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Religious consistency and sincerity of John Dryden| The evidence, principally in the religious poems

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THE RELIGIOUS CONSISTENCY AND SINCERITY
OF
JOHN DRYDEN:
The Evidence,
Principally in the Religious Poems.
by

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A. B., Carroll College, 1949

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts.

Montana State University
1960

Approved:

Byron Bryant (Chairman of Board
of Examiners)

W. P. Clark
Dean, Graduate School
DEDICATION

With deepest love

to

My Wife.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In presenting this thesis I should like to express my gratitude to Mr. Byron R. Bryant for the valuable advice and help he gave during the year in which it was written. My gratitude is due, too, to the Reverend R. Vincent Kavanagh, head of the English Department at Carroll College, for the suggestion from which this thesis sprang, and for the invaluable help he supplied. Thanks, too, are due to Dr. H. G. Merriam, Chairman of the Department of English at Montana State University, for the encouragement he gave to the work and for the suggestions which made it easier.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM: DRYDEN'S CATHOLICISM

In 1659, after the death of Oliver Cromwell, a young Englishman composed a poem entitled Herocie Stanzas, dedicated to the "glorious memory" of the "late Lord Protector." The young poet was John Dryden and his poem professed sympathy with the Puritan Protectorate. In the next year, 1660, this same young man penned another poem "on the happy restoration" of the Stuart and Anglican King, Charles II. In 1682 appeared a poem entitled Religio Laici, a profound defense of the Established Church of England, and an explanation for the author's membership in it. Five years later The Hind and the Panther, the poet's apologia for his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church, made its appearance. This poem was reprinted under the auspices of King James II, a Roman Catholic, who had come to the throne at the death of his brother Charles in 1685.

These are the facts in the case of the controversy over the conversion of John Dryden to the Roman Catholic Church. We find Dryden belonging successively to three different religions under three different rulers, each of whom was a member of the Church to which Dryden seems to have paid allegiance during the time of his rule.

Naturally, such coincidences aroused comment, both in
Dryden's own day and through the years up to the present time. Some critics have charged Dryden with opportunism; some have said that he was so indifferent to religion that a change meant as little to him as a rainbow's colors mean to a man born blind. Others have read a degree of consistency into his conversions, and have made them the product of a philosophical scepticism or political conservatism which dominated his life. But not one has examined, it appears, the possibility that Dryden might have become a Catholic because he was convinced of the truth of the Catholic Faith and had become convinced of its truth as a result of a long investigation of religion in a search for truth. By some Dryden's conversion has been called the natural solution to the needs of a mind craving religious security and ready to accept the most authoritative source of that security in a way both unquestioning and unreasoning.  

The importance of these investigations to literature lies fundamentally in the value a new concept of Dryden's sincerity and consistency must have in an understanding of

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1 The critics whom we will discuss at some length in the course of this study are Sir Walter Scott, George Saintsbury, Samuel Johnson, James Russell Lowell, Thomas Babington Macaulay, R. K. Root, and Louis I. Bradvold. These critics' attitudes will be presented at length in Chapter Three. The reader may turn to the Bibliography for a full list of critical books and articles by these men and other commentators on the poetry of John Dryden.
his religious poems. If these poems are the product of a sceptical or fideistic mind their meaning is set along one definite pattern. If they are the product of a mind firmly convinced of the truths which it believes, their meaning is of necessity far deeper and far richer than fideistic interpretation can know.

Since most of Dryden's critics who comment on his religious poetry, with the exception of some of his very early and more prejudiced contemporaries, find a certain degree of consistency as well as an amount of contradiction in the two religious poems, it is natural to look into Dryden's life for information which will explain the differences and the similarities in the poems.

Such fundamental identity of thought in two poems which superficially appear to be of opposite tendencies is obviously not an insignificant accident. Both poems spring from the same temper of mind, the same attitude toward philosophical and ecclesiastical problems. And the study of Dryden's thought is important and profitable for this reason, if for no other, that it minimizes, and possibly solves entirely, the biographical problem of his conversion, which has proved such a stumbling-block to some of his critics.2

Such an opinion is the reason for one recent extensive study of Dryden's religious poems. However, while critics may well agree with the basic premise quoted above, that the similarities, as well as the differences, in the two poems

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flow from Dryden's characteristic temperament, the statement of what that temperament actually was can differ widely from critic to critic. Since so much stress has heretofore been laid upon intellectual background, political predispositions, philosophical attitudes, and similar extrinsic material as the true source for understanding the ideas expressed in these poems, it might be very well to examine the poems themselves, to see if they can solve the problem of Dryden's sincerity and show the consistency of the motivating forces behind his various shifts of religious faith.

An examination of the type proposed above goes to the primary source of information about Dryden—his own statements. Such information must necessarily be studied in the light of historical and literary investigations and conjectures, but if the primary material is made the main font of our information the resulting concept of Dryden may prove to be far different from the opinions currently held about both the poet and his poems.

That Dryden could easily have intended his poems to be exact statements of his personal convictions and not mere poses adopted for an occasion he makes rather clear in the preface to The Hind and the Panther, in which he pleads for the hearing to which every honest man is entitled when he has been publicly maligned.
Truthfulness in poetry was not foreign to the poetic tradition in which Dryden wrote. Only a few years before the appearance of Dryden's poems, Abraham Cowley had written that: "There is not so great a Lyce to be found in any Poet, as the vulgar conceit of men, that Lying is Essential to good Poetry." And Dryden himself in his *Defence of An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* asserts that deception is the basest type of art, while the truth, not as men would like to write it or see it, but as it really is, is the measure of the perfection of all literary work.

In addition to his public aversion to deception, Dryden affirms, in a letter to his son at Rome in September, 1697, that "dissembling" is a talent not his, and that to lie for any reason would be to do the thing farthest from his mind, especially in the matter of his religious convictions.

But, as we will see at greater length in a later chapter, Dryden himself gives us a method by which we may test the sincerity of what he writes concerning his religion—the test of his staunchness in adversity. Most of the critics of Dryden have set up the same type of criterion, telling us that sincere men are known by their ability to stand by their beliefs when such beliefs are unprofitable, even dangerous.

That Dryden does remain firm, even when the possibility of gaining by his Catholicism has passed, we can easily see. Even in the reign of James II Dryden's religion did not bring him any material returns. True—he remained Poet Laureate and retained most of the royal grants he had received under Charles II, but the payment of the grants was not any less haphazard and incomplete than payment had been for him as an Anglican under Charles the Anglican King, and even Dryden's use of his pen in the Catholic controversy against the Established Church did not bring increased revenue to the poet.

With the flight of James II a Protestant King came to the English throne. Dryden, remaining a loyal Catholic, refused to take the oaths of religious conformity demanded of royal appointees and found himself no longer Laureate, but an unemployed literary man, forced at the age of fifty-seven to resort to play-writing and translating to support his wife and family.

Thus: since Dryden meets the test established by his own poetry and by his critics as well, we should look into his religious poetry for information concerning his convictions and especially concerning the causes and motives of his conversion to Roman Catholicism, to ascertain if his flight to Rome was that of an intellectually sincere man who felt that reason could lead him to the true religion, or that of a man whose political, or philosophical, predispositions had convinced him
of the invalidity of reason and the necessity of conformity to authority.

We cannot hope to find "scientific" proof of Dryden's states of mind. We can merely weigh the evidence of Dryden's life and work against the evidence produced by his critics. Doing this we may find that Dryden deserves the benefit of the doubt and that his poems should be read as sincere effusions of a heart guided by consistent principles. If this thesis can persuade the reader to let Dryden speak for himself to defend his Catholicism before he receives either the reader's praise or blame it will be well-rewarded.
CHAPTER TWO

TERMS AND THEIR MEANINGS IN THIS DISCUSSION

Before we can say that some object which presents itself to our vision is a tree we must do several things. First, we must know clearly what a tree is. Then, we must examine the object we see. Finally, we must compare the qualities we know a tree—to be a tree—must possess and the qualities we find in the object under examination. If the object of our scrutiny meets the test of this examination we may say, and say confidently, that we do see a tree. Without conscious effort we go through this psychological process each time we make a judgment—we set up a standard, compare a specific object to the standard, and render a judgment.

In the sphere of ideas and of philosophies the process is the same, carried on at a higher level of abstraction. And when we speak of men, pass judgments upon their actions and the motives which prompt those actions, we employ the same three-fold process of rational judgment.

If, then, we are to speak of Dryden's religious consistency and sincerity and attempt to draw some conclusions about the poet's motives in changing from one religion to another, under circumstances at least slightly suspect, we must set up definite standards on which to base our conclusions.
Dryden is charged with many things--scepticism, opportunism, fideism. Some critics say he was a man of sincere religious convictions, ever seeking for the truth and the best way of serving God. Before we can examine the charges against Dryden or see what he has to say in his own defence we must see the meanings of these various terms with which the critics speak of Dryden and we must examine both their historical application to Dryden and the various modes of thought and of action which they imply.

Since the most general charge of those made against Dryden's shift of religion is scepticism, we must see at some length just what scepticism can be and find out the attitudes with which a sceptic can view religion.

The term scepticism itself is derived from the Greek infinitive ακέπτεσθαι, "to inquire into" or "to examine carefully." "A sceptic in the broad sense is one who is in search of truth; he is an inquirer, one who has not made up his mind, who is undecided." 4 Anyone who holds an opinion, or who asks a question, is a sceptic in this broad sense. But generally speaking the term scepticism is used with a more specific philosophical meaning; and the philosophic sceptic holds a much more explicit and more limited set of principles about both the kind and the amount of knowledge

Philosophical scepticism can stand, according to its degree, for three things. It can signify, in the first place, doubt on rational grounds; secondly, it may mean disbelief on rational grounds; and finally, philosophical scepticism can stand for a denial of the possibility of attaining truth of any kind. This final denial of the possibility of attaining truth is the basic meaning of the term in philosophy, "Philosophical scepticism is then the doctrine which doubts or denies that the human mind can know the truth." Let us examine in greater detail the doctrines of these three degrees of scepticism.

The mildest type of scepticism is that which doubts the validity of human knowledge. A sceptic of this type will admit that your knowledge could be true; but he will also hold that anyone who contradicts your views could also be right. Every man to his own opinions, such a sceptic will say, for he maintains that there is no way of determining who is right or who is wrong. He asserts that man can know nothing for certain.

A more severe type of scepticism is that which disbelieves all human knowledge, on the assumption that since man is prone to error and since men do disagree with one another

5 Ibid.
no man's knowledge is worthy of credence—in fact, this type of sceptic will say there is really no way of knowing truth and will believe nothing. This type of sceptic differs from his milder brother by denying not only man's ability to know truth from error, but even his ability to know at all, maintaining that all so-called knowledge is delusion.

The most extreme kind of sceptic will go beyond his fellows any deny that such a thing as ultimate truth exists at all, or if it does exist, that there is any reason to believe that man actually can discover it. The mind cannot attain truth, according to this extreme of scepticism, not because there is no way of discovering who is right or what the truth is, but because there is no truth or no reason why man could discover it, even if it were a reality. This type of scepticism can be linked with fideism, as we shall see presently, because to a sceptic of this school fideism, acceptance of dogma on the basis of authority, is the only source of guiding principles for living.

Most of those who adhere to any one of the three types of scepticism share one common characteristic: they all believe in the truth of their outlook on man's ability to know, that the self-contradiction of this certainty sceptics have in their principles while maintaining scepticism in their practice has evidently not occurred to them is apparent from even a brief survey of the history of sceptical thought. Such
a survey is necessary for us at this point to give us a clear picture of the background of Dryden's own time.

The first philosopher to put into concrete terms the theories held by most succeeding sceptics was the Greek thinker, Protagoras, born about 450 B.C., who was overwhelmed by the subjective side of knowledge and who concluded finally that "as the object presents itself differently to different subjects, there is no objective truth: man is the measure of all things."6 This conclusion makes knowledge and truth completely subjective, individualistic, matters of private opinion. Carried further, since the individual can support his opinion by no authority but his own, the individual cannot be sure that what he knows is right, and he has no external standard to which he can compare his knowledge and thus pass from a state of opinion to a state of certitude in which he can say without fear of error that his judgment is true.

Pyrrho of Elis carried the ideas of Protagoras to a new extreme and proposed for his followers two main points:

(a) In themselves, real things are neither beautiful nor ugly, neither large nor small. We have as little right to say that they are the one as we have to say that they are the other.

(b) Real things, are therefore, inaccessible to human knowledge, and he is wise who, recognizing the futility of inquiry, abstains from

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Judging, 7
From an examination of these principles it can be seen that the real sceptic of this school would despair of knowing anything. Yet, the theory is self-contradictory, for the thorough-going sceptic would abstain from judging the truth of his own doctrines and would doubt that he could have a doubt, and so on "ad absurdum."

However, as we might suppose, this theory was not as evidently self-refuting as it might seem to the well-trained, or even to the novice, Aristotelian or Scholastic philosopher. While we cannot here examine the crushing arguments of Aristotle and the Scholastics against scepticism, it might be profitable to survey briefly the four main points given by sceptics to maintain their general position.

First, they argue that there have been so many errors in the history of human thought from the very earliest times that man must despair of keeping on the narrow path to truth. Next, they maintain that there are antinomies in thought which make certainty impossible—for example, the dispute about motion from place to place, or the problem of the one and the many, the general and the specific, which has cropped up again and again in the history of philosophical speculation.

The third argument, called the "historic diadexus proposed

7 Ibid., p. 185.
by Montaigne,"8 states that since man must have a criterion of knowledge against which to match what he discovers as a criterion of knowledge, he must go backwards "ad infinitum," never coming to ultimate and objective criteria on which to base certitude. The final argument of the sceptics merely restates the basic premise of both Protagoras and Pyrrho of Elis: since knowledge depends on physical and physiological conditions the individual can never acquire a true knowledge of reality, for all he learns is colored or modified by his own personal sensual perception.9

The man who is one of the earliest links of modern philosophy with ancient Greek scepticism is Montaigne, who died in 1592, just a bit more than a century before the death of Dryden in 1700. The scepticism of Montaigne is stated by Gustave Lanson in his book on Montaigne:

Ceci: que l'homme ne peut connaître aucune chose en soi; qu'en metaphysique, il n'y pas de certitude accessible à l'esprit humain ... ou la foi seule peut nous fournir des solutions fermes et vrais ... subjectivisme, positivisme, relativisme, sont des termes qui définiraient pour nous la position de Montaigne, plus exactement que les mots tres lâche de scepticisme, bon assuement pour son temps.10

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8 Barrow, op. cit., p. 33.
9 Ibid., Cf. Chapter III.
Again Lanson says:

Montaigne n'a jamais nie que la possibilité d'atteindre la vérité totale, absolue et éternelle; il a mis en doute la solidité des vérités prétendues générales. Il n'a pas contesté notre capacité de posséder certaines certitudes particulières... ll

In these passages Lanson explains the scepticism of Montaigne as a doubt of general or first principles which admits the value of sensation, individual experiences and particular ideas arising from immediate perception. However, once a man puts himself into a real doubt of his ability to come to the truth of general principles or universal ideas he seals his doom philosophically and becomes, if not in name certainly in fact, a thorough-going sceptic. The reason for this is evident from an examination of what Montaigne proposed as epistemological guides. To doubt the possibility of the mind's knowing first principles or universals is to state a universal principle and to contradict oneself. To state that only particular ideas are valid is to make another general statement and to contradict oneself again.

This self-contradiction that appears in Montaigne is evident also in the scepticism of the followers of Rene Descartes, the man who originated the principle of "Methodic Doubt." Descartes' method of achieving real truth was to have been

ll Ibid., p. 163.
a methodic doubt of everything until the truth of a first principle was intuited, after which other truths could be demonstrated deductively. But since Descartes called into doubt everything but his first principle—"cogito, ergo sum"—he made the individual the center of all certainty. Descartes did not become in practice, however, a sceptic. But his emphasis upon the individual gave a new impetus to the principle of Protagoras, that "man is the measure of all things," and exerted an influence toward scepticism in the ages which followed him.

The Renaissance brought about a revival of scientific investigation. Concern with things material, the subject matter of scientific study, led many scientists to sceptical doubt or disbelief of all that could not be handled, examined, or investigated in a material manner. The spiritual was denied—the material established as the only reality, until men like Thomas Hobbes could propose philosophies based upon the assumption that universal principles must be resolved into the laws governing matter, and that to entertain any idea of non-material beings was "non-scientific" nonsense.

It might be supposed that this materialistic form of scepticism was the common attitude of Dryden's age. Be showing Dryden's membership in the Royal Society—the English association of scientists and scholars—Louis I. Bredvold seeks to prove in the poet the existence of the typical "scienti-
fic" mind, a mind doubtful of all but the most specific material laws, Deistic in Religion and assuming that all the universe and all creatures in the universe, including man, are governed by certain strict, unchanging laws—alike inflexible for all levels of being, even the rational.

Materialism, or Deism—materialism in religion—, was not, however, the characteristic attitude of the Royal Society in Dryden's time. It is sufficient to mention the religious convictions of Robert Boyle, or of Dr. William Harvey, or of Thomas Spratt, the historian of the Society, to show that strong religious belief and sincere religious practice was not at all foreign to the men who contributed so actively to modern physics and medicine with their extremely accurate scientific research.

That there was a strain of sceptical thought in the England of Dryden no one can deny. Its seat, however, lay not in the principles of the organized scientists of the day, who advocated the application of reason to all fields of inquiry, but in the writing of Thomas Hobbes, whom we have mentioned, who restricted the use of reason to the investigation of material phenomena and the laws governing such events, believing that reason could not know of non-material existences and could not discover principles not dependent on matter.

Such a brief outline of scepticism from early beginnings in ancient Greece to seventeenth century England must suffice us here. Always the sceptic is the man who doubts
the existence of universal laws applicable to all being, or who underestimates the power of reason to discover those laws. The sceptic at first was struck by the subjective side of knowledge to the extent that he neglected to consider the objective material upon which all subjective learning apparatus must operate. By Dryden's time some sceptics were ready to admit the value of individual sensory perceptions, but denied the value of any universal law or the existence of any reality which could not be examined and handled in the laboratories of the new science.

It is easy to understand how a sceptic, despairing of his own ability to find the truth, or to discover any universal law to govern or guide his own actions, would turn to authoritative statements of principles for which his life craved, but which his scepticism denied him. This turning from sceptical doubt or disbelief to some standard of action laid down by authority of Church or of State or other social organization is called Pyrrhonism or Fideism. Fideism, then, is the extreme position of a sceptic who accepts a set of principles to guide his political, social, or moral actions, not because he sees any intrinsic truth in the principles themselves, not because he admits the credibility of the principles when he examines them with the powers of his intellect, but because they are established by some authoritative means—social convention, religious dogmatism, or by some social group claim-
ing the power to set up principles by which men must be gov-
erned.

The Fideist, then, believes because he wants to believe, not because he is forced by his reason and intellect to believe.

The opportunist is easily identified. He is the man who acts without principles of any kind, not because he necessarily maintains that there are no universal principles, but because his chief objective in life is personal affluence, material gain, political or economic well-being. To the opportunist principles are of no importance, except as standards to be embraced, creeds to be recited for personal profit. As the standards change so does the opportunist. His guide is "Carpe diem," his goal—gain, his conscience merely a voice with which he argues until opportunity wins out by using certain standard arguments in behalf of his about-facings, such as, "everyone is doing it," "I really am doing this for my fam-
ily, not for myself," "there's time to repent later, now's the time to get ahead."

These, then, are the names given to Dryden by one cri-
tic or another—fideist, sceptic, opportunist. If Dryden is one of these three we need go no further; but if Dryden is by any chance what he claims to be, a seeker for truth and finally a sincere convert to the Catholic Church, we must learn what were the seventeenth century ideas about finding truth, and what a sincere adult convert to the Catholic Church
must be, as well as the way in which the convert can find his way into the church.

From the study of Dryden's religious poems themselves, as well as from a survey of representative English thought of the late seventeenth century, we can perceive that thinkers of that period believed truth in religious matters was discovered by two means, reason and revelation. The reason, unaided by any supernatural light and motivated by a desire to find the answer to existence, the fulfilment of its desires for religious security, and the knowledge, derived from its own operation upon the data presented to it by the senses, that there is a God and it is reasonable for men to expect that He has prepared some way for them to reach Him, slowly discovers that way—Revelation. Once revelation has been found its content is investigated and seen by reason not to contradict anything already known by reason itself. Then reason accepts revelation, after which acceptance reason is no longer necessary and the soul follows the guides outlined by the divine Reveal-er, rather than relies upon human reason for the discovery of those laws.

This use of reason in religious matters may be seen in a poem of Abraham Cowley which I will quote in full, both for its summary of what seems to be representative seventeenth century thought, and for its similarity in idea and imagery to Dryden's defence of his Catholicism, The Hind and the Panther.
The Reason.

The Use of it in Divine Matters.

1.

Some blind themselves, 'cause possibly they may
Be led by Others a right way;
They build on Sands, which if unmoved they find,
'Tis but because there was no Wind.
Less hard 'tis, not to err us ourselves, than know
If our Fore-fathers err'd or no.
When we trust Men concerning God, we then
Trust not God concerning men.

2.

Visions and Inspirations some expect
Their course here to direct,
Like senseless Chimists their own wealth destroy,
Imaginary Gold t' enjoy.
So Stars appear to drop to us from Sky,
And gild the passage as they fly:
But when they fall, and meet th' opposing Ground,
What but a forbid Slime is found?

3.

Sometimes their Fancies they 'above Reason set,
And fact that they may dream of meat.
Sometimes ill Spirits their sickly Souls delude,
And Bæstard-Forms obstruct.
So Endors wretched Sorceress, although
She Saul through his disguise did know,
Yet when the Devil comes up disguis'd, she cries,
Behold the Gods arise.

4.

In vain, alas, these outward hopes are try'd;
Reason within's our only Guide.
Reason which (God be praised!) still walks, for all
Its old Original Fall.
And since it self the boundless Godhead join'd
With a Reasonable Mind,
It plainly shows that Mysteries Divine
May with our Reason join.
5.

The Holy Book, like the eighth Sphere, does shine
With thousand Lights of Truth Divine.
So numberless the Stars, that to the Eye,
It makes but all one Galaxie.
Yet Reason must assist too, for in Seas
So vast and dangerous as these,
Our course by Stars we cannot know,
Without the Compass too below.

6.

Though Reason cannot through Faiths Mysteries see,
It sees that There and such they be;
Leads to Heaven's Door, and there does humbly keep,
And there through Chinks and Key-holes peep.
Though it, like Moses by a sad command
Must not come into th' Holy Land,
Yet thither it infallibly does guide,
And from afar 'tis all descried.

In the editor's preface to the edition of Cowley's collected works from which the preceding poem is taken
Thomas Spratt, historian of the Royal Society, declares that Cowley's sentiments as well as those which Spratt himself expresses will meet the approval of Mr. M. Clifford to whom the edition is addressed, and will find approbation with the public who receive the book. Spratt then mentions a plan of Cowley to investigate his religion so as to establish it for himself upon a reasonable (not a sceptical or fideistic) foundation. Of Cowley Spratt writes:

But his last and principal Design, was that which ought to be the principal to every wise man; the establishing his mind in the Faith he professed.

He was in his practice exactly obedient to the Use and Precepts of Our Church. [The Established Church of England] Nor was he inclined to any uncertainty and doubt, as obhoring all contention in indifferent things, and much more in sacred. But he beheld the Divisions of Christendom: he saw how many Controversies had been introduced by Zeal or Ignorance, and continued by Faction. He had therefore an earnest intention of taking a Review of the Original Principles of the Primitive Church: believing that every true Christian had no better means to settle his spirit than that which was proposed to Ambrose and his Followers, to be the end of their wanderings, Antiquam exquirite Matrem.

This examination he purposed should reach to our Saviors and the Apostles lives, and their immediate Successors, for four or five Centuries; till Interest and Policy prevailed over Devotion. He hoped to have absolutely compassed it in three or four years, and when that was done, there to have fixed for ever, without any shaking or alteration in his judgment. Indeed it was a great damage to our Church, that he lived not to perform it. For very much of the Primitive Light might have been expected from a mind that was imbued with the Primitive meekness and Innocence. And beside, such a Work coming from one that was no Divine, might have been very useful for this Age; wherein it is one of the principle Cavils against Religion, that it is only a matter of interest, and only supported for the gain of a particular Profession.13

The apologies of Dr. Harvey and Dr. Boyle repeat the sentiments expressed here and seen latter in Dryden's The Hind and the Panther—that through the use of reason man can come to the door of revelation, that there reason dims like a star in the presence of the sun, and that once reason has brought man to revelation (to which it is an infallible guide, according to these men), so far as religious matters

are concerned reason has no further use. It is important to note, however, that reason has already shown the seeker for truth that God exists, that revelation is possible, that that revelation is the way to salvation, and that only through the use of reason can revelation ever be discovered. Can this be a sceptical attitude—a doubt of man’s ability to find truth?

But how can a convert come to the Catholic Church? What routes do Catholic apologists see by which those outside the Church can find and enter it? For a few moments we must concern ourselves with these questions if we are to secure a set of objective standards by which to judge the validity of the path by which Dryden claims he discovered his "Antiquam Matrem."

There are two basic means of approaching the Church and most adult converts follow one of these two paths or a combination of them both. The first means of approach is by historical analysis—an examination of the Scriptures for their historical accuracy, their trustworthiness, and their reliability. The second path is a psychological route and consists in an intellectual examination of the existence of God, His Nature, the possibility of revelation and of revealed religion, that characteristics of such a religion and the study of existing churches to see which one, if any, bears the marks which reason, unaided, has decided must identify the true church.

The sceptics of Dryden’s time turned to attack the
Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments, as not only non-inspired but as non-historical as well. Hobbes, Spinoza, and Griesbach—scholars of the "intellectual revolution" of the seventeenth and eighteenth century in Europe—all aim their scepticism at the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{14} Even a French Catholic scholar, Father Richard Simon, published a work of historical criticism of the Bible which was placed on the Catholic Church's Index of Forbidden Books. Dryden praises this work in \textit{Religio Laici} and says that the author, Father Simon, is called by some of his contemporaries a sceptic.\textsuperscript{15} Louis I Bredvold, Dryden scholar of some renown, says that Father Simon was really a good priest who merely sought to attack the Protestant reliance upon the Bible as the sole rule of Faith by his criticism of the Scriptures. Father Simon's good faith or lack of it need not concern us here, for it is sufficient for our purposes to show that his work and others of the time evidenced an attack upon the historical approach to the Church through their questioning of the historical accuracy of Holy Writ.


\textsuperscript{15} John Dryden, \textit{Religio Laici}, ll. 224--275. Unless otherwise noted all quotations from Dryden's works are taken from the edition by Sir Walter Scott and George Saintsbury (Edinburgh: T. A. Constable, 1883).
That Dryden was familiar with Father Simon's work is evident from his references to it in *Religio Laici*, but recent scholarship seems to establish as a fact that Dryden was also acquainted with the English translator of Father Simon's French text and that he probably had a chance to read selections of Simon's *Critical History of the Old Testament* while it was still in the press.16

But Dryden's attitude toward this sceptical attack on the validity of the Scriptures we will study fully in our survey of *Religio Laici* in a later chapter. Let us now turn to an examination of the second entry way into the church, the psychological approach.

Dryden seems to have followed this psychological route into the Roman Church, using the historical approach as an aid in determining what made up the bulk of revelation after discovering the fact of revelation by the use of reason. But before we see exactly what Dryden did, we should note if there be an objective value to this means of conversion. To some extent this method can be compared to the method of the modern scientist who reasons from effect to cause as he studies natural phenomena. The student of religion deduces from his study of God what qualities a church must have and what effects it must produce in its members if it be God-like, God-established.

Then he looks for these effects in the society in which he lives, and finding them, seeks out their cause.

Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Alphonsus, Roman Catholic theologians, have this to say concerning the necessary marks of the church which lays claim to divine guidance, marks which produce corresponding effects in its members:

Quatuor in symbolo Constantinopolitanæ recensentur proprietates Ecclesiæ, scilicet, unitas, sanctitas, catholicitas, et apostolicitas. Hoc autem ordine merito enumerantur: prima anim, unitas, immediate defluit ex ipso Ecclesiæ essentia, quatenus est societas religiosa visibilis; sanctitas efficaciam ejus spiritualem ad animas vivificandas arguit; catholicitas vim ejus diffusam prodict; demique apostolicitas perseverantem ejus in durando virtutem ostendat.

A more extended treatment of the marks of the church and the use made of them in The Hind and the Panther will appear in Chapter Four. However, if we note that Dryden discusses the Catholic Church from the point of view of its four marks we can see the value of knowing what these marks are and how they pertain to the true church. Now one final set of terms and words must be studied before we are ready to study the critics of Dryden's sincerity and consistency.

The difference between a fideist and an intellectually sincere Catholic lies in the use and definition of Faith. For the fideist Faith is not reasonable; he believes because he

wants to believe in some set of principles, not because his reason prompts him to rational acceptance of those principles. The Catholic who studies his religion from an intellectual viewpoint believes in its principles and doctrines because in them he sees nothing contrary to reason, nothing which reason must reject to maintain its own natural dignity. Perhaps his reason cannot fathom the mysteries, but is sees in the implications of the religious mysteries nothing that is self-refuting or contrary to the principles reason can establish in its own realm.

In these last few pages we have studied the objective criteria to which we can compare Dryden's words and actions in order to reach a conclusion about the validity of the charges made against him and to decide for ourselves if Dryden seems to be a sincere man in his religious professions—first of all Puritanism, then Anglicanism, and finally Catholicism.

To qualify as an opportunist, Dryden must share the characteristics of people of that ilk. He must be, as Webster puts it, one who makes a practice of "taking advantage, as in politics, of opportunities or circumstances, with little regard for principles or ultimate consequences."18

To bear the name sceptic Dryden must act from the sceptic's point of view, which, as we have seen, is doubt or denial

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that the human mind can know the truth. If he be a fideist our poet must fall into the ranks of the followers of Huwt (1630-1721), who put into concrete form the principles by which the true fideist acts: "... without the aid of divine revelation the human mind could never transcend mere probability; certitude is beyond its reach." 19

If, on the other hand, Dryden does not belittle the power of reason or does not act without regard for principles and is a sincere religious man, his own explanation of the value he assigns to both faith and reason must be considered, and in the light of what sincere religious men of the seventeenth century thought of the use of reason in divine matters we must consider Dryden's defence of his conversion to the Catholic Church. Having fixed the meaning of the terms used in the dispute over Dryden's conversion, we can enter the discussion itself.

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19 Barron, op. cit., p. 186.
CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL OPINIONS OF DRYDEN'S CONVERSION

In a letter to John Dennis written in 1693 or 1694, Dryden makes the following statement: "... we poor Poets Militant (to use Mr. Cowley's Expression) are at the Mercy of Wretched Scribblers: And when they cannot fasten upon our Verses, they fall upon our Morals, our Principles of State and Religion."  

Sir Walter Scott, commenting upon the furor aroused by Dryden's account of his conversion, notes that the accusations against Dryden in his own day were not few, and hints also at the motives prompting many of the charges of immorality and of opportunism leveled against Dryden.

For not only did Burnet at the time express himself with great asperity of Dryden, but long afterwards, when writing his history, he pronounced a severe censure on the immorality of his plays, so inaccur-

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20 The date is assigned by Malone, first editor of the letters of Dryden, and is reaffirmed by Charles E. Ward, latest editor of Dryden's correspondence. It is an answer, most probably, to a letter of Dennis dated March 3, 1693.

21 The Letters of John Dryden, C. E. Ward, ed. (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1942), p. 72. The editor adds this note: "As Dryden had reason to know: in number and virulence the attacks on him probably surpass those on any figure of the time," Note also that the letter expresses an affinity that Dryden feels for Cowley, his fellow in the Royal Society and the man who proposed the search through reason for primitive Christianity.
ately expressed as to be applicable by common construc-
tion, to the author's private character.22

The appearance of "The Hind and the Panther" excited a clamour against the author far more general than the publication of "Absalom and Achitophel." Upon that occasion, the offence was given only to a party, but this open and avowed defence of James's strides toward arbitrary power, with the unpopular circumstances of its coming from a new convert to the royal faith, involved our poet in the general suspicion with which the nation at large now viewed the slightest motions of their infatuated monarch. The most noted amongst those who appeared to oppose the triumphant advocates of the Hind, were Montague and Prior, young men now rising into eminence. They joined to produce a parody entitled the "Town and Country Mouse;" .... Indeed, although the parody was trite and obvious, the satirists had the public upon their side; and it now seems astonishing with what acclamations this attack upon the most able champion of James's faith was hailed by his discontented subjects. ....

Although Prior and Montague were first in place and popularity, there wanted not the usual crowd of inferior satirists and poetasters to follow them to the charge. "The Hind and the Panther" was assailed by a variety of pamphlets, by Tom Brown and others .... It is worth mentioning, that on this, as on a former occasion, an adversary of Dryden chose to select one of his own poems as a contrast to his latter opinions. The "Religio Laici" was reprinted, and carefully opposed to the various passages of "The Hind and the Panther," which appeared most contradictory to its tenets.23

I reprint this extended series of comments from Scott to sum up the type of arguments used against Dryden in the first moments of the controversy over his sincerity (1687--


23 Ibid., pp. 275--279.
1690). Dryden, the Catholic Church, James II, and the Royal Family are identified by the attackers. If Dryden is a Catholic, reasoned the opposition, he must be in the pay of the King who is a Catholic, and he must be writing to vindicate the King's entire policy. Dryden must have become a Catholic because he saw Catholicism as the quickest way to political preference.

This charge of opportunism, implicit, if not explicit in the literature to which Scott refers, was supported by what seemed to be apparent inconsistencies in Dryden's thought processes. Religio Laici appeared to appeal for one set of religious standards; The Hind and the Panther defended another religious profession, seemingly contradictory to that of Religio Laici. Established Churchmen and Whigs were quick to argue that The Hind and the Panther was the work of a Tory hireling, who was ready to perjure himself for profit.

Scott, respecting both Dryden's intellectual acumen and moral integrity, cannot bring himself to agree with these early critics. In 1801, when he prepared his edition of Dryden's works, he asserts that Dryden was neither a hireling nor an inconsistent thinker. Being strongly opposed to matters Catholic, however, Scott can not quite approve Dryden's Catholicism, no matter how emphatically he defends the poet's consistency and integrity.

We find, therefore, that Dryden's conversion was
not of that dordid kind which is the consequence of a strong temporal interest ... Neither have we to
reproach him, that, grounded and rooted in a pure
Protestant creed, he was foolish enough to abandon
it for the more corrupted doctrines of Rome. ...
We may indeed regret, that, having to choose between
the two religions, he should have adopted that which
our education, reason, and even prepossessions, com-
bine to point out as foully corrupted from the prim-
itive simplicity of the Christian Church.24

Scott seems to say that Dryden was certainly sincere enough
in what he did, even if it is regrettable that he turned to
Rome.

Referring to the matter of Dryden's inconsistency as
charged by his adversary who reprinted Religio Laici, Scott
remarks:

But while the Grub-street editor exulted in success-
fully pointing out the inconsistencies between Dry-
den's earlier and later religious opinions, he was
incapable of observing, that the change was adopted
in consequence of the same unbroken train of reasoning,
and that Dryden, when he wrote the "Religio Laici,"
was under the impulse of the same conviction, which,
further prosecuted, led him to acquiesce in the faith
of Rome.25

The reference made by Scott, and his own defence of
Dryden, sum up fairly accurately and precisely the arguments
for and against Dryden's religious poems in the eighteenth
and nineteenth centuries, as well as in the last decade of
the seventeenth century. Dryden, and his poetry—are di-

24 Ibid., pp. 264--265.

missed because he is considered an opportunist, a hireling, a turncoat; or Dryden and his poems are considered noteworthy because some critics (Scott and Johnson) are willing to grant that Dryden's conversion may have been real, though it was certainly unwise and regrettable.

Dr. Johnson speaks briefly of Dryden's religious poems. In his life of Dryden he calls *Religio Laici* one of the few spontaneous products of Dryden's genius, and mentions *The Hind and the Panther* as akin to the former poem in spontaneity. These poems Johnson contrasts to the more occasional political pieces brought forth by Dryden in behalf of one ruler or another from the time of the Protectorate to the rejection of James II.

Although he regrets the fablist imagery and the mechanics of *The Hind and the Panther*, and feels some antipathy toward the Catholicism of Dryden, Johnson never accuses the poet of opportunism, scepticism, or fideism. In fact, when he sums up the character of Dryden in his study in *The Lives of the Poets*, Johnson indicates that he feels Dryden was always a firm believer in whatever cause he backed. Johnson quotes Dryden's self-characterization from a letter written to a son in Rome in the late 1690's as the poet's own portrait of himself--moral, literary, human characteristics are all presented here and Johnson quotes Dryden with qualifications of no kind. This letter appears often in the present discussion.
for in it Dryden assures his boy that he will never lie about his religion, and never has lied about it, no matter how great the opportunity for gain or convenience.

Dr. Johnson took Dryden's word about his character in this way during the eighteenth century. In contrast to his ideas and Scott's characterization in the early nineteenth century, however, we find Thomas Macaulay's picture of Dryden in volume two of his History of England. Macaulay seems to look upon Dryden as the epitome of political corruption in the reign of James II. The Roman Catholic King is exceedingly objectionable to Macaulay, and religious prejudice is not one of the minor reasons for Macaulay's denunciation of the last of the Stuarts.

Of Dryden Macaulay writes:

He was not naturally a man of high spirit; and his pursuits had been by no means such as were likely to give elevation or delicacy to his mind. He had, during many years, earned his daily bread by pandering to the vicious tastes of the pit, and by grossly flattering rich and noble patrons. Selfrespect and a fine sense of the becoming were not to be expected from one who had led a life of mendicancy and adulation. Finding that, if he continued to call himself a Protestant, his services would be overlooked, he declared himself a Papist. The King's parsimony speedily relaxed. Dryden's pension was restored: the arrears were paid up; and he was employed to defend his new religion both in prose and verse.26

With the two men we have referred to above, Macaulay

Two eminent men, Samuel Johnson and Walter Scott, have done their best to persuade themselves and others that this memorable conversion was sincere. It was natural that they should be desirous to remove a disgraceful stain from the memory of one whose genius they justly admired, and with whose political feelings they strongly sympathised; but the impartial historian must with regret pronounce a very different judgement. 27

Scott and Johnson both go out of their way to show that they are attempting unprejudiced judgments of Dryden, whose religion they strongly opposed. They repeatedly assert that their judgments are based upon impartial consideration of the facts of Dryden's case as well as of the characteristics of Dryden's mind as expressed in his writings. Louis Bredvold, whose recent study of Dryden we will discuss in a later section of this chapter, has shown that Dryden's patent as Poet Laureate was in process of renewal several months before his conversion. Since the question of re-appointment of royal pensioners was always a lengthy one, Bredvold points out that Dryden's conversion to the Roman Church between the beginning of the process leading to a re-issuing of his royal patent (April 27, 1685) and the final grant of the patent (March 8, 1686) cannot be misinterpreted as a move prompted by political opportunism. 28

27 Ibid.

But Macaulay has more to say of the intellectual side of Dryden's conversion:

There will always be a strong presumption against the sincerity of a conversion by which the convert is directly a gainer. In the case of Dryden there is nothing to counterbalance this presumption. His theological writings abundantly prove that he had never sought with diligence and anxiety to learn the truth, and that his knowledge both of the Church which he quitted and of the Church which he entered was of the most superficial kind. Nor was his subsequent conduct that of a man whom a strong sense of duty had constrained to take a step of awful importance. Had he been such a man, the same conviction which had led him to join the Church of Rome would surely have prevented him from violating grossly and habitually rules which that Church, in common with every other Christian society, recognizes as binding. There would have been a marked distinction between his earlier and later compositions. He would have looked back with remorse on a literary life of near thirty years, during which his rare powers of diction and versification had been systematically employed in spreading moral corruption. Not a line tending to make virtue contemptible, or to inflame licentious desire would henceforward have proceeded from his pen.29

Macaulay says more, but the tenor of his words is evident in the few lines given above. Dryden's plays he sees as moral dangers. The charges he makes are faintly reminiscent of those brought against an ancient Socrates--corrupter of youth, destroyer of morals, contemptor of virtue.

Scott and Johnson, as well as Mr. Bredvold and some of the other critics we shall mention, see no basis for this charge of grossness made by Macaulay. In the final chapter of

this discussion we will study Dryden's own dramatic theory, seeing exactly what his thoughts were as he write plays like The Spanish Fryar, The Assigation, and The Conquest of Granada, in which some of the characters speak disparagingly of religion and religious, and in which perverse characters prosper, even in the midst of vicious lives.

As for the role of "impartial historian" to which Macaulay lays claim:

The opinion of Brougham that Macaulay was never in search of truth but aimed only to produce "an effect of glitter and paint" is in harshness worthy of Macaulay himself, but it is not without warrant. The dazzling style is without shade; neither the whites (generally the Whigs) nor the blacks (generally the Tories) admit of any adulteration of gray. There is not even an appearance of impartiality. For the reliability of evidence he cared less than for its usefulness for the purposes of his argument. ... Yet recognition is due to the intellectual power which wrests the evidence to the support of a thesis. Those aspects of his subject which did not enlist his interest or did not lend themselves to his thesis he tended to neglect....

However, Macaulay's test for sincerity is somewhat the same as that set up by Scott—the actions of the convert after his conversion. Mr. Bredvold and the other critics who make sincerity subject to the same criteria point out to us that together with Dryden's explanation of his actions we must consider the nature of the things he did, and the things he

wrote not only after becoming a Catholic but before his conversion to Rome to see if there is any consistent pattern in our poet's life, or if there is anything in his deeds which would disprove his words.

Macaulay's History has carried us from the time of Scott to the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1868 an American critic took up the question of Dryden and declared:

It is Dryden's excuse that his characteristic excellence is to argue persuasively and powerfully, whether in verse or prose, and that he was amply endowed with the most needful quality of an advocate—to be always strongly and wholly of his present was of thinking, whatever it might be.31

Such is James Russell Lowell's estimate of Dryden's character.

Of our poet's conversion Lowell states:

Dryden's conversion to Romanism has been commonly taken for granted as insincere, and has therefore left an abiding stain on his character, though the mud thrown at him by angry opponents or rivals brushed off as soon as it was dry. But I think his choice of faith susceptible of several explanations, none of them in any way discreditable to him. Where Church and State are habitually associated, it is natural that minds even of a high order should unconsciously come to regard religion as only a subtler mode of politics. Dryden, conservative by nature, had discovered before Joseph de Maistre, that Protestantism, so long as it justified its name by continuing to be an active principle, was the abettor of Republicanism, perhaps the vanguard of Anarchy. I think this is hinted in more than one passage in his preface to "The Hind and the Panther." He may very well have preferred Romanism because of its elder claim to authority in all matters of doctrine, but I think he

had a deeper reason in the constitution of his own mind. That he was "naturally inclined to scepticism in philosophy," he tells us of himself in the preface to the "Religio Laici;" but he was a sceptic with an imaginative side, and in such characters scepticism and superstition play into each other's hands.

Here, then, is another theory concerning Dryden's conversion. Its main point is the sincere search for truth which Lowell notes in Dryden. Two possible explanations for the culmination of that search in Romanism present themselves to Lowell: the first, that of political conservatism, we will see expounded soon after the turn of the present century; the second, philosophical scepticism, is the explanation given in the 1830's by Mr. Bredvold. This critic, however, does not couple the scepticism he finds in Dryden with superstition of any type or with imaginative religion, but emphasizes the idea just hinted at in Lowell's reference to the Church's older claim to authority in all matters of doctrine." This preference for authority is expanded by Mr. Bredvold into a fideistic attitude on Dryden's part—that attitude which we have seen is the last stand of a sceptic who must reconcile the doubts of his mind concerning religious security with the longings of a soul which craves some stable system of morality and worship.

These men to whom we have just referred in the last few pages are representative of the various attitudes toward

Dryden expressed in literary criticism of Dryden's religious poems during the time since his conversion to the Catholic Church.

Scott lists some of the contemporaries who accused Dryden of opportunism. Scott himself argues for Dryden's sincerity and consistency of religious conviction, accounting for his conversion to Catholicism on the basis of the wiles used by Catholic convert-makers to convince a man so eager for religious security. Johnson also pleads for the strength of character he sees in Dryden. Macaulay identified Catholicism with evil personified and charged Dryden with the basest opportunism and the grossest immorality. James Russell Lowell considers Dryden as sincere in all he undertook, sincere in all the beliefs for which he ever argued, and traces his conversion to Rome to either political conservatism or philosophical scepticism. Critical opinion falls almost universally into three categories:

(1) Dryden is an opportunist;

(2) Dryden is sincere because he is a sceptic or a fideist and his philosophical predispositions lead to a certain consistent desire for authoritative guidance in religion;

(3) Dryden is sincere because his political background is consistently conservative and leads him to greater and greater conservatism in religion.

The critics whose ideas we have examined thus far as well as
those we are about to discuss can be classified under one of these three headings. Writing in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, W.A. Ward professes a belief in Dryden's sincerity when he joined the Catholic Church and dismisses as unthinking any judgments to the contrary. His conclusion is based on the facts of Dryden's life, especially his strict adherence to the Church after the accession of William of Orange, despite the hardships such perseverance meant to the poet's old age.

*The Cambridge History*, however, is not the only work of our present century which has studied Dryden's conversion. In the twentieth century controversy over Dryden's changes of religion has not been lacking. Richard Garnett, reviving the theory of taste with his impressionistic criticism of literature, dismisses the religious poetry of Dryden because he does not like it and does not feel that it fits into the tradition of either apologetic or religious literature mainly because it does not reflect Garnett's personal beliefs. His contention seems to be, that since the poems don't express his own attitude toward the Catholic Church they must be entirely useless.

In *A History of English Poetry*, W. J. Courthope adopts a critical method based on the reciprocal effects of society and literature. Acting upon this premise he regards Dryden's conversions as sincere, and judges the poems as expressions
of Dryden's true religious sentiments, sincerely expressed.

Sir Herbert Grierson opposes Courthope and has a high regard for literature which is more detached from contemporary affairs rather than for that which depends upon society as an immediate source. He feels that Dryden is a sceptic and says that since he "believed in nothing" it was easy for him to shift religion without censure from his conscience.

While these four men make comments upon Dryden's religious poems they do so only in passing. The value of a study devoted entirely to Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther will lie in whatever light it can throw upon the meaning of the poems, the consistency of their ideas, and the sincerity of their origins. If Dryden has said something well the quality of his expression can only be studied in the light of what he has said. It must be evident that a man cannot make a fine literary profession of his belief in Catholic doctrines and explain the points of doctrine which convinced him of the truth of Catholicism, unless he knows what he is talking about. And we cannot judge the beauty of how well these ideas are expressed unless we know what ideas are influencing the poet. To study Dryden's poetry, then, not from one of the three points of view we have traced, but from a position entirely new—that Dryden might have been attempting an exposition of the reasons why he was
intellectually convinced of the truths of the religions to which he belonged, and that his intellectual sincerity and conviction is the reason for his eventual conversion to Catholicism, and that The Hind and the Panther is a poetic expression of various Catholic dogmas which had persuaded Dryden that only inside the Catholic Church was he following Christ fully—should shed some new light on Dryden, and should enable us to decide with a greater degree of certainty than ever before whether the poems are really good presentations of deep thought, or mere superficial ornaments designed to blind both the poet and his audience to the faults of Dryden's character.33

But there remain three more critics whose opinions of Dryden we must examine if we are to complete our knowledge of Dryden criticism up to the present moment.34

33 Cf. Oliver Elton, The Augustan Ages (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), for the theory that Dryden's conversions were all pragmatic in nature and that his poems based on his religious professions are merely attempts to rationalize his positions.

34 The critics discussed in this paper are chosen either for their extended treatment of Dryden's religious positions or for their representativeness in the discussion of the poet's sincerity. Other Dryden critics such as Mark Van Doren, W. P. Ker, John Sargeaunt, Bonamy Dobree, T. S. Eliot, David Masson, et al., do not deal specifically with Dryden's religion or at best comment very briefly and casually upon it. The selection is this paper of critical opinion is designed as representative, not exhaustive. Articles and books pertinent to the subject in hand are listed at some length in the Bibliography.
In the *Times' Literary Supplement* of April 17, 1937, an anonymous feature writer declares stern opposition to any charge of opportunism made against Dryden and sketches a case for Dryden's sincerity on the basis of a desire for authority--fideism--which he sees in Dryden's various conversions.

As we have seen, other writers have commented upon Dryden's conversion, but all in the light of one of the three interpretations we have listed above. One thing is common to all of these writers, however; they have discussed Dryden's Catholicism without a thorough and comprehensive understanding of or sympathy for Catholic apologetics, and they are all non-Catholics of one or another religious profession and interpret the conversion to the Catholic Church in the light of attitudes nonsympathetic, if not entirely antagonistic, to Catholicism.

Louis I, Bradvold, whose extensive studies of Dryden we are about to discuss, does not entirely share the non-Catholic attitude, for he has had his chapter on Roman Catholic apologetics of the seventeenth century checked for accuracy by Catholic authority. He does, however, err to the extent that he assumes all converts to the Catholic Church in the seventeenth century thought in the same was and followed the same path into the Church, forgetting that conversion is an individual thing, and that attitudes proper to the individual
must be considered by themselves, not in the light of a deductive system of reasoning.

But turning from past centuries to our own we find that twentieth century opinion will fit into the three-fold outline we have already discussed.

In our own century new theories have been advanced which attempt to take into account Dryden's obvious intellectual acumen, and his apparent desire to be believed in both Religio Laici and in The Hind and the Panther. Like Scott, modern critics respect Dryden's mind, admit he was not a mere mireling or opportunist, but fail to understand his Catholicism, the religion to which he gave the final years of his life and in which he remained despite opportunities of material profit elsewhere.

In 1907, R. K. Root, writing in the Publications of the Modern Language Association, attempted to trace a thread of consistency in all of Dryden's changes of belief. The consistent pattern, wrote Root, was political. Dryden was raised a Tory and a true Tory he remained for his entire life. True, Dryden was writing in praise of Cromwell's Protectorate in 1659, but the decadence following Cromwell's death led the young poet to realize the necessity of a restored monarchy for a peaceful and prosperous England. It was an easy step from Cromwellian Puritanism, said Root, to Restoration Anglicanism for the typical English spirit desired the ritual of the Es-
established Church more than the barrenness of the Puritan Assembly. So Dryden, along with half of England, became a member of the Established Church. No one was accused of time-serving, no one was charged with lack of principles. Dryden would never have been molested, in Root's theory, if he had not shifted a second time, to Catholicism under the Catholic King, James II. But this move, too, according to Root, is consistent with Dryden's Toryism, for when he was asked to choose between Church and King, Dryden chose the King. The King's religion was Catholicism so Dryden bowed to Rome. Confronted with any other religious choice, reasons Root, Dryden would have chosen the Established Church. But forced to decide between King and Church Dryden the Tory followed the King.

Root's theory may explain aspects of Dryden's conversions, but it fails to answer two important questions. Why did Dryden remain faithful to the Catholic Church after the accession of William? What can be said of Dryden's attitude toward religion itself at this time; did he consider it of primary or of secondary importance?

Leaving Root's theory, which neglects Dryden's use of the intellect and the reason in religious matters, we can turn to the most extensive study proposed to explain both Dryden's continued changes of religion and his intellectual capacity.
The theory which we will consider now and with which we will be concerned primarily in the body of this discussion is that of Professor Louis L Bredvold of the University of Michigan, who has the honor of being the first to really consider Dryden in the light of his times and as a part of what he calls the "Intellectual Milieu" of the seventeenth century. Mr. Bredvold considers Dryden as a thinker, principally, and is not directly concerned with the literary or aesthetic value of Dryden's work. His reason for this preoccupation with a hitherto neglected side of Dryden he explains in his opening remarks.

Dryden has received generous recognition for his stylistic achievement, for the way in which he has put the stamp of his genius upon the language of England, in both prose and poetry. …

But the content of Dryden's work, his cast of mind, and his intellectual equipment have received little attention, except in disparagement. Mr. Allan Lubbock, for instance, has recently asserted that Dryden's "whole body of work can be explained as the child of a deep enthusiasm, which made him attach but little importance to religion or politics, or even to many aspects of literature itself. What excluded everything else was the love of expression for its own sake. He devoted himself therefore to increasing the efficiency of his instruments." [Allan Lubbock, The Character of John Dryden, London, 1925, p. 6] … But this is the judgement of the twentieth century; readers in the past have been able to say more for Dryden.

… But the confession of so discerning a reader as Landor may remind us that there are stores of thought in Dryden's work which should not be ignored in an explanation and appraisal of his literary achievement. There is, indeed, something anomalous in a criticism which concerns itself with natural thinking and forcible expression without deigning to note what is thought and expressed.
Such criticism is either sophistical itself, or applicable only to sophists. And the unpleasant assumption underlies much of the criticism, much even of the praise, of Dryden, that he was a sophist and to be dealt with accordingly; that, with the possible exception of some of his literary criticism, his mind was neither sincere, nor significant, nor interesting.35

These words of Bredvold can be sufficient apologia for this paper. We can never know how well Dryden expressed his thoughts, how well-selected and well-wrought his words are, unless we know what the thoughts are which are conveyed in the words the poet uses. Communication, on any level, uses symbols to convey ideas. On a level of abstract thought we must study the thought before we can decide how effective or artistic is the method of communicating it.

The work in which the quotation above appears is not the first in which Mr. Bredvold's theory appears. In an article for Modern Philology in 1928, Mr. Bredvold tries to establish Dryden as a member of the Royal Society in order


The opinion of Landor to which Mr. Bredvold refers is quoted from Landor's Works (London: 1855), II, 667.

Our course by Milton's light was sped,
And Shakespeare shining over head:
Chatting on deck was Dryden too,
The Bacon of our rhyming crew;
None ever crost our mystic sea
More richly stored with thought than he;
Tho' never tender or sublime,
He wrestles with and conquers Time.
to show that he was a _sceptic_. Extending this theory in his edition of _The Best of Dryden_ in 1933 he traces what he believes is the thread of consistency connecting the various changes of religion in Dryden's life. This thread, he maintains, is scepticism, culminating in Pyrrhonism and the acceptance of the authority of the Roman Catholic Church as a fideist, not as an intellectually convinced convert basing his faith upon reason. This position of Mr. Bredvold is further elaborated in _The Intellectual Milieu_ in which he once more argues that Dryden was a sceptic whose fideism led him to Rome.

This charge of fideist is repeated by the writer of the article in the _Times' Literary Supplement_ to which we have referred. In this article the writer rejects the charges of insincerity and of opportunism made against Dryden by earlier ages, and rejects also any charge of scepticism, maintaining—as does Mr. Bredvold—that the sole reason for Dryden's conversion to the Roman Church was his fideistic attitude toward knowledge. This writer, however, differs from Mr. Bredvold by making no real disjunction between scepticism and fideism, while Mr. Bredvold sees fideism, not as the ultimate position of a sceptic, but as a new position which was opened to Dryden as a result of the scepticism which Mr. Bredvold feels motivated a large portion of Dryden's life.

In the introduction to _The Best of Dryden_ Mr. Bredvold
sums up his opinion of the poet:

Dryden shifted his allegiance from one church to another; but he remained consistent with himself in those philosophical preconceptions which he thought really mattered. 36

What those philosophical preconceptions were, according to Mr. Bredvold, we find described along with passages in Dryden which Mr. Bredvold interprets as indicative of philosophical scepticism.

His work reflects an intellectual tradition and a view of life which he shared with many other men of his age; but it was a tradition into which he clearly fitted, by virtue of his temperament and cast of mind. The centre of this tradition was philosophical scepticism, a form of sophistication widely disseminated in the seventeenth century, which furnishes the key to the intellectual side of Dryden's nature. 37

Mr. Bredvold then lists the main sources of his belief that Dryden was a sceptic, giving the passages in which our poet speaks of scepticism as characteristic of both his own mind and his age.

In his Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668) he described that essay as "sceptical, according to the way of reasoning which was used by Socrates, Plato, and all the Academies of old, which Tully and the best of the Ancients followed, and which is imitated by the modest inquisitions of the Royal Society." In his Defence of an Epilogue (1672) he stated that "we live in an age so sceptical, that as it determines little, so it takes nothing from antiquity on trust." He describes himself in his

37 Ibid., p. xxvi.
preface to Religio Laici (1682) as "naturally inclined to scepticism in philosophy." He carefully distinguished in the preface to Sylvaæ (1685) between his own "natural diffidence and scepticism" and the "positive assertion" and "dogmatical way" of Lucretius, whom he was translating. 38 And in his Life of Luæan (ca. 1696) he expressed the opinion that "all knowing ages" are "naturally sceptic, and not at all bigotted; which if I am not much deceived, is the proper character of our own." 39

We will examine most of these passages from Dryden in their proper context. At the present moment, however, we will do well to note that in only two of the works cited does Dryden apply scepticism to himself (Sylvaæ and Religio Laici).

That Bredvold sees, in this scepticism he points out in Dryden, the key to the poet's religious conversions is evident in his description of the conservative character of scepticism.

Dryden's changes in politics and religion were really consistent in that they were in the same general direction, in the direction of a more and more conservative view of life. Some of his greatest poems command a special interest as an expression of a conservative temperament. And he was impelled towards this conservatism, not only by the course of political developments in his time, but also by the essentially conservative tendency of the sceptical tradition. 40

38 In his article in Modern Philology, Mr. Bredvold uses this statement to establish an opposition between the thought of Dryden and that of Hobbes, and to identify with the spirit of scepticism both Dryden and the Royal Society, both adhering to the same philosophical principles.


40 Ibid., pp. xxviii--xxix.
Describing the character of Pyrrho of Elis, one of the early Greek sceptics, Mr. Bredvold identifies him with the conservative temperament he has already pointed out as Dryden's.

Naturally, such a man will be neither a revolutionist nor a martyr; he could never have sufficient confidence in any opinion to justify suffering inconvenience for it .... Pyrrho, the first great philosophical sceptic, was therefore a conformist and traditionalist in ethics, politics and religion.41

We must bear in mind constantly, as we study Dryden's own words, and not the facts of Dryden's life, that Mr. Bredvold has given us here a standard by which to judge if Dryden is really what Mr. Bredvold makes him, a sceptic. The standard is plain—Dryden's adherence to any belief in time of stress would disprove scepticism and Pyrrhonism; his conformity to the current ideas in ethics, politics and religion will indicate that he is fideistic.

In the light of Mr. Bredvold's standard it is interesting to study the opinion of Sir Walter Scott, who, incidentally, mentions the same means of judging Dryden that Mr. Bredvold gives in the passage we have just examined.

If we are to judge of Dryden's sincerity in his new faith, by the determined firmness with which he retained it through good report and bad report, we must allow him to have been a martyr, or at least a confessor in the Catholic cause.42

41 Ibid., p. xxix.
42 Scott, op. cit., p.268.
We have already seen the attitude with which Scott regarded the Catholic Faith. Yet, he must admit that Dryden's firmness in the face of oppression argues a sincerity of conviction which seems to belie Mr. Bredvold's accusation: that a man of Dryden's temperament would be a conformist, not willing to suffer for his convictions. Mr. Bredvold states also that the true sceptic will never be a revolutionist, yet Scott points out what Mr. Bredvold fails to mention at this point, that Dryden's position after the Whig Revolution was really revolutionary.

If, after the Revolution, like many greater men, he had changed his principles with the times, he was not a person of such mark as to be selected from all the nation, and punished for former tenets. Supported by the friendship of Rochester, and most of the Tory nobles who were active in the Revolution, of Leicester, and many Whigs, especially of the Lord-Chamberlain Dorset, there would probably have been little difficulty in his remaining post-laureate, if he had rectified the errors of Popery. But the Catholic religion and the consequent disqualification, was an insurmountable obstacle to his holding that or any other office under government; and Dryden's adherence to it, with all the poverty, reproach, and even persecution which followed the profession, argued a deep and substantial conviction of the truth of the doctrines it inculcated. 43

The only mention Mr. Bredvold makes of the continued profession by Dryden of the Catholic Faith after the accession of the Protestant William is found in the closing paragraph of The Intellectual Milieu, where, commenting on the charge

43 Ibid., pp. 268-269.
often made that Dryden became a Catholic solely for material
gain, he refers the reader to Dryden's own words in _The Hind_
and the _Panther_. The lines mentioned are sufficient to refute
the charge of opportunism; and if we realize that Dryden fore-
saw at the time of his conversion that the absence of a male
heir of James II would mean the succession of James' Protes-
tant son-in-law, William of Orange, we may see in them a will-
ingness to undergo whatever suffering or privation his new
faith would eventually demand, for he says, in the words of
the Hind who represents the Catholic Church:

_How for my converts, who you say, unfed
Have followed me for miracles of bread;
Judge not by hearsay, but observe at least,
If since their change their leaves have been increased,
The Lion buys no converts; if he did,
Beasts would be sold as fast as he could bid._

And later, in an argument between the _Panther_ (the Established
Church) and the Hind, Dryden says:

_The savage [the Panther],...
off'erd fairly to compound the strife,
And judge conversion by the convert's life.
"'Tis true," she said, "I think it somewhat strange,
So few should follow profitable change;
For present joys are more to flesh and blood,
Than a dull prospect of a distant good.
"T was well alluded by a son of mine,
(I hope to quote him is not to purloin.)
Two magnets, heav'n and earth, allure to bliss;
The larger loadstone that, the nearer this:
The weak attraction of the greater fails;
We nod a while, but neighborhood prevails;
But when the greater proves the nearer too,
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44 _The Hind and the Panther_, Part III, 11, 221--226.
I wonder more your converts come so slow.
Method in those who firm with me remain,
It shows a nobler principle than gain."
"Your inference would be strong," the Hind replied,
"If yours were in effect the suffering side:
Your clergy sons their own in peace possess,
Nor are their prospects in reversion less.
My proselytes are struck with awful dread,
Your bloody comet-laws hang blazing o'er their head;
The respite they enjoy but only lent,
The best they have to hope, protracted, punishment.
Be judge yourself, if interest may prevail,
Which motives, yours or mine, will turn the scale.
While pride and pomp allure, and plenteous ease,
That is, till man's predominant passions cease.
Admire no longer at my slow increase."

Mr. Bredvold cites these lines as a refutation of charges of opportunism in Dryden's conversion. It would seem that the very vigor with which the author explains that the opportunism side is not that of Rome, and that converts to Catholicism will be put to the test of suffering inconvenience can also be used in refutation of Mr. Bredvold's own charge of scepticism or Pyrrhonism. Mr. Bredvold makes consistency during adversity the mark of sincerity, declaring that no real sceptic could ever suffer inconvenience for a principle, since principles are meaningless to a sceptical mind. Dryden realizes this means of gauging sincerity, applies it to real sincerity, and lives it out until his death. It should be noted that Mr. Bredvold does not explain the fact of Dryden's firmness in his Catholicism, his suffering of inconvenience under William of Orange even after making such firmness the means of distinguishing the fideist from the

Ibid., 11, 362--388
sincere believer.

Mr. Bredvold's arguments may be summed up in the form of an extended syllogism. The background of Dryden's age was sceptical in the tradition of Pyrrho, consisting chiefly in a depreciation of reason and an emphasis upon the necessity of authority, especially in religious matters. Dryden shared this temper of his times, the more he used his reason to investigate religion the more sure he became of the necessity of authority as the only source of religious security. Therefore, Dryden's religious poems and religious conversions are the story of a consistent search for religious security which ends in the acceptance of the strongest religious authority Dryden could find, because he had become convinced reason in religion was totally unavailing.

But, lest we slight Mr. Bredvold's theory with too great compression, let us study it at greater length, seeing his arguments for Dryden's sceptical attitude, fideistic conversion to Rome, and discrediting of reason because he was a true representative of his intellectual milieu.

Speaking of the similarities in Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther, Mr. Bredvold writes that

Since both poems are woven on the same warp of Pyrrhonism and fideism, they may conveniently be treated together in our analysis. In their similarities, more than in their divergencies, we shall find what is characteristic of Dryden's mind.46

These similarities are the two basic fideistic arguments for Roman Catholicism used frequently by Catholic preachers in England who were so little confident of the reasonableness of their own possession they could not argue positively for the faith that was in them, but relied upon disparagement of reason as their argument for the authority of their church.

The fideist followed two argumentative patterns, as Mr. Bredvold points out—"the one theological or philosophical, and the other ecclesiastical." The first pattern emphasized faith at the expense of reason, and set up revelation as the source of religious truth which reason, weakened as it is by the fall of Adam, can never find. The second technique placed the emphasis on authority and by stressing the promenence of reason to error, laid the total responsibility for certainty in religious matters in the hands of absolute and infallible religious authority.

It is little wonder that both of these methods of apologetics, when carried to any extreme or when practiced very widely, have led to instant condemnation by the church. The glorification of either reason or authority and faith has always been opposed to the traditional stand of the church. As Mr. Bredvold states, the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas, as well as his theology, rests upon a con-

47 Ibid., p. 122
sideration of the powers of reason and of the ability of man's mind to know and to find the truth.

Mr. Bredvold maintains that Dryden combines the two approaches to the church which were stressed by the fideists of his day. As we examine Dryden's two religious poems in the next chapter we will try to see whether Mr. Bredvold's position is justified, or if Dryden perhaps reaches a position similar to that of traditional Catholicism—one which emphasizes both reason and revelation, stressing their mutual importance and individual supremacies in their specific fields. We will ask, too, if the similarities noted by Mr. Bredvold are restatements in varied forms of the theories of fideism, or if they might not be a prolonged series of questions, asked by Dryden in Religio Laici and answered finally in The Hind and the Panther.

The explanation for Dryden's fideism, says Mr. Bredvold, lies in the poet's acceptance of the spirit of his times. That spirit, combining both the old and the new method of thought, produced a method of reasoning which Mr. Bredvold sees as the characteristic of the Royal Society. The old doctrines of the sceptics, especially Pyrrho of Elis, had been uncovered during the early Renaissance. The modern spirit of scientific examination had led to the extreme materialistic rationalism of Hobbes. The more moderate thinkers, continues Mr. Bredvold, hesitated to overthrow the traditional
religious ideas, yet were eager to apply the methods of scientific investigations to all fields. Seizing upon the old scepticism, the majority of scientific investigators used it as a convenient means of avoiding dogmatism and extreme rationalism. Being sceptics, the scientists could hesitate to hand down the results of their experiments with absolutism which they had cursed in the scholastics of the middle ages. Being Pyrrhonists, they could avoid the untra-rationalism of Hobbes, whose position they saw clearly as an untenable extreme, unable to explain any phenomena not purely physical. This attitude of the Royal Society Mr. Bredvold classifies as anti-rationalism. Some reviewers of Mr. Bredvold's position question this nomenclature.48 The main point Mr. Bredvold fails to note is that a desire on the behalf of the Royal Society to shun Hobbes' ever-emphasis on the power of reason, really more non-rational than reasonable, is not anti-rationalism, but the purest and most desirable form of rationalism—-not any discrediting of the powers of reason, but an admission of their finite limitation.

However accurate Mr. Bredvold's terminology may or may not be, the fact of his argument is that it is centered about the charge of anti-rationalism. Considered from this

48 Cf. Modern Language Notes (1936), LI, 195--196 and Philological Quarterly (1936--37), Volumes XV and XVI.
point of view, religious-minded scientists of the seventeenth century, according to Mr. Bredvold, were certainly fideistic. Since he thinks of them as hesitant to accept reason in material matters, Mr. Bredvold must also think of the members of the Royal Society and those associated with its thought, including Dryden, as prone to accept authority, or revelation, as the only source of religious truth.

Here lies the essence of Mr. Bredvold's arguments about Dryden—the poet makes several allusions to scepticism; philosophical scepticism in the seventeenth century, according to this theory, meant the doubting of reason in material affairs and fideism in religious matters.

While some reviewers can dismiss the choice of terms made by Mr. Bredvold with a mention and a regret, it seems to me that the error is too serious to warrant light dismissal. Upon the term anti-rational rests the argument of The Intellectual Milieu. That there were extreme rationalists in the seventeenth century or that there were sceptics, it is not the purpose of this paper to deny. That some men mistrusted reason and that others overglorified its powers is not our problem. We are concerned with the specific attitude of one man, not a trained philosopher, but a thinker, a poet, John Dryden. That Mr. Bredvold's interpretation of Dryden's position as anti-rational, sceptical, and fideistic
can be questioned is our concern. Since Mr. Bredvold’s theory is based upon the two religious poems of Dryden, let us turn to them, examining them as Mr. Bredvold does, as one organic whole to be interpreted in the light of Dryden’s other statements about the power of reason, found in his various prose works. Dryden is, after all, the man who can tell us most about his habits of thought, and who can help us decide as nearly as we can ever do so, about his own sincerity and consistency.
CHAPTER FOUR

DRYDEN'S SELF-DEFENCE

Dryden's two poems on his religious attitudes are Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther, published respectively in 1682 and 1687. We will consider these two poems together in order to see if there is in them any consistency of thought. Finding consistency, we will ask whether it lies in a fideistic attitude toward religion, or in scepticism, or in a sincere desire for the possession of religious truth and security which the author thought he could find through the exercise of his powers of reason, or in opportunism.

The last sentence of the preface to Religio Laici sets, I believe, the tone of the two poems. "A man is to be cheated into passion, but to be reasoned into truth." The extent of the use of reason we have already been told in the preceding part of the preface. It is not to prove the truth of religious mysteries, not to explain God. Reason has one job in religion—to enable us to find God and the word with which He teaches us about Himself in His own way.

They, who would prove religion by reason, do but weaken the cause which they endeavour to support:

49 References to Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther are to Volume X of the Scott-Saintsbury edition. Page numbers are to pages in that volume, lines are from the poems. This quotation is from page 33.
... Let us be content, at last, to know God by his own method; at least, so much of him as he is pleased to reveal to us in the sacred Scriptures. To apprehend them to be the word of God is all our reason has to do ....50

Note that Dryden is careful in his word choice. He says that both reason and revelation (Scripture) have their place in religion. Reason's job is to discover the revelation God has given. Revelation's job is to prove religion and let us know what God wishes us to know about His Being. At the very beginning, then, of Religio Laici, we find the statement of a man definitely not an anti-rationalist but rather a critical realist, who acknowledges at once both the advantages and disadvantages of the faculty he wishes to address in his readers—reason.

Elsewhere in this same preface, apologizing for his presumption is speaking from a layman's point of view upon religion, Dryden states that "Being naturally inclined to scepticism in philosophy, I have no reason to impose my opinions in a subject which is above it; but whatever they are, I submit them with all reverence to my Mother Church."51 This statement is frequently seized upon as Dryden's confession of scepticism. However, it must be remembered that in A Defense of An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Dryden defines what he

51 Ibid., p. 11.
means by scepticism, saying that his essay has been "sceptical, according to that way of reasoning which was used by Socrates, Plato, and all the Academies of old ... and which is imitated by the modest inquisitions of the Royal Society."52

The Socratic method of discourse was basically opposed to that of the sceptics of early Greece, the former relying on rational examination of all sides of a subject to reveal the truth of the matter, the latter assuming that discussion could merely serve to clarify the issues but could not reveal truth since truth did not really exist, or at least if it did exist could not be ascertained by human reason. Plato was assuredly not a sceptic, for he depended upon the reason to transcend the limits of the particular thing to know the characteristics of the universal. Of the Academians Aristotle is perhaps the most famous, and Aristotle certainly believed he was teaching the truth and had no doubt that he and other men could find truth by the use of reason. That some members of the Academies were sceptics, there is little doubt. But scepticism existed mainly in the Middle Academy and that school "in its spirit and contents ... is more in keeping with the post-Aristotelian age than with the time of Plato and Aristotle."52a Dryden was not a trained philosopher. His association of Plato, Aristotle and all the Academies with scepti-

52 The Best of Dryden, L. I. Bredvold, ed. p. 474.
52a Turner, op. cit., p. 123.
cism may imply that he uses the term colloquially, not in a technical sense at all.

The Hind and the Panther continues the emphasis of the power of reason in the epigram from Virgil which precedes the preface. It is notable that Dryden chooses the same words that we found Spratt using to describe Abraham Cowley's proposed examination of the rational foundations of his religion.53 "Antiquam exquisitae matrem—Et vera incessu patuit Dea."54 Dryden made the study proposed by Cowley—he became a Catholic because of his findings.

Reason is the keynote of the opening part of Religio Latiæ, as well as the chief concern of its preface.

Dim as the borrowed beams of moon and stars
To lonely, weary, wandering travellers,
Is reason to the soul: and as, on high,
These rolling fires discover but the sky,
Not light us here; so reason's glimmering ray
Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way,
But guide us upward to a better day.55

Reason is certainly discussed as a weak guide—but none the less she is the guide to stronger and more certain light. Compare the sentiments of Cowley's poem we have read in chapter two as representative of the sentiments of the Royal Society in Dryden's day. "The Holy Book ... does shine. Yet reason must assist ... for ... Our course by Stars we cannot know, Without the Compass too below."53

53 See Chapter Three of this discussion.
54 Scott-Saintsbury, op. cit., X, 85.
55 Religio Latiæ, ll. 1--7.
These are not the lines of a sceptic, who would have to doubt the ability of the reason to know anything, especially anything that could not be handled or tested with the physical senses.

But Dryden always stresses the limits of reason along with its value. Just as for Cowley "Though Reason cannot through Faiths Mysteries see, It sees that There and such they be," so for Dryden

... as those nightly tapers disappear,
When day's bright lord ascends our hemisphere;
So pale grows reason at religion's sight,
So dies, and so dissolves in supernatural light.\textsuperscript{56}

The body of \textit{Religio Laici} breaks up into two parts. The first, a discussion of the comparative values of the various claimants to possession of revealed truth, stresses the importance of reason in discovering which system is true. The second part stresses the importance of reason in deciding which disputed dogmas of scripture are true, which false, and in distinguishing between the rival claims of tradition and scripture.

Part one sets forth Dryden's idea that revelation was the first form of religion— that God made a revelation to the early races of men who lost the purity of His word as they expanded and moved from place to place. Reason's role, then, is to recognize the validity of the bits of the original revel-

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid.}, \textit{II}. \textit{8--11}. 
ation it manages to find. Dryden proposes that the bulk of the original revelation has been transmitted in Holy Scripture. He meets the Deist claim that scripture is valueless because limited in availability by an appeal to reason—stating that savages for whom no revelation is obtainable "may see their Maker's face" if they "followed reason's dictates right, lived up, and lifted high their natural light." Finally, in this first part of the poem, the poet acknowledges the work of Father Simon, the French priest whose book had just been translated into English (1692), and who pointed out the liability of written work to error because of the mistakes so easily made in translation and the copying of manuscripts.

In part two of Religio Laici, Dryden discusses the desirability of an infallible Church to preserve the true meaning of scripture, but rejects the Catholic Church's claim to infallibility because she cannot restore lost sections of the scriptures, and is able merely to interpret the sections which are extant. The necessity of traditional interpretation of scripture, however, is stressed in Father Simon's work. Dryden meets Simon's reasons for tradition—the obscurity of the Bible on some points necessary for salvation—with an argument.

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58 Ibid., 11. 208--209.
from reason: "truth by its own sinews will prevail" to help every man find out for himself what he must do to reach heaven. Surely the defence of the average man's powers of reasoning is not the position of a fideist who relies solely upon authority because of his own inability to know truth!

But a second argument from reason, more striking than the first, is urged by the poet in behalf of private interpretation of scripture. He rejects the Catholic claim to interpret the Bible for all men with

It speaks itself, and what it does contain, In all things needful to be known, is plain.60

Finally, Dryden concludes, private reason is to govern the individual in all matters save those of minor importance in which authority or tradition is to be accepted in the interest of public peace. Note well the position this man gives to authority—supremacy in minor details, while the fideist would argue that authority must be the supreme guide in matters of importance and the sceptic would say that neither public nor private authority should prevail since neither could discover truth.

The philosophical basis, then, of Religio Laici seems to be a critical rationalism, an attitude which admits the

59 Ibid., l. 349
60 Ibid., ll. 369--370.
61 Ibid., ll. 444--450.
power of reason to discover certain truths and its inability to comprehend other truths which are beyond it. This attitude toward reason hardly seems a foundation for a charge like Mr. Bredvold's assertion that the poem is "woven" on the "warp of Pyrrhonism and fideism." The two fideistic arguments of Roman Catholicism which Mr. Bredvold sees underlying both Religio Laici and The Hind and the Panther are (1) the sacrifice of reason on behalf of revelation or religion; and (2) the emphasis of authority and sacrifice of individual reason in religious matters. Surely the argument for private interpretation of scripture in preference to traditional or authoritative interpretation in all save matters of minor import denies the second argument of the fideist-apologist; and the stress Dryden places upon the powers he says reason must have to enable us to find revelation and recognize truth from falsehood rather casts doubt, it seems, upon the first argument. But let us turn to The Hind and the Panther; perhaps there we might find the warp Mr. Bredvold distinguished.

We have noted that Dryden introduced his defence of his conversion to Catholicism with the epigram from Virgil with which Spratt summed up the rational search for religious certainty which Cowley proposed shortly before his death. That

63 Ibid., p. 122.
Cowley’s means of finding his “Ancient Mother” was to have been reason, Spratt makes clear in his sketch. That Dryden intended to use the same means seems probable from the similarity of his poetic imagery concerning faith and reason to that used by Cowley, and also from the similarity of his membership with Cowley in the Royal Society whose members seem to have shared Cowley’s attitude toward the place of reason in religious affairs. It is interesting to note, also, that two hundred years after Cowley’s proposal John Cardinal Newman was to sum up his journey into the Roman Catholic Church from Anglo-Catholicism with these same words from Virgil: "Antiquan exquirite matrem," are the words used by Spratt to describe Dowley; Newman uses the second half of the epigram, "Incessu patuit Dea" and Dryden makes use of the entire item. It seems highly probable that these three men, so much alike in background and attitude toward religious certainty, would choose the same Latin epigram to express similar ideas about the way to find the true religion.

Early in The Hind and the Panther Dryden draws his customary distinction between the abilities and the limits of reason. Speaking of the miracles surrounding the Resurrection of Christ and commenting upon the doctrine of Transubstantiation, he admits that faith is necessary for their acceptance though their credibility is based upon some evidence of the senses. When he says:
Let reason then at her own quarry fly,
But how can finite grasp infinity?64

he seems to say precisely what he said at the beginning of
Religio Laici—that human reason cannot explain religious mys-
teries, but can function in its own realm and can point out
that religious mysteries do exist. And later, when he argues
that reason is the scaffolding on which we build the struc-
ture of faith, he uses but another metaphor to show the les-
ser effectiveness of reason in religious matters, without,
however, expressing a sceptical attitude toward the validity
of reason itself.

Discussing the nature of man a bit later in the poem
Dryden makes a comment very similar to that with which he closed
his preface to Religio Laici. The difference between man and
brute creation, he says, lies chiefly in the fact that man
was created to be a creature of "mercy mixt with reason."65
What is the role of reason in the human species? "The God-
head ... reason did impart ... reason to rule, but mercy to
forgive; the first is law ...."66 Reason, then, is the law
of the nature of man, the guide by which he is to live. Is
this the idea of a sceptic, of a fideist

64 The Hind and the Panther, Part I, 11. 104--105.
65 Ibid., 1. 259.
66 Ibid., 11. 255--262.
So here again we fail to find the first of the two fideistic arguments which Mr. Bredvold asserts make up the basic structure of *The Hind and the Panther*. Reason is not sacrificed at the emphasis of revelation. On the contrary, reason is used as the scaffold for building up a firm religious faith, based on the revelation discovered by reason, and investigated by reason before acceptance. Reason's job in religious matters is then finished, but the role of reason is not degraded. Its usefulness in other aspects of life, in seeking its "own quarry" is asserted, and all that the poet does is state the limitations reason, as a finite ability, must of necessity have.

As regards infallibility, Dryden does not change his basic contention of *Religio Laici* in this later poem. Rather, he defends infallibility as he did in the poem on the Established Church. However, finding new reasons for the possession of this power by some church body, he rejects his former argument against it—that it could not restore lost sections of scripture—and bolsters his original defence of infallible interpretation with reference to the impossible situation brought about by private interpretation of the scriptures. If each person or sect which interprets scripture is right, he says, then God must condone opposites and permit contradictory interpretations to rule men. To argue for infallibility does not belittle reason; it merely admits the fact
of human nature mentioned in *Religio Laici* and restated in *The Hind and the Panther*—that even the devil can quote scripture and twist it to his own purposes. Assertion of infallible interpretation does not, however, deny rational interpretation. It merely stresses the importance of tradition, an importance already admitted in *Religio Laici*.

Not that tradition's parts are useless here, When general, old, disinterested, and clear; That ancient fathers thus expound the page, Gives truth the reverend majesty of age; Confirms its force by biding every test.67

The most reliable minds of all ages agree to point out the most rational or sensible interpretation of scripture—the one most in line with its purpose as guide to men—when an infallible interpretation is proposed, says Dryden. The change of emphasis in this later poem is not so much from private interpretation to public as it is from private to public religion. We shall see very shortly the reasons for Dryden's advocacy of a universal church; now, however, let us observe that Scott comments on the consistency of idea which would enable Dryden to embrace infallibility in *The Hind and the Panther* while rejecting it in *Religio Laici*. The belief in the primitive church was the consistent point in Dryden's outlook. In *Religio Laici* he found no trouble in admitting

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that the human reason could know them. Nor is this the ef-
even he would deny either that there are truths to know or

truths. However, this position is not that of the so-
ments of reason—the limited bound by the laws of

truth. In both poems, on the other hand, Dryden stresses the

meanings here for finding revelation and for assuredness of

revelation or comparison to religious security are the only

source in the can realm and the material sending-sphere;
drawn argues for the power of reason. He makes reason a

dreaded, but that of rational restoration. In both poems

not appear to be the shred of revelation as asserted by Dry-

or rational consciousness of which the two poems are women
told: restoration and devastation. We have seen that the shred

do in Dryden’s two reflection poems. The consciousness is two-

we have been able to observe, therefore, a consciousness

conclude.

upon the rational foundation of necessity. Logical and the

first among one nor a separate one, but an accopans calling

den’s consciousness of intelligibility was not, it appears likely,

related the power of the primitive consciousness. Hence, Dry-

seems that the rational consciousness for him was that our choice

with primitive consciousness in all essential notions to

his studies showed him that the Roman Catholic Church was then

rational power, for it had put together the episcopacy. When

that the early opinion had of necessity required a certain in-

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titude of a fideist who would accept religious truths solely because they were given to him by some authoritative body and because he had become convinced of his own inability to discover them, even if he thought that they existed. The second thread of consistency lies in the similarity of the dogmas which each poem defends. Further examination of the two works will show that Dryden’s conversion seems to be more an enlarging of the scope of his religious beliefs than a change or reversal of them.

Infallibility, we have noted, was one of the main ideas to which Dryden objected in Religio Laici. While admitting in that poem the desirability of an unerring guide in religion he could not see the possibility of its existence in his own day. Tradition was a second point on which Dryden’s views enlarged during the five years between the two poems. In Religio Laici Dryden reverences tradition when it is disinterested but laments the fact that too many men wish to gain fame as interpreters of scripture and that the existence of so many self-interested individuals in the history of Biblical interpretation makes it difficult to distinguish reliable tradition from false. Both of these points of dogma, which led Dryden to argue in Religio Laici for private interpretation of scripture, were seen in a clearer light and with a broader view of the nature of the church in the second poem. To understand Dryden’s notion of the nature of the church as
expressed in part two of *The Hind and the Panther*, it will be helpful to glance first at the traditional Catholic idea of the nature of the true church as shown by Natural Theology.

As we noted in an earlier section of this study when we considered the psychological approach to the true church, there are four marks by which the church may be known. It must be one, holy, catholic or universal, and apostolic. Each of these characteristics of the church produces a corresponding effect in its membership. By its fruits, then, the church of God is known; and the fruits are discovered by a reasonable examination of the members who claim to be followers of God’s Son, Christ.

We have neither space nor need to go into the methods of Theodicy, Natural Theology, by which the nature of God is studied and the characteristics of a God-like religion established. It must be sufficient to say that since God is one, unity, His church must be unified in membership, authority, dogma, and ritual. Since God is holy the church by which He wishes men to approach Him must have for its goal holiness, and must offer the means by which its members can perfect themselves or become God-like. From God’s unity comes also the universality of the church—God is one and must be the same for all men, at all times, in all places. And finally, since we are here concerned with the Christian religion we will not discuss the proofs for the divinity of
Christ, the church must trace its continuity back to its original founder, in this case Jesus Christ, and to the men to whom He committed it, His Apostles. The church must be Apostolic.

If we examine now part two of The Hind and the Panther, we may be struck by the accuracy with which Dryden describes his reasons for entering the Roman Catholic Church. They are, simply, that he has reason to believe that the true church should be one, holy, catholic or universal, and apostolic, and that he has found these characteristics in the Roman Catholic Church.

Speaking of the way in which Christ would assure the recognition of His Church after His death, resurrection and ascension, the Hind {the Catholic Church} says to the Panther {the Established Church}:

Now, to remove the least remaining doubt,
That even the blear-eyed sects may find her out,
Behold what heavenly rays adorn her brows,
What from his wardrobe her beloved allows,
To deck the wedding-day of his unspotted spouse!
Behold what marks of majesty she brings,
Higher than ancient heirs of eastern kings!
Her right hand holds the scepter and the keys,
To show whom she commands, and who obeys;
With these to bind, or set the sinner free,
With that to assert spiritual royalty.88

Thus Dryden begins his exposition of the marks of the church with the premise that God's church, His spouse, must be God-

88 The Hind and the Panther, II, 515--525.
like. What are those God-like marks she bears, and why are they found exclusively in the Roman Catholic Church?

"One in herself, not rent by schism, but sound,
Entire, one solid shining diamond;
Not sparkles shattered into sects like you:
One is the Church and must be to be true;
One central principle of unity;
As undivided, so from errors free;
As one in faith, so one in sanctity." \(^69\)

The first mark Dryden notes is that of unity—unity of membership, of belief, of practice, of sanctity. The proof of this unity he finds in the centuries-long battle of the Roman Church against heresy. Even heresies are united, in a negative way, by their unified opposition to one bulwark of truth, the Catholic Church, which alone has preserved the purity of Christ's doctrines, says Dryden,

Unity and universality are both shown, the poem continues, by the unfailing missionary efforts of the Catholic Church. Sanctity is evident in both her defence of orthodoxy against heresy and schism and in her missionary efforts conducted to gain souls, not new territories or possessions.

Thus one, thus pure, behold her largely spread ...
All shores are watered by her wealthy tides. ...
The self-same doctrine of the sacred page
Conveyed to every cline, in every age. \(^70\)

The necessity of universality is attested in the poem by the same means used in Natural Theology, the impossibility of the

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 11. 526--532.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 11. 548--555.
God of Truth condoning opposing doctrines.

But if you cannot think, (nor sure you can
Suppose in God what were unjust in men)
That He, the fountain of eternal grace,
Should suffer falsehood for so long a space
To banish truth, and to usurp her place, ...
If piety forbid such thoughts to rise,
Awake, and open your unwilling eyes:
God hath left nothing for each age undone, ...
Then think but well of him, and half your work is done.71

The apostolic succession of the Catholic Church is
attested by Dryden in several sections of The Hind and the
Panther. The Hind tells the Panther:

"Thus of three marks, which in the creed we view,
Not one of all can be applied to you;
Much less the fourth. In vain, alas! you seek
The ambitious title of apostolic:
Godlike descent! 'Tis well your blood can be
Proved noble in the third or fourth degree. ..."

'Tis said with ease, but never can be proved,
The Church her old foundations has removed,
And built new doctrines on unstable sands:
Judge that, ye wind and rains! you proved her, yet she
stands.
The ancient doctrines charged on her for new,
Show when, and how, and from what hands they grew.
We claim no power, when heresies grew told,
To coin new faith, but still declare the old.72

The ability of the Church to preserve the ancient doctrines
unscathed through heretical attacks proves her apostolic ori-
gins as well as her divine protection, the poet maintains.
Other churches cannot trace their doctrines to Christ, for
history shows when the other sects or churches began, who

71 Ibid., ll. 625—638.
72 Ibid., ll. 576—594.
their founders were, and the reasons why those founders broke with traditional Christianity.

In these references to The Hind and the Panther we have a brief outline of just some of the reasons Dryden gives for entering the Catholic Church. His desire for primitive Christianity, personal holiness, unified religion are discussed in full in the poem itself. In Religio Laici, where he speculates about the value of infallible interpretation of scripture, if such a thing were possible, Dryden uses references to these same four basic marks of the church to support his argument. The reason he sees in the earlier poem for rejecting Catholicism is resolved by the time The Hind and the Panther appears in 1687. The reason that the church has not restored lost sections of scripture is evidently because she transmitted to the Christian world the texts of scripture. Dryden's study has shown him that scripture is dependent upon tradition, not tradition upon scripture. With this discovery a second of Dryden's original difficulties disappeared and he was able to accept tradition as a necessary instrument of salvation, whereas in Religio Laici he had decided tradition was unessential because it consisted merely in interpretation of Biblical texts. The Hind and the Panther indicates that Dryden has examined the nature of tradition more thoroughly since the writing of his earlier religious poem. By 1687 he had come to realize that written words were generally
a substitute for the preached gospel, or a means of record-
ing what had been preached.

"Before the word was written," said the Hind,
"Our Saviour preached his faith to humankind:
From his apostles the first age received
Eternal truth, and what they taught believed.
Thus, by tradition faith was planted first,
Succeeding flocks succeeding pastors nursed.
This was the way our wise Redeemer chose,
Who sure could all things for the best dispose,
To fence his fold from their encroaching foes.
He could have writ himself, but well foresaw
The event would be like that of Moses' law; ...
No written laws could be so plain, so pure,
But wit may gloss, and malice may obscure ....
Thus faith was ere the written word appeared,
And men believed not what they read, but heard. ...
They writ but seldom [the apostles], but they daily
... taught ....
But what the apostles their successors taught,
They to the next, from them to us is brought,
The undoubted sense which is in scripture sought.73

In Religio Laici Dryden admitted the value and even the
need for both tradition and an infallible guide to primitive
Christian doctrines. In that poem, however, he stated that
tradition was not to be trusted because it too often could be
affected by self-interest and that infallibility could not be
accepted because only the Roman Church claimed infallible pow-
er and even then could not restore lost texts of scripture.
In The Hind and the Panther Dryden reaffirms the value of
tradition and of infallibility. But in this later poem he
sees the contradiction of his earlier position which accepted

73 Ibid., II. 305--363.
scripture without accepting the source from whence scripture came—tradition. Realizing the prerequisite necessity of tradition if scripture were to exist at all he recognized the necessity of some God-given assurance that the oral source of revealed truth be kept free from error, and so came to an acceptance of the fact of infallibility as well as the possibility which he had accepted as a member of the Established Church. The claims of the Roman Church no longer seemed preposterous, not because Dryden had despaired, as a fideist, of ever being able to find the truth for himself, but because history had shown him that Christ had bestowed upon His Apostles and their successors the right to transmit His teachings in the purest form. The historical fact of the Apostolic Succession of the Roman Church was enough to convince him of its right to the infallibility of the Apostles. Therefore, tradition and infallibility, which he had previously desired but which he had not been able to discover, were revealed to him through the use of his reason as it explored the history of religions and the nature of the true church.

Consequently, Dryden's route into the Catholic Church was the path we referred to in our definition of terms as the psychological. His guide along the way was reason, which he tells us he used to reconcile the doubts of his earlier position which demanded tradition as well as scripture as the rules of faith, and which demanded also that the church pos-
asses the power of infallible interpretation, not only of scripture but also of tradition. The doubts about his earlier position, it is well to note, do not seem to have arisen from a distrust of reason but more from a firm belief in the power of reason to tell him the truth about the nature of religion. 

The doubts were not those of a sceptic; nor were they solved in the manner of a sceptic become fideist. The doubts came about when the poet began to use his reason to examine his Anglican faith, they were resolved by the further use of reason in an investigation of both the Established Church and Catholicism. If it be objected here that any doubt at all, of any tenet, be the position of a sceptic, the objector uses the term in its pure etymological sense, with little reference to its epistemological meaning, implying doubt of man's ability to know or discover truth at all, not a questioning of some specific points to ascertain their truth or falsity.

We see, then, in Dryden's two religious poems, what surely seems to be a noteworthy thread of consistency, a consistency both rational and dogmatic. The rational consistency is the poet's use of reason to solve his religious problems and to bring him to religious security. The dogmatic consistency seems to be a continuous desire of Dryden's part for tradition and for infallibility as companions to scripture as religious guides. Both phases of his consistency led
the poet to become a Catholic.

The other dogmatic problems discussed in The Hind and the Panther seem to be more enlargements upon Dryden's former position, not absolute or contradictory changes of religious belief.

As regards the doctrine of Transubstantiation, very early in The Hind and the Panther Dryden says he sees no reason to doubt the omnipotence of God in other things once it has been admitted and established in such traditional Christian doctrines as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Death of Christ, the God-Man. If reason can admit the possibility of these doctrines, why should the sense of taste, of sight, or of touch prevent belief in the Eucharist? Dryden goes on to say that reason, studying history, assures us that the glorified body of Christ passed into the room where the Apostles were gathered while the doors were still locked. If a glorified body can pass through "the opposing might of bolts and bars impervious to light"74 then, "'tis plain One single place two bodies did contain."75 The same Omnipotence "Can make one body in more places dwell."76

Reason, then, acting on the evidence of the senses, concludes that Christ performed miracles while on earth, says the poet. Only God can suspend the ordinary laws of nature;

74 Ibid., I, 97--98.
75 Ibid., II, 100--101.
76 Ibid., I, 103.
since Christ effected this suspension of natural law, He is God. Believing in the Divinity of Christ, how can we doubt the truth of what He says and does?

If we believe that God could conceal His Godhead in flesh and blood, what objection can we make if He chooses to conceal the flesh and blood as our food? So Dryden continues. Convinced by reason that Christ is God, and that God is omnipotent, we are prepared to accept as true whatever the Omnipotent declares. Reason is not denied, not depreciated, but is used to establish the rational foundation of faith, argues Dryden. Is this the attitude of a skeptic or fideist? The skeptic denies that there is ultimate truth—the fideist accepts claims to verity because some authoritative statement says it gives him truth, and usually because there are pragmatic reasons, especially psychological ones, for believing in some truth or statement claiming to be ultimate truth. Dryden would appear to accept the statements of God's authority, not because of the authoritativeness, but because his reason has shown him the validity of statements made by Omnipotence and Omniscience.

Dryden touches very briefly upon the doctrine of Purgatory77 but does not enlarge on his comment, being content to observe that this doctrine is based on tradition, not on scripture. It is consistent with his enlarged views concern-

in the doctrinal sense, not political, depending, and comes in later
or precisely; strictly, which we must examine concerning the re-
of the Established Church seems doubtful, but the real test
suddenly in 1660 from the ranks of the Puritans to those
to commercialize in general, not a system. The Dryden shifted
den, for they were presented with notices of the comment-
are the basis for a group of political insurrectionary agentry. It
spread more noise. Nor here to see that the scenes can be used
of curiosity to gain some favorable attention among a wide-
over the literary world, and who apparently shared this method
see of a young man (announced-styled) who was just beginning to
the literary group or in any political party. They are the scene
and not necessarily Dryden's members ship in any further re-
representative conditions. They represent a political opining
not seen to present any problem in the question of Dryden's
The Heretic Stranger, in honor of Oliver Cromwell, to
on the evidence of reason.
that to the Drydens and base those answers ultimately
the mind and the reason provide the answers, as Dryden saw
be a little more historical later seems to suggest questions,
besto rhetorical attitudes. Hence, the poems seem bound in-
there does not seem to be, even in close examination
foremost be would have referred
The tradition that he would accept such a doctrine which
years, those following the deposition of James II and the accession of William of Orange to the English throne.

Before we discuss the final phase of Dryden's life, however, let us ask if there were any non-political reasons which might account for his conversion to the Catholic Church and which might answer the charges of insincerity, opportunism, lack of ideals, and Pyrrhonianistic scepticism leveled by Mr. Bredvold and the other critics we have discussed.

There is good reason⁷⁸ to believe that a year or two before Dryden's entry into the Catholic Church, his wife and two sons had entered that church. Dryden, apparently, if his family were already Catholics, did not have to look far for information about Catholicism. In fact, the most likely persuasion upon him from external sources probably lay within his family, not in his literary and political position as Poet Laureate to the English King. That the faith of Dryden's family was strong enough and sincere enough to make the poet notice and study it seems likely, if we consider the comments of Charles S. Ward, latest editor of Dryden's correspondence, who tells us that Dryden's sons not only were Catholics, but that in the last decade of the seventeenth century one of the sons was studying for the priesthood in Rome.⁷⁹

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⁷⁸ Sir Walter Scott in The Life of Dryden, initial volume of the works, makes this claim. Saintsbury lets Scott's story pass without comment or revision.

While it is entirely probable that the Catholicism of James II was a factor which helped Dryden make up his mind to embrace Catholicism, there are several factors which make it seem improbable that Dryden's conversion could have been prompted by the desire of political preferment. James' position inside the Catholic Church, could, no doubt, make it easier for Dryden to take the step that has caused so much controversy. However, if Dryden had acted in imitation of the king he would have embraced, most probably, the king's ideas on the position of Catholics in England. About the time of the appearance of *The Hind and the Panther*, James II was concerned with uniting the Catholics and the non-conformists in England against the privileged position of the Established Church. Dryden, on the other hand, deals almost exclusively with the merits of the Anglican Panther when compared to the Bear (the Independents), the Hare (the Quakers), the Ape (the Atheists), and the Lion (the Free-thinkers), the Boar (the Baptists), and the Fox (the Unitarians). Dryden was not at all concerned with obtaining the friendship of other dissidents; he was interested in freeing Catholics from disability and from the requirements of the Test Act. In this particular Dryden's position seems to have really been opposed to James', and was more apt to produce an enmangement between the poet and the king than to produce political benefits for the Laureate. The parable of the swallows in *The Hind and
the Panther is cited by Mr. Bredvold as Dryden's illustration of the disaster James' policies were sure to bring to English Catholics at the end of his reign. And the description of the dissident sects in England, not to mention the names Dryden gives them, was not the sort of thing to further accord between non-conformists and papists.

If Dryden had been the opportunist he is sometimes represented he would have taken every precaution to make his opinions conform to those of the king. He does not hesitate, however, to state his convictions and his opinions on unification, even if those opinions contradict those of the king. Dryden's later adherence to his Catholic faith after the accession of William, and his refusal to take the oaths of conformity demanded by the Test Act are further refutation of the charge of insincerity. Scott has discussed these points at great length, however, and seems to show convincingly enough that Dryden, if anything, was a man of principle, not an opportunist.

That Dryden was a man of no principles, and so easily persuaded by new ideas if they represented the easier of two routes, seems just as ridiculous, in the light of his actions both during and after James' reign, as the charge of opportunism. Yet Mr. Bredvold tells us that Dryden's wisdom was the wisdom of Pyrrho of Elis:

The wise man is he who cultivates this precarious
poise (balancing every proposition against its contrary and thus establishing that neither can be entirely known as either true or false) and does not allow any gale of opinion to ruffle his inner tranquility. Naturally, such a man will be neither revolutionist nor a martyr; he could never have sufficient confidence in any opinion to justify suffering inconvenience for it; he would have no reason for not conforming to the usage of society and the ritual of religion which he finds practised in his community.

According to Mr. Bredvold, Dryden was not sincerely enough convinced of any principles to suffer inconvenience for them. This he makes the test of Dryden's sincerity, the proof of Dryden's fideism. Dryden's actual position is, as we have seen, one of suffering—at first suffering inconvenience, and later suffering real hardship for the sake of his convictions. If Dryden had been more closely of the opinion of James II might he not have stood a better chance of receiving payment of his royal grants? That the grants were paid no more promptly after his conversion than before he became a Catholic we have pointed out in an earlier chapter. That the grants were withdrawn entirely because of Dryden's religion in the reign of James' Protestant successor, William, there can be little doubt, even if Bredvold passes over this phase of Dryden's consistency with a brief mention. It seems

81 Ibid.
unlikely that Dryden refused to swear allegiance to William and Mary merely because he thought they were usurpers, but seems more probable that he did not take the oaths because they demanded renunciation of the Catholic Church. Of this period in the poet's life Mr. Bredvold writes:

With the Revolution of 1688 the pensions, which had been regularly paid under James II, came to an end. As Dryden was unable to take the oath of allegiance to William and Mary, whom he regarded as usurpers, he could not be appointed to any office. .... Dryden was now thrown upon his own resources and, approaching sixty, manfully took up the burden of earning a living by his pen.82

We have mentioned Scott's ideas about this episode and the years that followed it. Let us repeat that despite Mr. Bredvold's assertion that Dryden's was a conformity in the manner of Pyrrho there seems plenty of foundation for Scott's opinion that Dryden could certainly be called a confessor for his faith, if not a martyr. The only mention I can find Mr. Bredvold making of this firmness in adversity which Scott calls Dryden's proof of his sincerity and a near martyrdom, other than the lines quoted immediately above, appears in the closing section of Appendix D of his long study of Dryden's intellectual milieu. "In the second place, by turning Catholic Dryden made it absolutely certain that his pension would terminate with the death of James. His

82 Ibid., p. xxii.
lot was even more precarious that that of Catholics with es-
tates.\textsuperscript{83} "But those who are interested to know what Dryden
himself really thought about this accusation (that he improved
his financial prospects by his conversion) may read it in The
Hind and the Panther, Part III, 221--223 and 362--386."\textsuperscript{84} This
certainly seems to be a bare minimum of space to devote to
the facts of Dryden's life which support or refute the con-
tention made earlier by Mr. Bredvold that Dryden's life, like
Pyrrho's, would prove his lack of conviction.

Mr. Bredvold refers to some of Dryden's prose works
as proof of the sceptical attitude which suggested several
points for discussion but which avoided making decisions a-
bout the problems posed, that is, the use of a debate con-
vention, as in \textit{An Essay of Dramatic Poesy}, instead of the
treatise, to discuss a problem. We have seen that Dryden in-
tended his \textit{Essay} to be sceptical in the manner of the Greek
philosophers as a whole. The debate or dialogue convention
was not merely a sceptical means of avoiding dogmatism. It
was a favorite literary device of Medieval authors for ex-
pression of the most emphatic kind of dogmatism and was used
by Saint (Sir) Thomas More as the means of expressing his
personal theories about the techniques of government in
\textit{Utopia}, just over a century and a half before Dryden wrote.

\textsuperscript{83} L. I. Bredvold, \textit{The Intellectual Milieu}, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 184.
Furthermore, Dryden himself, defending the Essay in the same year in which it was written tells his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard, who had attacked the essay, the reason for using the debate technique. It was not because a sceptical Dryden feared to make a definite statement about what he felt to be the truth, or because he doubted that human reason could attain to definite truth, but because he wished to flatter the patron to whom the piece was addressed, by letting him use his own reason to draw the conclusions.

"... they differed in their opinions, as it is probable they would; neither do I take it upon me to reconcile, but to relate them, leaving it to your lordship to decide it in favour of that part which you shall judge most reasonable." 85

Sincerity in Dryden, it would appear, cannot be disproved by appeal to the attitude of the fideist or Pyrrhonist. Nor can it be disproved by the arguments of a Macaulay, that Dryden's Catholicism would have produced a more moralistic attitude in his plays after his conversion than appeared in them before it. Dryden meets such opposition in the preface to several of his plays, especially in two of the plays most often cited as anti-clerical or irreligious. In the dedication of The Spanish Fryar (1679--1680), Dryden stresses his criteria for good dramatic characterization—that the characters be given certain identifying qualities and that they

85 Dryden, quoting his dedication of An Essay in the Defence (Cf. The Best of Dryden, p. 474.).
speak and act always in accord with those qualities, in a word, that speech and action of the dramatis personæ be consistent with their characters.

In the dedication of *The Assumption; or, Love in a Nunnery* (1672), Dryden makes similar statements. Evidently he does not intend his dramatic characters to speak for him, but for themselves. Dryden tells us that this particular play is based on a Protestant theme for the entertainment of a Protestant audience. If we believe what Dryden tells us about the origins of his dramas we must accept his word that the characters do not reflect his opinions but the opinions he believes his audience would like to see portrayed on the stage and the opinions consistent with the type of character who speaks the lines. That some of Dryden's audiences were not pleased is evident from the fact that a Protestant audience drove *The Assumption* from the stage and that a Catholic King, James II, prohibited *The Spanish Fryar*. Dryden's dramatic genius or success in these plays does not concern our thesis, however. The important thing to note is Dryden's reason for portraying the various kinds of virtues and vices he saw in the life he attempted to re-present dramatically.

A study of Dryden's prefaces, dedications, and introductions seems to indicate that his works are written for varying purposes. The plays are designed to entertain an audience and to bring revenue to their author. The odes are designed to
produce aesthetic pleasure or to commemorate a friend or acquaintance of the poet. In the translations of Latin classics Dryden saw another way to help support his family, especially after the deposition of James II. In his religious poems, the poet intends to present his self-defence of his religious opinions and actions. The religious poems, then, appear to be one main source of information we must study to see if they are consistent with the contention that Dryden's Catholicism was sincere and that his change from Anglicanism to Catholicism was the result of a consistent thought process. We have studied these poems, discovered on what foundation the charges against Dryden of opportunism, scepticism, and fideism rest, and seen what Dryden tells us himself about his Catholicism. Our task is done. It remains only to sum up our study.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Our problem has been whether or not the charges of insincerity, opportunism, time-serving, scepticism, and fideism made against Dryden by many of his critics because of his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church are justified. We saw in the first place what the phrases used by the critics mean and what a man would have to do to merit the charges they imply. We saw, too, what characteristics would motivate a sincere conversion to the Catholic Church and how compatible those characteristics would be with the seventeenth century attitude toward the use of faith and reason in religious matters. Then, we examined the charges made against Dryden and the foundations on which they are laid. And, finally, we asked Dryden what he had to say for himself concerning his Catholicism.

Dryden tells us plainly, it seems, that his two religious poems are written to express his own beliefs and motives, not to convince others, and to defend himself against the doubts raised concerning the sincerity and consistency of his acceptance of Catholicism. He shows us how his religious opinions were formed, apparently by the exercise of reason working on the evidence of the senses to establish the possibility of revelation and its possible content. Once revelation had been ascertained as a fact, its content seem to be credi-
ble if not explicable completely by reason, revelation became his chief religious guide. But reason, we can believe, had been used exclusively to determine the authority of revelation—to establish religious security. Dryden, then, would seem to insist that he is not a sceptic, for he does not doubt or belittle the power of reason or the ability of man to know truth. He also seems to resist the charge of fideist, because he accepts authority only after it is proved trustworthy by reason, not because he distrusts the ability of reason to find truth. Finally, his life and poems both refute the charge of opportunism by reflecting his courage to maintain his convictions in foul as well as fair circumstances.

The consistency of Dryden's attitude, we have discovered, seems to lie in his basic attitude toward tradition and infallibility, an attitude which he held as a member of the Established Church and which he enlarged through Ascetic's investigation before entering the Catholic Church where he was able to find the ideal religious guides his reason had told him were essential in the real Christian religion.

Dryden's sincerity can be determined only by the standards his critics have set up and which he himself says constitute the real test of sincerity: consistency and perseverance in the face of difficulty, willingness to suffer inconvenience and hardship for one's principles. Dryden's chief critic in recent times, so far as his religion is concerned,
hardly applies this test which he himself maintains is the means of distinguishing the sincere practicer of any profession, be it political or religious, from the fideist who has so little confidence in principles he will not suffer for them. This means a failure, it would appear, of Mr. Bredvold's charge of fideism, on the basis of the historical fact that Dryden did not renounce Catholicism when its profession became inconvenient, but remained firm in it through poverty and calumny.

No one can enter into another's soul and lay bare facts known only to God and the individual. But we can decide, on the basis of external evidence, the most probable motives behind any person's actions if we observe his habits and the willingness to persevere. If the arguments for doubt of consistency and doubt of sincerity in Dryden's religious conversion can be examined and shown to be far weaker than they at first appear, then his consistency and sincerity assume greater credibility. If this thesis has led the reader to look to Dryden himself for a defence of his religious consistency and sincerity, it has more than achieved its purpose—to persuade the reader to give Dryden the benefit of the doubt, to take him at his word as sincere in his Catholicism until he is proved otherwise. This study has not sought to prove beyond all doubt that Dryden's conversion was that of a man above all suspicion, above all worldliness—a saint.
It does wish, however, to encourage the reader to take the poet's word for his deeds until some stronger and more compelling reason for not doing so is discovered to cast suspicion upon the words of the two poems.
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