# *T. S. Eliot and the Crisis of the Modern*

*James W. Tuttleton*

*The foundation of the modern consciousness is this, that the individual man takes his stand apart and alone, without the support of any authority.*

—John Middleton Murry

"MODERNITY" AND "MODERNISM" are of course ambiguous and highly charged terms which have had a variety of meanings in recent religious, literary, and critical thought. To define them in full would constitute a valuable chapter in the lexicon of contemporary discourse. That indispensable project, however, is beyond the scope of the present paper. But perhaps one step may be taken in that direction by calling attention to the exceptional sense of the modern felt by some early twentieth-century writers who had abandoned the Christian past and begun a journey into the future virtually dissociated from the historic religious and moral tradition.

Naturally, the most acute and intelligent participants in the modernist era, those with the most penetrating grasp of the problematic of religious and spiritual values in their time, are most worth studying. And of these Thomas Stearns Eliot is exemplary, for he was prepared to pursue with exceptional rigor the implication of the modern which his culture had presented to him. How this poet—perhaps the greatest in English in this century—responded to modernist claims about religion and the moral life is an issue that illuminates the crisis of certitude in an exceptionally striking way. Let us approach Eliot, however, by way of a brief propaedeutic on the theme of naturalism and supernaturalism in the modern consciousness. Such a detour will be helpful in defining the religious and ethical aspect of the crisis to which Eliot felt obliged to respond. What was the crisis of the modern, then, so far as the natural and supernatural were concerned?

## *I*

IF WE CONTEMPLATE the generation that preceded Eliot's (he was born in 1888), it will be clear that the triumphs of deterministic science had already begun the process of subverting the authority of sacred scripture and of the Christian Church, which had for millennia organized and directed the lives of generations in the West. Modern astronomy had propounded a deterministic theory of the universe, according to which the cosmos was, in the words of Laplace, a *mécanique céleste* already doomed to entropic extinction in the cooling process of the sun. In biology Huxley and Darwin had demoted man from his privileged estate—as the special creation of God's divine plenitude—to that of an evolutionary product descended from furry arboreal quadrupeds; his social organization—including his religious rites and ethical codes—contained merely naturalistic transformations of the gregarious instinct. The impersonal mechanisms of natural selection were said to have no discernible teleology.

In social thought Comte elaborated a historical theory of the inevitable development of society from the theological to the metaphysical to the positivist era in which a "religion of humanity" would replace the supernatural orthodoxies of the past.

And in economics Marx propounded a theory of determinism in capital and leaped from it to the inevitable conflict of the classes and the triumph of the proletariat. Contemporaneously with Eliot, Freud deduced from the facts of mental life a determinism of the unconscious mind which in effect subverted claims for the reflective life found in philosophy and theology.

In one way or another all the major texts of Victorian literature had grappled with this new deterministic naturalism. Struggling against a growing subversion of religious and spiritual authority, the work of Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, and the rest conveys an anguished struggle to hold on to ethical and social values which had formerly been securely grounded in revelation. Arnold's *Literature and Dogma* (1873) was an exemplary text in trying to salvage something of sacred writing—its ethical imperatives and aesthetic character—for an age of growing unbelief. But subsequent history made plain what the perceptive could already foresee: that the grounds for ethics had been eroded as religious orthodoxy shuddered under the destructive weight of deterministic naturalism. By 1929 in *The Modern Temper,* Joseph Wood Krutch acknowledged rather ruefully that the collapse of ethical certitude had been fully accomplished:

> Historical criticism having destroyed what used to be called by people of learning and intelligence "Christian Evidences," and biology having shown how unlikely it is that man is the recipient of any transcendental knowledge, there remains no foundation in authority for ideas of right and wrong; and, if, on the other hand, we turn to the traditions of the human race anthropology is ready to prove that no consistent human tradition has ever existed.[1]

How did the younger generation, the generation of the modernists, receive the pessimistic conclusions that were widely drawn from the Victorian study of the phenomena of science? "A Free Man's Worship" (1918), by Bertrand Russell, Eliot's tutor in philosophy at Harvard, suggests one answer:

> That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feelings, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation be safely built.[2]

"Worship," of course, in the context of these ideas, seems a tonal paradox, and we should note that, if Russell calls himself a "free man," the ascribed freedom is essentially a freedom from bondage to the superstitious myths of the Christian past. A short time after the turn of the century, then, for most intellectuals who regarded themselves as *avant-garde,* the struggle with doubt appeared to be over. The sign of the modern was to be declared in the acceptance of the description of the world offered by science in its several deterministic branches.

In Anglo-American artistic life, *les jeunes* (as, without irony, they called themselves) embraced this scientism of the time, dismissed religious thought as bankrupt superstition, and championed, in one way or another, a new non-supernaturalist humanism founded on atheism or agnosticism. Dreiser explained away the causes of human behavior in the operation of "bodily chemisms," O'Neill in deterministic psychological drives like the Oedipal complex, Jeffers in Nietzschean inhumanism; Stevens aestheticized morality as another fiction of the imagination; and Hemingway asserted an underlying *nada* or existential nothingness. Pound

proclaimed the superiority of paganism; and Fitzgerald dismissed the Church as a mere "traditionary bulwark of morals" no longer necessary for the self-sufficient individual. In view of the wide currency of such ideas, it is no wonder that our chief historian of American writing, Robert E. Spiller, has concluded in *The Cycle of American Literature* that the salient characteristic of the modern in letters is the triumph of naturalism: "The philosophy of naturalism, which science had nurtured, could now become the central drive of a literary movement which had begun in the nineties, had been stalled for more than a decade by the forces of convention and reaction, and now [in the 1920s] had broken out into the open."[3]

Among intellectuals, Irving Babbitt, Eliot's teacher at Harvard; Norman Foerster, an American disciple; and John Middleton Murry may perhaps be taken as the clearest expositors of an *avant-garde* intellectual position meant to be progressive, scientifically informed, and modernist. Babbitt's New Humanism is articulated in a half dozen books and a cluster of seminal essays which have been usefully re-edited by George A. Panichas in *Irving Babbitt: Representative Writings* (1981).[4] While defending the idea of human freedom against the assaults of scientific determinism, Babbitt saw himself and his colleagues as "men of good will for whom dogmatic and revealed religion has become impossible."[5] Thus rejecting the supernatural, Babbitt proposed an ethical *modus vivendi* modelled on "the wisdom of the ages, a central core of normal human experience," which found its highest expression in the thought and conduct of Buddha, Christ, Confucius, and Aristotle.[6] The individual who submits himself to such a wisdom does "inner obeisance to something higher than his ordinary self, whether he calls this something God, or, like the man of the Far East, calls it his higher Self, or simply the Law."[7] As a substitute for "religious obligation" and "religious restraint," Babbitt posited the "inner check," a willed negation from extremes of desire; this "superrational and transcendent element" would alone, perhaps, "be capable of supplying a sufficient counterpoise to the various 'lusts' . . . that result from the free unfolding of man's natural will."[8] "To be modern," he remarked, "has meant practically to be increasingly positive and critical, to refuse to receive anything on an authority 'anterior, exterior, and superior' to the individual."[9]

With this position Foerster fully agreed in "Humanism and Religion": "The final effort of the modern or critical spirit must be to render clear and commanding an inner authority competent to take the place of outer authority."[10] And Murry concurred in arguing that since "the vital motion of religion" had become "petrified into dogmas and ceremonies," belief in the doctrines of the Church constituted an archaism of mind. For him "the foundation of the modern consciousness is this, that the individual man takes his stand apart and alone, without the support of any authority"; it is "primarily a consciousness of rebellion." Further: "The modern consciousness begins historically with the repudiation of organized Christianity. . . ." Murry embraced naturalism, rejected classical standards in literature, and identified the modern with a humanist romanticism—"a movement of the soul which begins with the assertion of the I AM against all external spiritual authority, which proceeds from this condition of rebellion and isolation to a new life-adjustment, and goes on towards the ultimate recognition of a new principle of authority in and through the deeper knowledge of the self. Briefly, it may be called the rediscovery of the greater I AM through the lesser I AM."[11]

The origin, cause, and nature of this alienated soul and the ground of this faculty of intuition were left rather cloudy. But Babbitt, Foerster, and Murry felt confident that the principle of authority for conduct could be elicited from an intuitive knowledge of the self, as well as from the cultural tradition, and that the institution of the Christian Church was no longer necessary. In fact, Babbitt asserted rather

strenuously toward the end of his life that something like the experience of Christian grace could be attained—had been attained in Buddhism—by effort of the unaided human will.

## *II*

THE MODERNIST TONE of the time, then accented liberation from bondage to the historical tradition of Christianity in the West, the superior world view of scientifically informed humanism (as embodied in the secular culture), the metaphysical adequacy of the self, and the necessity of standing alone in reaction to ecclesiastical authority. This was the intellectual milieu in which Eliot found himself after World War I. His theological background, a bland, rational New England Unitarianism, ought to have prepared him to receive these assertions of the modern with equanimity. After all, as Henry Adams had observed in his *Education,* the superiority of Unitarianism was assumed by its clergy to lie in the fact that "they insisted on no doctrine" and taught only "the means of leading a virtuous, useful, unselfish life, which they held to be sufficient for salvation."[12] Is it, then, paradoxical that Eliot felt himself to have been brought up "outside the Christian Fold"?[13] Already outside—reared, that is, in an amorphous humanism that claimed the status of a religion—Eliot was therefore unable to share in the culminating alienation of his contemporaries who had rejected the orthodox Christian world view and who were announcing, in effect, that *chacun fait son salut comme il peut.* The fact is that Eliot began with the skepticism at which they arrived; as he moved toward Christian faith, he and his contemporaries passed each other going in opposite directions.

Perhaps more acutely than most of his contemporaries, Eliot foresaw the implications of the new atheism, the new agnosticism, and the New Humanism because it had been his point of departure. Russell and his contemporaries had concluded with bravado that a philosophy of living, even a religion for the soul's habitation, could successfully be grounded on the world view of naturalistic humanism. But to Eliot, who began his inquiries without the support of an institutional, supernatural religion, that willed assurance, founded on a subjectivist egology, came increasingly to sound like whistling in the dark.

Setting aside the academic requirements of his studies, the largely self-directed education of T. S. Eliot was substantially intended to discover a stable ground for being and a guide for conduct that transcend the ethical relativism espoused by modern anthropologists. Deep immersion in the major philosophic texts from Plato onward—culminating in his dissertation on the philosophy of F. H. Bradley, and a serious exploration of the sacred texts of the Oriental tradition—evidences of which we find in the poems throughout the whole of his career, did not satisfy his quest for a spiritual authority equal to the task of disciplining the disorderly mind and the unruly passions.

That discovery was announced in 1927 in his conversion to Anglicanism in religion, royalism in politics, and classicism in literature. This spiritual event, it seems to me, points to the very crisis of modernity: that the mind could not discover in reason or history a ground for conduct or provide a life philosophy adequate to the spiritual needs of the reflective self in the twentieth century. The three elements in this conversion are intimately interrelated and finally inseparable. But for the purposes of this discussion I wish to concentrate on his conversion to Anglicanism as an expression of his dissatisfaction with the fruits of secular and humanist thought, particularly in relation to the essential nature of man and the foundation of morals.

## *III*

THE CENTRAL DEFECT of secular humanistic philosophy, Eliot held, was its optimistic view of human nature. Given the secular view, it might seem perfectly natural to make man the measure of all things, including the ethical norms that

govern personal and social obligation. But "the real trouble, of course," as Eliot observed in "Second Thoughts about Humanism," "is one of simple human fallibility."[14] What experience universally revealed—most recently in the carnage of World War I—is that human nature is radically disfigured by that moral imperfection—account for it however one might—that theologians have attributed to Original Sin. Citing T. E. Hulme's *Speculations,* Eliot concurred in the belief that humanism merged into romanticism in the belief that "man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can so rearrange society by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will get progress." But for Hulme, as for Eliot, "Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him."[15] But the humanist refused " 'to believe any longer in the radical imperfection of either man or Nature,' " whereas for Hulme and Eliot, "there is an *absolute* to which Man can *never* attain." For the modern humanist, as for the romantic, "the problem of evil disappears, the conception of sin disappears." But if man is "essentially limited and imperfect," if he is "endowed with Original Sin" and can "never himself *be* perfect" because he "is essentially bad," then "he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline—ethical and political. Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary."[16]

During the period from 1910 to 1920, Eliot's philosophical studies and fugitive poems—"Silence" (1910), "Easter: Sensations of April" (1910), "The Love Song of St. Sebastian" (ca. 1911), "Entretien dans un parc" (1911), "Prufrock's Pervigilium" (ca. 1912) and "The Death of St. Narcissus" (ca. 1914)—increasingly reflect his deep and anguished struggle with ultimate questions: the nature of God as the Absolute, the war between the body and the soul, the longing for the experience of the divine, the aspiration to sainthood, even, paradoxically, the ecstasies of martyrdom as a redemption from the spiritual torments of life in a godless and a desacralized universe. On the philosophical plane, he was also preoccupied with the question of whether morals can be grounded on human thought alone or whether divine revelation, in the form of the Scripture and the institution of the Christian Church, is not the indispensable foundation.

The *Ethical Studies* of F. H. Bradley, on whose work Eliot wrote his doctoral dissertation in 1916, was a central document in the resolution of this question. In Eliot's view, Bradley's inquiry into ethics was a "thoroughly empirical" effort "only to determine how much of morality could be founded securely without entering into the religious questions at all." However deeply into ethics a rational inquiry might be pursued, in the final analysis the separation of ethics and religion could not be sustained. Bradley, Eliot remarks,

> . . . perceived the contiguity and continuity of the various provinces of thought. "Reflection on morality," he says, "leads us beyond it. It leads us, in short, to see the necessity of a religious point of view." Morality and religion are not the same thing, but they cannot beyond a certain point be treated separately. A system of ethics, if thorough, is explicitly or implicitly a system of theology; and to attempt to erect a complete theory of ethics without a religion is none the less to adopt some particular attitude towards religion.[17]

Nearly ten years before his conversion, in 1917, Eliot's analysis of an implicit system of theology necessary to ground an adequate conception of ethics led him to observe, in a review of Coffey's *Epistemology,* that "The non-catholic reader will be unable to avoid a tribute of grave respect to the only Church which can even pretend to maintain a philosophy of its own, a philosophy, as we are increasingly aware, which is succeeding in establishing a claim to be taken quite seriously. . . ."[18] (The claim of the Church had of course already been well established; Eliot, however, reared "outside the Christian Fold," was just beginning to

become aware of the depth of its ethical and philosophical thought. But he could not take the decisive step of conversion until all of the intellectual ramifications of the problem could be resolved.)

The central bone of contention between naturalistic humanists and the Church was the origin of ethical imperatives. Eliot observed that

> Man is man because he can recognize supernatural realities, not because he can invent them. Either everything in man can be traced as a development from below, or something must come from above. There is no avoiding that dilemma: you must be either a naturalist or a supernaturalist. 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."[19]

Opening up the pages of the *Criterion*, which he had begun to edit in the 1920s, to issues associated with the New Humanism of Babbitt and his colleagues, Eliot and his contributors brought the crisis of modernity to a head. How—remarks Allen Tate in "The Fallacy of Humanism"—the Humanists "intend to validate their values they do not say; they simply urge them"; this led him to argue that "Humanism is not enough," for "if the values for which the Humanist pleads are to be made rational, even intelligible, the prior condition of an objective religion is necessary." "Religion," he concludes, "is the sole technique for the validating of values."[20] Likewise, G. K. Chesterton remarks in "Is Humanism a Religion?" that the New Humanism is "living on its Catholic capital. It is using, and using up, the truths that remain to it out of the old treasury of Christendom; including, of course, many truths known to pagan antiquity but crystallized in Christendom."[21]

Eliot similarly saw the New Humanism as an extension of the muddled thinking of *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), where Arnold's palaver about "the will of God" did not disguise that he had posited the ground of morals in the notion of "our best self, or right reason, to which we want to give authority"; this "best self," to Eliot, looked "very much like Matthew Arnold slightly disguised."[22] "In Eliot's view, Arnold never got outside himself, outside an anthropocentric humanism, whereas Eliot sought to arrive "at something outside of ourselves, which may provisionally be called truth."[23] This truth outside ourselves Eliot defined in a letter to Bonamy Dobrée in 1927 as "the conception of an immutable object or Reality the knowledge of which shall be the final object of the will." This Reality posited by Eliot is equivalent to the notion of the Christian God. He went on to say:

> There can be no permanent reality if there is no permanent truth. I am of course quite ready to admit that human apprehension of truth varies, changes and perhaps develops, but that is a property of human imperfection rather than of truth. You cannot conceive of truth at all, the word has no meaning, except by conceiving of it as something permanent. And that is really assumed even by those who deny it. For you cannot even say it changes except in reference to something which does not change; the idea of change is impossible without the idea of permanence.[24]

As Lewis Freed has observed, Arnold's ethical position was for Eliot an "irrational moral prejudice" in that it was "divorced from thought in any of its systematic forms: philosophical, theological, or scientific."[25] Likewise flawed was Babbitt's position, which evolved from Arnold's conception of the adequacy of culture as a ground for ethics: far from reflecting the mind of Aristotle, Christ, Buddha, and Confucius, Babbitt's Humanism was, to Eliot's mind, "alarmingly like very liberal Protestant theology of the nineteenth century: it is, in fact, a product—a by-product—of Protestant theology in its last agonies."[26] If one interrogates the ground of Humanist thought, say in Norman Foerster's *American Criticism*, Eliot asks, "Where do all these morals come from?" The moral ground of modernist humanism is so elusive that Eliot was led to remark that "modernism . . . is a mental blight which can afflict the whole of the in-

telligence of the time" because it substitutes amorphous feeling states for solidly grounded principles: "Where you find clear thinking, you usually find that the thinker is either a Christian (if he is a European) or an atheist; where you find muddy thinking you usually find that the thinker is something between the two, and such a person is in essentials a Modernist."[27]

Both the Christian thinker and the atheist thinker reasoned from theologically or philosophically founded principles, but for Eliot most "modernists," or Humanists, consulted only their own subjectivity, which they identified with the Inner Voice. "Why have principles," Eliot asked, "when one has the inner voice?"[28] Foerster's Humanism was in fact "too ethical to be true," and Eliot remarked that

> One advantage of an orthodox religion, to my mind, is that it puts morals in their proper place. . . . I can understand, though I do not approve, the naturalistic systems of morals founded upon biology and analytical psychology (what is valid in these consists largely of things that were always known); but I cannot understand a system of morals which seems to be founded on nothing but itself—which exists, I suspect, only by illicit relations with either psychology or religion or both, according to the bias of the mind of the individual humanist.[29]

As a "derivative of religion," the New Humanism would work "only for a short time in history, and only for a few highly cultivated persons like Mr. Babbitt—whose ancestral traditions, furthermore, are Christian, and who is, like many people, at the distance of a generation or so from definite Christian belief."[30]

## *IV*

THE REMARKABLE PUBLIC reaction in England and America to Eliot's acceptance of the Anglican faith is a vivid indication of how Eliot's critique of secular humanism had highlighted the crisis of the modern. For most of his *avant-garde* contemporaries, Eliot's conversion amounted to a betrayal of modernism itself. Krutch, for one, complained that Eliot and G. K. Chesterton had sought "refuge in Roman or Anglican Catholicism, whose dogmas, if accepted without argument, provide the basis [for ethics] which pure reason cannot discover."[31] That the inadequacy of reason to ground ethical thought might itself have led Eliot and Chesterton to reject the presumptions of modernism seems not to have occurred to Krutch. In an even more dismissive vein, the reviewer of *For Lancelot Andrewes* remarked that by "accepting a higher spiritual authority based not upon the deepest personal experience . . . , but upon the anterior and exterior authority of revealed religion, he has abdicated from his high position. Specifically he rejects modernism for medievalism."[32]

Some years later, in "Thoughts After Lambeth," Eliot was to reflect on this review as "a rather flattering obituary notice": "In words of great seriousness and manifest sincerity," the *TLS* reviewer "pointed out that I had suddenly arrested my progress—whither he had supposed me to be moving I do not know—and that to his distress I was unmistakably making off in the wrong direction. Somehow I had failed, and had admitted my failure; if not a lost leader, at least a lost sheep; what is more, I was a kind of traitor. . . ."[33] Privately acknowledging that "most critics appear to think that my catholicism is merely an escape or an evasion, certainly a defeat," Eliot told Paul Elmer More that he knew "the difficulty of a positive Christianity nowadays; and I can only say that the dangers pointed out, and my own weaknesses have been apparent to me long before my critics noticed them. But it [is] rather trying to be supposed to have settled oneself in an easy chair, when one has just begun a long journey afoot."[34]

The effect of this public debate about the radical inadequacy of the New Humanist ground for ethical belief was persuasive to Paul Elmer More, who privately observed to Percy Houston that "I agree quite heartily with T. S. Eliot in believing (a belief to which I have come slowly and almost reluctantly) that humanism without the divine is like a ship without a rudder."[35] In due course More

himself became a convert to Anglicanism, thereby providing for Eliot

> ... an auxiliary to my own progress of thought, which no English theologian at the time could have given me.... It was of the greatest importance ... to have at hand the work of a man [More] who had come by somewhat the same route, to almost the same conclusions, at almost the same time: with a maturity, a weight of scholarship, a discipline of thinking, which I did not and never shall, possess.[36]

Eliot perfectly understood that, to his contemporaries, his conversion had the appearance of a "desperate belief." But deep immersion in skeptical thought in modern philosophy, as well as in the texts of the New Humanists, had given him an unshakable conviction that "a Christian world-order, *the* Christian world-order, is ultimately the only one which, from any point of view, will work."[37] He accounted for the final emergence of his faith by a process of "rejection and elimination" very much like that experienced by the skeptic Pascal: "The Christian thinker" finds the world "inexplicable by any non-religious theory: among religions he finds Christianity, and Catholic Christianity, to account most satisfactorily for the world and especially for the moral world within; and thus, by what Newman calls 'powerful and concurrent' reasons, he finds himself inexorably committed to the dogma of the Incarnation."[38]

For Eliot, the Christian revelation in the Incarnation was "the only full revelation," and he described "the division between those who accept, and those who deny, Christian revelation ... to be the most profound division between human beings."[39] For those humanists who diagnosed his conversion as the swallowing of or pretense to belief in "incredible dogma" for the sake of "the luxury of Christian sentiments and the excitement of Christian ritual," Eliot decisively demurred: "For some the process is exactly opposite. Rational assent may arrive late, intellectual conviction may come slowly, but they come inevitably without violence to honesty and nature."[40]

Far from being a luxury, far from constituting a refuge from the ordinary problematics of the ethical life, religion for Eliot

> ... brought at least the perception of something above morals, and therefore extremely terrifying; it has brought me not happiness, but the sense of something above happiness and therefore more terrifying than ordinary pain and misery; the very dark night and the desert. To me, the phrase "to be damned for the glory of God" is sense and not paradox; I had far rather walk, as I do, in daily terror of eternity, than feel that this was only a children's game in which all the contestants would get equally worthless prizes in the end.

Religion, finally, gave him a hold on "the tip of the tail of something quite real, more real than morals, or than sweetness and light and culture."[41] That something he defined in "Religion and Literature" as "the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life. . . ."[42]

Although Eliot's conversion cannot be said to have profoundly affected the growing hegemony of secular modernism in the West, it had the effect of dramatically identifying the central inadequacy of a merely humanistic view of life. That the most brilliant poet and learned writer of his time should have submitted himself in utter humility to the spiritual authority of the Church—called anachronistic by his *avant-garde* contemporaries—highlights the crisis of modernity as perhaps no other event does in the life of a single artist or thinker of this century. Subsequent horrific events in our time—war, revolution, the Holocaust, and terrorism—make it impossible to argue convincingly for the optimistic humanist view that man is the adequate measure of things. Insofar as he thinks he is, everything indeed seems permitted, and human history dissolves into that "immense panorama of futility and anarchy"[43] described by *The Waste Land.* If, on the other hand, "a Church is to be judged" in part by "its intellectual fruits" and by its "monuments of artistic merit,"[44] Eliot's conversion refocuses our minds on what of value was lost in the emergence of a naturalistic view of life.

It reminds us of how the Christian Church has kindled the faith, thought, and imagination of Western artists and intellectuals. For Eliot's conversion to Christianity laid the groundwork for the composition of *The Idea of a Christian Society* (1939) and *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), works which—together with the majestic poems from *Ash Wednesday* through *Four Quartets*—are testaments to the inadequacy of modernism in satisfying the mind's need for a ground of truth and of ethical conduct transcending imperfect and transient human thought.

[1]Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Modern Temper* (New York, 1956), p. 9. [2]Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in *Mysticism and Logic* [1918] (New York, 1971), p. 41. [3]Robert E. Spiller, *The Cycle of American Literature* (New York, 1956), p. 159. [4]George A. Panichas, ed. *Irving Babbitt: Representative Writings* (Lincoln, Neb., 1981). [5]Irving Babbitt, *On Being Creative and Other Essays* (Boston, 1932), pp. xvii-xviii. As Thomas R. Nevin has shown in *Irving Babbitt: An Intellectual Study*, Babbitt held that though it was necessary to dispense with the absolutes founded in religion, "one may still retain standards" (Chapel Hill, 1984), p. 133. [6]Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Boston, 1924), p. 163. [7]Babbitt, *Literature and the American College* (Boston, 1908), pp. 60–61. [8]Babbitt, *On Being Creative and Other Essays*, p. 199. [9]Quoted by Eliot, "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt," *Selected Essays* (New York, 1964), p. 425. [10]"Humanism and Tradition," *Criterion*, 9 (1929), 31. [11]"Romanticism and Tradition," *Criterion*, 2 (1924), 276, 283, 288–89. [12]Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston, 1961), p. 34. [13]Letter to Bertrand Russell (22 June 1927), Russell Archive, McMaster University; cited in Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* (New York, 1977), p. 12. [14]Eliot, "Second Thoughts About Humanism," *Selected Essays*, p. 433. [15]T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," in *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Herbert Read (London, 1924), p. 116. [16]Eliot, "Second Thoughts About Humanism," p. 437; Hulme, "Humanism and the Religious Attitude," *Speculations*, p. 47. [17]Eliot, "Francis Herbert Bradley," *Selected Essays*, p. 403. [18]Eliot, in a review of *Epistemology*, by P. Coffey, *New Statesman*, 29 December 1917, p. 312. [19]Eliot, "Second Thoughts About Humanism," p. 433. [20]Allen Tate, "The Fallacy of Humanism," *Criterion*, 8 (1929), 662, 678. [21]G.K. Chesterton, "Is Humanism a Religion?" *Criterion*, 8 (1929), 383. [22]Eliot, "Francis Herbert Bradley," p. 401. [23]Eliot, "The Function of Criticism," *Selected Essays*, p. 22. [24]Quoted in Frank Kermode, ed., *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (New York, 1975), p. 24, n10. [25]Lewis Freed, *T. S. Eliot: The Critic as Philosopher* (West Lafayette, Ind., 1979), pp. 3–4. [26]Eliot, "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt," p. 422. [27]Eliot, "Commentary," *Criterion*, 8 (1928), 188. [28]Eliot, "The Function of Criticism," p. 17. [29]Eliot, "Second Thoughts About Humanism," pp. 432–33. Despite their differences, Eliot held Babbitt in the highest esteem as one who had virtually shaped the direction of his thought by virtue of the provocations of his humanistic ethics. [30]Eliot, "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt," p. 420. [31]Krutch, p. 155. [32]"Mr. Eliot's New Essays," *TLS*, 6 December 1928, p. 953. [33]Eliot, "Thoughts After Lambeth," *Selected Essays*, p. 325. [34]Letter to Paul Elmer More of 3 August 1929; quoted in John D. Margolis, *T.S. Eliot's Intellectual Development, 1922–1939* (Chicago, 1972), p. 143. [35]Letter from Paul Elmer More to Percy H. Houston, 11 July 1928; in the Princeton Univ. Library; quoted in Margolis, pp. 140–41. [36]Eliot, "Paul Elmer More," *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, 5 February 1937, p. 373. [37]Eliot, "Catholicism and International Order," in *Essays Ancient and Modern* (New York, 1936), p. 117. [38]Eliot, "The *Pensées* of Pascal," *Selected Essays*, p. 360. [39]*Revelation*, ed. John Baillie and Hugh Martin (London, 1937), pp. 1–2. [40]Eliot, "Second Thoughts About Humanism," p. 438. [41]Letter from T.S. Eliot to Paul Elmer More, 2 June 1930, quoted in Margolis, p. 144. [42]Eliot, "Religion and Literature," *Selected Essays*, p. 352. [43]Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, p. 177. [44]Eliot, "Lancelot Andrewes," *Selected Essays*, p. 300.