CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS ALIENATION

Yeats believes that religion concerns itself with the ultimate Reality as the core of its truth - first through intuitive glimpses and, then, through transcendental self-knowledge. It transforms the observer's character by thoroughly purging his heart of all crudities and rousing his disinterested love for God and His creation and steeping his mind in ineffable peace. Yeats says that it leads one on to the direct experience of the very core of Reality.

In The Two Kings, Yeats maintains that in the hands of unillumined persons, real religion, as it has been taught by the seers and prophets of the world, has degenerated into a mere creed, a bundle of crude dogmas and meaningless ceremonials:

And loosen on us dreams that waste our life,
Shadows and shows that can but turn the brain.

Yeats believes that religion makes man proud, selfish, discontented, acquisitive and unscrupulous. In Fergus and the Druid, Fergus says:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 281.
A King and Proud! and that is my despair.
A feast amid my people on the hill,
And pace the woods, and drive my chariot-wheels
In the white border of the murmuring sea;
And still I feel the crown upon my head.¹

Fergus says that religion has failed to teach man how
he may unlock the gates of pure intuition by practising self-
control, selfless service and concentration of mind. Fergus
says:

I see my life go drifting like a river
From change to change; I have been many things -
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
A king sitting upon a chair of gold -
And all these things were wonderful and great;
But now I have grown nothing, knowing all.
Ah! Druid, Druid, how great webs of sorrow
Lay hidden in the small state-coloured thing!²

Fergus believes that it does not lead man through
higher and higher altitudes far above the brute plane. That's
why he wishes to be ''no more a king, /But learn the dreaming
wisdom''³ that would reduce the pain of mental and spiritual
unrest.

The growth of Yeats' religious ideas is closely related
to his family background. Yeats was brought up in a religion

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.103.
² Ibid., p.104.
³ Ibid., p.103.
that could have been at best one of the nineteenth century
Protestant versions of Christianity: but in fact he was
never sufficiently instructed in the Christian creeds to have
really believed them, or really disbelieved them. His
father's agnosticism, confirmed by the standard Victorian
popularizers of science, annulled at the early age in his
mind all residual Christian beliefs. But the contented nega-
tion his father enjoyed was incomprehensible to him. And the
prolonged attempt to repudiate his father's religious opinions
gave an incorrigible bias to the poet's speculations, and in
the course of life betrayed him into many extravagant theori-
es and eccentric attitudes. Thus metaphysics became for
Yeats an existential, and not an essential, study. His
speculations are always directed towards a practical object:
to find, not the truth as such, but rather "a system of
thought that would leave (his) imagination free".1

The religious philosophy followed by his great ancestors
had to play a vital role in shaping his sensibilities and
attitudes towards God, hell and heaven. His father J.B. Yeats
writes:

1. A Vision, Introduction, p.XI.
My father was evangelical as was then fashionable in the best intellectual circles. He must have said something about hell in my hearing, yet I did not make any real acquaintance with that dismal and absurd doctrine till I went to Miss Davenport's school. The school was managed upon the highest principles of duty, no prizes were ever given for all must work for sake of duty, and we slept with our Bibles under our pillows with directions to read them as soon as we awoke in the morning; but hell was the driving force. Miss Emma Davenport, who was the chief of the school, often spoke of it.¹

He continues:

...........I suddenly amazed myself by coming to the conclusion that revealed religion was myth and fable.²

He adds:

......while listening to the clergyman I could at the same time comfort my eye and soothe my spirit by looking toward the sea and sky.³

This ultimately led him to the conclusion that the "fear of God and God's justice"⁴ was only for weak people.

We may assess something of Yeats' development from The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid. It is the last of the long traditional poems, and shows the "interior variety"⁵ which he had looked for as far back as 1902, as well as the

¹ Yeats, John Butler, Early Memories, (Dublin, 1923), p.4.
² Ibid., p.72.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Essays and Introduction, p.18.
movement between passion and reverie, turbulence and stillness. Here is the progression of the theme of religious alienation towards the rhetorical cadence, with full mastery of all the resources of blank verse:

That love
Must needs be in this life and in what follows
Unchanging and at peace, and it is right
Every philosopher should praise that love.
But I being none can praise its opposite.
It makes my passion stronger but to think
Like passion stirs the peacock and his mate,
The wild stag and the doe, that mouth to mouth
Is a man's mockery of the changeless soul. 1

The final lines seem mortised and tenoned by its weight and alliteration. The whole poem rises and falls with its own particular rhythms, to embody his ideas on religion:

Self-born, high-born, and solitary truths,
Those terrible implacable straight lines
Drawn through the wandering vegetative dream,
Even those truths that when my bones are dust
Must drive the Arabian host. 2

Thus, we find that Yeats hated institutionalised religion which kept the spirit of man in bondage. On the other hand the need for a centre of creative meaning, a religion was present in his mind from his early twenties. He writes:

2. Ibid., p.467.
I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and
Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion
of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an
infallible church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of
stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable
from their first expression, passed on from generation
to generation by poets and painters with some help from
philosophers and theologians. I wished for a world,
where I could discover this tradition perpetually, and
not in pictures and in poems only, but in tiles round
the chimney piece and in the hangings that kept out
the draught. ¹

During the last years of his life Yeats struggled to come to
even closer grips with reality. Again and again he tries to
tear off the polite, superficial part of himself:

Leave nothing but the nothings that belong
To this bare soul, let all men judge that can
Whether it be an animal or a man. ²

He chooses new models; now he is Timon, Lear, or Blake beat-
ing against the wall ''Till Truth obeyed his call'' ³; he is
a fool, a ''wild old wicked man'', ⁴ a mad ''old man''. ⁵

¹ Autobiographies, p.115.
² The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.542.
It recalls to our mind the great teaching of the Upani-
shads: ''The individual self and the universal self,
living in the heart, like shade and light, though be-
yond enjoyment, enjoy the result of action. All say
this, all who know spirit, whether householder or
ascetic.''
The Ten Principles of Upanishads, Shri Purushit Swami
and Yeats (Lon. Faber and Faber,1971), p.31.
³ Ibid., p.576.
⁴ Ibid., p.587.
⁵ Ibid., p.626.
Until late in 1931 the closest approach Yeats had discovered to his own way of thinking about reality was in Berkeley, and Berkeley did not associate God's imagination and power with man's as closely as Yeats would have wished. But in 1931 he found confirmation in an unexpected quarter. He made the acquaintance of an Indian Swami, Shri Purohit, and learned that in the wisdom literature of the East the accepted belief was that the individual self is the universal self, maker of the past and future. At the highest moments of consciousness the individual self, detached from action, is aware of this identity. In the efforts which the Indian holy man makes to get rid of all that prevents this knowledge Yeats finds his own image of the artist who purges away the inessential to get down to the bedrock of passion. That the total meaning of the Upanishads is different from this does not escape him but he imagined some reconciliation between the 'banners of East and West'.

Because of his all encompassing belief in soul, self, or imagination, words which Yeats uses interchangeably, many of his later poems assert more authoritatively than before the virtual identity between images produced by the imagination and actual people and events. Yeats liked to

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.165.
tell Frank Harris' story of Ruskin's picking up a phantom cat, opening the window, and throwing the cat outside. In The Circus Animals' Desertion, and elsewhere he calls all his characters together as if to say, here is the universe which I have created and peopled and made as real as anything in the world:

Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?

He adds:

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
What stalked through the Post Office?

Not only are the symbols like men, but conversely the men are like symbols or actors:

Come gather round me, players all:
Come praise Nineteen - Sixteen,
Those from the pit and gallery
Or from the painted scene
That fought in the Post Office
Or round the City Hall,

Who was the first man shot that day?
The player Connolly,
Close to the City Hall he died;
Carriage and voice had he;
He lacked those years that go with skill,
But later might have been
A famous, a brilliant figure
Before the painted scene.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.632.
2. Ibid., p.611.
3. Ibid., p.608.
A man is welded to his image, a player to his role; when we speak of the drama of a heroic action our language is no more figurative than when we speak of its reality. Yeats does not escape his own symbols, but is caught up into them also, and in the poem *High Talk*, he describes himself as "Malachi Stilt-Jack", and insists that the stilts are part of him as much as his body is, and that, on the other hand, both are "metaphor":

Malachi Stilt-Jack am I, whatever I learned has run wild,  
From collar to collar, from stilt to stilt, from  
father to child  
All metaphor, Malachi, stilts and all.  

But even after Yeats has hammered home the power of the human imagination, one question is left. What is the relation between the human self and the universal Self of the Upanishads, or to put it another way, what limitations upon man's omnipotence exist? What is the relation, for example, between life and death, or between man and God? Once Yeats had said that man had created death, but that was a momentary cry of defiance; he thought a great deal more about this subject now that he was preparing the second edition of *A Vision*, and came to the conclusion that life stood in relation to death or to destiny or to God as his

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two gyres stood to one another.

Rarely had he pushed his thoughts so far before. A Vision, when it appeared in 1937, put a great deal of emphasis upon the Thirteenth Cycle, "which may deliver us from the twelve cycles of time and space"¹, a doctrine that in 1925 he had hardly touched upon. The idea of thirteen cycle seems to have come from Christ and the Twelve Apostles; and the Thirteenth Cycle, with its absurdly mechanical title, has many qualities of divinity. "Within it live all souls that have been set free"², Yeats says.

But not until the last pages of the book does the Thirteenth Cycle assume its real importance. There Yeats describes how, having fully evolved and knit together the symbol of A Vision, he draws of himself up into the symbol, as he could well do now that it was wholly personalized as a system and systematized as an expression of personality:

But nothing comes — though this moment was to reward me for all my toil. Perhaps I am too old surely something would have come when I meditated under the direction of the cabalists. What discords will drive Europe to that artificial unity — only dry or drying sticks can be tied into a bundle — which is the decadence of every civilization? How work out upon the phases the gradual coming and increase of the counter — movement, the antithetical multiform is flux:

2. Ibid.
Should Jupiter and Saturn meet,
O what a crop of mummy coheats:

Then I understand. I have already said all that can be said. The particulars are the work of the thirteenth cone or cycle which is in every man and called by every man his freedom. Doubtless, for it can do all things and knows all things, it knows what it will do with its own freedom but it has kept the secret.1

Only at this point do we realize that Yeats, after building up a system over three hundred pages, in the last two pages sets up that system's anti-self. All the determinism or quasi-determinism of A Vision is abruptly confronted with the Thirteenth Cycle which is able to alter everything, and suddenly free will, liberty, and deity pour back into the universe. The revolt against his father's scepticism and against his own was complete at last, though it brought him to no Church. God had forced His way ineluctably into Yeats' mind:

Then my delivered soul herself shall learn
A darker knowledge and in hatred turn
From every thought of God mankind has had.
Thought is a garment and the soul's a bride
That cannot in that trash and tinsel hide:
Hatred of God may bring the soul to God.

At stroke of midnight soul cannot endure
A bodily or mental furniture.
What can she take until her Master give!
Where can she look until He make the show!
What can she know until He bid her know!
How can she live till in her blood He live! ¹

Looking back over Yeats' works we can see that such a God
was always likely to come out of it; the Eternal Darkness
and the great journey man were among His antecedents, but
until now He had been as much as possibly disregarded and
His power undermined. He is the God of unwilling belief.

Whether Yeats meant that the Thirteenth Cycle could
do all things or could merely influence the particulars, he
does not seem to have decided. In the passage from A Vision,
it is noticeable that he takes both positions. Either way
his theories were considerably disrupted by their enlargement.
Some of his resultant uneasiness may be observed in an essay
which he wrote on Shelley, where he says that the plot in
Prometheus Unbound was made incoherent because Shelley, in
defiance of his theories, made Demogorgon terrible instead of
benevolent.

He goes forward flaunting his individuality against
inevitability. All that is known fights with all that is
unknown; God is Himself man's opponent, and the final

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 558.
struggle is with Him, whether He keeps His own shape or takes
that of death or destiny. As Yeats wrote in a little poem
called The Four Ages of Man:

He with body waged a fight,
But body won; it walks upright.

Then he struggled with the heart;
Innocence and peace depart.

Then he struggled with the mind;
His proud heart he left behind.

Now his wars on God begin;
At stroke of midnight God shall win.¹

The war on God is the ultimate heroism, and like all heroism
in Yeats ends in defeat.

In All Souls' Night, Yeats summons three friends, one
by one, from the grave to join him and reveal the occult
wisdom he so fervently desires. In the opening stanza of
All Souls' Night Yeats sets the scene by simply announcing
that 'Midnight has come'; Christ Church bell is sounding,
and wine stands ready on the table should a ghost appear:

Midnight has come, and the great Christ Church Bell
And many a lesser bell sound through the room;
And it is All Souls' Night,
And two long glasses brimmed with muscatel
Bubble upon the table. A ghost may come;
For it is a ghost's right,
His element is so fine
Being sharpened by his death,
To drink from the wine-breath
While our gross palates drink from the whole-wine.²

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 561.
² Ibid., p. 470.
In the second stanza of *All Souls' Night* Yeats proclaims that he needs a mind free from the complexities of the world that can stay "'Wound in mind's pondering/As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound"' although "'the living mock'". He seeks to reassure the reader at every turn that he will reveal marvellous truths: "'Because I have a marvellous thing to say', and it is about the dead.

Thus, throughout the poem Yeats continually describes things by negation. The spirit has no moisture and no breath much as the fire in stanza four is not fed, not lit, not disturbed by storm. By denying the applicability of the natural to represent the supernatural, Yeats suggests a sense of the incomprehensibility of the "'soul's journey'" through eternity:

And there, free and yet fast,
Being both Chance and Choice,
Forget its broken toys
And sink into its own delight at last.

Yeats values the traditional experiences of the saint. This last sentence contains the image Yeats incorporated in stanza four of *All Souls' Night*:

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.472.
5. Ibid. It recalls to our mind the great teaching of Lord Krishna in *The Gita*:

"'He who abandons all desires and acts free from longing, without any sense of mineness of egotism, he attains to peace.'" II-71 *The Bhagavad Gita* (Tr.) S. Radhakrishnan, Delhi, Blackie and son (India) Ltd., 1977.
Two thoughts were so mixed up I could not tell
whether of her or God he thought the most.
But think that his mind's eye,
when upward turned, on one sole image fell;
And that a slight companionable ghost,
wild with divinity,
Had so lit up the whole
Immense miraculous house
The Bible promised us,
It seemed a gold-fish swimming in a bowl.¹

The marvellous irony of "'on one sole image'" as the answer
implicit in the question "'whether of her or God he thought
the most'" and the amusing metaphysical conceit of Heaven
as a gold-fish bowl reveal his religious ideology.

The fifth and sixth stanzas of All Souls' Night describe how Yeats' friend Florence Emery became a follower of
Buddhist thought and travelled to India where a "'learned
Indian'"² instructed her on the soul's journey, "'wherever
the orbit of the moon can reach, /Until it plunge into the
sun'"³. Like William Morton and Florence Emery, MacGregor
Mathers was a student of the occult until a desire for knowledge
beyond the grave had driven him out in search of dreams:

He had much industry at setting out,
Much boisterous courage, before loneliness
Had driven him crazed;
For meditations upon unknown thought
Make human intercourse grow less and less; ⁴

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.471.
² Ibid., p.472.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p.473.
He never had any dogmatic religion, nor was he likely to acquire one. And if we still pursue this study, that is only because later he was to gain, although never an experimental faith, yet a quite unusually accurate and vivid scientific understanding of religious conviction, which comes, as he put it, "from shock and is not desired."\(^1\)

He employs the traditional symbols of all the religious beliefs, but not upon properly religious or divine authority. They are authenticated merely by a popular convention. And, since multitudes can err, he thus diminishes the status, of all deities and dogmas from realities to metaphors; or puts them into doubt as perhaps nothing more than mere symbolizations of some collective hallucination or of some urgent gregarious mood. Hence an ambiguous tone, a false note, is to be found not infrequently as a blemish in much of his seemingly pious devout or religious verse. He having employed a traditional Christian title for God, addressed his prayers to some wholly fanciful deities:

0 kinsmen of the Three in One,
0 Kinsmen, bless the hands that play.\(^2\)

Now "the Three in One", if the phrase is intended to mean any one thing more than another, presumably draws its meaning

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from Holy writ and the Christian tradition. But neither of these would furnish grounds for any belief in the existence of those other very highly connected persons. If we were meant to attach any serious sense of the title 'Three in One', he must have intended to write in the character of a Christian. But, in the prayer of a Christian, the rest of the invocation would, at the best, be frivolous, and at the worst, if sincerely intended, heretical. It would in either case be remarkably impious. If, on the other hand, we were meant to take the 'kinsman' seriously, 'the Three in One' must be received in some wholly unconventional sense. But there is nothing in the context to establish or enforce this, and in fact, the poet has merely deprived a traditional term of its meaning.

Yeats believes that a religion is at once an explanation of existence, and a way of life, a discipline of the feelings and appetites. His emotional or practical religion came from such sources as were to furnish him with no precise beliefs. The first of these was romantic love, a sublimation of the affection which a man naturally feels for another being of his own created kind; whereby this affection, becoming extravagant, passes beyond the limits of nature, and is at last directed to something not human but a supernatural, divine. In Ephemera, the lover says:
'Ah, do not mourn', he said,
'That we are tired, for other loves await us;
Hate on and love through unrepining hours.
Before us lies eternity; our souls
Are love, and a continual farewell'. ¹

Thus is the mediaeval chivalrous tradition, love for an
actual woman was sublimated at last to love for a heavenly
bride. In The Poet pleads with the Elemental Powers, the
lover says:

Great Powers of falling wave and wind and windy fire,
With your harmonious choir
Encircle her I love and sing her into peace,
That my old cares my cease;
Unfold your flaming wings and cover out of sight
The nets of day and night. ²

He continues:

Dim Powers of drowsy thought, let her no longer be
Like the pale cup of the sea,
When winds have gathered and sun and moon burned dim
Above its cloudy rim;
But let a gentle silence wrought with music flow
Wither her footsteps go. ³

Alternatively, romantic love is a sort of corruption or car-
nalization of charity, of the religious virtue that draws
certain men towards God. For whom he holds in The wanderings
of Uisín:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.80.
2. Ibid., p.174.
3. Ibid., p.175.
Wo, the gods a long time are dead.¹

whereby an emotion whose object is supernatual, mistakenly
seeking its object in nature, gives wholly inordinate
worship to some mere created thing. In His Wildness, the
poet says:

Were I but there and none to hear
I'd have a peacock cry,
For that is natural to a man
That lives in memory,
Being all alone I'd nurse a stone
And sing it lullaby.²

The poems composed for Maud Gonne or about her, however,
have commonly for theme something more complex than a mere
frustrated romantic desire. A note of personal exhaustion
which, in the mode of the nineties, the poet expresses is
linked even in the earliest poems of love to the passion
itself. Sometimes this tendency even promotes an explicit
desire to be freed from the burden of loving:

O would, beloved, that you lay
Under the dock-leaves in the ground.³

The second emotional source of his religion was Irish
nationalism, a complex feeling linked to a complicated
political doctrine. It began as a simple nostalgia for
Sligo:

¹. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.59.
². Ibid., p.458.
³. Ibid., p.176.
where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We cook for clambering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young steams. 1

Gaelic personifications of Ireland, conceived as a beautiful
suffering woman, attracted him first as incentives to an
heroic, magnanimous virtue:

She says my man will surely come,
And fetch me home agin;
But always, as I'm movin' round,
Without doors or within; 2

But she knows that:

God lights the stars, His candles,
And looks upon the poor. 3

His conception emerging of a supernatural beauty symbolically
figured as The Rose forms the basis of his religion:

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:
Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;
The Druid, grey, wood nurtured, quiet-eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;
And thine own sadness—whereof stars, grown old
In dancing silver—sandalled on the sea,
Sing in their high and lonely melody.
Come near, that no more blinded my man's fate,
I find under the boughs of love and hate,
In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal beauty wandering on her way. 4

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.88.
2. Ibid., p.96.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.100.
Yeats believes that nationalism is in itself a religion. It is prone to assert a transcendent or superhuman value; to identify this value with the being of the nation; and to exact on behalf of this value a sort of aggressive, heroic activity, with the subordination of every alternative moral or natural good. A nationalist is one to whom such a nation is an object immediately apprehended, calling for a loyalty distinct from and anterior to rational benevolence, allegiance to any political system, obedience due to any religion or church. Such men would prefer to see the nation independent and in ruins, that grown prosperous in vassalage and reconciled to bonds:

Parnell come down the road, he said to a cheering man: 'Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone'.

Now the existence of a nation in this metaphysical sense is known to the historian and manifest in history only by the quasi-religious allegiance which it continues to command. A more personal and immediately religious emotion excited in Yeats the desire for the realization of a divine event. The Mother of God deals with the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Mary, God's Mother herself, is the speaker, the mask through which Yeats himself speaks. He speaks thus:

The threefold terror of love; a fallen flare
Through the hollow of an ear;
Wings beating about the room;
The terror of all terrors that I bore
The Heavens in my womb. ¹

Instead of the glory and omnipotence of deity, we are given here the emotions of a victim of God's love. And her predominant, absorbing emotion is terror. She imagines the common lot of women. "Chimney corner, garden walk"², the neighbors' gossip, things she had once found "content"³ in, are now longingly remembered. For she is subject now to this terrifying, incomprehensible thing:

This love that makes my heart's blood stop
Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones
And bids my hair stand up?⁴

How much in this there is of Yeats, how far in spirit it is from the Gospels, can be assessed if we recall that this is a version of the Magnificat. And it would seem that for Yeats, or that for Yeats in certain moods the apprehension of the Christian annunciation as an actual event was a thing abhorrent in exactly such a way.

Yeats believes that a religious poet seeks a reality more real than that offered by sensible experience. His

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 499.
² ibid.
³ ibid.
⁴ ibid.
great desire for centrality, the permanent at the root of
the transient makes him shun the hollow conventional beliefs
about life and death:

Many times man lives and dies
Between his two eternities,
That of race and that of soul,
And ancient Ireland knew it all.
Whether man die in his bed
Or the rifle knocks him dead,
A brief parting from those dear
Is the worst man has to fear.
Though grave-diggers' toil is long,
Sharp their spades, their muscles strong,
They but thrust their buried men
Back in the human mind again.1

Yeats holds that the Church and holy men subsist on
dogmas and rituals which, if they are to have meaning, must
possess creative value, the ability to affect and order the
feelings of communicants. Dogmas and rituals are the inner
and outward forms of the Church and holy men, rooted in
revelation and tradition, and stultifying only when they are
no longer able to affect their communicants. Dogmas, as
such, are not dead. They become lifeless only when they fail
to embody concretely the driving force to eternity. The
Three Hermits reflects the idea:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.637.
That the shades of holy men
Who have failed, being weak of will,
Pass the Door of Birth again,
And are plagued by crowds, until
They've the passion to escape.
Moaned the other, 'They are thrown
Into some most fearful shape'.
But the second mocked his moan:
'They are not changed to anything,
Having loved God once, but maybe
To a poet or a king
Or a witty lovely lady'.

It is inconceivable that dogma should be separated from belief. To a Catholic, a belief is a very direct thing: one believes that Christ was of Virgin Birth, that he actually walked on the Sea of Galilee, that he brought back to life Lazarus who had really died, that he himself really rose from the dead and ascended in a vertical direction straight to Heaven, and that he is represented by an infallible Pope in Rome. Regardless of what theologians may say, all these events are not, to those who believe in them, parables or symbols, or myths in the sense that others can take their place: to the Catholic they are the real thing, based on historical fact, miraculous but real. They show how God disclosed himself to men, how the supernatural was visualized in the natural. To Yeats, the whole thing is inexplicable and not at all rational.

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 298.
Yeats believes that one must have faith in order to understand and believe; more properly, one must believe in order to understand - credo ut intelligam. From Oedipus at Colonus embodies the idea:

Endure what life God gives and ask no longer span;
Cease to remember the delights of youth, travel-wearied aged man;
Delight becomes death-longing if all longing else be vain.

Even from that delight memory treasures so,
Death, despair, division of families, all entanglements of mankind grow,
As that old wandering beggar and these God-hated children know.  

What is important is that dogma and ritual become dead if they are not able to endow the whole of life with a sacramental character. It is this lack of divine spark in dogmas and rituals that has likened life to a "storm-beaten old watch-tower" 2 where a "blind hermit rings the hour" 3. Religion in the hands of a "wandering fool" 4 is "All-destroying" 5. It is like "Gold-sewn Silk on the sword-blade" 6 where "Beauty and fool" 7 are laid together.

2. Ibid., p.434.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
Yeats, being a religious poet, was concerned with eliciting from religion the same sort of emotional belief that the Church draws out of the faithful by the use of rituals. Religion, Yeats believes, has failed to dispel the dark gloom created by the "impurities" in the soul of man. In *Rigid Consideration Christian Love Insufficient*, he says:

> Why do I hate man, woman or event?  
> That is a light my jealous soul has sent.  
> From terror and deception freed it can  
> Discover impurities, can show at last  
> How soul may walk when all such things are past,  
> How soul could walk before such things began.¹

The two most characteristic elements of the Oisin-Patrick dialogues in *The Wanderings of Oisin* are the defiance by the doughty old pagan of the Christian religion, and his lamentation over his abject state. Oisin will have none of a way of life lived not for the joy of living, as the Fenians had lived, but for a heavenly reward; and so consisting largely of prayer. And he is hard set to believe Patrick when the saint tells him that Finn is in hell suffering torments; that great warrior could break through the bonds. But helpless because of his physical condition, Oisin can do little save lament for a time that is gone and boast of what he would to Patrick and his monks were he in the vigor of his days.

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 356.
Yeats' principal source for his dialogue material was the Ossianic Society Transactions. Here, for instance, Oisin speaks his dislike of Christian customs which appear in the forms of: "Fasting and prayers"¹ and here he laments his lost strength:

Hopeless for ever: ancient Oisin knows,
For he is weak and poor and blind, and lies
On the anvil of the world.²

Now Patrick paints a picture of Finn in Hell:

where the flesh of the footsole clingeth on the
burning stones is their place;
where the demons whip them with wires on the
burning stones of wide Hell,³

And the names of the Fenians' hounds come apparently from the same source:

..........with strong hounds three,
Bran, sgeolan, and Lomair,⁴

Yeats believes that the only thoughts that our age carries to their logical conclusion are deductions from the materialism of the seventeenth century; they fill the newspapers, books, speeches; they are implicit in all that we do and

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2. Ibid., p.42.
3. Ibid., p.61.
4. Ibid., p.2.
think. The English and Irish countrymen are devout because ignorant of these thoughts; but we, till we have passed our grain through the sieve, are atheists. Yeats does not believe in the Incarnation, in the Church's sense of that word, and he knows that he does not, and yet, seeing that like most men of his kind he desires beliefs, the old Carol delights him. *John Kinsella's Lament for Mrs. Mary Moore* reflects the idea. In order to "keep the soul of man alive," one has to banish "age and care," but the Christian Brothers think that they believe, and suddenly confronted with the reality of their own thought cover up their eyes:

The priests have got a book that says
But for Adam's sin
Eden's Garden would be there.
And I there within.
No expectation fails there,
No pleasing habit ends,
No man grows old, no girl grows cold,
But friends walk by friends.
Who quarrels over halfpennies
That plucks the trees for bread?  

Yeats holds that the intellect of the "Holy Land of Ireland" is irreligious. Religion has failed to create in man a sense of something far more deeply interwoven in the life of man. *I am of Ireland* exemplifies the idea:

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.620.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.621.
4. Ibid., p.526.
'The fiddlers are all thumbs,
Or the fiddle-string accursed,
The drums and the Kettledrums
And the trumpets all are burst;
And the trombone's, cried he,
'The trumpet and trombone', 1

The moral system of Ireland being founded upon habit,
not intellectual conviction, has shown of late that it cannot
resist the onset of modern life. Parnell's Funeral illustrates the idea:

........... All that was sung,
All that was said in Ireland is a lie
Bred out of the contagion of the throng,
Saving the rhyme rats hear before they die. 2

The people are quick to hate and slow to love; and
they have never lacked in exciting the most evil passions
thereby: 'Troubling the endless reverie'. 3 To some extent
Ireland but shows in an acute form the European problem, and
must seek a remedy where the best minds of Europe seek it –
in audacity of speculation and creation. They must consider
know the foundations of existence and learn to seek ''truth,
Lest all thy toiling only breeds/New dreams, new dreams' 4;
because ''there is no truth/ Saving in thine own heart'' 5.
Christianity must meet today not the criticism as its

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p.527.
2. Ibid., p.542.
3. Ibid., p.65.
4. Ibid., p.66.
5. Ibid.
ecclesiastics seem to imagine of the School of Voltaire, but of that out of which Christianity itself in part arose, the School of Plato, and there is less occasion for passion. In *Solomon to Sheba*, Yeats says:

'There's not a man or woman
Born under the skies
Dare match in learning with us two,
And all day long we have found
There's not a thing but love can make
The world a narrow pound'.

Yeats holds that the way love and religion are being practiced is symptomatic of an underlying malaise in the life of man. In *Brown Penny*, he says:

O Love is the crooked thing,
There is nobody wise enough
To find out all that is in it,
For he would be thinking of love
Till the stars had run away
And the shadows eaten the moon.
Ah, Penny, brown penny, brown penny,
One cannot begin it too soon.  

Yeats, as we have seen, made a religion of art, which means in effect that he neutralized religion. Religious activity is the dynamism of the soul in its efforts to comprehend ultimate or absolute truth, meaning and purpose, and to bring actual life into a relationship with them. This

1. The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 333.
2. Ibid., p. 268.
did not concern Yeats. The effort to bring actual life into the radius of the ultimate implies the possibility of correspondence between the supernatural and the natural worlds, through which the life of man is given meaning and purpose. It is, therefore, interesting to find in Yeats’, The Shadowy Waters the prediction of a supernatural realm, the world of Faery, of the "Ever-living"¹, which, however, exists in an antithetical relationship to the world of humanity. The herdsman is often seen by his wife "lying like a log"² or "fumbling in a dream"³. His mutterings of "wild riders"⁴ are all fanciful. For him human life is lived in a closed circle, a purposeless efflorescence denies the significance which can be given to it only by an integral relationship with the absolute, while the supernatural world is such another closed circle where only death and despair reign. Aibric says:

It's certain they are leading you to death. 
None but the dead, or those that never lived, 
Can know that ecstasy, Forgael! Forgael! 
They have made you follow the man-headed birds, 
And you have told me that their journey lies 
Towards the country of the dead.⁵

¹ The Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 229. 
² Ibid., p. 230. 
³ Ibid. 
⁴ Ibid. 
⁵ Ibid., p. 231.