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Edited by Byron Adams: Edward Elgar and His World

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Measure of a Man:

Catechizing Elgar's Catholic Avatars

CHARLES EDWARD MCGUIRE

In Memoriam (I): The Pan-Christian Avatar, or “What Is the Meaning of Prayers for the Dead?”

In the back of the nave of Worcester Cathedral is the Elgar Window, a memorial to the composer Edward Elgar. This window is an adornment the cathedral holds with pride: besides the requisite postcards, pamphlets, and Pitkin guides for sale in the gift shop, signs pointing the way to the window are attached to the walls of the cathedral itself, greeting visitors as they enter from the north door. The window, designed by Archibald Nicholson, was the result of an appeal by Ivor Atkins (friend of Elgar's and longtime organist of Worcester Cathedral) and the dean of the cathedral, William Moore-Ede. Its construction proceeded rapidly in the ancient building, and the dedication occurred on September 3, 1935 at the Worcester meeting of the Three Choirs Festival, a little over a year after Elgar's death. As was fitting for a fallen cultural hero, Viscount Cobham, then Lord Lieutenant of Worcester, unveiled the memorial.¹

The Elgar window is an idealized representation of several scenes from *The Dream of Gerontius*. It is constructed of three panels, capped by six smaller arched windows (figure 1). In the center, Gerontius appears in two manifestations. In the lowest panel, he is the sick, dying old man from Part I of the oratorio. His attendants pray for him, underscored by the text “Go forth upon thy journey, Christian Soul” (Part I, rehearsal number 69). This prayer sends the viewer into the second segment of the window above, where Gerontius, transformed into the Soul, is borne aloft toward the throne of Christ by an obviously masculine Angel.² Surrounding the throne, right, left, and above, are other angels hovering around a rainbow; they sing a hymn (from Part II of *Gerontius*, rehearsal number 60), “Praise to the

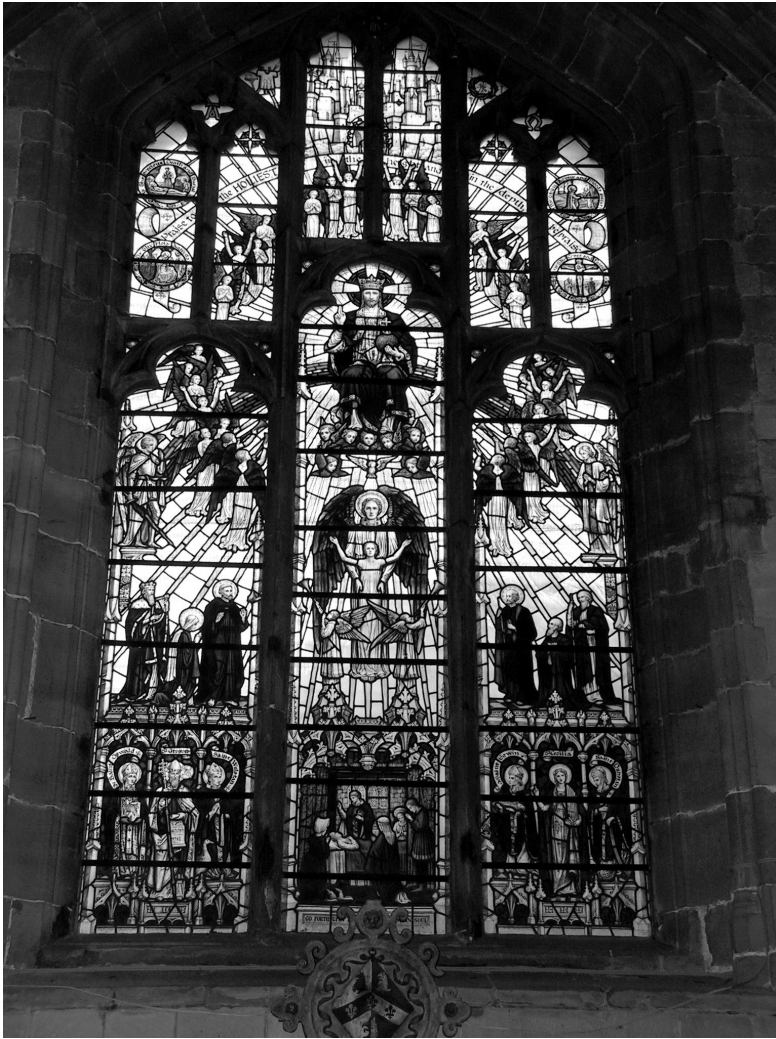


Figure 1. The Elgar Window, Worcester Cathedral.

Holiest in the height, and in the depths be praise.” The window’s side panels feature holy figures, including local saints with nationalistic connotations—Dunstan, Oswald, and Wulstan—the musical figures Saint Cecilia and Gregory the Great, plus a number of the persons mentioned in the Part I prayers of *Gerontius*, which are labeled for those not familiar with popular hagiographic iconography.³ Close by the window is a more specific memorial plaque (figure 2), with the inscription “Edward Elgar O.M.,

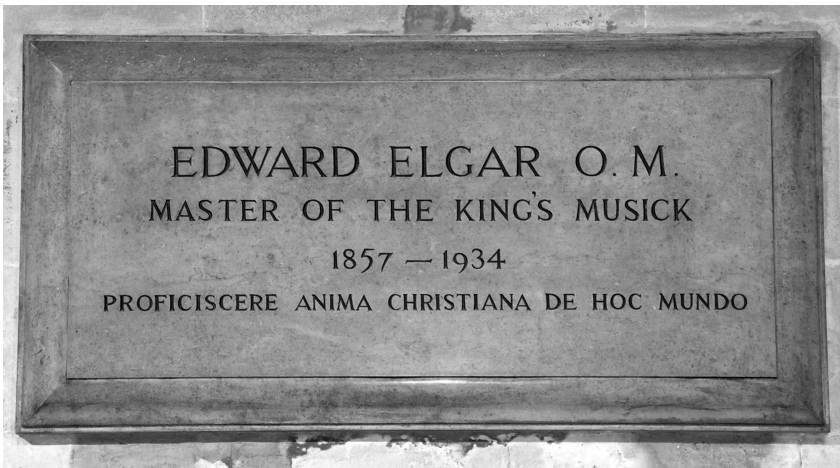


Figure 2. Elgar memorial plaque, Worcester Cathedral.

Master of the King's Musick, 1857–1934, Proficiscere Anima Christiana De Hoc Mundo.” This Latin phrase, drawn from the liturgy, is sung by the Priest at the end of the first part of *Gerontius* (Part I, rehearsal number 68).

For the window's dedication, “Nimrod” from the Variations on an Original Theme, op. 36 (the *Enigma* Variations) followed Ludwig van Beethoven's *Drei Equale* for trombones. An afternoon performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* (in the time slot traditionally reserved at the Three Choirs Festival for Felix Mendelssohn's *Elijah*) completed the day's events.⁴

That these memorials were appropriate to Elgar is not in question. After all, at the time of his death on February 23, 1934, he was Britain's “official composer,” a status publicly acknowledged by his being made a baronet and awarded the Order of Merit, and in his position as Master of the King's Musick. Even if his music was not at the time as revolutionary or relevant as that of a younger generation of British composers, the program to proclaim him as “essentially English” or even “quintessentially English”—and therefore a totem of nationalism—had already begun.⁵ Worcester was proud of its native son, and there was no place more appropriate to begin memorializing him than within the walls of its most famous building.

Yet both Elgar's memorial window and plaque would not have been deemed appropriate in Worcester Cathedral at the time of the premiere of *Gerontius* in 1900. After the English Reformation, the cathedral had become an Anglican building. Elgar at his own death was at least nominally a practicing Catholic and the texts chosen for both memorials were from “The Dream of Gerontius,” a poem by the notorious nineteenth-

century Catholic convert, Cardinal John Henry Newman. Although Elgar softened some of the doctrinal edges of the poem, his oratorio remained a celebration of mystical, even fervent Catholicism—so much so that its performance was banned for nearly a decade in Gloucester Cathedral as “inappropriate,” and performances in the Anglican cathedrals at Worcester and Hereford took place only after large segments of the text were bowdlerized, removing the more objectionable Catholic elements.⁶ In the space of three decades, then, Elgar's religion was deemphasized and defused enough by his fame that he could be seen not as Catholic but as a sort of pan-Christian.

The risk of such an interpretation of Elgar is that it both oversimplifies and undervalues his Catholic influences. To have been memorialized so easily within a church of a different faith calls into question the strength and importance of his faith. One conclusion could be that Elgar's faith was weak. Through numerous anecdotal examples, Jerrold Northrop Moore offers this opinion in his biography *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life*. Discussing the confirmation of Elgar's daughter, Carice, Moore presents Elgar as having a lack of regard for both religion and his daughter. Moore states that neither Edward nor Alice Elgar attended Carice's confirmation—the sacrament in which a Catholic publicly proclaims his or her religion. Instead, Moore maintains, the Elgars deputized Rosa Burley—not herself a Catholic—to take care of the effort on June 11, 1903, while Elgar stayed at home to work on *The Apostles*.⁷ The anecdote is an interesting one, and it does a great deal to solidify Moore's case; however, it is not true. Carice Elgar was confirmed on May 19, 1907 (Pentecost), long after Moore's date of 1903, as is made clear in Carice's letter of 24 May 1907 to the Leicester family and by the confirmation register at Belmont Abbey (figure 3).⁸ Rosa Burley had nothing to do with the matter. May Grafton, Elgar's niece who *was* a Catholic, acted as Carice's sponsor, and both Edward and Alice Elgar attended, along with Alfred Kalisch and Julia “Pippa” Worthington; according to Alice's diary, they had tea with the bishop after the ceremony.⁹

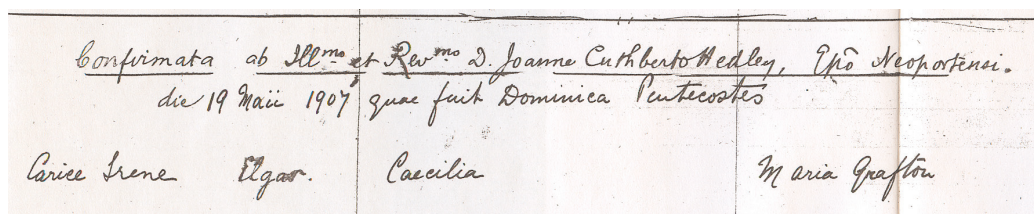


Figure 3. The confirmation register at Belmont Abbey.

Such anecdotes make for lasting impressions, however, and Moore and others use them continually to press an interpretation of Elgar's faith as weak. This has become the position of the popular Elgar press, maintained at the time of this writing on the Web site of the Elgar Society:

It is therefore perhaps inevitable that, when he produced *The Dream of Gerontius*, a setting of a poem by a Roman Catholic Cardinal which explores various tenets of the Catholic faith, people should jump to the conclusion that his Catholicism underlay his whole life. But his faith was never that strong.¹⁰

Faith, of course (or lack of it), is not the point. Even if Elgar's faith was "never that strong" the experiences he had as a Catholic youth and a composer rising to fame affected his compositional output, his relationships with others, and, in short, his whole life. No matter what the state of his faith, Elgar was—and remained—culturally Catholic. His early Catholic roots influenced his view of the world around him and conditioned Britain's view of him. The popular presentation of faith "never that strong" is an anachronism. It takes a view from the late twentieth century, when ritual secularism largely replaced religion in Great Britain, and ascribes it to an age when all Christian religions, including Elgar's Catholicism, were steeped in ritualistic practices that were both spiritual and cultural.

The popular negating of Elgar's Catholicism both at his death and today serves an obvious end: it makes Elgar's music safer, more palatable for a British audience. In essence, it creates an avatar for Elgar as the "essentially English composer" beyond the reach of any of the complicating factors of partisan religion. An avatar is the embodiment of an archetype. As a manifestation of a symbol or a motif, it is akin to both an interpretation (when applied to an individual from an external person or source) and a disguise (when applied to an individual by him- or herself). The avatar might be built from certain elements of the individual, refracted and interpreted to point toward a specific meaning, or it might be an honest representation of that individual. The Elgar memorialized in Worcester Cathedral in 1935 was interpreted by those around him as "Pan-Christian," just as many today interpret a lack of faith in Elgar as another avatar, "Weak Faith." It is not surprising that both academic and popular scholars would attempt to transform Elgar in such a way. Doing so sheds responsibility for some of the more problematic compositions Elgar created, including *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, and allows us to concentrate more on his secular instrumental compositions.¹¹ Creating a newer avatar for Elgar also seems wholly rational and reasonable, given that Elgar himself devised so many over the course

of his own life, from the itinerant Victorian-era inventor to the English gentleman, uninterested in music.¹² Contriving the Weak Faith and the Pan-Christian avatars satisfies the need to safely negate his Catholicism—what John Butt presciently called the “most ‘foreign’” aspect of Elgar’s background—while making the composer safely “English.”¹³ Further, this strategy serves to validate the often banal and even boorish statements Elgar made to interviewers, anecdote-publishing friends, and the like.

The purpose of this essay is to trace Elgar’s history of, and responses to, Catholicism against the backdrop of Catholic history in Great Britain throughout his life, from 1857 until 1934. This era witnessed profound changes for Catholicism in England, including an increased civil role for English Catholics within society as a whole, the growth to greater numbers through both conversion and Irish immigration, fundamental shifts in English-Catholic doctrine, and the struggles of Catholicism—like all religions of the time—against Liberalism and the application of scientific evidence and reasoning to questions of faith and perceived wisdom. Continual prejudice against Catholics and Catholicism was a simple fact within Elgar’s world, and the composer’s perception of this prejudice, along with such prejudice itself, colored his moods, reactions, and judgments.¹⁴ All of these elements were in flux throughout Elgar’s lifetime, and their impact on his beliefs and his approach to Catholic culture and English culture were profound. His beliefs were fluid throughout his life, and thus he created a set of multiple avatars to facilitate self-representation. Criticism and biography, in turn, have accepted the later, more cynical Weak Faith avatar at face value without questioning the truth of it or its earlier manifestations. Consequently, throughout this investigation, I will catechize Elgar’s Catholic avatars, those he created for himself and the varied embodiments he projected to his friends, family, and the public at three stages in his life.

The catechism is the Catholic profession of faith: a set of ritualistic questions posed to children during religion classes and sometimes within certain masses. When you “catechize” an individual, you probe his or her beliefs. Although the avatars to be examined include the posthumous one (Pan-Christian), already briefly examined, the bulk of this study will test the avatar present during Elgar’s youth, the “Faithful Child.” This will include a detailed examination of Catholic education during the era to locate the sources of Elgar’s childhood systems of belief. Shorter discussions of avatars present during his marriage and the early years of his success (the “Publicly Faithful” avatar), as well as from 1905 until his death (the “Weak Faith” avatar) will be examined to ascertain his relationship to the religion of his birth and how cultural Catholic elements affected his life and compositions. Catechizing these avatars will show that despite making light of

Catholicism and all religions throughout the last decades of his life, and even moving toward elements of a nature-loving secularism, Catholic tenets retained a strong hold upon Elgar.¹⁵

English Catholicism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,
or “How Do You Prove That the Pope or Bishop of Rome
Is the Successor of St. Peter?”

Elgar, who was born in 1857, was alive during one of the most tumultuous times in English Catholic history. Until 1791, Catholicism was outlawed as a religion in England, with exceptions made for embassy chapels of foreign governments; prior to this Catholics often had to worship in secret, and a permanent Catholic infrastructure in England was impossible. The right to worship freely was given in 1791 and basic rights of franchise and political office were granted to Catholics under the Emancipation Act of 1829.¹⁶ After centuries of prohibition, the reestablishment of the Catholic hierarchy in England in 1850 turned what had been a “mission church” in England into a permanent one, with dioceses, parishes, and typical church organizational structures, including the presence of permanent bishops and cardinals. This event, along with the 1869–1870 doctrines of papal infallibility (the belief that when the Pope spoke *ex cathedra* he could not err on matters of Church doctrine) and the immaculate conception (the belief that the Virgin Mary was born free of the taint of original sin) caused a great deal of Protestant protest and even riots against Catholics, and remained a constant problem within England until the mid-1870s.¹⁷ But such factors, though engaging and damaging, paled in comparison to the attention given to internal questions that arose within nineteenth-century English Catholicism. During Elgar’s life, the three major groups of English Catholics—the Old Catholics, including the family of his boyhood friend Hubert Leicester; the converts to Catholicism, including his first teacher, Caroline Walsh, and his own mother, Ann Elgar; and Irish-immigrant Catholics—held a constant, often rancorous conversation about the direction the English Catholic Church should take. Elgar experienced directly the first two of these three groups.

Each of these Catholic constituencies had different intellectual, political, and class bearings, and each has been studied in independent ways, often at odds with the other. Questions of doctrine and subsequent change have been examined but often focus solely on a perceived shift from the culture of Old English Catholicism to Ultramontaniam.¹⁸ The Old English Catholics were mapped as reserved, intellectually naive, inclined to yield

diplomatically to the Protestant majority in most things, and class-stratified. Most of the Old English Catholics were landed gentry, farmers, and agricultural laborers.¹⁹ Rather than agitating directly for political equality, as the immigrant Irish Catholics and converts did, the Old English Catholics were generally moderate if not conservative in their demands regarding political power and their place within English society. For much of the nineteenth century, the Old English Catholics had great difficulty responding to the needs of either the immigrant Irish or the converts because they had spent much of their lives isolated from other classes.²⁰ Even aspects of aesthetics differed. The Old English Catholics favored Gothic designs. Immigrant Irish Catholics in general thought such neo-Gothic buildings were too expensive, particularly in new urban Catholic enclaves. Catholic converts, who tended to be Ultramontanists, feared that a Catholic Gothic revival would lead English Catholics to emphasize a national character of Catholicism instead of an international one.²¹

Ultramontanism has been defined frequently over the last century. The term literally means “beyond the mountains” (similar to the Italian *oltre-montano*). From 1829 forward, English-language sources used it to mean strong support of papal authority. A mid-nineteenth-century definition comes close to the contemporary, almost militant spirit of the movement:

The essence, then, of Ultramontanism of English Catholics we take to be this; that by divine institution no branch of the Church has any rights whatsoever against the supreme authority of the Pope, and that the “national” principle of action, on which all human affairs must be conducted in the secular order, is totally inapplicable to the affairs of religion. As a practical corollary to this doctrine, we hold that it is of primary importance to the well-being of Catholicism in any country that no hindrance whatsoever should exist between the See of Rome and the clergy and laity of that country, or to the direct action of the Pope upon his spiritual subjects in all spiritual things.²²

With their fervent belief in the supremacy of the Pope in all things spiritual, Ultramontane Catholics were in direct conflict with the English Protestant majority, who saw this at least partially as an issue of national sovereignty. They feared that English Catholics would be loyal to the Pope instead of being loyal to the Crown. Most of the nineteenth-century Catholic converts fell into the Ultramontane camp, as this was the most public face of nineteenth-century English Catholicism. With the publication of Newman’s sermon “The Second Spring,” Ultramontane Catholics considered themselves part of a renewal of English Catholicism, and “Second

Springers” considered themselves to be more intellectually inclined and more in league with the primary aspects of the Catholic faith than their Old English Catholic brethren.²³ In other words, to the Ultramontanes, “its own brand of Catholicism was Catholicism itself, and any deviation an inadequate rather than an alternate expression of the same essential faith.”²⁴

Ultramontanism won the historiographical war. The discussions of nineteenth-century English Catholicism describe triumphant Second Springers imposing a mystical, Rome-loving doctrine throughout England, and the Old English Catholics disappearing.²⁵ Yet as Mary Heimann noted in 1995, Old English Catholic ideals and traditions survived long into the nineteenth century. Indeed, many of the factors traditionally associated with Ultramontanism, including the popularization of extraliturgical devotions and the increase in personal devotional books had their roots in pre-nineteenth-century English practices, especially the Old English Catholic’s extraliturgical prayer book of choice, *The Garden of the Soul*.²⁶ Moreover, while Ultramontane ideals were gradually accepted as the public face of English Catholicism, Old English Catholic practices still existed throughout the entire century, and many Catholics resisted change. The impact of Ultramontane elements was limited by timing and geography. In Yorkshire English-Catholic parishes, syllabi from the 1860s still held to eighteenth-century Garden-of-the-Soul English-Catholic tenets; the first Ultramontane “knottier points of dogma” were not introduced in Yorkshire parish schools until 1868 and were not fully integrated into the religious syllabi until 1876.²⁷

Thus, for the Catholics living in these tumultuous times, everything was new, and everything was up for debate. Throughout the century a series of journals argued over the elements of the reconstituted religion: its physical fabric, how it should present itself publicly to the larger Protestant majority around it, what elements of new rituals it should accept, and how to promote such elements within its systems of education.

The “Faithful Child” Avatar: 1857–1889, or
“In What Manner Must Baptism Be Administered,
So As To Be Valid?”

The “Faithful Child” avatar has two facets: Elgar’s religious education against the backdrop of events in Catholic history and how biographers discuss his religious education. From Elgar’s birth in 1857 until he left Worcester for London in 1889, Catholicism was the major spiritual and cultural fact of his life: he attended a Catholic church and three Catholic schools, had Catholic friends, and received his first major musical employment as an organist at a Catholic church. Whether or not Elgar had a strong faith during this period is inconsequential, because the ritual identifiers that marked him as Catholic were always present and easily apparent to those around him.

Readers of the many Elgar biographies will find Catholic education mentioned, even placed prominently within the context of the composer’s early life. Percy Young’s *Elgar, Newman, and The Dream of Gerontius: In the Tradition of English Catholicism* provides a typical example of how scholars use Elgar’s education. Note that in the following passage, Young employs Elgar’s Catholic education as an example illustrating the composer’s life-long sense of alienation from the rest of society:

There is no reason to believe that the education provided for Edward Elgar here was in any way inferior to that of any other school in Worcester. He was at school altogether ten years, benefiting from a longer period of education than many of his contemporaries. Attendance at a Catholic School in England, however, could lead to a sense of alienation. As was the case within living memory in the early years of this century, boys at such schools were regarded by their contemporaries—under parental influence—with a degree of suspicion. Elgar—not only in youth—was sensitive, subject to moods of withdrawal, and often misunderstood.²⁸

In this and other passages, Young views English Catholicism from one lens only, that of a unified, monolithic religion. But such presentation of Catholicism is really just lip service, because the same Catholic facts are mentioned in passing and then easily forgotten for the more compelling narrative of Elgar’s personal and complicated history. Every biographer who dwells at any length on Elgar’s youth mentions at least one of the three Catholic schools he attended: a Dame school run by Miss Caroline Walsh at 11 Britannia Square, Worcester; St. Anne’s School at Spetchley

Park; and Francis Reeve's school at Littleton House in Lower Wick.²⁹ Most of the biographers mention these institutions only in combination with something from Elgar's future rather than dwelling for any length of time on Elgar's childhood. Within the narratives of their examinations, Walsh's school is where Elgar received his first formal piano lessons; the woods surrounding St. Anne's supposedly gave Elgar one of his inspirations for *The Dream of Gerontius*; and a stray comment by Reeve may have inspired part or all of *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*.³⁰

But a Catholic school in 1860s England was more than just a place to receive inspiration for the musical future. During Elgar's years in these three schools he was trained in Catholic theology above all other subjects, which a series of articles in the Catholic journal *The Rambler* makes clear. Besides being theologically desirable, some saw teaching Catholic religion as a political necessity, since outside the confines of the church or the classroom Catholics would still have to live within a larger Protestant world:

Mixed up as all classes of Catholics are with Protestants, it is the height of cruelty not to arm them with fit weapons to fight the battle of faith against its enemies. We must recollect that religious controversy is not confined to the pulpit, the platform, and the periodical. It is not the especial privilege of the noble and the wealthy. Its sounds are heard as loudly in the workshop, the kitchen, and the field, as in the halls of a university. Boys and girls begin the intellectual struggle.³¹

Catholic education, then, was an integral part of the struggle. And that battle extended beyond merely preserving elements of pride. The articles in *The Rambler* divide Catholic education from that of their Protestant counterparts, viewing it as elemental to the preservation of the soul

because Protestantism, though it may instruct the mind, yet is utterly powerless to train the soul; it may store the memory with knowledge, and even enforce a certain outward decency of conduct in morals, but it cannot penetrate man's nature in the inmost recesses of his heart; and without this, education is but a dream.³²

Consequently, education that "armed" Catholics with a generous religious and theological underpinning was viewed as necessary to the moral, cultural, and political survival of English Catholics. Other subjects were possible, but anything for the young Catholic had to be grounded in religion first and religion foremost.³³

Elgar began his education in 1863 and over the course of the next few years attended three distinctly different types of schools: a Dame school primarily for girls; a mixed school at Spetchley Park; and, from about 1869 to 1872, a school for young gentlemen at Littleton House. All three schools were Catholic, and all three emphasized elements of religion over all other subjects—at least according to the evidence that has survived.

Caroline Walsh, who ran the Dame school, was, like Elgar's mother, a convert to Catholicism.³⁴ Her calling to the Church stretched into the more fervent "Second Spring" variety and her conversion around 1846 was only a first step. She quickly joined the Daughters of the Heart of Mary (taking their threefold vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience) and attended their Charing Cross school for about four months in 1851 as preparation for religious education work in Worcester. When not teaching the students, she ministered to Worcester's spiritual welfare by walking "round among the poor Catholics of the town. She obliged the sluggards to leave their beds and prevented them from missing Mass."³⁵ Her rooms at Britannia Square were in what was evidently considered a convent by the Catholic hierarchy since she was given the title of Superior in 1852. The school was supported by the small tuition payments made by students like Elgar and his sisters, as well as a grant of £245 made by Henry Foley.³⁶

St. Anne's, the school at Spetchley Park, is a bit more difficult to pin down. A charity school, it existed from 1842 until 1986. Initially, the Berkeley family, members of the local Catholic gentry, created the school for all children of the community—Catholic or Protestant.³⁷ It is likely (though currently not known) that by the time Elgar attended St. Anne's in the mid-1860s, it was entirely a Catholic foundation. Between 1857 and 1863 (before Elgar arrived at the school), the Sisters of St. Paul ran the institution.³⁸ As an order, they were influenced by their continental roots (the Sisters of St. Paul were founded in the eighteenth century in Chartres and arrived in England from France in 1847; the order did not become independent in England until 1864) and by their growing numbers, who were both Old English Catholics and converts. According to the Berkeley family, Elgar attended the school for two terms, so it is likely he arrived in 1867 or 1868, because he began attending his next school in 1869.³⁹

Littleton House, Francis Reeve's school, unlike Walsh's or St. Anne's, was a for-profit enterprise. It tailored "Young gentlemen . . . for Commercial pursuits" and was a fixture of the Worcester Roman Catholic world.⁴⁰ Reeve, according to Jerrold Northrop Moore, initially wanted to be a priest, but after a childhood fall he was banned from that ambition since nineteenth-century Catholicism required the purported guise of both spiritual and material perfection: any bodily injury or chronic ailment destroyed the

opportunity for a young man or woman to take holy orders.⁴¹ Instead, Reeve followed a different path: he married, had a number of children, and taught Catholic boys. According to the Census of 1871 (the year Elgar and his friend Hubert Leicester neared the completion of their attendance of Reeve's school), Reeve and his wife, Lucy (listed as "Assistant to Schoolmaster"), maintained twenty-two boarding students aged six to sixteen (four of them their oldest sons) in addition to their four other children younger than age six.⁴² Reeve also took day students from the town, such as Elgar and Leicester. Basil Maine stated that when Elgar attended Reeve's school there were about thirty students there.⁴³

Advertisements for Reeve's school note that besides engaging in subject studies, "students attend Mass daily."⁴⁴ This agrees with the general discussions of midcentury English-Catholic education. Perhaps the most striking element of such descriptions is how much time was spent conforming to ideas of Catholic ritual and prayer:

The pattern of the school was fitted to the Church year. On Holidays of Obligation the children attended Mass in the morning and then had the afternoon off. This happened for the Feasts of the Ascension, Whitsun, Corpus Christi, Saints Peter and Paul and All Saints; also Epiphany and the Assumption if they fell during term. This was of course in addition to attendances at Sunday Mass, Benediction, and catechism, which were also the responsibility of the schools. Children were questioned on Monday morning and those who had not been to Mass were punished. . . . The regular [school] routine included daily prayers each morning and hymn singing.⁴⁵

The round of required mass attendance, continual professions of faith, and submission to the Catholic calendar would have created a further sense of community for Catholic children and held them apart from their Protestant neighbors.

Part of the Faithful Child avatar intersects with Elgar's attempt to mythologize his past, to create a serviceable and romantic history for himself. His schooling was part of this, and when later recalling it for biographers and friends he used Reeve as a touchstone for his religious oratorios. Elgar gave Reeve credit for planting the seed of the plot and purpose of *The Apostles* in a well-known anecdote which was published in most Elgar biographies after it appeared in 1905 in Robert J. Buckley's early interview-based study:

The idea of the work originated in this way. Mr. Reeve, addressing his pupils, once remarked: "The Apostles were poor men, young men,

at the time of their calling; perhaps before the descent of the Holy Ghost not cleverer than some of you here." This set me thinking, and the oratorio of 1903 is the result.⁴⁶

The mythological genesis of the work lent Elgar a sense of purpose for *The Apostles* beyond the merely musical: it fastened the composition to Christian education.

Central to the progression of Elgar's early faith and education was his relationship to the Worcester parish of St. George's. Though a student at Walsh's Dame school and Littleton House, typical religious instruction for Catholics at midcentury was handled by the parish priest, who might visit the school several times a week to teach and catechize the students.⁴⁷ During most of Elgar's school years, there were two priests at St. George's, the most permanent being Father William Waterworth, S.J.⁴⁸ Waterworth arrived in Worcester during 1857 and left in 1878.⁴⁹ He had an impressive pedigree for a parish priest posted to a sleepy provincial town: education at a Jesuit grammar school in London followed by seminary at Stonyhurst, the most celebrated Catholic public school in England, where students were taught at a level comparable to Cambridge or Oxford; rector of the Jesuit Church of St. James's, Spanish Place, one of the most important Catholic churches in London; and confessor to Henry Edward (later Cardinal) Manning.⁵⁰ Fr. Waterworth certainly encouraged Ultramontane theology when he gave an eleven-year-old Elgar a votive picture of St. Joseph, with a simple French text, and likely would have instructed Elgar to pray to such an image.⁵¹ Two prayers to St. Joseph were commonly available to Catholics in *The Garden of the Soul*; each asks for intercession from Joseph.⁵²

Most sources, be they Worcestershire history or Elgar biography, present Fr. Waterworth as an erudite, affable individual loved by his Catholic parishioners and local Protestants alike. Fr. Brian Doolan's brief history *St. George's, Worcester: 1590–1999* is typical of the Waterworth hagiography, noting that the priest was

described by his Jesuit obituarist as "a model of Rectors." . . . He was a considerable scholar who had been destined for an academic career but this was impeded by delicate health. He lectured regularly to the "Worcester Cathedral Institute," contributed articles to *The Rambler* and *The Dublin Review* and was a notable preacher. He was on the warmest personal terms with the Dean and Canons of the Cathedral and other Protestant divines in the city.⁵³

If this is the case, Waterworth must also have been charming and disarming, for his writings are militantly pro-Catholic, almost to the point of anti-Protestant condescension. Elgar's primary religious teacher and leader wrote a number of books that take the rhetorical stance that the English Reformation was at best a tragic mistake and at worst a hideous crime against humanity.

Some of Waterworth's attacks on Anglicanism were so cogent and radical that they were reprinted in cheap pamphlets for wider distribution to agitate the Catholic populace. Such was the case with his "The Popes and the English Church," originally published in the October 1870 issue of *The Month* and quickly reprinted by the Catholic Truth Society, a popular Ultramontane organization.⁵⁴ Waterworth's words are those of an impassioned partisan as he denies the legitimacy of the Anglican Church:

Anglicanism is, as at present constituted, hopelessly anti-Catholic. It is a sheer nationalism, and such a nationalism is destructive of one of the great marks of the Church, distinctly indicated in the Creed of the Apostles and the Creed of Nicea, namely, Catholicism—"I believe in the Holy Catholic Church": "I believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."⁵⁵

The major thrust of the article begins at this point: there is only one Church, and it has always been (and still was in Waterworth's time) under the spiritual and temporal leadership of the Pontiff, and any attempts to remove elements of the Church from the control of the Pontiff are morally bankrupt and illegitimate. No figure is safe from Waterworth's harsh and unyielding criticism; he calls Oliver Cromwell "unprincipled."⁵⁶

Waterworth's entire corpus of writings presents all elements of Anglicanism, including the infrastructure it confiscated during the Reformation and created afterward, as illegitimate. His writings from the 1850s are if anything even more absolutist in tone, especially regarding the veracity of other denominations and the absolute spiritual power and the necessity of the Pope. To Waterworth, any Englishman who recognized a "Protestant establishment" was flawed and a pretender because Protestant establishments were temporal and not divine—to him, the only church was the Catholic Church and, as he repeatedly stated, "all others are false."⁵⁷ Waterworth would even take historical events and place a distinctly Catholic spin on them, such as when he conflated the English love of freedom and independence with Catholicism:

The introduction of the Liturgy of Edward VI into this country, in the year 1549, was the signal of insurrection: after a lapse of more than 300 years, that Liturgy is still the fruitful source of discontent

and religious and civil agitation. When it was first of all forced upon the nation, seventeen counties rose up nearly simultaneously, sword in hand, to defend their religious liberties. In the words of the first Article of the great Charter of English freedom, they declared that "the Church of England shall be free, and enjoy her rights and liberties inviolate." These words of *Magna Charta* signify that Sovereigns shall not meddle with the Church; that the Pope shall direct the spiritual authorities to the exclusion of other influences; and that the appointment of Prelates shall not be interfered with by the temporal power. Catholics, jealous of the tyranny and assumptions of a bad king, extorted our glorious Charter from King John.⁵⁸

Such was Fr. Waterworth, the man "esteemed by the Catholics and the Protestants." Waterworth's anti-Anglican view of history differs greatly from the dominant discourse espoused by pro-Anglican historians such as George Macaulay Trevelyan, who asserted that the English nation gained its essential character only through the Reformation.⁵⁹ In contradistinction to the dominant Anglican ideology, Waterworth's aggressive Catholic revision of English history—echoed today by such revisionist historians as Eamon Duffy—was the basis of the primary religious education of the young Elgar and, indeed, of all the other Catholics in Worcester.⁶⁰

Indeed, Waterworth's effects on Catholics around Elgar were profound. Elgar's own sister, Ellen Agnes (also referred to as "Helen Agnes" and nicknamed "Dot" or "Dott"), became a Dominican nun in 1902 and eventually a prioress.⁶¹ Elgar's schoolmate Hubert Leicester, who hailed from an old Catholic family, embraced the Catholic history of Worcester with relish, using it as an arena for Ultramontane polemical writings. In 1932, he published a short pamphlet about the history of Catholicism in Worcester, from Henry VIII's Protestant Reformation through the penal times. A good deal of Leicester's language in this publication mirrors the militant tone Waterworth used in his own writings. Leicester refers to "the so-called Reformation" and terms Henry VIII's confiscation of Church lands and property "stealing." Indeed, Leicester maps the entire history of the English Reformation as an exercise in theft, stating that those who turned away from Catholicism did so for love of money, not religion, claiming, "When the first Bills were introduced into Parliament for the establishment of an English Protestant Church, the measures were passed principally by the votes of the holders of ill-gotten wealth."⁶² Like the polemics of Waterworth, there was no room for compromise within Leicester's rhetoric—yet his writings appeared decades after the establishment of basic civil rights for Catholics in England and after his long and illustrious political career.⁶³

While Leicester presented a wholly Ultramontane face, Elgar associated himself with the Ultramontane faction on at least two occasions, either voluntarily or because he was required to do so for professional advancement. The first instance was when he began as organist at St. George's. In the second instance, Elgar placed an advertisement in the Catholic magazine *The Tablet* in 1878, advertising his services as combined secretary and music teacher. *The Tablet* was one of the most important organs of Ultramontane Catholic news and opinion throughout the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ Elgar's advertisement spoke diligently to that world:

To Musical Catholic Noblemen, Gentlemen, Priests, Heads of Colleges, & c., or Professors of Music—A friend of a young man, possessed of great musical talent, is anxious to obtain partial employment of him as Organist or Teacher of Piano, Organ, or Violin, to young boys, sons of gentlemen, or as Musical Amanuensis to Composers or Professors of Music, being a quick and ready copyist. Could combine Organist and Teacher of Choir, with Musical Tutor to sons of noblemen, & c. Has had several years experience as Organist. The advertiser's object is to obtain musical employment for him, with proportionate time for study. Age 21, of quiet, studious habits, and gentlemanly bearing. Been used to good society. Would have unexceptional references. Neighbourhood of London preferred; the Continent not objected to. Disengaged in September.⁶⁵

The advertisement presents Elgar as flexible in his abilities and eager to apply himself to almost anything for the sake of employment. Had it proved successful, such a position would have kept him in the insulated doctrinal world of Ultramontane Catholicism, and the advertisement shows Elgar's willingness to live and work within that world. But young Elgar's notice did not evince the most savvy business strategy because advertising in *The Tablet* meant the readers would be primarily Ultramontane Catholics—converts—and not the Old English Catholics, who might have had the money and resources to hire Elgar for such a desirable position.

Elgar found no suitable employment from his advertisement; however, St. George's soon gave him a modest professional position. He deputized there as organist for his father in 1872, was appointed assistant organist in 1873, and eventually became titular organist in 1885, serving until he departed for London in 1889.⁶⁶ Consequently, Elgar had ample opportunity to compose Catholic music and partake in Catholic ceremonies.⁶⁷ One nonliturgical devotional ceremony during these years, on October 7, 1888, inaugurated the "Apostleship of Prayer" and the blessing of a Sacred Heart

statue which still exists in St. George's today. Sacred Heart statues were icons used for extraliturgical devotions in the nineteenth century in churches or at home; *The Garden of the Soul* shows seven pages of prayers for this ritual.⁶⁸ As the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, published between 1907 and 1914, noted, "Devotion to the Sacred Heart may be defined as the devotion to the adorable Heart of Jesus Christ insofar as this Heart represents and recalls His love; or what amounts to the same thing: devotion to the love of Jesus Christ insofar as this love is recalled and symbolically represented to us by his heart of flesh."⁶⁹ The importance of this event is reflected by the presence of the visiting Bishop Edward Ilsley, who officiated at the service; traditionally, bishops visited parishes for the sacraments of confirmation and ordinations, as well as installing a new priest in the parish. The Litany of the Sacred Heart, which began to appear in Catholic devotional prayer books after 1875, is a brief ritual that includes responses to prayers said by a celebrant.⁷⁰ Its form is close to the "Agnus Dei" prayer, since after addressing Christ's heart with numerous blandishments (including "Heart of Jesus, burning furnace of charity, /Heart of Jesus, abode of justice and love") it simply asks for Christ's mercy.⁷¹ For this ceremony, Elgar composed his last composition for St. George's, the *Ecce Sacerdos*. The composition is quite concise (only fifty-three measures long) and Elgar dedicated it to Hubert Leicester.⁷²

Leicester's fervent Ultramontane prose clearly reflected Waterworth's early influence as a religious teacher. Elgar, too, might have traveled this path, but the only tangible manifestation of fervor before 1889 was the completion of *Ecce Sacerdos*. In his Faithful Child years, Elgar's experiences with Catholicism were steady but various. From the time of his education until he left Worcester for London, he was never conscious of a life without aspects of the Catholic Church, either because he was learning about it through the offices of Walsh, Reeve, the teachers at Spetchley Park, and Fr. Waterworth, or because he was employed as a musician at St. George's. It cannot be known if he shared Hubert Leicester's religious fervor at this time, as nothing within the extant anecdotal or historical record, outside of his Catholic religious music, suggests an intense devotion to Catholicism save the ineffectual advertisement to be a musician for Catholic families or organizations. It is only in his next incarnation, as the "Publicly Faithful" avatar, that Elgar seeks to project an overtly Catholic image.

The “Publicly Faithful” Avatar: 1889–1905, or “What Is the Meaning of This Frequent Use of the Sign of the Cross?”

In the period between 1889 and 1905, Elgar manifested the “Publicly Faithful” avatar in three ways: by attending mass, by publicly proclaiming himself a Catholic in interviews and compositions, and by complaining to friends and intimates about the anti-Catholic prejudice that he experienced repeatedly. Once he arrived in London in 1889, it is easy to detect signs of a sort of religious fervency that developed during the early years of his marriage. Elgar attended church no less than fifty times in 1890, despite frequent illness and bad weather frustrating his attendance.⁷³ Elgar’s only child, Carice, also became a public manifestation of the family’s religious faith: as a school-girl she was made to wear a prominent gold cross tied with a black ribbon around her neck.⁷⁴ Public proclamations of his creed appeared on the scores of his oratorios *The Dream of Gerontius*, *The Apostles*, and *The Kingdom*, which he dedicated “A.M.D.G.” (*Ad majorem dei gloriam*—“To the greater glory of God”). While not unheard of at the beginning of the twentieth century, Elgar’s dedications of his oratorios to the Almighty was certainly unusual among British composers.⁷⁵ The publicity for all three of these oratorios, leading up to their premieres in 1900, 1903, and 1906, respectively, included discussion in both the musical press and the English Catholic press.⁷⁶ Elgar arranged for a public expression of belief to be published with Canon Charles Vincent Gorton’s libretto interpretations of the last two oratorios; Gorton’s interpretations were sold at performances.⁷⁷ At the first performance of *The Apostles* Elgar presented the singers with postcard copies of Ivan Kramskoi’s mystical painting *Christ in the Wilderness* (its subject looking realistically human and upset) and let it be known publicly that he composed *The Apostles* with a print of the painting in his study.⁷⁸ He also allowed *Gerontius* to be used as a fund-raising piece for the building of the Catholic cathedral in Westminster on June 6, 1903.

Besides proactive presentations of his Catholicism, Elgar also exhibited some reactive ones, such as when he complained to the unsympathetic Rosa Burley about his perception of prejudice against Catholics:

[Elgar] replied that I little knew how seriously his career had been hampered by his Catholicism. He told me of post after post which would have been open to him but for the prejudice against his religion, of golden opportunities snatched from his grasp by inferior men of more acceptable views. It was a subject on which he evidently felt very bitter for he embroidered it at great length.⁷⁹

Again, the question here is not necessarily one of faith: in this period, Elgar complained to Burley that he had suffered because those in power around him identified him as *Catholic*, which was a negative public definition instead of the positive one Elgar strove to present to the world during this time.

Other signs of the Publicly Faithful avatar are external to Elgar. Even though his Catholic faith may have been "never that strong," English Catholicism's faith in Elgar remained steadfast. The *Catholic Directory*, an organizational compendium of Catholic parishes within England, proudly named Elgar in a list of "Catholic Knights."⁸⁰ The *Catholic Encyclopedia* gushingly noted the fame of *Gerontius*.⁸¹ But his Catholicism could and did often expose Elgar to various sorts of criticism, even after he became famous. The prominent critic Edward Algernon Baughan stated in 1906, when *Gerontius*'s fame was assured by many successful performances, that it "is almost groveling in its anguish of remorse, and it has the peculiar sentimentality that is characteristic of the later Roman Catholic Church."⁸²

Even during this era, though, cracks in the Publicly Faithful avatar are apparent. Elgar's marriage to Alice Roberts is a good example. When the two were married, on May 8, 1889, Alice was still a Protestant and practicing Anglican, thus making the union to a Catholic a "mixed marriage." Such a marriage would have seemed eminently reasonable to the young Elgar; his parents maintained a "mixed" liaison from the time of Ann Elgar's conversion to Catholicism in 1856 until William Henry Elgar's deathbed conversion in the first decade of the twentieth century. Yet by 1884 Ultramontane doctrine, taught to all English Catholics through the process of catechism, said that "mixed marriages" were forbidden in the Catholic Church except "for very grave reasons and under special conditions."⁸³ This prohibition may have caused Elgar and Alice Roberts some difficulty, since they chose not to marry in Malvern or Worcester, where Elgar's Catholic roots were strongest, but at the London Oratory on Brompton Road.⁸⁴ That Alice Roberts converted to Catholicism after her marriage to Edward Elgar is immaterial, and it would not have mitigated the delicacy of the situation; under the proscribed rubrics of the time, had Elgar's Catholicism been the conservative Ultramontane variety expected of a midcentury convert's child, Alice would have had to become a Catholic convert herself, before the marriage.

Long after the end of the Publicly Faithful period, professions of Elgar's faith were continued by others on his behalf, but in the years after he completed *The Kingdom*, the composer's testimonies to his religious beliefs decreased steadily. Geoffrey Hodgkins notes that at this time "Elgar abandoned what we may call orthodox religious belief . . . and turned to a more humanistic outlook, which gradually became embittered and sceptical."⁸⁵

The culprit, besides Elgar's general depression and hypersensitivity, may well have been his growing fame: the acclaim garnered by the *Enigma* Variations and *Gerontius* placed him firmly in the spotlight as a public figure and musician with many more conducting opportunities and a brief, tumultuous professorship at the University of Birmingham. Such recognition came at the expense of lost time for composing, and both *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* were much smaller works than originally planned.⁸⁶ Once complete, they did not become the obvious successors to *Gerontius*, and the difficulty of composing them to his own satisfaction turned Elgar away from completing another oratorio—the composition with which he would publicly proclaim his faith—for the rest of his life. Although incandescent during its duration, Elgar's Publicly Faithful phase lasted only a few years of his life.

The “Weak Faith” Avatar: 1905–1934, or “What Is the Faith of the Catholic Church Concerning the Eucharist?”

In the last period of Elgar's religious development, from 1905 while he composed *The Kingdom* to the end of his life, Elgar's faith seemed only to falter. As Hodgkins notes, he did keep up appearances, attending a succession of churches in Hereford (until 1910), London and Sussex (from 1910 to 1923), and Worcester (from 1923 until his death in 1934). Certain biographers tell us that Elgar attended these churches because Alice wished him to do so—even ordering him a regular Sunday morning cab in Hereford for this purpose—or because he particularly admired a priest in one parish or another.⁸⁷ In this period he also indulged in hobbies as an amateur scientist, perhaps as a countermove against religion, first with chemistry and later with microscopes.⁸⁸ During these years, in public and semipublic pronouncements, the composer began to project aspects of the “Weak Faith” avatar. He allowed himself to be modern and skeptical regarding religion in the face of new scientific discoveries and tied himself more closely to elements of the land and nature.

Elgar's skepticism came out most clearly when describing his young life in Worcester. When he received the Freedom of the City of Worcester from then-mayor Hubert Leicester in 1905, Elgar reminisced about his days working at St. George's as an organist, when Leicester was his choir-master. At the time they were both in a wind quintet, and in the process of his own mythmaking, implied that composing music for the quintet took precedence over religion: “We met on Sunday afternoons, and it was an understood thing that we should have a new piece every week. The sermons

in our church used to take at least half an hour, and I spent the time composing the thing for the afternoon."⁸⁹

Further skepticism occurred in letters to Leicester, criticizing the material elements of Catholicism in Rome following a trip there in 1908:

If you have any religious feeling whatever, don't go to Rome—everything money—clergy gorgeous & grasping. . . . "Special music" (bombardon & side drum & Gounod's Ave Maria). Present Pope a good holy simple man but knows nothing . . . should be replaced by permanent Commission with secretary who could be dismissed.⁹⁰

Through such observations and actions, Elgar began to distance himself from elements of Catholicism both in private and public communication for the last three decades of his life. Further, he publicly presented himself as someone who, though Catholic, could appreciate the art and cultural offerings of Protestants, as was the case in an interview with Rudolph de Cordova:

I attended as many of the [Anglican] Cathedral services as I could. . . . The putting of the fine organ into the Cathedral at Worcester [1874] was a great event, and brought many organists to play there at various times. I went to hear them all. The services at the Cathedral were over later on Sunday than those at the Catholic church, and as soon as the voluntary there was finished at the church I used to rush over to the Cathedral to hear the concluding voluntary.⁹¹

The quotation still locates Elgar as a practicing Catholic (ever important for the composer of semisacred oratorios in the first decade of the twentieth century) and gives him an innocent reason to go to the cathedral (to hear music), but places him in a category of valuing art over dogma—thus helping him appear more universal.

Aside from doubt of Rome and publicly valuing music over Catholicism, Elgar made a self-conscious attempt to link himself with nature and thus create a sort of proto-naturalistic spirituality. This is what Elgar would be remembered for, as others have noted, since the historiography of the composer is largely one of associating him with the pastoral impulse.⁹² In a preface he wrote in 1930 for Hubert Leicester's *Forgotten Worcester*, Elgar romanticized his life as a child in the small city by transforming all that was important into the glorious image of a country sunrise:

It is pleasant to date these lines from an eminence distantly overlooking the way to school; our walk was always to the brightly-lit west.

Before starting, our finances were rigidly inspected—naturally not for me, being, as I am, in nothing rigid, but quite naturally, by my companion, who tackled the situation with prophetic skill and with the gravity now bestowed on the affairs of great corporations whose accounts are harrowed by him to this day. The report being favourable, two pence were “allowed” for the ferry. Descending the steps, past the door behind which the figure of the mythical salmon is incised, we embarked; at our backs “the unthrift sun shot vital gold,” filling Payne’s meadows with glory and illuminating for two small boys a world to conquer and to love. In our old age, with our undimmed affection, the sun still seems to show us a golden “beyond.”⁹³

The “golden beyond” was the neighborhood of Worcester where Reeve’s Littleton House was located, separated from the main section of the city by an easily traversed river.

Elgar’s compositions became part of the nostalgic enterprise that eventually valued nature over faith. *Gerontius* is a case in point, and many scholars have been so captivated by Elgar’s imagery that they ignore the larger ramifications of the transference from works of faith to works of nature. Michael Kennedy is a case in point:

From 1866 to 1868, young Edward attended a Roman Catholic school at Spetchley. This was under the patronage of the Lord of the Manor, Robert Berkeley. Many years later Elgar told Ernest Newman that “as a boy he used to gaze from the school windows in rapt wonder at the great trees swaying in the wind; and he pointed out to me a passage in *Gerontius* in which he had recorded in music his subconscious memories of them.” Although Newman did not enlarge upon this, it is fairly reasonable to suppose that the passage concerned is in Part II, rehearsal cue [68] at “the summer wind among the lofty pines.”⁹⁴

Belief in the divinity of nature was easily transferred into doubts about the veracity of the afterlife, as can be seen from Kennedy’s collection of anecdotes about the composer’s latest articulated beliefs:

[In his last years Elgar] expressed a wish that he should be buried at the confluence of Severn and Teme, without religious ceremony. He had for many years avoided going to church and while dying and still lucid he refused to see a priest, none other than the son of Gervase Elwes. He objected to the church’s “mumbo jumbo,” he said. His consultant, Arthur Thomson, was impressed by his “magnificent

courage." Elgar told him he had "no faith whatever in an afterlife. I believe there is nothing but complete oblivion."⁹⁵

Such private admissions were entirely in keeping with his skeptical nature and, private as they were, suited the image of Weak Faith well. Yet just before he died, the legacy of Elgar's cultural Catholicism reaffirmed itself strongly. On his deathbed, Elgar received last rites from Fr. Reginald Gibb of St. George's parish, probably at the instigation of Carice and Philip Leicester (Hubert Leicester's son), since Elgar was almost certainly unconscious from doses of morphine. Moore notes that Gibb later claimed in newspaper reports he had obtained a confession of faith from Elgar, but this testimony may have been exaggerated.⁹⁶

In Memoriam (II): The Old English Catholic Avatar, or "What Do You Mean by Extreme Unction?"

Elgar always identified himself with the country, preferring it to life in London. Even before he was knighted, he dressed like a member of the gentry and took up aristocratic sports such as golf (and later games like billiards). He showed a predilection for chivalry and things Gothic; he was a political conservative. With the exception of *Gerontius*, most of his sacred works were compositions of appeasement, easily sung by either Catholic or Anglican congregations.⁹⁷ He composed a number of pieces for the Three Choirs festivals that were quickly taken up by Anglican choirs throughout England and have remained a part of the Anglican choral tradition. In short, Elgar became the embodiment of an Old English Catholic: with a set of beliefs more reserved than mystical; a readiness to appease the dominant Protestant majority; and a readiness to act his part as a gentleman when needed. Indeed, if this was the case, it makes Elgar's lack of a permanent memorial at St. George's understandable. For a church whose tradition within English Catholicism was to stress the public propagation of the Ultramontane tenets proclaimed by Waterworth and other like-minded parish priests, Elgar's distinctly non-Ultramontane pronouncements may well have discouraged his boyhood parish from celebrating or memorializing him.

St. George's may never have had the opportunity. Elgar was buried in a grave beside his wife at St. Wulstan's Catholic Church in Little Malvern; at his request, the requiem was said as a Low Mass, so no music was performed. Doolan notes, however, that St. George's celebrated a High Mass (sung) in his honor around this time, performing an early version of

Elgar's 1902 *Ave Verum Corpus* with its original "Pie Jesu" requiem mass text. This is an interesting substitution, since it associates a hymn that celebrated Christ's suffering (identified in the nineteenth century with the Ultramontanes) with the traditional *Lacrymosa* text.

St. George's modest commemoration to Elgar paled in comparison to the elaborate expressions of mourning offered to his memory at the Anglican Worcester Cathedral. Indeed, the Elgar Window presents only one facet of such memorials. On March 2, 1934, a week after Elgar's death, the cathedral organized a "national memorial service" using members of the Three Choirs Festival Chorus and included selections from his last three oratorios: Prelude to Part II of *The Apostles*; Prelude to *Gerontius*, concluding solo and chorus from Part I ("Proficiscere Anima Christiana"), selections from Part II popularly known as "Angel's Song" and "Angel's Farewell"; and parts of *The Kingdom*, including the Virgin Mary's meditation ("The Sun Goeth Down") and "The Lord's Prayer."⁹⁸ The prayer intoned by Dean Moore-Ede at this occasion was conspicuously ecumenical:

We give thee humble and hearty thanks that it pleased Thee to endow our fellow citizen Edward Elgar with that singular mastery of music, and the will to use it in Thy service, whereby he being dead yet speaketh: now filling our minds with visions of the mystery and beauty of Nature; now by the concert of sweet and solemn sounds telling our hearts secrets of life and death that lie too deep for words; now soaring with Angels and archangels and with all the company of Heaven in an ecstasy of praise; now holding us bowed with the broken and contrite heart before the throne of judgment. We thank Thee for the great place he holds in the glorious roll of England's Masters of Music. We thank Thee for the love and loyalty which ever bound this her son to the Faithful City.⁹⁹

Aside from being demonstrative about "Nature," the prayer commends Elgar's music for its power to affirm both a Christian faith and solemn comfort.¹⁰⁰ Again, this Elgar is "Pan-Christian" and proudly celebrated in the Anglican cathedral as Worcester's "native son." Yet the musical selections listed above also came from the fertile period of Elgar's full flower into fame, namely, 1899–1906. As a manifestation of Elgar's pan-Christian avatar as well as the changing nature of the times, these works—with their intense yet evanescent Catholic overtones—were wholly welcome in the Worcester Cathedral. In essence, they foreshadowed the presentation of both the memorial plaque with its mystical Latin declaration and the memorial window with its safer English version.¹⁰¹

The semisacred oratorio selections were not the only items on the program for the memorial concert. Also featured were three movements from Elgar's first major compositional success, the *Enigma* Variations: I—C.A.E., a musical portrait of Alice Elgar, the composer's wife; IX—Nimrod, characterizing Elgar's friend August Jaeger; and XIII—***, Elgar's noble friend and patron Lady Mary Lygon. By luck or by design, Ivor Atkins and W. H. Reed, close friends throughout Elgar's life, chose works that spoke to Elgar's long-standing ideals of domesticity, erotic friendship, and unrequited love.¹⁰² Their choices pointed the way beyond public proclamations of Elgar's religion to the increasingly secular world he would inhabit in the years after 1905. The Weak Faith avatar, denuded of Elgar's spiritual beliefs, became dependent on his friendships, not his childhood beliefs, and consequently became safe for consumption by all.

Elgar in his lifetime saw English Catholics move from a marginalized community into the mainstream of society. The composer's successful and honored career was a certain sign of this shift. Yet even so, a backlash of prejudice against Catholics was a pungent memory for Elgar's Catholic friends and contemporaries. Some, like Leicester, chose to delve deeper into their own faith for any public presentation, and Elgar certainly adopted this stance in the early years of his career. Old prejudices die hard within a culture, however, and today's biographers must reexamine Elgar in the light of his Catholic upbringing. Was he a man whose faith was "never that strong," or did he embody the avatar of an "Old English Catholic" in order to present a publicly acceptable religious facade? Elgar's mixed religious background, inherited from his parents, his own mixed marriage, and his work within a predominantly Anglican profession made being able to speak to both faiths not just convenient, but a necessity for his survival. In such a world, it is no wonder the man did not feel at ease.

NOTES

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1. Anthony Boden, *Three Choirs: A History of the Festivals* (Phoenix Mill, Eng.: Alan Sutton, 1992), 183.

2. It is clear the figure is Christ and not God from the cross that forms part of the halo, the right hand making the sign of benediction, and the left hand holding an orb, which is the symbol of Christ's kingdom on earth. The point is further clarified in a description of the window published in the *London Times*, 5 January 1935: "Dominating the design is the figure of Christ wearing royal and sacerdotal vestments. His right hand is raised in blessing and in His left He holds the starred orb symbolical of universal rule over heaven and earth. Round the throne is the rainbow symbolical of God's covenant with Man." The masculine gender of the Angel echoes the pronouns used by Elgar in *Gerontius* and by Cardinal John Henry Newman in the original text. See "his ample palm," Part II, rehearsal number 9; and "I will address him. Mighty one, my Lord, my Guardian Spirit, all hail!" Part II, rehearsal number 17.

3. *Times* (London), 4 September 1935.

4. *Ibid.*

5. A critical reaction was already building in the 1920s, but manifestations of it abound in the obituaries and appreciations of Elgar in the April 1934 issue of *The Musical Times*.

6. See Charles Edward McGuire, "Vaughan Williams and the English Music Festival: 1910," in *Vaughan Williams Essays*, ed. Byron Adams and Robin Wells (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2003), 260; and Jerrold Northrop Moore, ed., *Elgar and His Publishers: Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1:351–52; 371–75.

7. "Alice wrote on June 11: 'E. very badsley [*sic*] & dreadfully worried &c.' Carice's confirmation took place that day but neither parent attended, leaving all the arrangements to Miss Burley." Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984; repr. 1999), 407.

8. Carice's letter to the Leicester family is dated "Empire Day, [19]07." Letter of Carice Elgar to Hubert Leicester, [24 May] 1907, Worcestershire County Records Office, 705:185 BA 8185/1. The confirmation record from Belmont Abbey notes that Carice Irene Elgar "took the Confirmation name Caecilia and her Godmother was Maria Grafton. She was confirmed by Bishop Cuthbert Hedley O.S.B. . . . on the Feast of Pentecost, 19th May 1907." A copy of the confirmation register confirms the spelling of her name as "Caecilia." Letter to author from Abbot Paul Stoneham of Belmont Abbey, 28 April 2006.