CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

I

Whatever may be the aim or approach, almost every evaluation of Eliot's work has ultimately to consider the problems of continuity or discontinuity, consistency or inconsistency in his overall development. Some are of the opinion that between roughly 1928 and 1934 there was a major shift in his centre of interest. For them Eliot's controversial declaration of classicism in literature, royalism in politics and Anglo-catholicism in religion and his confirmation in the Church of England marked the first stage of a progressive decline in critical and poetic power. Again, others found a continuity in poetic development, but a shift of interest from literary to social and religious criticism. But all these questions will become immaterial if his work can be shown as a progressive and coherent development. I am suggesting that if you take any Eliot you must take all, and that those who wish to ignore Eliot's later works in favour of the earlier works are simply evading the real significance of the Eliot's oeuvre. The present thesis seeks to define and establish the general characteristics of continuity and coherence in Eliot's development as a poet and man of letters, specially in the light of his religious position, which has always been seen emanating from his life and his writings.
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It is only for convenience that one attempts to separate the various aspects of his career, and the various literary forms in which he expressed himself. To him all alike are meaningless in disconnexion from that living core of energy, which may be called imagination in the realms of art and religion in life itself. It is difficult, in spite of the appearances, to think of Eliot changing his mind. But, we can certainly think of the growth of his mind, and he invites us to share with him the pains and pleasures of growing. If his mind changes, it changes only as the larva changes through chrysalis to perfect insect, and this change is the working out of an inner principle of development which was inherent from the very beginning. This seminal principle was nothing but a sense of the Whole as a living unity, rooted and grounded in God, and this enabled him to survey the whole human scene from an elevation above the reach of his contemporaries and to subject it to a critique more searching and comprehensive than any it could receive from other modern writers. Further, a study of the whole body of Eliot's writings reveals almost a palimpsest nature of his writings. Ideas, feelings, phrases, analogies and recurrent preoccupations are developed, refined, dropped and readopted in new forms in different areas of his interest over long periods of time.
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The mind of Eliot is a rich store-house of various religious, political and social thoughts, profoundly sensitive and perilously poised among the rude forces and chaotic flux of a mechanical age and the consequent rootlessness. With impeccable restraint, astonishing reconciliation of thought and feeling, and with a steady grasp of purpose, he courageously tried to wrestle with the main problems of his age not by logic but by flexibility, resilience, intuitive reasoning and poetic imagination. Eliot's view that 'a great poet, in writing himself, writes his time', and that the essential function of the poet is 'to express the greatest emotional intensity of his time, based on whatever his time happened to think', is a profound statement on the responsibilities of a poet -- a statement which revealingly reflects his own practice as a poet. Eliot, 'in writing himself', certainly wrote his time: he expressed the rich diversity and complex pattern of experience of his own age -- the age of Bergson, Freud, Jung, Frazer, anthropological studies, Marxism, psychology, and daring experiments in the various forms of art.

Eliot's response to the tormenting complexity of his age -- a response, which was continually modified and renewed as he suffered and matured silently, to the
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'immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history', is essentially moral and spiritual. His one purpose in life as a poet and man of letters is to find a way of controlling and ordering, of giving shape and significance to the chaotic fragmentation of modern life. This is because he is basically a poet and writer of the moral nature of man, or the spiritual history of man, and not of physical nature or of merely subjective life. He saw that the overriding problem, i.e., the alienation of the twentieth century man, which was the result of anarchic individualism and scientific regimentation, could be solved only at the religious level by referring to man's spiritual existence. Because the requisite wholeness of outlook can grow only out of religion which comprehends all aspects of life and effectively counteracts the futility and anarchy of contemporary history. Starting with a keen awareness of the problems posed by the humanists and by Bradley Eliot persistently sought for a solution to the dilemma arising out of those problems. He sought for some final assurance which will transcend humanistic dualism, and looked towards some kind of ontological monism. And this search for a solution of the problems in singleness and integration was, more than
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anything else, the urgent force behind Eliot’s creative impulse. Thus, the solution for all the problems confronting him had to be found in the realms of religion and art; and the distinctive quality of his art that makes him so powerful an influence in the modern world is the enactment of an attitude, the sustained enactment of the conditions of religious awareness. And, for him, religion was Christianity: he had to go back to the moral and spiritual wisdom of Christianity for the organisation of his life and art.

II

Eliot’s interaction with Christianity and the Christian tradition started quite early in his life. It has now become almost a commonplace to put Eliot in a line of disinherited Boston aristocrats whose familiar representatives include Henry Adams and Henry James. In *After Strange Gods* he presents himself as a typical New Englander, but this inheritance was reinforced and complicated by the position of the Eliot family in St. Louis in the later half of the nineteenth century. Eliot’s grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot, a Unitarian minister, who had left Boston in the early 1830s to establish himself
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in a new frontier town, played a central role in the
development of St. Louis and the state of Missouri. The
pioneering Unitarian minister's whole being, and with
it that of his family, was invested in the destiny of
the mid-western city. When the poet was born his
grandfather was dead, but the old man's influence on
Eliot could hardly be questioned. In fact, the Protestant-
ism that surrounded his infancy was, by all accounts,
remarkable for its practical and intellectual vigour.
But St. Louis Unitarianism marked both the starting point
and the point of departure for Eliot. The formation of
Eliot's basic social attitudes coincided with a period
of intense disillusionment with St. Louis culture and
tradition at a stage of progressive decline. He felt with
great immediacy and pain the thin emotional and moral
climate of New England Puritanism which prevented him
from having a direct and productive contact with a more
comprehensive experience of life.

Then, Eliot's academic programmes at Harvard, the
milieu in which and the influences under which he grew up
and matured as a poet and man of letters of the first
half of the twentieth century, one of the most agonizing
periods in the history of Western civilization, impelled
him towards a direction and a destiny quite different
from that followed by his American forefathers and his own
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contemporaries. Particularly, the interaction between Eliot and thinkers and writers like Babbitt, Royce, Bradley, Puline and Maurras, and their formative influence on him made Eliot yearn for a return to the world of experience, integration and fulfilment by way of religion, away from the isolation, fragmentation and incoherence which characterized the traditional American experience. This was Eliot's journey back home to the European tradition which, according to him, was built up on a solid infrastructure of the Christian tradition.

Eliot's redemptive journey to reality and integration was guided by a pervasive sense of tradition which has been quite engagingly defined in his manifesto-essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. The concept of tradition explained in this essay is ultimately found to be the Christian tradition with proper ramifications in the various fields of human activity. Other concepts like that of personality, impersonality, authority and historical consciousness have also been discussed in this essay, and all the discussions converge towards the definition of the central concept of tradition, specially in the field of literature. When this seminal concept ramifies in other fields the general direction of Eliot's thinking becomes clear in the sense that tradition was for him the grand European tradition based on a productive interaction of
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Christianity and the Graeco-Roman tradition of classical Europe.

As a critic and thinker Eliot wrote literary essays and lengthy articles and treatises on society, culture, politics, religion and even education. In this field he must take his place among the poet-critics like Dr. Johnson, Coleridge and Matthew Arnold. It has to be noted that his re-examination of English literature has had deep repercussions and has led to the creation of a new artistic sensibility. His reassessments of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, of the metaphysical poets, of the great Romantics, of Dante and of Milton, have thrown new light on literature and stimulated new interest for revaluation of these authors. His view of the creative process, his insistence on a unified sensibility, on a sense of tradition and history, and on impersonality, together with his great concern for the renewal of the language of poetry, have had a profound influence on modern literature. In all these writings he was motivated by an overriding concern for order. The function of criticism is, according to Eliot, the quest for order, which again looks forward to the problems of organisation, authority and tradition. Again, the Arnoldian notion that poetry and religion are interchangeable, and that poetry is, at bottom, a criticism of life were unacceptable
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to him. Eliot could not conceive of poetry or art or humanism as alternatives or substitutes for religion.

In the late thirties Eliot expressed himself more clearly on social and religious issues. Having blazed the trail towards anti-romantic and anti-individualistic tendencies under the influence of Babbitt, Maurras and Hulme, Eliot further went on to a radical disanagram of democracy and secularism. Starting with a scathing attack on liberalism in *After Strange Gods*, he published his Cambridge lectures collected as *The Idea of Christian Society*, as a reaction against what he felt to be a disintegrating society, and offered a positive scheme based on Christianity. Then, in his later work, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* he argued for a common culture shared organically by the whole people at different levels to be determined according to the degrees of consciousness. Eliot’s concept of culture is basically religious because, for him, the culture of people is ‘an incarnation of its religion’. Again, he was not rabidly political, but his Christianity was active and linked with political life, which, according to him, should be based on the right ethics. He was in favour of conservatism, aristocracy and royalism, and was opposed to anarchy, demagogy,
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tyranny and Communism, in so far as Communism ignored the inviolable rights and sacredness of human life and the importance of the life of the spirit. Along with this he disliked materialism, utilitarianism, pragmatism and scientific humanism. Again, education, which was one of his major preoccupations, was essentially a religious issue connected with the Christian doctrine of Man.

In his poems and plays Eliot starts with the conception of a world of formal moral and spiritual values, absolute and impersonal, and then raises the poetic and dramatic structures required for the artistic expression of those values. Behind and beyond the complex technique, the dazzling verbal organisations extending the mystery of language, and the complex pattern of images, metaphors, borrowed and adopted ideas and phrases, there is a sharp sense of awareness of a specific moral attitude and spiritual position. And this position is seen to be less obviously Christian in the early poems, but emerges more explicitly so in the later poems. The early satirical poems, which are Laforgian in technique and structure, deal with haunting metaphysical anxiety accompanied by an insistent yearning for some kind of ontological solution. They reflect directly Eliot's philosophical position outlined in his thesis on Bradley. According to J. Hillis
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Miller, who has convincingly analysed the relationship between Eliot's thesis and his earlier poetry, 'The pathos of the human condition is man's inescapable exclusion from absolute experience ... and this pathos ... is the chief subject matter of Eliot's early poetry'. (1) But the moral and spiritual position, which hints at the possibilities of removing the excruciating sense of anxiety, uncertainty and conflict, becomes more and more explicit through 'Gerontion', The Waste Land and 'The Hollow Men', till in Ash Wednesday the Church becomes the only mode and means for redemption. As a matter of fact Eliot moves away from the Bradleyan position which entangled his thought up to about 1923 to the position of a Christian for whom God has established and confirmed the objectivity of time and space. The result is that in Four Quartets, apart from references to Atonement and divine intercession, the idea of the Incarnation and human fulfilment dominates the whole poem and history becomes a pattern recognised by God, but in which man lives.

Then, in the plays Eliot starts with the treatment, in a new art-form, of the same problems depicted in his earlier poems and presents a full dramatic treatment of

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Christian martyrdom in Murder in the Cathedral. In the plays set in the contemporary settings the problem of the spiritual elect and that of the two Christian paths of salvation have been dramatically delineated. From the murky, morbid and spiritually suffocating world of The Family Reunion the playwright moves into a new world of lightness, gaity, sympathy, tolerance and new humanity depicted in the later plays, and deals with the same spiritual problems. The process of humanization in Eliot's drama, which is concerned with the central problem of the quest for spiritual reality, is completed in The Elder Statesman, which is a drama of confession and absolution, of love through human understanding rather than love through the rejection of created things. At last Eliot has become successful in giving human love its proper place in the divine scheme of things.

Eliot's art begins and ends in recognizing and affirming the moral and spiritual principles enshrined in Christianity. The ideals have been explained in the prose writings and the actuality of the moral and spiritual wisdom of Christianity has been enacted in the poems and plays. It is, indeed, a fact that the ultimate transcendence of religious experience is present in Eliot's drama and poetry, and that a gap between them and the prose writings remains.
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III

In the gradual unfolding of Christian awareness when each new gesture becomes more explicit and expansive than the earlier one, Eliot always points to the same sense of reality in human life based on the idea of Original sin and the accompanying moral and spiritual struggle depending on spiritual sanctions. This sense of reality in the human condition is the subject of his artistic vision, and this has also shaped the hierarchy of his critical values. Eliot's art explores this vision of reality and establishes its validity through the suggestion and affirmation of the existence of a superhuman pattern behind the human. In all his works he shows his concern for the conditions of the Christian mind, and looks for an organisation in art, which will be an emanation of the Christian organisation of life, in which 'the natural end of man -- virtue and well-being in community' is acknowledged for all, and 'the supernatural end -- beatitude' is recognised and aspired after by those who have the eyes to see it.

From the very beginning Eliot tried to reach out to an experience of totality and completeness. This quest for reality and a persistent longing for metaphysical
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certitude drew him on to try to express the ineffable. It pointed him to final causes, to hidden meanings and correspondences. Bradley, Bergson, the Symbolists, the mystics, primitive myths and rituals helped Eliot in his exploration of the universe of values and in his attempts to chart out the unmeasurable world. All the efforts culminate in religious understanding and religious illumination. And Eliot as a religious man was endowed with a unified vision of the world, and was fully aware that men, irrespective of the place and the time they lived in, had common aspirations and longings. His profound studies of Eastern and Western systems of philosophy made him aware of their mutual complementariness, and of the need for some kind of interpenetration or synthesis of the two. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the two creeds and it is summed up in Eliot's striking line from *Four Quartets*: 'Only through time time is conquered'.

In Hinduism time and the body do not matter because they are obstacles; what matters is the escape for ever from the wheel of time. But, in Christianity, time and eternity are not dissociated; they are inextricably linked. The notion of the presence of the permanent in the temporary, the timeless in time, is ultimately found at the
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religious level, and this notion of time is essentially Christian. Christian thought from Duns Scotus and Aquinas to Kierkegaard and T.S. Eliot, is more or less existential. Everything takes place in time: sin and redemption through the birth and death of God take place in time. The Christian stresses the reality of the instant of grace and illumination in time, which places man in the context of Eternity. The fundamental relationship between time and eternity is embodied in the Incarnation, the union of God with man at a given moment in time, during which the contingent becomes permanent and history is eternalized.

The main purpose behind Eliot's life-long preoccupation with the problem of time is to find solution for the problem of living here and now -- at a time when history seems to be an immense panorama of futility. What constitutes the identity in time of a human being or a civilization? Has life any meaning or purpose in time or outside of it? All these questions add up to one, which is the major question haunting all the poetry and drama of Eliot: Is time redeemable? There must be something beyond it from which time starts and towards which it moves, or in relation to which it has meaning. It is his quest for the means of redeeming time that led Eliot to the Christian tradition. The journey from barren time, i.e., time without faith and therefore separated from transcendance, to time redeemed by the Hanged Man, is, to put it briefly, the
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orduous journey of Eliot's soul in his poetry and drama.

Now, in the light of the discussions and analyses given in the preceding chapters, it is necessary to evaluate and define Eliot's brand of Christianity. Christian ideas and categories are quite ubiquitous in his writings, though the emphasis on particular dogmas and aspects of the faith is very personal. At the early stage of his life and career he probably disbelieved in the 'substantial unity of the soul' or in any kind of universal soul, which might have caused deep metaphysical anxiety and fear. But, gradually he came to recognise that in Christianity belief in a particular soul could be reconciled with belief in a superhuman soul. Even then, the early pessimism and the despondency engendered by the difficulties of embracing a positive faith was supplemented by the Catholic philosophy of disillusion, which is connected with the idea of sin. Eliot accepted the doctrine of original sin, which is the heritage of mankind, because he was deeply depressed by the spectacle of futility, and because it, perhaps, lent a semi-mythical support to Eliot's opposition to the romantic-humanistic view of life.

The questions of the freedom of will, Fate and pre-destination are always entangled with the idea of sin.
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But, Eliot's position seems to be rather that there is a superhuman plan or design -- a divine plan for every individual life, which we can conform to or reject at our own risk. Regarding salvation, Eliot stresses the importance and efficacy of human effort to work it out, but the effort ultimately becomes more and more like an effort of expiation and an attempt at mystical penetration of reality. The effort and action will involve suffering which has always been given a significant place in the scheme of things by the Church. 'Right action', which may be an internal as well an external affair, is chiefly a matter of making 'perfect the will' of God. It demands renunciation, which is complete and effective only when the ego is annihilated. This is a paradox at the heart of Christianity, and Lord Claverton of The Elder Statesman has discovered it at last: '... in becoming no one I begin to live'.

Renunciation and askesis are important aspects of Christianity which appealed to Eliot, who felt strongly the need for spiritual discipline to redeem human failure in the modern world. Eliot himself wrote about this very clearly in 1930 in an essay dealing with the problems of humanism and religion:
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I found no discipline in humanism; only a little intellectual discipline from a little study of philosophy. But the difficult discipline is the discipline and training of emotion; this the modern world has great need of; so great a need that hardly understands what the word means; and this I have found is only attainable through dogmatic religion. ... But it takes perhaps a lifetime merely to realise that men like the forest sages, and the desert sages, and finally the Victorines and John of the Cross and (in his fashion) Ignatius really mean what they say. Only those have the right to talk of discipline who have looked into the Abyss.

('Religion without Humanism', in Humanism in America, ed. N. Foerster, 1930, p. 110)

The motives of renunciation and asceticism have clearly been embodied in the later poems and dramas of Eliot. Renunciation, action and suffering constitute the purpose of penance, which is 'lifetime's death in life' of 'The Dry Salvages', and this resembles almost a purgatory on the earth. Purgatory is one of the central motifs of Eliot's poetry. He sees man hovering over a twilight between damnation and salvation because of his inability to cross 'With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom'. The only way to avoid damnation is not dissembling but purgation of sin:

The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre --
To be redeemed from fire by fire.
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And this is, more or less, Dante's vision of Purgatory which appealed to Eliot. Purgatory as a state of life on this earth means a self-imposed disciple, which involves the categories of action and suffering, in 'death's dream kingdom'. This may also be partly identified with the life of askesis followed by the saint or the penitent, who accepts purgatorial suffering as a means of bringing spiritual health. In this connection it should be remembered that Eliot believes, with the Catholic Church, that human beings may work out their own salvation through their actions. But this belief is countered and complemented by another belief which calls for man's passive submission to the will of God. Eliot has successfully joined the two outwardly contradictory beliefs in striking phrases like, 'We must be still and still moving', of 'East Coker', or in the two means of liberation suggested by Agatha in The Family Reunion: the 'present movement of pointed light' and the whole life's march 'across a whole Tibet of broken stones'. It is through such artistic synthesis that Eliot is able to come close to a full understanding of the purpose of purgation and askesis, which is nothing but the final union of the human spirit with God. Christian mystics like St. John of the Cross, who influenced Eliot very deeply,
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the doctrine of the 'dark night of the soul' only to achieve this final consummation.

To a Christian, a divine revelation is an act of grace, and Eliot as a Christian accepts this all the time. Particularly, grace manifest in the Incarnation is one of the most important Christian experiences frequently mentioned directly or indirectly in his works. Generally Catholics emphasize the Incarnation and Protestants stress the Atonement. But, Eliot as a Catholic does not exclude Atonement from his faith and from his writings, but he certainly emphasizes the Incarnation. This is, perhaps, because the Incarnation attaches great value to human nature and human life, and because it is more in consonant with Eliot's speculations about the nature of reality and about time than Atonement is. Again, among the Catholic sacraments, Penance and Holy Communion or Eucharist are very frequently alluded to in his works. One of the most important things that Eliot sought in the Church is communion. The life of the Church is, for him, the solution of the problem of isolation or alienation in modern life. Because in the Church, tradition is alive and dynamically functional, and this can make Communion actual. Here, through the negation of the self, one's isolation is broken, and even Communion with God is made possible. But, Eliot does not
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see God incarnating in historical time, and his supreme visions of beatitude are different from that of Dante and other medieval mystics to whom it seemed that Christ and the Virgin appeared in visible shapes. It may be because of a different cultural and religious environment that Eliot, as a poet of our time, experienced the Absolute as a timeless entity or Epiphany which cannot be depicted in concrete shapes. It may also be that he has followed the more intellectual approach of Thomas Aquinas Whom Eliot regarded 'as great and lovely as Dante himself'. (2)

Again, an important aspect of Eliot's Christianity is his development, as shown in his writings, from individualism to a search for social unity and acceptance of social obligations by way of Christianity. He envisages Christianity as a religion of spiritual discipline which will produce social benefits through the individuals living an organic life of disciplined devotion. Again, the concept of individualism is not the same for the Catholics and the Protestants. Though Catholicism recommends the life of the Church and the community, it also stresses the need and the right of the individual to perfect his own soul, even if it entails physical isolation from society and devotion to a life of contemplation.

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Protestantism rejects such religious cloistering and stresses the need and the right of the individual to try to understand the word of God in his own way. Regarding the Christian Eliot it is, now, a commonplace to state that he takes the Catholic position, but it is difficult to characterise his poetry as purely Catholic poetry. It is simply that he stresses the more Catholic aspects of Christianity like the dogma of Incarnation, the perfection of will and religious discipline, penance, confession, purgation and communal worship. But the more Protestant aspects of Christianity like the dogma of Atonement, the need for intensity of faith and the efficacy of private worship are also present in the texture of his thought and art. For example, Eliot's emotional attitudes and his emphasis on the idea of Original Sin will hardly receive a central place in his thought and art without his Puritan heritage in New England.

Further, it has to be kept in mind that Eliot's Christianity is inextricably entwined with his philosophical position. We have observed him tracing his mother's descent from Schleirmacher by way of Channing, Emerson and Herbert Spencer. But the
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philosophy of Schleimacher was a meeting-ground of Absolute Idealism and Unitarianism, just as Harvard University in the last century was haunted by these two schools of thought. Again, at one period of his life he seemed to have preferred a dualistic view of life. We have seen him defending Paul Elmer More's Christian dualism in the Times Literary Supplement of February 21, 1929. There is again Bradleyan ideas profoundly influencing his thought and his art. But, starting with his Unitarian heritage, the dualistic view of life engendered by the ideas of man like Babbitt and P.E. More, and the concept of appearance and reality, Eliot always longed for some kind of ontological monism, or an overriding sense of a higher purpose -- may be at the religious level -- in which good and evil, appearance and reality, and other contradictions can be subsumed and resolved. However, 'No cheap and easy Monism', as Bradley put it, 'can stand before an enquiry into logic, but the desire to comprehend our Universe as the double outgrowth and revelation of single principle, depends on a genuine impulse of philosophy'. (3) This 'single principle' is of paramount importance in Eliot's work.

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It is possible that his art became for him the means of giving expression to his vision of ontological monism -- a vision of harmony and peace in which futility and meaninglessness is transformed into significance and fruitfulness, and all the confusion, duality and contradictions are resolved and integrated.

From the moment Eliot reached the solid ground of faith, he worked hard to adapt Christianity to the needs of his time. Christianity provided a unifying principle to his creative vision, and the jumble of contradictions and irrelevances of life took shape as a complete system in which even sin was vasa 'behovery'. In fact, Christianity became a principle of organisation in the life and art of T.S. Eliot. In a slightly different perspective he may be regarded as a Christian realist looking upon the individual as part of a society having a past, a present and a future, which is informed with God's purpose. What was important to Eliot was not the individual in isolation, but the individual in relation to other individuals as part of a living community with a spiritual centre. The life of the Church -- the livingness of enacted self-discovery was the solution of the problem of isolation in life because in the Church tradition was a living thing which could make communion
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actual by breaking down spiritual barriers between individuals through the annihilation of the ego and enrichment of the self. In the Indian philosophy which Eliot studied seriously, the ego is a product of an automatic natural energy called karma, which expresses as desire and involves one in suffering. Over against this is a comprehensive consciousness of a self beyond mind and body, a self which is not a separate ego but identical with a total self called Atman. The separate self suffering from a mixture of memory and desire can, however, join the total self, and the end of such a process, summed up in the phrase, 'Thou art That', is an objectivity which leads to self-identification, a paradoxical union not unlike the poetic synthesis of Eliot.

IV

But, what is important about Eliot is not merely that he was a Christian poet and thinker : what is important about him is that he was the most significant poet and man of letters of our time. Throughout his artistic life he constantly strove to enact a universal
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order of imagination and spirit where both life and art find significance and linkEdness in a comprehensive and organic whole. His artistic genius was permeated by his deeply held religious visions, which he transmuted into beautiful and significant works of art. Speaking generally, Eliot's art is difficult and exacting in nature. It is impossible not to see in it a sustained process of self-scrutiny and self-exploration. It is also impossible not to feel that, at any moment, the poetical problem is also a personal and at the same time a universal spiritual problem—a problem in the attainment of a difficult, and often cruelly painful and arduous sincerity. Dr. F.R. Leavis has very revealingly said, 'the poetry itself is an effort at solving diverse impulsion, recognitions and needs'. (4)

For Eliot art becomes ultimately some kind of spiritual exercise. Modern man is the protagonist of Eliot's poetry and drama. Everything is alien to him, and he stands alone in the centre of creation, haunted by a nostalgia for spiritual order. And the Christian is a man separated from God and from himself—the divided or fragmented being who seeks unity. Eliot aims

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at bringing him back to the original cosmic or spiritual rhythm or order. He feels that at the bottom or foundation of life there must be a deeply held faith based on a Pascalian sense of doubt and despair, on a sense of boredom, horror and glory of life, and on an awareness of the terror of infinite spaces to be faced only with some guiding hand or light. Eliot shares such a religious attitude towards life with Baudelaire and Dostoevsky, and in our time, with Simone Weil. Without such an attitude or belief life is a waste land, and Eliot who lived and suffered in this barren cactus land because of metaphysical anxiety, despair and an overwhelming sense of insecurity and meaninglessness, heard the call and joined the Church of England. It is relevant to observe here that, in taking this important step in life, he chose neither the church of his Puritan ancestors nor that of his hero and guide, Dante, but the Anglican High Church, which represents the middle way, the Greek way or the way of the Buddha.

Eliot's work is a work of integration both artistic and existential. His writings, starting from the early poems to Four Quartets and the plays, make a gradual and constantly deeper integration according to
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the categories of the Christian tradition, a double process of assimilation and re-creation, in which the aesthetic element cannot be separated from the spiritual element. Starting from the depths of despair and anxiety depicted in the early poems, through 'Gerontion', The Waste Land and 'The Hollow Men', Eliot's questing soul ascends gradually to the heights and the blessed regions of Ash Wednesday. The music of the verse transmits the exaltation and the ineffable joy of the liberated spirit. And from this stage onwards, through 'Marina', 'A Song of Simeon' and 'Journey of the Magi', the questing soul moves to the visions of timelessness of The Four Quartets, to the point where

Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement.

This timelessness is reached through love, which transcends everything; and in this vision of timelessness, which fuses Plato's love with the eternal rose of Dante's Heaven, there is room even for the wisdom of
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Krishna of the Bhagavad Gita, regarded by Eliot as
the greatest poem in the world next to that of Dante:

I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant —
Among other things — or one way of putting the
same thing.

...  ***  ...  ***  ...  ***  ...
And do not think of the fruit of action.
Fare forward.

O voyagers, O seamen,
You who come to part, and you whose bodies
will suffer the trial and judgement of the sea,
Or whatever event, this is your real destination.
So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna
On the field of battle.

Not fare well,
But fare forward, voyagers.