides with the Mass. Beginning with a citation of Eliot’s “A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry,” which was cited by other critics, noted above in the discussion of *Ash-Wednesday*, Ayers quotes Eliot, as “the consummation of the drama, the perfect and ideal drama, is to be found in the ceremony of the Mass.” Adding a further comment from character “B” of Eliot’s dialogue, Ayers says that “we crave ... a ‘liturgy less divine [than that of the

102. Fergusson 6, 7, 6 [sic], 8, 14.

Mass],” from which Ayers gets the title for his essay.¹⁰³ He then details the events in the play as they correspond to the Mass — “a virtual incorporation of the liturgy,” which then results in the “conversion of the audience of the drama into a worshipping congregation.” The death of the martyr in the play imitates the passion of Christ in the Mass. Thus, in the context of the play, the members of the audience become participants. This is supported by the original context of the drama as Eliot wrote it — “not for performance in the theatre, but for presentation in the ‘semi-liturgical setting’ of the Chapter House at the Canterbury Festival, June 1935.” Further support comes from the sermon which is the Interlude of the play, as noted above. This makes Part I “the Mass of the Catechumens or the Liturgy of the Word, ... instructional and preparational in character, and confession and repentance are dominant themes.” Following the Interlude sermon, Part II becomes “the Mass of the Faithful or the Liturgy of the Eucharist, ... concerned with the offer of the sacrifice (Offertory), the sacrifice itself (Consecration), and the participation of the community in the sacrifice (Communion).” Thus, the entire play takes on not only the “Mass-form” in some detail, but given the original setting of the play and Eliot’s view of drama, the play also takes on the “Mass-function” as well.¹⁰⁴

Nonetheless, Ayers sees the liturgical texts and sequences of Part I as “‘maimed’ and misdirected,” especially the “displaced Gloria.” The Gospel text for the sermon in the Interlude, however, is St. Luke 2:14, which is part of the Gospel for Christmas midnight Mass and the origin of the words that begin the *Gloria in excelsis*. One reason Ayers gives for the displacing of the *Gloria* is that, in Part I, “Thomas then sought not God’s glory, but his own.” But later, in Part II, following the sacrifice of Thomas’ martyrdom,

it is entirely in accord with liturgical practice in the Mass and the fundamental purposes of the whole body of the liturgy that here in the concluding section of *Murder in the Cathedral* a redeemed Chorus should on behalf of a redeemed community raise their voices in an exultation indebted to the Gloria in Excelsis, the Te Deum, and the Benedicite in Omnia Opera, praising “Thee, O God, for the glory displayed in all the creatures of the earth.”¹⁰⁵

103. Robert W. Ayers, “*Murder in the Cathedral: A ‘Liturgy Less Divine.’*” *T. S. Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral*, ed. Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretations* (New York: Chelsea, 1988) 105 [sic].

104. Ayers 105, 106-107.

105. Ayers 109-110, 114.

Thus, the play is structured on the Mass in most details, as Ayers has set out to demonstrate in his essay. At those points where a one-to-one correspondence is lacking, Ayers attributes to a purposeful omission or displacement that not only works for the play itself, but also extends the Mass structure and purpose into a larger context. Displacement of the *Gloria*, for example, as Ayers has discussed, is in service of the drama and the theological point of the play. And the displacement of the *Gloria* also fits into the overall theology of the Mass as Ayers has presented it. I have already discussed much the same theology and liturgical elements above. Ayers, however, has taken those points to a further point with much more detail, thus affirming my original contention as regards this play and all of Eliot's post-conversion works.

In making his point, Ayers has included reference to the liturgical year, to the calendar of Saints as well as the calendar of the church year, and to the theology of Advent. I have already discussed many of these matters above. Among the interesting details in Ayers' discussion is his comment about the greeting of the archbishop on his entrance being "Peace," derived from the traditional "Bishop's salutation to his congregation, 'pax vobis' (to be distinguished from the ordinary Priest's 'Dominus vobiscum')." ¹⁰⁶ This indicates not only a knowledgeable insight on the part of Ayers, but also a solid liturgical awareness on the part of Eliot. Thus, even in the details of the play, Ayers demonstrates Eliot's understanding and use of liturgical details typical of an Anglo-Catholic.

Clifford Davidson approaches the play as a modern version of a medieval Saint's play, which is in agreement with my assessment, noted above. Davidson also affirms what I have indicated is a basic element of an Anglo-Catholic orientation, that Eliot's use of such a genre shows his preference for medievalism, which is in accord with the interests of the Oxford Movement and Anglo-Catholicism, as noted elsewhere in this dissertation. Davidson goes on to add that Eliot's preference for medievalism is over and against his preference for modernism, which he sees as "the result of his [Eliot's] conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927." As such, he feels that Eliot saw his play "in terms of a connection with ritual and liturgy." Davidson goes on to cite similar-

106. Ayers 108.

ities with other Saint's plays of the Middle Ages and books about those plays which would have been available to Eliot from his schooling and near the time of his composition of the play.

About these works, Davidson adds:

The so-called liturgical drama, designed to be sung as part of ... the liturgy on certain feast days ... in the Middle Ages, may be significant for our understanding of *Murder in the Cathedral* because the dramas are ritual forms, and Eliot frequently, even before his conversion, spoke of the close connection which exists — or ought to exist — between ritual and drama. ... As in the liturgical plays, Eliot in his modern saint play insisted on a close association with the liturgy, utilizing in the Canterbury production the antiphons appropriate to the feast day of the martyr and ending the action with the *Te Deum*, regarded as a traditional conclusion of a liturgical drama and here transferred from Matins to Vespers to preserve this association.¹⁰⁷

Deepening this connection between drama and ritual or liturgy, Davidson asserts:

First, it must be understood that he [Eliot] accepted the sacramentalism and ritualism of the Anglo-Catholic theologians of the Church of England which affirmed the role of the Mass in establishing the framework around which life ought to be lived. ... Also, the rites for the Anglo-Catholic included acts which in some sense not only provide a memory (*anamnesis*) of the past historical events of the Incarnation and Crucifixion, but also somehow bring the events into present and make the present-day worshippers participants in these events that are made contemporary with them.

As noted above, Davidson derives support for this *anamnesis*, or bringing of the past into the present, from the sermon in the play, in which Becket says, "whenever Mass is said, we re-enact the Passion and Death of Our Lord."¹⁰⁸ This sense of *anamnesis* is central to the Mass — *anamnesis* being a word used in psychoanalysis and theology, meaning the form of remembering that brings the memory back to life today.

Davidson also buttresses this with reference to the rediscovery of ritual in early twentieth-century anthropology, something to which I alluded in my fourth chapter. More specifically, he again notes Eliot's use of Catholic liturgy as stemming from Eliot's conversion in 1927, adding: "Even by 1926, he saw drama as a form that stands in relation to the liturgy, while in 1928 one of the characters in his 'Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry' insisted that 'Drama springs from religious liturgy, and ... cannot afford to depart far from religious liturgy. ... the only dramatic satisfac-

107. Clifford Davidson, "Murder in the Cathedral and the Saint's Play Tradition," *T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral*, ed. Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretations* (New York: Chelsea, 1988) 123-136, esp. 123, 125.

108. Davidson 126-127, esp. 127.

tion that I find now is in a High Mass well performed.”¹⁰⁹ These statements from Eliot’s own writing, which have also been cited by other critics, as noted above, strongly support Davidson’s argument, as well as my own overall contention, about Eliot’s high-church orientation and his use of liturgical elements and Mass structure in his writing. Such high-church influences and such use of liturgical elements are not to be seen as simply generic pietistic religious expressions or as expressions of Eliot’s personal faith — indeed to see Eliot’s work that way is to miss the point. Rather, in Eliot’s writing the much stronger and more specific influence of his Anglo-Catholic orientation is evident in his use of doctrine, saintly figures, liturgical elements, and Mass structure — which is a more intellectual and doctrinal, and a less personal and pietistic, stance, also in line with Eliot’s personality and literary views.

In accord with my own assessment of Eliot’s specific religious orientation as stemming from the Oxford Movement, Davidson comments further and more specifically on Becket’s cult as Saint, “his [Becket’s] cult having been revived in the Church of England through the efforts of the Anglo-Catholic movement that originated with Newman, Keble, and Pusey at Oxford and, perhaps more importantly, through the Cambridge Camden Society with its interest in architecture and its expression of faith.” Taking this even a step further, Davidson adds that Becket’s “opposition to ... the officialdom of the state” was something “that Anglo-Catholicism had come to appreciate.”¹¹⁰ Thus, Davidson notes the influence on Eliot of what he calls the Anglo-Catholic movement, more specifically for us the Oxford Movement, on which Anglo-Catholicism is largely based. Davidson notes the issues of architecture and the expression of faith as specific concerns of Anglo-Catholicism, as I listed at the end of my second chapter. He indicates further, in accord with what I noted above, that even the fact of Eliot’s writing about Becket is itself an acknowledgment of an Anglo-Catholic influence, not only because of the interest in saints in general, but also given the Oxford Movement’s appreciation of Becket and the issues surrounding him. Later in his essay, Davidson indicates that the Becket cult had been revived as a result

109. Davidson 127, 128.

110. Davidson 129.

of Oxford Movement leaders. Davidson cites as his source for this information Borenius's *St. Thomas Becket in Art* (1932), a book reviewed by Francis Wormald for the October 1933 issue of *Criterion*¹¹¹ — such a reference would certainly place the review in Eliot's ken. Since it appears that the suppression of Becket's cult had occurred during Henry VIII, that fact further reinforces Eliot's rationale for seeing the beginning of the Anglican Church as not during Henry VIII but during Elizabeth I — a point noted earlier in this dissertation.

Davidson goes on to discuss martyrdom modelled after the sacrifice of Christ. He includes scriptural references from the Psalms for further identification, concluding, "these Tempters who come to Becket, internalized and mental as they are, nevertheless do in some sense reflect the temptations that Jesus according to the Gospels had to endure in the desert." Then, citing *The Waste Land* and Jesse Weston's 1920 *From Ritual to Romance*, Davidson adds references to the the imagery of the seasons, of death and resurrection, of spring, and of medievalism's wheel of fortune and Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. The "peace which the world cannot give," noted throughout Christianity and in the *Book of Common Prayer*, "can be found only at the center of the wheel," which is a place of rest and "which must be beyond this world's flux and the turning of the wheel." Davidson then adds a brief discussion of the season of Advent and its themes, indicating that according to the *South English Legendary*, Becket returned to England on 1 December, instead of 30 November, as indicated above. In the process Davidson notes the three feast days of Becket — the feast of his Translation on 2 July, *Regressio S. Thomae* on 2 December, and the martyrdom on 29 December, the last two dates framing the action of the play. He also notes that 1 December, 1170, fell on a Tuesday according to the sources he cites, which was the third day of Advent.¹¹² That places the First Sunday in Advent on 29 November and Becket's assassination on 29 December 29, a Tuesday as well.

Finally, Davidson discusses common errors in the portrayal of the character of St. Thomas, affirming from his sources that Thomas was not celebrating Mass nor dressed in a chasuble, the

111. Davidson 133.

112. Davidson 130, 131, 132, 134, 133.

traditional Mass garment, but rather the setting was dinnertime and Vespers, or the evening prayer office. Nonetheless, Eliot has an altar onstage and still uses the structure of the Mass for his play. Even though he is aware of the historical inaccuracy of these details, Eliot uses the altar and the concluding canticles in service of his theme of martyrdom, efficacious sacrifice, and similarity to Christ's sacrifice to reinforce the Mass structure of the play. About the use of the litany following the canticles, Davidson adds, "The conclusion with the litany is a final Anglo-Catholic touch, and we are reminded that even today [1985, the original publication date of this essay] Mass at an Anglo-Catholic church such as All Saints, Margaret Street, London, is likely to be concluded with a similarly devotional prayer." Davidson closes by observing that Becket's first name is the same as Eliot's, and, citing *Ash-Wednesday*, he concludes from this that the doubts and faith anxieties with which Becket is struggling "[exemplify] some of the playwright's own agonizings before, during, and after his conversion."¹¹³

The primary reasons for discussing *Murder in the Cathedral* are that it is a religious and liturgical play; it contains themes and allusions found in *Journey of the Magi*, "A Song for Simeon," *Ash-Wednesday*, *Four Quartets*, and even *The Waste Land*; and it ties up some additional loose ends. In the beginning of my fourth chapter on *The Waste Land*, I noted that *The Waste Land* opens with an allusion to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Both of those works start in the spring, and by its allusion to Chaucer, *The Waste Land* suggests a spiritual pilgrimage, as discussed at length in the fourth chapter. At the center of *The Waste Land* is the Church of St. Magnus the Martyr at the foot of London Bridge. Chaucer's pilgrims would have passed by this church in the process of crossing London Bridge on the way to Canterbury. Eliot, having opened with an allusion to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and a suggestion of pilgrimage, having included St. Magnus Martyr Church at the center of *The Waste Land*, and having neared the end of his own spiritual journey at the time of writing *Murder in the Cathedral*, yet another form of closure is evident in Eliot's coming full circle to arrive, himself, at Canterbury with this drama of St. Thomas à Becket. In Becket's murder, or martyrdom, is the origin of the cult of St. Thomas à

113. Davidson 134-136, esp. 135.

Becket that undergirds Chaucer's work and provides the reason for the pilgrimage. The arrival at Canterbury further suggests Eliot's own spiritual arrival at the Cathedral Church of Canterbury, at which the Church of England is centered. Finally, it also suggests healing for Eliot, having made his own spiritual pilgrimage from *The Waste Land* to the time and place of the saint, who was martyred and now promises healing — as noted in the Prologue of *Canterbury Tales*, "The hooly blisful martir for to seke, / That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke."¹¹⁴ So at this point, having arrived at a surer faith orientation, Eliot turns to write one more long poem of a more overt Christian nature. Lyndall Gordon feels that, at this point, Eliot turned from drama back to poetry out of a "need to explore the design of spiritual autobiography three more times, in order to wring from his life that classic pattern." She adds, referring to *Four Quartets*, "This would be the ideal conclusion to spiritual autobiography: a simultaneous ascent and descent of the ladder to heaven."¹¹⁵ I would concur, especially in the case of "Little Gidding." Thus, I turn to the final work for discussion, *Four Quartets*, which, as will be noted at the end of this chapter, completes the circle of poetic themes and religious quest.

Eliot's *Four Quartets*

Finally, Eliot's *Four Quartets* is made up of four separate poems published in different years, assembled, and published as a whole in 1943. "Burnt Norton" was first published in 1936, "East Coker" in 1940, "The Dry Salvages" in 1941, and "Little Gidding" in 1942.¹¹⁶ These span a period of about eight years, beginning almost a decade after Eliot's formal conversion in 1927. Like Eliot's prose discussed in the third chapter, these later poetic works of Eliot's mature Christian period reveal a shift in Eliot's faith and life, a period in which he broadens his concerns, themes, and Christian orientation. Nonetheless, themes from previous works continue to appear,

114. Geoffrey Chaucer, "General Prologue," *The Canterbury Tales, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Riverside, 1957) 17-265: p. 17, ll. 17-18.

115. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 124.

116. David A. Moody, ed., "Chronology of Eliot's Life and Works" *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) xvi-xvii.

along with Christian images and allusions to liturgical places, actions, and characters.

Lyndall Gordon recounts the scene of the inspiration for "Burnt Norton" in the second volume of her biography of Eliot. Burnt Norton, "about three-quarters of a mile's walk from Chipping Campden, along the Stratford road," is an idyllic place perceived by some to be outside of time, and was the site of a visit by Eliot and Emily Hale in 1934-1935.¹¹⁷ Thus, in the opening poem of *Four Quartets*, Eliot reflects on time, memory, and potential selves. The second poem is "East Coker." "East Coker is the village in Somerset from which Andrew Eliot set out," Gordon tells us.¹¹⁸ This second poem is a reflection on starting and ending at the same place, on ancestors and one's roots, and, at the end of the fifth section, on exploration. The name of the third poem, "The Dry Salvages" comes from "A group of three rocks called the Dry Salvages [which] was the last landmark when the young Eliot had sailed from Cape Ann [Massachusetts] to Maine."¹¹⁹ After a parenthetical note below the title, "The Dry Salvages" continues the exploration and the journey to the new world with reference to the river, presumably the Mississippi, the sea, primitive religious references, the bell of the buoy near the Dry Salvages, and the sameness of the beginning and end. Finally, the name of the fourth, "Little Gidding," comes from "the only one of the four places that had no autobiographical association," and a place where a singular type of devotional life was practiced by the Ferrar family in the seventeenth century.¹²⁰ "Little Gidding" includes reflections on seasons and length of days, intersection of time and timelessness, the four elements, prayer, purification, and the sameness of beginning and ending. There is much to say about each of these poems that make up *Four Quartets*, but I shall look only at the major themes, images, and allusions that pertain to my study, indicating chiefly that the Anglo-Catholic influence on Eliot's life continues to show in his poetry in ways deeper and different from mere religious pietism.

117. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 46.

118. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 103.

119. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 115.

120. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 126. See also Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Andrewes to Baxter and Fox, 1603-1690*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975) 105-106. And see Cross and Livingstone 508-509, 828.

In "Burnt Norton," the opening section is a reflection on present and past time, memory, and possibility. In the last lines of the first section, the speaker looks down into a drained pool and sees children behind him in the reflection. There is a sense here of ancestors behind one. But also, for a reader of a more liturgical orientation, this passage has strong baptismal implications. Sunlight filling the pool suggests more than just the usual water, more like the water of enlightenment or illumination, the latter being another word for baptism. The presence of children in the reflection suggests the children of God that believers become in baptism. It also suggests the children that believers are, even as adults, especially in regards to baptism, which also carries a further sense of potentiality. In baptism, it is taught that believers need to grow spiritually and constantly refresh their baptism. But in the context of the grace of God, believers are never in a more perfect state than in baptism, even as children, depending totally on the grace of God. Therefore, another way to look at it is that all their lives believers seek to grow spiritually to become stronger and more perfected believers, something which they already are in baptism. Further, adding the potentiality of the earlier lines, as well as of the very similar last three lines, especially past and future being contained in the present and pointing to one end, this could easily be a meditation on eternity, with God presiding over all of time and for whom time is constantly in the present. All this counters the harsh reality that we humans cannot bear, as Eliot says.¹²¹ And this in turn sets up the other sections of *Four Quartets* with further reflections on purification, forgiveness, and growth.

The second section of "Burnt Norton" opens with the image of a cross, an "axle-tree," surrounded by garlic and sapphires. Some have suggested the garlic stands for gluttony and the sapphires for materialism. The point to keep sight of, however, at least for the purposes of this study, is the image of the cross, which can become "the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless."¹²² While the world turns around us in flux, the still point offers focus, stability, and reassurance. (This is very much the same concept as discussed above in the context

121. T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," 1936, *Four Quartets*, 1943 (New York: Harcourt-Harvest, 1971) 33-40, 4-10, 44-46, 42-43.

122. Eliot, "Burnt Norton" (1936) 47-48, 62-66, 70-72, 83-89.

of the medieval wheel of fortune image in *Murder in the Cathedral*.) But that all comes in the context of opposites coming together, much the same way as temporal and eternal come together in the Incarnation and in the Christian cross. This duality further sets up the middle lines of the section with their differentiation of inner and practical desire, or inner and outer compulsion, which in turn suggests a sense of meditation in the final lines. The third section continues this mystical sense, using images of darkness related to purification of the soul. The last few lines of this section are about "perpetual solitude, ... / Internal darkness, deprivation / And destitution of all property" being the only way, which is a mystical way out of a life of materialism, distraction, apathy, and emptiness.¹²³ This is the mystical solution, trading a vapid spiritual emptiness for a *kenosis* or proper "spiritual emptying." The brief fourth section uses the image of the yew, a symbol for death, and plays that off against the silent, still light "At the still point of the turning world."¹²⁴ This carries on the theme of enlightenment, linking it to the cross of the still point of section two. The final section returns to the reflection on eternity, timelessness, and beginning and end. Included here is also a reference to words and to "The Word in the desert." Word capitalized usually refers, in Eliot and elsewhere, to the Word of God and the Word made flesh in Christ's Incarnation. That Word is most attacked by "voices of temptation," which is a further allusion to Christ's temptation in the desert following his baptism by John, which is traditionally the Gospel reading for the first Sunday in Lent. This in turn sets up the second half of this section, which is a meditation on the "ten stairs" of St. John of the Cross and his *Dark Night of the Soul*; "un-being and being," which could easily be a reference to the existential theology of twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich; and enlightenment.¹²⁵

In "East Coker," lines one, fourteen, and fifty of the first section repeat the thought of one of the opening epigraphs of *Four Quartets*, that the beginning and the end are the same, or "the road up and road down are the same."¹²⁶ As Eliot reflects on the place from which his family

123. Eliot, "Burnt Norton" (1936) 96-98, 114-126, 101-103, esp. 115, 117-118.

124. Eliot, "Burnt Norton" (1936) 133, 135-136.

125. Eliot, "Burnt Norton" (1936) 146-147, 165, 139, 149, 144-156, 160, 168.

126. T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," 1940, *Four Quartets*, 1943 (New York: Harcourt-Harvest, 1971) 1, 14, 50.

originally came, this section has a generational ring to it. In the larger context with the other religious references elsewhere in this work, this also has the ring of baptism, as discussed above. In the second section, as he continues to reflect on ancestry and family origins, the speaker includes thoughts of wisdom, the wisdom of the ages, "knowledge derived from experience," and the possible self-deception of such wisdom. He concludes, "The only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless."¹²⁷ Humility is a returning theme for Eliot, related to spiritual growth. In the third section, the speaker says to his "soul, be still, and wait without hope," which leads into lines about faith, hope, and love in the context of light and stillness. This in turn leads to reflection on death and birth, again, in the context of "arriving where you are."¹²⁸ The more important image of this section is the darkness with which the section opens, "O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark, / The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant."¹²⁹ This connects with the darkness of the third section of "Burnt Norton": "Nor darkness to purify the soul / Emptying the sensual with deprivation" and "Internal darkness, deprivation / And destitution of all property."¹³⁰ Both references occur in the middle of each of these first two poems — suggesting darkness at the center or internal darkness. These references to darkness, vacancy, and purifying darkness, and especially to sensual emptying, remind one of St. John of the Cross' *Dark Night of the Soul* and his mystical teaching. His approach to God is an emptying in that he "turns off" his senses until he is in utter darkness — that is when he is totally dependent on God and when a deeper, more mystical communion with God is possible. Thus, there is a reversal of light and senses with darkness and spiritual insight.

The fourth section of "East Coker" opens with an image of surgeons, hospitals, and disease, which the speaker employs to talk of "Adam's curse," or Original Sin. Here Eliot plays opposites off each other: "Our only health is the disease," and "to be restored, our sickness must grow worse." Thus, to be set free from Adam's curse of Original Sin requires the "dying nurse,"

127. Eliot, "East Coker" (1940) 75-77, 79-85, 94-98, esp. 97-98.

128. Eliot, "East Coker" (1940) 123-126, 133, 136, esp. 123.

129. Eliot, "East Coker" (1940) 101-102, .

130. Eliot, "Burnt Norton" (1936) 96-97, 117-118.

which would be Christ, the “wounded surgeon,” or “Wounded Healer” in the words of a recent popular religious title by Henri Nouwen. After mention of “frigid purgatorial fires,” the last stanza refers to the Eucharist: “The dripping blood our only drink, / The bloody flesh our only food.” The final line reinforces up this eucharistic sense with, “Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.”¹³¹ This playing with opposites, or paradoxes, such as Good Friday, wounded surgeon, and the blood and flesh of death restoring life are essential paradoxes of Christianity, besides fitting with the other paradoxes at work here. Finally, in the fifth section, Eliot repeats the sameness of beginning and end with, “Home is where one starts from,” and “In my end is my beginning.” Embedded in this theme is the speaker’s

fight to recover what has been lost
And found again and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.¹³²

The speaker’s sense of loss and gain is similar to his sense of beginning and end — they are the same or inconsequential, leaving only the journey or the trying. This also has overtones of confession and forgiveness being an endless task, given humanness, which in turn relates to the complete forgiveness at baptism that is renewed with each confession and absolution. To put it into sharper focus, it is as Martin Luther said of baptism and sanctification, or growth in faith, that “We never do any better than crawl back to our baptism.”

“The Dry Salvages” continues the sense of journey begun in the last poem, but from the American perspective. It also continues the reflection on time. Using the image of the “groaner” which Eliot defines under the title as “a whistling buoy,” and “The tolling bell [which] / Measures time not our time,” he concludes the first section with a line that is a slight variation on a Christian invocation, “that is and was from the beginning, / Clangs / The bell.”¹³³ This links the journey to the time image, and in turn to the prayer book and church bells. Section two opens with six stanzas of six lines each and an average of twelve syllables per line. The rhyme scheme

131. Eliot, “East Coker” (1940) 147-157, 165, 167-171, esp. 155, 152, 156, 153, 147, 171.

132. Eliot, “East Coker” (1940) 190, 209, 186-189.

133. T. S. Eliot, “The Dry Salvages,” 1941, *Four Quartets*, 1943 (New York: Harcourt-Harvest, 1971) 1-10, 31-48, esp. 32, 35-36, 46-48.

is such that each line rhymes with the respective line in the other stanzas — thus, the first line of the first stanza rhymes with the five other first lines of the succeeding stanzas, and likewise the second through the sixth lines. And further, not just the end syllable or two rhyme, but in some cases up to four syllables. In addition, the concept in each line rhymes with the concept in the respective line in each succeeding stanza. The final word of each stanza, also the rhyming sixth lines, are “annunciation,” “renunciation,” “annunciation,” “destination,” “examination,” and “Annunciation.”¹³⁴ This is almost the basic structure of a *sestina*, which is defined as “[consisting] of six stanzas of six lines each followed by a three-line conclusion or *envoy* ... [requiring] a strict pattern of repetition of six key words that end the lines of the first stanza,”¹³⁵ except that the *envoy* seems to be missing here. It is quite a fascinating part of the poem, given the intricate structure of rhyming end words of lines and rhyming concepts of lines. Besides the rhyming of words, this rhyming of concepts is very characteristic of Hebrew biblical poetry. For them, instead of rhyming sounds, much of their poetry tended to rhyme concepts, which is why so many passages sound so repetitious to modern ears. This is an interesting technique for Eliot, and it suggests not only a scriptural feel, but also a feel for the way such passages are read in the context of the liturgy. Further, such a tight structure has its own liturgical feel to it. Also, the lines contain images of belief, prayer, emotion, devotion, and annunciation. The word “annunciation” is used three times, twice uncapitalized, and the third and final time capitalized as “the one Annunciation.” The other three words that are interspersed, “renunciation,” “destination,” and “examination,” are words that are also a part of the Christian vocabulary, referring to the process of confession, renouncing evil, examining one’s life, and setting one’s destination on the path of sanctification. This reinforces the Christian sense of the word annunciation and the religious overtone of the entire passage. It is into this process of living and confessing that “the one Annunciation” of the coming of Christ in the Incarnation makes all the difference. As an additional note and perhaps an interesting observation, such a combination of sixes — six stanzas, six

134. Eliot, “The Dry Salvages” (1941) 49-84, esp. 54, 60, 66, 72, 78, 84.

135. Robert DiYanni, ed., *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and the Essay*, 4th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998) 478.

lines, the second section of the third poem, an average of twelve syllables per line — makes me want to make more of this structure. The “calamitous annunciation” and the “last annunciation” are not as important as the “one Annunciation,” which is Christ’s. If the other two are less than expected, then I think of the Anti-Christ, whose number is 666, according to the biblical book of the Revelation of John. While I cannot make this work out to my satisfaction, the concept fits.

After these opening thirty-six lines, the second section of “The Dry Salvages” continues with further reflection on aging and on life, including the wonderful line, “We had the experience but missed the meaning.” Toward the end of the section, reference is made to the “bitter apple and the bite in the apple,” which is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden and sinfulness, requiring examination of one’s actions and motives in the process of confession. However, the process can be compromised by lack of awareness or by the concealing of the reality of these events and actions, as related two lines later, with “Waves wash over it, fogs conceal it.”¹³⁶ This points up the necessity of examining one’s life for growth. In the third section, the speaker begins by wondering “what Krishna meant.” This brings in allusions to Eastern Philosophy, to Krishna and Arjuna, which Eliot had studied in school, and serves to broaden his religious reflections. In both traditions, the journey of faith and growth and the arrival at one’s “real destination” are at issue. Thus, despite the reassertion that “the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back,” or perhaps because of it, the third section ends with “Not fare well, / But fare forward, voyagers.”¹³⁷ The short fourth section encourages prayer in each of its three stanzas, inviting the “Lady,” or “Queen of Heaven” to “Pray for all those who are in ships,” to “Repeat a prayer also on behalf of / Women who have seen their sons or husbands / Setting forth, and not returning,” and “Also [to] pray for those who were in ships.” Here, at the end, is repeated the image of bells marking time, but this time even more liturgically related as “the sea bell’s / Perpetual angelus.”¹³⁸ According to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, the Angelus is

the devotion consisting in the repetition thrice daily (early morning, noon, and

136. Eliot, “The Dry Salvages” (1941) 85-123, esp. 93, 117, 119.

137. Eliot, “The Dry Salvages” (1941) 124, 166, 165, 129, 167-168.

138. Eliot, “The Dry Salvages” (1941) 169, 178, 170, 174-176, 179, 182-183.

evening) of three Ave Marias with versicles and a collect as a memorial of the Incarnation. A bell is rung three times for each Ave and nine times for each collect. The name comes from the first word of the opening versicle in the Latin. During Paschaltide its place is taken by a devotion beginning with the verse "Regina coeli laetare, allulia." Its history is obscure. ... The devotion did not come into general use until the 17th cent. The evening Angelus bell is commonly known in Italy as the "Ave Maria."¹³⁹

Hence, the references to the "Lady" and "Queen of Heaven" together with prayer, bells, and the "Perpetual angelus" maintain a strongly liturgical orientation that in turn relates to other parts of *Four Quartets*.

The final section opens with images of horoscopes, fortune-telling, psychoanalysis, and drugs as the result of human curiosity. The speaker offers a counter to that human curiosity: "But to apprehend / The point of intersection of the timeless / With time, is an occupation for the saint." This is a turning point in this section, which concludes with "Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender" and "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action." In addition, this culminates in the Incarnation, which resolves all the opposites, itself being a combination of opposites of humanity and divinity:

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled.¹⁴⁰

This is the alternative to natural human curiosity, but it is beyond the capability of the masses, who only experience but miss the meaning, according to the previous section of the poem. It is for the saint to grasp the meaning through prayer, discipline, and action. The controlling "hint," also not fully understood, is the Incarnation. Again, this is language and thinking well within a more liturgical orientation of the Christian tradition, with saints, discipline, and Incarnation.

Finally, "Little Gidding" opens with a reflection on one of the shortest days of the year, using images not only of light and dark but also of "frost and fire." Included are references to "the dumb spirit" and "wind" and "pentecostal fire" in the same line.¹⁴¹ The section ends:

139. Cross and Livingstone 54.

140. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages" (1941) 184-200, 200-202, 205, 214, 215-219.

141. T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," 1942, *Four Quartets*, 1943 (New York: Harcourt-Harvest, 1971) 4, 10.

... And prayer is more
 Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
 Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.
 And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
 They can tell you, being dead: the communication
 Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.
 Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
 Is England and nowhere. Never and always.¹⁴²

This is an obvious reference to Pentecost and the tongues of fire speaking in new languages.

Pentecost has already been mentioned earlier, in line ten. This is the festival otherwise known as the birthday of the Church. The Spirit, which descended in the form of tongues of fire that day is elsewhere symbolized by wind. In Romans, the Spirit prays through believers, thus linking wind, fire, Pentecost, and prayer. This is another point of intersection of eternity or the timeless, namely the spiritual realm, with the temporal or human realm — a form of communication, of which Holy Communion is the fullest form for liturgical Christians. While some Protestants might accentuate Pentecost mostly for the gifts of the Spirit, for the most part the day is more a liturgical festival ending the fifty days of the Easter season. As a further note, “the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living” is on Eliot’s memorial stone in Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Continuing this imagery of the Spirit, the second section includes references to the four elements, air, earth, fire, and water. Besides being the four ancient elements, three of these carry connotations of the Spirit — water of Baptism, air or wind, and fire, all of which enliven humanity, which comes from the earth. The second section nears its conclusion with the “gifts reserved for age,” which are “the cold friction of expiring sense / Without enchantment,” “the conscious impotence of rage / At human folly,” and “the rending pain of re-enactment / Of all that you have done, and been.” To counter this, the section ends with reference to the refining fire.¹⁴³ Section three opens talking about “attachment,” “detachment,” and “indifference.” It continues with references to “Being between two lives,” “memory,” “love,” and “liberation,” which echo *The Waste Land*. The last half begins with a sense of becoming “renewed, transfigured, in another

142. Eliot, “Little Gidding” (1942) 45-53.

143. Eliot, “Little Gidding” (1942) 54-77, 129, 131-132, 135-136, 138-139, 145.

pattern.” The section ends with “a symbol: / A symbol perfected in death” and “the purification of the motive / In the ground of beseeching.”¹⁴⁴ The brief fourth section opens:

The dove descending breaks the air
 With flame of incandescent terror
 Of which the tongues declare
 The one discharge from sin and error.
 The only hope, or else despair
 Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
 To be redeemed from fire by fire.¹⁴⁵

The dove is another traditional symbol for the Holy Spirit, which breaks the air in its descent to earth. Coming at Pentecost in the form of tongues of fire, the Spirit’s presence frightened everyone present. When the Spirit comes, it prompts a choice — either remaining in sin, and thus being subject to the fire of judgment, or becoming subject to the Spirit’s enlightening and refining fire, and thus being set free from sin and death. Thus, these opening lines relate back to the end of the immediately preceding section, with the suggestion of purification of motives. They also relate back to the “symbol refined in death,” since by death of self, believers are reborn by the Spirit, just as by the Spirit’s refining fire, they are saved from the fire of judgment. And here is another juxtaposition of opposites in paradox.

Section four of “Little Gidding” ends with “Love” as the solution for which “human power” is powerless. Again, the stanza ends with “Consumed by either fire or fire,” echoing the end of the previous stanza.¹⁴⁶ The final section is in the form of a coda, combining all previous themes and recapitulating the thrust of the entire work. The beginning and end come together, as do the common word and the formal word, birth and death, life and death, history and timelessness, exploring and arriving, the last and the beginning, and fire and rose — all become one.¹⁴⁷ This is an excellent, concise communion of all the elements of the entire *Four Quartets*, with the goal of reconciling opposites. Such is also the process of salvation, sanctification, and confession and forgiveness. Such is also the culmination of a journey, especially a journey of faith.

144. Eliot, “Little Gidding” (1942) 152-153, 155, 156, 158, 165, 194-195, 198-199.

145. Eliot, “Little Gidding” (1942) 200-206.

146. Eliot, “Little Gidding” (1942) 207-213, esp. 213.

147. Eliot, “Little Gidding” (1942) 214-259.

Overall, *Four Quartets* is a journey begun by a visit to Burnt Norton. Eliot visited there with Emily Hale, whom he had loved and with whom he maintained a strong friendship all his life. This visit with her prompted his reflection on life, memory, past and future, and potentiality. From here, the poem moves to East Coker, the site from which Eliot's family set off for America. The journey is then to America, to the Dry Salvages off the coast of Massachusetts, near the area of New England where the Eliot family was centered for some time. Included are images of the Mississippi and of America and commerce. *Four Quartets* culminates in a visit to another English site, Little Gidding. Little Gidding was the site of a seventeenth-century monastic and domestic community. Thus, images of prayer accompany the concluding reflections of the entire work. While Christian and liturgical references exist throughout the work, as outlined above, they predominate especially in this final poem. There is definite movement through the *Four Quartets*, with the journey and many of the images and themes culminating in "Little Gidding."

Admittedly, there is more going on in this work than I have covered here so briefly. Analysis of this work would be an inexhaustible feat. However, what I have sought to highlight for the purposes of this study have been the references to liturgical Christianity. I have by no means exhausted the approach to or the meaning of the allusions, images, and references noted. In fact, other critics have commented on some of the same points. Nonetheless, these are the points that I see in the work that pertain to Christianity, more specifically to a liturgical form of Christianity. The emphasis of religious references has revolved around liturgical texts, confessional imagery, church calendar festivals, doctrinal concerns, and ecclesiastical issues, in which a more liturgical Christian would be interested and with which a more Protestant Christian would be less familiar.

In the third chapter of *Eliot's New Life*, Lyndall Gordon sums up *Four Quartets*: "Starting from 'acute personal reminiscence' ... *Four Quartets* recounts Eliot's struggle to recast his lot. ... The period of trial in his life from 1934 to 1938 then came to epitomize the grim ordeal of a whole society under fire from 1940 to 1942. Yet in the midst of danger, ... there is a promise of renewal in a shaping idea of the perfect life."¹⁴⁸ Gordon interprets *Four Quartets* from the per-

148. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 94.

spective of Eliot's biography, noting especially his spiritual development along the way. This makes for an interesting approach and fills in some of the gaps in my brief comments above, my intent not being to provide a thorough interpretive analysis of the poem nor an analytical understanding of the person of Eliot. Lyndall Gordon begins by seeing the entire work as a further expression of the Puritan search for perfection, growing out of Eliot's early American influence and making use of the "colonial New England ... distinctive literary forms" of "sermon and spiritual biography." Then, following the line from *The Waste Land* through the conversion or turning of *Ash-Wednesday*, she picks up on the epigraph of "Burnt Norton" as presenting two ways to perfection — the way up and the way down, both being equal. The way up dominates "Burnt Norton," and the way down dominates the second and third poems, she adds. The way up is the attempt at spiritual ascent, and the way down "an operation on Original Sin," having recognized the flaws and shortcomings of human flesh. The encouragement is "to try again and yet again" in this "pilgrimage" toward "the perfect life," so Eliot "emulates the repetition of the Bible." Thus, the "intersection of time and timelessness," the place where the human and divine meet, is part of each of the poems.¹⁴⁹

Considering Eliot's visit to Burnt Norton with Emily Hale, Gordon sees in "Burnt Norton" "the moment of love, fixed in memory." The effort here is to turn his love for her into the so-called higher love of religious faith, an effort which is more understandable given Eliot's marital status at the time. Gordon goes on to cite "Eliot's fascination for the extremities of the religious life" from his early poetry of 1914-1915, citing especially "The Burnt Dancer" and "The Death of St Narcissus," as the "origin of the refining fire of *Four Quartets*." She also cites Eliot's use of St. John of the Cross, who "revealed the way down," since "[the] way up was now closed to him."¹⁵⁰ While she works with the facts of Eliot's biography, she also affirms the spiritual journey of this, and the following three, poems. She recounts the complexity of Eliot's feelings for and friendship with Emily Hale, the spiritually searching quality of his early poetry, and his read-

149. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 94-95, 95-96, 97.

150. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 99-100, 101.

ings in mysticism as coming together in these poems, giving them the emotional vitality directed primarily at the spiritual quest for a life of perfection. This continues into the second poem, "East Coker": "Contaminated by sin, as he felt, in the four years between the first and second *Quartets*, he had now to begin a long ordeal of self-transformation to make himself worthy of the Word. Beginning — this word reverberates through *East Coker* — once more from the bedrock of temporal existence, he set out to find the pattern of the perfect life."¹⁵¹ As she continues her discussion of "East Coker," she further confirms her approach: "Much of what is obscure in *East Coker* does become clear in terms of the facts of Eliot's life: the conflict between recoil from marriage, and the longing provoked by Emily Hale's departure in the autumn of 1939, shortly before Eliot wrote the poem. ... The youthful would-be 'saint' rejects his sexual need; the ageing poet — exaggerating his age — deprecates 'the disturbance of the spring'."¹⁵²

Identifying with his ancestors from East Coker, specifically with "the grave Tudor moralist, Sir Thomas Elyot, grandson of Simon Elyot of East Coker, and Andrew, the cordwainer who left East Coker in 1669," who were "[bold] in their piety," Eliot affirms his English heritage. He then connects his spiritual journey in the poem with the Puritans' quest for religious freedom and piety as they traveled from England to America. Both are religious quests to establish a perfect life or society. Hence, from his roots in East Coker, Eliot's ancestral "venturesomeness (Home is where one starts from)" urges the explorer at the end of *East Coker* to journey to the New World, just as the internal promptings spur him on spiritually, "determined to break the mould of the empty life." Gordon says of "the pilgrim who abandons East Coker," that he is "like the pilgrims of the seventeenth century who left what they saw as Babylon for a New Jerusalem, 'a city on a hill,' a holy life."¹⁵³ This is an interesting and an apt relationship to make, between the speaker's journey, like that of the Eliots, from East Coker to *The Dry Salvages*, and the quest of the pilgrims. Both exhibit not just the physical journey, setting out for the New World, but also

151. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 102.

152. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 104.

153. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 104-106, 111-115, esp. 105, 106, 113, 106, 112.

the religious quest, seeking a holy life. Besides searching for the perfect life, Eliot also wanted to avoid the "death-in-life" of meaningless routine. "In *East Coker*," Gordon also says, "he [Eliot] rebels not only against the social round, but against all pointless recurrence." The temporal world is an "endless cycle"; thus, in the midst of the "deadening round of habit," the speaker hopes "to transcend time, and reach the stillness of eternity." This will be a difficult and lonely task, "So he goes forward into 'the dark' to be remade," Gordon says, thus entering St. John of the Cross' Dark Night of the Soul.¹⁵⁴ Gordon concludes, "Mere physical existence in Eliot's opening line, 'In my beginning is my end,' finds its alternative in an ideal pattern of existence that leads to the final triumphant claim to eternal life: 'In my end is my beginning.'" And from this sense of these lines of the poem she adds, "For all its rigour, *East Coker* is the most optimistic of the *Quartets*." Since it was written "at the darkest moment of the war," Gordon cites Helen Gardner's affirmation of the poem's "extraordinary impact" as Eliot worked through his own more personal concerns and thus gave expression also to the concerns of England at this time.¹⁵⁵

Lyndall Gordon sees "The Dry Salvages" as very autobiographical, beginning with the Mississippi's impression on Eliot and his efforts to reassess his life's past, present, and future. The rocks of the Dry Salvages, sometimes hidden and treacherous, suggest the dangers of the sea and of such a journey. In addition to the physical journey, the rocks also suggest the dangers of the spiritual journey, of which Gordon says, "It is not before the world but out of sight 'between the rocks' that a convert must test the authenticity and reach of his faith." Since "Eliot despised a watered-down Christianity of sweet promises," Eliot's way of discipline and mysticism, the *via negativa*, of his spiritual journey, becomes clearer. Gordon sees this seafaring journey in a "vein of optimism," as an "act of faith," echoing Whitman and Columbus. In the context of the sea voyage, the "bell ... warns of death and judgement," continuing the sense of spiritual journey. At the end of "The Dry Salvages," Gordon continues, Eliot realizes that he is, in all humility, not one of the saints, but rather he "owns that for him, as for other people, the most to be looked for

154. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 111, 112, 111, 112, 106.

155. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 112, 110.

is the odd hint or guess that comes in rare 'unattended' moments when he drifts into the interface between time and the timeless." Gordon praises this realistic self-understanding: "It is braver, and certainly more realistic, to face one's sheer ordinariness, to expect no divine call, to write (as Hopkins put it) letters to 'dearest him that lives alas! away,' and still to go on trying to perfect existence." Thus, Lyndall Gordon concludes of "The Dry Salvages," that it "is about the frontiers of action where a significant life is made. There are two struggles, first with the ghosts of the past, then with the ghosts of the future. Memories, expectations: these impede the new life, and must be dissolved in the timeless pattern of spiritual autobiography."¹⁵⁶ So she concisely traces Eliot's overall spiritual development from the ambition of his early days and earlier poetry, through the pilgrimage of *The Waste Land*, through "the 'turning' convert of *Ash Wednesday*," up to this point of the last of *Four Quartets*: "The impulse to turn from a contemptible society was reversed in the winter of 1940/1. ... This was not a retreat, but a new challenge. He had to find a way to use what he knew of the perfect life of the spiritual élite to improve the life of ordinary people."¹⁵⁷

Lyndall Gordon opens her comments about "Little Gidding," acknowledging Eliot's recognized religious ordinariness:

The last *Quartet* reaches for a sublimity that Eliot knew to be beyond him, beyond everyone. ... Eliot said that the poetry of the Bible (at its height in Psalms and Isaiah) was secondary to religious experience. ... The problem for the religious poet, Eliot went on, is that he is dependent on the experience but cannot command it. He can speak the Word only if the divine spark enters him.

This would be the ideal conclusion to spiritual autobiography: a simultaneous ascent and descent of the ladder to heaven. The design was there from the start in the figure of the ten stairs from St John of the Cross that appears in *Burnt Norton*. In the middle two *Quartets*, Eliot had duly performed his descent into the dark night of humility. Now, he set before himself the possibility of ascent, but it would depend upon the yield of his own life.¹⁵⁸

At the beginning of "Little Gidding," Gordon notes a "muted longing for renewal," adding that "The individual struggle goes in tandem with the set pattern of spiritual autobiography." Thus,

¹⁵⁶ Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 114-124, esp. 116, 117, 118, 119.

¹⁵⁷ Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 118-119.

¹⁵⁸ Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 124.

the final poem's "initiating scene is this flaming light, and a pilgrim kneeling in a secluded church, the site of a devout community in the seventeenth century." This community, Gordon feels, "may be the closest phenomenon in Anglican history to the American Puritan impulse to go into the wilderness to found a 'city on a hill.'"¹⁵⁹ This conveniently links the American and English parts of Eliot's background, pursued again in the second and third *Quartets*, to the speaker's spiritual journey, and it thus becomes another part of the reconciliation of this final poem. Gordon goes on to tell some of the history of the Little Gidding community, especially about the refuge given to Charles I, which in turn caused Cromwell's troops to destroy much of the place. Next, Gordon reminds us of Eliot's visits to Burnt Norton in September 1934, to Little Gidding in spring 1936, his crossing to America later in 1936, and his visit to East Coker in 1937. Eliot was going through some emotional difficulties during these years concerning his marriage to Vivienne, involving his visits with and feelings for Emily Hale, and dealing with his sense of guilt, adding that *Four Quartets* "gestated in Eliot's mind for about as long as *The Waste Land*: seven years in all."¹⁶⁰ Eliot blended images and themes in "Little Gidding," bringing *Four Quartets* to a resolution. Hence, Gordon adds, "elements that sustain us also destroy us" — like fire and the waters of the Mississippi. Also, "Superimposed upon the bomber is the dove of the holy spirit. The refining fire — pain that is God-given and, as such, accepted — may redeem what Eliot called (in his outline) the 'daemonic' fire of war."¹⁶¹ This is the result of Eliot's bringing together the way up and the way down at the end of the work.

At the end of her chapter on *Four Quartets*, Lyndall Gordon includes a brief discussion of Eliot's process in producing eighteen drafts of "Little Gidding," consisting of "three main layers of composition," tracing the timeline from outline through typescript to revision, and noting elements of the poem's development in stages, in use of sources, and in predominant themes, with the poem "[concluding] with an Invocation to the Holy Spirit." She notes that the "first draft ...

159. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 124-133, esp. 125, 126.

160. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 126-127, 127-128.

161. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 128.

[gives] evidence of an underlying schema that was loftier, potentially, than the final one, and which might have provided a heaven-sent climax to Eliot's earlier work, but which he could not (for reasons we can only guess) fulfill." Nonetheless, she notes that "The introspective mind of the last *Quartet* remains," and "It was under these unique conditions [of the resilience of the "people who lived through the Battle of Britain"] that Eliot was making an effort, through *Little Gidding*, to feel his way into that sense of community."

At this point, Gordon feels that Eliot had to come to terms with the fact of his own ordinariness, identifying with the English community and not just with the intellectual élite. This comes from a number of sources in his life, including his residence with a house of women at "the Shambles" (Shamley Green) and his "chats with retired Indian majors through the long night hours at the Post," where he served in his capacity as a fire watcher during the war. Also at this time, Eliot was in the process of accepting "the fact that he would not himself receive the divine spirit" in the way of the mystics, which was to see "his own condition as index of a general human condition." Thus, Gordon concludes, "The conclusion, in one sense, remains provisional," and she adds that "This may be less triumphant than his [Eliot's] initial plan, but its advantage is to make the poem more moving to those of us whose lives are imperfect, and who can make no claim to beatitude." While in his earlier poetry, Eliot had felt a greater gap between the divine reality and ordinary life, here in "Little Gidding" that gap closes for him — this, Gordon feels, is a part of the reconciliation occurring in this final poem, not only poetically but also personally for Eliot.¹⁶²

Smidt's more general approach to *Four Quartets* acknowledges the "musical" structure and "contemplative" qualities over and against the "dramatic" and "descriptive," respectively. He comments on the lines about time in "Burnt Norton" as stemming from Bergson's theory of time. He refers to "East Coker" as "the Good Friday poem," and he notices the "Biblical conception of heaven as that of a feast ... shared by all" — "clearly a sense of communion." Smidt adds in this regard, "Among the seven Catholic sacraments, that of Penance is most frequently alluded to in

¹⁶²Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 133-141, esp. 133, 136, 136-137, 139, 140.

his [Eliot's] work; but next comes that of the Holy Communion. We find it most conspicuously in *Gerontion* and *East Coker*." In commenting about "The Dry Salvages," Smidt states that "the poet sees our only hope in the 'Prayer of the one Annunciation,' the message of grace to humanity. It is because divine grace is necessary in the last resort that the soul must wait even without hope — so that no thought of our ability to earn salvation shall supervene." Smidt also discusses Bradley's influence on Eliot's poetry, commenting specifically on "Little Gidding" that as Eliot became a Christian poet and Bradley's ideas became less acceptable to him, he fell back on Royce's idealism "so that the belief in God and in the individual soul might be supported." As "East Coker" dealt "mainly with the dark night of the soul" and "The Dry Salvages" had "right action for its theme," Smidt adds, "the opposite themes are combined in the poem of reconciliation, *Little Gidding*, in which all the activity of history is seen to be a pattern of timeless, motionless moments, and all our exploration to lead us back to our starting point." Finally, Smidt comments on "Little Gidding" from the larger perspective of Eliot's spiritual development:

But the note of renunciation is heard in practically all of Eliot's poems from *The Love Song* onwards. The more definitive note of askesis is struck in *Whispers of Immortality* and continues down to *Little Gidding*. ... In his earlier poetry there is another motive as well that draws him to an annihilation of the personality: the fear of judgment, the fear of reality, the very fear of losing his individuality. ... He sees man as hovering in a twilight between salvation and damnation. It is impossible for most people, because of their weakness, their nothingness, to cross "With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom." So our only hope, if we are to avoid damnation, and if we realise that it is useless to dissemble, is in the purgation of sin:

The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
To be redeemed from fire by fire. (*Little Gidding*, IV)¹⁶³

Later in his book, Smidt comments more specifically on each of the *Four Quartets*, noting their "personal and emotional" character. Smidt acknowledges the Christian character of the poems, but adds, "Apart from *East Coker*, perhaps, they are less specifically Christian than, for instance, *Ash-Wednesday* or *Murder in the Cathedral*." Smidt cites as his support a work by Richard Lea in which Lea felt that "A non-Christian mystic can feel just as much at home here as

163. Smidt 98, 170, 205, 208, 228, 205, 162, 188, 201-202.

a Christian."¹⁶⁴ While that may be true in very general terms, I would certainly direct Mr. Smidt's attention to the critics below, as well as to my own comments above, who take the *Quar-tets* just as far as *Ash-Wednesday* and *Murder in the Cathedral* in terms of Mass structure and liturgical content — the fact that more than Christians would be comfortable with the poems does not mean that they are lacking in Christian and liturgical content, imagery, and structure. Hence, I strongly disagree with Smidt's assessment of the poems' "all-embracing, if rather diffuse, Christianity."¹⁶⁵ Certainly, there is more than just the Christian content, but the governing principle is not only Christian but liturgical, and certainly not "diffuse." It simply may be a structure or set of images with which Smidt is unfamiliar.

As he begins to discuss each poem, Smidt says little of a specifically Christian nature about them, pausing to acknowledge what Lyndall Gordon also acknowledged about "Burnt Norton" that it grew out of "lines left over from the composition of *Murder in the Cathedral*." Smidt also notes the "close similarity of *Burnt Norton* to the fourth and fifth parts of *Ash-Wednesday*," which suggests to Smidt that those sections of *Ash-Wednesday* may be a sort of "first draft of the later poem." He feels, "This reveals something about the permanent patterns of Eliot's poetic thought, and also reinforces both the religious and the erotic associations which are present in *Burnt Norton* but subdued by its more abstract reflections." Specifically of what Smidt calls the "fourth movement" of "Burnt Norton," he does add: "It is really a prayer for grace and permanence, that belief in the vision may remain. The sunflower and the clematis suggest Christ and the Virgin, and perhaps even the Father may be hinted at in the image of the yew."¹⁶⁶

In his comments about "East Coker," Smidt focuses on the renunciation, suffering, and humility he sees there. He notes specifically about the "fourth movement" the necessary renunciation of self and the acceptance of Christ's passion in order to be healed. In the poem's "final movement," he sees a development from "the pessimistic ending of *Burnt Norton*" with a stress

164. Smidt 213.

165. Smidt 214.

166. Smidt 216-217, 216.

on “striving” and “perpetual struggle and exploration.”¹⁶⁷ In “The Dry Salvages,” that striving becomes the aspiration of sainthood for some, but for most it is “moments of illumination” and hints and guesses. This realization is the result of the wisdom gained by the poet in the first two poems. About the lines in the “second movement” regarding the Annunciation, which I discussed above, Smidt sees “‘the calamitous annunciation,’ ‘the last annunciation’ and ‘the one Annunciation’ to represent the Fall, the Last Judgment and the Incarnation respectively — and interestingly enough, he says this parenthetically. He adds that “The point of intersection of the timeless / With time,” is to be “interpreted as the Incarnation of God in the temporal world.”¹⁶⁸

Finally, in “Little Gidding” Smidt sees the alternating themes of “history and the purifying fire.” About the “first movement” of the poem he says, “a sacred place is found in present-day England, which, because of its hallowed associations, will give meaning to a journey whenever one arrives. ... There is an exhortation to prayer, and the whole idea is that of a discipline, a ritual and a sanctuary which may enshrine the timeless in time. One might say that the poet points to the importance of the Church.”¹⁶⁹ This is my contention, of course, and this is perhaps Smidt’s strongest recognition of the rôle of the Church and of faith in relation to “Little Gidding.” However, he doesn’t stress this point as I have and as other critics have, as will be seen below. As he moves into the “second movement,” he notes “the now famous night scene in the London of the blitz.” The ghostly stranger the poet meets in this section Smidt identifies as Robert Browning, whose name is like Brunetto Latini in the part of Dante’s *Inferno* that Eliot is imitating at this point. Smidt is confident of this identification, believing Eliot to have been interested in “Browning’s ‘thought and theory’ concerning God, eternity and evolution.” The “third movement,” Smidt says, “deals with the purification and expanding of love beyond desire,” and the fourth section “emphatically repeats the idea that suffering is ordained by Love and may lead to redemption.” In the final section, “death is seen as a new beginning and a reconciliation of all things.” He concludes, “And at the end of the poem the dualism and struggle which have been

167. Smidt 217-218.

168. Smidt 218-219.

169. Smidt 219, *emphasis added*.

the burden of the *Quartets* is overcome in a great monistic credo." About the combined *Four Quartets*, Smidt feels that "Burnt Norton" has greater "poetic magic," but "Little Gidding" has "the greatest philosophical wisdom and detachment." Smidt also sees "finality of illumination [in the "ecstatic moments of *Four Quartets*"] beyond which he [Eliot] cannot pass."¹⁷⁰ While Smidt's recognition of the religious elements, especially the more liturgical elements, in these poems is not as thoroughgoing as I would like to see and as other critics', this final statement of his acknowledges the spiritual journey of *Four Quartets* and of all Eliot's creative works.

While Smidt notices, "More and more in Eliot's later work the idea of timelessness is connected with the Christian revelation," he expands that revelation to include Eastern religions. Of course, Smidt acknowledges the point of contact between Eastern and Western traditions, seeing similarities especially between the Old Testament's Ecclesiastes and the view of life he finds in Buddhist tradition. Smidt cites Dr. Staffan Bergsten's dissertation, *Time and Eternity*, which sees Eliot's concept of timeless bliss as basically unbiblical, Eliot having "superimposed favourite philosophical ideas of his own on the Christian teaching" with the "support of ... Hindu and Buddhist mystics." He sees the similarity of the traditions in certain symbols, such as the symbol of darkness shared by Hindu and Christian traditions. The concept of "voiding the mind of everything save faith" is as much Indian philosophy as that of St. John of the Cross. But Smidt notes Helen's Gardner's objection to the inclusion of Krishna in "The Dry Salvages" since she feels that tradition "despairs of the material world" while Christianity "is built upon faith in an event by which the material world was not condemned but saved." This is a solid theological point which would suggest limits to the interaction between the two traditions, to which Smidt rightly responds that Eliot's redemption is "*from history and a redemption of history.*" The resolution comes in the doctrine of the Incarnation rather than the Atonement, Smidt adds, making it "possible to believe in redemption through the realisation of a timeless fulfilment of the temporal and [managing] to reconcile Christianity and Hinduism without offending against either." Smidt reaffirms the centrality of the Incarnation: "he [Eliot] has interpreted the central Christian doc-

170. Smidt 220-221.

trine of the Incarnation in a completely poetical, a completely modern and a profoundly reverent way as 'the intersection of the timeless with time.' Thus the Incarnation just as much as the Passion means Atonement and Salvation. It is the redemption of all history."¹⁷¹ Here, Smidt acknowledges the place of the Incarnation in Eliot's theology and poetry, seeing it as also a reconciling factor between his Christianity and his interest in Eastern philosophy. However, Smidt's discussion of the Incarnation at this point does not include the nuances of the high-church stress on this doctrine, as discussed elsewhere in this study and as Smidt presents elsewhere, quoted below.

Returning to Eliot's more orthodox Christian orientation, Smidt concludes that Eliot's bringing together of Eastern and Western religious philosophies has been done without compromising Eliot's Christian orthodoxy. Primarily, Smidt sees Eliot as having changed Christianity by helping to adapt it "to the consciousness of our age." Yet within Eliot's Christian orthodoxy, Smidt calls some of Eliot's Christian ideas "extreme" while others are ignored. Smidt doesn't elaborate on these ideas at this point, but elsewhere he indicates what he believes to be the dividing line between the ideas Eliot stresses and the ones he ignores. In a paragraph discussing individualism, Smidt differentiates between Catholicism and Protestantism:

To determine Eliot's poetry as Catholic or Protestant, however, is hardly of any interest except as indicating which aspects of Christianity he is particularly occupied with and which he more or less ignores. He leans to Catholicism in stressing the doctrine of Incarnation rather than that of Atonement; the perfection of the will and religious discipline rather than the intensity of faith; penance, confession and purgation rather than judgment; communal rather than private worship. Such things as the adoration of the Virgin and the belief in the intercession of saints are more superficial Catholic elements of his poetry.¹⁷²

This is the clearest statement from Smidt of his perception of the differences between Eliot's Catholic leanings and a more Protestant perspective, and it is very much in line with the distinctions I have drawn throughout this dissertation. So even though he has not commented as much on the more liturgical and Anglo-Catholic nuances of Eliot's themes and allusions, at least this brief quotation indicates that he definitely understands the distinctions. But he adds

¹⁷¹. Smidt 179, 182, 179, 187, 204, 228-229 [sic], 179.

¹⁷². Smidt 228-229, 210.

that making such distinctions “is hardly of any interest except as indicating which aspects of Christianity he [Eliot] is particularly occupied with.” Such has been the intent of this study. So not only does Smidt affirm that Eliot definitely leans to the more Catholic end of the religious spectrum, he also acknowledges the place of such a study from his own perspective — a study which has involved him only tangentially.

John Gatta has written about *Four Quartets* based on the motif of music. Lyndall Gordon also alludes to the music imagery in the work in passing, as have a number of other critics, including Kristian Smidt. According to Gatta, some critics have gone so far as to look for “an exact structural model in specific compositions by Beethoven or Bartok,” an effort which Gatta feels is “invariably unpersuasive.” But while he feels that approach may have gone too far, “inquiry into the conceptual and metaphoric import of Eliot’s plentiful allusions to music may not yet have gone far enough.” He sees the poem as a “contemplative journey” with music used as a “metaphorical vehicle.” Gatta’s essay, entitled “Spheric and Silent Music in Eliot’s *Four Quartets*,” begins with the metaphor of the “traditional and ancient Medieval-Renaissance myth of the music of the spheres,” which in turn is linked to “the Logos of Christian revelation.” Gatta ties in the “absolute reality of the Incarnation” and relates it both to Eliot’s spiritual journey and to the music metaphor, saying that for Eliot “to possess the final wisdom of the mystic, [he] must extend the metaphor of music beyond its natural limits into the *via negativa* region of paradox, ... for beyond the highest sphere of the revolving universe lies a ‘still point’ where the only music to be heard is a total and intense absence of sound.” Then, tying in St. John of the Cross’ “silent music” and Dante’s “soundless vision of the Love that turns the heavens,” Gatta posits that “For Eliot the end of all journeying ... would bring a person to a ‘music heard so deeply / That it is not heard at all.’”¹⁷³

In tracing the history of the “speculative conceptions of world harmony” — the music of the spheres — Gatta first notes Pythagoras and those who thought “the vibrating strings of the musi-

¹⁷³ John Gatta, Jr., “Spheric and Silent Music in Eliot’s *Four Quartets*,” *Renascence* XXXII.1 (Summer 1980): 194, 195.

cal lyre contained the secret of the Logos itself." These "speculative conceptions" were later Christianized further by Boethius and St. Gregory the Great, through the Elizabethan era. Specifically, Gatta mentions Sir Thomas Elyot, T. S. Eliot's ancestor and a "presence" in "East Coker," and his *Boke Named the Governour*, which "speaks of the 'ordre and motions harmonically' of celestial bodies."¹⁷⁴ Continuing to reinforce the spirituality of *Four Quartets*, Gatta sees the music metaphor as a part of that, perhaps even in service of it. Speaking again of the "unheard music," Gatta says, "Within the larger context of *Four Quartets*, this music would seem to represent nothing less than the 'formal pattern' of spiritual meaning that lies behind phenomenal appearances, the universal harmony of existence sustained by Divine Love." Adding to the Elizabethan influence, he quotes Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*: "there is a musicke where-ever there is a harmony, order or proportion; and thus farre we may maintain the musick of the spheares; for those well ordered motions and regular paces, though they give no sound unto the eare, yet to the understanding they strike a note most full of harmony." Yet the reason we cannot hear this celestial music is because of the Fall and our resulting limited human consciousness. Hence, the need for purgation or the way of the mystic in order to apprehend the celestial song and, hence, God.¹⁷⁵

Gatta also affirms what other critics have noted, namely the "ancient quaternary of air, earth, water, and fire expressed in the movement from 'Burnt Norton' through ... 'Little Gidding.'" Also related to this are the "four strings of the tetrachord" and "man's four bodily humours [which] come together in the music of the stars and the crystalline spheres." Gatta sees this as an expansion to a more "cosmological frame of reference, [which] stresses ... that the unheard music is not merely private and subjective, but also universal in its import because it symbolizes the hidden Logos which is common to all." All this serves to set up "the 'way' of spiritual dis-possession, discipline, and interior detachment charted by teachers like St. John of the Cross" in order for "the soul [to] recover its original harmony of being and its prelapsarian perception of

174. Gatta 196.

175. Gatta 199-200.

the spheric music."¹⁷⁶ Finally, he sees the fifth movement of "Little Gidding" as a "coda," which, citing William T. Moynihan, he calls "a 'climactic perception' that concludes 'an almost ritualistic sequence' proceeding from 'insight' and 'loss' through 'searching' and 'praying.'"¹⁷⁷

Of course, Gatta has more to say, especially as he subjects various passages of the poem to his approach. But for my purposes, his use of the music metaphor is reasonable, appropriately and carefully limited, and well explained, especially as it relates to the religious allusions and the spiritual quest. The dependence of that metaphor on the ancient and medieval-Renaissance music of the spheres makes a further link with the medieval theological tradition which was so much a part of the more liturgical and doctrinal among Anglicans. Allusions to the Fall as disabling humanity from hearing the music of the spheres are not only part of that same ancient understanding of music, but also a solid understanding of Christian dogma and Original Sin, which again is in line with a doctrinally and liturgically oriented Church. Further, Gatta's frequent references to the Incarnation as used in the poem again reinforces the Incarnational and ecclesiastical stress of a liturgical Church. And of course, just the use of music as a motif and structural principle relates closely to the liturgy. So even even an analysis of *Four Quartets* from the perspective of music as a structural principle and a metaphor points us back to the ritualistic and spiritual orientation and content of the work.

Professor John D. Boyd, S.J., of Fordham University, has written on the overall structure and themes of *Four Quartets* from the perspective of what he calls the "Paschal Action." Father Boyd also begins with the Incarnation as "the substantial union of the Word of God with a concrete human nature, soul and body, a union specifically achieved in the person Jesus Christ." "The redeemed," he adds, "imitate this union of the human and divine" as "the adopted children of God through baptism and incorporation into the Church." From here, Father Boyd goes on to remind us that "we were redeemed by Christ's Suffering, Death and Resurrection," and that "these form a unity of action." Thus, when Father Boyd refers to the "Paschal Action," he means

¹⁷⁶. Gatta 200-201.

¹⁷⁷. Gatta 203.

that Christ's "Death and Resurrection comprise a single action."¹⁷⁸ To back up this understanding, Father Boyd cites St. John the Evangelist's presentation of Christ's messianic destiny in terms of both aspects of light and dark together. St. John, he adds, also refers to the Death and Resurrection in terms of a journey. And he adds a reference to St. Paul, especially the latter's understanding of baptism as "a symbol of both the Death and Resurrection (Romans, vi, 3; Colossians, ii. 11ff.)," adding a quote from "F. X. Durrwell, C.S.S.R., a prominent theologian of the Redemption": that "The Crucifixion and the Resurrection are not so much two separate events as one mystery with two facets."¹⁷⁹ This sets up the paradox that is so much a part of *Four Quartets*, as well as being so much a part of the deeper understanding of the mystics.

In the next section of his essay, having laid out the foundation of the working paradox of the paschal action, Father Boyd goes on to say, "I have developed elsewhere how this Paschal Action becomes the model of much of the work of the Christian imagination in presenting the life of the redeemed patterned on it. This life in turn is fed and nourished by a further image of the Paschal Action — the liturgical life of the sacraments." He clarifies further, "the Paschal Action is not ironic, that is, one's expectation of one reality being replaced by another. Rather it is the essentially paradoxical, the coexistence of two realities, of the divine and the human, of nature and grace." Father Boyd sees this paschal action in "at least three ways in Eliot's *Four Quartets*: in the overall structure of the religious theme in each quartet; in the structure, largely paradoxical, of some local passages, taken as examples of many more throughout the poem; and finally in the structure of the *Quartets* as a whole." He adds, "A second triad is of distinguishable themes in the work: the theme of insight, whether through realization or memory; that of art; and finally the religious theme, our main interest, of dedication to the Christian Incarnation and its saving message." The stability among these themes is "the still point," and finally, the religious theme "subordinates," even "absorbs," the other two, leaving *Four Quartets* a "dominantly religious poem," according to Father Boyd.¹⁸⁰

178. John D. Boyd, S.J., "The Paschal Action in Eliot's *Four Quartets*," *Renascence* XL.3 (Spring 1988): 176-177.

179. Boyd 178-179, 177, 179.

180. Boyd 179, 179-180.

Analyzing each of the four, Father Boyd relates the four elements to each: air to "Burnt Norton", earth to "East Coker," water to "The Dry Salvages," and fire to "Little Gidding."¹⁸¹ Throughout, the religious theme continues, though somewhat muted in "Burnt Norton." In "East Coker," there is a "need for the Christian ascetical descent by way of self-denial." Far from muted, section four of "East Coker," with its "five rich stanzas" presenting the wounded surgeon, Adam, the hospital, and the Church, the religious theme asserts itself more strongly and clearly. In "The Dry Salvages," the journey detours through Eastern mysticism "in order to find one's true Christianity, as a way of getting to the still point. ... This wisdom, being broad in scope, leads to the Christian redemption of the fourth movement, centered in the human context of the Word Incarnate." This passage Father Boyd believes, along with many other critics, to be the most positive and hopeful in the entire work. Finally, "Little Gidding" is set in a "the house of a religious community." Finally, Father Boyd adds that "the four elements must die" in order for "prayer to be valid" and "purified," "to communicate with the dead in the Communion of Saints," and to arrive at the still point and be meaningful.¹⁸² Having discussed each *Quartet* briefly, Father Boyd extracts four passages, one from each *Quartet*, in order to demonstrate how the paschal action is present not only in each *Quartet*, but also in shorter selections *within each Quartet*. Highlighting the passage on the still point in "Burnt Norton" (I, ii, 16-23), the fourth movement of "East Coker" (II, iv, 1-25), the last movement of "The Dry Salvages" (III, v, 17-32), and the "unusual" opening or "prelude" of "Little Gidding" (IV, i, 1-20), Father Boyd notes the "Christian Incarnation and ... the participation in it by the redeemed," the "union of suffering and death with new life ... as a sign of the success of the Paschal Action," the "redemption for saints and for the rest of us," and the "season of the Holy Spirit's presence, the closest we get to the Resurrection and its full paschal meaning."¹⁸³

Finally, Father Boyd sees the paschal action present in the overall structure of the entire *Four Quartets*. Since the four poems were written over a period of some years, Father Boyd does not

181. Boyd 180-183.

182. Boyd 181, 182, 183.

183. Boyd 184-187, esp. 184, 185, 186.

feel the need to unify them as a single poem, with “each cyclically developing a similar theme.” Nonetheless, he does note the religious theme of the paschal action looming as the major theme, uniting the other two and becoming clearer and more explicit as the *Quartets* progress. Thus, “the *Four Quartets* is best seen as a unit, a single poem, growing to its strongest in ‘Little Gidding,’ yet more so, when it is read as complementing and vivified by everything that has gone before.” Father Boyd concludes, “The poem’s unity, its character as a religious poem and its quality as poetry for being such owe much, then, to its being an aesthetic imitation of the Paschal Action, here and elsewhere an important rubric of the Christian imagination.”¹⁸⁴

Father Boyd’s approach stresses the paradoxical nature of the paschal action of *Four Quartets*. His perspective is strongly Catholic, specifically Roman Catholic and Jesuitical in his case, stressing the traditional theological doctrines of Incarnation and the sacramentality and ecclesiology that grow out of it. He presents the paradox of Christ as human and divine, which undergirds the Incarnation. He also links that to the death and resurrection of the paschal action as a single unit. And he sets his analysis in terms of the seasons of the church year, specifically the events of Holy Week, including a reference to the Ascension and Pentecost as being the Church’s way to relate to and understand Christ’s resurrection. First, human and divine come together in Christ in the Incarnation. Second, the Church participates in the Incarnation especially through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Third, such participation of the redeemed in the Incarnation, through communion and otherwise, forms the Church, thus defining ecclesiology. Fourth, inasmuch as Pentecost is the “birthday of the Church,” the time when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples, this is the Church’s starting point, from which the Church approaches the resurrection of Christ, looking back through the ascension. Just as Christ’s Incarnation is a paradox, a bringing together of opposites, so also is Christ’s death and resurrection — one cannot exist without the other; they are indeed of a piece. Added to that piece is, of course, the ascension. Finally, all these elements, growing out of a more liturgical, theological, and doctrinal Church, come together in the religious theme of the poem. Also coming together in the

184. Boyd 186-187.

work, for Father Boyd, is Eliot's paradoxical religious background:

We may wonder why Eliot, while developing the Paschal Action so copiously, never mentioned the Resurrection. His method of understatement, his natural reserve and perhaps his Protestant interiority and lack of exuberance may help explain this. We would never expect in him Hopkins' "Enough, the resurrection."¹⁸⁵

Looking back over the entire *Four Quartets*, Lyndall Gordon sees

three forms of life ... superimposed one upon another. First, there is the parallel: the repetition of lives that have gone before, and the ritual repetition of the observant life. This coexists with the aspiring line of progressive development: this would fit the linear form of the converted life which leads through the ordeals of the wilderness to a vision of the promised land, the grail, or the Celestial City. Eliot's journey, though, ends where it began. Its final form is circular. After the effort at transformation, he realizes that he has become what was always implicit in his origins. In so far as he has been true to his child's sense of being, he has not changed. ... [He] returns at the last to his American childhood to recover simplicity and innocence. This biographical circle is intact also from the opposite angle: Eliot's "way back" to England completes the "way forward" of Andrew Eliot to the New World. Eliot planned that his life should end, even more neatly than his poem, in the ancestral earth of East Coker where his ashes do, in fact, now lie. The parallel, line, and circle compose an abstract design, but one distilled from actual life.¹⁸⁶

She encourages readers of *Four Quartets* to "experience a cumulative effect, like a great piece of music." She also reminds her readers of Eliot's own sense that the poems improved as he progressed from "Burnt Norton" to "Little Gidding," so Eliot could finally say, "The *Four Quartets*: I rest on those."¹⁸⁷ Thus, Eliot himself sees *Four Quartets* as the culmination of his poetic career. *Four Quartets* stands as a resolution of his own life and spiritual journey. So there is the sense that Eliot rests on the work not only professionally, but also personally and religiously. Finally, for Eliot, "*Little Gidding* recounts 'the end of the journey': 'end,' 'purpose,' 'fulfilment' are the words in the air. The 'end' is to come to rest in theological orthodoxy."¹⁸⁸

185. Boyd 186.

186. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 141.

187. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 141-145, esp. 142, 143.

188. Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* 139.