Chapter – 2
Eliot’s Socio-Cultural Views in Relation to His Belief
Chapter – 2

Eliot’s Socio-Cultural Views in Relation to His Belief

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Eliot’s later career evinces a progressive expansion and humanization of his religious interests. In fact, his religious commitment was closely associated with his social interest. When he eventually turned to the Church of England in 1927, his decision was misunderstood and misinterpreted by some critics who thought that Eliot did so in order to acquire social and political power in the country. But the fact is that Eliot was not motivated by any mercenary self-interest. Quite early in his career, he had understood the socio-cultural importance of religion as a binding force in society. “Undoubtedly, he was interested in the fate of his soul, but he was equally concerned about the fate of a society moving inexorably toward thoroughgoing secularism and materialism which accompanies it.”

Eliot was of the conviction that the Church would provide him with the cultural and intellectual framework for the rest of his life without bringing any radical change in his thinking about society, culture, tradition and literature. It has to be particularly borne in mind that it was the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, the involved union of matter and spirit, body and soul, as embodied by Christ, which best explains the standpoint of Eliot. His views regarding tradition, culture, politics, society, education and humanism are all coloured by this peculiar standpoint. A brief discussion of these views would further clarify the perspective from which his plays are to be examined in the present study.

Eliot’s concept of tradition, formulated in his seminal critical essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, implies an organic relationship and mutual interaction between past and present. According to Eliot, the modern technological advancement

and the increasing comfort of living should not be mistaken for the moral or intellectual improvement of human beings. He believed that modernity had ruptured its connection to a more vital past and was consequently impoverished. In fact, Eliot conceived of history not as continuous progress but as something characterized by ruptures and retrogression. Thus after periods of seeming progress, history goes into reverse and moves in retrogressive ways. Such notions of Eliot complicated his sense of the past, especially in the context of tradition. Eliot's idea of tradition, as propounded in the above mentioned essay, is strangely unprogressive.

Defining the sense of tradition, Eliot says that it involves a historical sense, which is a sense "not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence". That is why Homer is supposed to be as much contemporary in the present as Elton John. Eliot's idea that a new work of art has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order, departs radically from the Romantic notion that it is the duty of an artist to create the absolutely unique and original work. He points out that every artist finds himself or herself in some relation to those who have gone before. As such, there is a mutual give and take between the past and the present. The past influences the present and is itself influenced by the latter. Once a person has read the first line of The Waste Land, he cannot read the opening lines of Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales in the same way again. Tradition, thus, is not a chronological succession; it is always complete in itself. The new work alters all the other works in the set of existing "monuments", As a matter of fact, what Eliot actually means by tradition in the literary context, is not mere conformity to the past but the use of it for the formation and restraint of the individual talent. For him, tradition constitutes an external authority which requires submission on the part of the individual writer. It is significant to note that this concept of tradition acquires a religious complexion after

Eliot’s conversion. In *After Strange Gods* (1993), Eliot describes tradition as “a way of feeling and acting which characterizes a group throughout generations”.\(^3\) Now tradition becomes a metaphor signifying the outer authority of Church. “Tradition by itself is not enough; it must be perpetually criticized and brought up to date under the supervision of what I call orthodoxy”.\(^4\) Obviously, Eliot’s ‘orthodoxy’ means Christian orthodoxy. It is interesting to note that in both the contexts—literary and religious—Eliot takes exception to originality. In the literary context, originality means that the writer has no points of contact with his predecessors, and in the religious context, it points to the attempt on the part of a writer to evolve his own philosophy and thus try to act like a Messiah. In Eliot’s later years, we find an assimilation of the religious tradition into the literary tradition, with the result that “a writer is truly traditional only if he discovers a literary tradition for himself as well as draws on Christian orthodoxy”.\(^5\) When we look at Eliot’s plays, we find that in them Eliot appears traditional in both the senses of the term. He assimilates the entire tradition of European drama into the design of his plays, and at the same time, also draws on Christian orthodoxy. In fact, he restores to drama its roots, and displays in his own plays the much-required sense “of the timeless and of the temporal together”\(^6\) -a sense which alone makes a writer traditional.

Eliot attached great importance to culture. He was well aware of the fact that an individual is shaped by the culture into which he is born. He was against the modern view that the prime object of life is to realize one’s uniqueness. According to him,

---

4-Ibid., p.62.
what makes life worth living is man’s conformity to a vital traditional culture. Such a culture encompasses not only the formal arts but also the popular arts including music, house-design, and cooking. Eliot’s idea of culture is to be found mainly in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, but even before the publication of this work we can find his views regarding culture woven into the thematic pattern of his poems and prose works. However, it is in the *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* that we find a clear picture of Eliot’s idea of culture in relation to religion and society. Here he maintains that “no culture has appeared or developed except together with religion”. It is to be noted that Eliot’s idea of culture differs from that of Arnold, who considered culture as something more comprehensive than religion. Eliot believes that “religion just because it comprehends everything, cannot be compared with anything”. He says that though culture and religion are integral to each other, it is the latter which is virtually the basis of the former:

> any religion, while it lasts, and on its own level, gives an apparent meaning to life, provides the framework for a culture, and protects the mass of humanity from boredom and despair.

Thus, in Eliot’s thinking, the primary emphasis is on religion, without which no culture can either come into being or maintain itself. However, Eliot looked upon culture as a way of life, and his plea for the maintenance of culture was a plea for the strengthening of a society’s established way of life.

Eliot’s thinking about politics is also strongly conditioned by his religious point of view. His being “royalist in politics” is inseparable from, and consequent upon, his being “anglo-catholic” in religion. His idea of kingship is derived from the idea of the

---

7-*Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, London: Faber, 1948, p.15.
8-*To Criticise the Critic and other Writing*, p.115.
9-*Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, p.134.
ultimate kingship of Christ. He believes that a king has "not merely a civil but a religious obligation toward his people". In his essay "Catholicism and International Order", he observes:

we feel convinced that our spiritual faith should give us some guidance in temporal matters; that if it does not, the fault is our own; that morality rests upon religious sanction, and that the social organization of the world rest upon moral sanction, that we can only judge of temporal values in the light of eternal values.

In the final number of the Criterion, Eliot openly admitted that: "For myself, a right political philosophy came more and more to imply a right theology-and right economics to depend upon right ethics."

Eliot's reflections upon society, and its relationship with religion, are to be found in His The Idea of a Christian Society (1939). In this book, Eliot attacks liberalism, and puts forward his own idea of a new and better social order:

The only possibility of control and balance is a religious control and balance; the only helpful course for a society which would thrive and continue its creative activity in the arts of civilization, is to become Christian. That prospect involves, at least, discipline, inconvenience, and discomfort: but here as hereafter the alternative to hell is purgatory.

12-Ibid. p.325.
However, Eliot is quick to point out that Christian organization of society is not the same thing as a society consisting exclusively of devout Christians:

It would be a society in which the natural end of man—virtue and well-being in community—is acknowledged for all, and the supernatural end—beatitude—for those who have the eyes to see it.\textsuperscript{14}

In fact, the great question before Eliot was that of “the validity of a civilization”\textsuperscript{15}. Like many other thinking persons, he was deeply shaken by the terrible events of September, 1938. He tells that he was overcome by “a feeling of humiliation, which seemed to demand an act of personal contrition, of humility, repentance, and amendment; what had happened was something in which one was deeply implicated and responsible.”\textsuperscript{16} Hence, in the Notes to the book, he writes: “the notion of communal responsibility, of the responsibility of every individual for the sins of the society to which he belongs, is one that needs to be more fully apprehended.”\textsuperscript{17}

Obviously, Eliot has a Christian attitude to, and understanding of, the meaning and end of man’s existence. He relates the existential problems of man to Christian values with a view to restoring the wholesome vision to the confused humanity of today. “We need to know”, he writes, “how to see the world as the Christian fathers saw it; and the purpose of resascending to origins is that we should be able to return, with greater spiritual knowledge, to our own situation. We need to recover the sense of the religious fear, so that it may be overcome by religious hope.”\textsuperscript{18} One can easily

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p.34.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.64.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.73.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p.62.
understand why Eliot constantly stresses the need for turning to the central affirmations and insights of the Christian faith so as to discover in them new spiritual energies to regenerate and vitalize our sick society.

Eliot had a clear cut idea of social structure which he favoured. He did not like classless society. He pleaded for the existence of a functional social elite which could provide the right kind of guidance for society. He did not favour authoritarianism but he pleaded for a traditionally hierarchical community in which distinctions of rank did not cause envy or rebellion but provided occasions for recognizing their function in making and maintaining social stability. An aristocracy required the presence of those who could work the land such as peasantry or yeoman farmers. The presence of intellectual elite, such as clergymen, teachers, and poets, was also necessary as they were able to sustain values and belief which could save people from the modern malady of anomic. Such a community, according to Eliot, needed a single faith, racial homogeneity, and a common language. From these elements a common culture could emerge that would help to position social and cultural identities. Eliot believed that industrialism was a curse and that a return to the land would be the best antidote to urbanization and liberalism, the set of ideas that have created crisis of identities.

Eliot was of the conviction that the church lay at the heart of a civilized society. Without it society would fail and succumb to the onslaughts of communism and fascism. That is why he pointed out that society should be organized around the institutions of faith rather than the institutions of secular power. His chief concern was how to preserve those Western traditions that embodied the core values of western civilization, particularly in the face of the second World War.

Eliot’s view of education seems to be just a part of his professed scheme to fight against the evil of secularism. In “Modern Education and the Classics” (1932), he clearly states: “As the world at large becomes more completely secularized, the need becomes more urgent that professedly Christian people should have a Christian education, which should be an education both for this world and for the life of prayer
in this world”. He is of the conviction that unless “we can get complete agreement about religious truth...we must not expect to be able to agree upon an ideal system of education which can be put into practice”.

Evidently, Eliot’s view of life and things, particularly after his conversion, is governed by his religious belief. But this belief, it must be said, does not impel him towards a merely dogmatic theological position. Rather it leads him to discover points of harmony between religious belief and secular social concerns. His turning to the field of drama, as mentioned earlier, is a strong testimony to this fact. John D. Margolis rightly remarks that Eliot’s conversion to stage is “a direct consequence” of his religious conversion. The learned critic maintains that Eliot’s “Christianity inspired in him a social— one might even say missionary—concern that made him impatient with his limited social impact as a writer of difficult, learned poetry.” In his introduction to his mother’s work Savonarola: A Dramatic Poem (1926), Eliot writes that the “play, like a religious service, should be a stimulant to make life more tolerable and augment our ability to live”. The statement clearly indicates that Eliot is concerned with the betterment of this life rather than with escaping from it or denying its validity. In this regard, the following remark of Martin Scofield is worth-quoting:


20. To Criticise the Critic and Other Writings, p.116.


22. Ibid., p.184.

Eliot’s growing religious belief after 1925 became, it is clear, the major element in his experience and provided the central subject for his poetry— not as a matter for the exposition of dogmatic truths, but as a matter for exploration, and integration with the rest of experience.²⁴

In fact, the nature of Eliot’s conversion itself reveals that he never favoured extremist position. His choice of Anglo-Catholicism in preference to Roman Catholicism shows his liking for the middle way. He was drawn towards Anglican Church because in it, a believer would be guided by the authority of the Church’s formulated tradition, yet still be free to reject parts of that tradition which in conscience he could not accept. Roger Kojecsky observes that Eliot’s “choice of Anglo—rather than Roman—Catholicism can be harmonized with the view of religion he later elaborated as a social as much as purely spiritual tradition”²⁵. Roman Catholicism might have appeared to Eliot a religion without humanism, that is, without a critical spirit. John D. Margolis perceptively remarks that “though Eliot’s conversion led him to be increasingly critical of humanism, the very character of that conversion partook of its mediating spirit”²⁶. As a matter of fact, the determining vision that emerges in Eliot’s later career is one which is a product of his endeavour to harmonise his religious belief with the social ideals imbibed by him at an early stage. It is this vision that shapes and directs the thematic pattern of his plays, and establishes him as a dramatist of socio-religious concerns.

---


²⁵ T.S. Eliot’s Social Criticism, p.219.

Eliot is said to have possessed a Christian humanistic imagination. Hence it would be relevant to discuss his attitude to the philosophy of humanism in general and to that of New Humanism in particular. This discussion is intended to help us form a clear idea regarding Eliot’s attitude to religion and also to society. Generally speaking, humanism implies a philosophy the central concern of which is man and his happiness. It underlines the value and dignity of man, and considers him central to all values and schemes of things. All knowledge and human institutions are deemed useful only when they help man realize his potentialities. Most of the humanists hold that what matters for man is this earthly existence and not the unseen otherworld. So man’s attention ought to be centred here and now as against heaven or hell. This also implies a rejection of the supernatural.

Though the world “humanism” was first used in the early nineteenth century, the origin of the concept of humanism dates back to the pre-Socratic period in Europe. The dictum of Protagoras, the ancient Greek thinker, viz. “man is the measure of all things” may be said to have sown the seed of humanism. However, it was in the Renaissance that humanism emerged as a decisive force. The discovery of the ancient Greek authors awoke people to the fact that while medieval Europe had been preoccupied with Divinities, the ancient Greeks concerned themselves with the study and treatment of the life of man in society. Soon, humanism came to mean knowledge and practice of the philosophy of life found in these writers. However, it would be wrong to presume that the Renaissance humanism was a simple resumption of Greek and Roman culture. Jerrold E. Seigel rightly observes that the “humanists were seldom tempted to try to replace Christianity with classical culture, but they often thought they could purify and enhance the spiritual life of their time by an infusion of classical ideals within a basically Christian framework.”27 In fact, the Renaissance humanists

tried to assimilate in their Christian view of life all that was good in pagan thought, particularly the worldly wisdom and accomplishments.

The next important age with regard to humanism was the Victorian age during which Arnold emerged as a strong exponent of humanistic ideals. At a time when naturalism was in vogue, advocating that man was only a by-product of nature, having no connection with a religious or spiritual world beyond nature, Arnold came forth with the idea that culture was a perfection of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality.

The twentieth century has witnessed a variety of trends in humanism. Notable among them are Scientific, Realistic, Marxist, Liberal, Existential, Evolutionary, and New-humanistic humanisms. Since most of Eliot’s ideas regarding humanism are revealed through his involvement in the controversy around 1930 over the question of New Humanism both in America and England, we have to discuss this brand of humanism rather at a greater length.

The exponent of New Humanism, Irving Babbit, was a profound scholar and thinker. He was greatly influenced by the teachings of Buddha and Confucius. His philosophy of humanism seeks to avoid extremes of science and religion, and lays emphasis on the importance of human reason and freedom of will in artistic, ethical and intellectual considerations. Harmony and restraint resulting from the “inner check” of free and enlightened reason are the principal values of his philosophy. His disciple and upholder of New Humanism, Norman Foerster, describes humanism as “a working philosophy seeking to make a resolute distinction between man and nature and between man and the divine". He further points out that though humanism is never new, it must constantly confront new problems in time and place:

In the Renaissance, its great foe was medieval otherworldliness; today its great foe is thisworldliness, obsession with physical things and the instincts that bind us to the animal order—in a word, the many forms of naturalism that have all but destroyed humane insight, discipline, and elevation.\(^{29}\)

The implication is that just as the task of the Renaissance humanism was to return human thought and study to a median position from the medieval emphasis on otherworldly considerations, so the task of the twentieth century humanism is to return human thought to a median position, liberating it from the contemplation of the subhuman levels. This emphasis upon restraint and moderation as pointed out above, is at the heart of New Humanism. This fact is borne out by a statement of Irving Babbitt in which the humanists are described as "those, who, in any age, aim at proportionateness through a cultivation of the law of measure."\(^{30}\) Irving Babbitt, together with Paul Elmer More, another New Humanist, believes in the concept of dualism, according to which, the world exists simultaneously upon two levels—the level of the flesh and matter; and the level of the mind and spirit. The task of the humanist is to achieve the correct relationship between the two levels.

T.S. Eliot had a profound respect for Irving Babbitt and accepted most of the ideas of his teacher regarding the problems of human existence. He appreciated Babbitt’s stress on the need for tradition, and for discipline and restraint. He agreed to his teacher’s notion of the superiority of the Classical over the Romantic, and of the dualism of human existence. Like Babbitt, again, Eliot was of the view that true humanity depended upon some kind of ascetic programme; the submission of the

---

29. Ibid., p.x.

natural desire and will to something more complete and comprehensive, something above the natural.

Babbitt’s philosophy seeks to differentiate man from nature by endowing him with free will, which, in turn, enables man to transcend nature with the help of his moral perception or “inner check”. This faculty of inner check gives man some control over his actions, and endows him with a sense of moral responsibility. While the humanists like Paul Elmer More maintain that this distinctive faculty of “inner check” is derived from God, Babbitt does not accept this explanation, and affirms that this faculty exists in man himself and does not have any external source.

Babbitt’s refusal to accept the divine origin of the “inner check” is what Eliot considers the most dangerous aspect of his brand of humanism. Eliot wrote three essays namely “The Humanism of Irving Babbitt” (1928), “Second Thoughts about Humanism” (1929), and “Religion without Humanism” (1930), which offer a sort of reassessment of his teacher’s thought in the light of his new-found belief. These essays clearly indicate that Eliot’s disagreement with Babbitt centers on the religious question. However, Eliot’s approach in these essays is constructive, and he has rejected nothing that is positive in Babbitt’s teachings. As John D. Margolis observes. “By 1928 Eliot had not, of course, outgrown his conviction as to the importance of such humanist principles as order, discipline, and tradition. He had, however, come to feel that those values were, fundamentally, religious”31. Since Babbitt is unable to take the religious view, Eliot considers Babbitt’s humanism an “alternative” to religion. But, Eliot asks:

...is this alternative anymore than a substitute? And, if a substitute, does it not bear the same relation to religion that ‘humanitarianism’ bears to humanism?32

Eliot seeks to suggest that the difference between humanitarianism and humanism is only of one step; “the humanitarian has suppressed the properly human, and is left with the animal; the humanist has suppressed the divine, and is left with a human element which may quickly descend again to the animal from which he has sought to raise it”.33 The point of Eliot’s attack is that humanism without religion results in naturalism.

Eliot’s basic objection is that “the humanist makes use, in his separation of the ‘human’ from the ‘natural’, of that ‘supernatural’ which he denies” 34. Thus, John D. Margolis observes that the “New Humanists’ failure to distinguish clearly between the natural and the supernatural was central to Eliot’s objection to the movement”35. The idea of man’s independence from the supernatural, as put forward by Babbitt and other humanists, is repellent to Eliot because he is convinced that “if this ‘supernatural’ is suppressed...the dualism of man and nature collapses at once....if you remove from the word ‘human’ all that the belief in the supernatural has given to man, you can view him finally as no more than an extremely clever, adaptable, and mischievous little animal”36. Since Eliot is unable to accept such a debased view of

33. Ibid., p.473.
man, he finds Babbitt’s humanism incomplete and untenable.

It should be noted, however, that Eliot never intends or attempts to destroy the bases of humanism, nor does he deny its importance. He actually accepts humanism as ancillary to religion. He is particularly appreciative of the critical spirit of humanism. As he puts it, humanism asks the necessary question: “Is this particular philosophy or religion civilized or is it not?”37 Eliot is aware that humanism “makes for breadth, tolerance, equilibrium and sanity. It operates against fanaticism.”38 And, therefore, he welcomes its assistance as “a mediating and corrective ingredient in a positive civilization founded on definite belief.”39

It is this idea which is elaborated in Eliot’s final essay on the topic, “Religion without Humanism”, in which he calls attention to “the danger of the other extreme: the danger, a very real one, of religion without humanism”40. Eliot repeatedly points out that religious belief, when not subjected to humanistic criticism, is likely to degenerate into superstition. He says that the activities of philosophy, science and religion “depend upon humanism to preserve their sanity. Without it, religion tends to become either a sentimental tune, or an emotional debauch”41.

Eliot, then, clarifies the nature of the potential contribution of humanism, and says that instead of pretending to be a new sect, humanism should continue and

37. Ibid., p.489.
38. Ibid., p.488.
39. Ibid., p.489.
41. Ibid. p.111.
enlarge its old task, "labouring to reconcile and unite all parts into a whole". These remarks of Eliot show that he is at one with the humanists as to the need for such things as discipline, order, and control in life as well as literature; but he finds humanism incapable of fulfilling these things:

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;...and this I have found is only attainable through dogmatic religion.

Thus, with all the existential awareness of the plight of the modern man, Eliot believes that life can only be redeemed by recognizing the reality and supremacy of the supernatural, which implies, for him, God, Christianity, and Church. Discussing the contribution of Babbitt's humanism to the growth of Eliot's vision, John D. Margolis perceptively remarks: "Having been led by the humanism of Babbitt to a recognition of the need for these qualities (discipline, order, and control), and having failed to find them fully realized in any secular system, he had gone beyond humanism to what he held to be the true source of those values". The truth inherent in the remark of Margolis is borne out by the statement of Eliot himself, scattered in essays other than those discussed above. Thus, in his essay on Dante(1929), Eliot says that "the love of man and woman(or for that matter of man and man) is only explained and made reasonable by the higher love, or else is simply the coupling of animals". Again, in a 1941 essay entitled "The Christian Conception of Education", Eliot writes:

42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., p.110.
45. Selected Essays, p.274.
Humanism as a way of life, and in particular as a way of education, is not enough... Humanistic wisdom can provide a helpful, if in the end joyless nourishment for the intelligent educated individual...-but it cannot sustain an entire society.46

The foregoing discussion regarding humanism and Eliot's attitude to it leads us to conclude that while admitting the value of humanism and its ideals, Eliot has subjected them to his Christian faith. He shares the concerns of the New humanists as regards the contemporary human predicament and the course of modern civilization, but at the same time, he assimilates them into his religious viewpoint. He is unable to see the salvation of humanity only in the cultivation and practice of the faculty of "inner check". He rather affirms the validity of religious and spiritual values which alone, according to him, can revitalize and guide the bewildered humanity of today.

Though what Eliot says about the nature, function and contribution of humanism is generally viewed in the context of the contemporary humanistic movement, he himself has left us in no doubt as to his attitude to the entire tradition of humanism. In fact, he preferred to accept the traditional use and implication of the word 'humanism', according to which personality is regarded as the source of good, and life as the measure of values. In an unpublished letter to the editor of the Bookman, Eliot is reported to have written in 1930:

I do certainly associate the contemporary use of the word 'humanism' with that of T. E. Hulme. Hulme's use of the term is traditional and just; and if our new humanists mean something

entirely different then they should call it by some other name.\textsuperscript{47}

It is clear from the remark that Eliot's view of humanism in general is very nearly the same as his view of the New humanism. He is of the conviction that humanism is valuable in its own place; but it is auxiliary to, and incomplete without, religion. At the same time, he also feels that religion too needs the critical and corrective discipline of humanism to preserve its sanity and humility. In this way, he tries to reconcile the values of religion with those of humanism.

Eliot's endeavours to integrate religious belief and social humanistic vision, the natural and the supernatural, are the distinguishing feature of his later works, particularly his plays. As stated above, his humanistic vision is a composite product of the ideals cherished by the New humanists as well as the ideals associated with traditional humanism. As such, his plays reflect the principles such as dualism of human existence, freedom of will, and sense of moral responsibility, and, side by side, they also reflect the fundamental social concern, viz. the study of the life of man in society. In fact, Eliot's subject of study in his plays is man and his psychological, social and moral problems. He is primarily interested in man and his manifold concerns. This is borne out by the nature of the recurring themes of his plays-search for identity, the need for honesty in human relations, understanding between husband and wife, relationship between parents and children, the need for discarding social masks, acceptance of one's past, and so on. A man interested in understanding and portraying the life of man in society is a thorough humanist, though his guiding principle is his religious faith. Eliot's method of relating the human psychology with affirmations

\textsuperscript{47} Cited in Roger Kojecky, \textit{T.S.Eliot's Social Criticism}, p.75.
affirmations of religious belief in his plays tends to establish him as a dramatist of religio-social vision.

It is interesting to note that Eliot's works appear, upon a close examination, to form an ascending-descending curve in terms of his religio-social vision. In his poetry, he rises from secular to religious order, whereas in his plays, the curve is descending in so far as he moves from religious to secular social concerns, to interest in man and his psychological maladies. Thus, while his poetry up to "Burnt Norton" represents the exploration and discovery of religious belief, his plays embody an application of that belief to the problems of the modern man. Joseph Chiary rightly observes: "From the moment Eliot reached the solid ground of his faith, no writer did more than he for the adaptation of Christianity to the needs of our time." 48. It is this adaptation of Christianity to the needs of our times that Eliot's plays aim at, as he tries in them to integrate religion and society.

Eliot's first full-length play, Murder in the Cathedral, is about Christian martyrdom. It is mainly concerned with assertions of religious belief. But it also evinces a well-marked social vision, as it seeks to underline the impact of the martyrdom of Thomas on the lives of the women of Canterbury, who typify the common humanity. In the same way, Harry, in The Family Reunion, discovers in the course of the play that his trouble is not psychological but spiritual. Though he sets out on the path of purgation and illumination all alone in the end, it is implied that his following that path will be the saving of his family too, and, by implication, of the entire human family. The Cocktail Party centres on the theme of human relationships, particularly love-relationships, in the modern society. The sacrifice of Celia is

presented so as to lead the unawakened and ordinary personages like Edward and Lavinia to a new perception of the meaning of life. In *The Confidential Clerk*, Eliot devotes as much attention to the problem of the relationship between parents and children as to the divine orientation of Colby, the protagonist. The playwright is now much more concerned with the redemption of time than with the need for transcending it. What is important to note in the context of this play is that religious belief is more fully integrated into the social vision than it is in the earlier plays. Eliot's last play, *The Elder Statesman*, is his most human play, which embodies the understanding on the part of the dramatist that the ordinary is extraordinary enough. In this play, human love receives such a treatment that it becomes the earthly reflection of divine love and thus a positive value. David Ward has made a very perceptive remark in connection with the progressively increasing human interest of Eliot's plays:

The humanizing of Eliot's drama began with a gesture in *The Family Reunion*: Downing, the faithful servant, the ordinary man, is able to see the benevolence of the Eumenides long before Harry. In *The Cocktail Party*, Celia's history is not central to the play, which is much more concerned with the adaptation of the mediocre Edward and Lavinia to the problems of life. *The Confidential Clerk* goes a stage further, and is concerned with problems of self-deceit and illusion, with understanding and love, much more than spiritual heroism. *The Elder Statesman* is the conclusion of the process; there is no suggestion of any of the characters proceeding to an extraordinary spiritual destiny; the end of the play is quiet and peaceful atonement for a life of error. It is a drama of confession and absolution *in extremis*, of love through human understanding rather than love through self-destruction;...