SIR THOMAS BROWNE: A STUDY
IN THE MIDDLE WAY

by

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PART I

THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY AND METHOD OF BROWNE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although Sir Thomas Browne's most important work, the Religio Medici, created an intellectual stir at the time of its publication, the fickle current of taste and appreciation soon veered away and the book was left stranded on the sandbars of the quaint and curious. From the age of Pope to the present time, critics who have looked at the work at all have usually viewed it with a kind of amused condescension. During the eighteenth century it suffered great neglect. The nineteenth century corrected this, but its romantic admiration did Browne no great favor. Lamb and his friends took Browne under their protective wing, but they loved him for his quaintness and strangeness, much as a magpie loves bright stones and bottle caps. It was not until comparatively recent times that either the Religio or its modest author received much serious attention, except from the viewpoint of style.[1]

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[1]For a typical romantic reaction, see Lamb's rather charming justification for choosing to know Browne and Fulke Greville personally rather than more important authors: "The reason why I pitch upon these two authors is, that their writings are riddles, and they themselves the most mysterious of personages. They resemble the soothsayers of old who dealt in dark hints and doubtful oracles; and I should like to ask them the meaning of what no mortal but themselves, I should suppose, can fathom." In Hazlitt on English Literature, ed. Jacob Zeitlin (New York, 1913), p. 317. See Olivier Leroy, Le Chevalier Thomas Browne (Paris, 1931), pp. 295-313, for eighteenth-century neglect and for an excellent summary of the most important of the Romantic appreciations.

With the modern growth of interest in the history of science, however, Browne's stock has risen rapidly, and as a scientist he has been studied with care and sympathy. There have been large gains in our understanding of his position in the scientific life of his time; his position as a respectable "advancer of learning" has been pretty firmly established. Critics now have the task of consolidating the ground won and at the same time exploring more fully the countless byways of seventeenth-century science.

Yet this new interest and understanding is not without dangers. So completely has interest in Browne's science dominated recent studies, that his other great interest, religion, has sunk into relative unimportance. While studies have been made of minute aspects of his science, very little is now said of his religious beliefs or techniques. The purpose of this paper is to correct that imbalance by directing attention to the complexity and richness of Browne's religious thought, particularly as it is displayed in the Religio.

The best way to introduce the procedure followed in this essay is to review briefly the present state of the question. Perhaps the most widespread view is that Browne's religion was fideistic in spirit, divorced both from solid intellectual content and denominational attachment. Curiously enough this conclusion has been reached by quite different paths. On the one hand, there are those who, blind to all save his scientific impulse, look upon him as a daring scientific rationalist attempting to free himself from the trammels of religious belief. This is the main tendency of the very influential life of Browne

published by Edmund Gosse in 1905. At best, according to Gosse, Browne put "theology and science in water-tight compartments, with no possibility of interchange between them." Furthermore, since all of his intellectual energy was devoted to scientific labors, his religious thought was intellectually undistinguished, and approached indeed the nominal. At times Gosse even suggests that Browne was a religious sceptic who sheltered himself under protestations of orthodoxy only that he might more effectively insinuate doubts and objections. In brief, Browne's religious principles are seen as sceptical, unsure, and questioning.[1]

On the other hand, critics who have approached Browne from less specialized directions have reached the same conclusions. By concentrating on a few passages, frequently taken out of context, they have insisted that his faith was completely imaginative, if not irrational. While denying that he was a sceptic, they have treated him as a mystic and a fideist, one whose religion was marked by far more sweetness than light. This is perhaps the most common interpretation of Browne, especially attractive since it lends itself beautifully to the creation of charming literary essays. Within this broad grouping there are many degrees. Dowden shows the trait in a moderate form. To him Browne's

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[1]Edmund Gosse, Sir Thomas Browne (London, 1905), pp. 25-32. Gosse's was certainly the best life of Browne until the publication of Jeremiah S. Finch, Sir Thomas Browne (New York, 1950). See R. Balfour Daniels, Some Seventeenth-Century Worthies in a Twentieth-Century Mirror (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1940), for a curious inversion of Gosse's position. Daniels recognizes Browne's religious interests but believes that they were a betrayal of truth. For example, "Yet he is always concerned about the fate of his soul, a strange state of mind for a medical man." (p. 100)

divinity may best be described as a compound of love and wonder. In a typical passage Dowden writes:

> In a period of religious excitement he discourses on religious subjects in a luminous serenity; he is free from such personal terrors, such spasms of fear, such cold and hot fits as attacked Bunyan; sometimes when he soars in his flights of imaginative faith, he soars so smoothly that we hardly discern the quiver of a wing.

While such criticism is graceful and not actually inaccurate, it contains dangerous seed. Already there is the suggestion that Browne inhabited nameless regions of imagination without contact with the world we live in, that he was a skylark soaring high above the earth by means of an imagination subject to no rational discipline. We are not surprised to hear Dowden saying in another place that "in truth he stands somewhat apart from the movements of his own day." One of the identifying marks of this school of interpretation is the isolation of Browne.[1]

Paul Elmer More carries the interpretation a step further, seeing the Religio as a "protest of the imagination against the imperious usurpations of science." Reading the work through these spectacles, he finds Browne's "boasted tolerance toward the creed of Catholic, Jew, or Pagan...next of kin to indifference," and concludes:

> He is one of the purest examples of the religious imagination severed from religious dogma or philosophy.... There is, one must repeat, in this romantic wonder, setting itself above

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[1]Edward Dowden, Puritan and Anglican (New York, 1901), pp. 44 and 36. It is interesting to note that some critics have not been content with fideism as a label for Browne's thought, since it does not suggest clearly enough his imaginative freedom. Thus we find Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (Oxford, 1945), p. 333, calling it "ultra-fideism," and Samuel T. Coleridge, Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century, ed. Roberta F. Brinkley (Durham, N.C., 1955), p. 113, using the term "ultra-fidianism."

> the systematic intellect and the governing will, an insidious danger, which in later times we have seen degenerate into all kinds of lawless and sickly vagaries. Undoubtedly the works of Sir Thomas Browne are already lacking in solid content, and verge into the pure emotionalism of music; yet they are saved in the end by the writer's sturdy regularity of life and by the great tradition which hung upon the age.

More trails off rather inconclusively. The fact is that one does not really feel in Browne the same emotionalism of music (if music is in truth a form of emotionalism) that one experiences, say in Shelley. The "great tradition which hung upon the age" does not seem to explain the difference to me, for I am not sure how a tradition can hang upon an age without hanging also upon the individuals who wrote in that age.[1]

The extreme statement of the imaginative interpretation is to be found in Dewey K. Ziegler, who is exceedingly direct:

> Because Browne's religion becomes entirely irrational, his writing about religion, stirring as it can be, in general has a quality of irresponsibility. The interest tends to centre not in the subject, but in the treatment of the subject.... The conflict between faith and reason, which tormented and dejected other men of his period, furnished Browne material for paradoxes—a few sublime, many trivial.

Ziegler carries his distaste for Browne to rather amazing lengths. For example, he says:

> To construct paradoxes and to make images sometimes becomes an end in itself. To this extent religion loses its vitality for him. "I would not perish," Browne says, "upon a Ceremony, Politick point, or indifferency." One feels that no one could perish for one of his delightful metaphors or paradoxes.

It is amusing to see Browne so soundly whipped for not being tormented,

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[1]Paul Elmer More, "Sir Thomas Browne," Shelburne Essays, Sixth Series (New York, 1909), pp. 166 and 172. For a similar interpretation see C. H. Herford's introduction to the Everyman edition of Browne, The Religio Medici and Other Writings (London, 1952), pp. xiii-xiv.

for not being willing to die for points admittedly immaterial. In Ziegler's world vital religion apparently consists in the composition of slogans that one wishes to perish for. But Ziegler's evangelical intensity should not blind us to the fact that both he and the urbane More are making essentially the same kind of judgment. Both deny that Browne used reason in religious matters; both isolate him from the world of fact.[1]

There is an off-shoot of this school which delights above all in magnifying supposed contradictions in Browne. These critics revel in oddity and quaintness. For example:

> We must recognize first that Sir Thomas contains within himself as many contradictions as his favorite book, the Bible. There is the Browne who liked to let his mind soar into mystical visions.... There is also the Browne who made such a painstaking collection of minute specimens that the diarist Evelyn wondered at his meticulous industry. There is again the Browne of the Religio Medici, and the Browne who practiced medicine for forty-six successful years in Norwich. Indeed, so self-contradictory is he that there are few things which can be definitely set down and called his, in which he unalterably believes.[2]

But where are the promised contradictions? That a devout and meditative physician composed a book dealing with his religious beliefs while supporting himself by his profession and maintaining an active interest in experimental science is hardly startling. This temptation to write about Browne in an imitatively paradoxical way is hard for some to

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[1]Dewey K. Ziegler, In Divided and Distinguished Worlds: Religion and Rhetoric in the Writings of Sir Thomas Browne (Cambridge, Mass., 1943), pp. x and 49.

[2]Robert R. Cawley, "Sir Thomas Browne and His Reading," PMLA, XLVIII (1933), p. 429.

resist, and is dangerous because it also produces artificial separation of Browne and his world.

More moderate interpretations have been made of Browne's religious thought, especially by historians of religion. Hunt, for example, admits that Browne used reason partially when he says, "Sir Thomas Browne was one of those philosophers who reasoned or believed at the dictate of fancy. He followed reason when it suited him, and faith when he preferred faith." Jordan is inclined to place more weight upon the rational element, holding that "Browne was not a fully emancipated rationalist, but within the range of his experience and observation he sought to be guided solely by the light of his own intelligence." Finally Denonain recognizes Browne's respectable intellectual accomplishments, but interprets him solely against the background of continental rather than English thought.[1]

Critics of this last group, as well as Dowden, recognize the liberality of Browne's views and view him with general sympathy. But they all isolate Browne in the sense that they admire him only as an individual, not as a member of any movement or church of his day. Despite the fact that Browne on several occasions speaks of his devotion to the Church of England, the critics seem not to listen. Dunn, whose book is devoted to Browne's religious philosophy, does not mention the Anglican Church except incidentally.[2]

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[1] John Hunt, Religious Thought in England (London, 1870), I, 363; W. K. Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration in England... (1603-1640) (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 448; Jean-Jacques Denonain (ed.), Religio Medici (Cambridge, Eng., 1955), pp. xv-xx.

[2] William P. Dunn, Sir Thomas Browne: A Study in Religious Philosophy (Minneapolis, 1950).

It should be made clear that in practice these various motives seldom occur separately, but are so twisted and intertwined that it is impossible, or at least not worth the effort, to separate them completely. The main fact that emerges is that in practically all critics Browne is cut off from the religious life and pulse of his day, and especially from the communion to which he vowed his obedience.

My contention is that Browne was not only predominantly rational in his approach toward religion, but that his adherence to the Church of England was both sincere and important to him. That church was not a temporary resting place for him, but an institution whose principles and characteristic religious techniques and opinions he made his own. Upon analysis we will find that Browne was an ideal Anglican layman who defended the position of his church with considerable intellectual skill as well as imaginative force.

Because Browne was neither a professional theologian, a methodical thinker, nor a copious writer, it is necessary to build up our case by indirection, by showing the implications of his thought in more highly developed writings. This necessitates an organization which may seem to move in all directions at once. However, it is hoped that the main lines of the argument will emerge with some clarity.

In the first part of the paper Browne's religious thought is discussed in terms of broad religious movements and possibilities without reference to denominational labels. The first topic to be taken up is mysticism. The intention here is to clear the ground, because though Browne has been called a mystic or mystical in tendency by many critics,

an examination of their claims against a valid definition of mysticism will show that there was nothing mystical in the man. In this manner I hope to counter part of the argument that Browne's religion was imaginative rather than rational.

In order to meet the charge that Browne went to the opposite extreme and abandoned religion for the fair fields of experimental science, the whole question of scepticism must be examined closely. Montaigne will be taken as the standard by which to measure pyrrhonic scepticism and its usual religious resultant, fideism. Blaise Pascal will next be discussed to show that scepticism may be employed by a thinker only in order to counteract the dangers of sinful pride. A few scattered sceptical texts do not make a man a sceptic, for he may well merge his scepticism in a much more subtle and complex religious compound, as did Pascal. In this context, too, the "Learned Ignorance" of Nicolaus Cusanus will be presented as a technique only superficially like scepticism. The main distinction to be made is between a scepticism which destroys confidence in the human reason and other systems which merely attempt to determine the bounds within which reason is effective.

Next these threads will be gathered together in an attempt to show by direct analysis of the Religio and other of Browne's writings that Browne was certainly neither a pyrrhonic sceptic nor a fideist. There are in his writings too many appeals to reason, too many signs of a deep respect for rationality, to justify such an interpretation. It will be argued that like Pascal, Browne maintained scepticism as only one

element in a complex religious attitude. He used sceptical principles to humble his reason, but never allowed them to dominate his mind. The characteristic mark of his thought is a skillful balancing of discordant and contradictory elements to form in combination a delicate, flexible and sophisticated whole. This is the famous middle way, the way of moderation and of sensitivity to the complexity of truth. The way in which this system of balances operated in Browne will be shown in detail.

Finally, Browne's science will receive some attention. By establishing the case for science in Christian thought, mainly from the thought of Augustine, and then tracing the idea through Renaissance figures, Browne's conformity to the limitations imposed upon the scientist by his faith can be shown. Not only did Browne recognize the dangers of an unlimited devotion to scientific principles, but he also worked out a system of balances to prevent himself from falling unawares into the slough of mechanism. In this chapter it will be argued that Christian thought has encouraged the development of modern science in important ways, especially by its insistence upon the goodness of the material creation and the value of examining it for religious purposes. The conclusion is that Browne subordinated his science to religion without surrendering its legitimate exercise or value.

That will conclude the first part of the paper. If the arguments convince the reader, he will have to admit that Browne was neither mystical or fideistic on the one hand, nor sceptical, insincere or shallow in his religious professions on the other. Rather he adjusted all of these feelings into an elaborate synthesis which cannot be named

but which is marked by a shrewd appreciation of the dangers of extremes and a cautious attempt to make the most of many different kinds of truth.

The second part of the thesis attempts to connect Browne firmly with the Anglican tradition. The thought of the Church of England in Browne's period will be developed out of the works of Archbishop Laud, William Chillingworth, and Jeremy Taylor, with John Donne and Richard Hooker supplying corroborating evidence. In these thinkers will be found the same caution, the same dread of extremes, the same kind of rationality as in Browne. The *via media* may be equated with Browne's system of balances.

This contention will be worked out in detail. Starting from the Anglican desire for peace in the Christian world attained through a comprehensive unity based upon toleration, it will be shown that in order to defend this desire the Anglicans made use of the same kind of arguments as Browne. The key Anglican theorems were: that all that is necessary, both for salvation ultimately and for communion between churches in this life, is a belief in the great truths of Christianity abstracted from theological elaborations; that since man is an erring creature he can attain to nothing more specific than the formulation of these principles in the Creed. Consistently the Anglicans argue that to impose greater burdens upon the minds and hearts of believers is to destroy true religion.

These principles will be discussed in detail and their applications shown. It will be pointed out that the English Church demanded no subscription to theological niceties of its members, that it looked upon

heresy as an error of the will rather than an error of the understanding, and that it opposed manfully religious contentions based upon differences of opinion in minor matters. Then the distrust with which less moderate theologians viewed the Anglicans will be pointed out, and the relations between Anglicanism and the equally liberal Arminianism of Holland will be traced.

After this study, a close analysis will be made of Browne's _Religio_ as an Anglican document. It will be shown point by point that Browne not only was in full agreement with the principles of Anglicanism, but that most of his arguments may be paralleled closely in the writings of the leaders of his church. The conclusion is that Browne was an Anglican thinker who conformed willingly to the discipline of his church, and who should be looked upon in this light rather than as an individualist who knew no rules nor boundaries. He was rooted in the Church of England and drew upon its accumulated wisdom for that stability and confidence which is so often noted in him.

CHAPTER II

BROWNE'S RELATION TO MYSTICISM AND PLATONISM

Difficulties in methodizing Browne's somewhat rhetorical thought are compounded by semantic confusions. The critic who feels the obligation of removing possible sources of trouble can find no better place to begin than Mysticism and Platonism. In this chapter, which is mainly intended to pare excrescences from the real problems, it will be argued that neither term is applicable to Browne without distortion of his thought. Critics who attempt to connect him with these traditions have not clarified his work, but have turned ideas that are relatively simple and forthright into vague and wavering mystery.

Mysticism is too large and complex a subject to be trifled with; yet if the best authorities are to be believed, nothing is more common than to give the word hasty, loose, and inaccurate meanings. Helen White, writing of mysticism in Blake, exclaims, "Verily, mysticism has come to mean so many things that it has ceased to mean much of anything." In common usage, she continues, the word suggests "little more than a vague emotional reaction in which awe and sense of strangeness play almost equal parts." Such objections are found not only in works of literary criticism, but in all treatments of mysticism, irrespective of purpose or the religious affiliation of the writer. The Benedictine scholar Dom Cuthbert Butler makes a similar complaint:

> There is probably no more misused word in these our days than "mysticism"....It has been identified with the attitude of the religious mind that cares not for dogma or doctrine, for church or sacraments; it has been identified also with a certain outlook on the world—a seeing God in nature, and recognizing that the material creation in various ways symbolizes spiritual realities....And, on the other side, the meaning of the term has been watered down: it has been said that the love of God is mysticism; or that mysticism is only the Christian life lived on a high level; or that it is Roman Catholic piety in extreme form.

Dean Inge, who certainly is not disposed to identify mysticism with Roman Catholic piety, observes testily that "No word in our language—not even 'Socialism'—has been employed more loosely than 'Mysticism.'"[1]

When the dangers of a word are so widely recognized, when it is admitted on all sides that the term may refer to any one of an extensive array of only distantly related ideas, then that word should be treated as an ideological rattlesnake, to be avoided or else rendered harmless. That a plethora of meanings is equivalent to no meaning is a commonplace accepted by everyone, but unfortunately misinterpretations of Browne have been made, and remain uncorrected, because the term _mystical_ has been carelessly applied to his writings. For example, Dunn comments on the _oh altitudo_ section of the _Religio_ in this manner:

> Our physician is revealing himself as a full-fledged mystic, and we watch him in his first splendid flight. He is a new Tertullian, eager to explore the farthest reaches of that father's "odd resolution"....He has already dropped that plodding figure of keeping the road. In this mood he throws out every ballast of reason and climbs into a rarefied and exhilarating atmosphere where it is intoxication to believe

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[1]Helen C. White, _The Mysticism of William Blake_, Univ. of Wis. Stud. in Lang. and Lit., No. 23 (Madison, 1927), p. 44; Dom Cuthbert Butler, _Western Mysticism_ (New York, 1924), p. 2; William Ralph Inge, _Christian Mysticism_ (London, 1899), p. 3.

the most irrational things he can find in the Bible.[1]
When we come to analyze the passage, it will be seen that Browne is not really embracing irrationality. The passage may quite profitably be read as an elaborate commentary upon the ordinary Christian beliefs that faith is necessary to the religious life and that faith deals with that which is above reason. But that is not the point here. Dunn simply does not have anything very precise in mind when he shouts mystic. The word is used as a kind of talisman, which once used seems decisive and meaningful, but when looked at closely is as hollow and ineffective as any other magical device.

If only a few scattered passages were at stake, the question would not be worth a dispute. But critics have extended mystical to envelop Browne's whole religious outlook. Their usual procedure is to label Browne's thought as vaguely mystical, thereby making it unnecessary to analyze the text with care. Then, when it becomes apparent that Browne was not a mystic in the sense that St. Theresa was, the critic is almost compelled to fall back on the argument that Browne's religion was richly imaginative, poetical, without substance, and so on. In short, much of the laxity of thought attributed to Browne may more justly be charged to his critics. They are the ones who have introduced a terminology and train of consequences which do not pertain.

The only way to show the irrelevance of mysticism in a study of Browne is to define the term and then measure Browne against the standard. An acceptable definition is not easy to formulate, because

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[1]William P. Dunn, Sir Thomas Browne (Minneapolis, 1950), p. 42.

those who write on the subject in an age as predominantly materialistic as ours seldom overcome the temptation to extend their definitions over the whole realm of the non-materialistic. For religious purposes such a procedure may be justifiable, but for historical scholarship, especially that dealing with Christian thought, it is worse than useless. In his important and influential Christian Mysticism Dean Inge, for example, defines mysticism in such vague and far-reaching terms as:

> the attempt to realise the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or, more generally, as the attempt to realise, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal.

What manifestation of the religious impulse does not fall within these limits? It is somewhat surprising to find Inge treating as mystical what would ordinarily be considered typical of the average Christian, as when he says, "The mystic... makes it his life's aim to be transformed into the likeness of Him in whose image he was created." It is even more disconcerting to read:

> "The true Mysticism," it has been lately said with much truth, "is the belief that everything in being what it is, is symbolic of something more." All nature... is the language in which God expresses His thoughts; but the thoughts are far more than the language. Thus it is that the invisible things of God from the creation of the world may be clearly seen and understood from the things that are made; while at the same time it is equally true that here we see through a glass darkly, and know only in part. Nature half conceals and half reveals the Deity....

The well-known text from Romans is described by Gilson as lying at the foundation of all natural theologies in Christianity. Also we shall discover it is a key concept in the structure of Christian scientific study. One would hardly expect to find mysticism reaching out to

include both scholasticism and science.[1]

By including everything, Inge's formulations broaden out into meaninglessness, like a river spreading over a plain until it loses its identity and becomes a swamp. In one place he says of mysticism that "as in religion it appears in revolt against dry formalism and cold rationalism, so in philosophy it takes the field against materialism and scepticism." Again, "everyone is naturally either a mystic or a legalist." The contrasts are revealing. Inge can make us aware of the difference between the living and the dead, between religion as power and religion as pretence, between Christianity as a living faith and Christianity as the mask for indifference or as a bundle of bone-dry formulae. But his definitions do nothing further. In Inge's terms every Christian is either a mystic or no Christian at all. For our purposes such a definition has no value.[2]

Never should it be forgotten that Christianity is not a philosophy, not even in St. Thomas. It is not a speculative theory, but a religion of salvation, a means whereby man comes into contact with God. A proper definition of mysticism must recognize this fact and deal with

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[1]Inge, Christian Mysticism, pp. 5, 9 and 250; Etienne Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, trans. A. H. C. Downes (New York, 1940), p. 26.

[2]Inge, Christian Mysticism, pp. 22 and 36. Rufus M. Jones, in Studies in Mystical Religion (London, 1919), p. xx, gives a similar definition, but recognizes the problem of faith when he adds, "There is, too, a mystical element of this normal type in any genuine faith.... Faith in the primary sense is a way of corresponding with Realities which transcend sense-experience." He does not, however, solve the difficulty. For a typical example of the tendency to widen definitions in an attempt to solve modern spiritual problems, see Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (New York, 1955), pp. 3-25.

the manner of contact. This is only to say that a valid definition must distinguish between mysticism and simple faith. Butler offers the following:

> the mystic's claim is expressed by Christian mystics as "the experimental perception of God's Presence and Being," and especially "union with God"—a union, that is, not merely psychological, in conforming the will to God's Will, but, it may be said, ontological of the soul with God, spirit with Spirit. And they declare that the experience is a momentary foretaste of the bliss of heaven.

Not only does this give the differentia required, but it also agrees with the core of the discussions in less precise writers. Underhill cites as one of the marks of the true mystic a "living union with this One" which is reached by the Mystic Way and culminates in "the condition which is sometimes inaccurately called 'ecstasy,' but is better named the Unitive State." Bennett speaks of mysticism as a "way of life, in which the conspicuous element is the immediate experience of God," while even Inge mentions "the unitive or contemplative life, in which man beholds God face to face, and is joined to Him" as the goal of mystical experience.[1]

Besides being sufficiently precise these definitions also draw attention to the most important fact about mysticism, namely that it is a kind of experience rather than a religious theory. In the writings of the mystics themselves this is always evident. For example, this

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[1]Butler, p. 4; Underhill, p. 81; Charles A. Bennett, A Philosophical Study of Mysticism (New Haven, 1923), p. 7; Inge, Christian Mysticism, p. 12. See Rufus M. Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism (New York, 1939), p. 260, and Joseph B. Collins, Christian Mysticism in the Elizabethan Age (Baltimore, 1940), p. 15, for similar statements.

statement by the Blessed Angela of Foligno may be taken as a typical claim:

> But when the soul doth feel the presence of God more deeply than is customary then doth it certify unto itself that He is within it; it doth feel it, I say, with an understanding so marvelous and so profound, and with such great love and divine fire, that it loseth all love for itself and for the body, and it speaketh and knoweth and understandeth those things of the which it hath never heard from any mortal whatsoever. And it understandeth with great illumination and with much difficulty doth it hold its peace.[1]

But if it is true that mysticism is a kind of experience, then it follows that a man cannot be considered a true mystic unless he reports immediate and experimental knowledge of God. Nor can he even be called mystically inclined unless he expresses the desire for such experiences or makes some effort toward achieving them. And, it should be remembered, the mystical union with God or desire for such a union are confined to this life, for all Christians hope for union with God after death, that being the condition of beatitude.

Are there any mystical experiences in Browne? Does he make mystical claims? There are none that I know of. He is aware of the possibility of mystical experience, for in Christian Morals he divides men into three classes, those who "maintain the allowable station of men," those who fall below it, and those who surpass it—who "have been so divine, as to approach the apogeum of their natures, and to be in the confinium of spirits." In the same work he shows his familiarity with the vocabulary of mysticism, but does not suggest that his knowledge is more than scholarly. The passage, which seems to me determinative, reads:

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[1]Quoted in Bennett, p. 72, where other examples may be found.

> And since there is something of us that will still live on, join both lives together, and live in one but for the other. He who thus ordereth the purposes of this life, will never be far from the next; and is in some manner already in it, by a happy conformity, and close apprehension of it. And if...any have been so happy, as personally to understand christian annihilation, extacy, exolution, transformation, the kiss of the spouse, and ingression into the divine shadow, according to mystical theology, they have already had an handsome anticipation of heaven; the world is in a manner over, and the earth in ashes unto them.

Nothing could be more definite than this distinction between the life of the ordinary Christian who seeks to direct his life in conformity with the divine Will, and the mystic who anticipates heaven on earth.[1]

All the evidence indicates that throughout his life Browne chose the middle estate, striving to live a full but simple Christian life. Near the beginning of the Religio he summarizes his religious method in these words: "where the Scripture is silent, the Church is my Text; where that speakes, 'tis but my Comment...." In things indifferent he follows neither Rome nor Geneva, but the "dictates of my owne reason." There is nothing in this to lead us to suspect a mystical leaning. The tone of the passage is scholarly, conventional, and vaguely rationalistic. In a prayer at the end of the work Browne sums up his religious aspirations without any reference to mystical yearning:

> Blesse mee in this life with but the peace of my conscience, command of my affections, the love of thy selfe and my dearest friends, and I shall be happy enough to pity Caesar. These are, O Lord, the humble desires of my most reasonable

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[1] Sir Thomas Browne's Works, ed. Simon Wilkin (London, 1835-36), IV, 104 and 114. All quotations from Browne, except those from the Religio, will be from this edition, hereafter referred to as Wilkin. The only other place in which Browne employs this mystical terminology is in a passage in Urn Burial almost identical to the last quoted. (Wilkin, III, 496.)

> ambition, and all I dare call happinesse on earth: wherein I set no rule or limit to thy hand or providence; dispose of me according to the wisedome of thy pleasure. Thy will bee done, though in my owne undoing.

Browne again aims only at conforming his life to God's will in an ordinary sort of way. No mystic could be content with this "reasonable ambition"; for him the taste of God would be the only "happinesse on earth."[1]

Furthermore, Underhill says of mysticism that "its aims are wholly transcendental and spiritual. It is in no way concerned with adding to, exploring, re-arranging, or improving anything in the visible universe." Though this may be a trifle overstated, dissociation from the world of science and learning to a pronounced degree is characteristic both of the mystic and also the devotee of that type of religion often called "spiritual." By the latter is meant the religious attitude of a man overwhelmed by the importance of his soul's direct relations with God, whether or not these reach mystical intensity. Such a man is willing to sacrifice everything in life in order to maintain his consciousness of close communion with God. Two examples of this feeling will both demonstrate its flavor and show how foreign it is to Browne. Gerard Groote, founder of the Brethren of the Common Life, once wrote:

> Do not spend thy time in the study of geometry, arithmetic, rhetoric, dialectic, grammar, songs, poetry, legal matters or astrology; for all these things are reproved by Seneca,

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[1] Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici, ed. Jean-Jaques Denonain (Cambridge, Eng., 1955), pp. 9 and 102. Hereafter referred to as Religio.

> and a good man should withdraw his mind's eye therefrom and despise them; how much more, therefore, should they be eschewed by a spiritually-minded man and a Christian.

Such spirituality was not for Browne. He was an avid student of the classics and antiquity, a rhetorician, an analyst of the sources of error, a competent and inquiring physician, an experimental biologist, an antiquarian, collector of oddities, a linguist, and what have you. His range of interests was phenomenal; his curiosity almost without bounds. Again, in the Imitation of Christ, whose author was closely associated with the Deventer group, we find similar expressions:

> O Truth, that God art, make me one with Thee in perfect charity; for all that I read, hear, or see without Thee is grievous to me: for in Thee is all that I will or may desire. Let all doctors be still in Thy presence, and let all creatures keep themselves in silence, and do Thou only Lord speak to my soul. The more that a man is joined to Thee and the more that he is gathered together in Thee, the more he understandeth without labour high secret mysteries, for he hath received from above the light of understanding.

There is nothing like this desire for the Lord speaking Soul to soul in Browne. On the contrary, he collects his divinity from Scripture, the church, and the book of creatures. For him the voice of the Lord is filtered through these agencies; it is indirect and mediated. Nor does he claim to understand, with or without labor, the high mysteries of his faith; he merely accepts them as unknowable. He is, in short, close to the opposite end of the Christian scale.[1]

This difference between immediacy and mediation is extremely important in distinguishing types of religious endeavour. Because of

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[1]Underhill, p. 81; Groote in E. F. Jacob, Essays in the Conciliar Epoch (Manchester, Eng., 1953), p. 141; Thomas à Kempis, The Imitation of Christ, trans. Richard Whitford (New York, 1953), p. 7 (Chapter 3).

his reliance upon illuminating experiences and personal communication with the divine, the mystic is religiously rather independent. While in view of the great number of Roman Catholic mystics it would be unwise to state that the mystic cannot live within an organized church, it is nevertheless probably safe to suggest that the mystic has less need of the institution than the ordinary Christian. His faith and spiritual life are fostered and fed by his private apprehension of God, while the ordinary believer lives through the agency of the church, its graces, services, and ministrations. But again Browne clearly chooses the path of common belief. "In Divinity," he says, "I love to keepe the road, and, though not in an implicite, yet an humble faith, follow the great wheele of the Church...."[1]

In summary then: Browne's religious method and practice are in all important respects mediated, with the church playing a much more important part in his religious life than is generally realized. This will be fully documented later. Here, if the ground has been cleared somewhat, if the weeds of mysticism used magically have been chopped away, if it has been made clear that Browne neither makes claim to anything like mystical experience nor indicates any proclivity for it, a sufficient basis for future development will have been laid.

This subject, however, demands further amplification, because frequently the case for Browne's mysticism is developed along somewhat different lines. Scholars often make much of the occurrence in his

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[1]Religio, p. 10. For the strain between the mystic and the institution see Bennett, p. 147.

writings of elements variously termed Platonic, Neo-Platonic, or speculatively mystical. For several reasons I believe that it is impossible, or at least unprofitable, to investigate Browne's Platonism. In the first place, to settle upon a definition of Platonism is no easy matter. Significantly enough we find that it is usually spoken of in very vague and broad terms. Dean Inge again furnishes us with an excellent example of over-wide definition, when he divides Christian thought into Catholic, Protestant, and Platonic. His description of the last is noble but indefinite:

> The characteristics of this type of Christianity are—a spiritual religion, based on a firm belief in absolute and eternal values as the most real things in the universe—a confidence that these values are knowable by man—a belief that they can nevertheless be known only by whole-hearted consecration of the intellect, will and affections to the great quest—an entirely open mind toward the discoveries of science—a reverent and receptive attitude to the beauty, sublimity and wisdom of the creation, as a revelation of the mind and character of the Creator—a complete indifference to the current valuations of the worldling.[1]

This is nothing more than the portrait of the ideal Christian intellectual, be he Platonic or Aristotelian; there is nothing in this list which would not apply to either Aquinas or Hooker.

Aside from the basic problem of definition, complications of historical development arise. The course of Platonic thought through Christian history is well known. Historically Platonism became intimately associated with Christianity as early as the second century. From that time on it played an important part in Christian theology, but by the time of the Renaissance in England, it had entered Christian

[1] William Ralph Inge, The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought (New York, 1926), p. 35.

thought so many times and from so many different sources, had received so many modifications and been adapted to so many purposes, had become so thoroughly ingrained in the vocabulary of theology, that it takes a very steady hand to separate it from the whole Christian context. No doubt these difficulties can be overcome by close and laborious analysis, and the Platonism of a Renaissance philosopher or theologian determined fairly accurately. But Browne was neither a philosopher nor a theologian. He did not leave a large or methodic body of work. He was notoriously and confessedly loose in his language. Under such circumstances it is futile to attempt to sort out Platonic strands in the skein of his thought. That Browne was familiar with Platonic writings, that there are passages in his writings which make use of Platonic images and ideas is indisputable. But it is questionable whether we can go further than this bare admission.

Perhaps a few examples will make the difficulties more obvious. In one place, after mentioning his belief in angels, Browne adds:

> Now, besides these particular and divided Spirits, there may be (for ought I know,) an universall and common Spirit to the whole world. It was the opinion of _Plato_, and it is yet of the _Hermeticall_ Philosophers; if there be a common nature that unites and tyes the scattered and divided individuals into one species, why may there not bee one that unites them all? Howsoever, I am sure there is a common Spirit that playes within us, yet makes no part of us; and that is, the Spirit of God....

Upon this passage the critics have pounced like tigers. Dunn identifies the concept of the world-soul as Neo-Platonic and comments, "Browne, with his usual catholic willingness, seems ready to entertain the unorthodox notion of an _anima mundi_, a universal spirit of nature."

Despite the distinction clearly made by Browne, Willey says that "he professes himself a follower of Hermes Trismegistus, and feels, pantheistically, 'the warm gale and gentle ventilation' of the world-soul." Finally Gosse abandons all restraint in saying, "He declares his confident belief in the neo-Platonic theory of an undivided and common spirit animating the whole world." It is from evidence and commentary such as this that the argument for Browne's Neo-Platonism is constructed. Browne is willing enough to exhibit his erudition; he is also willing to entertain almost any theory as a possibility worthy of consideration; but surely there is some difference in mentioning an idea and being committed to it. Furthermore, in this passage the world-soul is not even intended as a serious possibility. Browne uses it only as a rhetorical device to introduce his real point. The "there may be" resting upon an "if there be" is obviously intended to contrast with the firm "I am sure there is." And this is as close, to my knowledge, as Browne comes to a Platonic emanation, while he says nothing of Ideas.[1]

Likewise attempts to distinguish between a Christian transcendent God and a Neo-Platonic immanent God in Browne fail, for in his thought God is both transcendent and immanent. Though he frequently speaks of the divine Spirit in man, as in the passage just quoted, he is always careful to preserve the distinction between creator and created—"a common Spirit that playes within us, yet makes no part of us."

Not only do critics fail to maintain their case in a positive way, but they also tend to view as mystical, Neo-Platonic, or pantheistic—

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[1]Religio, p. 42; Dunn, p. 113; Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, (New York, 1953), p. 49; Gosse, p. 40.

the terms frequently merge—statements in Browne which are demonstrably quite different. Dunn, for instance, says:

> And then in a final sentence, almost pantheistic in its inclusiveness, he disposes of the whole matter of causation. "For though we christen effects by their most sensible and nearest causes, yet is God the true and infallible cause of all; whose concourse, though it be general, yet doth it subdivide itself into the particular actions of every thing, and is that spirit, by which each singular essence not only subsists, but performs its operation."

If this is pantheistic in tendency, then St. Thomas is a pantheist, for Browne here is almost paraphrasing the great theologian. In the Summa Theologica we find:

> it is to be observed that where there are several agents in order, the second always acts in virtue of the first; for the first agent moves the second to act. And thus all agents act in virtue of God Himself; and so, He is the cause of action in every agent. Thirdly, we must observe that God not only moves things to operate...but He also gives created agents their forms and preserves them in being. Therefore He is the cause of action not only by giving the form which is the principle of action... but also as conserving the forms and powers of things....

So dependent is the being of every creature upon God, St. Thomas declares elsewhere, that "not for a moment could it subsist, but would fall into nothingness, were it not kept in being by the operation of the divine power."[1]

The same kind of ineffective reasoning is seen in an even more important judgment in Dunn:

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[1]Dunn, p. 111; Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York, 1945), I, 977 and 963 (Part I, q. 105, art. 5, and q. 104, art. 1).

> The almost unescapable implication is that in the end all is absorbed into God. Browne rests at last in the conviction that "he only is; all others have an existence with dependency, and are something but by a distinction." "All that is truly amiable is God, or as it were a divided piece of him, that retains a reflex or shadow of himself." In short, the steady drift of these last pages is in the direction of the mystical and occult philosophies, and the thought overflows, as all powerfully imaginative thought must, any narrowly anthropomorphic conceptions of the creator and his creation.

But the quotations do not justify the conclusion, for they could be used just as easily to demonstrate a drift toward Scholasticism. The first quotation from Browne parallels St. Thomas', "all beings other than God are not their own being, but are beings by participation." The second, while imaginatively decked out, is not far different from Aquinas when he says, "Hence from the first being...everything can be called good and a being inasmuch as it participates in the first being by way of a certain assimilation, although distantly and defectively...."[1]

I am certainly far from suggesting that Browne was a follower of the Angelic Doctor, though he was probably as familiar with his works as with Plato's. It would be foolish to fall from one extreme into another. No one has suggested that Browne was a belated schoolman, but Dowdell's Aristotle and Anglican Religious Thought illustrates the proposition that the Aristotelian approach bears as little fruit as the Platonic in the investigation of most seventeenth-century religious writings. Dowdell argues initially that Anglicanism is "not really true to itself" when it wanders from Aristotelian principles and claims that the Articles, the Homilies and the whole via media are "steeped" in

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[1]Dunn, p. 119; Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, I, 427 and 55. (Summa Theologica, Part I, q. 44, art. 1, and q. 6, art. 4).

Aristotle. Later, however, after investigating the writings of the English churchmen, he withdraws into the much more modest claim that Anglican thought "is born of Aristotle and the great commentators, Peripatetics, Scholastics, and Neoplatonists," which in effect is an admission that it was an eclectic mixture. In short, there does not seem to be any advantage in introducing either Platonism or Aristotelianism into the discussion. Browne drew water from many wells. He was above all a studious Christian who felt that the immense and varied resources of Christian theological thought were his to enjoy. To labor the importance of any one segment is to impose a kind of order upon his thought which does not exist. It is also to attempt to explicate the simple by means of the complicated and problematical.[1]

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[1]Victor L. Dowdell, Aristotle and Anglican Religious Thought (Ithaca, 1942), pp. 4 and 13. As far as I can judge Dowdell does no more than show that the English theologians were widely acquainted with Aristotle's writings. He quite properly objects to Inge's division into Catholic, Protestant, and Platonic thinkers, but his own division into Catholic and Protestant, Platonic and Aristotelian does not have a great deal to recommend it. (p. 21) Robert Sencourt, in Outflying Philosophy (London, 1923), pp. 299-323, has done the most to relate Browne and St. Thomas but tends to exaggerate their similarities. He does, however, agree with my valuation of Platonism in Browne, concluding that "the physician found little of value in Plato; for the matters of the soul he turned to spiritual authority and to the directions of devotion." (p. 354).

CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM OF SCEPTICISM

Scepticism was an important product of the wide-spread reaction against philosophy which followed the collapse of scholasticism and the social stability of the medieval world. And as Bredvold has observed, that philosophical scepticism which derives historically from Pyrrho cannot be separated from the whole context of doubt which marks the age. It merged with other traditions; it became part of a climate of thought. Nevertheless, we must isolate it as best we can, or else face once again the difficulties of definitions as vague as this:

> scepticism follows a broadly marked-out pattern. This includes, in whatever order, a sense of the inadequacy of human knowledge, a consequent sensitivity to dualisms and contradictions, a concern with paradox as expressing the complexity of truth, a belief in the wholesome effect of doubt, and a conviction that where knowledge falters, a right life can supply the only legitimate confidence known to man.

While Miss Wiley's efforts to find in scepticism a guide for the present are interesting, her definition is not very practical as a research tool. Wiley herself places in the sceptic ranks: Paul, Augustine, Abelard, Nicolaus Cusanus, Luther, Bruno, Erasmus, Shakespeare, Bacon, Descartes, Galileo, and Ralegh among others. One doubts that there is a bed large enough to hold this company. A more orderly, less ambitious, procedure will better serve our

purposes.[1]

It must be realized at the outset that Pyrrhonic scepticism—the theory that the human mind cannot arrive at any truth, that a suspended judgment in all matters constitutes the closest approach to unknowable truth—is essentially not a philosophy but the rejection of philosophical endeavour, not a system of thought but the rejection of system, not a methodical construction but a total reduction of rational pretensions. There are, to be sure, degrees of scepticism, but every remove from this absolute position is theoretically questionable.

As Montaigne realized so well, the sceptic position weakens the minute it makes concessions. Furthermore, unless we work with the pure form, we shall find that the limits imposed upon reason by rational Christian theologians such as Aquinas are not easily distinguishable from those demanded by a weakened form of scepticism. Pure scepticism then is the logical starting point, and pure scepticism is the philosophical equivalent of the universal solvent of the laboratory.

Next it is important to distinguish between scepticism as a permanent condition of mind and scepticism as a stage in a larger process. In philosophy the first is represented traditionally by Pyrrho, although some have doubted that such a scepticism can seriously and completely be held by man. Pascal is of this opinion when he says:

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[1]For the general aura of doubt see Louis I. Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden (Ann Arbor, 1934), pp. 16-17, and Etienne Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience (London, 1938), pp. 119-121. The quotation is from Margaret L. Wiley, The Subtle Knot: Creative Scepticism in Seventeenth-Century England (London, 1952), p. 59. For her motivation see p. 137.

> What then shall man do in this state? Shall he doubt everything? Shall he doubt whether he is awake, whether he is being pinched, or whether he is being burned? Shall he doubt whether he doubts? Shall he doubt whether he exists? We cannot go so far as that; and I lay it down as a fact that there never has been a real complete sceptic.

Whether or not Pascal's criticism is wholly valid, it shows at least that true scepticism is difficult. But scepticism may operate merely as a breathing place between the death of one philosophy and the birth of a new. In this case the scepticism either disappears when the new system has been perfected or else remains as a kind of control within a larger synthesis. Gilson, for example, argues persuasively that Descartes' philosophical system was a reaction against his scepticism.[1]

Scepticism in relation to religion presents the same double aspect. If scepticism is accepted as the final word and is adopted wholly, a man may well abandon all rational effort and seek a new center around which to group the possibilities of his life. The choices seem to be two: a complete surrender to faith grasped blindly and with an intensity proportionate to the feeling of loss experienced in the rejection of reason or an equally complete surrender to the lure of the sensual life dictated by the conviction that religion and morality too are radically uncertain. Scepticism, however, may constitute only a stage in a religious progress, may become only a part of a more complex attitude toward religious truth. Properly speaking it can no longer be called scepticism, because we must name in terms of the whole, not of constituent parts. Unfortunately

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[1]Blaise Pascal, Pensées, trans. W. F. Trotter (New York, 1941), p. 143; Gilson, Unity, p. 126. Gilson's opinion is shared by Alexandre Vinet, Études sur Blaise Pascal, ed. Pierre Kohler (Lausanne, 1936), p. 117.

the wholes in this case have no names, and consequently the whole subject is shrouded by verbal confusion. The best procedure is to study scepticism in actual historical situations, leaving the problem of naming alone for the present.

Montaigne and "The Apology for Raymond Sebond" (1580)

Because of the Renaissance mixture of anti-philosophical motives, it is more profitable in a general survey such as this to look at a few selected documents closely than to attempt a sweeping survey of sceptical thinkers. The gods have been kind, for in Montaigne's "Apology for Raymond Sebond" they have provided an ideal text. Not only is it what Bredvold has called "the classic and standard exposition of modern sceptical thought," but it also leads directly into the thought of Pascal. Finally, because of its connections with the type of Christian philosophy represented by Sebond himself, the "Apology" furnishes us with an opportunity of contrasting that philosophy with fideism.[1]

Montaigne's attack is directed specifically against those "who are ignorant of nothing, who rule the world, who know everything." Both his intention and plan are laid down very neatly when he says:

> The means I take...to subdue that frenzy, is to crush and tread under foot human pride and arrogance, to make them sensible of the inanity, the vanity and insignificance of man; to wrest out of their fists the miserable weapons of their

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[1]The "Apology" was not the first work of its kind by any means. In 1520 Gian-Francisco Pico della Mirandola and in 1530 Cornelius Agrippa had published similar protests against dogmatic philosophy. See Bredvold, pp. 28-29 for this, and p. 30 for the quotation above. Jean Plattard, Montaigne et son temps (Paris, 1933), p. 192, claims that Montaigne borrowed largely from Agrippa.

> reason; to make them bow the head and bite the dust under the authority and reverence of the divine majesty.

His program includes two distinct though related elements, an attack upon human reason as applied to philosophical or scientific materials and an attack upon human reason directed toward the comprehension of the divine. The second, which will be treated later, is not really scepticism, since it is shared by sceptics, mystics, and rationalists alike. It is not going beyond the evidence to say that it is a common ground in Christian writings. [1]

The heart of the essay, then, lies in Montaigne's effort to destroy completely the proud claims of reason. No line of argument, no method is neglected. The perpetual burden of Montaigne's song is that man is in reality nothing, in pretension all, and that his pretensions rest upon sand. Every argument is designed to pull man from his pedestal. Place man against the backdrop of the whole universe. Look at him. What a puny mite he is. "Is it possible," Montaigne asks, "to imagine anything more ridiculous" than that this curiously futile creature, unable to rule either himself or physical nature, should have the audacity to claim lordship of the universe? He then makes his famous and daring comparisons between men and animals in order to jar men out of their egocentricity. Considered naturally man is but an animal, one among many. "We are neither superior nor inferior to the rest. All that is under heaven, says the sage, is subject to one law and one fate...." Do we

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[1] Michel de Montaigne, "Apology for Raymond Sebond," in Essays, trans. E. J. Trechmann (New York, 1946), pp. 463 and 378. Hereafter referred to as Apology.

ask for proof? Animal instinct is superior to human reason in effectiveness; animals move with grace and skill to accomplish their several ends, while men blunder clumsily along. All of our supposed superiority rests "not upon any true ground of reason, but...a foolish arrogance and stubbornness."[1]

Having thus successfully reduced man to a bestial level, Montaigne turns his heaviest artillery directly upon human reason. He asks if man actually has the power to find what he seeks, if in the long centuries of philosophical enquiry any solid truth has been discovered. His conclusion is that man has learned nothing but his own weakness. "The ignorance which was naturally in us we have by long study confirmed and verified." This proposition is backed up by the simple but effective technique of listing the contradictory opinions which have been held on various topics and then pointing out how impossible it is to determine which is correct. For Montaigne science is an absurdity. We know nothing of nature; our so-called explanations of physical phenomena are a tissue of blunders. If Nature should ever condescend to disclose her secrets, "O Heavens, what mistakes, what blunders we should discover in our poor science! I am mistaken if it has grasped the right end of any single thing...." The human body, for instance, has been pried at, peered at, rearranged, cut and patched out of all recognition, but nothing substantial has been learned. Yet despite the abysmal ignorance displayed by science at every turn, men dutifully accept the jargon of the moment as final truth. The world is thus "filled with, and steeped in, nonsense and lies." Reason having failed us in the past, will fail us

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[1]Apology, pp. 379, 387, and 412.

now and forever, and Copernicus will soon join Ptolemy. This argument is important, for it draws attention to the fact that a thoroughgoing sceptic lacks altogether the motivations necessary for scientific investigation. Needless to say philosophy fares even worse. It is quite hopeless. "She has so many faces, so much variety, and has said so many things, that they include everything we can dream or imagine." Nothing, in truth, is too fantastic or absurd for this discipline. Then follow long lists of philosophical absurdities. Montaigne confesses to a certain wicked joy in bundling together "all the asinine things which have been uttered by _homo sapiens_."[1]

Thus blow after crushing blow is delivered. In intellectual matters everything rests ultimately upon the foundation of first principles which by definition can never be demonstrated. What then of the superstructure? "All the rest, the beginning, middle and end are but dreams and smoke." Again, philosophers presuppose a mind operating with the precision of a well-oiled machine. How far this is from actuality. Our reasoning is affected by a host of outside and accidental factors, by our opinions, our state of health, even by the climate. "If our judgement be at the mercy of sickness and violent emotions; if folly and madness are bound to influence the impression we receive of things, what reliance can we place in it?" What assurance do we have? What can we know we know?[2]

But the most damaging of the sceptic bolts derives from the

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[1] _Apology_, pp. 426, 461-462, 464, 493, and 470.

[2] _Apology_, pp. 465 and 491.

deceptive nature of the senses. An opponent may be able to wiggle his way out of the other snares, but he cannot deny that the senses are both "the sovereign lords of his knowledge" and "uncertain and liable to deception in all circumstances." Montaigne reviews the usual examples of the unreliability of sensible impressions, then sums up the argument:

> Our ideas are not due to direct contact with outside things, but are formed through the mediation of the Senses; and the senses do not take in the outside objects, but only their own impressions. So the idea and image we form is not that of the object, but only of the impression and the feeling made by it on the senses; which impression and the object are different things. Wherefore whoever judges by appearances, judges by something other than the object.

Man is thus condemned to reason with a shifting and ineffective instrument upon data furnished by irresponsible senses which at best give only impressions of undeterminable relation to real objects. The case against rational certainty is complete.[1]

This is the classic modern presentation of the sceptical case in its most rigorous form, the Pyrrhonic. Montaigne rejects the slightly more moderate Academic scepticism because its affirmation of ignorance is too dogmatic. Also renounced is Academic probabilism, the contention that a bias toward one of two contrary propositions is allowable if the bias does not harden into a commitment. This Montaigne will not tolerate, for it implies some sort of knowledge which justifies the leaning. Nothing but pure Pyrrhonism will do. Our attitude must be one of wavering, doubting, enquiring, of being sure of nothing and answering for nothing, of remaining always in a perfect suspension of

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[1] Apology, pp. 514 and 522.

judgment. With real fervor Montaigne pleads for this suspension:

> Is there not some advantage in being free from the necessity that curbs others? Is it not better to remain in suspense, than to be entangled in the many errors that the human imagination has brought forth? Is it not better to suspend one's conviction than to get mixed up with those seditious and wrangling divisions?

Although this sounds attractive, it should not be forgotten that assent to this program demands total surrender of the reason. Here, as elsewhere in the essay, Montaigne employs a striking "nakedness" figure. Scepticism, he says:

> presents man naked and empty, confessing his natural weakness and ready to receive from on high some power not his own; stripped bare of human knowledge, and all the more fit to harbour within himself divine knowledge, supressing his own judgement to leave more room for faith....He is a blank tablet prepared to take from the finger of God such forms as he shall be pleased to engrave upon it.

That is the point: the sceptical process inevitably results in a tabula rasa.[1]

Before going on to discuss the reason and consequences of Montaigne's stand, a few words should be added concerning his treatment of reason and divinity. While, as I have suggested, much of what he says is common to virtually all Christian writing, the totality of his rejection of rationality in religion is nevertheless important. Here is found the same conceptual extremity that has characterized the preceding arguments. Montaigne insists that God cannot be measured by human scales. "What can be more fruitless than to try to divine God by our analogies and conjectures, to measure him and the world according to

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[1] Apology, pp. 485, 429, and 431-432.

our capacity and our laws...?" God is unknowable. His promises are "unimaginable, inexpressible and incomprehensible, and absolutely different from anything in our miserable experience." Though language betrays us into thinking that we can make statements concerning God, in reality while our tongues move, our understandings remain in total darkness. So far removed from human frailty are the divine perfections that no human terms may join the two orders. All this is in a way ordinary enough, but in Montaigne one feels that God is becoming not only unknowable but unreal, less than the shadow of a shadow. In any event, human efforts to understand divine matters are seen as not only unsuccessful but almost impious, since they degrade God by reducing him to our human level. We had best leave the divine entirely alone.[1]

Such then is the argument of the "Apology for Raymond Sebond."[2] It is not difficult to understand why Montaigne chose this path. He was understandably dissatisfied with the Christianity of his day, which from his own experiences appeared to have reached a nadir. To Montaigne

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[1]Apology, pp. 437, 443, and 453.

[2]I might say here that I am taking the essay at face value as a type of possible thought. Whether or not Montaigne was sincere is for this purpose beside the point, as is the correctness of this interpretation in the light of his whole thought. Plattard, pp. 200-205, ably defends Montaigne's sincerity, while many critics who interpret the work as an attack upon Christianity show by their comments that they have read carelessly. (See, for example, Irene Cooper Willis, Montaigne (New York, 1927), p. 72.) In any case, I feel that the position I have taken is justified by Plattard's observation, p. 196: "Et n'est-il pas étrange que ce soupçon ne soit pas présenté à l'esprit des lecteurs chrétiens de Montaigne au xviie siècle? Les Pascal, les Nicole, les Malebranche ne cherchaient qu'à discréditer l'auteur des Essais; ils ont stigmatisé sa morale païenne, sa 'nonchalance du salut', son épicurisme: ils n'ont pas vu dans l'Apologie une arme de guerre, et de guerre sournoise, contre la foi."

a comparison between Christian and Moslem manners could only bring a blush to Christian cheeks. Zeal there was in abundance, but only directed towards "hatred, cruelty, ambition, avarice, detraction, rebellion. Against the grain, towards kindness, good-will, moderation, it will neither walk nor fly...." Religion has lost all firmness; it has been degraded into a political tool, changing with every new political combination, shifting with every wind of power. From these observations of a nation in the grip of civil-religious war Montaigne draws the sad conclusion that Christianity is presently rootless. "We are Christians by the same title as we are natives of Perigord or Germany" is an indictment. We are, that is to say, not Christians at all. There is no substance to our faith; the kernel is gone and the worthless husk alone remains.[1]

Impermanence and bad faith meet our eyes on every side. But need our state be like this? No, says Montaigne with feeling:

> If we held fast to God by the mediation of a living faith; if we held to God through him and not through ourselves; if we had a divine foundation and foothold, human accidents would not have the power to shake us as they do.... We should not allow it to be disturbed at the bidding of any fresh argument, or yield to the persuasions even of all the eloquence that ever man employed; we should withstand those waves with an unmoved and inflexible firmness.

This is a cry not only for simple faith, but for simple faith as the answer to unbearable pressures. The language is that of a man who yearns for permanence and certainty above all else. As Zeitlin observes, "It was a desperate plunge of his intellect to find a clue to some order

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[1] Apology, pp. 373-375.

amidst moral and political chaos...." Desperation is the keynote, and like most moves of desperation, it avoids one extreme only to fall into another.[1]

Montaigne's analysis of the causes of the undeniable horror of his time centers almost exclusively upon the problem of pride. To attain the living faith which will bear the fruits of love and peace, man must bind himself to God. In Montaigne's powerful language:

> The knot which ought to bind our judgement and our will, which ought to closely knit and join our souls to our Creator, should be a knot that takes its folds and its strength, not from our ponderings, from our reasons and feelings, but from a divine and supernatural compulsion, having but one form, one face and one light, which is God's authority and his grace.

Everything which stands in the way of this goal must be crushed. And human pride, the cause of our downfall in the beginning, the source of our corruption now, is singled out as the villain. Man must force himself to the realization that he cannot raise himself above humanity, that he is nothing, so that God may raise him if He will. All is really contained in the formula, "The more we give and owe and render to God, the more shall we act as Christians."[2]

In the end Montaigne says no more than submit and obey. Abandon the pretensions of self. Man should not exercise his own judgment, but should have his duty prescribed to him. In order to avoid novelty, private opinion, constant error, we must follow the Church. The mind,

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[1] Apology, p. 371; Jacob Zeitlin (ed.), The Essays of Michel de Montaigne (New York, 1934), I, lix.

[2] Apology, pp. 376, 424, 525, and 477.

"an erratic, dangerous and unthinking tool," leads to disaster. Our choice is either "the way marked and trodden by the Church" or "that vast, turbulent and undulating sea of human opinions." Much has to be sacrificed for the sake of peace. Montaigne was perfectly aware of the sacrifice and of the desperate nature of his solution, for he calls it "a last resort," "a desperate thrust, in which you have to abandon your weapon in order to disarm your adversary, and a secret ruse which should be practised seldom and with reserve."[1]

In the "Apology" scepticism does not lead inevitably to any specific religious solution. What it does, and does very effectively, is to strip man. Man may then clothe himself, as it were, in various new religious and moral garments. If Montaigne's pyrrhonic scepticism is accepted as final, a man may turn either to fideism, which appears to be the main drift of Montaigne's intent, or to libertinism, which was one of the historical consequences of his teaching. The reason for this dual possibility has been suggested earlier. Once human reason has been crushed, a man may turn to faith, but having been lowered to the position of a beast, he may be content to remain on that level.[2]

Yet these do not exhaust the possibilities. Though Montaigne's arguments are fideistic, it is difficult to think of him as a real fideist. It seems (though I admit that we are dealing here mainly with impressions)

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[1] Apology, pp. 414, 445 and 481.

[2] See Bredvold, pp. 35-36 and Jacques Chevalier, Pascal, trans. Lilian A. Clare (London, 1930), pp. 23-29, for Montaigne and libertinism. See Gilson, Unity, p. 127, for supporting evidence that Montaigne teaches nothing but the art of unlearning.

that Montaigne's rejection of reason, complete as it is in theory, is partly rhetorical. Without laboring the point, a few passages from Martin Luther's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, a genuine fideistic document, will illustrate the differences in tone and intensity. Of reason Luther writes:

> But faith won the victory and routed reason, that ugly beast and enemy of God. Everyone who by faith slays reason, the world's biggest monster, renders God a real service, a better service than the religions of all races...can render.

And of the importance of doctrine received by faith and unmodified by reason, he says: "Let us do everything to advance the glory and authority of God's Word. Every tittle of it is greater than heaven and earth. Christian charity and unity have nothing to do with the word of God." Finally, a passage which shows the inflexibility of the fideist conviction:

> The least little point of doctrine is of greater importance than heaven and earth. Therefore we cannot allow the least jot of doctrine to be corrupted....our doctrine, God be praised, is pure because all the articles of our faith are grounded in the Holy Scripture.

Though as a fideist Montaigne would have been forced to recognize that these doctrines follow from his own principles, he would undoubtedly have been shocked by them. If Montaigne was a fideist, then he simply erred in not recognizing that there are dogmatisms other than those which develop through rationalistic pride.[1]

Furthermore, from the first and unduly neglected portion of the essay it can be argued that Montaigne admitted the possibility of a third

[1]Martin Luther, A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, trans. Theodore Graebner (Grand Rapids, Mich., n.d.), pp. 99, 212, and 209.

option. Here he defends Sebond against the attacks of the fideists, those who say that "Christians injure their cause when they endeavour to ground their belief on human reasons." Montaigne's defense is worth quoting in substance:

> It is Faith alone that vividly and with certainty embraces the sublime mysteries of our religion. But that does not mean that it is not a very fine and very laudable undertaking to employ in the service of our faith also the natural and human implements that God has given us. It is not to be doubted that that is the most honourable use that we can put them to, and that there is no occupation or design more worthy of a Christian than to aim, by all his studies and reflections, at embellishing, extending and amplifying the truth of his belief. We are not content to serve God in spirit and with our soul; we also owe him and render him a bodily reverence; we apply our limbs even and our movements and external things to do him honour. We must do the like, and accompany our faith with all the reason that is in us; but always with this reservation, that we must not imagine that it depends upon ourselves, nor that our endeavours and arguments will be able to attain to a knowledge so divine and supernatural.

He goes on to say that there are in the universe "some marks imprinted on it by the hand of that great architect," "some image that in some sort recalls the artificer who has built and formed them." All creation images the divine, for the world is "a very holy temple" wherein man can contemplate the wonders of the Creator. Yet by natural reason alone we are unable to apprehend these signs. We must be enlightened by the grace of God first, then our eyes will be opened.[1]

This is all in perfect accord with Sebond, who actually does not claim much independent value for human reason. In his preface Sebond

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[1]Apology, pp. 370-371 and 376. See Edward Dowden, Michel de Montaigne (Philadelphia, 1906), p. 287, for a typical statement of the theory that Montaigne treats Sebond with scant respect and attacks rather than defends him.

speaks of the two books of God, nature and the Bible, the first of which is primary in the order of time since it has existed from the origin of the world. But the second is primary in order of importance. "Le second livre des sainctes Escritures a esté depuis a l'homme, et ce au deffault du premier: auquel (ainsi aveuglé comme il estoit) il ne voyoit rien...." Over and over Sebond insists that the book of nature cannot be read properly except by the man illuminated by faith. "Nul ne peut veoir de soy...s'il n'est esclairé de Dieu et purgé de sa macule originelle." That is the reason the pagan philosophers failed in their task. This superiority of faith is, of course, a commonplace in Christian thought, for the simple reason that if natural reason were sufficient, there would be no need for the Christian revelation.[1]

It is possible, then, to reconcile the two arguments of Montaigne. In his great sceptical demonstrations Montaigne is speaking only of man considered as a natural agent. "Let us then," he says, "for the nonce consider man alone, without outside assistance, armed only with his own weapons, and destitute of the divine grace and knowledge...." Then he forces upon every man the knowledge of his terrible weakness and drives him to faith for salvation. But there is no reason why a man cannot recreate his reason within the faith. That is to say, if scepticism is used only as a temporary tool to induce a crisis, it is not incompatible with a Christian philosophy. After faith has been accepted as a guide, reason may be raised from its grave, not to measure God or pry into

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[1]Raymond Sebon, La Theologie Naturelle, trans. Michel de Montaigne in Oeuvres Complètes de Michel de Montaigne, ed. A. Armaingaud (Paris, 1932), I, x and xi-xii.

His secrets, but rather to embellish, extend and amplify the truth of faith. Historically this is what Gilson calls the Augustinian solution. In Augustine's thought faith is necessary to break the deadlock of philosophy. Truth, he claims paradoxically, must be known before it can be found. So central is this concept to Augustine that Pegis can characterize his whole system as "growth in understanding WITHIN the truth that he has come to possess through faith."[1]

These three options have been discussed to show as vividly as possible that sceptical attacks upon reason are religiously indeterminate. It must be confessed, however, that libertinism, fideism, and understanding within the faith are not equally likely results. Augustine, speaking against the Academics, puts his finger on the greatest practical danger of scepticism. He had, he tells us, become convinced that man is unable to find truth and had lost all hope. "Consequently I had become lazy and utterly indolent; for I had not the courage to make a search for that which the most ingenious and learned men were unable to find."[2] Great intellectual force is necessary to overcome the psychological inertia produced by a complete scepticism. This makes either fideism

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[1] Apology, p. 379; Etienne Gilson, Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages (New York, 1938), pp. 21-25; Anton C. Pegis, "The Mind of St. Augustine," Medieval Studies, VI (1944), 3. For a typical Augustinian statement of the principle see De Ordine, trans. Robert P. Russell, in The Writings of Saint Augustine, Fathers of the Church series (New York, 1947-48), I, 303: "since no one becomes learned except by ceasing to be unlearned, and since no unlearned person knows in what quality he ought to present himself to instructors or by what manner of life he may become docile, it happens that for those who seek to learn great and hidden truths authority alone opens the door."

[2] Contra Academicos, trans. Dennis J. Kavanagh, in Writings of Augustine (see note 1), I, 194.

or libertinism more likely, as does the fact that scepticism aims at destroying completely the reason. For, to return to a figure used earlier, reason must be raised from the grave in the third option, and resurrection is always a miracle. Though pyrrhonic scepticism may be used as a tool to humble the reason, it is extremely dangerous, for it is a knife that kills as easily as it cures. As for Montaigne himself, it is hard to determine which path he took. Every reader must make his own decision, or leave his mind in a state of suspension. Montaigne is an elusive figure.

Pascal and the Reaction against Pyrrhonism

Perhaps no one was more impressed by the power of Montaigne's arguments than Pascal. Certainly no one was more intensely aware of their danger. Pascal maintains both the truth and the insufficiency of scepticism. In his thought pyrrhonism becomes partial, balanced and controlled by other elements. This network of stresses and the reasons for it are now to be considered.

Like Montaigne, Pascal was frightened by the religious and social turmoil of Europe. He too was a political conservative, believing that order once established should not be disturbed. For instance, he readily admits that the law of hereditary monarchy is absurd, but adds that because men are absurd, the rule becomes reasonable and just. Without such an arbitrary principle of government men would be at the mercy of perpetual revolutions. "Let us then," he pleads, "attach... to something indisputable. This is the king's eldest son. That is clear,

and there is no dispute. Reason can do no better, for civil war is the greatest of evils." Here as in Montaigne is evident a strong desire for peace and stability, the acceptance of the customary based upon the conviction that men are unable to govern themselves by pure reason.[1]

Not much space need be devoted to Pascal's statement of his sceptical principles, since roughly they are the same as Montaigne's. He accepts the dominance of custom and the deceitful nature of imagination, reason, and senses. He agrees that men are dominated by a self-love which corrupts their judgment, and that they have never discovered by reason the sovereign good upon which happiness rests.[2]

Yet Pascal was not happy in his scepticism. He was haunted by a vivid realization of the horrors of pyrrhonic inertia, of men wallowing in their ignorance:

> This resting in ignorance is a monstrous thing, and they who pass their life in it must be made to feel its extravagance and stupidity....For this is how men reason, when they choose to live in such ignorance of what they are, and without seeking enlightenment. "I know not," they say...

This, says Pascal, would be permissible if we were dealing with some empty question in philosophy, but we are engaged in a search which concerns our whole being.[3] The sceptic suspension is useless, doubting is useless, unless it leads to a serious attempt to discover

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[1]Pascal, p. 108. See Chevalier, p. 144, for his political conservatism.

[2]This material is presented in an orderly fashion by Chevalier, pp. 197-205. Typical sceptical statements by Pascal may be found in _Pensées_ 73, 82, 83, 92, and 100.

[3]Pascal, pp. 73 and 78.

truth. If we do find ourselves "in terrible ignorance of our beginnings and end," ought we accept this lightly? If it is true that the soul is "only a little wind and smoke," is this not a 'thing to say sadly, as the saddest thing in the world"? The human reaction should not be an Olympian calm, but fear. "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me. How many kingdoms know us not!"[1]

This is a powerful indictment against those who mask as sceptic suspension their defeat or their indifference. But striking as the language is, it proves nothing. The sceptic at this point can reasonably counter with "If wishes were horses." Pascal, however, is not attempting here to prove; he is merely asking that scepticism be looked at more closely. Whereas in the "Apology" Montaigne worked toward scepticism, Pascal takes it as his starting point and subjects it to a rigorous examination. And what disturbed Pascal most in the sceptical arguments, it seems, was their facility. A man may find it difficult to disagree with the demonstrations as they unfold before him, but at the back of his mind there lurks a suspicion that something is being left out. Pascal's great objection against scepticism is that it simply does not conform to the facts of existence as we know them.

Against the sceptics, argues Pascal, we can say this: if man is an animal, he is at any rate a thinking animal, and nothing can obscure that fact for long. "Man is obviously made to think. It is his whole dignity and his whole merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought." Despite the sceptic effort to convince us of the parity of reason in man and instinct in animals, there is a vital difference in these activities,

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[1]Pascal, pp. 65-75.

expressed succinctly by Pascal in "The beak of the parrot, which it wipes, although it is clean." Both the existence, distinction and dignity of man's ability to think are facts as obvious as his weaknesses, and must be taken into account.[1]

What are we to do? How can these two groups of solid observations be reconciled? There is open war between the dogmatists and the sceptics, a war in which it is impossible to remain neutral, for neutrality is the sceptical position. Just as in Pascal's famous wager, we can neither take one side nor the other nor remain neutral. We must act and we cannot act. The sceptics say we should doubt everything. Pascal objects that "speaking in good faith and sincerely, we cannot doubt natural principles." The dogmatists say that truth is in our possession. But this is not true either. "We have an incapacity of proof, insurmountable by all dogmatism. We have an idea of truth, invincible to all scepticism." We have in short reached a deadlock. "What a chimera then is man!" exclaims Pascal:

> What a novelty! What a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy! Judge of all things, imbecile worm of the earth; depositary of truth, a sink of uncertainty and error; the pride and refuse of the universe.

Faced by this confusion, according to Pascal, man can only turn to God for direction.[2]

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[1]Pascal, pp. 55 and 115. See also: "I cannot conceive man without thought; he would be a stone or a brute." (p. 115) and, "It is not from space that I must seek my dignity, but from the government of my thought....By space the universe encompasses and swallows me up like an atom; by thought I comprehend the world." (p. 116)

[2]Pascal, pp. 142-143 and 127.

Superficially this looks like scepticism resolving itself into fideism, but it is actually more complex. The passage quoted above is not pyrrhonic, because the contrary terms, "judge of all things...depositary of truth...pride of the universe," are meant seriously. Scepticism is true, but not totally true, because the opposite principles are also true. Both scepticism and dogmatism contain, but are not, truth. Christianity alone is true because it contains these two bodies of contradictory truths in solution. "That a religion may be true, it must have knowledge of our nature. It ought to know its greatness and littleness, and the reason of both. What religion but the Christian has known this?" This in outline is Pascal's rational argument for the truth of Christianity. It is also the best example of his whole method, a method which assumes: 1) that truth is complex and many-sided and that, consequently, a given position is usually true within its limits or under some aspect, but false if accepted as total; 2) that total truth is best approached by holding in equipoise numerous contradictory partial truths which interact upon one another to form harmonies. Pascal operates with a "both - and" rather than an "either - or" grammar of thought. His method is not quite the resolution of extremes into a mean, but the holding of extremes in solution. Chevalier calls it the employment of

a principle of equilibrium.[1]

Pascal uses his technique effectively to resolve various aspects of the sceptic-dogmatist dilemma. All men, it is agreed, seek happiness. The sceptics rightly observe that the unaided powers of men have never enabled them to attain that desirable state. On the other hand, we experience a constant urge toward the search for happiness, an urge which is discouraged neither by the long history of human failure nor the reasoning of the sceptics. Only Christianity can explain these facts. The Christian doctrine of the fall from a more perfect condition fits the data perfectly. Again, we observe in life an eternal war between reason and the passions. The rationalists who renounce the passions and depend upon rational guidance make gods of themselves and are overthrown in their pride by the very passions they scorn. The sceptics who renounce reason fall prey to their passions and grow bestial. Only the Christian scheme takes into account both dangers and avoids them. Christianity

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[1] Pascal, p. 141; Chevalier, p. 69. Because Pascal is a difficult thinker concerning whom I can claim no special competence, I would like here to bolster my argument by an appeal to authority. Chevalier, p. 180: "Thus the Pascalian dialectic in no way denies reason, to raise faith upon its ruins. On the contrary, it is an endeavour to show that the Christian religion is eminently in conformity with reason, and that the latter must submit to it." Fortunat Strowski, _Les Pensées de Pascal: Étude et Analyse_ (Paris, n.d.), p. 157: "Je m'étonnerais qu'on ait jamais regardé Pascal comme un sceptique, si je ne me rappelais que l'on a découpé au hasard ses fragments, sans tenir compte de leur contexture, et qu'ainsi, on a pris souvent pour thèse ce qu'il présentait comme une erreur à réfuter." Vinet, p. 121: "pendant quelques moments, lui était bon, pourvu qu'il obligeât la raison à crier merci; de là, dans son livre, des assertions périlleuses, des contradictions; mais êut-il été, ce que nous n'accordons pas, plus fort dans ce qu'il allègue en faveur du pyrrhonisme que dans ce qu'il allègue contre cette secte, nous n'en disons pas moins que, personnellement, il n'est point pyrrhonien; êut-il mal défendu sa cause, on voit clairement que le pyrrhonisme n'est point sa cause...."

cures both vices, pride and sloth, "not by expelling the one through means of the other, according to the wisdom of the world, but by expelling both according to the simplicity of the Gospel." It humbles man more effectively than scepticism can, but without inducing despair. It gives life more value than stoicism can, but avoids dangerous pride. "It alone fulfils the duty of instructing and correcting men."[1]

There is nothing in Pascal's argument which destroys either the mystery or the rationality of Christian truth. "Christianity is strange," he says, but he does not say that it is irrational. His method is in fact highly rational. The acceptance of Christianity does not entail the abandonment of reason. On the contrary, once the Christian explanation has been accepted, it can be checked rationally in the sense that it fits the facts of our condition better than any other system of thought. Pascal makes much of the idea that we do not have to know what a thing is to know that it is; the incomprehensible is not totally beyond the sphere of reason. To illustrate he refers to the problem of infinity. In mathematics we know that there is an infinity in number, but we do not know what the infinite number is. It can be neither even nor odd, since the addition of a unit can make no change in an infinite series. We know that there is such an infinite, but we are ignorant of its nature. Similarly we may know that God is a simple infinite, and may even think of a mental analogy, "a point moving everywhere with an infinite velocity," but we do not know the being of that God. Yet not everything that is incomprehensible is of the same grade. There are two kinds of incomprehensibilities, one according to our logic, the other according to relation

[1]For the search for happiness theme and the Fall see Pascal, pp. 134 and 144; for the problem of pride and sloth and the Christian solution, pp. 130 and 145.

with facts. Thus while Pascal admits readily that the doctrine of the transmission of original sin cannot be understood by the human mind, that it is shocking to our logical sense of justice, he argues that it is nevertheless necessary inasmuch as we cannot explain our contradictory nature without it:

> Certainly nothing offends us more rudely than this doctrine; and yet, without this mystery, the most incomprehensible of all, we are incomprehensible to ourselves. The knot of our condition takes its twists and turns in this abyss, so that man is more inconceivable without this mystery than this mystery is inconceivable to man.

This is certainly a highly sophisticated piece of reasoning. Pascal has almost nothing in common with the fideist, very little in common with the sceptic. He is a rationalist of great subtlety and intellectual force.[1]

Throughout his writings Pascal maintains with great skill a system of cautious balances. The middle path is sought on the principle that "If we submit everything to reason, our religion will have no mysterious and supernatural element. If we offend the principles of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous." Rationalism, scepticism and fideism must be combined. While it is not possible to lay down the exact proportions of each, so complex and mysterious is the human mechanism, it is essential to recognize the necessity of such a combination. In the end, says Pascal, we must trust to common sense:

> We must know where to doubt, where to feel certain, where to submit.... There are some who offend against these three rules, either by affirming everything as demonstrative, from want of knowing what demonstration is; or by doubting everything, from want of knowing where to submit; or by submitting in everything, from want of knowing where they must judge.

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[1] Pascal, pp. 79-80, for infinity; for graded incomprehensibilities, p. 144 and Chevalier, pp. 178-180.

The nearest approach to truth lies in moderation. So in the controversy concerning the will Pascal advises the via media. Against the followers of Luther he defends the "power of human nature"; against the Pelagians, the "powerlessness of human nature." Both are partially true; neither should be rejected; neither should be allowed to exclude the other. This is a much more defensible position than the extremity of the various theological dogmatists or the reactionary extremity of Montaigne.[1]

This concludes a somewhat fragmentary survey of scepticism. What emerges most clearly from this discussion is that scepticism may be turned to many different religious purposes. Consequently, no scattering of apparently pyrrhonic texts in a writer proves that he is in fact a sceptic. The scepticism, as in Pascal, may be only part of a balance which cannot properly be called sceptical. Nor, for the same reason, can we easily decide that a writer is fideistic. The lines separating these various religious types are uncertain and wavering. Later it will be argued that Browne is quite like Pascal in his consistent use of the principle of equilibrium, that he is neither a sceptic nor a fideist.

However, before turning to Browne, another tradition demands some attention. Although the "learned ignorance" of Nicolaus Cusanus has some similarities to pyrrhonic scepticism, it is really quite different in essence. An investigation of this body of thought will shed much light on the nature of Browne's meditations, especially by clarifying the problem of the infinite which Pascal touched upon briefly. There is no better teacher of the intricacies of infinity than Nicolaus.

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[1]Pascal, pp. 94 and 93. For his position in the free-will controversy, see Chevalier, p. 121. An interesting example of Pascal's middle way is: "To leave the mean is to abandon humanity. The greatness of the human soul consists in knowing how to preserve the mean. So far from greatness consisting in leaving it, it consists in not leaving it." (p. 123)

CHAPTER IV

THE LEARNED IGNORANCE

To explicate the problems of seventeenth-century thinkers by turning to the works of the fifteenth-century cardinal, Nicolaus Cusanus, may seem unwarranted. Yet Cusanus in his day faced essentially the same problems that Montaigne, Erasmus, Pascal, and other moderate men of succeeding centuries wrestled with valiantly, namely the disintegration of Christian intellectual and social unity. Gilson sees as central in Nicolaus the ambition to end those philosophical and theological dissensions which he saw were threatening the life of the Church. He hoped that future disasters might be forestalled by convincing men of the insignificance of their quarrels. And so he opposed all dogmatisms, for in dogmatism, he felt, lay the heart of the trouble. In summary form this seems similar to the aim of Montaigne, and there are certain broad similarities. But the difference in the methods employed by the two men is so great that it puts in shadow their agreements. Basically Montaigne's case rested upon the deceitful nature of the human instrument. Nicolaus places his emphasis upon the inherent incomprehensibility of certain clearly defined areas of knowledge. No two systems could be more unlike in their effects.[1]

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[1]Gilson, Unity, p. 113. See also Jacob, p. 155.

To appreciate properly the differences between pyrrhonic scepticism and the "learned ignorance," it is necessary to look first at Nicolaus' approach. His whole position is contained in germ in the beginning of the treatise Of Learned Ignorance (1440). For Nicolaus there are two phenomena which a theory of knowledge must account for. The first is man's natural desire for knowledge; the second, man's inability to attain perfect knowledge. The combination of these forms a contradiction which Nicolaus sets out to resolve.

Nicolaus deals with man's desire for knowledge in this way: God has implanted in all beings the desire to fulfill the possibilities of their particular natures. He has also given them suitable faculties to accomplish this desire. Nicolaus accepts the theory that all beings are arranged in an ascending scale of perfection, the great chain of being, and holds that man, by virtue of his place in this scale, participates in rational being. If this is so, then the perfection of man's capabilities must lie in the attainment of truth. The desire for such attainment is certain, for we can observe the "sound untrammelled intellect's desire for truth, which, by its natural discursive movement, it ceaselessly seeks in all things...." Yet there are potent reasons to suspect that such a consummation can never be reached.[1]

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[1]Nicolaus Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, trans. Germain Heron, introd. D. J. B. Hawkins (New Haven, 1954), p. 7. The argument that God wishes all beings to fulfill their natures derives from the idea of the perfect outgoingness of God. See p. 75: "every creature, as such, is perfect, though by comparison with others it may seem imperfect. God in His infinite goodness gives being to all in the way in which each can receive it. With Him there is no jealousy; He communicates being without distinction...." For Nicolaus and the chain of being, see Nicolaus Cusanus, The Idiot, introd. W. R. Dennes (San Francisco, 1940), p. 12, and Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 80.

To show that the human mind cannot achieve absolute truth, Nicolaus begins by distinguishing complete certainty or absolute truth about anything from absolute Truth in itself which is God; he then investigates each. Attainment of the first is impossible because the activity of the mind always involves measurement. Men judge of the uncertain by comparing it with the certain. But no two things or movements are alike, for if they were they would not be different. The necessary conclusion, according to Bett, is that "since our knowledge of sensible things is always by a more or less...our knowledge of these things is itself a more or less, an approximation to the truth, but never the exact truth...." The same conclusion may be reached by considering the relation between thing and perceiving mind. Since absolute truth is indivisible, it follows that the only possible measure of truth is truth itself, just as a circle is the only possible measure of a circle. But it is evident that the mind itself is not truth. It can never, then, grasp the truth perfectly, but only by an approximation. Nicolaus illustrates this point by comparing it with the relationship between a circle and an inscribed polygon. As the number of sides of the polygon is increased, the figure approaches the circle as a limit. But the polygon will never coincide with the circle on this side of infinity. Nicolaus appears here to be expressing a highly optimistic view of progressively more accurate sets of approximations limited only by the almost theoretical boundary of identity. He is somewhat less enthusiastic when it comes to practical application, saying that:

> It so far surpasses human reason, however, to know the precision of the combinations in material things and how exactly the known has to be adapted to the unknown that

> Socrates thought he knew nothing save his own ignorance, whilst Solomon, the Wise, affirmed that in all things there are difficulties which beggar explanation in words....

Whatever his personal feelings as to the probability of success, there is nothing in the theory itself which would prevent the exercise of scientific reasoning within the determined limits.[1]

Because men can make approximations only, and because it is not known how precise these approximations are, there is no room in Nicolaus' system for human pride to strut. He is just as antagonistic as Montaigne toward "those who know everything." But since his argument is not based upon the evidence used by the sceptics, he need not reject rational activity. Rather than being a broad rejection of the power of the human reason, Nicolaus' effort is merely to investigate rationally the limits of precision in thought which man must accept. There is nothing in his doctrine to induce despair.

Of course, when we consider the relation of the human mind to Absolute Truth, degrees of approximation become irrelevant. Here Nicolaus begins to formulate those concepts of the nature of the infinite which form so important a part of the whole system of the learned ignorance. God as the absolute maximum is far beyond the scope of the finite reason. Since our knowledge is based upon comparison, it is easily seen "from the self-evident fact that there is no graduation from infinite to finite...that the simple maximum is not to be found where we meet degrees of more or less...." In other words, there

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[1] Learned Ignorance, pp. 7 and 67; Henry Bett, Nicholas of Cusa (London, 1932), p. 120; Learned Ignorance, pp. 11 and 8.

is no possible comparison between the infinite and the finite, with the result that the infinite must remain forever unknown and mysterious.[1]

Nicolaus elaborates his meditations upon the infinite into the famous conception of the meeting of contraries in God. It is not pertinent to discuss this theory in detail. Suffice it to say that Nicolaus identifies the maximum with the minimum, holding that the two merge in the infinite. Bett has properly objected that Nicolaus' case rests upon a flagrantly equivocal use of the word minimum. It should, however, be recognized that Nicolaus was well aware of the inadequacy of his language, advising that

> an understanding of this matter will be attained rather by our rising above the literal sense of the words, than by insisting upon their natural properties, for these natural properties cannot be effectively adapted to such intellectual mysteries.

Nicolaus says that in the infinite the maximum and the minimum coincide. We may choose to say that in the infinite the words simply have no meaning. Nicolaus' terminology has the advantage of bringing the principle to life, making it vivid and unforgettable. But whether the language of paradox or that of bald statement is adopted, the underlying reality, the mystery of the infinite, remains the same. And it is this mystery, not the mode of expressing it, which fascinates Nicolaus:

> This is far and away beyond our understanding, which is fundamentally unable by any rational process to reconcile contradictories. We proceed to truth through the things made known to us by nature; and, as this process falls very short of the infinite power of the maximum, we are unable to link together by means of it contradictories which are infinitely distant from one another.

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[1] Learned Ignorance, p. 11. See Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York, 1955), p. 536, for the argument that the concept of infinity is the core of the learned ignorance.

This is the center of Nicolaus' thought, that the infinite is utterly incomprehensible, above any form of meaningful affirmation or negation. But what is perhaps even more important is the fact that by subjecting the mind to the contemplation of the infinite, we may humble it without destroying our confidence in its effectiveness in other areas.[1]

Nicolaus enjoys working out the implications of the infinite. He realizes that his use of mathematics is entirely symbolical. The underlying reality is beyond the reach of any kind of statement, but it is possible to catch glimpses of it distantly through mathematical symbols and demonstrations. The technique Nicolaus invents is to study finite mathematical figures as they are and then attribute their perfections to corresponding infinite figures. Next comes the daring speculative leap from the infinite figure to the simple Infinite, which, he prudently notes, "cannot possibly be expressed by any figure." The result is that "whilst we are groping in the dark, our ignorance will enlighten us in an incomprehensible fashion and enable us to form a more correct and truer notion of the Absolute." Immediately he plunges into the abysses of the infinite, setting up for demonstration the curious proposition that an infinite line would simultaneously be a straight line, a triangle, a circle, and a sphere. Rather than linger over the elaborate demonstrations, it is enough to note that they proceed along strictly logical lines

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[1] Learned Ignorance, pp. 10 and 13.

to prove the mind-shattering proposition.[1]

This is not the idle game it appears to be. By means of his infinite mathematics Nicolaus can derive far-reaching theological principles. For example, take two finite lines, one two feet long, the other three feet. In each of these lines there is an essence, else they would not be lines. Since they are distinct lines, there must also be in them a principle of difference. The essence cannot be different, because the essence of the finite line is the infinite line which is one.[2] Difference, then, can arise only because the lines do not share the essence equally. Yet this cannot be true either. The infinite line is neither more nor less in the two-foot line than in the three-foot line, since the infinite is not subject to more or less. It must be in each equally. Transposing this conclusion into larger terms, Nicolaus proposes that:

> the Maximum is in each thing and in no one thing in particular. Since it is by the same essence that it is in each thing and each thing in it, and since it is itself this very essence, then it is no other than the Maximum, which is then the Maximum in se: The Maximum which is the rule and measure of all things is really one and the same as the Absolute Maximum in se....

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[1] Learned Ignorance, pp. 27-28. An example might prove interesting. The coincidence of the infinite straight line and the infinite circle is proved in this manner: In a nest of concentric circles we approach the infinite circle as we move outward. Let us take arcs of these circles and impose them upon a tangential line. The curve of the arc clearly approaches the straight line as a limit. But when the circle becomes infinite the limit will be reached. Therefore, the circumference of an infinite circle is a straight line. The remainder of the demonstration is based upon the principle that all that is potential in a finite line is actual in an infinite line. By rotating a straight line about a center and various axes, we can generate the other figures. These must be actual in the infinite straight line. Nicolaus has other proofs, but these will give some idea of the method. (pp. 28-33)

[2] This theorem is demonstrated in Learned Ignorance, pp. 36-37. Let us take it for granted here.

Statements such as this have given rise to the wolf-cry of pantheist. The charge is hard to maintain, for the paradox that the Maximum "is in each thing and in no one thing in particular" cuts both ways. The brute fact is that in the wonderful realm of the infinite ordinary rules of judgment have no more relevance than in Alice's Wonderland. This rational confusion, arrived at logically, is precisely what Nicolaus intends to produce.[1]

Space limitations prevent the presentation of more of Nicolaus' fascinating arguments, but at least one substantial example of his theologizing should be given. His handling of the infinite circle will serve both to show the flavor of his thought and his resemblance to Browne, who also was in love with this figure.

> The circle is a perfect figure of unity and simplicity. We have previously seen that the triangle is a circle; the trinity then is unity, and that unity is infinite as the circle is infinite....Because of this infinite unity, all the attributes of the Maximum are the Maximum without diversity or distinction: in Him goodness is not one thing and wisdom another, they are one. In Him all diversity is identity: His power is so infinitely one that it is at once infinite and infinitesimal; and His duration is so infinitely one that past, present and future are there without any distinction, forming a duration that is most perfectly one without beginning or end, which is eternity....
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> All this we gather from the infinite circle, which having neither beginning nor end is eternal, is infinitely one and infinite in capacity. Now, because this circle is infinite, its diameter also is infinite; and the diameter is the circumference for this circle is infinitely one and there cannot be more than one infinite. But the middle of an infinite diameter is infinite, and, as the middle is the centre, it is evident that the centre, diameter and circumference are one and the same. The lesson we here learn in our ignorance is that the Maximum, which is at once the minimum, is incomprehensible; and in it the centre is the circumference.
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> You see how the Maximum in its simplicity and indivisibility

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[1] Learned Ignorance, pp. 36—39.

> is wholly and completely in the midst of all, because it is the infinite centre; how while outside all it encompasses all, because it is the infinite circumference; how it penetrates all because it is the infinite diameter....Because it is the centre it is the efficient cause, because it is diameter it is the formal cause, because it is the circumference it is the final cause. It gives being because it is the centre, it governs because it is diameter, it conserves in being because it is the circumference. And many similar conclusions could be drawn.[1]

The fecundity of Nicolaus' imagination is amazing, and he loves to embellish his principle. One feels immediately that the tone here is much like Browne's. How fully the good doctor would have relished this passage! And yet, it should be noted that Nicolaus does not let his imagination run riot. There is logic and control in the passage; but logic applied to the infinite sounds like fantasy.

For the purposes of our investigation it is interesting to note that Nicolaus is something of a puzzle to historians of philosophy. They find him notably hard to classify, and disagree with gentlemanly violence about his beliefs. Consider his Neo-Platonism. Hawkins insists that Nicolaus is quite unoriginal, that he merely "follows the customary Neoplatonic scheme of the outflow of things from God and their return to him...." Jacob disagrees; Nicolaus, it seems to him, makes significant breaks from the Neo-Platonic tradition. Hay in turn thinks that Nicolaus derived his mathematics of the infinite from Aristotle and medieval Aristotelians, and says "I believe we shall find Nicolaus' words less incomprehensible when we suppose that the Platonic strands are an embroidery on Aristotelian principles." The critics diverge as greatly in their evaluations of his pantheism.

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[1] Learned Ignorance, pp. 46-48.

Whittaker claims that he is an out-and-out pantheist similar to Bruno. Hawkins denies this, maintaining that while Nicolaus' distinction between God and creation "is in many respects vague and ambiguous," his orthodox intention is obvious. But Jacob finds that Nicolaus' peculiar distinction lies in his success in making just such a distinction.[1]

It is true that we always find different evaluations of philosophical thought, but here the divergence is so great that one reasonably suspects that something deeper is at work. Does not the docta ignorantia transcend and confound all labels just as its subject, the infinite, does? The secret, heart, or if you will, trick of Nicolaus is in the manipulation of the infinite. And the infinite, no matter how it is approached, generates paradox. The mind, confronted by these paradoxes, becomes confused, whirls about in a new order of comprehension or perhaps reasonable non-comprehension. The docta ignorantia is simply a technique for making the mind accept its fundamental limitations through the use of reason. Its victories are designedly Pyrrhic. Consequently, when we deal with the infinite, philosophical differences are irrelevant. In speaking of the infinite the Platonist, the Aristotelian, the mystic, the sceptic, the rational theologian, the

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[1]For Platonism: Hawkins' introduction to Learned Ignorance, pp. xiv; Jacob, p. 164; W. H. Hay, "Nicolaus Cusanus: The Structure of His Philosophy," Philosophical Review, LXI (1952), 14. For Pantheism: T. Whittaker, "Nicholas of Cusa," Mind, XXXIV (1925), 436; Hawkins' introduction, p. xxii; Jacob, p. 159.

mathematician all sound alike by necessity.[1]

If this is true, there is additional reason to be suspicious of a too ready identification of propositions stressing the mystery of the infinite with mysticism. For example, the famous "God is the circle whose center is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere" is not necessarily mystical, though a mystic might well employ it. It is not necessarily irrational or even highly imaginative, for it may be reached through orderly mathematical reasoning.

But it is time to sum up the meaning of the learned ignorance. When Nicolaus' leading principles are combined, namely that the mind desires the fulfillment of its rational nature, and that absolute truth eludes the mind, the conclusion must be that the immediate object of the mind's desire must be ignorance. Since the natural desire was implanted by God for a purpose, such ignorance of ultimates must be the divine intention. Therefore, says Nicolaus, "the more profoundly we learn this lesson of ignorance, the closer we draw to truth itself." Undoubtedly the whole movement is consciously anti-philosophical. As Gilson has aptly observed:

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[1]Hermann Weyl, in The Open World (New Haven, 1932), p. 8, points out that Nicolaus rejected the traditional mysticisms just as firmly as the old logic and created something quite new in philosophy. The paradoxical nature of infinity is seen even in pure mathematics. In the mathematics of the infinite we find such statements as: The infinity of even numbers is equal to the infinity of all numbers. In the world of infinity a part may be equal to a whole. There are the same number of points on lines one inch, one foot, and one mile long. The infinity of points in a cube is equal to those on any plane or any line forming that cube. (George Gamow, One Two Three...Infinity (New York, 1953), pp. 27-29.)

> Such was the last word of medieval philosophy, and I am far from being blind to its magnificence, or deaf to the secret truth of its message; I am merely pointing to the fact that it was a complete abdication of philosophy as a rational discipline.

But this does not mean that the learned ignorance is by any means irrational. Indeed, Gilson takes pains to show that in Nicolaus' thought lay the seeds of the new mathematics and new physical sciences.[1]

The fact that the learned ignorance, unlike pyrrhonic scepticism, does not lead to despair in intellectual activity, but merely limits the range of that activity, cannot be repeated too often. Jacob recognizes this distinguishing factor clearly when he says:

> Now what is sometimes described as Nicolaus' scepticism of the intellect is rooted in this idea of the absolute unity and infinity of God. Docta ignorantia is far removed from any despair or belittling of the human intelligence. No man with such respect for mathematical truth should be so accused.

But curiously enough Montaigne himself gives us the best description of the vital difference of the two modes of thought. In his essay "Of Vain Subtleties" he observes:

> It may be said, with some appearance of truth, that there is an ABC ignorance that preceded knowledge, and another, a doctoral ignorance that comes after it: an ignorance that knowledge creates and engenders, just as it uncreates and destroys the former.

As far as Christianity is concerned, he continues, the simply ignorant make good Christians by accepting without question the laws of the Church. The middle group is dangerous; "minds of middle strength and middle capacity beget erroneous opinions." Some few, however, pass through this middle state to a learned ignorance and arrive "with

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[1] Learned Ignorance, p. 12; Gilson, Unity, p. 118.

marvellous profit and confirmation, as at the extreme limit of Christian intelligence, and in the enjoyment of their victory feel comforted, grateful for divine favours, morally reformed, and truly humble." Montaigne himself does not aspire to the third stage, but significantly says that he strives to return to the first, to move from scepticism to fideistic belief.[1]

But if the learned ignorance differs from scepticism, it has much in common with the balance established by Pascal. He, too, often dealt with infinite mathematics and nowhere more effectively than in his concept of the two infinities, which bears some relation to Nicolaus' maximum and minimum in the limited infinity of the universe. When man surveys the world, says Pascal, he sees that:

> No idea approaches it. We may enlarge our conceptions beyond all imaginable space; we only produce atoms in comparison with the reality of things. It is an infinite sphere, the centre of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere. In short it is the greatest sensible mark of the almighty power of God, that imagination loses itself in that thought.

The mind discovers a comparable infinity in the small, "an infinity of universes." Man occupies the middle ground between the infinitely large and the infinitely small, between God and nothing. His mind occupies the same position in the world of thought, and "this is what makes us incapable of certain knowledge and of absolute ignorance." Pascal's thought is strikingly similar to Nicolaus' "A creature is not God, nor is it nothing; it is, as it were, posterior to God and prior to nothing, or it stands between God and nothing...." The consequence is the same in both Nicolaus and Pascal, the adoption of a cautious

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[1]Jacob, p. 163; Montaigne, Essays, p. 263. See Whittaker, p. 437, for another testimony to Nicolaus' rejection of scepticism.

balance between the power and the limitations of reason.[1]

There is, however, one great difference in the way in which the two thinkers react to the universe they have discovered. In Pascal one finds traces of a quietism, almost at times a surrender. In the section quoted above he says also:

> I think that we shall remain at rest, each in the state wherein nature has placed him. As this sphere which has fallen to us as our lot is always distant from either extreme, what matters it that man should have a little more knowledge of the universe? If he has it, he but gets a little higher. Is he not always infinitely removed from the end...?

Cusanus, on the contrary, experiences great joy in the investigation of the infinite and the study of nature. While both men agree that final knowledge lies on the far side of the grave, there is nothing in Nicolaus similar to Pascal's "The eternal silences of these infinite spaces frighten me." Nicolaus revels in the infinite; it is intensely exhilarating to him. For example, in the Idiot, after demonstrating through mathematics the impossibility of our knowing, the idiot draws this conclusion:

> Whereupon wisdome (which all men by nature desire to know...) is no otherwise knowne, then that it is higher than all knowledg, and utterly unknowable, and unspeakable by all language, and unintelligible by all understanding, and unmeasurable by all measure, and unlimitable by all limits...and unimaginable by all imagination...and unapprehendable by all apprehension, and unaffirmable in all affirmation, and undeniable in all negation....

Much of the elaboration has been omitted from the quotation, but what

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[1] Pascal, pp. 22 and 25; Learned Ignorance, p. 72. See Jacob, p. 155: "It fell to Nicholas of Cues to restore—or attempt to restore—the balance of reason and emotion by weighting once more the scale of reason, while at the same time demonstrating the limitations of the rational method."

remains is still somewhat staggering. The principle is drawn out in sheer delight. A man does not so write unless he takes joy in his ideas.[1]

The sources of this joy, which Nicolaus terms in a burst of enthusiasm the "joy-joyfullest comprehensibility of incomprehensibility," are two. First Nicolaus realizes that the incomprehensibility of God the Infinite and Unknowable enhances the value of the Christian possession. Since the roots of our being are in God, our life and its possibilities are beyond measure. We hold a treasure in our religion which is "innumerable, unweighable and unmeasurable." But joy wells up in Nicolaus' heart also from springs purely intellectual. His mind is charmed with the beauty of his solutions, by the beauty of a universe which can furnish materials for such wonderful thoughts. "O wonderful facility of difficult things! I see now that all these things do most evidently follow the granting of an infinite line...," says the orator after the idiot has spoken, and "O wonderful facility of difficult things!" says Nicolaus throughout his works. By this intellectual joy he is supported in life. After death there is the prospect of illimitable knowledge. Combined, these motives form the attitude of Nicolaus toward life, an attitude marked by intellectual curiosity and effort, great joy in learning, and serenity in the face of man's intellectual weakness. The last day will solve all, but before that awesome day there is much to study and take delight in. The conclusion to the Idiot expresses beautifully this combination of non-mystical wonder and serenity:

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[1]Pascal, p. 26; Idiot, p. 5.

> Thus now thou hast that which is granted us to contemplate in eternall Wisdome, that thou mayest behold all things in a most simple rectitude, most truly, precisely, unconfusedly, and perfectly, though in an aenigmatical mean; without which the vision of God cannot be in this world, until he shall grant, that without any shadow, he shall be made visible unto us...

In this, too, we are close to the heart of Browne's thought, as the next chapters will show.[1]

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[1] Idiot, pp. 6, 22 and 23.

CHAPTER V

FAITH AND REASON IN SIR THOMAS BROWNE

Now that the necessary background has been sketched in, it is possible to turn directly to the *Religio Medici*, the work which this paper is intended to elucidate. Before proceeding to trace out the relation of Browne's thought to scepticism and the learned ignorance, before exhibiting the balances which make it akin to the systems of Pascal and Nicolaus, it is important to say a few words about the organization and style of the *Religio*, for these present certain problems to the critic.

From Browne to the present no one has claimed that the work is methodical. It is essentially a partially organized and artistically elaborated commonplace book or a series of loosely arranged *pensées*. Browne himself says that the work was composed for his "private exercise and satisfaction" and "was rather a memoriall unto me then an example or rule unto any other." While this disorder may be exaggerated, it is nevertheless true that the book cannot be treated with the logical rigor that formal works of controversy, either theological or philosophical, may expect. No doubt aware of the microscopic scrutiny which any book touching upon religious matters in the troubled 1640's was likely to receive, Browne very carefully tells his readers how to approach the work:

> There are many things delivered Rhetorically, many expressions therein meerely Tropicall, and as they

> best illustrate my intention; and therefore also there are many things to be taken in a soft and flexible sence, and not to be called unto the rigid test of reason.

Furthermore, as Croll has shown, the Baroque prose style used by Browne had as its end the expression of thought in motion rather than the reporting of the results of thought. All of these factors, looseness of organization, rhetorical extravagance, and a dynamic mode of expression contribute to produce a prose difficult to analyze properly.[1]

However, it is erroneous to look upon the work as completely chaotic and formless. Just as in reading Boswell's Life of Johnson or Lucien Price's Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead one becomes aware gradually of unities other than those of formal organization, so also does a careful reading of the Religio reveal a cumulative unity and structure of thought. Indeed, the Religio has the virtues and many of the failings of great conversation. Above all else it shares the vitality of recorded dialogue, the powerful sense that one is in contact with a living mind striving manfully with problems, the immediacy of the unpremeditated. As one statement is played off against another, as ideas suddenly emerge, are looked at from all angles, then are rejected or modified, the reader recreates in his own mind the whole process of Browne's thought. What Browne loses in neatness of presentation is more than made up for in this sense of life. At any rate, the contention of this paper is that Browne must be studied in terms of the whole. It is hoped that the present chapter will show that Browne's thought is built up by indirection and that apparent contradictions can in great part be

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[1] Religio, pp. 3-4; Morris W. Croll, "The Baroque Style in Prose," in Studies in English Philology: A Miscellany in Honor of Frederick Klaeber, ed. Kemp Malone and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis, 1929), p. 428.

resolved as blending together into a delicate, flexible, and curiously precise network of balances. As in Nicolaus and Pascal, there is in Browne a conviction that no single viewpoint is sufficient for truth, but that many opposites must be merged into a synthesis without a name.

The habit of interpreting Browne on the basis of partial evidence is so widespread that even a scholar like Bredvold is content to classify him loosely as a fideistic sceptic quite similar to Montaigne. The evidence hardly justifies such a conclusion, although there are undoubtedly passages in Browne which taken alone would suggest this reading. In one place Browne says:

> wee doe but learne to-day what our better advanced judgements will unteach us tomorrow: and Aristotle doth but instruct us, as Plato did him; that is, to confute himselfe. I have runne through all sects, yet finde no rest in any: though our first studies and junior endeavors may stile us Peripateticks, Stoicks, or Academicks, yet I perceive the wisest heads prove, at last, almost all Scepticks, and stand like Janus in the field of knowledge.

In another place he seems to move easily from scepticism into fideism, when he says, "Since I was of understanding to know we know nothing, my reason hath beene more pliable to the will of faith." And when he adds, "this I think is no vulgar part of faith, to believe a thing not only above, but contrary to reason, and against the arguments of our proper senses," the case seems complete. Does it not appear that nothing could be less open to argument than Browne's sceptical and fideistic convictions?[1]

Yet just as many convincing passages, drawn from all kinds of contexts, can be culled from the Religio to show Browne's great respect

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[1]Bredvold, pp. 40-41; Religio, pp. 90 and 14-15.

for reason. Of his adherence to Christianity he writes:

> not that I meerely owe this title to the Font, my education, or Clime wherein I was borne, as being bred up either to confirme those principles my Parents instilled into my unwary understanding; or by a generall consent proceed in the Religion of my Countrey: But that having, in my riper yeares, and confirmed judgement, seene and examined all, I find my selfe obliged by the principles of Grace, and the law of mine owne reason, to embrace no other name but this....

He later claims that no other church seems "so consonant unto reason, and as it were framed to my particular devotion" as the Church of England. These statements are conscious and deliberate rejections of that sceptical stronghold, the domination of custom and education in human life.[1]

Again and again signs of a deep love for rational endeavour appear. One of his charges against the Koran is its "policy of Ignorance, deposition of Universities, and banishment of Learning...." He is proud of his scholarship and pities those who lack it. "I cannot contemn a man for ignorance, but behold him with as much pity as I doe *Lazarus*." The "duty of his condition" as a scholar obliges him to spread widely the benefits he has derived from study. "I make not therefore my head a grave, but a treasure of knowledge; I intend no Monopoly, but a Community in learning." And his belief in the value of study is further shown when he says "I study not for my owne sake onely, but for theirs that study not for themselves." In another place he excludes one group from his vast charity, the multitude, "that great enemy of reason, vertue and religion...that numerous piece of monstrosity, which taken

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[1] *Religio*, pp. 5 and 8.

asunder seeme men, and the reasonable creatures of God; but confused together, make but one great beast...." Nor does he mean the street mob only, but all "ignorant Doradoes" irrespective of wealth or position. Again he shows his dislike of ignorant enthusiasm when he condemns the millenarians "who, neither reasonably understanding things past or present, pretend a knowledge of things to come...."[1]

In still another part of the Religio Browne declares his reliance upon reason to settle religious doubts:

> If, therefore, there rise any doubts in my way, I doe forget them, or at least defer them till my better setled judgement and more manly reason be able to resolve them; for I perceive every mans owne reason is his best Oedipus, and will, upon a reasonable truce, find a way to loose those bonds wherewith the subtilties of errour have enchained our more flexible and tender judgements.

While none of these passages is completely convincing in itself, their combined force is undeniable. They weaken the case for Browne's scepticism and suggest strongly the need for major qualifications. Still stronger declarations against scepticism are to be found in other works. In Vulgar Errors occurs a passage which, though somewhat lengthy, deserves to be quoted in full:

> And, as credulity is the cause of error, so incredulity oftentimes of not enjoying truth: and that not only an obstinate incredulity, whereby we will not acknowledge assent unto what is reasonably inferred, but any academical reservation in matters of easy truth, or rather sceptical infidelity against the evidence of reason and sense. For these are conceptions befalling wise men, as absurd as the apprehensions of fools, and the credulity of the people....For this is not only derogatory unto the wisdom of God, who hath proposed the world unto our knowledge, and thereby the notion of himself,

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[1]Religio, pp. 33, 80, 76, and 60.

> but also detractory unto the intellect and sense of man, expressedly disposed for that inquisition. And, therefore, hoc tantum scio, quod nihil scio, is not to be received in an absolute sense, but is comparatively expressed unto the number of things whereof our knowledge is ignorant. Nor will it acquit the insatisfaction of those who quarrel with all things, or dispute of matters concerning whose verities we have conviction from reason, or decision from the inerrable and requisite conditions of sense. And, therefore, if any affirm the earth doth move, and will not believe it with us, it standeth still; because he hath probable reasons for it, and I no infallible sense, nor reason against it, I will not quarrel with his assertion. But if, like Zeno, he shall walk about, and yet deny there is any motion in nature, surely that man was constituted for Anticyra, and were a fit companion for those who, having a conceit they are dead, cannot be convicted into the society of the living.

Here Browne upholds the validity of our knowledge of many things in spite of our ignorance and uncertainty about others. He denies the notion that either positive or negative ignorance, credulity or incredulity, is pleasing to God. He condemns the sceptical position in all aspects while affirming at the same time the need for moderation and caution in study.[1]

Browne is then neither a sceptic nor an extreme rationalist, neither a fideist nor a dogmatist, but a man deriving from each a measure of truth, balancing carefully the advantages and disadvantages of each. Like Pascal and Nicolaus he pursues that elusive middle way, which in the words of T. S. Eliot is "of all ways the most difficult to follow. It requires discipline and self control, it requires both imagination and hold on reality."[2] As Pascal says, "We must know where

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[1] Religio, p. 10; Wilkin, II, 210-211.

[2] T. S. Eliot, For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order (London, 1928), p. 42.

to doubt, where to feel certain, where to submit." But to apply this rule intelligently a man needs the daring of the tight-rope walker, as well as his ability to evaluate instantly the resultant of many diverse and changing forces. This idea of balance or the resolution of opposites into harmony is the predominant technique of Browne's thought. He is a master at his difficult trade. In the Religio his skill is best studied by dividing the material into two parts, balance in the moral life and balance in the intellectual life. Each part will center upon a nucleus passage around which subordinate ideas cluster.

The directing principles of Browne's moral thought are contained in an unduly neglected passage of the Religio:

> As Reason is a rebell unto Faith, so passion unto Reason: As the propositions of Faith seeme absurd unto Reason, so the Theorems of Reason unto passion, and both unto Faith; yet a moderate and peaceable discretion may so state and order the matter, that they may bee all Kings, and yet make but one Monarchy, every one exercising his Soveraignty and Prerogative in a due time and place, according to the restraint and limit of circumstances.

Browne, like Pascal, demands first of all that man be looked upon as a whole, that no important fact be left out of an account of the moral life. An adequate theory must cover the totality of man's experience as it is in fact experienced in order to have lasting value. Pascal's insistence upon this point, as we have seen, was the basis of his rejection of scepticism. Browne pays similar attention to the facts by recognizing the existence and importance of three orders of experience in man: faith, reason, and passion. Again like Pascal he insists that the three orders have each a kind of validity and must be balanced so that "they may bee all Kings...in a due time and place." Elsewhere Browne

argues that the contradictory and opposed elements within man should harmonize together just as in the physical world "divided Antipathies and contrary faces doe yet carry a charitable regard unto the whole, by their particular discords preserving the common harmony...." For Browne there is no virtue in narrowly methodic systems. The attempted suppression or destruction of any of the orders, either faith by the philosopher, reason by the sceptic or fideist, or passion by the Stoic, results in a civil war within man that is both deadly and futile.[1]

Finally, it should be observed that there is no doubt in Browne's mind as to the relative value of the three orders: faith is first in importance, reason next, and passion last. Just as passion is subordinated to the rule of reason, so in turn should reason yield to the direction of faith. The two lower faculties move within limits assigned by a controlling faith, but within those limits they enjoy legitimate authority. Furthermore, reason may exercise some measure of control over faith, not directly but by interpreting what falls under the authority of faith. Browne does not attempt to delineate precisely the boundaries separating the realms of the three kings, for such precision would be contrary to his view of human complexity. He is content with the flexibility of laying out a principle broadly, while reserving at all times the right to adapt to the multiform conditions of actual human situations.

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of Browne's ethical thought is his reliance upon experience. While the elaborate rhetoric

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[1] <u>Religio</u>, pp. 27 and 89.

at first hides this quality by giving a bookish tinge to his statements, close reading will reveal a high degree of that experiential knowledge of man's condition which gives vigor to ethical writings. Browne, for example, presents the fundamental moral dilemma in this way:

> the practice of men holds not an equall pace, yea, and often runnes counter to their Theory; we naturally know what is good, but naturally pursue what is evill: the Rhetoricke wherewith I perswade another cannot perswade my selfe: there is a depraved appetite in us, that will with patience heare the learned instructions of Reason; but yet performe no farther than agrees to its owne irregular Humour. In briefe, we are all monsters, that is, a composition of man and beast, wherein we must endeavour to be as the Poets faigne that wise man Chiron, that is, to have the Region of Man above that of Beast, and sense to sit but at the feete of reason.

While not as succinct as Paul's "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members," Browne's statement is equally empirical. He starts with a description of what he has observed of man's state.[1]

And having suggested the ideal relation between passion and reason, that sense should "sit but at the feete of reason," Browne continues by asking if such a solution is workable. His conclusion, based upon his own experience, is that unaided reason cannot control the passions adequately. As he puts it: "that vertue is her owne reward, is but a cold principle, and not able to maintaine our variable resolutions in a constant and setled way of goodnesse." His own attempts to live a virtuous life according to the directions of reason failed, although to make the case more decisive he claims that he was naturally inclined

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[1] Religio, p. 71; Romans 7:23.

to such a life. "I could serve her [virtue] without a livery," he says, "yet not in that resolved and venerable way, but that the fraility of my nature, upon an easie temptation, might be induced to forget her." Browne's rejection of a purely rational ethics, his granting of moral primacy to faith, is based upon observation and experiment, not upon mere theory or the authority of ancient tomes.[1]

Yet though reason has been demoted, Browne has no intention of either abandoning it or of minimizing its great importance. Running throughout his works is a gentle contempt for those who must either accept a thing fully or reject it wholly, those "vulgar heads that looke asquint on the face of truth, and those unstable Judgements that cannot consist in the narrow point and centre of vertue without a reele or stagger to the circumference." An exclusive reliance upon faith would be just such a "stagger to the circumference." For example, in speaking of martyrdom he observes that mere suffering in "matters of Religion" does not entitle a man to the glorious title of martyr. Those who die for foolish reasons, like "the miserable Bishop that suffered in the cause of _Antipodes_," act foolishly and are not worthy of respect. Browne goes so far as to say, undoubtedly with conscious exaggeration, that such deaths are really sinful. "The leaven, therefore, and ferment of all, not onely Civill, but Religious actions, is wisedome; without which, to commit our selves to the flame is Homicide...." This rule may be taken as general: faith directs the human reason but does not negate it; human actions must still be reasonable.[2]

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[1]_Religio_, p. 61.

[2]_Religio_, pp. 8 and 37.

Because he realizes that faith and reason are two distinct types of experience, Browne does not expect reason to prove the facts of the religious life. On the contrary, once a spiritual fact has been felt, Browne is disposed to admit its truth, enjoy its possession, and ask no impertinent questions concerning it. He believes with Pascal and Nicolaus that we know that many things are without having a clear notion of what they are. A good example of his procedure is found in his discussion of the nature of the soul. First he outlines various theories. Next he asks if either reason or experiment can contribute to a solution. His anatomical work has persuaded him that since there is "no Organe or proper instrument for the rationall soul," we may assume its incorporeity. But he goes no further. With almost deliberate violence he throws the whole question over: "Thus are we men, and we know not how; there is something in us that can be without us, and will be after us...." For Browne the investigation of such questions has a certain interest, but in the end it is more important to know that we have souls than to fret about their composition.[1]

So also is the possibility of the world-soul brushed aside. Browne mentions it only to dismiss it abruptly as of little import. "I am sure there is a common Spirit that playes within us, yet makes no part of us," says Browne:

> and that is, the Spirit of God, and scintillation of that noble and mighty Essence, which is the life and radicall heat of spirits.... This is that gentle heate that brooded on the waters, and in six dayes hatched the world; this is that irradiation that dispells the mists of Hell, the clouds of horrour, feare, sorrow, despaire; and preserves the region

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[1]Religio, p. 49.

> of the mind in serenity; whosoever feels not the warme gale and gentle ventilation of this Spirit, (though I feele his pulse,) I dare not say he lives; for truely, to mee, without this, there is no heat under the Tropick; nor any light, though I dwelt in the body of the Sunne.

It is foolhardy for the critic to attempt what Browne sensibly leaves obscure, either an exact definition of this Spirit or of the mode of its presence in man. Browne is too subtle to fall unawares into pantheism. His qualifying clause, "that playes within us, yet makes no part of us," is equivalent to Nicolaus' "the Maximum is in each thing and in no one thing in particular," or Augustine's "Or are You not in every place at once in the totality of Your being, while yet nothing contains You wholly?" In the passage the Spirit of God is identified partially with life itself, partially with the principle of life, the soul. Behind the whole flickers Genesis 2:7, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." But the Spirit of God is also taken as the grace of God "that dispells the mists" of the hell of man's corrupted state. It also merges with that certainty of faith which "preserves the region of the mind in serenity." It is all of these things, and none of them in particular. The passage is an impressive triumph of Browne's vivifying and combining art. Yet its brilliance should not obscure by excess of light the fact that the whole is based upon the simple conviction of experience, "I am sure there is a common Spirit." This is the fact; let the explanation be what it will.[1]

The same empiricism is seen in Browne's treatment of the great

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[1] Religio, p. 42; Augustine, Confessions, p. 4.

themes of Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell, "those foure inevitable points of us all." Once again Browne accepts the evidence of his experience and gladly lets details go by the way. Heaven is "where the soule hath the full measure and complement of happinesse, where the boundlesse appetite of that spirit remaines compleately satisfied, that it cannot desire either addition or alteration...." Browne insists that the "insatiable wishes" and "boundlesse appetite" be accepted as undoubted facts of experience. The only way in which man's observed desire for completion can be fulfilled is "in the enjoyment of that essence, whose infinite goodnesse is able to terminate the desires of it selfe, and the insatiable wishes of ours...." In another place he dismisses as "unworthy the desires of a man, that can but conceive a thought of the next world" that counterfeit immortality gained through our progeny. In brief, immortality, in as far as it can be proved, is proved upon the pulses. Alongside this yearning for perfection, all else fades into insignificance; alongside the great fact, details disappear. So "the necessary Mansions of our restored selves are those two contrary and incompatible places wee call Heaven and Hell," but Browne adds, "to define them, or strictly to determine what and where they are, surpasseth my Divinity." Nor is he bothered by the way in which resurrection will be accomplished; "How shall the dead arise, is no question of my faith...."[1]

While in the preceding Browne obviously relies upon evidence other than rational, his defense of its validity is certainly not irrational.

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[1] Religio, pp. 59, 64, 53, 63-64, and 62.

He defends rather shrewdly the distinction between the two kinds of experience. "Many things are true in Divinity," he admits, "which are neither inducible by reason, nor confirmable by sense...." Yet to forestall any objections by the materialistic rationalist, he takes the offensive by showing that the same relations exist between reason and sensation. There are "many things in Philosophy confirmable by sense, yet not inducible by reason." No rational explanation can be given for the magnet's pointing north, yet the fact itself can be established by a "single experiment unto the sense." If we admit the validity in scientific investigations of observed facts without abandoning our intellectual integrity, why can we not admit also the validity of the facts of religious experience?[1]

Like so many other Christian moralists Browne rejects philosophy on the practical grounds of ineffectiveness. Peripatetics, Sceptics, and Stoics all failed to live up to their teachings. In Browne's eyes bare speculative errors are unimportant when compared with errors of practice. As he says:

> The opinions of theory and positions of men, are not so voyd of reason as their practised conclusion: some have held that Snow is blacke, that the earth moves, that the soule is fire, ayre, water; but all this is Philosophy, and there is no <u>delerium</u>, (if we doe but speculate)....

In effect he does not so much reject as ignore philosophy. As a good Christian he is convinced that happiness is not to be won through philosophical endeavour but by following Christ and his religion. Therefore, he dates his nativity from his baptism, not "esteeming

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[1]<u>Religio</u>, p. 62.

my selfe any thing before I was my Saviours, and inrolled in the Register of Christ...." For this reason also he concludes the Religio by choosing divinity over philosophy:

> there is no felicity in what the world adores. Aristotle whilst hee labours to refute the Idea's of Plato, fals upon one himselfe: for his summum bonum is a Chimaera, and there is no such thing as his Felicity. That wherein God himselfe is happy, the holy Angels are happy, in whose defect the Devils are unhappy; that dare I call happinesse: whatsoever conduceth unto this, may with an easie Metaphor deserve that name; whatsoever else the world termes happines, is to me a story out of Pliny.... [1]

Turning to Browne's attitude toward the intellectual rather than the moral aspects of life, we find an even more decisive avoidance of scepticism, an even better example of skillful balance. The nucleus passage is short but full of meaning:

> In my solitary and retired imagination...I remember I am not alone, and therefore forget not to contemplate him and his attributes who is ever with mee, especially those two mighty ones, his wisedome and eternitie; with the one I recreate, with the other I confound my understanding.... [2]

The balance here is almost formal. On the one hand there is the contemplation of eternity designed to "confound" the understanding in the

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[1] Religio, pp. 70, 99, 58, and 102. See Christian Morals: "However thy understanding may waver in the theories of true and false, yet fasten the rudder of thy will, steer straight unto good and fall not foul on evil. Imagination is apt to rove, and conjecture to keep no bounds.... Speculative misapprehensions may be innocuous, but immorality pernicious; theoretical mistakes and physical deviations may condemn our judgments, not lead us into judgment. But perversity of will, immoral and sinful enormities walk with Adraste and Nemesis at their backs, pursue us unto judgment, and leave us viciously miserable."(Wilkin, IV, 66-67)

[2] Religio, p. 15.

manner of the learned ignorance. To balance this is the contemplation of God's wisdom, a way in which to "recreate" or re-establish reason. The one combats pride; the other, pyrrhonic despair.

First, let us follow the course of Browne's meditations on eternity, a subject which fascinated him for the same reasons that attracted Nicolaus. Here Browne deliberately imposes upon his mind impossible weights to learn experimentally its limitations. Of eternity he says:

> who can speake of eternitie without a soloecisme, or think thereof without an extasie? Time we may comprehend; 'tis but five dayes elder then our selves, and hath the same Horoscope with the world; but to retire so farre backe as to apprehend a beginning, to give such an infinite start forward as to conceive an end in an essence that wee affirme hath neither the one nor the other; it puts my Reason to Saint Pauls Sanctuary O! Altitudo!

Browne knows perfectly well what he is about. In saying, "Who can speake of eternity without a soloecisme?" he points out that it is the subject of eternity itself which generates paradox, not any special attitude toward it. But if the infinite by its very nature is beyond human comprehension, and if anything said of the infinite must assume the form of paradox, then it follows that such expressions are the closest possible approaches to the unattainable truth. Therefore, Browne can say of God:

> Wee doe too narrowly define the power of God, restraining it to our owne capacities. I hold that God can doe all things; how he should work contradictions, I do not understand, yet dare not therefore deny....I will not say God cannot, but hee will not performe many things, which wee plainely affirme he cannot: this, I am sure, is the mannerliest proposition, wherein notwithstanding I hold no Paradox.

No real paradox (in the sense of contradiction) is involved, because an honest confession of ignorance is both the safest and the most accurate

solution to a problem involving infinite quantities.[1]

In this context of thought it is possible to interpret correctly the famous oh altitudo passage which numerous critics have taken as the "key" to Browne's thought and have glossed as being completely irrational and "mystical." Browne says:

> I love to lose my selfe in a mystery, to pursue my Reason to an oh altitudo. 'Tis my solitary recreation to pose my apprehension with those involved aenigma's and riddles of the Trinity, with Incarnation, and Resurrection. I can answer all the objections of Satan, and my rebellious reason with that odde resolution I learned of Tertullian, Certum est, quia impossibile est.

As far as content goes, the passage is an explication of the nature of religious mysteries and the part faith must play in the Christian life. Mysteries are justified in religion by this implicit train of reasoning: God as the Infinite is incomprehensible, and in His dealings with man introduces into human affairs infinite forces. The nature of such dealings is, therefore, beyond human understanding, and mystery in religion is both normal and expected. Since mysteries are beyond the reach of rational testing, they must be accepted through faith or not at all.[2]

Because faith deals with infinite matters, it is both different from and superior to logic. Browne glories in his possession of this source of supernatural truth, and illustrates its nature by distinguishing it from what is believed by logical evidence, making specific reference to the first such distinction made in Christian history,

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[1] Religio, pp. 16 and 38.

[2] Religio, p. 13. See Dunn, p. 54 and Dowden, p. 47, for the passage taken as a key.

namely John 20:29: "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Browne's words, which follow directly the _oh altitudo_ passage, are:

> I desire to exercise my faith in the difficultest points, for to credit ordinary and visible objects is not faith but perswasion. Some beleeve the better for seeing Christ his Sepulchre....Now contrary, I blesse my selfe and am thankeful that I lived not in the dayes of miracles, that I never saw Christ nor his Disciples... then had my faith beene thrust upon me, nor should I enjoy that greater blessing pronounced to all that believe and saw not.

There is nothing in this to justify much wonder or excitement. It is orthodox enough in Christian thought. Nor should the celebrated _certum est, quia impossibile est_, usually taken as being highly irrational and mystical, confuse the issue. As a matter of fact it is highly ambiguous. Gilson discusses its implications in Tertullian brilliantly:

> Il faut pourtant reconnaître qu'elles sont équivoques. Si _prorsus credibile, quia ineptum est_, ou _certum quia impossibile est_, signifient simplement: il faut bien le croire, puisque la foi ne porte que sur l'incomprehensible, et c'est justement pourquoi c'est certain, puisque la foi est plus sûre que la raison, Tertullien n'a rien dit d'original. Si, au contraire, on prend son double _quia_ au pied de la lettre, on lui fera dire que l'ineptie même du dogme est ce qui le recommande à l'acceptation de la foi, comme son impossibilité en garantit la certitude.... Pensée tout à fait originale cette fois, mais on hésite à croire que même un orateur ait placé le critérium du vrai dans l'absurdité.

Since Browne himself warns us not to read his writings "au pied de la lettre," since the first explanation of Gilson fits the context perfectly, there is no reason to suspect that Browne is here supporting

irrationality.[1]

The case for Browne's romantic and irrational approach toward religion built upon the oh altitudo passage breaks down even more completely when we consider his motivation. Why does he love to lose himself in a mystery? Browne supplies the answers "to pose my apprehension," "to pursue my Reason," "to answer my rebellious reason." The purpose of the contemplations is clearly to humble the reason by means of a technique not unlike the learned ignorance. That this is Browne's meaning is proved by another well-known passage:

> Since I was of understanding to know we know nothing, my reason hath beene more pliable to the will of faith; I am now content to understand a mystery without a rigid definition, in an easie and Platonick description. That allegorical description of Hermes (Spaera cujus centrum ubique, circumferentia nullibi.) pleaseth mee beyond all the Metaphysicall definitions of Divines; where I cannot satisfie my reason, I love to humour my fancy....where there is an obscurity too deepe for our reason, 'tis good to sit downe with a description, periphrasis, or adumbration; for by acquainting our reason how unable it is to display the visible and obvious effects of nature, it becomes more humble and submissive unto the subtilties of faith; and thus I teach my haggard and unreclaimed reason to stoope unto the lure of faith.

The argument presented here is highly rational and may be expressed:

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[1] Religio, p. 14; Etienne Gilson, La Philosophie au Moyen Age (Paris, 1947), p. 98. Failure to take Browne's Christianity seriously results in critical irresponsibility. Leslie Stephen, for example, writes: "He regards all opinions less as a philosopher than as a poet. He asks, not whether a dogma is true, but whether it is amusing or quaint. If his imagination or his fancy can take pleasure in contemplating it, he is not curious to investigate its scientific accuracy...." (Hours in a Library (New York, n.d.), II, 20). Browne does not look upon dogma either as a poet or as a philosopher, but as a Christian. It can be argued that insistence upon the "scientific accuracy" of a religious dogma implies a much greater confusion of mind than can be found in Browne.

Since I have come to recognize that human reason cannot operate successfully upon material which transcends the human, I have subordinated my fallible reason to the truth of faith. I do not approve of a "scientific" theology which attempts to define (rather than to comment upon) that which by definition is beyond definition. I do not deny the value of reason, but "where I cannot satisfie my reason," I refuse to pretend to a precision of language. All our statements regarding the Infinite are analogical and must be recognized as such. "Where there is an obscurity too deep for our reason," reason itself instructs us that loose and easy language is more accurate than that outwardly precise terminology which falsifies by imposing upon the infinite the trappings of the finite. So I contemplate the infinite and mysteries to demonstrate to my reason that it cannot account for them, and thereby force it to admit the validity of the truths of faith.[1]

Also, and this is most important, the contemplation of eternity is but half of Browne's program and is offset by meditations upon God's wisdom which strengthen regard for the reason. Browne says:

> That other attribute wherewith I recreate my devotion, is his wisdome, in which I am happy; and for the contemplation

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[1]Religio, p. 14. It might be noted that the figure of the infinite circle was so pleasing to Browne that he used it five times in his writings. Like Nicolaus he was fully aware that it was purely metaphorical. In Christian Morals, he writes: "Created natures allow of swelling hyperboles: nothing can be said hyperbolically of God, nor will his attributes admit of expressions above their own exuperances. Trismegistus's circle, whose center is every where, and circumference no where, was no hyperbole. Words cannot exceed where they cannot express enough. Even the most winged thoughts fall at the setting out, and reach not the portal of divinity." (Wilkin, IV, 93-94) The other references are less important. They may be found in Vulgar Errors, Wilkin, II, 189 and III, 304, and Garden of Cyrus, Wilkin, III, 443.

> of this onely, do not repent me that I was bred in the way of study: The advantage I have of the vulgar, with the content and happinesse I conceive therein, is an ample recompence for all my endeavours, in what part of knowledg soever. Wisedome is his most beauteous attribute, no man can attaine unto it, yet Solomon pleased God when hee desired it.

Browne cautions against efforts to penetrate God's secrets in the usual manner. Since "we behold him but asquint, upon reflex or shadow," it is foolish to think that we can exhaust His wisdom. But we can know that "he is wise in all, wonderfull in that we conceive, but far more in what we comprehend not."[1]

Next Browne shows how the wisdom of God sanctions human intellectual activity. Since he is primarily interested in establishing the validity of his own scientific interests, he formulates his thought in terms of science. But there is no reason to suppose that he would limit the exercise of reason to that field; he has extended it himself in the quotation above when he says "in what part of knowledg soever." Browne's claim is that:

> The world was made to be inhabited by beasts, but studied and contemplated by man: 'tis the debt of our reason wee owe unto God, and the homage we pay for not being beasts; without this, the world is still as though it had not been, or as it was before the sixth day....

This concept of study as a positive Christian duty is quite interesting. Underlying it is the idea of imitation expressed in Christian Morals:

> He honours God, who imitates him; for what we virtuously imitate we approve and admire: and since we delight not to imitate inferiors, we aggrandize and magnify those we imitate; since also we are most apt to imitate those we love, we testify our affection in our imitations of the

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[1] Religio, pp. 17-18.

> inimitable....Where imitation can go no farther, let admiration step on, whereof there is no end in the wisest form of men.

Since God is wise, man does well to imitate Him by exercising his reason. Study becomes transformed into a form of praise, regardless of what is studied.[1]

Browne neither affirms nor denies that reason can reach any important truth. For him the activity is more important than the result. God does not demand that we reach truth through rational effort, but He is pleased by our efforts. Browne concludes:

> And this is almost all wherein an humble creature may endeavour to requite and someway to retribute unto his Creator: for if not he that sayeth, Lord, Lord, but he that doth the will of the Father shall be saved; certainly our wills must bee our performances, and our intents make out our actions....[2]

Thus does Browne justify scholarship to man; thus does he establish research as an almost liturgical mode of worship.

It might be noted that Browne's attitude here is curiously similar to that of Aquinas, who says in the Summa Contra Gentiles:

> It /the pursuit of wisdom/ is more noble because through this pursuit man especially approaches to a likeness to God Who "made all things in wisdom" (Ps. 103:24). And since likeness is the cause of love, the pursuit of wisdom especially joins man to God in friendship.

Later in the same introductory part of the work St. Thomas quotes with full approval a passage from Hilary which emphasizes the importance of process rather than results:

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[1] Religio, p. 18; Wilkin, IV, 93.

[2] Religio, pp. 19-20.

> Enter these truths by believing, press forward, persevere. And though I may know that you will not arrive at an end, yet I will congratulate you in your progress....But do not intrude yourself into the divine secret, do not, presuming to comprehend the sum total of intelligence, plunge yourself into the mystery of unending nativity; rather, understand that these things are incomprehensible.

Browne, I hasten to add, is no scholastic. But it is well to remind ourselves from time to time that the claims of the Christian rationalist are rather modest. In any event, it should now be clear that Browne is reasonable if not purely rational, a rationalist in leaning rather than a romanticist.[1]

Browne's final approach to religious problems can best be studied by looking at specific examples of his reasoning. His treatment of predestination is typical and instructive. For Browne most theological disputes are meaningless, for the simple reason that they fall within the area of infinite effects of an infinite cause. "Could humility teach others, as it hath instructed me, to contemplate the infinite and incomprehensible distance betwixt the Creator and the creature....it would prevent these arrogant disputes of reason...." Predestination is for him clearly such a pseudo-problem, impossible to be resolved in finite terms. His argument is simple enough:

> Indeed he onely is, all others have beene and shall be, but in eternity there is no distinction of Tenses; and therefore that terrible terme Predestination, which hath troubled so many weake heads to conceive, and the wisest to explaine, is in respect of God no previous determination of our estates to come, but a definitive blast of his will already fulfilled, and at the instant that he first decreed it; for to his eternitie

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[1] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, Book I, trans. and ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York, 1955), pp. 61 and 76. (Chap. 2, par. 1 and chap. 8, par. 2.)

> which is indivisible and altogether, the last Trumpe is already sounded....to speake like a Philosopher, those continued instants of time which flow into a thousand yeares, make not to him one moment; what to us is to come, to his Eternitie is present, his whole duration being but one permanent point, without succession, parts, flux, or division.

Whether or not this is an adequate theological account of the problem is not particularly relevant, for Browne makes no pretence of being an expert in that field. But it is undeniable that his argument is rational.[1]

This example is particularly instructive, for as luck would have it, Browne has expressed the same idea in a quite different form:

> I was not onely before my selfe, but Adam, that is, in the Idea of God, and the decree of that Synod held from all Eternity. And in this sense, I say, the world was before the Creation, and at an end before it had a beginning; and thus I was dead before I was alive; though my grave be England, my dying place was Paradise, and Eve mis-carried of mee before she conceiv'd of Cain.[2]

Taken by itself this might appear to be merely a poetical rhapsody, a mass of paradoxes designed to shock or amuse. Yet in the light of the first passage we can see that Browne has a serious intention here. The paradoxes playing upon time and eternity make vivid and concrete the principle that the infinite is really beyond our comprehension. Browne is delighted, of course, but his delight lies not in foolish oddity, but in the wonder of the infinite. Like Nicolaus he revels in the amplification of the principle, but beneath the striking phrases there is a rationally defensible position.

It is perhaps unnecessary to labor the conclusions of this investigation. Browne is demonstrably far from pyrrhonic scepticism. There

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[1]Religio, pp. 70 and 16.

[2]Religio, p. 74.

is an undeniable strain of scepticism in him, for he has abandoned, along with his whole generation, trust in a coherent and inclusive philosophy and rests content with an empiricism. Like all Christians he denies that the unaided reason is capable of attaining enough truth about man's position in the scheme of things to make him happy or to save him. But he does not crush the human reason beyond recovery. Instead, like Pascal, he adopts a tempered solution and balances faith and reason. He makes extensive use of the techniques of the learned ignorance both to humble pride and to establish a basis for broad Christian communion through the elimination of theological impertinences.

To think of Browne as an idle dreamer or an irresponsible paradox-monger is to miss both the intellectual subtlety of the man and the rationality which underlies his arguments. Beneath Browne's rhetorical flow there is much hard-headed wisdom, much delicate irony. His attitude toward life is neither soft, flabby, nor irrational, but is rather to be described as witty in Eliot's sense:

> we can say that wit is not erudition....It is not cynicism, though it has a kind of toughness which may be confused with cynicism by the tender-minded. It is confused with erudition because it belongs to an educated mind, rich in generations of experience; and it is confused with cynicism because it implies a constant inspection and criticism of experience. It involves, probably, a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible....

But perhaps the best summary of Browne's thought and attitude is that which he has given us in <u>Christian Morals</u>, expressed in that noble and sonorous language which is always a delight to listen to:

> Live unto the dignity of thy nature, and leave it not disputable at last, whether thou hast been a man; or, since thou art a composition of man and beast, how thou hast predominantly passed thy days, to state the denomination. Un-man not, therefore, thyself by a bestial transformation....In thine own circumference, as in that of the earth, let the rational horizon be larger than the sensible, and the circle of reason than of sense: let the divine part be upward, and the region of beast below....Desert not thy title to a divine particle and union with invisibles....Let thy thoughts be of things which have not entered into the hearts of beasts: think of things long past, and long to come: acquaint thyself with the choragium of the stars, and consider the vast expansion beyond them....Have a glimpse of incomprehensibles; and thoughts of things, which thoughts but tenderly touch.[1]

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[1] T. S. Eliot, "Andrew Marvell," in Selected Essays 1917-1932 (New York, 1932), p. 262; Wilkin, IV, 103.

CHAPTER VI

THE RELATION OF SCIENCE TO RELIGION IN BROWNE

To discuss Browne's science in detail would lead us far afield, but to determine the relation between his scientific pursuits, his dissections, laboratory work, calling as a physician, and his religious faith is a necessary part of a full explication of his religious philosophy. Some critics have so distorted this relation that their total picture of Browne is highly misleading.

Two questionable interpretations have been made. The first, that Browne is a believer only in the vaguest possible sense of the word, is found in Gosse's contention that the real argument of the Religio is:

> that if a man of science will hold the truth of the Christian religion sincerely in mystical matters, he may take as his reward the right to examine the material world of nature with all the scepticism which his experimental heart desires. Theology and science in water-tight compartments, with no possibility of interchange between them—that is the ideal of the physician's religion....

Because Gosse believes that Browne's primary allegiance was to the cause of amoral science, he finds evidence everywhere that Browne was cunningly "insinuating subtle reservations" in matters of faith. His adherence to Christianity is seen as very superficial, hardly more than nominal. Beneath a mask of religious profession the real Browne yearns for the land of the experimental heart's desire.

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[1]Gosse, pp. 29 and 27.

Ziegler has elaborated upon this reading. In separating science from religion and in devoting his rational energies entirely to science, Browne left his religion in a vacuum. As Ziegler has it:

> Seldom did he claim to justify his religion by reason—that faculty with which he formulated his observations in science. This abstention from a philosophical... connection between nature and God was modern, as we have seen, in its division of the realms of reason and faith.

Ziegler also notes that Browne does not search for final causes in his scientific work, and adds ominously that "to dispense with the final cause in nature is to avoid that great unified hierarchy which led up to God; it is to shut religion away from the domain of reason."[1]

On the other hand, certain critics have interpreted Browne by using the concept of "unified sensibility" which T. S. Eliot applied to the "metaphysical" poets. According to this theory Browne is characterized by the ability to live in varied and separate worlds, one of which happens to be science; another, religion. Willey describes the unified sensibility in this way:

> It meant the capacity to live in divided and distinguished worlds, and to pass freely to and fro between one and another, to be capable of many and varied responses to experience, instead of being confined to a few stereotyped ones.

Browne certainly had many and varied interests and did possess a wide range of responses. But Willey is not convincing when he says that "something of the peculiar quality of the 'metaphysical' mind is due to this fact of its not being <u>finally committed</u> to any one world. Instead, it could hold them all in a loose synthesis together...." Applied to

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[1]Ziegler, pp. 8 and 27.

Browne this idea results in the judgment:

> The peculiar irony of Browne, his wistfulness, the air of compassion with which he ponders all time and all existence, proceed from his detachment from each and all the worlds he contemplates; so that he can indulge his whim in fitting together what patterns he pleases with their fragments.

This is to say that Browne was no more than a virtuoso, an ineffectual dabbler in science and in all else, a man without roots and without values. Such a view is difficult to maintain.[1]

Against Gosse and Ziegler it will be argued here that Browne does not dissociate science and religion but merely recognizes that they are different activities, each necessarily involving its own special techniques, and that he subordinates his science to the superior order of faith rather than the converse. Against the proponents of the "loose synthesis," Browne's major commitment to the world of religious value will also be maintained. To bypass the whole question of value is dangerous in Browne studies, and, it might be added, in the study of the metaphysical poets as well.

Until quite recently it would have been necessary to evaluate Browne's scientific competence before beginning a discussion such as the following. Most scholars felt that only by great leniency and stretching of terms could Browne be granted even a humble doorway-seat in the temple of science; many were not willing to go this far.

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[1]Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, pp. 50 and 53. My distrust of this "loose synthesis" theory is shared by S. L. Bethell, The Cultural Revolution of the Seventeenth Century (London, 1951), p. 98, and Frank L. Huntley, "Sir Thomas Browne and the Metaphor of the Circle," JHI, XIV (1953), 354.

But today he is generally regarded as a competent, though not very important, research biologist.[1]

Browne's scientific interests and ability being granted, the best way in which to study the relations of that science to his faith is to survey the whole question of science in the Christian scheme and then to look at Browne against this historical background. By doing this we will be able to appreciate more fully the problem he faced and the skill with which he formulated a working solution.

The "Book of Nature" in Christian Thought

The concept of the "Book of Nature" which Browne employed has had a long and important history in Christian thought. Behind it lie the ideas that the material creation is good because created by God, and worthy of study because the artifact reflects the Workman. These ideas are clearly expressed in two Biblical texts which have had an

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[1]For an example of the older interpretation, see Almonte C. Howell, "Sir Thomas Browne and Seventeenth Century Scientific Thought," SP, XXII (1925), 61-80. Many literary scholars still hold this view. The tide began to turn with the publication of Gordon K. Chalmers, "Sir Thomas Browne, True Scientist," Osiris, II (1936), 28-79. Egon S. Merton has done the most to put Browne's science in proper focus. See his "Sir Thomas Browne's Scientific Quest," Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences, III (1948), 214-228; "Sir Thomas Browne as a Zoologist," Osiris, IX (1950), 413-434; and especially Science and Imagination in Sir Thomas Browne (New York, 1949). Professional biologists have also written of Browne's scientific studies with appreciation. See G. E. Hutchinson, "Tuba mirum spargens sonum" in The Itinerant Ivory Tower (New Haven, 1953) and Joseph Needham, A History of Embryology (Cambridge, Eng., 1934), pp. 112 and 138. Excellent treatments of the problems facing seventeenth-century scientists are found in Hardin Craig, The Enchanted Glass (New York, 1936), especially pp. 65-68, and Madelaine Doran, "The 'Credulity' of the Elizabethans," JHI, I, (1940), 151-176.

enormous effect on many Christian thinkers throughout the ages:

> And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

> For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they [men] are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

Gilson summarizes the implications of these texts admirably:

> But just as it is not Christian to run away from the body, so neither is it Christian to despise nature. How can we possibly belittle these heavens and this earth that so wonderfully proclaim the glory of their Creator, so evidently bear on them the marks of His infinite wisdom and goodness? The true Christian feeling for nature is that which finds expression throughout the Psalms, and above all in the Canticle of the Three Children in the fiery furnace: Benedicte opera Domini Domino; laudate et superexultate eum in saecula.

It may, of course, be validly objected that there are other historical Christian feelings toward nature. But for the purposes of the present argument it is enough to show that the response in question is possible for a Christian, not that it alone is possible.[1]

A normative pattern for the Christian attitude toward nature can be traced in the Confessions of St. Augustine. In his commentary on Genesis, Augustine dwells lovingly on the text quoted above:

> And you saw, O God, all the things that You had made, and they were very good. We see them too, and they are very good. With regard to each order of things, when You had said that they were to be made and they were made, You saw one by one that they were good....and You saw that all things as a totality were not only good but very good. For taken one by one they were simply good; but taken altogether they were not only good but very good.

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[1]Gilson, Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, p. 126. See also Psalms 19:1-6; 8; 24:1-3; 95:3-6; 104; 145:10-14; and 148.

Augustine here seizes upon the key point that created things are especially good as they form a harmony, a system. If God is, as St. Augustine believes, a conscious creator who disposes his works in order and wisdom, then the creation itself must be orderly and rational. So important is this idea of the orderliness of nature that Alfred North Whitehead believes that modern science would not have arisen without it, and that it arose mainly in Christian thought.[1]

Augustine was not in a position to follow out these implications, even if he had desired to do so. For him nature is mainly a source of wonder, a means of helping the soul to praise God. He is caught up in the prospect of the whole universe praising its Maker:

> Without ceasing Thy whole creation speaks Thy praise—the spirit of every man by the words that his mouth directs to Thee, animals and lifeless matter by the mouth of those who look upon them: that so our soul rises out of its mortal weariness unto Thee, helped upward by the things Thou hast made and passing beyond them unto Thee who has wonderfully made them....

His expression of this chorus of praise shows no sign whatever of actual observation of nature. It is lyrical, rhetorical, and literary, though undoubtedly sincere. The aspects of nature he speaks of are generalized—mountains, sea, fruitful trees, all stars and lights—and his phrasing is that of the Psalms. For Augustine nature is still viewed poetically and from afar.[2]

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[1] The Confessions of St. Augustine, trans. F. J. Sheed (New York, 1943), pp. 348 and 268. Hereafter referred to as Confessions. Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (New York, 1925), pp. 17-18.

[2] Confessions, p. 83. See p. 147 for a typical example of his method, this time a rearrangement of Psalm 148.

Augustine, of course, does not advocate unlimited attention to nature. It is essential that our attention be focused upon creator rather than upon creation, for the goodness of things is relative only:

> It was You, Lord, who made them: for You are beautiful, and they are beautiful: You are good, and they are good: You are, and they are. But they neither are beautiful nor good nor simply are as You their Creator: compared with You they are not beautiful and are not good and are not. These truths, thanks to You, we know; and our knowledge compared with Your knowledge is ignorance.

Mere intellectual curiosity is therefore fruitless: "Thus men proceed to investigate the phenomena of nature—the part of nature external to us—though the knowledge is of no value to them: for they wish to know simply for the sake of knowing." Not only is such knowledge useless, but it is positively wicked if it diverts attention from God, if it perverts man's sense of values. In the end, says Augustine, it is better to believe in God and obey Him without knowing anything of science, than to be one "who can measure the heavens and number the stars and balance the elements, if in all this he neglects You who have <u>ordered all things in measure and number and weight</u>."[1]

This, then, is the pattern of the Christian view of nature in Augustine: Nature is good as the handiwork of God. By means of it man can rise to a higher understanding of the glory of God. The study of creation is limited only by the qualification that scientific activity be subordinated to religious purposes in the sense that it may not be pursued as an end in and for itself. These are the essentials of a Christian attitude toward nature in any age.

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[1] <u>Confessions</u>, pp. 264, 247, and 87.

The expression "Book of Nature" or "Book of Creatures" derives from the Latin Middle Ages. It is found frequently in medieval writings, as in Dante's:

> O grace abounding, wherein I presumed to fix my look on the eternal light so long that I consumed my sight thereon!
> Within its depths I saw ingathered, bound by love in one volume, the scattered leaves of all the universe....

Although the term was new, the conception embodied in it was quite like that of Augustine, namely, as Dante has it, that God "made whatsoever circleth through mind or space with so great order that whoso looketh on it may not be without some taste of him." But we should not linger over the Middle Ages, for more interesting developments were to follow.[1]

Renaissance scientists were attracted by the term "Book of Nature." They not only made frequent use of it, but every specialist began to adapt it to special purposes. Vesalius, writing to Fallopius in 1561, limited its extension: "I still live in hope that at some time or other, by some good fortune I may once more be able to study that true bible, as we count it, of the human body and of the nature of man." Kepler, that strange and intense mathematical astronomer, raised the figure to new heights by a daring use of ecclesiastical imagery: "As...I have been made priest of God, the creator of the book of nature, I have composed this hymn for God the creator." The idea thus acquired new meanings and

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[1] The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, trans. J. A. Carlyle, Thomas Okey, and P. H. Wicksteed (New York, 1950), pp. 605 and 462. (Paradiso, Cantos 33 and 10.) See Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. W. R. Trask (New York, 1953), pp. 319-321, for numerous examples of the figure in medieval writings.

increased richness.[1]

But in some cases the religious emphasis was almost entirely abandoned. In an extremely important, even world-shaking, declaration Galileo uses the figure in a purely secular context:

> Philosophy is written in that great book which ever lies before our eyes—I mean the universe—but we cannot understand it if we do not first learn the language and grasp the symbols, in which it is written. This book is written in the mathematical language, and the symbols are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures, without whose help it is impossible to comprehend a single word of it; without which one wanders in vain through a dark labyrinth.

One may say with little exaggeration that modern science with all of its philosophical implications grew directly out of this attitude. Certainly from it developed the limiting of scientific investigation to those aspects of reality which can be treated mathematically, namely measurable bodies moving in measurable space and time. The fascinating story of this new way of viewing reality has been told so often and so well that there is no need to repeat it here. It is enough to note the nature of the new materialistic and mechanistic universe. Burtt describes it well in these words:

> that view of the cosmos which saw in man a puny, irrelevant spectator...of the vast mathematical system whose regular motions according to mechanical principles constituted the world of nature....Space was identified with the realm of geometry, time with the continuity of number. The world that people had thought themselves living in—a world rich with colour and sound, redolent with fragrance, filled with gladness, love and

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[1]Vesalius in Michael Foster, Lectures on the History of Physiology during the Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Cambridge, Eng., 1924), p. 18; Kepler in Carola Baumgardt, Johannes Kepler: Life and Letters (London, 1952), p. 122.

> beauty, speaking everywhere of purposive harmony and creative ideals—was crowded now into minute corners in the brains of scattered organic beings. The really important world outside was a world hard, cold, colourless, silent, and dead; a world of quantity, a world of mathematically computable motions in mechanical regularity.

Man is almost read out of the universe, while God remains only long enough to give the whole machine a fillip, then fades slowly away somewhat like the Cheshire Cat.[1]

Nothing could be more unlike the traditional Christian view of science than this new mathematical system. But we perhaps err in assuming that the issues were as clear to men of the Renaissance as they are to us. In the following pages I hope to show how the older view was able not only to maintain itself successfully in some men, but even to contribute in important ways to the progress of science, and also how certain scientists, Browne among them, were able to accept mechanism without abandoning the human values of the older and broader system of thought.

Here as elsewhere, Nicolaus Cusanus seems to represent a pivotal point in the history of thought. His feelings toward nature are very interesting. Like Augustine he accepts the principle of Romans 1:20, interpreting it in terms of the learned ignorance:

> All our greatest philosophers and theologians unanimously assert that the visible universe is a faithful reflection of the invisible, and that from creatures we can rise to a knowledge of the Creator, "in a mirror and in a dark manner", as it were.... Though we neither perceive it nor understand it, we know for a fact that all things stand in some sort of relation to one another....

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[1]E. A. Burtt, The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science (New York, 1925), pp. 64 (for Galileo quotation) and 236. See Burtt, pp. 40-107, and Whitehead, pp. 28-79, for excellent surveys of the growth and implications of modern science.

But Nicolaus looks upon the study of nature as a more important way of reaching God than does Augustine. His emphasis is different, and significantly enough he sees physical nature through new eyes.[1]

Here is a typical example of Nicolaus' attitude toward the world of nature:

> That the vast bulk, the beauty and the ordered adjustment of this visible world must fill us with amazement at the incomparable skill of its creator, goes without question among wise men....
>
> When we measure the size and analyse the elements and study the behaviour of things, we make use of the sciences of arithmetic and geometry and even of music and astronomy. Now these same sciences God employed when He made the world. With arithmetic He adjusted it into unity, with geometry He gave it a balanced design upon which depends its stability and its power of controlled movement....
>
> God has set up the elements in an admirable order, for He created all things in number, weight and measure....
>
> Who could help admiring this craftsman who in spheres and stars and in the vast stellar spaces employs such skill that, with no discontinuity, achieves in the widest diversity the highest unity....[2]

There is much of interest in this passage, from the conception of God as the great Geometrician to the love for vastness suggested near the end. But most important are the signs of a new way of viewing the universe. Augustine, one might say, looked upon creation from a mountain-top, seeing all in broad outline and impressive panorama. Nicolaus actually descends into the valleys, centers his gaze upon things and studies them closely; he wants to "measure the size and analyse the

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[1] *Learned Ignorance*, p. 25. For an excellent analysis of the similarities and differences of Nicolaus and Augustine, see F. E. Cranz, "St. Augustine and Nicholas of Cusa in the Tradition of Western Christian Thought," *Speculum*, XXVII (1935), 297-316.

[2] *Learned Ignorance*, pp. 118-120.

elements and study the behaviour of things." This shift in method is revolutionary, but there is no reason to suspect that Nicolaus violates the limitations imposed upon the study of nature by Augustine.

Everywhere the learned ignorance is at work, operating at once as an impetus and a drag. The ever-wider possibilities of existence which grow out of the thought that the infinite nature of the Creator is reflected in His creation serve to motivate the human mind to study and contemplate the whole wonderous structure. But the sense of limitation inculcated by these same considerations of the infinite prevent the finite human mind from shifting emphasis from Creator to creation, from mistaking finite mental constructs for infinite reality. Nicolaus makes this last point quite clear:

> In such a high diversity of endlessly admirable things learned ignorance has taught us never to hope to penetrate to the reasons of all the works of God, but only to admire; for the Lord is great and of His greatness there is no end. He is the absolute maximum and the author and comprehender of all His works....

Yet though at best our results can be only dim hints of God's glory, we continue our efforts, for those hints are enough to make us thirst for the inexpressible joys of the apprehension of truth which will come in a future life. As Nicolaus says, and as Browne after him will say:

> To approach the inaccessible light is not in our power. It is the gift of Him Who gave us the turning of our face towards Him together with the most ardent desire to seek Him. When we have done this, He in His great love will not abandon us but will show Himself to us; and when His glory shall appear, will eternally satisfy us. May He be blessed for ever.

This briefly is the tradition within which Browne's science finds a place, a tradition which could embrace new techniques but which preserved the

priority of religion and was, indeed, motivated mainly by religious impulses.[1]

To neglect the importance of a religious motivation for a good part of early modern science is to miss one of the most fascinating facets of a complex period. Many of the early investigators had no practical bent; they would have been unable to understand Bacon's utilitarian impulses. And yet they performed prodigious labors under the most trying circumstances with a devotion which love of abstract truth alone does not adequately explain. Nowhere can the decisive influence of religion as a scientific motivation be seen more clearly than in the career of Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), who has been called "incomparable" by Einstein, "the most acute thinker ever born" by Kant, and "almost unparalleled" by von Humboldt.[2]

For Kepler the pursuit of scientific knowledge was a religious vocation. He writes to Mastlin in 1595:

> I strive to publish...in God's honor who wishes to be recognized from the book of nature....I am not envious of anybody. This I pledged to God, this is my decision. I had the intention of becoming a theologian. For a long time I was restless: but now see how God is, by my endeavors, also glorified in astronomy.

Consistently he speaks of his activities in the terminology of religious worship. Sometimes his figures draw us up short by their boldness, as when he says: "As we astronomers are priests of the highest God in regard to the book of nature....I am content with the honor of

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[1]Learned Ignorance, pp. 120 and 121-122.

[2]Tributes are in Baumgardt, pp. 9 and 16.

having my discovery guard the doors of the sanctuary in which Copernicus performs the service at the higher altar...." There may be dangers in such an exalted view of one's work, but at any rate Kepler's religious motivation is beyond dispute.[1]

Kepler views science in much the same way as does Nicolaus. There is in man an inward striving toward knowledge which must be good since it is implanted by God. "Our creator has given us a spirit in addition to the senses," and has given it that we may reach Him. He has also furnished us with a world full of "hidden treasures," so that our minds will always have material upon which to operate for His glory. Kepler has little patience with those who do not realize that science is praise. He defends his position by appealing to Paul's text in Romans:

> Here is treated the Book of Nature which is so highly praised by the Holy Scriptures. Paul presents it to the heathens so that they may see God in it just as the sun can be observed in water or a mirror. Why should we Christians take less pleasure in contemplating this since it is our task to honor God in the right way, to worship and admire Him? Our worship is all the more deep, the more clearly we recognize the creation and its greatness....

Over and over this same theme: we study nature that we may contemplate the glory of God and in such contemplations praise Him. If this motive is present it makes no difference whether nature is studied in its broad and obvious aspects as in Augustine, closely and mathematically as in Kepler, or closely and descriptively as in Browne. In all these forms science is a legitimate Christian pursuit.[2]

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[1]Baumgardt, pp. 31 and 44.

[2]Baumgardt, pp. 34-35 and 33.

Nor should it be forgotten that the turmoil and uncertainty of theology during this disturbed period drove religious men like Kepler into science as a refuge. The bitterness of religious controversy, the widespread partisan spirit, the demands for narrow conformity, lent to scientific work an almost irresistible appeal to many intellectuals. Kepler turns his back on the whole distressful situation:

> I will not take part in the fury of the theologians. I will not stand as a judge over my brethren; for whether they stand or fall, they are brethren of mine in the Lord. As I am not a teacher of the Church, it will suit me better to pardon others and think well of them rather than accuse and misinterpret them.

It is against a background of bickering and persecution that we must see the man in order to understand his intense devotion to astronomy. Touching and beautiful is his plea to Bernegger in 1623: "Let us leave the vicissitudes of politics alone and let us remain in the pleasant, fresh green fields of philosophy." And even finer is this quotation from a letter of 1629: "When the storms are raging and the shipwreck of the state is frightening us, there is nothing nobler for us...than to let down the anchor of our peaceful studies into the ground of eternity." Browne too lived in this world; Browne too felt the appeal of the "fresh green fields" of natural philosophy.[1]

Science as Religious Endeavour in Browne

In the *Religio* Browne identifies himself almost at once as one who studies nature in order to render praise to God. "Thus are there two bookes from whence I collect my Divinity," he says, the Bible and "that

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[1]Baumgardt, pp. 107, 156 and 183.

universall and publik Manuscript, that lies expans'd unto the eyes of all...." This book, he continues, was the Scripture of the pagans, and strangely enough "the ordinary effects of nature wrought more admiration in them," than the miracles of God effected in the Jews. Christians, then, ought not to "disdain to suck Divinity from the flowers of nature." This same theme of admiration before God's creation is expressed vividly, if not very poetically, in one of the little poems which Browne inserts into the text now and again:

> Teach my endeavours so thy workes to read,
> That learning them, in thee I may proceed.
> . . . .
> And then at last, when homeward I shall drive,
> Rich with the spoyles of nature, to my hive,
> There will I sit, like that industrious flye,
> Buzzing thy prayses, which shall never die....

More passages could be quoted, for on almost every page Browne directs attention to this motive of praise.[1]

Equally evident in Browne is the shift in the manner of reading the Book of Nature which has occupied our attention earlier, the shift from leafing through it casually to studying it with a magnifier. In an important passage Browne says:

> The world was made to be inhabited by beasts, but studied and contemplated by man: 'tis the debt of our reason wee owe unto God, and the homage we pay for not being beasts....The wisedome of God receives small honour from those vulgar heads that rudely stare about, and with a grosse rusticity

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[1] Religio, pp. 21-22 and 19. See Donne, Essays in Divinity, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson (Oxford, 1952), p. 7: "The first book [the Register of God's Elect] is then impossible; the second [the Scriptures] difficult; But of the third book, the book of Creatures, we will say the 18th verse, The deaf shall heare the word of this book, and the eyes of the blinde shall see out of obscurity."

> admire his workes; those highly magnifie him, whose judicious enquiry into his acts, and deliberate research of his creatures, returne the duty of a devout and learned admiration.

"Deliberate research," as a positive duty for those who are capable of it, is frequently advocated by Browne. One of his charges against the unstudious in Vulgar Errors is that: "hopelessly continuing in mistakes, they live and die in their absurdities; passing their dayes in perverted apprehensions and conceptions of the world, derogatory unto God and the wisdom of the creation." In the same work he suggests that such ignorance may well be sinful; bad scholarship and sloppy research are virtual insults to God. In Browne's own words:

> some have transcribed any thing; and although they cannot but doubt thereof, yet neither make experiment by sense, nor enquiry by reason, but live in doubt of things, whose satisfaction is in their own power; which is, indeed, the inexcusable part of our ignorance, and may, perhaps, fill up the charge of the last day. For, not obeying the dictates of reason, and neglecting the crys of truth, we fail, not only in the trust of our undertakings, but in the intention of man itself. Which, although more venial in ordinary constitutions, and such as are not framed beyond the capacity of beaten notions; yet will it inexcusably condemn some men, who, having received excellent endowments, have yet sat down by the way, and frustrated the intention of their abilities.

This is certainly not the attitude of the virtuoso. No more serious concept of scientific study can be imagined.[1]

Both Browne's devotion to research as a religious or semi-religious duty and his insistence upon close and accurate study appear in a very curious passage in the Religio in which he expresses a preference for small creatures:

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[1] Religio, pp. 18-19; Wilkin, II, 193-194 and 212.

> ruder heads stand amazed at those prodigious pieces of nature, Whales, Elephants, Dromidaries and Camels; these I confesse, are the Collossus and Majestick pieces of her hand; but in these narrow Engines there is more curious Mathematicks, and the civilitie of these little Citizens more neatly sets forth the wisedome of their Maker....

Now as a matter of fact we know that Browne was interested in "prodigious pieces," and later became somewhat of an expert on whales. What he is objecting to in this passage is really the cursory viewing of nature. The "curious mathematics" of any beast are revealed only by dissection, experiment, and close observation. "Ruder heads" may be impressed by the obvious, but such admiration is shallow and easily forgotten.[1]

Enough proof has been presented to show that Browne viewed his scientific studies in a religious light, thereby fitting into an important Christian tradition. But the real question is, could he preserve such an attitude in practice? Undoubtedly he was sincere in his professions of religious motivation, but he was also in love with the details and convolutions of his biological research. The seductions of scientific work are very great; it is easy for attention to be transferred unconsciously from Creator to His rich and fascinating creation. Newman recognized this danger and its moral consequence when he said: "'How great and wise is the Creator, who has done this!' True: but it is possible that his [the scientist's] thoughts may take the form of 'How clever is the creature who has discovered it!'" The danger is intensified by the fact that in order to pursue his calling the scientist must accept a mechanistic nature, for his whole technique is based upon that

[1] Religio, p. 21. See Wilkin, III, pp. 514-517 for his account of whales, and also Finch, pp. 176-178.

assumption. It is difficult for him to adopt this conception as a necessary hypothesis day after working day without gradually allowing it to assume in his mind the status of total truth. Bit by bit he may forget the Creator, withdrawing into the limits of his own field of study and its particular techniques.[1]

Browne was not, of course, as fully aware of these dangers as we are, but neither was he totally naive about his science. In Browne there is a rather elaborate system of balances designed (or at least operating) to handle the problem. Actually Browne lives in two universes, or looks upon nature in two ways—as a scientist and as an admirer. He is careful to maintain the distinction, though the two methods affect one another in his composite view of nature.

As a scientist Browne assumes a mechanistic universe, as indeed he had to for his investigations. His term for this conception is the "straight line of Nature." He defines nature as "that streight and regular line, that setled and constant course the wisedome of God hath ordained the actions of his creatures, according to their severall kinds." He qualifies slightly by admitting the possibility of miracle, but in general he feels that "God is like a skilfull Geometrician," working

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[1]John Henry Newman, "The Tamworth Reading Room," in his Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects (London, 1918), p. 300. Newman's whole discussion of the point, pp. 298-305, is well worth reading. Bacon is, I think, a good example of a scientist who lets God go by default, not design. John Ray, in The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation (London, 1709), strikes me as a man in whom the old formulae are beginning to atrophy. He speaks Browne's language, but one senses in him an eighteenth-century coolness, a lack of living conviction. See, for example, pp. 32-33.

according to the "constituted and forelaid principles of his art," who does not ordinarily interfere with the established course of a universe operating by law.[1]

Browne heightens the effect of this mechanistic conception by adopting the Art of God figure:

> Art is the perfection of Nature: Were the world now as it was the sixth day, there were yet a Chaos: Nature hath made one world, and Art another. In briefe, all things are artificiall, for nature is the Art of God.

This aspect of nature was that studied by Browne the scientist. Of it he says again: "This is the ordinary and open way of his providence, which art and industry have in a good part discovered, whose effects wee may foretell without an Oracle; to foreshew these, is not Prophesie, but Prognostication." (It is interesting to note Browne's recognition of the importance of prediction as a scientific goal.) Upon this basis, the acceptance of an orderly, predictable, inflexible universe, the not inconsiderable bulk of his scientific work rests. By following this road Browne is moving toward the devitalized and impersonal universe of modern science.[2]

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[1] Religio, p. 22. See Richard Hooker, Works, ed. John Keble, rev. R. W. Church and F. Paget (Oxford, 1888), I, 209: "But howsoever these swervings are now and then incident into the course of nature, nevertheless so constantly the laws of nature are by natural agents observed, that no man denieth but those things which nature worketh are wrought, either always or for the most part, after one and the same manner."

[2] Religio, p. 23. See Kepler in Baumgardt, p. 33: "Nevertheless here we see how God, like a human architect, approached the founding of the world according to order and rule and measured everything in such a manner, that one might think not art took nature for an example but God Himself, in the course of His creation took the art of man as an example, though man was to appear only later on."

But in order to prevent this methodological conception from gaining power over him, Browne consciously cultivates its opposite, an entirely different universe eliciting completely different reactions. Against the "straight line" he places a "serpentine and crooked line." In addition to the way of order there is:

> another way full of Meanders and Labyrinths... and that is a more particular and obscure method of his providence, directing the operations of individualls and single Essences: this we call Fortune, that serpentine and crooked line, whereby he drawes those actions that his wisedome intends, in a more unknowne and secret way; This cryptick and involved method of his providence have I ever admired....

It is in this context that he refers to the final cause, saying:

> This is the cause I grope after in the works of nature, on this hangs the providence of God; to raise so beauteous a structure as the world and the creatures thereof, was but his Art, but their sundry and divided operations, with their predestinated ends, are from the treasury of his wisedome.[1]

Ziegler is quite correct in saying that Browne does not employ the final cause in his scientific work, but he errs in failing to see that science does not exhaust Browne's attitude toward the natural world. Browne is teleological in his "groping" way, his meditations upon the unfathomable mystery of the

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[1]Religio, pp. 23 and 20.

universe which is neglected in mechanism.[1]

While out of the straight line Browne's science grew, out of the serpentine line developed his curious speculations about natural stenography, types in nature, final causes, and so on. There is, for example, his belief that the visible world is merely a reflection of underlying realities:

> for in this masse of nature there is a set of things which carry in their front, though not in capitall letters, yet in stenography, and short Characters, something of Divinitie, which to wiser reasons serve as Luminaries in the abysse of knowledge, and to judicious beliefs as scales and roundles to mount the pinnacles and highest pieces of Divinity.... this visible World is but a picture of the invisible, wherein, as in a pourtract, things are not truely, but in equivocall shapes, and as they counterfeit some more reall substance in that invisible fabrick.

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[1]Merton, Science and Imagination, p. 93, argues that Browne uses teleological arguments frequently in his scientific work. But one need only read carefully the sections in Browne he refers to, which are presumably the clearest examples, to see that this is not so, or not so except in a limited sense. Browne argues, for example, that the chameleon cannot live on air because it has the ordinary organs of digestion: "Thus we perceive the providence of nature, that is, the wisdom of God, which disposeth of no part in vain, and some parts unto two or three uses, will not provide any without the execution of its proper office, nor where there is no digestion to be made, make any parts inservient to that intention." (Wilkin, II, 484) This is hardly the argument from design as commonly understood, but a biologist's recognition of the functionalism of parts within a living organism. Browne's claim (Wilkin, IV, 142) that "the providence of nature" has provided sea weeds to shelter small fish can easily be taken as an observation of the interlocking economies of the natural world. He does not say that the plants exist only or primarily for this purpose. Nor does he really claim as Merton reports that "the sea is calm during the nesting time of the kingfisher, so that the nests may float undisturbed." Rather he refuses to come to any conclusion: "for whether out of any particular prenotion they [birds] choose to sit at this time, or whether it be thus contrived by concurrence of causes and providence of nature, securing every species in their production, is not yet determined." (Wilkin, II, 432) Our knowledge of the mechanisms of animal life, it hardly need be added, is still fragmentary.

This is not science, nor did Browne think that it was. It was, he thought, a way of viewing nature which was as valid within its limits as his strictly scientific researches were in theirs. Browne makes no serious effort to read the future through signs and portents; he uses them as a method of keeping himself from becoming too enamoured of the straight line. His cautious approach to providence is indicated when in Christian Morals he speaks of it in this way:

> Mark well the paths and winding ways thereof; but be not too wise in the construction, or sudden in the application. . . . Leave future occurrences to their uncertainties, think that which is present thy own; and, since 'tis easier to foretell an eclipse than a foul day at some distance, look for little regular below. Attend with patience the uncertainty of things, and what lieth yet unexerted in the chaos of futurity.

Browne, briefly then, introduces into his thought a principle of uncertainty to limit the activity of his scientific reason.[1]

It is not hard to justify this dual attitude toward nature rationally. In essence the distinction Browne is making is that between nature considered in terms of species and nature considered in terms of individuals. He explicitly contrasts "actions of his creatures, according to their severall kinds" with "operations of individuals and single Essences" in the key definitions quoted above. And, of course, we know that science is a system of statistical generalizations unable to predict the reactions of individuals, be they men, cells, or

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[1]Religio, p. 17. See also p. 178. Passage from Christian Morals is in Wilkin, IV, pp. 71-72. For the intriguing subject of signatures and hieroglyphics see Marjorie H. Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle (Evanston, Ill., 1950), pp. 21—26, and Gordon K. Chalmers, "Hieroglyphs and Sir Thomas Browne," Virginia Quarterly Review, XI (1935), 547-560.

atoms.[1]

Let us summarize the two systems: On the one hand we have the straight line, the orderly and predictable universe which is investigated by reason, which is a reflection of God's open wisdom. This universe is predominantly mechanistic and may easily produce in man either pride or despair. On the other hand, there is the crooked line of providence, the obscure and mysterious aspect of the world, which is contemplated by the mind in order that it may become aware of the hidden wisdom and power of an infinite God. Since this world is the world of individuals, it is not predictable, and it humbles the pride by illustrating the uncertainty of things. Yet the personal God behind this world protects man from despair. Together the two views produce a balance, the end product of all of Browne's thought.

Browne is not bothered by apparent contradictions in these two systems, for he has the learned ignorance to reconcile them. How can the designs of God for individuals be fulfilled in a world which follows immutable law? For Browne the answer is easy:

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[1]That Browne was aware both of the nature and the consequences of the distinction is shown in Vulgar Errors where speaking of the machinations of Satan, he says: "that although men concede there is a God, yet should they deny his providence. And therefore assertions have flown about, that he intendeth only the care of the species or common natures, but letteth loose the guard of individuals, and single existencies therein; that he looks not below the moon, but hath designed the regiment of sublunary affairs unto inferior deputations. To promote which apprehensions, or empuzzle their due conceptions, he [Satan] casteth in the notions of fate, destiny, fortune, chance, and necessity; terms commonly misconceived by vulgar heads, and their propriety sometime perverted by the wisest." (Wilkin, II, 248.)

> There is a neerer way to heaven than Homers chaine; an easie Logick may conjoyne heaven and earth in one argument, and with lesse than a Sorites resolve all things into God. For though wee Christen effects by their most sensible and nearest causes, yet is God the true and infallible cause of all, whose concourse, though it be generall, yet doth it subdivide it selfe into the particular actions of every thing, and is that spirit, by which each singular essence not onely subsists, but performes its operations.[1]

This raises the question to the level of the infinite, and contradictions based upon considerations of finite being no longer have rational meaning.

Finally, though we have wandered quite a distance, it should not be forgotten that this whole combination of feelings toward nature is in turn balanced by the other source of his divinity, the Book of God, that is to say the Bible and Church, or more generally the world of human values and aspirations we looked at in the preceding chapter. In conclusion it seems safe to say that Browne has taken every possible precaution against falling into the pitfalls which gape for the Christian who is at the same time a scientist.

One thing which impresses us in reading Browne is his confidence and his joy. A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the pessimism of the seventeenth century, which was produced at least partially by the success of the scientists in overthrowing the old universe and replacing it with a very disturbing new one. "And new philosophy calls all in doubt," says Donne. Modern scholars have collected numerous examples of the intellectual and moral confusion of the time. A typical example is this, quoted by Douglas Bush from Drummond's A Cypresse Grove (1623):

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[1] Religio, pp. 26 and 27.

> The Element of Fire is quite put out, the Aire is but Water rarefied, the Earth is found to move, and is no more the Center of the Universe, is turned into a Magnet; Starres are not fixed, but swimme in the etheriall Spaces....Thus Sciences by the diverse Motions of this Globe and the Braine of Man, are become Opinions, nay, Errores, and leave the Imagination in a thousand Labyrinthes. What is all we knowe compared with what wee knowe not?[1]

There is nothing of this feeling in Browne, for one of the important consequences of the learned ignorance is its contentment with limitations. As we have seen, in Nicolaus limitation becomes a source of joy, since it suggests the richness of the Christian inheritance in the next world. Browne, like Nicolaus, was set on fire by the thought of the inexhaustible nature of the physical universe. Yet, again like Nicolaus, he did not place his hopes in the fragile basket of scientific progress. Time and time again he draws our attention to his conviction that it is no great matter if we miss the truth. In Vulgar Errors he says: "Thus have I

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[1]Douglas Bush, "Two Roads to Truth: Science and Religion in the Early Seventeenth Century," ELH, VIII (1941), p. 91. See Nicolson, pp. 65-104 and Basil Willey, "The Touch of Cold Philosophy" in Richard Foster Jones et al, The Seventeenth Century... (Stanford, 1951), pp. 369-376, especially p. 372, for full treatments of the subject. Howard Schultz, Milton and Forbidden Knowledge (New York, 1955), pp. 13-14, believes that this whole interpretation should be modified. He doubts that Donne was really upset by Copernican astronomy when he wrote the Anatomie, taking it as a rather conventional piece of writing. ("Funeral elegies are not usually merry.") I have misgivings myself based upon the observation of how casually the Copernican theory and the possibility of plural worlds are treated in many writings of the century. For typical examples of writers who mention these topics with no indication whatever of gloom or disturbance, see John Donne, Works, ed. Henry Alford (London, 1839), III, 514; Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. A. R. Shilleto (London, 1893), II, 47, 59 and 63; James Howell, Familiar Letters, ed. Oliphant Smeaton (London, 1903), II, 185; and John Ray, The Wisdom of God, pp. 18-20 and 26. A revaluation of this whole subject seems in order.

declared some private and probable conceptions in the enquiry of this truth; but the certainty hereof let the arithmetic of the last day determine, and therefore expect no further belief than probability and reason induce." And again in the same work:

> We leave it unto God. For he alone can truly determine these, and all things else; who, as he hath proposed the world unto our disputation, so hath he reserved many things unto his own resolution; whose determination we cannot hope from flesh, but must with reverence suspend unto that great day, whose justice shall either condemn our curiosities, or resolve our disquisitions.

These and similar declarations are marked by a note of calm confidence which rests upon the conviction that God wishes us to investigate the universe and the equally strong conviction that He does not particularly care whether or not we discover the truth, since He cannot expect a finite being to comprehend the work of an infinite force. In other words, Browne's confidence rests upon the learned ignorance with its careful balance between a sense of the goodness of human reason and a profound but not overwhelming sense of reason's limits.[1]

There is no particular reason to answer the theories of Gosse or Willey in detail. Nothing in Browne indicates either the equivalence of his various interests in terms of value, or a leaning toward science separated entirely from religion. Browne accepts a mechanistic world only as a working hypothesis and maintains always the primacy of faith. His system of balances fulfills perfectly the conditions for science established by Christian thinkers.

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[1]Wilkin, III, 235, and II, 187.

PART II

BROWNE AND ANGLICANISM

CHAPTER I

PROBLEMS AND EXPEDIENTS IN THE STUDY OF ANGLICANISM

The aim of this second Part is to show that Sir Thomas Browne was an Anglican thinker and believer in substantial agreement with the principles, ideals, and spirit of a large group of English churchmen contemporary with him, namely those clustered more or less closely around Archbishop Laud. Before presenting this case, however, it is useful to clear the ground, eliminating beforehand sources of possible confusion and misunderstanding. The treatment of religious topics is always fraught with danger, because religion itself is a subject which impinges upon and becomes involved with many other human activities and aspirations.

The inherent complexity of the subject is magnified greatly in the study of seventeenth-century religion. Religious differences in that period were so closely connected with rival political philosophies and vast economic changes, so deeply woven into the intellectual fabric, that it is only with great difficulty that we can discuss them without introducing extraneous considerations. Furthermore, the issues which were then debated in books and on battlefields are not yet dead. The controversial spirit engendered by living issues still permeates much scholarship. A writer's attitude toward the Oxford Movement of the last century is only too often the source of his judgments concerning

Caroline divinity. A historian's politics may well affect his valuation of the old struggle between Anglican King and Puritan Parliament. Because of these complications every writer in the field has the duty of making clear his own point of view, while paring away those issues irrelevant to his purpose.

The Ambiguity of "Orthodoxy"

In the discussion of religious topics the term orthodox offers as many openings for confusion as the most confirmed semanticist might desire or fear. As ordinarily used by those who are not professional theologians, the term expresses little more than vague approval on the part of the conventional Christian writer or equally vague disapproval on the part of those who find value in undifferentiated protest.

The dangers of using the word loosely can nowhere be better illustrated than in Browne studies. Dunn, who has written the most extensive treatment of Browne's religion, opens his discussion by drawing our attention to the fiercely polemical character of seventeenth-century religious writings. "It was," he observes, "a day when Truth and Error were as real and as immutably opposed as God and the Devil." And that, for all practical purposes, concludes his analysis. Working within a framework which can deal adequately only with extremes, he constantly finds himself surprised at Browne's moderation and concludes that Browne must be unorthodox. When Browne says that he will not divide himself from any man because of a difference of opinion, Dunn comments that he is "obviously out of sympathy with the

church militant" and is tainted with the "easy scepticism of Montaigne." Again, when Browne confesses with equanimity to several youthful heresies, Dunn finds his tone "eminently calculated" to enrage "the orthodox," without telling us to whom precisely he is referring. No effort is made to find out what opinions on heresy or separation were current among the various religious groups. What we have here is a completely mythical "orthodox" churchman, who, although he never quite emerges from the shadows, is apparently composed of about equal parts of gall, extreme Calvinism, and downright stupidity.[1]

Such obvious over-simplification can be corrected only by examining the historical context with some care. This is no easy matter, for the Church of England from its inception has been notoriously or gloriously vague and formless. When in the sixteenth century the Scottish reformer George Buchanan was asked by the Portuguese Inquisition to explain the principles of the English Church, he replied, with that touch of desperation familiar to all who have asked themselves the same question, "As to the Anglican Church, the English could never explain to me its essence or its nature."[2]

The fact is that there have been several English Churches, and as a consequence the orthodoxy of particular churchmen depends upon what

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[1]Dunn, pp. 37-42 and 62. See Edward Dowden, Puritan and Anglican (New York, 1901), p. 45, for a similar but less extreme example of the same tendency. J. D. Hyman, William Chillingworth and the Theory of Toleration (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), pp. 22, 26-36, and 68, makes similar assumptions which isolate and distort the thought of Chillingworth.

[2]Rose Macaulay, They Went to Portugal (London, 1946), p. 69.

point in time is taken to represent the "real" Church of England. Consider, for example, the important question of Calvinism in the English Church. Depending upon whether the key period chosen is that extending from the Oxford Reformers to Cranmer, that following the Marian exile when the important theologians were Geneva-trained, or that of the compromising Elizabethan Settlement, the Church will be considered essentially non-Calvinistic, predominately Calvinistic, or quite moderately Calvinistic.

One's evaluation of early Anglican history becomes of great importance when we deal with the religious situation of the early seventeenth century. During the last decade of the sixteenth century a strong reaction against Calvinism and European connections in general arose within the Church, a movement led by Andrewes and inspired by the moderation of Hooker. These churchmen and their followers insisted upon the independence of the English Church as a spiritual force midway between Rome and Geneva, turned to the early Fathers for inspiration, and championed an orderly ceremonial in the public worship of the Church. It is with this movement that Laud is connected. Whether this reaction is labelled a divergence from the natural course of the Church and hence unorthodox, or a return to the true springs after many years of wandering in the desert, depends upon one's general theory of Anglican

development.[1]

Personally I feel on the basis of the Anglican formularies, the writings of the early reformers, the accidental nature of the Marian exile, and the tone of Anglicanism through the centuries, that the movement initiated by Hooker and developed by Laud is "true" Anglicanism in any ordinary meaning of the word. But the point to be made here, one which cannot too strongly be insisted upon, is that as far as Browne is concerned the whole question is somewhat irrelevant. From the brief sketch given above it is evident that we can speak of Anglican orthodoxy only in a relative sense. But it is equally certain that the dominant form of official Anglicanism in the first part of the seventeenth century was that represented by Laud, think of it what we will. Laud was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633 to his execution in 1645; the school he represents was predominant during that period and had been growing in influence from the time of Hooker.

Browne was born in 1605; Religio Medici was written in 1635 and

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[1]For the nature of the reaction see E. R. Adair, "Laud and the Church of England," Church History, V (1936), 124; Godfrey Davies, "Arminian versus Puritan in England ca. 1620-1640," HLB, No. 5 (April, 1934), 157; and G. W. O. Addleshaw, The High Church Tradition (London, 1941), p. 23. The view that this was a divergence is found in W. K. Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration in England... (1603-1640) (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), pp. 115-117; that it was a return, in A. S. Duncan-Jones, Archbishop Laud (London, 1927), pp. 12 and 48. For the role of Hooker see Keble's Preface to Hooker's Works, I, lxxii-lxxviii. Contemporary arguments that the Marian exiles corrupted the Church are in Hooker, I, 141-142 and Peter Heylyn, Cyprianus Anglicus (London, 1668), pp. 50-51. See E. C. A. Bourne, The Anglicanism of William Laud (London, 1947), pp. 25-149, for a full treatment of the thesis that Laud is in line with the whole historical tendency of the English Reformation.

published in 1642. To say that Browne is a Laudian, therefore, is to say that he was an orthodox Anglican in the sense that he was a member of the controlling party in the Church of his day. While I believe that this party was orthodox in a more general sense, I will not insist upon the point. Absolute orthodoxy in this context does not have to be determined, since the main fact to be established is that Browne was not an isolated figure without any real place in the formal religious life of his period.

The Pertinent Distinction between Thought and Action

In discussing Laudian Anglicanism it will prove fruitful to consider the simple distinction between thought and action, theory and practice. For the purposes of this paper little is to be gained by moving into the realms of politics and church polity. The form of government in the Church, the relation of Church and State, and the actual tolerance extended by the Church are difficult and controversial topics. They will be avoided here. We will confine the investigation to ideas and ideals more specifically religious.

One of the most obvious justifications of what might seem at first a somewhat arbitrary and cowardly proceeding is that Browne was a layman not concerned with questions of Church government, a doctor of scientific bent not greatly interested in politics, a thinker who never had to face the problems of the administrator of either secular or ecclesiastical affairs. While it is generally granted that Browne was a loyal Royalist, and while Finch has recently presented evidence that he more actively supported the King's cause during the Civil War than

had hitherto been assumed, we have no more than hints in his writings from which to reconstruct his views on political-religious subjects.[1] This being so, there is no compelling reason to enter into problems complicated and at the same time peripheral.

Furthermore, it may be argued that the elimination of political motives is a gain in clarity. A distortion is introduced into scholarship by the failure even partially to dissociate religious matters from political attachments. This is best illustrated in the work of that admirable historian of English religion, John Tulloch. In arguing, for example, that Laudian divines "have no right to claim the inheritance of the Church of England," Tulloch concerns himself almost entirely with the question of church government and the Laudian support of Stuart monarchy. This preoccupation with what from the religious standpoint are side issues prevents him from seeing the close connections existing between the Anglican bishops and the rational theologians he so justly admires. Reluctantly he recognizes that a connection existed, but resorts to paradox to account for it. It is, he observes, one of the "strange anomalies" of history that Puritanism, "which began in impulses of liberty" and has always been associated with political freedom, was in matters of dogma fiercely intolerant. On the other hand, the Laudian party, "while servile in spirit and tyrannic in the exercise of constituted authority," was quite liberal theologically. We find Laud, continues Tulloch with some embarrassment,

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[1] Jeremiah S. Finch, Sir Thomas Browne (New York, 1950) pp. 123-29.

> extending patronage to the earliest of our rational theologians. All these theologians came out of the bosom of the party, and continued, more or less, closely associated with it. And even in the case of some of the most distinctive of the Anglo-Catholic theologians themselves, there are traces of a certain freedom of thought on purely theological matters.

Despite the bias shown in terminology, the logical tension within the passage is evident. The historical facts play havoc with Tulloch's theory, and he is partially aware of this. When he speaks of the obviously close relationship between Laud and both Chillingworth and Taylor, he must again adopt this somewhat puzzled tone. While it would not be difficult to challenge Tulloch's identification of Puritanism and the cause of freedom, we do better to avoid the political question entirely. It only sets up oppositions which did not exist, or existed only in secondary matters. To concentrate upon religious essentials is the straightest path through the chaos.[1]

There is no reason why a blanket approbation of Archbishop Laud should form a part of this paper. He has been attacked with great vigor for centuries; recently he has found persuasive defenders. Errors of judgment have no doubt been made on both sides. My own opinion after reading extensively in Laud is that he was a conscientious and capable churchman who defended with vigor and skill legitimate political and ecclиastical theories. That he had personal weaknesses is true, but that he was responsible for the

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[1]John Tulloch, Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century (Edinburgh, 1874), I, 63-64. For his trouble in explaining the relations between Laud and Chillingworth see I, 292-293; between Laud and Taylor, I, 352-353.

religious troubles of his day is questionable. The difficulties he faced were probably beyond human solution.[1]

Scholars sometimes forget the difference between formulating theories in the security of libraries and applying those theories in the world of passionate and erring men. It is amusing, for instance, to notice that in most discussions of religious tolerance a man's reputation is almost always inversely proportional to his position in the Church or his public responsibilities. Very few bishops are heroes. In some cases a man's reputation actually sinks with promotion. Jeremy Taylor is universally praised for the Liberty of Prophesying which he wrote when he was a simple priest. But when as Bishop of Down and Connor he found it necessary to abandon his theories and use force, some of his admirers cool toward him.[2]

Hooker put his finger on the exact difficulty involved here when he wrote:

> He that goeth about to persuade a multitude, that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favourable hearers; because they know the

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[1]See Bourne and Duncan-Jones for elaborate defenses of Laud. The Whig historians generally have treated Laud rather harshly. Most famous, perhaps, although certainly extreme, is the attack of Thomas Babington Macaulay in his review of Hallam's Constitutional History. For Laud Macaulay expresses "a more unmitigated contempt than for any other character in our history." Macaulay's invective must be read in order to be believed. See The Works of Lord Macaulay, ed. Lady Trevelyan (London, 1871), V, 203-204. See Adair's whole paper and John R. H. Moorman, A History of the Church in England (London, 1954), pp. 229-233, for modern interpretations neither vindictive nor adulatory.

[2]See Dowden, Puritan and Anglican, pp. 207-208. Logan Pearsall Smith (ed.), The Golden Grove (Oxford, 1930), p. xviii, is more sympathetic.

> manifold defects whereunto every kind of regiment is subject, but the secret lets and difficulties, which in public proceedings are innumerable and inevitable, they have not ordinarily the judgment to consider.[1]

The point need not be labored, but the more we can eliminate the unnatural and unjust distinction made between working churchmen and those who deal only with theories, the more we shall appreciate the actual community of thought existing within the Anglican Church.

In any event, an appreciation of the practical problems facing bishops will prevent our making such naive judgments as this one concerning Laud:

> To the average Englishman he was a martinet who resembled an inquisitive government inspector or a fussy schoolmaster rather than a Father in God. With the help of his numerous spies he made it his business to see that the clergy had clean surplices and that they wore them...that churches were kept clean and in good repair; that bishops did their duty by repressing what was wrong and promoting what was good for the Church in the eyes of their Metropolitan; and that the clergy were dutiful and obedient to the will of their civil and spiritual overlords. Laud assumed, or seemed to assume, that if this were done God's kingdom would surely come.[2]

One can object that the closing assumption is gratuitous and based upon no evidence whatever, and one can doubt that this writer has the magical power of reading the "average" English mind of some centuries past. But the main objection that should be made is that, if the actions attributed to Laud above were discreditable, there seems to be nothing for an archbishop to do but sit in his palace and smile at

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[1]Hooker, I, 198.

[2]T. F. Kinloch, The Life and Works of Joseph Hall (London, 1951), p. 121.

pigeons. One gathers that Laud would have been much more commendable if he had insisted upon dirty surplices and churches, bishops who avoided their duty, and disobedient clergymen.

But there is, I repeat, no necessity to judge Laud's actions. Since Browne lived entirely in the realm of thought and the exercise of personal virtue, it is only fair that in comparisons we restrict the field to that of thought, the expressions of ideals, the practice of those ideals in a private capacity. If we do this, I hope to show that there is no wall separating Laud, the rational theologians, or the Norwich physician.

The Fact of Limitations

Although in the following we will be dealing almost exclusively with the Laudian group, I do not wish to imply that the principles, arguments, or degree of tolerance attributed to them were their private property. For practical reasons it is necessary to set up opposites such as Anglican and Roman Catholic, Anglican and Puritan, but we err greatly if we let these rather loose and inaccurate terms become solidified, as though they were physical objects.

When, therefore, in the following pages Anglican positions are contrasted with Puritan or Calvinistic thought, the latter terms should be taken in "a soft and flexible sence" as Browne would say. I have no desire to set the Puritans up for target practice, or to deny that there were liberal elements within the vast complex. One of the most discouraging aspects of the whole history of the period is that moderates

were not able to recognize their areas of agreement amid the welter of charges and passions. The important school of the Cambridge Platonists exhibits many characteristics here attributed to the Laudians. They are not discussed because their main period of activity falls somewhat later than our focal points, and also because they bear only indirectly and vaguely upon Browne. In brief, there is no reason to maintain that only the Anglicans possessed certain traits; it is enough that they did possess them.

For similar reasons little attention will be paid to contemporary continental developments. Certainly the kind of Anglican thought to be described is not unlike that of some Lutherans. But again limitations of space, pertinancy, and competency operate. Arminianism, however, because of its very close connection with Anglican thought, will be touched upon briefly.

Finally, it might be well to add a few notes on terminology. For convenience' sake the term Anglican in succeeding pages will denote the school of Laud, with the reservation previously made that other concepts of "true" Anglicanism are possible. There are no acceptable alternatives. Laudian is too broad, since it suggests a group committed both to the Archbishop's political and religious principles. Furthermore, it implies that Laud dominated the thought of the group. Chillingworth, as a matter of fact, did not parrot the ideas of his patron, but reached his conclusions by independent and conscientious study. He would certainly have resisted the implication that he was a party man. Arminian, though in contemporary use, is not acceptable

because it blunts the importance of Anglican theological independence. High-Church is simply inaccurate. Bourne has demonstrated that Laudian principles in the main are accepted today by all save extreme branches of the Anglican communion.[1] The only remaining possibility, Anglo-Catholic, while acceptable if properly understood, may too easily be confused with the nineteenth-century movement of the same name. It is also rather clumsy for constant use.

Since the Anglicans objected violently to the Roman Church's appropriation of the title Catholic, the words Roman Catholic, Roman, and Romanist will be used indiscriminately to indicate that body. Puritan, as suggested above, will be used only in a vague and general sense; for a definition of Puritanism, if possible, is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. By Puritans I mean those who, whether Presbyterian or Separatist, opposed the Anglican Settlement, whose theology was mainly Calvinistic or extremely Protestant, who insisted upon a continuing reformation, who held the Church of Rome in utter detestation, and who minimized the ceremonial aspect of worship.

Method of Investigation: Main Figures and Texts

In order to block out the main lines of Anglican theology in the first part of the seventeenth century, the following method will be adopted. The main evidence will be drawn from the works of Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645), William Chillingworth (1602-1644), and Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667). More specifically, emphasis will fall

[1] Bourne, p. 22.

upon Laud's Conference with Fisher (held in 1622, published in 1639), Chillingworth's The Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation (1638), and Taylor's Liberty of Prophesying (1647). The substantial agreement of these men will demonstrate a certain homogeneity in the Anglican thought of the 1630's and '40's, the period in which Browne was meditating, composing and making public his Religio. In order to show somewhat the continuity of Anglican thought from Hooker to Laud, important or characteristic points will be bolstered by quotations from Richard Hooker (1554-1600), the greatest of Anglican theologians, and John Donne (1572-1631), a good representative of the movement during the second and third decades of the century.[1] Less significant theologians will enter the discussion from time to time for the illustration of special points.

The three main figures have been chosen to illustrate different facets of Anglican thought. The choice of Laud was inevitable. As Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor of the University of Oxford, he was the most important, the most influential, the most powerful churchman in England during the period. He represents the nearest thing in the Anglican Church to an official viewpoint. Although I have attempted to make him central throughout, this has not always been possible because he was primarily a man of action and did not leave a

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[1] In addition to my own readings in Donne I have made extensive use of Itrat Husain, The Dogmatic and Mystical Theology of John Donne (London, 1938) and Roy W. Battenhouse, "The Grounds of Religious Toleration in the Thought of John Donne," Church History, XI (1942), 217-248. I am in more substantial agreement with Husain than with Battenhouse, who seems to me to place undue emphasis upon Donne's somewhat questionable mysticism.

completely developed statement of his principles. Aside from the Conference with Fisher we have only a few sermons, speeches, and passages from his defence before Parliament to work with. But these will show his thought sufficiently well, and will be supported by the evidence of his patronage of the other figures.

William Chillingworth is also essentially a one-book writer, but that book is lengthy and inclusive. He has been chosen as a representative of the most intellectual wing of the Anglican party. Both Tulloch and Hunt classify and praise him as a rational theologian. Chillingworth was also a member of what is sometimes called the Great Tew group, which included Lord Falkland, Hales, Sheldon, Morley, Hammond and Earle, many of whom became important after the Restoration. By showing the agreement between Laud and Chillingworth, I hope to connect this important group of men with Laud as far as theology separated from politics goes.

If Chillingworth exemplifies the intellectual firmness and dialectical skill of the Anglicans, Taylor may well be taken as an example of Anglican grace and love of beauty. He does not disagree with the others, but his emphasis is somewhat different.[1] Together these three men give us a good cross-section of the best Anglican thought during Browne's young manhood. Their strikingly different tempers show the variety within unity which Anglicanism valued so highly. Laud the peppery administrator and church statesman, Chillingworth the controversialist, and Taylor the gentle devotional writer, are bound together

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[1] See Tulloch, I, 379 and 406 for the similarity between Taylor and Chillingworth.

by a body of common principles and similar ideals. What they have in common we will call Anglicanism.

Brief sketches of the principal figures will serve both to show the personal relationships existing between them, and to orient us more exactly in time. Only a few outstanding and relevant facts concerning Laud need be given. He was educated at Oxford under the guidance of John Buckeridge, who was a fervent disciple of Andrewes and a leading exponent of the new Anglicanism. Later he was promoted by his important pupil, and throughout life they supported one another. Together they saw to it that Andrewes' sermons were published in 1629.[1] During his Oxford career Laud maintained the views of his tutor publicly and was active in opposing the Calvinistic element at the University. He became a fellow of St. John's in 1593 and President of that college in 1611. It is important to note that Laud retained throughout his life an active interest in Oxford. This is relevant because Browne too was an Oxford man. As a matter of fact he was in residence during the period in which Laud's influence was at its height, for Laud became Chancellor in 1628.

Laud's rise in the Church was steady but not unduly spectacular. He became Bishop of St. David's in 1621, Bath and Wells in 1626, and London in 1628. Five years later he was raised to the Primacy and commenced in full earnest his stormy political and ecclesiastical career. In 1641 he was imprisoned by Parliament, tried three years later, and executed in 1645 by a bill of attainder when the case against

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[1]For Buckeridge see Canon Venables' article in DNB, s.v. "Buckeridge."

him broke down completely.

The Conference with Fisher was the result of a cause célèbre. The mother of George Villiers, the all-powerful Duke of Buckingham, had been converted to Roman Catholicism, an event of great danger to Church and State since it was rumoured that the Duke himself was wavering. King James directed Dr. Francis White to hold a conference with the Jesuit Fisher before the parties concerned. A second conference was held at which the King himself was present, but the results were apparently not satisfactory, for the King requested Laud to maintain the Anglican case in a third conference, held in 1622. Laud prepared his account the same year, but did not publish it in full until the previous conferences had been made public. While the work is not well known generally, it constitutes one of the finest of the Anglican defenses against Rome.[1]

The personal intimacy of Laud and Chillingworth dates from Chillingworth's birth, for Laud, then at St. John's, was the boy's godfather. Chillingworth too was educated at Oxford, receiving his M. A. from Trinity and being named a Fellow in 1628. Shortly thereafter he was converted to Roman Catholicism, curiously enough by the same Father Fisher with whom Laud had crossed swords.[2] Chillingworth

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[1]It is mentioned by Taylor, for example, as essential to a basic theological library. See Heber in Taylor's Works, I, lxxix.

[2]Fisher might repay close study. His real name was John Percy, but like most Jesuits working in England he used a variety of aliases. He was born ca. 1570 and died in 1641. Although his career was varied, he seems to have specialized in the conversion of intellectuals. An interesting, though overly pious, account of his life may be found in Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus, ed. Henry Foley, First Series (London, 1877), I, 521-542.

was especially impressed by Fisher's argument that only the Roman Catholic principle of infallibility could maintain the cohesion of Christendom. Consequently, he left Oxford in 1630 and entered the great Roman seminary at Douay.

It was at this crucial point that Laud's influence proved most decisive. Laud was deeply disturbed by the defection of his godson and initiated a correspondence with him. So impressed was Chillingworth by the arguments of Laud that in 1631 he returned to England where he was kindly received by the Bishop. Although he resumed his Oxford life, Chillingworth was not yet able to return completely to the English Church. While he granted that it was a true Church, he had reservations about subscribing to the Articles. Because this point of subscription will be of some importance later, it is worth noting his objections, which are contained in a letter to Dr. Sheldon. Chillingworth believed that "the damning sentences in St. Athanasius's creed (as we are made to subscribe it) are most false, and also in a high degree presumptuous and schismatical." He also found it difficult to accept the principle of subscription, which he held was "an imposition on men's consciences, much like that authority which the Church of Rome assumes." Unfortunately we do not possess a detailed account of his change of attitude, but he did subscribe in 1638 and was immediately given preferment through the influence of Laud. However, we know from the letter to Sheldon that Laud was involved in the discussion, and when we come later to see Laud's interpretation of subscription, the probable line of argument will become evident.[1]

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[1] The letter is in William Chillingworth, Works (Philadelphia, 1840), p. xiii. See also Tulloch, I, 285-287.

During the Civil War Chillingworth supported the Royal cause, though with the natural misgivings which all moderate men felt at the necessity of settling the issues by violent means. He was active at the siege of Gloucester, was later made prisoner, fell ill and died in the early part of 1644. His funeral was marred by the zeal of the Puritan divine Cheynell, who hurled The Religion of Protestants into the open grave, shouting, "Get thee gone, thou Cursed Book, which hast seduced so many precious souls: Get thee gone, thou corrupt rotten Book, Earth to Earth, Dust to Dust: Get thee gone into the Place of Rottenness, that thou mayest Rot with thy Author, and see Corruption."[1]

This "corrupt rotten book," like much of the controversial literature of the day, grew out of a long continued series of debates. In 1630 the Jesuit Wilson, going by the name of Knott, published a work which was answered by the Provost of Queen's College, Dr. Christopher Potter, who in turn was countered by Knott in 1634. At this point Chillingworth entered the picture and assumed the Anglican burden. After working for several years he published his rebuttal of the Catholic position in 1638. The Religion of Protestants was at once recognized by Laud as a valuable contribution to Anglican apologetics. Indeed, it has been suggested, and my reading supports the contention, that the connection between Laud's and Chillingworth's defences is much closer than has been granted.[2]

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[1]For Chillingworth's feelings at the outbreak of hostilities see Sermon I, Works, pp. 530-548. The quotation from Cheynell is in John Walker, An Attempt towards Recovering an Account of the Numbers and Suffering of the Clergy of the Church of England...(London, 1714), Part ii, p. 63.

[2]The suggestion is in Felix R. Arnott, "Anglicanism in the Seventeenth Century," in Anglicanism, ed. P. E. More and Frank L. Cross (Milwaukee, 1935), p. lviii.

The third member of our triumvirate received his education at Cambridge, which was then more Calvinistic than the Laud-reformed Oxford. After receiving his M. A. in 1633, however, Taylor attracted the notice of Laud, who became his patron and by his influence secured an Oxford Fellowship at All Souls for the young preacher. Later Laud invited Taylor to preach before him at Lambeth, commended his performance highly, and promised continued aid. It is generally recognized that the support of Laud was decisive in the young preacher's life. Taylor had no money, no connections, no prospects. His fellowship gave him not only security but also that access to books and learned company which he needed for his intellectual growth. Laud made good all his promises, appointed Taylor one of his personal chaplains and secured valuable livings for him.

Naturally Taylor supported the King during the War. Our record of his life during this period is very confused and imperfect. In any event, it was from a refuge in Wales that he wrote his famous Liberty of Prophesying in 1647. After the Restoration Taylor was named Bishop of Down and Connor and Vice Chancellor of the University of Dublin. After a turbulent ecclesiastical career, not unlike that of Laud, he died, we may suspect rather willingly, in 1667.

These brief biographical notices will have served their purpose if they have impressed upon the reader the fact that Laud constantly supported and encouraged Chillingworth and Taylor. Despite the false separation that some scholars have posited, the records show steady approval on the part of Laud, constant respect on the part of his friends. That this was a rapport more than

accidental will be shown in the following chapters. But it is worth emphasizing here that those who divide the men have as yet produced no satisfactory explanation of the matters of fact summarized above.[1]

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[1]The main sources for the biographical sketches were: Laud—Bourne and Heylyn. Chillingworth—Tulloch, I, 261-343; Hunt, I, 374-382; Jordan, pp. 377-400. Taylor—Life by Heber in Taylor's Works, I, i-ccii; Logan Pearsall Smith's introduction to The Golden Grove, pp. xiii-lxiii; Dowden, Puritan and Anglican, pp. 197-214. Smith and Dowden are especially valuable as literary studies.

CHAPTER II

PEACE AND TRUTH:
THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Anglican thought is somewhat difficult to approach, for essentially it is an attitude applied to circumstances as they arise rather than a definite body of formulations. In this chapter, after a brief description of the problem of disunity, the greatest challenge facing Christian thinkers in the century, we will discuss the conditions which the Anglicans considered necessary for any valid solution. The nature of these conditions shaped Anglican thought and led directly to the famous _via media_ as the only acceptable approach to controversial topics. Some of the implications of the middle way will be touched upon, mainly to give as directly as possible the whole tone of Anglican theology.[1]

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[1]Although scattered references to some Anglican theologians have already appeared, it might be useful here to give a resumé of editions and abbreviations used. All Laud quotations are from _The Works of William Laud_, ed. William Scott and James Bliss, Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology, 7 vols. (London, 1847-60) and will be cited as Laud. Chillingworth is quoted from _The Works of William Chillingworth_ (Philadelphia, 1840). Taylor references from _The Whole Works of Jeremy Taylor_, ed. and with life by Reginald Heber, rev. Charles P. Eden, 10 vols. (London, 1864) will be cited as Taylor, _Works_. Those from the Logan Pearsall Smith anthology, _The Golden Grove_ (Oxford, 1930) will appear as Taylor, _Golden Grove_. Hooker quotations are from _The Works of... Mr. Richard Hooker_, ed. John Keble, rev. R. W. Church and F. Paget, 3 vols. (London, 1888). Quotations from _The Works of John Donne_, ed. Henry Alford, 6 vols. (London, 1839) will be cited as Donne, _Works_, while those from _The Sermons of John Donne_, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, 10 vols. planned (Berkeley, Calif., 1953—present) will be referred to as Donne, _Sermons_.

The Anglican Desire for Christian Unity

The Anglican desire for unity within Christendom approached the intensity of passion and established a foundation for the whole superstructure of thought elaborated in that Church. One of the most impressive declarations of this profoundly experienced feeling is a sermon which Laud delivered in 1628 on the text from Ephesians, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." While generally Laud's style is pungent and effective rather than formally beautiful, in this one sermon he can strike out such splendid lines as, "This 'unity of the Spirit' is closer than any corporal union can be; for spirits meet where bodies cannot, and nearer than bodies can." So central to his thought, his heart, his whole religious being is the concept of unity, that he rises to rare eloquence in speaking of it:

> I press "unity" hard upon you:—pardon me this zeal. O that my thoughts could speak that to you that they do to God; or that my tongue could express them but such as they are; or that there were an open passage that you might see them, as they pray faster than I can speak for "unity."

With fervent persistence he hammers away at the oneness of the Christian belief. We serve but one Lord, worship but one God, are sanctified by one Holy Spirit. Our faith, as also our hope and baptism, is one, and there is but one body of which we are members. But this unity is not monolithic; rather if consists of "different graces, but all tending to one edification; divers offices, but all joint overseers of the same work." Nothing, he continues, provokes God as much

as division in that church which He purchased with His one life that it might live in unity.[1]

The beauty of unity was naturally emphasized by the horrors of disunity which were only too apparent throughout Europe. It is with real pain that Laud contemplates the state of religion in his century:

> For my part, death were easier to me, than it is to see and consider the face of the Church of Christ scratched and torn, till it bleeds in every part, as it doth this day; and the "coat of Christ," which was once spared by "soldiers, because it was seamless," rent every way....

Indeed, contemplation of "Christendom bleeding in dissension, and which is worse, triumphing in her own blood" was one of the few things which could dampen the spirits of the ordinarily hopeful archbishop. While he was sustained by his faith and could not grant that the church might really end, the means of preservation were certainly obscure to him. After division upon division, he says, the church has become _terra liquefacta_, and all is uncertain. Quite touchingly his faith struggles with his observations. There is melting everywhere, in all parts of the church, in all places. "And," says Laud, "but that I know 'hell gates cannot prevail against it,' it 'melts' so fast sometimes, that I should think it is, as the world takes it for, a house of butter against the sun." This mood, a kind of elegiac weariness with an irrational

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[1]Laud, I, 163, 160 and 155. See Hooker, I, 252. Franklin Le Van Baumer has written two articles which support my views. See his "The Church of England and the Common Corps of Christendom," _Journal of Modern History_, XVI (1944), 1-21, for a study of the Anglican emphasis upon unity from Cranmer to Laud. Significantly enough his rather exhaustive studies indicate that this ideal ceased to be of much importance after 1648. In another article, "The Conception of Christendom in Renaissance England," _JHI_, VI (1945), 131-156, he elaborates upon his theme and covers a wider area.

and impossible world, is not infrequently found in Anglican writing. Certainly it is in Browne. The great shock produced by the terrible separations within Christendom should be recognized more generally as a primary source of the world weariness so often noted in the century. While other motives such as the shock of the new science undoubtedly played a part, this simple religious fact too moved men's hearts and minds more than we are easily able to imagine.[1]

Nor were the Anglicans unaware of the pressing practical dangers of disunity. They constantly drew attention to the fact that Christian controversy, marked only too often by blind zeal and open hatred, served the interests of religious scepticism and indifference. Christians were almost forcing intelligent men to turn away from the church. Laud solemnly warns Christians everywhere that they are actually fighting the cause of their common enemy:

> And though I cannot prophesy, yet I fear that atheism and irreligion gather strength while the truth is thus weakened by an unworthy way of contending for it. And while they thus contend, neither part consider that they are in a way to induce upon themselves and others that contrary extreme which they seem most both to fear and oppose.

Chillingworth also was bothered by this aspect of the controversy, and warned the Romanists that their constant harping upon lack of certainty within the Protestant camp cut deeper than they imagined. All that is necessary to put into doubt all Christianity and all religion is an extension of the area under survey, according to Chillingworth. Why "might not a Jew conclude as well against all christians"? A Turk could so argue against both Christians and Jews, and "an atheist

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[1]Laud, I, 165; II, xvii; I, 111.

against all religions, and a sceptic against all reason."[1]

But the greatest peril these churchmen foresaw was the internal degeneration of Christian practice. Judgment, and mercy, and fidelity, says Hooker, are the essentials of the law. "These things we ought to do; and these things, while we contend about less, we leave undone. Happier are they whom the Lord when he cometh shall find 'doing' in these things, than disputing about 'Doctors, Elders, and Deacons.'" But unfortunately the attention of most men was focused hypnotically on the beam in their enemy's eye. The heady drink of virtuous hating had proved irresistible, and men were enjoying to the full the pleasures of religiosity. Taylor, recognizing this, objects with vigor that men "are so busy in trifles and such impertinencies...that they neglect the greater things of the law, charity, and compliances, and the gentleness of christian communion." In another place he again contrasts "trifles and impertinencies" with "those glorious precepts of christianity and holy life which are the glories of our religion." This misdirection of energy has set "all the world in factions, all damning one another, each party damned by all the rest." The Christian world, instead of being a vast and orderly brotherhood, a community of believers, has been reduced to chaos, to "a shambles and a perpetual butchery." And there

[1]Laud, II, xv; Chillingworth, p. 471. See Hooker, II, 21: "With our contentions their irreligious humour also is much strengthened. Nothing pleaseth them better than these manifold oppositions about the matter of religion, as well for that they have hereby the more opportunity to learn on one side how another may be oppugned, and so to weaken the credit of all unto themselves; as also because by this hot pursuit of lower controversies amongst men professing religion, and agreeing in the principal foundations thereof, they conceive hope that about the higher principles themselves time will cause altercation to grow."

is nothing in sight but everlasting persecutions and religious wars.[1]

This desire for unity and this recognition of Christian disintegration was not, of course, limited to the Anglicans. We have already seen Montaigne and Pascal making similar pleas and charges. Probably few Christians, if we except the not inconsiderable number of zealots and madmen, would have denied the proposition that unity is better than faction had it been put to them. But the all important questions were, what kind of unity? unity on whose terms? unity upon what basis? In the next chapter the Anglican answer to these questions will be worked out; here it is better to look at the prerequisites the Anglicans established, their conditions for an acceptable solution.

Conditions for a Satisfactory Solution of the Disunity Problem

Above all else the Anglicans insisted upon two main conditions, reasonableness and inclusiveness, truth and charity, and tried to strike a mean between their demands. Their attitude is seen strikingly in Laud's statement:

> I have no aim to displease any, nor any hope to please all. If I can help on to truth in the Church, and the peace of the Church together, I shall be glad, be it in any measure. Nor shall I spare to speak necessary truth out of too much love of peace; nor thrust on unnecessary truth to the breach of that peace which once broken is not so easily soldered again.

The check and balance character of this kind of thinking is patent, as is its coolness and control. Chillingworth agrees with Laud, emphasizing that unity can be bought at too dear a rate. It is obvious that dissension

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[1]Hooker, I, 170; Taylor, Works, V, 408, 362 and 518.

could be eliminated by submitting all to the direction of the "chief Mufti of the Turks," but somewhat questionable whether that would be advantageous to Christian religion. We cannot let our natural desire for peace sweep us beyond the pale of reason. And so Chillingworth concludes, "It were a thing much to be desired, that there were no divisions; yet difference of opinions...is rather to be chosen than unanimous concord in damned errors....Amica pax, magis amica veritas!"[1]

Underlying this insistence upon rationality is the realization that a solution has no permanent holding power unless it rests upon a rational base. In fact, Laud argues the case directly out of Aquinas. A true union must be anchored upon the "esse perfectum rei, the perfect essence of that thing." Any other union is ultimately worthless and cannot have in it "rationem boni, the true being and nature of good."[2]

But if a reasonable basis for unity is to be sought, it is imperative that men approach the task without passion and in a spirit of scholarly impartiality. What I am looking for, says Chillingworth, is the right way to salvation.

> But whether this way lie on the right hand, or the left, or straight forward; whether it be by following a living guide, or by seeking my direction in a book, or by hearkening to the secret whisper of some private spirit, to me it is indifferent. And he that is otherwise affected, and hath not a traveller's indifference...it is odds but he will take his desire that it should be so, for an assurance that it is so.

Decades earlier Hooker had made the same demand and had set before

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[1]Laud, II, xi; Chillingworth, p. 374.

[2]Laud, III, 412.

himself the task of determining what "the naked truth doth afford" according to "the light of sound and sincere judgment, without either cloud of prejudice, or mist of passionate affection." This is a part of the Anglican program—to question everything, to look carefully into all possibilities, neither to accept or reject anything without a searching examination.[1]

Nor did the Anglicans neglect the demands of the practical reason, but held that a solution must conform to the actual state of affairs. Practicality, common sense, pragmatism, call it what we will, is deeply engrained in the Anglican makeup. They accepted, of course, the permanent nature of the Reformation; but they accepted as well the success of the Roman Catholic counter-attack. As far as a formal union with Rome was concerned, they admitted its theoretical desirability, but did not believe it within the realm of the possible, and so did not spend a great deal of time discussing it. A perfect union could be reached, says Laud, "if some tenets of the Roman party, on the one side, and some deep and embittered disaffections on the other, have not made it impossible, as I much doubt [i.e., fear] they have."[2] Never were these thinkers seduced by the appeal of vague "if only's," or the lure of religious Utopias. They did not wait up nights for the Second Coming.

The second major Anglican condition was that the desired unity be built upon the broadest possible foundation. No system is valuable that does not furnish a means of binding together not only the various

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[1]Chillingworth, p. 18; Hooker, I, 171.

[2]Laud, III, 412.

Protestant sects, but also Christians everywhere, be they Roman, Anglican, Protestant, Greek, Abyssinian or whatever.

In defending himself against the charge of Lord Say and Seal that he was narrow-minded, Laud insisted that his eyes had ever been fixed upon "the whole Catholic Church of Christ, spread upon the face of the whole earth." Look to it, he warned the Puritans:

> certainly my comprehensions are not so narrow as theirs, whose largest cannot, or will not, look upon one entire national Church; nay, a parochial is too big for them, and a conventicle big enough. Nor did my "narrow comprehensions" ever reject that great body, the Catholic Church, out of the Creed, as some of late have done....

And in his private devotions Laud often prayed, "O eternal God and merciful Father, I humbly beseech Thee, bless Thy holy Catholic Church, wheresoever spread upon the face of the whole earth." This interest was neither merely personal nor academic. Rather it was a living principle which penetrated Anglican thought from beginning to end. The vision of the whole church, the church catholic existing in all lands under all forms, was always before the eyes of these men. Anything which operated to narrow the bounds of the church was firmly and unequivocally rejected.[1]

Anglican Independence: the Middle Way

These demands for impartiality in the search, rationality in approach and means, attention to the humanly possible, and recognition

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[1]Laud, VI, Pt. I, 88 and III, 7. See Donne, _Sermons_, II, 280: "And since the Church cannot be in one, in an unity, take heed of bringing it too neare that unity, to a paucity, to a few, to a separation, to a conventicle. The Church loves the name of Catholique; and it is a glorious, and an harmonious name."

that the whole church was of greater importance than any individual part set the Anglicans apart from all extremists. The Anglican was not a "true blue" Protestant, though he accepted fully the fact of the Reformation; nor was he Catholic in the limited sense of Rome. Rather he took for his guiding principle the old Christian claim, "Whatever is good, is ours." Anglican independence is exhibited and justified in Laud's fine declaration:

> no salvation must be possible, did it lie at their mercy, but in the communion of the one, and in the conventicles of the other; as if either of these now were, as the Donatists of old reputed themselves, the only men in whom Christ at His coming to judgment should find faith. No, saith S. Augustine, and so I say with him, Da veniam, non credimus, "Pardon us, I pray, we cannot believe it." The Catholic Church of Christ is neither Rome, nor a conventicle. Out of that there is no salvation, I easily confess it. But out of Rome there is, and out of a conventicle too; salvation is not shut up into such a narrow conclave....therefore, I have endeavoured to lay open those wider gates of the Catholic Church confined to no age, time or place....[1]

"Pardon us, I pray, we cannot believe it," is the invariable Anglican response to those who attempt to constrict the Church within any narrow walls. It is firm, but not impolite; gentle but unyielding.

Because the Anglicans adopted this moderate position, they cannot be considered party men. The whole of this paper will demonstrate the Anglican rejection of Rome; here we will glance at the Anglican attitude toward the Reformation and Protestant groups in general. While the Anglicans looked upon the Reformation as a worthy, even a necessary, development, they did not feel that it had any mysterious sanctity. In fact, the very conditions under which it was effected, the heat and

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[1] Laud, II, xvii.

turmoil of battle, the necessity for generating a force great enough to withstand the whole enormous pressure of the Roman Church, were likely to result in dangerous extremes. Laud presents the temperate Anglican view of the Reformation when he analyzes it as:

> so difficult a work, and subject to so many pretensions, that it is almost impossible but the reformers should step too far, or fall too short, in some smaller things or other; which, in regard of the far greater benefit coming by the reformation itself, may well be passed over and borne withal. But if there have been any wilful and gross errors, not so much in opinion as in fact, sacrilege too often pretending to reform superstition, — that is the crime of the reformers, not of the reformation; and they are long since gone to God to answer it, to whom I leave them.

But this leaves the Anglicans perfectly free to criticize Protestant positions which they consider erroneous. Chillingworth shows typical Anglican independence when he writes:

> Yet I would not be so mistaken, as if I thought the errors even of some protestants inconsiderable things, and matters of no moment. For the truth is, I am very fearful that some of their opinions...are too frequent occasions of our remissness, and slackness, in running the race of christian perfection....These errors, therefore, I do not elevate or extenuate; and, on condition the ruptures made by them might be composed, do heartily wish, that the cement were made of my dearest blood....

And so, too, Laud, while objecting to the limitations placed upon salvation by the Romanists, adds with caution, "nay, I doubt not but there are some Protestants, which can, and do, as stiffly and as churlishly deny them salvation, as they do us." Briefly, the Anglicans maintained that both sides had erred, and they agreed with no man's error.[1]

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[1]Laud, II, 173-74; Chillingworth, p. 290; Laud, II, 323. See also Hooker, I, 163 and Keble's emphasis of Hooker's independence in Hooker, I, lxxx.

The most striking exhibition of this spirit of independence and moderation is the Anglican refusal to reject the Church of Rome absolutely. Invectives against the "whore of Babylon" are not to be found in these writers. Rather they emphasized the fact that the Roman Church is a part of the Christian family. Taylor is typical when he argues that though the Romanists may be rebellious and mistaken children of the church, yet they are its children; "for they are consigned with the same baptism, profess the same faith delivered by the apostles, are erected in the same hope, and look for the same glory...."[1] The Anglicans also held that the separation was not made from Rome as she was a church, but as she failed in her duty. Laud says that Protestants have "not left the Church of Rome in her essence, but in her errors; not in the things which constitute a Church, but only in such abuses and corruptions as work toward the dissolution of a Church." This view was shared by all the Anglican writers.[2]

While not inclined to minimize what they considered to be serious corruptions in the Roman Church, the Anglicans saw no reason to magnify the differences. They could not, on the one hand, forget the common heritage, and commonly they spoke rather wistfully of days gone by, as Laud does: "The time was...that you and we were all of one belief....A division was made, yet so that both parts held the Creed, and other common principles of belief." And on the other hand, they were acutely aware of the dangers of Rome-baiting. As Hooker

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[1]Taylor, Works, V, 601. See also Laud, II, 144 and Hooker, I, 438.

[2]Laud, II, 213 and 152; Chillingworth, pp. 60 and 195; Hooker, I, 346-47; Heylyn, p. 19.

points out, many of the "jealousies, heart-burnings, jars and discords" among Protestants have resulted from a mad effort to surpass one another in rejecting everything Roman.[1]

As might be expected, such a middle position was not likely to be kindly received by those who held in a terrible sense the dictum, "He who is not with me, is against me." The middle way is inherently dangerous by the mere fact that it is in the middle, and consequently exposed to attack from two sides. No one was more fully aware of the danger than Laud himself. In the Preface to the Conference with Fisher he warns the king that the Church of England

> is in a hard condition. She professes the ancient Catholic faith, and yet the Romanist condemns her of novelty in her doctrine; she practices Church government as it hath been in use in all ages and all places...and yet the Separatist condemns her for Antichristianism in her discipline. The plain truth is, she is between these two factions, as between two millstones, and unless your Majesty look to it...she will be ground to powder....

At his trial years later Laud was made vividly aware of the truth of this analysis of the Anglican position. Attacked then as an enemy to the Protestant cause, he could only protest:

> And shall I suffer on both sides? Shall I be accounted an enemy by one part for opposing the papist, and accused for a traitor by the other for favouring and complying with them? Well, if I do suffer thus, 'tis but because truth usually lies between two extremes, and is beaten by both (as the poor Church of England is, at this day, by the papist and the separatist.)

In a later chapter we will document more fully the fact that the Anglicans were almost invariably looked upon as occupying a highly ambiguous position by those rigid theologians who insisted upon neat

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[1] Laud, II, 141; Hooker, I, 129.

categorizations.[1]

Yet in spite of all dangers and discouragements the Anglicans clung to the rule that the way of salvation must not be narrowed. They believed, in the words of Taylor, that

> to make the way to heaven straighter than God made it, or to deny to communicate with those with whom God will vouchsafe to be united, and to refuse our charity to those who have the same faith, because they have not all our opinions and believe not every thing necessary which we over-value, is impious and schismatical; it infers tyranny on one part, and persuades and tempts to uncharitableness and animosities on both....[2]

This "no narrowing of the gates" theme, which has already appeared several times in this chapter, will reappear time and time again in various contexts. It is one of the guiding lights of Anglican thought, a principle to which these thinkers constantly turned, and from which they gained new strength and conviction in times of need.

It is a principle which leads directly to emphasis on what Christians have in common. Chillingworth insists that peace and "unity of communion and charity" could be attained if men would only allow:

> that the way to heaven is not narrower now than Christ left it, his yoke no heavier than he made it; that the belief of no more difficulties is required now to salvation, than was in the primitive church...if, instead of being zealous papists, earnest calvinists, rigid lutherans, they would become themselves, and be content that others should be, plain and honest christians....

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[1]Laud, II, xiii and III, 415. These quotations may seem to violate my rule of disregarding matters of discipline. The Separatists actually objected to Laud on other grounds as well, but these quotations happen to be the clearest expressions of Laud's recognition of the dangers of the middle way.

[2]Taylor, Works, V, 601.

Over and over the Anglicans affirmed this point. Chillingworth argues that "christians must be taught to set a higher value upon these high points of faith and obedience wherein they agree, than upon these matters of less moment wherein they differ...." Could men but see clearly they would recognize that the forces which bind them together as Christians are greater by far than the disruptive forces which part them. So Laud insists that the religion of both Protestants and Roman Catholics is the same, namely the Christian religion. And Taylor deplores, in almost identical words, that men should look upon the different sects among Christians as different religions. All are "but pieces and minutes of christianity."[1]

At the end of his Conference with Fisher, Laud, then an elderly man labouring under the burden of many years, ceaseless activity and great cares, fused in his mind the ending of the book and the ending of his life. Confronted by approaching death, he tried to formulate the aims he had set before himself and the spirit in which he had tried to act. God be merciful, he prays, "Who knows that however in many weaknesses, yet I have with a faithful and single heart...laboured the meeting, the blessed meeting, of 'truth and peace' in His Church."[2] We too may take this ambition, the promotion of both truth and peace in the church, as the central Anglican concern. The desire for peace on a broad, practical, reasonable basis leads directly to the development of

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[1]Chillingworth, pp. 244 and 281; Laud, II, 417; Taylor, Works, V, 533-34.

[2]Laud, II, 429. For similar expressions see Laud, II, xi; III, 44 and 67.

the doctrine of fundamentals as the key to the whole problem, while the equally strong desire to maintain truth leads to the second great Anglican formulation, the belief that while no man is infallible, every man must use his reason. Upon the combination of these motives rests the whole Anglican case.

CHAPTER III

FUNDAMENTALS, FALLIBILITY AND REASON: ANGLICAN CORNERSTONES

The Distinction between Fundamental and Non-fundamental Articles

Nothing is more central to Anglican theology than the concept of the "fundamentals" of religion. Because, as we have seen, these thinkers wished to eliminate grounds of contention by focusing attention upon points held by all Christian bodies, they had the task of determining what those common principles were. "Nothing," says Donne, with typical Anglican distrust of zeal, "becomes a Christian better than sobriety; to make a true difference between upper buildings, and foundations, betweene collaterall doctrines, and Doctrines in the right line."[1] But pointing out the difference between doctrines necessary to be believed for salvation and those which are peripheral is not a radical or unusual procedure. Probably some such distinction is to be found in most Christian theologies. What distinguishes the Anglican effort is the way in which the distinctions were made, the broad and liberal nature of the points settled upon, and the consistency with which the Anglican teachers carried out the full implications of their stand.

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[1]Donne, Sermons, II, 204-205.

Curiously enough, considering the importance of the subject, the Anglicans were reluctant to specify what they considered fundamental. In the great running debates of the age the Roman theologians were eager to possess a list of points which the Anglicans would defend as fundamental. But this demand was resisted. Laud contents himself, if not his opponent, with the statement that points fundamental "are but the Creed, and some few, and those immediate, deductions from it." There are other fundamentals, such as the belief that Scripture is the infallible word of God, which are not in the Creed, but these according to Laud are obvious. Chillingworth speaks with the same kind of looseness when he says that the Creed is "a sufficient, or rather more than a sufficient summary of those points of faith which were of necessity to be believed actually and explicitly."[1]

The Anglicans hardly ever went beyond such generalities. In one place Chillingworth does give a list of points which he personally considers fundamental, but adds that it should not be taken as either official or binding. The list, which follows, is interesting because it shows what the Anglicans meant by immediate deductions:

> If any one should deny, that there is a God; that this God is omnipotent, omniscient, good, just, true, merciful, a rewarder of them that seek him, a punisher of them that obstinately offend him; that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world; that it is he, by obedience to whom men must look to be saved: if any man should deny either his birth, or passion, or resurrection, or ascension, or sitting at the right hand of God; his having all power given him in heaven and earth; that it is he whom God hath appointed to be judge of the quick and the dead; that all men shall rise again at the last day; that they which believe and

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[1]Laud, II, 370 and 51; Chillingworth, p. 87.

> repent shall be saved; that they which do not believe and repent shall be damned; if a man should hold that either the keeping of the mosaical law is necessary to salvation; or that good works are not necessary to salvation; in a word, if any man should obstinately contradict the truth of any thing plainly delivered in scripture....

Not only should it be noted that these propositions circumvent almost entirely the great theological quarrels of the day, but also special attention should be given to the final clause—plain delivery in Scripture is the measuring stick. Chillingworth maintains in many places that "those truths will be fundamental, which are evidently delivered in scripture, and commanded to be preached to all men."[1]

By means of this rule the Anglicans were, first of all, able to argue that if a fundamental point is by definition "evidently delivered," the mere fact that a doctrine is disputed throws doubt upon it. Chillingworth believes that there is "no more certain sign, that a point is not evident, than that honest and understanding and indifferent men, and such as give themselves liberty of judgment after a mature consideration of the matter, differ about it."[2] The importance of this attitude is obvious. It shifts the burden of proof upon those who go beyond the bare statements of the Creed; they must justify the necessity of their elaborations.

More important yet was the subtle investigation of the implications of "evidently" conducted by the Anglicans. What constitutes an evident or plain revelation? Their answer was: 1) that there is no set block of items absolutely necessary for every man's salvation; 2) that

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[1]Chillingworth, pp. 156 and 35.

[2]Chillingworth, p. 34. See Taylor, Works, V, 416.

there is in Christianity an absolute minimum standard of belief, a "foundation," denial of which alone separates a man entirely from the church.

The proposition that there is no established and unvariable block of things to be believed, explains the reluctance of the Anglicans to draw up lists of fundamentals. According to Laud, there must be "a latitude in the faith" with reference to the salvation of particular men. "To set bounds to this," he says, "and strictly to define it for particular men—Just thus far you must believe in every particular, or incur damnation—is no work for my pen." To establish a rigid model of belief is to forget that men differ vastly in abilities. "To whomsoever God hath given more, of him more shall be required," is about all we can say. God's gifts to men, "both ordinary and extraordinary," are so various that no man can legislate in matters of belief. In summary, says Laud, never will I "take upon me to express that tenet or opinion, the denial of the foundation only excepted, which may shut any Christian, the meanest, out of heaven."[1]

This same attention to the capabilities of men is also seen in the Anglican effort to make more precise the nature of deductions from articles. While evident deductions were sometimes put into the category of fundamentals, this was only in a secondary sense; for by definition, says Laud, "deductions are not prime and native principles; nor are superstructures foundations." Laud points out that most deductions, even if true, move from the foundation of belief, and that

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[1]Laud, II, 362 and 402-403.

"many millions of Christians go to heaven" without believing them explicitly. Such deductions, then, "may require necessary belief, in them which are able and do go along with them from the principle to the conclusion," but strictly speaking they are not fundamental. Taylor presents the same argument, and defends it by saying, "I see not how any man can justify the making the way to heaven narrower than Jesus Christ hath made it...." This does not mean that there is no substance to Christian belief; only that these theologians will not define that substance for all men.[1]

The Anglicans were forced to recognize, however, that there is a point beyond which no man can go and still be called a Christian. This absolute minimum of belief was the "foundation," which was conceived as the very heart of Christianity. Laud explains what is meant by the foundation when he writes:

> everything fundamental is not of like nearness to the foundation, nor of equal primeness in the faith. And my granting the Creed to be fundamental, doth not deny but that there are quaedam prima credibilia, "certain prime principles of faith," in the bosom whereof all other articles lay wrapped and folded up. One of which since Christ, is that of S. John: "Every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God." And one, both before the coming of Christ and since, is that of S. Paul: "He that comes to God, must believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek Him."

Taylor gives as the foundation Jesus Christ crucified, claiming that salvation was promised to those who held St. Peter's creed, "We believe and are sure that thou art Christ, the Son of the living God."

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[1]Laud, II, 32-33; Taylor, Works, V, 371.

"All other things," he continues, "are implicitly in the belief of the articles of God's veracity, and are not necessary in respect of the constitution of faith to be drawn out, but may lie in the bowels of the great articles without danger to any thing or any person." In brief, then, all the Anglicans actually demanded was belief in Christ.[1]

Because of the importance of these points, they are worth lingering upon for a moment. The whole argument is developed in an orderly and exact way by Chillingworth. He starts by applying the principle of "much given, much required; little given, little required." "To infants, deaf men, madmen, nothing, for aught we know, is given; and, if it be so, of them nothing shall be required." Simple as this seems, it solves the rather pressing question of the condition of unbaptised infants. Others may well have given to them only to know "that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek him." For them this will suffice for salvation. This is the lowest degree of faith for those who are at all capable of belief. Obviously here we have a basis for believing in salvation outside the Christian faith. Chillingworth hedges somewhat on this point:

> Now it is possible that they, which never heard of Christ, may seek God; therefore it is true, that even they shall please him, and be rewarded by him; I say rewarded, not with bringing them immediately to salvation without Christ, but with bringing them, according to his good pleasure, first, to faith in Christ, and so to salvation.

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[1]Laud, II, 50; Taylor, Works, V, 368. See also Taylor, Works, V, 370 and Hooker, I, 270: "The main drift of the whole New Testament is that which St. John setteth down as the purpose of his own history; 'These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is Christ the Son of God, and that in believing ye might have life through his name.'"

It could be argued that this is begging the question, but it should be realized that the question of salvation outside the Church is a theological puzzler. In general the Anglicans would say only that God is just and will not expect the impossible of man. Returning to Chillingworth—for those "to whom faith in Christ is sufficiently propounded, as necessary to salvation, to them it is simply necessary and fundamental to believe in Christ; that is, to expect remission of sins and salvation from him, upon the performance of the conditions he requires...." One of these conditions is that we believe what has been revealed by Him, when it has been sufficiently declared to us. But sufficient declaration is relative. A thing may be sufficiently revealed to one man, but not another. That point will, consequently, be both necessary and not-necessary. There can, then, be no list of fundamentals for all men. To ask for such a list is to request "a coat to fit all statues" or a "dial to serve all meridians."[1]

According to Chillingworth, and this is the point around which his entire book is built, the following practical rule will do:

> it is sufficient for any man's salvation to believe that the scripture is true, and contains all things necessary for salvation; and do his best endeavour to find and believe the true sense of it.[2]

This simple, undogmatic, highly liberal interpretation of the theological

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[1]Chillingworth, p. 196.

[2]Chillingworth, p. 198. See Hooker, I, 143: "Some things are so familiar and plain, that truth from falsehood, and good from evil, is most easily discerned in them, even by men of no deep capacity. And of that nature, for the most part, are things absolutely unto all men's salvation necessary, either to be held or denied, either to be done or avoided."

requisites for salvation was the basis of the Anglican case for universal Christian communion. Upon these broad principles, also, they built their conception of a church which abstains from dogmatic pronouncements as far as possible, which grants to the individual the freedom to believe what he can believe.

Human Fallibility

Fortunately for us the Anglicans had to defend their doctrine of fundamentals against the attacks of the Roman apologists. Their arguments reveal the structure of the Anglican mind, which is our primary interest. Now the argument for fundamentals broadly conceived depended upon the validity of the Anglican conception of a vast inclusive unity rather than proved it. But it was precisely this point which was at issue. Chillingworth states the basic difference with his usual clarity:

> to reduce christians to unity of communion, there are but two ways that may be conceived probable: the one, by taking away the diversity of opinions touching matters of religion; the other, by showing that the diversity of opinions, which is among the several sects of christians, ought to be no hindrance to their unity in communion.

The first way is valid only if it can "be made evident to all men, that God hath appointed some visible judge of controversies, to whose judgment all men are to submit themselves." No doubt such a judge would be desirable, but one may not argue that "it seems convenient there should be one judge of all controversies for the whole world; therefore God hath appointed one." On the contrary, the Anglican contention was that "we are able to demonstrate, that it hath not been

the pleasure of God to give to any man, or society of men, any such authority."[1]

The Anglicans, in other words, based their case on the demonstration of human fallibility in all contexts. And while the arguments were directed mainly against the Romanists, the principle was equally valid against any group which claimed a direct and infallible channel to the mind of God. One thinks of Hooker's fine aphorism, "Two things there are which trouble greatly these later times: one, that the Church of Rome cannot, another, that Geneva will not erre."[2]

The Anglican case was built up of many elaborate, involved, and unfortunately lengthy arguments. There is no reason for a full analysis of their defense here. What is important is the fact that distrust of human reason was one of the cornerstones of Anglican thought. By establishing this key point we can show that Browne was only following the leaders of his Church when he expressed a kind of "scepticism."

The Anglicans fashioned their argument against infallibility by a technique of elimination. If there is a principle or source of infallibility in the church, it must reside somewhere. By investigating all of the possibilities, and showing that in each case there was no basis for the claim, the Anglicans proved their case. In the following survey Taylor will bear the burden, since he alone treated this subject systematically. Laud and Chillingworth had to take up points as they arose in actual controversy, and unfortunately neither wrote much on some aspects of

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[1]Chillingworth, pp. 281 and 138.

[2]Hooker, I, 140 n. The phrase is a MSS annotation.

the question: Biblical interpretation, for example. Yet their essential agreement with Taylor is beyond doubt, since they accepted fully the consequence of the demonstration, namely that there is no infallibility in the church.

Complicated as the argument may be in its developed form, behind it all lies the simple generalization that all men can and do err. As Hooker advises, "Think ye are men, deem it not impossible for you to err; sift unpartially your own hearts, whether it be force of reason or vehemency of affection, which hath bred and still doth feed these opinions in you." And Taylor develops the point more fully, when he says that certainty would disappear if men would but "observe the infinite deceptions, and causes of deceptions, in wise men, and in most things, and in all doubtful questions, and...not mistake confidence for certainty." His defense of this "scepticism" is familiar to us. The truly wise man is hesitant; the ignorant alone are cocksure. "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil; but a fool rageth, and is confident," says Solomon, and so says Taylor too. He holds that "Peradventure yea, peradventure no, is very often the wisest determination of a question" and confesses frankly, "I find the more I search, the further I am from being satisfied, and make but few discoveries save of my own ignorance." Taylor then adds a touch which is quite charming and which illustrates beautifully the intellectual sophistication of these men:

> I think I have spoken reason in my book, and examined it with all the severity I have; and if after all this I be deceived, this confirms me in my first opinion, and becomes a new argument to me that I have spoken reason; for it furnishes me with a new instance that it is necessary there should be mutual compliance and toleration, because even

> then when a man thinks he hath most reason to be confident he may easily be deceived.

This sense of personal fallibility is quite characteristic of the Anglicans, and since their case was strengthened by the fact of human error, they accepted their own weakness calmly and without fear.[1]

The first possible source of religious infallibility and the most important was the Scriptures. Both sides agreed that the Scriptures are infallibly true. Of course, the Romanists argued that this could not be known without accepting the infallibility of their church. The Anglicans were able to answer this objection, but because the debate was within a Christian context, preferred to take it for granted.[2] But although the Scriptures are infallibly true, said the Anglicans, they must be read and interpreted by men who can err, and therefore, they cannot furnish an infallible rule to determine all uncertainties. Because Biblical interpretation will be of considerable importance when we examine Browne, the basic Anglican attitudes must be determined. Of course, on this particular point, they found no objections on the Roman side.

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[1]Hooker, I, 194; Taylor, Works, V, 359 and 362-363.

[2]Laud, II, 131; Chillingworth, p. 25. The Anglican case for the infallibility of Scriptures is in substance: belief in such infallibility rests mainly upon faith, and there is no single way of demonstrating its truth. Our conviction depends upon a combination of motives, the chief of which are: 1) the tradition and existence of the church, which operates as a "moral motive to belief" by persuading us to investigate the Bible with care; 2) the light of nature or natural reason which shows us the necessity for revelation and also convinces us of the reasonableness of the Christian teaching; 3) the light of the work itself "in conversing wherewith, we meet with the Spirit of God inwardly inclining our hearts." This too-brief summary is from Laud, II, 70-130. See also Chillingworth, pp. 81, 213 and 477.

Taylor first lays down the proposition that "by choice and industry no man can secure himself that in all the mysteries of religion taught in scripture he shall certainly understand and explicitly believe that sense that God intended." There is the fact of textual variants and corruptions. He does not try to extenuate in any way the confusion of the texts or the fact that a truly definitive edition is impossible. Rather he notes that "every variety of reading takes away a degree of certainty from any proposition derivative from those places so read." If it is objected that this implies that there is no certainty at all in the Bible, the Anglicans reply that we must trust in God to preserve the essential points of doctrine. Chillingworth argues that nothing can

> be more palpably inconsistent with his goodness, than to suffer scripture to be undiscernably corrupted in any matter of moment, and yet to exact of men the belief of those verities, which without their fault, or knowledge, or possibility of prevention, were defaced out of them. So that God requiring of men to believe scripture in its purity, engages himself to see it preserved in sufficient purity; and you need not fear but he will satisfy his engagement.

This insistence upon the necessity of assuming a reasonable God will be met often in Anglican thinking. Here the main point is that the Anglican case for concentration upon the broad principles of Christian belief is strengthened by textual uncertainty, for elaboration of that belief is not possible if the Scriptures are untrustworthy in points of detail.[1]

The Anglicans were also fully aware of the almost overwhelming difficulties of interpretation and showed no tendency whatever toward an over-simple literalism. There are in the Bible, claims Taylor,

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[1]Taylor, Works, V, 411-413; Chillingworth, p. 115.

both literal and spiritual senses, with the literal divided into the natural and the figurative; the spiritual, into allegorical and anagogical. He makes it plain that in adopting such divisions he is not blindly following an arbitrary system. Either some such system of variable interpretations is admitted or the much greater difficulty of out-and-out contradiction must be faced. This is not to say that he favors Alexandrine allegorizing. On the contrary, the Anglicans preferred the literal and evident, but were conscious of its limitations.

If it is granted that no one principle of interpretation is possible, it must also be granted by experience that there are very few places in the Bible which are not capable of "divers senses." We can never be sure whether a given passage is to be taken in a literal or a spiritual sense. And, Taylor is quick to observe, this difficulty arises in questions of "great concernment."

> I instance in that famous place from whence hath sprung that question of transubstantiation, Hoc est corpus meum; the words are plain and clear, apt to be understood in the literal sense; and yet this sense is so hard as it does violence to reason, and therefore it is the question whether or no it be not a figurative speech. But here what shall we have to determine it?

This is a clever example, working as it does against any Protestant leaning toward literalism; for here is a clear case of a literal reading which favors the Roman party. Taylor cites other texts in which a figurative reading must be adopted. We read, for example, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off"; yet observes Taylor with wry practicality, "we have figures enough to save a limb."[1]

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[1] Taylor, Works, V, 414 and 417. See Hooker, I, 147-149.

What today we would call the problem of semantics is also to be reckoned with. Words are by their very nature imprecise. Human understandings differ enormously from one another in native strength and are subject to many accidental influences. So human minds reacting upon words inevitably produce varying interpretations. The same words "seem to divers men, nay, to the same men upon divers occasions, to speak things extremely disparate, and sometimes contradictory, but very often of great variety." Turning to history for support, we find that the Scriptures have obviously provided no certain or even effective rule for the settling of theological disputes. Taylor points to twenty-six interpretations of the text "the sceptre should not depart from Judah till Shiloh come," twenty opinions on justification "all drawn from the scriptures, by the men only of the Anglican confession," sixteen opinions on original sin, "and as many definitions of the sacraments as there are sects of men that disagree about them." Reliance upon scripture as a means of settling such questions has obviously backfired, and "what was intended for a remedy becomes the promoter of our disease, and our meat becomes the matter of sickness."[1]

Taylor's summary and conclusion is worth quoting because it shows the extent of his criticism. It is contained in one of those magnificent but interminable seventeenth-century sentences which can never be quoted in full:

> since...there are in scripture many other mysteries and matters of question upon which there is a veil; since there

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[1]Taylor, Works, V, 419 and 426.

> are so many copies with infinite varieties of reading; since a various interpunction, a parenthesis, a letter, an accent, may much alter the sense; since some places have divers literal senses, many have spiritual, mystical, and allegorical meanings; since there are so many tropes, metonymies, ironies, hyperboles, proprieties and improprieties of language, whose understanding depends upon such circumstances that it is almost impossible to know its proper interpretation...since there are some mysteries which at the best advantage of expression are not easy to be apprehended, and whose explication by reason of our imperfections must needs be dark, sometimes weak, sometimes unintelligible; and lastly, since those ordinary means of expounding scripture, as searching the originals, conference of places, parity of reason, and analogy of faith, are all dubious, uncertain, and very fallible; he that is the wisest, and by consequence the likeliest to expound truest in all probability of reason, will be very far from confidence; because every one of these, and many more, are like so many degrees of improbability and incertainty, all depressing our certainty of finding out truth in such mysteries and amidst so many difficulties.[1]

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that this attitude toward scripture was the considered opinion of responsible Anglican theologians and formed an important part of their defense of "fundamentals alone important." What matter, says Taylor, if there are these difficulties, "since all agree in the articles of the creed as things clearly and plainly set down, and as containing all that which is of simple and prime necessity." What matter, says Laud in turn, that matters of lesser importance are obscure. A man may not be saved if he does not believe in the death and resurrection of Christ (although the cautious Anglican adds "in the ordinary way of salvation"), but he may easily be saved without knowing the truth of that which is necessarily obscure. And Chillingworth, who presents an argument similar to that of Taylor though less elaborate, maintains that this very uncertainty shows beyond doubt "that it is sufficient for any man's

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[1]Taylor, Works, V, 427.

salvation, that he believe the scripture; that he endeavour to believe it in the true sense of it...and that he conform his life unto it...."[1]

Because this last statement of Chillingworth contains a principle of great importance in understanding Browne, the point should be made more definite. Chillingworth says that everything in scripture is necessary to be believed because it is revealed. But this does not mean that everything is revealed because it is necessary to be believed. Of those places in scripture which are obscure, says Chillingworth:

> it is a matter of faith to believe that the sense of them, whatsoever it is, which was intended by God, is true; for he that doth not so, calls God's truth into question. But to believe this or that to be the true sense of them, or, to believe the true sense of them, and to avoid the false, is not necessary either to faith or salvation. For if God would have had his meaning in these places certainly known, how could it stand with his wisdom, to be so wanting to his own will and end, as to speak obscurely?

Here we see another important application of the "reasonable God" line of argument. But most important here is the distinction between believing the truth of a thing and believing that we know what that truth is.[2]

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[1]Taylor, Works, V, 427; Laud, II, 48; Chillingworth, pp. 65-66.

[2]Chillingworth, p. 156. I might add a general comment on the problem of scriptural interpretation. Willey has an interesting discussion of the topic in his The Seventeenth Century Background, pp. 65-80. But his statement of the problem is partial. For example, he sees the main difficulty in these terms: "How to fit a supernaturalist and poetic scripture into the new world-scheme, how to reconcile Jehovah with the ontologically-certified Dieu of Descartes...." While the importance of this aspect of the problem cannot be denied, it is also true that a critical study of scriptural interpretation was necessary on purely religious grounds, and was carried out by Anglican thinkers without any reference to the "new philosophy" or science. Taylor, for example, whose attitude toward interpretation was critical and highly sophisticated, had little if any contact with science. Again the pitfall of the single explanation has been insufficiantly avoided; undue emphasis has been placed upon a part of the intellectual background, leaving equally important motives completely in the dark.

Neither tradition nor the Fathers offer certainty. "Tradition," decides Taylor, "is a topic as fallible as any other, so fallible that it cannot be sufficient evidence to any man in a matter of faith or question of heresy." The Anglican belief was that tradition would be valuable, if it could be found. Taylor's argument in brief is that there has never been general agreement upon the true traditions of the church, that the Fathers who were historically in the best position to know these traditions disagreed radically about them, and that any real traditions have been irrevocably lost through the natural attrition of time. This last point is especially vivid to Taylor. In the present, he says, "all the particulars which time and infinite variety of human accidents have been amassing together are now concentred, and are united by way of constipation." Every generation, every political or religious upheaval, every distortion produced by local interests has obscured truth in this matter.[1]

The Anglicans treated the tradition of papal infallibility with special sharpness. Chillingworth argues that it is the existence of such a tradition that is at issue, not the abstract value of tradition. He is willing to believe if it can be shown to be a true tradition. But, he continues, "I hope you would not have me take...your word; for that were to build myself upon the church, and the church upon you. Let then the tradition appear; for a secret tradition is somewhat like a silent thunder." The

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[1]Taylor, Works, V, 429 and 432. See Hooker, I, 266.

Anglicans were fond of detecting examples of such obviously circular reasoning.[1]

While the Anglicans had great respect for the Fathers, they were temperamentally incapable of hero-worship. Not only were the works of the Fathers subject to the vagaries of time and corruption, but more important yet, the Fathers themselves were but men. Laud says that "no one of them durst think himself infallible, much less, that whatsoever he preached was the word of God." And Taylor adds shrewdly, "We look upon wise men that lived long ago with so much veneration and mistake, that we reverence them not for having been wise men, but that they lived long since." If we had lived in their day, he continues, "I suppose we should then have beheld them as we in England look on those prelates who are of great reputation for learning and sanctity." There was no reason to fall into the opposite extreme, as Milton did, of villifying or denigrating them. Taylor insists that he wishes to make "no invasion upon their great reputation, which I desire should be preserved as sacred as it ought," but merely to place them properly within the context of belief. They were men and erred seriously on occasion. They were men and spoke wisely and profoundly at times.[2]

The case against councils, in brief, was that they were composed

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[1]Chillingworth, p. 153. See Taylor, Works, V, 431: "it would be remembered that a concealed tradition was like a silent thunder, or a law not promulgated." Unless this figure was much more general than I imagine, this passage shows that Taylor had read Chillingworth rather closely.

[2]Taylor, Works, V, 488-490; Laud, II, 114; Taylor, Works, V, 487 and 519.

of men and consequently were subject to human error. Laud gives the Anglican argument:

> That since it is thus in nature and in civil bodies, if it be not so in ecclesiastical too, some reason must be given why; "for that body also consists of men;" those men, neither, all equal in their perfections of knowledge and judgment, whether acquired by industry, or rooted in nature, or infused by God;—not all equal, nor any one of them perfect and absolute, or freed from passion and human infirmities. Nor doth their meeting together make them infallible in all things; though the act which is hammered out by many together, must in reason be perfecter than that which is but the child of one man's sufficiency.

Taylor emphasizes the historical evidence when he discusses this topic. He who thinks that all councils followed reason and did not err "is a stranger to the history of the church, and to the perpetual instances and experiments of the faults and failings of humanity." After citing examples of positive error, Taylor exhibits Anglican pragmatism by saying, "All the arguments in the world... cannot make it so certain that they are infallible, as these two instances do prove infallibly that these were deceived." To argue in the face of fact is "but plain sophistry." And so much for councils.[1]

It does not seem worthwhile to go into the main question, the infallibility of the Pope, since all the grounds upon which the Roman Catholic case was built have been undermined by the preceding arguments. In practice, of course, the discussions of this point were exceedingly complex and lengthy. Every scriptural passage, every opinion of the Fathers, every conciliar decision was examined in detail, analyzed, and answered. History was carefully searched for examples

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[1]Laud, II, 253-254; Taylor, Works, V, 444 and 447.

of Papal errors. Disagreements between various schools of Roman theologians were skillfully exploited. But none of this bears upon our question.

The proposition that there is no principle within the church by means of which all controversies may be settled, was adapted to many purposes by the Anglican thinkers. Their conception of the nature of the church, their attitudes toward heresy and the freedom of the individual within the English Church, were all colored and modified by this recognition of human fallibility. Laud says:

> For the Church consists of men subject to error; and no one of them, since the Apostles' times, hath been assisted with so plentiful a measure of the Blessed Spirit, as to secure him from being deceived. And all the parts being liable to mistaking, and fallible, the whole cannot possibly be infallible in and of itself, and privileged from being deceived in some things or other.[1]

Later it will be shown how well he lived up to the implications of this statement.

The Necessity of Reason in Religious Thinking

Though the Anglican line of argument presented above is quite sceptical, indeed reminiscent at times of Montaigne, it would be highly misleading to think that the Anglicans were fideistic in tendency. They were attempting to determine the limitations of the reason and adjust their thinking to those limitations, not attempting to destroy reason completely. They were seeking the same tempered solution we have already found in Pascal and Browne. Hooker, for example, shows the

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[1]Laud, II, 77.

Anglican distrust of fideistic belief, when he says, "By these and the like disputes an opinion hath spread itself very far in the world, as if the way to be ripe in faith were to be raw in wit and judgment; as if reason were an enemy unto religion, childish simplicity the mother of ghostly and divine wisdom." All the Anglicans were convinced of the validity, indeed the necessity, of reason.[1]

This is not to say that they were "rationalists" in the rigid sense of the term. They recognized the primacy of faith, as all Christians must. Salvation is through faith not knowledge. Laud says clearly:

> But the way of knowledge was not that which God thought fittest for man's salvation. For man having sinned by pride, God thought fittest to humble him at the very root of the tree of knowledge, and make him deny his understanding, and submit to faith, or hazard his happiness.

Human reason simply cannot attain to a knowledge of those truths necessary for salvation, so, in Hooker's words, "The unsufficiency of the light of nature is by the light of Scripture so fully and so perfectly herein supplied, that further light than this hath added there doth not need unto that end."[2]

It is futile to speak of proving matters of faith or expecting the same kind of certainty in them as in matters of science, for they are different kinds of illumination. Faith, says Laud, is an evidence as well as a knowledge, and because it rests directly upon the veracity of God, is more certain than any human knowledge whatever. Yet the evidence for this certainty is never as clear as that of knowledge,

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[1]Hooker, I, 366.

[2]Laud, II, 123; Hooker, I, 331-332.

simply because the object of faith is "things not seen," and the subject sees "in a glass, or dark speaking." Indeed, if the principles of reason could demonstrate faith, "there would be no room for faith," no need really for revelation.[1]

But, as the quotation from Hooker above suggested, faith and reason are not contraries. Laud describes the relations of the two in this way:

> though reason without grace cannot see the way to heaven... yet grace is never placed but in a reasonable creature, and proves by the very seat which it hath taken up, that the end it hath is to be a spiritual eye-water, to make reason see what by "nature only it cannot," but never to blemish reason in that which it can, "comprehend." Now the use of reason is very general; and man, do what he can, is still apt to search and seek a reason why he will believe....

Since it is based upon the nature of man, this tendency is good in itself, dangerous only when a man "will use no other scale but reason, or prefer reason before any other scale."[2]

This view of the relation of faith and reason precludes the adoption of an extreme scepticism. Furthermore, the Anglicans were quick to observe that the destruction of reason would not solve any of the controversies, but merely transfer those quarrels to another ground. All that would be accomplished would be more confusion and the exaltation of somewhat questionable forces. The superiority of faith, as Chillingworth realizes, is not the issue. Both sides really

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[1]Laud, II, 100 and 118.

[2]Laud, II, 87-88. See Taylor, Golden Grove, p. 143: "Faith gives a new light to the soul, but it does not put our eyes out; and what God hath given us in our nature could never be intended as a snare to Religion, or engage us to believe a lie...."

grant that truth. But when a man has to make a choice, say between the Anglican and Roman communions, he can hardly decide by faith. He must choose one before the other because he sees that it is reasonable to do so. There is no alternative. "But you that would not have men follow their reason," Chillingworth challenges, "what would you have them follow? their passions? or pluck out their eyes, and go blindfold?" If it is answered that they must follow authority, the counter is obviously that the whole question concerns the nature of the authority to be followed. It is only pushing the question back a notch. In truth it is "a plain impossibility for any man to submit his reason but to reason; for he that doth it to authority, must of necessity think himself to have greater reason to believe that authority."[1]

The Roman Catholic apologists, continues Chillingworth, make a great deal of the dangers of private judgment. But the term is ambiguous. If by private judgment is meant an individual's conviction that he knows with absolute certainty all the truths of faith, then the Anglicans reject it as firmly as the Romanists. But if private judgment is merely "every man's particular reason," it cannot be eliminated. For if man's reason is rejected, religious questions must be resolved on grounds of "chance, and passion, and prejudice, and such other ways, which if they lead one to truth, they lead hundreds, nay thousands, to falsehood." Here we have in plain terms a rejection of the vagaries to which fideism leads.[2]

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[1]Chillingworth, pp. 150-151.

[2]Chillingworth, pp. 149-150. See Hooker, I, 143.

Further elaboration upon this point shows even more clearly the steady Anglican rejection of blind faith. Chillingworth defends reason in strong terms:

> For my part, I am certain, that God hath given us our reason, to discern between truth and falsehood; and he that makes not this use of it, but believes things he knows not why; I say, it is by chance that he believes the truth, and not by choice; and that I cannot but fear, that God will not accept of this "sacrifice of fools."

(It should perhaps be made clear that Chillingworth is addressing these remarks to scholars and men of learning. The whole debate presupposes scholarship; the simple and the ignorant are not subject to such conditions.)[1]

The immorality of rejecting reason was seen under two heads, the effect on men and the reflection upon God. As to the first, to surrender the reason and power of judgment is quite simply to destroy one's whole moral being, to un-man oneself. He who puts his rights into the hands of the Pope, for example, who "is firmly prepared in mind to believe and receive all such interpretations without judging of them, and though to his private judgment they seem unreasonable," is no longer a free moral agent. Either he is a mental slave, or, and this is more likely, in some degree or another, a hypocrite. Taylor emphasizes this danger of hypocrisy, arguing that if a man follows any guide against his reason, he is certainly sinning by maintaining "a hypocritical profession of truth, or a violent luxation of the understanding."[2]

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[1]Chillingworth, p. 150. For the salvation of the ignorant see Chillingworth, pp. 78 and 358; Laud, II, 314-316 and 349.

[2]Chillingworth, p. 285; Taylor, Works, V, 494.

Such a rejection of reason is also a reflection upon the wisdom of God, implying that God's creation is faulty. Laud insists that reason is a gift of God. "And certainly God did not give this admirable faculty of reasoning to the soul of man for any cause more prime than this, to discover, or to judge and allow, within the sphere of its own activity...of the way to Himself...." And Hooker had expressed the same conviction earlier:

> Nor let any man think that following the judgment of natural discretion in such cases we can have no assurance that we please God. For to the Author and God of our nature, how shall any operation proceeding in natural sort be in that respect unacceptable? The nature which himself hath given to work by he cannot but be delighted with, when we exercise the same any way without commandment of his to the contrary.

We either act like men and accept the privilege and responsibility of reason or we become beasts. Both Taylor and Hooker explicitly offer this choice, and Taylor adds, it is difficult to see that we have any duty to become "obediently blind and sottish."[1]

Anglicanism and the Learned Ignorance

This combination of attitudes, the necessity for dealing with matters of controversy by reason, and the recognition of the weakness and fallibility of that reason, is what we have spoken of earlier as the tempered solution. Again we have seen in operation the kind of mind which seeks to reconcile, which, highly conscious of the whole range of human experience, determines to construct a scheme which may sacrifice no aspect of truth. In fact the greater part of our case that

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[1]Laud, II, 91; Hooker, I, 297-298; Taylor, Works, V, 446. See also Hooker, I, 325.

Browne is in sympathy with the Anglican thinkers has now been made, for the attitude toward reason sketched out above is identical to that worked out earlier for Browne. Whatever we may choose to call this complex attitude, whether the learned ignorance, Christian scepticism, the tempered solution, the middle way, it is shared by Browne and the leaders of his church.

Some scholars have recognized more or less clearly that certain Anglicans possessed this type of mind. Battenhouse, for example, mentions Donne's praise of "a profitable, a wholesom, a learned ignorance," and on this basis connects Donne with the tradition of Nicolaus and Erasmus. Tulloch is not so explicit, but in speaking of Chillingworth, he says:

> There are certain minds—and Chillingworth's was one of them—that see difficulties in every argumentative form of doctrine. Their rational inquisitiveness makes them acutely sensitive to the limits of human knowledge in all directions; and the dogmatic meanings which human controversy has imposed upon the simple creed of the Gospel strongly repel and at times disturb them.... No Church heretofore has been so wise in this respect as the Church of England. Even Laud appreciated religious difficulties too well not to welcome such service as Chillingworth's....

But the easiest way of showing Anglican learned ignorance is to look at some of the direct consequences of their attitude toward reason. Here we will look briefly at the rejection of elaborate theologies, the turning toward ethics, and the inherent trust in the reasonable nature of God. All of these are perfectly characteristic of the kind of mind we are interested

in.[1]

One of the most characteristic marks of the Anglican thinkers was a deep mistrust, similar to that of Erasmus, of elaborate theologies. Taylor scorns utterly "pertinacious disputing about things unnecessary, undeterminable, and unprofitable." "How many volumes," he adds, "have been writ about angels, about immaculate conception, about original sin, when that all that is solid reason or clear revelation in all these three articles may be reasonably enough comprised in forty lines?" Chillingworth in turn defends vigorously the broad, non-dogmatic learning of the Anglican divines. "Because they fill not their brains with notions that signify nothing, to the utter extermination of all reason and common sense, and spend not an age in weaving and unweaving subtil cobwebs, fitter to catch flies than souls," they are looked down upon.[2]

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[1]Battenhouse, p. 225; Tulloch, I, 288-289. See Donne, Works, II, 373 for an excellent example of his recognition of the middle way between despair and presumption. See also Hooker, I, 201: "yet our soundest knowledge is to know that we know him not as indeed he is, neither can know him: and our safest eloquence concerning him is our silence, when we confess without confession that his glory is inexplicable, his greatness above our capacity and reach. He is above, and we upon earth; therefore it behoveth our words to be wary and few."

[2]Taylor, Works, V, 361-362; Chillingworth, p. 28. See Laud, II, 70 and Donne, Sermons, VIII, 146, where Donne objects against the same kind of complex and useless learning, "speculative and dazling, riddling and entangling perplexities of the Schoole, passionate, and uncharitable wranglings of Controverters." In this the Anglicans remind us of Erasmus. For example, Erasmus once wrote that "we have with much assurance, laid down certain laws in accordance with which God has performed His mysterious works; when at times it were better to accept the fact, but to leave the method to the Omnipotence of the Almighty." (Quoted in Christopher Hollis, Erasmus (Milwaukee, 1933), p. 51.) J. Huizinga, Erasmus (New York, 1924), p. 148, describes Erasmus' thought as marked by "a consciousness of the indefiniteness of the ground of all things...the awe of the ambiguity of all that is."

Because they believed that truth is impossible to attain in any but a broad and flexible sense, the Anglicans made almost a cult of simplicity. The greatest symbol of their desire for simplicity was the primitive church. To these men primitive Christianity was simple and undifferentiated. Time and time again they use it as a figure for the land of their heart's deepest desire. The ideal nature of their concept is apparent in Taylor's:

> The Ancients were nearer to the fountains Apostolical. Their stream was less pudled, their thred was not fine but plain and strong, they were troubled with fewer heresies; they were not so wittily mistaken as we have been since; they had better and more firm tradition, they had pass'd through fewer changes, and had been blended with fewer interests....their questions were concerning the biggest articles of Religion...their piety was great, their devotion high and pregnant, their discipline regular and sincere, their lives honest, their hearts simple....

It is even more apparent when Taylor contrasts early Christianity as "a simple profession of the articles of belief and a hearty prosecution of the rules of good life" with the present "when divinity is swelled up to so great a body, when the several questions which the peevishness and wantonness of sixteen ages have commenced, are concentred into one...."[1]

The desire for simplicity is also exhibited in the Anglican preference for the Apostles' Creed over later formularies. Although Taylor believes that the Nicene Creed embodies a true system of belief, he argues on constitutional grounds that the increased definiteness of that formulary is defective. The creed is best left in "naked original simplicity," for "those creeds are best which keep the very words of scripture; and that faith is best which hath greatest simplicity...."

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[1]Taylor, Golden Grove, p. 134; Taylor, Works, V, 516.

Every step taken from the general statements of the creed, every modification or deduction, every theological elaboration, leads us into the endless swamp of the uncertain and the questionable. Taylor, therefore, can argue with considerable shrewdness:

> But if this [i.e., the Apostles' Creed] was sufficient to bring men to heaven then, why not now? If the apostles admitted all to their communion that believed this creed, why shall we exclude any that preserve the same entire? why is not our faith of these articles of as much efficacy for bringing us to heaven as it was in the churches apostolical....?

In brief, these men belonged to that great anti-scholastic reaction of the Renaissance, but not to the fideistic branch of it.[1]

But if the doctrinal part of Christianity is thus simplified, almost inevitably greater emphasis will be placed upon the ethical side of religion. Taylor goes so far as to say that a good life is a surer means of discovering truth than any intellectual effort:

> A holy life will make our belief holy, if we consult not humanity and its imperfections in the choice of our religion, but search for truth without designs save only of acquiring heaven, and then be as careful to preserve charity as we were to get a point of faith; I am much persuaded we shall find out more truths by this means; or however, which is the main of all, we shall be secured though we miss them; and then we are well enough.

In this passage we find in germ the whole Anglican attitude toward heresy, which will be developed later. The Anglicans did not look upon religion as a series of truths to be reached, but primarily as an effort made. It is the quality of that effort, and the effect of belief upon action, which are important; the theological purity of that which is positively held in the circumference of the brain is of minor importance.[2]

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[1]Taylor, Works, V, 400, 406 and 373.

[2]Taylor, Works, V, 367.

Behind the whole of Anglican thought lies an implicit belief in a reasonable God, a God who according to Taylor, "disposes of all things sweetly and according to the nature and capacity of things and persons." This means that the whole scheme of religion must be humanly possible. The Anglicans did not, of course, attempt to reduce God to the human, but merely insisted that it is impious to think of Him as a tyrant. Chillingworth, for example, describes the moral dilemma produced by the theological rigidity of the Romanists in this way: "Neither is it credible the wiser sort of them should believe this their own horrid assertion, that a God of goodness should damn to eternal torments those that love him and love truth, for errors they fall into through human frailty!"[1]

No one handled this principle of God's reasonableness with more skill than Chillingworth. He uses it to defend the Anglican emphasis upon simplicity of doctrine in a striking passage:

> For to say, that when a place of scripture, by reason of ambiguous terms, lies indifferent between divers senses, whereof one is true, and the other is false, that God obliges men, under pain of damnation, not to mistake through error and human fraility, is to make God a tyrant; and to say, that he requires us certainly to attain that end, for the attaining whereof we have no certain means; which is to say, that, like Pharaoh, he gives no straw, and requires brick; that he reaps where he sows not; that he gathers where he strews not; that he will not be pleased with our utmost endeavours to please him, without full, and exact, and never-failing performance.... Which, whether it can consist with his goodness, with his wisdom, and with his word, I leave it to honest men to judge.

In another place he uses it to instill confidence in those men who are discouraged by the difficulty of attaining truth. It makes no difference,

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[1]Taylor, Works, V, 406; Chillingworth, p. iv.

he says. Even if in a given case reason and authority were both on one side, a man holding the contrary need not fear. We need only consider "the strange power that education and prejudices instilled by it have over even excellent understandings." And then we should reflect on God's goodness, for "God, who knows whereof we are made, and what passions we are subject unto, will compassionate such infirmities, and not enter into judgment with us for those things, which, all things considered, were unavoidable." This is extremely important with respect to Browne, for it explains that calm confidence in him which has proved puzzling to some critics.[1]

Finally the principle is used conspicuously by both Chillingworth and Hooker to argue against that Puritan tendency toward perfection which limited salvation to the "chosen." God, says Chillingworth, does not demand of us the highest degree of faith. "Though men are unreasonable, God requires not any thing but reason." Men always tend toward extremes; God is satisfied with slight bendings toward truth. He is satisfied if we attain that "degree of light" which leads us to abandon sin. Chillingworth is careful to add that he does not doubt that the certainty of faith may, by the gift of God, become stronger than any other certainty whatever, but "what God gives as a reward to believers, is one thing; and what he requires of all men as their duty, is another; and what he will accept of, out of grace and favour, is yet another."[2]

If this whole argument be valid, that God will accept what men can

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[1]Chillingworth, pp. 146-147 and 200.

[2]Chillingworth, pp. 81-82. See Hooker, I, 322-323 for a similar argument.

do, and that men can attain only a limited understanding of divine matters, it necessarily follows that only the Anglican doctrine of communion in essentials and freedom and tolerance in speculative matters fits the facts. Why, the Anglicans ask with Chillingworth, "should men be more rigid than God? Why should any error exclude any man from the church's communion, which will not deprive him of eternal salvation?" And from this follows the negative proposition that "whosoever requires harder or heavier conditions of men than God requires of them, he it is that is properly an enemy of the church's universality." This latter constitutes the main Anglican objection to the Church of Rome, and indirectly to any church group which insists upon conforming to a rigid and definite theology.[1]

As a summary of the Anglican position I would like to quote from Donne's remarkable "Satyre III," which contains a virtual abstract of the whole.[2] The problem posed is "seeke true religion. O where?" First the extremes of Rome and Geneva are rejected, a clear enough indication of the famous middle way. But then we find, surprisingly enough, these lines:

> Graius stayes still at home here, and because
> Some Preachers, vile ambitious bauds, and lawes
> Still new like fashions, bid him think that shee
> Which dwels with us, is onely perfect, hee
> Imbraceth her, whom his Godfathers will
> Tender to him, being tender, as Wards still
> Take such wives as their Guardians offer, or
> Pay valewes.

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[1]Chillingworth, pp. 281 and 233.

[2]"Satyre III" is quoted from John Donne: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose, ed. John Hayward (Bloomsbury, 1929), p. 129.

Closely examined, this is not an attack on the Church of England, but rather a rejection of those whose provinciality prevents them from seeing beyond the Channel to the Church of Christ in all lands. It is furthermore a rejection of the view that the English Church, or any other church, is perfect. Finally, it is a reaffirmation of the necessity for reason rather than a sheep-like following of custom.

In following verses Donne dissects those who through either indifference or disappointment in not finding perfection, equate all churches. Finally he presents the positive Anglican program. "Though truth and falsehood bee/ Neare twins, yet truth a little elder is." This is a fine example of the Anglican confidence in the validity of reason modified by the recognition of the slender line separating truth from error. Then follow the lines:

> Be busie to seeke her, beleeve mee this,
> Hee's not of none, nor worst, that seekes the best.
> To adore, or scorne an image, or protest,
> May all be bad; doubt wisely; in strange way
> To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;
> To sleepe, or runne wrong, is. On a huge hill,
> Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will
> Reach her, about must, and about must goe;
> And what the hills suddennes resists, winne so;
> Yet strive so, that before age, deaths twilight,
> Thy Soule rest, for none can worke in that night.

With these views Chillingworth, Laud and Taylor would agree fully, as this chapter has attempted to show.

Permanized
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RAG CONTENT

CHAPTER IV

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

After having blocked out the main lines of Anglican thought, we can now focus more directly on the church which was shaped by an application of those principles. To begin with, the implications of the fallibility of the church will be amplified by an examination of the Anglican conception of the place of the English Church within the whole Christian scheme. This will lead to the final Anglican attitudes toward controversy and heresy, which in turn will determine rather exactly the degree of theological freedom granted the individual church member. Finally, after proving the highly liberal nature of this doctrine of personal freedom in dogmatic matters, we will survey rapidly the main binding force within the Church of England, the emphasis upon uniformity of worship.

The Particular and Erring Church: Its Implications

Since Anglican practicality demanded at all times that solutions to religious problems be rooted in facts, the medieval ideal of the universal church as a formal organization was displaced by the idea of the particular national church as the fundamental ecclesiastical unit. Laud argues that since Christ left the government of the church in the hands of the Apostles jointly, He intended from the very beginning an aristocratic rather than a monarchical system of rule. He substantiates

this theory by appealing to the practice of the primitive church, the impossibility of Rome ever making good its great claims, and the obvious political fact that a monarchical church cannot exist in a world wherein national rulers jealously guard their sovereignty.[1] In Anglican thought what cannot be, need not be.

Laud also holds that, although each church receives its "essence and being of a church from the definition of the Catholic Universal Church of Christ," the latter has no actual existence except as it is embodied in particular churches. Therefore, he is able to describe the relations between the various existing churches in this way:

> the Roman Church and the Church of England are but two distinct members of that Catholic Church which is spread over the face of the earth. Therefore Rome is not the house where the Church dwells; but Rome itself, as well as other particular churches, dwells in this great universal house....I come a little lower. Rome and other national Churches are in this universal catholic house as so many daughters, to whom, under Christ, the care of the household is committed by God the Father, and the Catholic Church the mother of all Christians.

Laud is fond of this daughters figure and uses it often, for it conveys simultaneously the ideas of common origin, basic similarity, intimate connection, and actual independence. This last is essential. Because the universal church has "equal existence" in all particular churches, each church must be left free to chart its own course and regulate its own internal affairs. Hooker describes the relationship between churches by a figure which emphasizes especially this independence when he compares them to "divers families" rather than "divers servants of

[1]Laud, II, 221.

one family."[1]

The question then arises, on what basis do we recognize any particular national organization as a legitimate church? Here the Anglicans applied the principle of the foundation to good purpose. A true church is simply one which denies not Christ. Hooker says that "all men are of necessity either Christians or not Christians. If by external profession they be Christians, then are they of the visible Church of Christ." The only "object" which separates Christians and non-Christians is "Jesus Christ, in whom none but the Church doth believe and whom none but the Church doth worship." Working from such a belief, Laud can say that though the Greek Church has erred grievously, it is yet a true church, for "every error denies not Christ, the foundation; or makes Christ deny it, or thrust it from the foundation."[2]

The Anglicans neither accepted every church as being of equal value nor were wholly indifferent to the doctrinal content of the various churches. Rather they recognized that being and truth in this context are convertible terms; a "false" church is simply no church, and they refused to judge so strictly any body which served Christ. "Right," on the other hand, refers to "perfection in conditions," and since both the Greek and Roman Churches erred seriously, neither was a right or fully acceptable church. Yet, the point is that the Anglicans did not

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[1]Laud, II, 410 and 346; Hooker, I, 475. See also Chillingworth, p. 58 and Hooker, I, 351.

[2]Hooker, I, 342 and 368; Laud, II, 26.

deny communion to any true church. One of the finest expressions of this charitable view is Taylor's: "For what is it to me if the Greek church denies procession of the third Person from the second, so she will give me the right hand of fellowship though I affirm it...."[1]

It is naturally imperative that the hand of friendship be extended by both parties. The Anglicans could not communicate fully with Rome, because the Romanists would not do their share. Here as elsewhere friendship must be based upon equality. Although the Anglicans disliked many Roman doctrines, they made it clear that they would be willing to formulate a working agreement with Rome, if Rome in turn would relent somewhat. Chillingworth says that the reason for the separation is "not so much because you maintain errors and corruptions, as because you impose them, and will allow your communion to none but to those that will hold them with you."[2] Of course, to the Puritan this gesture of conditional friendship was a betrayal of truth and the Protestant cause.

This Anglican emphasis upon mutual toleration grounded upon the will to unite rather than upon doctrinal purity is striking. The reason for it is not far to seek. It is a direct consequence of the axiom that the church is not infallible and the corollary that no one church is infallible either. We have touched upon this point earlier, but it is important enough to receive more attention.

In only one quite limited sense is the church infallible. Although, says Laud, "the Church is constituted of men, and _humanum est errare_,"

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[1] Laud, II, 143 and 24; Taylor, _Works_, V, 603.

[2] Chillingworth, p. 358.

the Holy Catholic Church of the creed cannot err, for then it would no longer be holy. Yet this admission is of no more than theoretical value, since the church in question is the mystical body of Christ, comprising the whole militant church on earth—which as we have seen is the aggregate of all believing bodies but without formal organization—and also the church triumphant in heaven. The church militant itself is only imperfectly holy, "inasmuch as all sanctification, all holiness, is imperfect in this life, as well in churches as in men."[1]

Consequently, the nearest approach to infallibility in the earthly church is but this, "that the whole militant Church of Christ cannot fall away into general apostasy," that is, cannot disappear. Laud repeats this idea when he explains that the Gospel promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church means only "they shall not prevail to make the Church Catholic apostatize, and fall quite away from Christ, or err in absolute fundamentals, which amounts to as much." But it is enough that some body of believers somewhere hold the truth; men have no way whatever of telling whether they or their church are in truth or error. Chillingworth concurs in this interpretation, fraught as it is with so many consequences bearing on personal freedom, when he says that the infallibility of the church does not mean:

> that some society of christians, which may be known by adhering to some one head, for example, the pope, or the bishop of Constantinople, is infallible in these things; but only thus, that true religion shall never be so driven out of the world, but that it shall always, somewhere or other, have some that believe and profess it, in all things necessary to salvation.

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[1]Laud, II, 157. See Hooker, I, 338.

Obviously demands for conformity, followed by persecution of those who differ, cannot be made if a church is unsure of the soundness of its own position. This belief in the church's fallibility was one of the English Church's greatest contributions to the cause of toleration.[1]

The modesty of the Anglican claim is somewhat staggering if looked at in detail. It is, in the first place, limited to fundamentals. The whole church may very well err in all else. As Laud says:

> for aught I yet see, the whole Church militant hath no greater warrant against not erring in, than against not knowing of, the points of divine truth.... And if she may be ignorant or mistaken in learning of any point of divine truth, doubtless in that state of ignorance she may both err, and teach her error; yea, and teach that to be divine truth which is not; nay, perhaps teach that as a matter of divine truth which is contrary to divine truth, always provided it be not in any point simply fundamental.

If this be the extent of the infallibility of the whole militant church, how much more slippery and equivocal must be the state of the particular church. Laud accepts this conclusion, saying bluntly, if you desire to "rely upon a particular infallible Church, it is not to be found on earth."[2]

We have spoken earlier of the Anglican desire for the inclusion of all believers within the faith. This motive, combined with the recognition of the imperfection of the church, resulted in a concept which was anathema to the Puritan. Whereas the Puritans thought of the church as an assembly of the elect, a chosen body separated from the wicked, the Anglicans saw rather a mixed assembly wherein both the chosen and those to be rejected gather until God makes the final separation. Men

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[1]Laud, II, 158 and 180; Chillingworth, p. 160.

[2]Laud, II, 179 and 23.

are not in the church because they are saved but that they may be saved. Laud, for instance, quotes St. Augustine with approval, "There are bad fish in the net of the Lord, from which there must be ever a separation in heart and in manners; but a corporal separation must be expected at the sea-shore, that is, the end of the world," and adds, "And the best fish that are, must not tear and break the net, because the bad are with them." Hooker agrees with this declaration and indeed uses the same simile.[1]

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of this clash of concepts. Anglicans and Puritans were so far apart in their ways of looking at the basic meaning and structure of the church that no compromise was possible. Even if they had understood the issues clearly, they could have reached no solution, for here there is no middle path. To the Puritan the Anglican practice was abominable, a betrayal of the purity of the church, a surrender to Mammon. To the Anglican the Puritan ideal was impossible and uncharitable. One example will illustrate the difference. Hooker defends prayers for earthly things on the ground that while a perfect man would not perhaps wish to pray for them, the church must look after the interests and needs of the mediocre. "But the tender kindness of the Church of God it very well beseemeth to help the weaker sort, which are by so great odds moe in number, although some few of the perfecter and stronger may be therewith for a time displeased."[2] Talk of this sort was

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[1]Laud, II, 164; Hooker, I, 342. See also Taylor, Works, VI, 345-347; Hooker, I, 151; and Donne, Works, II, 371.

[2]Hooker, II, 153.

foolishness to the Puritan. Later we shall take up this theme when we speak of the Anglican system of worship, but for our immediate purposes the main importance of the Anglican theory of the church outlined above lies in the attitude toward heresy which developed from it.

The Anglican Attitude toward Controversies and Heresy

The Anglican solution of the problem of controversies was exceedingly simple. Laud gives the following summary:

> He hath left an infallible rule, the Scripture. And that, by the manifest places in it which need no dispute, no external judge, is able to settle unity and certainty of belief in necessaries to salvation; and in non necessariis... there ought not to be a contention to a separation.

Chillingworth dismisses things not necessary in an even more off-handed way, saying of such controversies, "If others were continued or increased, it were no matter."[1]

The Anglicans sought to place religious controversy in its proper perspective; they did not attempt to eliminate it. They saw, with that practical sense which never failed them, that it was impossible to demand that men be of one mind in all things. As Taylor says, since men have by nature "such variety of principles, such several constitutions, educations, tempers and distempers, hopes, interests, and weaknesses, degrees of light and degrees of understanding," difference is inevitable. Laud speaks in the same vein, when he says of non-essentials, "if about them Christian men do differ, it is no more than they have done, more or less, in all ages of the Church...." It would

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[1]Laud, II, 218; Chillingworth, p. 107.

no doubt be pleasant if there were complete agreement, "but this cannot be hoped for till the Church be triumphant over all human frailties, which here hang thick and close about her."[1]

All that is left for men is to make the best of things as they are, to accept differences. The Anglicans saw no great difficulty in such a program. After all the mere fact of differences was not the root of the troubles of the time. Taylor makes this point clear:

> All these mischiefs proceed not from this, that all men are not of one mind, for that is neither necessary nor possible, but that every opinion is made an article of faith, every article is a ground of a quarrel, every quarrel makes a faction, every faction is zealous, and all zeal pretends for God, and whatsoever is for God cannot be too much.[2]

Against this zeal the Anglicans placed the distinction between necessary and incidental. By definition the non-necessary is subsidiary; whether we are right or wrong about such points is to God indifferent.

This last is a key point, for it shifts the whole emphasis from the realm of fact to that of attitude. Speculative matters, Chillingworth reminds his opponents, are non-spatial; we do not hold opinions in the same way we own land:

> I may hold my opinion, and do you no wrong; and you yours, and do me none: nay, we may both of us hold our opinion, and yet do ourselves no harm; provided the difference be not touching any thing necessary to salvation, and that we love truth so well, as to be diligent to inform our conscience, and constant in following it.

Since no man can be sure that he is holding true beliefs, it is absurd to demand truth of him. In controversy, says Chillingworth, "if we,

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[1]Taylor, Works, V, 366; Laud, II, 400.

[2]Taylor, Works, V, 368.

using diligence to find the truth, do yet miss of it and fall into error, there is no danger in it. They that err, and they that do not err, may both be saved." Taylor, in fact, goes so far as to say that there are many positive values in the obscurity of Scripture. God left the Scriptures obscure and mysterious in details

> as trials of our industry, and arguments of our imperfections, and incentives to the longings after heaven and the clearest revelations of eternity, and as occasions and opportunities of our mutual charity and toleration to each other and humility in ourselves....

The main point is that the actual truth of specific doctrines was not considered as important as the spirit in which they were held.[1]

The most important application of this line of reasoning was in the question of heresy. As might be expected, the Anglicans were loath to call anyone heretical. Their "sceptical" hesitancy, based upon the difficulty of knowing the truth, is seen in Laud's declaration:

> It ought to be no easy thing to condemn a man of heresy in foundation of faith; much less a Church....Heaven gates were not so easily shut against the multitudes, when S. Peter wore the keyes at his own girdle. And it is good counsel which Alphonsus a Castro...gives: "Let them consider, that pronounce easily of heresy, how easy it is for themselves to err."[2]

If a man does not deny outright a fundamental of faith, such as the divinity of Christ, it is difficult to convict him of heresy, for in other matters we have to take into account the possibilities both of error on our part and inculpable error on the part of the "heretic."

For the Anglicans heresy could only be looked upon as an erroneous

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[1] Chillingworth, pp. 114 and 112; Taylor, Works, V, 410.

[2] Laud, II, 29.

disposition, not a positive error. Taylor says directly that "heresy is not an error of the understanding but an error of the will," an opinion shared by Hooker. To neglect this fact, continues Taylor, is to miss the meaning of Christianity, to confuse it with philosophy. Christianity is a system of belief leading to right living. "To live well is the product of that believing, and as proper emanation from it as from its proper principle, and as heat is from the fire." Heresy to the Anglicans is basically a sin of pride, of preferring one's personal constructions to the belief of the church without sufficient reason, of deliberately turning away from the great body of believers and breaking Christian unity. So, says Taylor, a man is heretical if we see in him "a design of ambition, and making of a sect," or motives of peevishness or greed. But even here we must be wary, for it is easy to see such imperfections in those with whom we disagree. Taylor insists so strongly upon motivation as the determinant that he claims that a man may be a heretic while believing the truth. In a remarkable passage he explains:

> A wicked person in his error becomes heretic, when the good man in the same error shall have all the rewards of faith. For whatever an ill man believes, if he therefore believe it because it serves his own ends, be his belief true or false, the man hath an heretical mind, for to serve his own ends his mind is prepared to believe a lie. But a good man that believes what according to his light, and upon the use of his moral industry, he thinks true, whether he hits upon the right or no, because he hath a mind desirous of truth and prepared to believe every truth, is therefore acceptable to God because nothing hindered him from it but what he could not help, his misery and his weakness....

From whatever point they start the Anglicans returned to this point: a man who is prepared to believe the truth and tries to find truth, is safe

and no heretic.[1]

There is little room for persecution in the Anglican scheme. If heresy is a matter of motivation and hence interior, clearly there is no way in which it can be proved. In the historical situation in which they were placed, the Anglicans could not champion unlimited religious freedom. However, they at least set up a framework which demanded such freedom. In purely speculative matters, Taylor argues, "which end in notion and ineffective contemplation," men should abstain from compulsion and let God take what course He will. Compulsion is to be avoided because we can never be certain that we are not unawares persecuting truth. As Taylor observes:

> it is very disproportionable for a man to persecute another certainly for a proposition, that if he were wise he would know it is not certain; at least the other person may innocently be uncertain of it. If he be killed, he is certainly killed; but if he be called heretic, it is not so certain that he is a heretic.

We do much better, argues Taylor, to confine our punishments to those overt acts which are crimes in a civil sense and to let the uncertain and difficult cases of conscience pass safely through our hands.[2]

Of course, and this is an aspect of the question frequently overlooked, a program such as this cannot be put into effective operation unless individuals cooperate with it. If a man held his opinion as opinion only, if he were not disposed to see in himself or his faction the absolute and unalterable truth, if he would grant the possibility

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[1]Taylor, Works, V, 382; Hooker, I, 370; Taylor, Works, V, 383-384 and 397. See also Laud, II, 351.

[2]Taylor, Works, V, 517. See also V, 511, 520 and 346.

that he might be in error, if he were willing in short to offer the Anglican Church the same kind of toleration that the Church held out to him, the bishops would not interfere with him. However, if he maintained that the Church was absolutely wrong, and attempted to overthrow or subvert it, then obviously he was an enemy to both church and freedom. In such a case the English Church would claim the right of self defense and would suppress him. If Anglican reasoning holds true, an individual has no more right to persecute or demand conformity than does an organized body.

The Church of England and Its Members

Thus far only the general enunciations of Anglican policy have been looked at. However, as every student of religious history knows, it is easy for men to be liberal when debating, somewhat more difficult to carry out their fine principles into church work. Yet the demands made by English churchmen of members of their church reflect the same principles, the same spirit.

As a guiding rule for the government of the church Laud proposes this simple rule:

> the Scripture, where it is plain, should guide the Church; and the Church, where there is doubt or difficulty, should expound the Scripture; yet so, as neither the Scripture should be forced, nor the Church so bound up, as that upon just and farther evidence she may not revise that which in any case hath slipped by her.

Here are the familiar topics of fundamentals and imperfection. The major role of the church, that of expounding, does not suggest much rigidity, while the door is left open for change. In a personal confession

of faith, which would presumably be adequate for any church member, Laud gives in capsule form the bases of Anglican belief:

> to believe the Scripture and the Creeds, to believe these in the sense of the ancient primitive Church, to receive the four great General Councils so much magnified by antiquity, to believe all points of doctrine, generally received as fundamental in the Church of Christ....

This emphasizes the predominately conservative nature of Anglican belief, but as we have seen, the "sense of the ancient primitive Church" merely means the theologically simple and undefined.[1]

But by law the Church of England was bound to maintain the specific formulations known as the Thirty-nine Articles (1562 in Latin; Englished in 1571). Here is the real test of the consistency of Anglican thought. Before discussing the position taken by Laud with regard to these articles, it should be observed that they are in themselves rather ambiguous. W. A. Curtis describes them in this manner:

> The makers of the Anglican Articles at every stage cherished a statesmanlike desire, fostered assiduously both by the political sagacity of successive sovereigns and by the balance of conservative and liberal theological parties in Church and State to remain in touch with Catholic as distinct from Papist tradition, at every possible point, while keeping in line with the primary evangelical positions of the Reformed Churches. Theological initiative or originality was neither displayed nor coveted....The Articles are scarcely a system of ordered doctrine: upon many important topics they are silent.

Although it can be held that the Articles are moderately Calvinistic, it is generally admitted that they need not be so interpreted. Bicknell

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[1]Laud, II, xv and 361. See Chillingworth, p. 33, for a similar confession.

observes that the best evidence of the barely Calvinistic nature of the Articles is that the Puritans were never satisfied with them. In 1572 they sent admonitions to Parliament protesting their theological inadequacy. In 1595 the highly Calvinistic Lambeth Articles were written by Puritan divines as a more accurate formulary of belief than the Articles, and again the Puritans asked for changes at the Hampton Court Conference of 1604. One need only compare the Lambeth Articles with the Thirty-nine Articles to appreciate the difference between full-blown Calvinism and a set of theological formulations so moderate that they can hardly be denominated.[1]

But even this moderate and ambiguous set of formulations seemed too rigid for Anglican tastes. Laud clearly states that the Church does not require complete acceptance or rigid adherence. His statement is:

> I did not say, that the Book of Articles only was the continent of the Church of England's public doctrine. She is not so narrow, nor hath she purpose to exclude anything which she acknowledges hers, nor doth she wittingly permit any crossing of her public declarations; yet she is not such a shrew to her children as to deny her blessing, or denounce an anathema against them, if some peaceably dissent in some particulars remoter from the foundation....

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[1]W. A. Curtis in Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. "Confessions." E. J. Bicknell, A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, rev. H. J. Carpenter (London, 1955), p. 17, for reference; pp. 7-20, for a brief history of the Articles. Tulloch, I, 42, agrees fully with this interpretation of the nature of the Articles, while Sir David Lindsay Keir, The Constitutional History of Modern Britain (London, 1948), pp. 87-91, covers the opposition of the Puritans in Parliament. See The Creeds of Christendom, ed. Philip Schaff (New York, 1919), III, 486-516 and 523-525, for scholarly texts of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Lambeth Articles respectively. See also Keble's Preface to Hooker's Works, I, cx-cxiv, for an analysis of Hooker's objections to and modifications of the Lambeth Articles.

He goes on to explain that the Church does not excommunicate those who hold beliefs contrary to the Articles, but only those who "affirm that the Articles are in any part superstitious, or erroneous." It is one thing, says Laud, to disagree with an article and quite another to say that the position expressed in that article is certainly wrong. The Church of England does not claim that the Articles are necessarily fundamental, merely that they are possible.[1]

Furthermore, Laud gives members of the Church full liberty to take advantage of the vagueness of the Articles, as well as the option of accepting them in a general sense only. He says:

> All consent, in all ages, as far as I have observed, to an Article or Canon, is to itself, as it is laid down in the body of it; and if it bear more senses than one, it is lawful for any man to choose what sense his judgment directs him to, so that it be a sense _secundum analogiam fidei_; and that he hold it peaceably, without distracting the Church; and this till the Church, which made the Article, determine a sense. And the wisdom of the Church hath been in all ages, or the most, to require consent to Articles in general, as much as may be, because that is the way of unity; and the Church in high points requiring assent to particulars, hath been rent.

So liberal is this concept of the meaning of subscription that Chillingworth is able to say, in a work approved by Laud and accepted by the Anglican Church as a major theological contribution, that subscription means only:

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[1]Laud, II, 59-60. See _Anglicanism_, ed. More and Cross, p. 186, for Bishop Bramhall's statement: "We do not suffer any man 'to reject' the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England 'at his pleasure'; yet neither do we look upon them as essentials of saving faith...but in a mean, as pious opinions fitted for the preservation of unity. Neither do we oblige any man to believe them but only not to contradict them." Bramhall's dates are 1594-1663.

> that the constant doctrine of it [i.e., the English Church] is so pure and orthodox, that whosoever believes it, and lives according to it, undoubtedly he shall be saved; and that there is no error in it, which may necessitate or warrant any man to disturb the peace, or renounce the communion of it.

Obviously Chillingworth is following here the Laudian interpretation, for his statement is far from claiming that the Articles are all true.[1]

Under the terms of this view of subscription it is difficult to see how the Articles could trouble the conscience of any uncommitted Christian. Only those who believed in the necessity of more definite, less liberal theological definition could object. In other words, the Articles so interpreted constitute a bulwark of religious freedom. To take an extreme and hypothetical case, there seems to be no reason why a man could not believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation and yet subscribe. It is true that Article XXVIII reads in part, "Transubstantiation...in the Supper of the Lorde, can not be proued by holye writ, but is repugnaunt to the playne wordes of scripture, ouerthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath geuen occasion to many superstitions." If the believer in transubstantiation, however, admitted that he might be wrong, that the position of the Article was possibly true, and that those who held such a view had solid grounds for their belief, he could yet hold the contrary without violating the Laudian spirit of subscription. A Roman Catholic, of course, could not subscribe, since in holding transubstantiation true, he must also believe that all other theories of the Eucharist are absolutely false.

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[1] Laud, VI, Pt. I, 12; Chillingworth, p. 36.

Permanized
ARTESIAN BOND

It is difficult to imagine how the Church of England could have made more modest doctrinal claims. All that the Church really demands is that it be granted the possibility of being right. To be sure, the Anglicans pointed out that church members should follow the teachings of the Church unless they could prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that it had erred in a fundamental point. Nothing less serious justifies the breaking of unity. Donne warns:

> Take heed therefore of going on with thine own inventions, thine owne imaginations, for this is no following; Take heed of accompanying the beginners of Heresies & Schismes; for these are no followings where none have gone before.... And therefore to follow Christ doctrinally, is to embrace those Doctrins, in which his Church hath walked from the beginning, and not to vexe thyselfe with new points, not necessary to salvation.

But this is only a way of making vivid the Anglican argument that the individual must constantly be aware of his personal weakness and never illogically set up fallible man as superior to the admittedly fallible church. No restriction is placed upon the right of an individual to hold dissenting opinions, but he is prevented from imposing his private views upon the Church or re-modeling Christianity to the pattern of his own mind. Laud makes this distinction by saying that "it is one thing for a private man...to prefer and so follow his private judgment before the whole congregation...and quite another for an intelligent man, and in some things unsatisfied, modestly to propose his doubts even to the Catholic Church." A "right sober man" may dispute questions of religion with any prelate or church whatever, "so it be with modesty, and for the finding out or confirming of truth, free from

vanity and purposed opposition against even a particular church."[1]

Furthermore, the public teaching of the Church was marked by the same tolerance toward theological differences. Anglican theologians assiduously refrained from extending definitions beyond the simple and obvious. This may be observed in such controversial matters as the nature of the Eucharist and the meaning of Christ's descent into hell. Donne gives the Anglican rule:

> we must abstain from inquiring _de modo_, how such or such things are done in many points, in which it is necessary to us to know that such things are done: as the manner of Christ's presence in the sacrament, and the manner of Christ's descent into hell, for those are _arcana imperii_, secrets of state, for the manner is secret, though the thing be evident in the Scriptures.

Concerning the Eucharist the Anglicans held, in the words of Laud, that "the worthy receiver is, by his faith, made spiritually partaker of the 'true and real Body and Blood of Christ, truly and really,' and of all the benefits of His Passion." Rather than investigating the mechanisms involved, they preferred to meditate upon the wonder of the mystery. Typical is Hooker's contrasting the joy of the Apostles when they received the first communion with the futility of prying questions. "They had at that time a sea of comfort and joy to wade in, and we by that which they did are taught that this heavenly food is given for the satisfying of our empty souls, and not for the exercising of our curious and subtle wits." So also Taylor, "It was happy with christendom when she in this article retained the same simplicity...that is, to believe the

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[1]Donne, _Sermons_, II, 299; Laud, II, 154-155. See also Chillingworth, p. 396 and Heylyn, p. 40.

thing heartily, and not to enquire curiously."[1]

The same intention to bypass the complexities of theology is seen in Laud's stand on the Descent into Hell topic. He merely says that "the Church of England takes the words as they are in the Creed, and believes them without farther dispute..." But he adds immediately:

> And yet if any in the Church of England should not be thoroughly resolved in the sense of this article.../he may say/ "I conceive thus or thus of it; yet if any other way of His descent be found truer than this, I deny it not, but as yet I know no other."[2]

It should be noted that the Anglicans did not forbid theological speculation, but asked only that such theorizing be recognized as theorizing and not imposed upon any man or church as dogma.

In summary, it must be admitted, I believe, that the Anglicans carried their general principles of dogmatic simplicity and the right of every man to follow his own reason into their own church. Perhaps no church of the period was more liberal in this respect. But upon one point the Anglicans were unyielding, and that was the necessity of an orderly and beautiful form of public worship. Here they would not compromise.

Anglican Worship

While the Puritans objected to many of the dogmatic positions of the Anglicans, their full fury was reserved for the Anglican mode of

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[1]Donne, Works, III, 84; Laud, II, 320-321; Hooker, II, 351; Taylor, VI, 11. See also Taylor, Golden Grove, p. 21; Hooker, II, 348 and 350-354; Laud, II, 320-330.

[2]Laud, II, 53-54.

worship. Anglican insistence upon uniformity of public worship according to the set forms of the Prayer Book was the immediate cause of Laud's downfall and one of the most important direct causes of the Civil War. Yet despite their recognition of the hatred which was being stirred up against them, the leaders of the English Church budged not a bit.

It might seem that a discussion of this topic would lead far afield. But, as a matter of fact, nothing more clearly illustrates the flavor of Anglicanism. Here, of course, is a subject much less exact than dogmatic theology and consequently more difficult to discuss. But it gives insight into the feelings, the emotional response of these thinkers. This is not to suggest that Anglican reasonableness will not be evident. On the contrary, no other subject furnishes such a classic example of the middle way. Yet there will appear in the Anglicans a rare aesthetic quality which will be relevant in studying Browne.

When Laud was attacked in Parliament for promoting "Popish or superstitious ceremonies," he replied by outlining the Anglican concept of worship. "But all that I laboured for in this particular," he says, "was, that the external worship of God in this Church might be kept up in uniformity and decency, and in some beauty of holiness." And in defending the validity of this purpose he clings stubbornly to the proposition that man being a creature composed of body and soul, both parts must be taken into consideration by the Church.[1]

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[1]Laud, III, 407-408. Laud also argued that the slovenly condition of English churches prevented many wavering Romanists from coming over to the Church. While this point has practical importance, it is not worth a full discussion here.

This view is especially interesting, since it indicates a basic difference between Anglican and Puritan thought. Addleshaw has characterized the predominant Protestant attitude toward worship in terms which are certainly true of the Puritans:

> It has thought of "spiritual" as something opposite to "material"; the latter is evil and can have no part in worship. Worship is a matter of the mind and soul; there is no place in it for bodily actions, the beauty of nature or man's creations.

There is neither this austerity nor this almost Manichean dualism in Anglicanism, for the Anglicans believed that the body influences the soul just as the soul affects the body. Furthermore, there is implicit in their whole attitude the view that the body and the material in general are good, a view that we have previously investigated from the point of view of Christian science. "For my own part," says Laud, "I take myself bound to worship with body as well as in soul, whenever I come where God is worshipped."[1]

One reason the Anglicans fought so valiantly for their form of worship was that they realized that many or most church members were not spiritual athletes. Those devices, therefore, which helped simple men to raise themselves above their ordinary state were to be encouraged. Laud claims on the basis of practical experience that "with the contempt of the outward worship of God, the inward fell away

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[1]Addleshaw, p. 16. Laud, VI, Pt. I, 56. For excellent presentations of this view of Puritanism see Dowden, Puritan and Anglican, pp. 6-14, and Herbert J. C. Grierson, Cross Currents in English Literature of the XVIIth Century (London, 1929), pp. 184-189. Addleshaw, p. 21, points out that during the Protectorate the Puritans forbade even the use of the Lord's Prayer.

apace, and profaneness began boldly to show itself." There is no doubt in Laud's mind that ceremonies and outward forms are secondary, that "the inward worship of the heart is the great service of God, and no service acceptable without it." But an orderly and artistically designed liturgy aids this essential worship by encouraging in men feelings of awe, wonder and devotion. Church art, music, vestments, fragrant prayers, bodily motions such as bowing and kneeling create the most effective and reverent atmosphere for prayer and praise. So we find Hooker, for example, arguing that while it is true that God does not care where we worship, the place of worship is nevertheless important, for

> the very majesty and holiness of the place, where God is worshipped, hath in regard to us great virtue, force and efficacy, for that it serveth as a sensible help to stir up devotion, and in that respect no doubt bettereth even our holiest and best actions in this kind.

And Chillingworth, in turn, bases the need for ceremonial on the grounds of fear and hope:

> fear that too much simplicity and nakedness in the public service of God, may beget in the ordinary sort of men a dull and stupid irreverence; and out of hope, that the outward state and glory of it, being well-disposed, and wisely moderated, may engender, quicken, increase, and nourish the inward reverence, respect and devotion which is due unto God's sovereign majesty and power.

These reasons, for the Anglicans, were compelling.[1]

But one is conscious in reading the Anglican defenses that there

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[1]Laud, III, 408 and II, xvi; Hooker, II, 57; Chillingworth, p. 30. For the power of set forms to symbolize Christian unity see Hooker, II, 29. For the power of ceremonies to edify see also Hooker, I, 419; Donne, *Sermons*, VIII, 228; and Taylor, *Golden Grove*, p. 138.

was also at work an instinctive dislike of austerity and bareness. These men were deeply shocked by the Puritan conviction that beauty and grace are superfluous, and never really understood the type of mind opposing them. Laud can barely contain his disgust, "a barn with them is as good as a church; and no church holy with them, but that which is slovenly even to nastiness...." And in another place, "But this is the misery, 'tis superstition now-a-days for any man to come with more reverence into a church, than a tinker and his bitch come into an ale-house." That men should desire to destroy the beauty of worship was ultimately incomprehensible to the Anglicans, whose love of beauty was as deep as their love of truth. Their feelings are expressed in a lament of Taylor's, written after the Puritan victory:

> I shall onely crave leave that I may remember Jerusalem and call to minde the pleasure of the Temple, the order of her services, the beauty of her buildings, the sweetness of her songs, the decency of her Ministrations, the assiduity and Oeconomy of her Priests and Levites, the daily sacrifice, and that eternal fire of devotion that went not out by day nor by night; these were the pleasures of our peace...

Donne shared this love of beauty, for as Walton tells us the first thing he did when made Dean of St. Paul's was to repair and beautify the church. Walton also quotes Donne as saying:

> O the power of Church-musick! that Harmony added to this Hymn has raised the Affections of my heart, and quickned my graces of zeal and gratitude; and I observe, that I always return from paying this publick duty of Prayer and Praise to God, with an unexpressible tranquillity of mind, and a willingness to leave the world.

Between this sensitivity to all aspects of art, this deeply felt response to sensible impressions, and the Puritan ideal of Christian life as a

battle and pilgrimage there was no middle way.[1]

This basic difference in outlook meant that the Puritans and Anglicans could not even understand one another when they debated the question. One detects at times in the Anglican apologists the feeling that they are not coming to grips with the real issue. The formal charges of the Puritans, that ceremonies were popish and that they were impositions upon the exercise of the free spirit, were easily enough answered. But behind these lay depths the Anglicans could not penetrate. The answer to the objection of popish superstition was obvious. Laud says:

> I would have them remember that we live in a Church reformed, not in one made new. Now all reformation that is good and orderly takes away nothing from the old, but that which is faulty and erroneous. If anything be good, it leaves that standing.

And as a matter of fact, continues Laud, there is a great deal of good in the Roman services. "For every line in the Mass-book, or other popish rituals, are not all evil and corruptions. There are many good prayers in them; nor is anything evil in them, only because 'tis there." Hooker held the same view in his generation. When it was suggested that the Roman extreme of rich ceremonial should be counteracted by Protestant bareness, he drily remarked, "He that will take away extreme

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[1]Laud, VI, Pt. I, 107 and 57; Taylor, Golden Grove, p. 6; Izaak Walton, The Lives... (London, 1956), pp. 55 and 62. For the actual condition of English churches in the period see Adair, p. 124. See also the corroborating evidence of Bishop Hall, a strict Calvinist and no friend to Laud, in Kinloch, p. 120. For the Puritan concept of pilgrimage see William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism (New York, 1929), pp. 142-145.

heat by setting the body in extremity of cold, shall undoubtedly remove the disease, but together with it the diseased too." In brief, here as elsewhere the Anglicans refused to be stampeded into extreme positions out of mere blind distrust of Rome.[1]

But Anglican conservatism was tempered by moderation. Although Laud says that "the less alteration is made in the public ancient service of the Church, the better it is," he does not approve of over-indulgence even of a good thing. So concerning ceremonies the rule is, again according to Laud, "Too many overburden the service of God, and too few leave it naked." Donne uses the same figure, which indeed was the standard Anglican one, when he says, "so the Church of God, is not beyond sea, as that we must needs seek it there, either in a painted Church on one side, or in a naked Church on another..."[2]

The second Puritan objection, that set services limit too severely the free gifts of God in individuals, appeared to the Anglicans pure sophistry. They considered it dangerous because they were aware that if carried out to its logical conclusions, it would mean that every man was his own church. But said the Anglicans, if a distinction is made

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[1]Laud, III, 341; Hooker, I, 442. See also Husain, pp. 35-38 for similar views in Donne.

[2]Laud, III, 341 and II, xvi; Donne quoted in Husain, p. 10. See Hooker, II, 60 for Anglican conservatism in this matter. The Anglicans presented impressive arguments that their view of ceremonies was the historical position of the English Church. Certainly the preface "Of Ceremonies" in the Prayer Book (1559) supports this claim. For text of the preface see Liturgical Services...in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, ed. William K. Clay, Parker Society (Cambridge, Eng., 1847), pp. 36-38. Heylyn, p. 4, and Laud, VI, Pt. I, 58 give good summaries of the Anglican argument from history.

between private prayer and public prayer, there is no problem. To set up unvarying forms of public worship "for unity and decency in that external worship" denies no man the right of praying in whatever way he desires in private. All persons, Laud points out, are "free to use any form of prayer agreeable to the foundations of Christian religion, which shall best serve their several private occasions."[1]

Again the Anglicans stiffened at the thought of the graceful language of the Book of Common Prayer giving way to outpourings of the private spirit. Hooker is typical when he begs men to consider:

> the grievous and scandalous inconveniences whereunto they make themselves daily subject, with whom any blind and secret corner is judged a fit house of common prayer; the manifold confusions which they fall into where every man's private spirit and gift (as they term it) is the only Bishop that ordaineth him to this ministry; the irksome deformities whereby through endless and senseless effusions of indigested prayers they oftentimes disgrace in the most unsufferable manner the worthiest part of Christian duty toward God, who herein are subject to no certain order, but pray both what and how they list.

Laud likewise protests "the bold and impudent attempts of weavers, cobblers, and felt-makers, taking on them to preach without knowledge, warrant, or calling." He is deeply perturbed at "what froth and base stuff is preached to the consciences of men." There is in this no doubt something of pride, for the Anglicans were learned and cultivated men who shared the Renaissance contempt for the "vulgar" when the latter poached on their preserves. But it is also the anguished protest of men for whom religion was a thing of beauty as well as a source of instruction. Services were looked upon as means of symbolizing the glory of God and

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[1]Laud, VI, Pt. I, 97. See Hooker, II, 27 and 116-117; Taylor, _Works_, V, 299; and Addleshaw, p. 32.

therefore were deemed worthy of adornment.[1]

What Dowden says of George Herbert is true in some degree of the Anglicans in general: "He needed grace and refinement as incentives and he needed for repose some chastened order made sensible. The parish music of voices accompanied with viol and flute sufficed to lift him above all temporal cares." Although on most points they were willing to compromise, they could not turn from their artistic recreations of Jerusalem the beautiful to the harsh bareness of a conventicle. That would have been a betrayal of their conception of the church, for each could have said with Herbert:

> I joy, dear Mother, when I view
> Thy perfect lineaments and hue
> Both sweet and bright.
> Beauty in thee takes up her place,
> And dates her letter from thy face,
> When she doth write.

This joy they would not surrender.[2]

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[1]Hooker, II, 121; Laud, VI, Pt. I, 100 and 103.

[2]Dowden, Puritan and Anglican, p. 108; George Herbert, The Works of ..., ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1941), p. 109. For a picture of Anglican devotion at its most charming, see the treatments of Herbert in Dowden, Puritan and Anglican, pp. 97-120, and Margaret Bottrall, George Herbert (London, 1954), pp. 62-63 and 70-73. See also in Herbert's A Priest to the Temple, "The Parson's Church" for his middle way in church furnishings, and "The Parson's Condescending" for his love of old customs and his typically Anglican remark, "If there be any ill in the custome, that may be severed from the good, he pares the apple, and gives them the clean to feed on." (Works, pp. 246 and 283.) Herbert's love for church music is reported by both Walton and Barnabas Olney in Bottrall, pp. 42-43, and his own "Church-Musick" with the line "sweetest of sweets, I thank you...." is even more impressive testimony. (Works, p. 65.)

CHAPTER V

THE REPUTATION OF THE ANGLICANS

That Browne was viewed in his own day as being somewhat ambiguous religiously is merely an additional proof of his Anglicanism, for the whole group of Anglican thinkers fell under the same shadow. Those who had girded up their loins for the defense of pure religion did not know what to make of these gentle and questioning theologians who were so ready to admit the weaknesses their church shared with all earthly churches, who smilingly granted that they might err as easily as their opponents. When men were stirring up their souls to a pitch of effort by convincing themselves of their absolute rightness, the drily intellectual analysis of religious differences made by Anglican thinkers seemed outrageous. As Hooker remarked, "Coldness, which in other contentions may be thought to proceed from moderation" is not in religious matters "so favourably construed." With wry logic he dissects the Puritan zeal:

> For there are divers motives drawing men to favour mightily those opinions, wherein their persuasions are but weakly settled; and if the passions of the mind be strong, they easily sophisticate the understanding; they make it apt to believe upon very slender warrant, and to imagine infallible truth where scarce any probable show appeareth.[1]

But those who felt the might of the Holy Spirit welling through their bones and blood had little patience with "probable show" or with those who

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[1]Hooker, II, p. 4.

maintained it. To such men the Anglicans were trimmers at best, but more probably hidden enemies chipping away at the faith by means of their questions and qualifications. The poised aloofness and intellectual sophistication of these Anglicans, their quiet but persistent "Peradventure, yea; peradventure, no," at first troubled and finally enraged their passionate contemporaries.

All of the Anglicans hitherto considered were viewed with suspicion by the religious patriots of the age. Although the usual formal charge was Popery, with Arminianism running a close second, the real accusation was lack of enthusiasm, failure to accept fully the extreme Protestant cause. Certainly the Romanist charge is without substance; in a Roman Catholic environment the Anglicans would surely have met the same suspicious stares and lack of understanding.

Because these men could not be neatly labelled, they were thought to have hidden motives in all they said or did. The writers of the "Christian Letter" of 1599 discover such a secret purpose in Hooker, namely:

> to make questionable and bring in contempt the doctrine and faith itselfe. For we saw the theme and the cause you have in hand to be notable simples, whereof a skilful popishe apoticarie can readilie make some fine potion or sweete smelling ointment, to bring heedlesse men into the pleasant dreame of <u>well-weening</u>, while they closelie set on fire the house of God.

In 1614 Dr. Robert Abbott, brother of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, preached directly against Laud at Oxford, reaching a climax in the presumptuous question:

> Might not Christ say...What art thou, ROMISH or ENGLISH? PAPIST or PROTESTANT? Or what art thou? A Mungrel or compound of both...? What, do you think there are two

> Heavens? If there be, get you to the other, and place your selves there, for into this where I am ye shall not come.

The argument, such as it is, supposes that there is no middle way, that nothing but bare extremes exist or are possible. Even Bishop Hall, a more tolerant and intelligent man than Abbott, seems to have held the same view. Puzzled rather than vindictive, he pleads with Laud: "I would I knew where to find you: today you are with the Romanists, tomorrow with us; our adversaries think you ours, and we theirs.... How long will you halt in this indifference?" Mere association with Laud, as in the case of Taylor, was enough to make a man suspect, while Chillingworth's breadth and his temporary conversion to Rome made him a prime target.[1]

It would be a mistake to treat these charges merely as examples of the uninhibited controversial style of the day. Hall was patently sincere, and the other accusers were in their intense manner deeply shocked. The Calvinists saw such a sharp line of cleavage between truth and error that they could no more understand the Anglican type, than the political zealots of the latter part of the century could understand the moderation of Halifax.[2]

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[1]Hooker, I, xix, for quotation from "Christian Letter"; Heylyn, p. 67, for Abbott; and Kinloch, p. 33, for Hall. See Heber in Taylor, Works, I, xx, for the aura of distrust which surrounded Taylor and for the argument that it was mainly his connection with Laud which caused it. For Chillingworth see Tulloch, I, 269: "It was Chillingworth's fate to be thoroughly misunderstood by religious blockheads and partisans on both sides. Blind Papist and blind Puritan alike feared and disliked him." Husain, pp. 1 and 18, shows that Donne has likewise been accounted wavering, especially by modern scholars.

[2]See Thomas Babington Macaulay, The History of England from the Accession of James II in Works, I, 193, for an excellent sketch of the character of Halifax.

That the Anglicans were hidden Roman Catholics is so obviously false that it needs no refutation, but the charge that they were Arminian is more interesting and significant. In practice the Puritans found Arminianism and Roman Catholicism barely distinguishable, which is in itself a commentary upon their powers of discrimination. For example, in the Parliament of 1629 an unnamed member had this to say:

> I desire that we may consider the increase of Arminianism, an error that maketh the grace of God lackey it after the will of man; that maketh the sheep to keep the shepherd, and makes mortal seed of an immortal God. I desire that we look into the very belly and bowels of this Trojan Horse, to see if there be not in it men ready to open the gates to Roman tyranny and Spanish monarchy: for an Arminian is the spawn of a Papist....

In the same Parliament a Remonstrance was presented, protesting the "dayly growth and spreading of the Faction of the Arminians, that being...but a cunning way to bring in Popery." In this document Laud was specifically named a "principal patron" of the group.[1]

Despite this emotional and unfounded identification of Arminianism and Roman Catholicism, the Puritans were correct in seeing a similarity between the Remonstrant and Anglican movements. To investigate the nature of this similarity will widen the base of the argument by placing Anglicanism more exactly in the historical context of general European religious history. The feelings of the Anglicans toward this sister movement will furnish another example, and a striking one, of Anglican independence. Finally, it is possible that Browne came into contact with Arminian thought while he was a student at Leyden, and a brief

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[1]Duncan-Jones, pp. 113-114; Heylyn, p. 181.

survey of Arminius will be of interest for that reason.[1]

The essence of the religious attitude of Arminius is to be found in an evaluation of him made in 1623 by his disciple Simon Episcopius:

> Being a man of prudence and mild in spirit, he perceived that those Churches were distracted and separated from each other in many ways, and that in these days neither measure nor end was observed in making secessions; that endeavours were therefore to be used to induce the contending parties to lay aside animosity, and to sing a funeral song over their unnecessary enmities and quarrels; that every exertion was then to be employed, to take an accurate account of such doctrines as are absolutely necessary, and each party to confine itself within those limits; that, with regard to all the rest, whatever was capable of being tolerated, or did not hinder salvation, should receive toleration; that the rule of Prudence and Charity alone is sufficient for this purpose; and that, without these, continual strife and hatred must be perpetuated, which would cause the tears of the Church afresh to flow.[2]

The resemblance of this plan in aim, method and spirit to that followed by Anglican thinkers is remarkable. Here once again the desire for unity furnishes the main motivation, while the means to that unity are

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[1]Arminius was a professor of divinity at Leyden, and that city was for many years the center of Arminian influence. Although the Remonstrants went into exile after the Synod of Dort (1619), they were permitted to return in 1630. Their influence became widespread and produced in Holland a rare climate of toleration. Browne attended the University of Leyden in 1633. I think it very likely that he met and conversed with Arminian thinkers. This is, of course, conjectural, but it is not unreasonable. For the return of the Arminians to Holland, see Jordan, pp. 348-49. For the reputation of the University of Leyden for tolerance in this period, see H. John McLachlan, Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England (Oxford, 1951), pp. 34-35. Browne's year at Leyden is discussed by Finch, pp. 75-88, mainly from the viewpoint of his medical studies.

[2]Quoted in The Works of James Arminius, ed. and trans. James Nichols (London, 1825), I, xviii. Hereafter referred to as Arminius, Works.

the holding fast to fundamentals and freedom in all secondary matters.

Nichols believes that Arminius' revulsion from dissension and his great love for peace and unity lie at the center of his whole theology. Certainly few thinkers have valued unity more highly. For Arminius union is in his own words, "the chief good and therefore the only one." Unity is no superficial end, but the force which preserves all things in being. "For all things together, and each thing separately, are what they are by that very thing by which they are one; and, by this union, they are preserved in what they really are." With such an ideal of unity before his eyes, he was naturally driven almost to distraction by the divisions within the Christian world. "Either human ignorance or human perversity," he says, has corrupted Christianity. Separation splits men into parties "and even into shreds of parties, in direct contradiction to the nature and genius of Christianity." While professing himself well pleased with the Reformation in general, he adds "yet I cannot dissemble the intense grief which I feel at my heart on account of that religious discord which has been festering like a gangrene..."[1]

In his Fifth Oration, "On Reconciling Religious Dissensions Among Christians" (1606), Arminius developed this theme most fully. Like the Anglicans he feared that heated controversies among the learned led to confusion and indifference among the simple. Lost and confused, they already "begin to indulge in the imagination, that they may esteem the principles of religion alike obscure and uncertain." Furthermore, once dissension gets a foothold, all barriers are swept away; for as "similarity in manners, studies, and opinions, possess very great power in

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[1]Nichols in Arminius, Works, I, 310; Arminius, Works, I, 373 and 372.

conciliating love and regard," so does dissension destroy the whole fabric of social life. Even the best of men "instantly renounce, one against another, all tokens of friendship, and burst asunder the strictest bands of amity."[1]

From this center of irritation terrible cancers spread. Enmities of the heart swell into "schisms, faction and secession into different parties." Every fragment arrogantly assumes exclusive right to the heritage of the whole:

> factions equally appropriate to themselves the renowned name of "the true Israel," which they severally deny to their adversaries, in such a peremptory manner as might induce one to imagine each of them exclusively endowed with a plenary power of passing judgment upon the other, and as though it had been previously concluded, that the name of ISRAEL, by which God accosts in a most gracious manner the whole of his Church, cannot encircle within its embrace those who differ in any point from the rest of their brethren.

From schism follow the curses of persecution and religious wars, a virtual hell of inverted Christianity because each man considers his adversary "the most infectious and pestilent fellow in the whole Christian world, a public incendiary, a murderer of souls, and enemy of God." For the "sanguinary zealot" Arminius has a contempt tinged with fear.[2]

In Arminius' analysis the causes for dissension are two: the blindness of the human mind, and the operations of the uncontrolled affections. This implies clearly the balance of scepticism and trust in reason found in Pascal and the Anglicans. Arminius was certainly

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[1]Arminius, Works, I, 378 and 381.

[2]Arminius, Works, I, 382 and 387.

in the tradition of Christian scepticism, as is shown by a letter to Drusius (1608) in which Arminius praises his friend:

> that you openly declare, that you are still in doubt, and suspend your judgment, where, after the arguments have been produced, you are afraid of giving a full assent.... that you do not refuse at this period of life to change your opinions, even after you have been for many years so well versed in these matters. I love these two properties in you so much the more, because they approach the more nearly to my own intentions. For there is not such a vast difference between those subjects which engage your attention and those which engage mine, as not to allow me in some instances to hesitate and suspend my decision, since all religious doctrines are not equally necessary. For this conduct of mine I am calumniated by many persons, who carry the knowledge of all things inclosed within the casket of their own breast, from which whenever they are interrogated on any subject, they suppose that they utter forth nothing less than oracles which must be received with open ears and hearts.[1]

There are further indications of a kind of learned ignorance in Oration I, "The Object of Theology." Arminius expatiates on the eternity, glory and infinity of God, suggestively enough employing the circle of God metaphor—"The whole of this system of heaven and earth appears scarcely equal to a point 'before him, whose centre is every where, but whose circumference is in no place.'" As the perfection of being, as Being itself, God is the source and ground of all being and all knowledge. Yet the distance between God and created being is infinite, and Arminius contrasts directly the infinite essence of God with the finite human mind. The mind can partake of infinity only in the sense that "it apprehends Infinite Being and the Chief Truth, although it is incapable of comprehending them." Since man cannot possibly receive the Infinite "in the infinity of its nature," it must be

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[1] Arminius, Works, I, 168 n.

proposed to us "in a manner that is accommodated to our capacity." From this line of reasoning comes the important conclusion that in this world theology "is PRACTICAL and through faith," a design for life rather than a theoretical construct of the intellect. "THEORETICAL THEOLOGY belongs," on the other hand, "to the other world, and consists of pure and unclouded vision..."[1]

Arminius developed his solution to the religious problem in a way quite like the Anglicans. We should ever remember, he says, "How extremely difficult it is to discover the truth on all subjects, and to avoid error." Nor should it be forgotten that "it is as possible for us, as it is for him [i.e., our opponent], to hold wrong principles." If this "scepticism" is accepted, there remains no alternative except to turn to

> a consideration of all those articles of religion respecting which there exists on both sides a perfect agreement. These will perhaps be found to be so numerous and of such great importance, that when a comparison is instituted between them, and the others which may properly be made the subjects of controversy, the latter will be found to be few in number and of small consequence.[2]

Arminius hoped that a general synod would be able to compose most difficulties and reach a satisfactory common ground. For such a meeting to succeed, those attending should preserve the modesty of

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[1] Arminius, Works, I, 262 and 264. It is interesting to note that Arminius develops the idea of contingency of being along the same lines as scientists in the Christian tradition. For example: "But all beings, both visible and invisible, corporeal and incorporeal, proclaim aloud, that they have derived the beginning of their essence and condition from some other than themselves...." And so, all created things "utter speech" declaring their Maker and His perfections. Works, I, 262-263.

[2] Arminius, Works, I, 407-408.

mind that Augustine advised, namely:

> that none of us say, that he has discovered the truth: But rather let us seek it, as though it were unknown to each of us. For thus it will be possible for each of us to be engaged in a diligent and amicable search for it, if we have not by a premature and rash presumption believed that it is an object which we had previously discovered, and with which we are well acquainted.

The Synod of Dort would have been a terrible blow to his confidence in human reasonableness, and fortunately he did not live to attend it. However, Arminius did not put all his trust in formal agreement. If, he says, "mutual consent and agreement" cannot be reached, then the differing parties should adopt a "fraternal concord in Christ" and mutually "acknowledge the other for partakers of the same faith and fellow-heirs of the same salvation—although they may both hold different sentiments concerning the nature of faith and the manner of salvation." Both parties should extend "the right hand of friendship" and agree at least to abstain from bitterness and railing in their controversies.[1]

Because of his conviction that all men can err, Arminius adopted a conception of the nature of the church similar to that of the Anglican thinkers. The church is an erring body, for "the veracity of the Church is the veracity of men: But the veracity of men is imperfect and inconstant, and is always such as to give occasion to this the remark of truth: 'All men are liars.'" Upon particular points which are not simply and obviously scriptural the church cannot prove that it presents the sense intended by God. All the arguments of the church

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[1]Arminius, Works, I, 459 and 460-461.

"can produce nothing more than an opinion in the minds of those to whom they are offered. Opinion, therefore, and not knowledge, is the supreme effect of this efficacy." The church is dependent upon Scripture; it should be viewed only as the "guardian, herald, and interpreter" of the sacred writings, never "wise above that which is written" because always constrained by "her own imbecility, and the depth of things divine."[1]

The Roman claim that there must be a principle of infallible certainty in all religious doctrines is denied by Arminius on the grounds of experience. "And experience testifies, that a testimony of this kind never yet had an existence, that it does not now exist, and...we certainly think that it never will exist." The church universal cannot decide controversial points because it cannot possibly meet together. The Fathers offer no grounds of certainty, for each could err, and therefore even in the unlikely event that a harmony of Fathers could be agreed upon, the evidence would still be fallible. Councils offer no grounds for hope, because they are only too obviously fallible. Of what avail are arguments from past councils, asks Arminius:

> if a good cause had been badly defended, and had been overpowered and borne down, not by any defect in itself, but through the fault of those who were its defenders, and who were either awed into silence through fear, or betrayed their trust by an incompetent, foolish and injudicious defence?

No external means to unity serve; only toleration and emphasis upon the doctrinally simple and fundamental will ensure the peace of the Christian family.[2]

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[1]Arminius, <u>Works</u>, I, 332-333.

[2]Arminius, <u>Works</u>, I, 335 and 401-403.

Perhaps the best example of the way in which Arminius practiced these principles is to be found in the views on predestination which he put forth in his "Declaration of Sentiments" in 1608. Arminius' great objection to high-Calvinist theology was that the doctrine of predestination cannot be proved an absolute truth and is therefore not to be imposed as fundamental. Christianity is anchored upon "that decree of God by which Christ is appointed by God to be the Saviour, the Head, and the Foundation of those who will be made heirs of salvation," declares Arminius along with the Anglicans. Every other doctrine is subordinate to this. He also argues that the doctrine of predestination reflects discreditably upon the wisdom, justice and goodness of God; that it is contrary to the nature of man, in that it denies the freedom of the will and makes a mockery of human actions; and that it contradicts the purpose of creation itself, which was an act of love on God's part and the communication of goodness not destruction. But these are ancillary; the main charge is that the doctrine is more precise than the evidence warrants.[1]

It is not by probing thus the nature of the unknowable that man will be saved, but by meditating on the love which God has for him. This great love of God for sinning man is two-fold: the love by which He gave His only Son as a Saviour; the love by which He required obedience to that Saviour, not according to the rigor and severity of immutable justice, but according to "his grace and clemency, and with the addition of a promise of the remission of sins, provided fallen man repent." This key argument is developed by Arminius in a way which

[1]Arminius, Works, I, 554-555 and 559-563.

reminds us at once of Anglican balance and of Pascal. Though the passage is somewhat lengthy, it is worth quoting in substance, because it is such a fine example of middle road thinking:

> But, that we may more clearly understand the fact of this two-fold love being the foundation of all religion and the manner in which it is so...it will be profitable for us to contemplate with greater attention the following words of the Apostle to the Hebrews: "He that cometh to God, must believe that HE is, and that HE is a rewarder of them that diligently seek HIM."—In these words two things are laid down as foundations to Religion, in opposition to two fiery darts of Satan...[i.e., Security and Despair]....In what human mind soever either of these pests is fostered, it is impossible that any true and proper worship of God can there reside. —Now both of them are overturned by the words of the Apostle: For if a man firmly believes, "that God will bestow eternal life on those alone who seek him, but that He will inflict on the rest death eternal," he can on no account indulge himself in SECURITY. And if he likewise believes, that "God is truly a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him," by applying himself to the search he will not be in danger of falling into DESPAIR....Those persons, therefore, who seek God, can by no means indulge in a single doubt concerning his readiness to remunerate: And it is this which acts as a preservative against DESPAIR or distrust.[1]

Here as elsewhere in Arminius weight is placed upon the mercy of God and the corollary that it is sufficient for man to make an honest effort to know and live the truth.

Arminius' own pronouncements on the nature of salvation are simple in the extreme. God has decreed "to appoint his Son Jesus Christ for a Mediator, Redeemer, Saviour, Priest and King, who might destroy sin by his own death." He has promised to "receive into favour those who repent and believe." This plan for salvation He will "administer in a sufficient and efficacious manner," combining

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[1]Arminius, Works, I, 572 and 573-574.

wisdom, mercy and justice in a way which men cannot understand. Arminius substitutes foreknowledge for predestination, holding that God "knew from all eternity those individuals who would, through his preventing grace, believe and through his subsequent grace would persevere." He frowns upon all further refinement of definition, especially if proposed as necessary belief. The whole purpose of his formulation, says Arminius, is to offer a basis so moderate that "it cannot afford any person just cause of expressing his adversion to it; nor can it give any pretext for contention in the Christian Church." Stop with what is agreed upon and certain; do not plunge heedlessly into the "unsearchable judgments of God."[1]

Arminianism was essentially a reaction against dogmatism. Tulloch has described the slough of dogmatism which Protestantism fell into during the latter part of the sixteenth century. Not only is this reflected in the tremendous multiplication of hard and set confessions—some twenty being drawn up within about thirty years—but more significantly in the establishment and spread of Calvinism, the most logical and most dogmatic of Protestant philosophies. Arminianism was a new protest, a protest against this and every other form of dogmatic rigidity. Tulloch sees in the Arminian distinction between fundamentals and non-fundamentals the "most significant and solvent of all the rational principles" of the school. The question which the Arminians proposed and the answers which they gave are thus summarized by that historian:

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[1]Arminius, Works, I, 589 and 592. This is substantially the content also of the famous Five Arminian Articles of 1610. For the text of these, see Schaff, III, 545-549.

> Did any series of dogmas, after all, constitute Christianity? Was it not rather a personal belief in one or two great facts—"a very few things, which alone are precisely necessary to be known and believed for the obtaining of eternal life?" And has the Church right to insist upon anything beyond the acknowledgment of these facts as its formal basis? . . . The Arminians inclined to answer these last questions in the negative. The only fundamental truths, they maintained, were the facts lying at the basis of Christianity as contained in the language of Scripture, or, at the utmost, as expressed in the Apostles' Creed.

From this it is evident that the Anglicans did not stand alone. The similarity is further pointed up by a description of the Dutch school given by Frederic Platt:

> Theologically, Arminianism is a mediating system throughout. Its most characteristic feature is conditionalism. Absolutism is its persistent opposite; moderation, the mark of its method. The failure to appreciate this position accounts for the frequent and grave misunderstandings of Arminianism...

This might as easily and as justly have been said of the Anglicans.[1]

Because of this close parallelism of thought and spirit, it is somewhat surprising to find the Anglicans stoutly denying that they were Arminian. But upon examination the Anglican position is seen to be consistent and understandable. The Anglicans did not wish to deny their affinities with the Dutch movement, but they refused to surrender their claim of independence. They refused to admit that their principles had been imported from abroad and were thereby an innovation in the English Church.

Their argument is neatly expressed by Peter Heylyn in his defense of Bishop Richard Montague's Appello Caesarem, which had been attacked by the Puritans in the Parliament of 1625 as Romish and Arminian.

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[1]Tulloch, I, 5-6, 21, 9 and 35; Frederic Platt in Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, s.v. "Arminius."

Heylyn says that what is called Arminianism is nothing more than the "true original and native Doctrines of this Church at her first Reformation." In proof of this he quotes extensively from early reformers and also attempts to determine the place of Arminian thought in the development of the Church. For a time Calvinism had "overspread the face of the Church" and its original doctrines had been submerged. But when the predestinarian quarrels began in Holland, the books of both sides were brought into England and diligently studied. The result was not the adoption of any set of foreign doctrines, but rather that the Arminian tracts "awaked many out of the dead sleep in which they were, to look with better eyes into the true and native Doctrines of this Church." In brief, then, "the entitling of these Doctrines to the name of Arminius, seems to be like the nominating of the great Western Continent by the name of America...." The Anglicans had no mind to let their opponents use the potent lever of "innovation" against them.[1]

Indeed the Anglicans were successful in turning the charge of innovation upon their opponents, who were only too ready to adopt the decisions of the high-Calvinist Synod of Dort. Montague defended himself by such a technique of counter-charge:

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[1]Heylyn, pp. 126-127. See Laud's protest against the use of the term in Laud, III, 304. Platt (see note p. 237) agrees with the contemporary Anglican interpretation of the relationship when he writes: "In England...there was a presage of Arminian thought long before the time of Arminius and his system....The influence was seen in the ambiguity or comprehensiveness of the Articles of the English Church. Latimer and Hooper, Andrewes and Hooker might with propriety have been called Arminians, if Arminianism as a system had been in vogue when they wrote."

> You, or any Puritan or Papist, make it plain that anything by me disclaimed for being the public, established, doctrine of our Church is yet the doctrine of the Church, and I am ready to recant. If the Synod of Dort hath determined otherwise, let their determination stand for me; I quarrel them not, I meddle not with them. Those that like the Decrees of that Synod, or are bound to maintain the Decrees of that Synod, let them maintain them if they like them...I have no part nor portion in them. I am not tied to uphold them farther than they consent unto that which I am bound to maintain, the doctrine of the Church of England.

Montague was supported in this quarrel by Laud, who in asking the aid of the Duke of Buckingham in 1625, pointed to the real issue involved. As for Montague himself, in some points he was merely defending the "resolved Doctrine" of the Church; in others, merely exercising his right to an opinion on points "left at more liberty for learned men to abound in their own sense, so they keep themselves peaceable." But the real issue was the freedom of the English Church, which was resisting the attempt to make it subservient to continental Calvinism. Doctrinal differences within the Church should be decided by the legal powers set up for that purpose, the King and the Bishops in Convocation. To let any foreign body interfere even indirectly would be disastrous. The Synod of Dort had no jurisdiction over the Church in England, "and our hope is," says Laud, "that the Church of England will be well advised...before she admit a foraign Synod."[1]

As far as the predestinarian question goes, the Anglicans were basically in agreement with Arminius, although they preferred to be even more vague and liked best of all complete silence. Temperamentally they

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[1]Montague in Anglicanism, ed. More and Cross, pp. 315-316; the letter to Buckingham is in Laud, VI, Pt. I, 244-49. See Donne, Sermons, VII, 127-128.

were repelled by the implications of Calvinistic thought. Donne, for example, speaks bitingly of those who reject simple "home-spun divinity," those who say in effect:

> I care not for God's revealed will, his acts of parliament, his public proclamations, let me know his cabinet counsels, his bosom, his pocket despatches. Is there not another kind of predestination, than that which is revealed in Scriptures, which seems to be only of those who believe in Christ? May not a man be saved, though he do not, and may not a man be damned, though he do perform those conditions, which seem to make sure his salvation in the Scriptures?

"All agree," he says elsewhere, "that the merit of Christ Jesus is sufficient for all. All agree, that there is enough done for all." Let us rest in that, in God's mercy, and "let the Thomists and the Scotists in the Roman Church wrangle" about details and mechanisms if they will.[1]

Laud also brushes aside the whole question with obvious impatience. "They would fain know all the secrets of predestination," he complains. But this is one of God's foundations upon which he has placed his seal of secrecy. Scripture tells us that the Lord knows his own and continues, "and let every man that calls on the name of Christ, depart from iniquity." This suffices, says Laud, and "if he do not that, he is not Christ's; let him talk of predestination while he will." There is no doubt that personally Laud was shocked by predestinarian theology. In one place he says:

> almost all of them say that God from all eternity reprobates by far the greater part of mankind to eternal fire, without any eye at all to their sin. Which opinion my very soul abominates. For it makes God, the God of all mercies, to be the most fierce and unreasonable tyrant in the world. For the question is not here, what God may do by an absolute act of power, would He

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[1]Donne, Works, II, 204 and I, 134.

> so use it upon the creature which He made of nothing: but what He hath done, and what stands with His wisdom, justice, and goodness to do.

But it is important to note that on this point the Anglicans had no intention of forcing their own personal views on the Church. There was nothing in Anglicanism which would prevent a man from holding the Calvinist doctrine if he did not insist that his theology be imposed upon others as absolutely fundamental.[1]

The Dr. Christopher Potter who was engaged in the Knott debate is an excellent example of an Anglican Calvinist. In 1629 he wrote a letter to a friend explaining his views on predestination. He could not give up his great admiration for Calvin. "I love Calvin very well," he confesses, but adds immediately, "I cannot hate Arminius." Although he did not agree with Arminius, he would not attack him. "For my life, I cannot obtain of my conscience to declaim, and revile, and cry down an opinion, when I cannot see any solid satisfying answer to many contrary scriptures and reasons." In his younger days ("when I was most ignorant, I was most confident") he had opposed the Arminians rancorously. Now he has discovered that much may be said for the Arminian view, that it has many scriptures and many eminent theologians and Fathers to support it. He is willing, therefore, to hold still with Calvin, but lightly and without contention, granting the Arminians the right to hold their not unreasonable opinions. This was perfectly acceptable Anglicanism, for the Anglicans would no more insist upon the infallibility of Arminius than of Calvin.[2]

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[1]Laud, I, 130 and VI, Pt. I, 132. See Heylyn, pp. 30-39, for supporting quotations from early English churchmen.

[2]Potter's letter is in Arminius, Works, I, xxix-xxx.

It might be well to add here a short note on Socinianism, a heresy frequently attributed to the Anglicans by their enemies. This term also was used rather indiscriminately, as may be seen from the title of a book Francis Cheynell published in 1643:

> The Rise, Growth and Danger of Socinianism, together with a Plaine discovery of a desperate designe of corrupting the Protestant Religion, whereby it appears that the Religion which hath been so violently contended for (by the Archbishop of Canterbury and his Adherents) is not the true Protestant Religion, but an Hotch-potch of Arminianisme, Socinianisme and Popery. It is likewise made evident, That the Atheists, Anabaptists, and Sectaries so much complained of, have been raised or encouraged by the doctrines of the Arminian, Socinian and Popish party.

While one may suspect that Cheynell was aiming more at rhetorical effect than precision, the linking of Arminian and Socinian was just in a way. After observing that "moderate Calvinists or liberal theologians of any kind inevitably ran the risk in those days of being labelled 'Socinian,'" McLachlan goes on to claim that both movements were alike in working for tolerance and in opposing dogmatism. In another place he says:

> Arminianism and Socinianism had close affinities and were born of a similar tendency of mind. The difference between them was more one of emphasis than radical departure. "Arminianism was rather the dictate of moral sentiment, Socinianism a product of the reason." The opponents of one system found themselves at loggerheads also with the other....[1]

This argument explains, of course, why the Anglicans were frequently called Socinians, for they were a part of the same broad

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[1]Cheynell's title from Frank L. Huntley, "Sir Thomas Browne and His Oxford Tutor," The History of Ideas News Letter, II (July, 1956), 52. McLachlan, pp. 21-22 and 50.

movement. Yet they were really at the other end of the liberal spectrum because of their conservatism, liturgical impulse, and distrust of reason. If by a Socinian we mean one who denies the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the efficacy of the sacraments, and the possibility of miracles, then it is evident that the Anglicans were never Socinian. When Chillingworth was accused of this heresy by Knott, he replied simply that he was an orthodox Anglican holding firm to the truth of Scripture, the Apostles' Creed, and all fundamentals preached by the early church. In things indifferent he would neither take any man's liberty from him nor allow his own to be taken from him. This he insisted was not heresy, but reasonable Christianity. The relation was one of vague sympathy rather than coincidence of opinion.[1]

This question of Socinianism is of special interest because one of the men most suspect was a Thomas Lushington (1590-1661) who was Browne's tutor at Oxford and later his friend in Norwich. According to McLachlan, Lushington was an "orthodox high-churchman of the Laudian school," at least during the period Browne studied with him. Later rumors circulated about him, and, again according to McLachlan, he actually translated two Socinian tracts. While this does not appear to be absolutely certain, it is worth mentioning. There is, of course, no evidence whatsoever that Browne was a Socinian even if his friend had

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[1]For the distinguishing marks of Socinianism given above, see McLachlan, pp. 11-15. For the general charge of Socinianism brought against Laudians, see Howard Schultz, Milton and Forbidden Knowledge (New York, 1955), p. 115 and references on p. 268. McLachlan, p. 54, agrees with this interpretation of the nature of the relationship between Socinians and Anglicans.

such leanings. In view of the general relation between Socinianism and Anglicanism presented above, it can be said that if Browne were in touch with liberal thought either in Arminian or Socinian form, he would have had little trouble in reconciling it with his Anglicanism. Indeed, he would have found support and kindred spirits in the ranks of Dutch theologians, without the necessity of falling into heresy of any kind.[1]

In conclusion I think we may say with some confidence that the charges brought against the Anglicans were based almost entirely upon a distaste for liberality in any form; that the Anglicans were neither Arminian nor Socinian, although they had affinities to a greater and lesser extent with both these continental schools; and finally that Anglicanism forms an important part of a general European reaction against the logical precision of the dogmatisms both of Rome and Geneva, a reaction which employed the techniques of Christian scepticism as a major weapon.

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[1]McLachlan, p. 109. See pp. 108-117 for a full treatment of Lushington. The evidence that Lushington translated the tracts does not seem perfectly convincing to me, resting as it does on the testimony of one Edmund Porter and rumor. Unless the evidence presented by Porter is stronger than McLachlan reports, the identification may be questioned. Huntley (see note on page 242), pp. 50-52, argues that the charge was unfounded. Lushington was evidently a rather puckish man, and was frequently in trouble due to his lack of gravity. For his relations with Browne, see Finch, pp. 40-44 and 102. Finch finds no heresy in the man, but relates an anecdote concerning him, which though not particularly pertinent, is really too good to pass by. When Lushington became chaplain to Bishop Corbett: "The bishop would sometimes take the key of the wine-cellar and he and his chaplaine would lock themselves in and be merry: then first he layes down his episcopal hood, 'There layes the doctor;' then he putts off his gowne, 'There layes the bishop;' and then 'twas 'Here's to thee Corbet' and 'Here's to thee Lushington.'"

CHAPTER VI

THE RELIGIO MEDICI
AS AN ANGLICAN CONFESSION AND APOLOGY

Contemporary Reaction to the Religio[1]

Like the Anglican churchmen just discussed Sir Thomas was an enigma to those who loved the false certainty of clearly spelled out labels. Not knowing where to find him, they concluded that Browne was indifferent to religion. Published without Browne's authorization in 1642, the Religio Medici became at once famous and suspected. Sir Kenelm Digby's Observations, printed before the issuance of Browne's authorized version, did much to push the work forward, for Digby was known everywhere and by everybody. Flamboyant, talented, romantic, and wordy, he was perhaps the most ubiquitous figure of the century; it is doubtful whether one can investigate any facet of the century without stumbling across him sooner or later. With the flair of a true publicist Digby procured, read and wrote a thirty-page commentary on the Religio, or at least said he did, within a period of twenty-four hours. The substance of his observations may not be very weighty, but he brought Browne

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[1]Except where otherwise noted all facts and quotations in the following are from Wilkin, I, lxii-lxvii and II, vii-xii. See Frank L. Huntley, "Publication and Immediate Reception of Religio Medici," Library Quarterly, XXV (1955), 203-218, for a detailed treatment of the circumstances surrounding the publication, and especially his fine treatment of the character and career of Digby. See also Finch, pp. 104-119.

to the attention of the fashionable world and was the first to patronize his work in both senses of the word. Because of the popularity of the book in England, John Merryweather published a Latin translation in Leyden (1644), which gave Browne a European reputation. The Religio enjoyed numerous translations and editions and fascinated men of various beliefs through both style and matter. In England Alexander Ross, a cantankerous Scotch schoolmaster, attacked both Browne and Digby violently in 1645. He was later to have the distinction of refuting in one volume the scientific efforts of Browne, Lord Bacon, and Harvey.[1]

While it is true, as Johnson observed of the Religio, that "what is much read, will be much criticised," the reaction to this unassuming little volume proceeded in too many directions to be so easily explained. As many of the European translators and editors were convinced of Browne's Catholicity as were sure that he was a true Protestant. A French reprint of the Latin translation not only defended Browne against all charges of impiety and atheism but also claimed him as a Roman Catholic in all but name, "ad sectam Anglicanam per vim malignam nativitatis aut fortunae praeter voluntatem advectum." The Roman Church did not agree with this judgment, and Browne went on the Index Expurgatorius. One Samuel Duncon, a Quaker, read the book, was convinced that he had a likely convert within grasp, and wrote to Browne as follows:

> Judgeinge thee juditious, I therewith send thee a booke to peruse; and if thou desire any personall conferrance with

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[1]Digby's Observations are reprinted in Wilkin, II, 119-152. See Finch, p. 173 for Ross.

> me...concernynge the principalls of our religion...I shall indeauer it, in the same loue I present this booke to thy vieue, who am a lover of mankinde in generall, and thyselfe in particuler.[1]

In Paris the great French physician Guy Patin found the book highly agreeable, but expressed some reservations as to Browne's faith:

> On fait icy grand état du livre intitulé Religio Medici. Cet Auteur a de l'esprit. Il y a de gentilles choses dans ce livre. C'est un mélancolique agréable en ses pensées; mais qui à mon jugement cherche maître en fait de religion, comme beaucoup d'autres, et peut-être qu' enfin il n'en trouvera aucun. Il faut dire de luy ce que Philippe de Comines a dit du...François de Paule, Il est encore en vie, il peut aussi bien empirer qu' amander.

Cultivated and light criticism of this kind was not to be expected from the Germans, who even in that day were known for their ponderous and humorless concentration. A Tobias Wagner warned that the work was so deeply tinged with atheistical impieties that it was not to be read without danger of infection. Many other German critics considered it atheistic, or at best an exhibition of indifferentism. It is pleasant to come upon Herman Conringius, who not only found it delightful, but said bluntly of its critics, "Utinam nemo Medicorum, imo Theologorum, illo homine sit minus religiosus." And so the criticisms go, ranging from claims of orthodoxies of various kinds to warnings of dread atheism. Browne was, it seems, all things to all men.

But closer observation reveals that the turmoil of opinion was confined to those who did not understand Anglicanism. Foreigners could not be expected to have much knowledge of that strange religious

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[1] Johnson's "Life of Sir Thomas Browne" is reprinted in Wilkin, I, xvii-liv. The quotation is on I, xxi. Duncon's letter is in Wilkin, I, 352.

animal, the Church of England; Digby was a Roman Catholic; Ross, both an oddity and a Scot.[1] There were, to my knowledge, no Anglican criticisms of the book, with the single exception of a rather gentle objection by Tillotson that the "certum est, quia impossibile est" proposition might be misunderstood. Although Anglican bishops had troubles of their own in 1642, it is nevertheless striking that there are no Anglican criticisms either in the Caroline or Restoration periods of a work which claimed to be Anglican.

As the introduction to this paper has shown, the ambiguity of Browne has never been sufficiently resolved, modern critics differing as widely as those of his own day, although in somewhat less denominational terms. The purpose of this chapter is to clinch the contention that Browne is best regarded as an orthodox Anglican writer, whose Religio is not only in conformity with Anglican thought but may even be read profitably as an Anglican apology. This view is shared by Rose Macaulay who not only notes that many passages in Browne suggest "an admirably typical Anglican apology," but declares flatly that the Religio is "the best and most agreeable confession of the Anglican religion ever,

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[1]Digby's somewhat surprising lack of understanding of Anglicanism is seen in the following: "Yet I cannot satisfy my doubts thoroughly, how he maketh good his professing to follow the great wheel of the church.... For to do so...obligeth one to yield a very dutiful obedience to the determinations of it, without arrogating to one's self a controling ability in liking or misliking the faith, doctrine, and constitutions, of that church which one looketh upon as their north-star: whereas, if I mistake not, this author approveth the church of England, not absolutely, but comparatively with other reformed churches." (Wilkin, II, 120.) Digby is correct in his evaluation of Browne, but he seems not to realize that this was the normal grade of Anglican conformity.

before or since, published." While it would be foolish to insist that the Religio is no more than such an apology, the view offers a remarkably coherent picture of the work and has the great virtue of destroying the antiquated theory that Browne was an idle dreamer divorced from all reality or that his religion was so highly imaginative and formless that it is deserving of admiration only because of its splendid style.[1]

This does not mean that the present interpretation is able to explain fully every line of the Religio, much less to show that every part of it contributes directly to the Anglican cause. The book consists in good part of various meditations and speculations which are personal to Browne and clearly identified as such by him. But at least it can be shown that these speculations were not intended to undermine the authority either of religion or the Anglican Church. It can also be shown that the foundations upon which Browne builds, the main principles which he accepts, the major arguments that he presents are those of the Church. Beyond this it is probably impossible to go. To pass every word of Browne through logical sieves is contrary to the spirit in which he wrote. Dr. Johnson, who approached Browne studies as an Anglican, a Tory, and a man of remarkably good sense, found no fault in him. He was disturbed neither by the charges laid to Browne's account nor the loose style of the piece. In an unduly neglected passage of critical acumen he says:

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[1]Rose Macaulay, Some Religious Elements in English Literature (New York, 1931), pp. 109 and 107. Miss Macaulay does not share my interpretation of Laud, whom she calls "that conformity-enforcing, heretic-baiting, cruel, narrow and petty primate." (p. 112)

> Whether Browne has been numbered among the contemners of religion, by the fury of its friends, or the artifice of its enemies, it is no difficult task to replace him among the most zealous professors of Christianity. He may, perhaps, in the ardour of his imagination, have hazarded an expression, which a mind intent upon faults may interpret into heresy, if considered apart from the rest of his discourse; but a phrase is not to be opposed to volumes; there is scarcely a writer to be found, whose profession was not divinity, that has so frequently testified his belief of the sacred writings, has appealed to them with such unlimited submission, or mentioned them with such unvaried reverence.[1]

An Analysis of Sections 1-10 of the Religio Medici

Although the plan of the Religio is not rigorous, it is misleading to think of it as entirely haphazard. There is throughout a continuity of process, one point leading into another, both affecting and in turn being modified by it. Topics must be discussed in terms of clusters of thought rather than in terms of sentences and individual sections. This would be a laborious task were it not that the first ten sections are rather more orderly than the rest of the work. And these sections are the essential ones, for in them Browne establishes with sure touch the framework of his whole religious thought. The Anglicanism of the whole book can be seen by analyzing these sections in detail. Their content, as well as the manner of development, is best seen in summary as:

1. Browne's confession of Christianity and the motives upon which his faith is held.
2. His affirmation of Protestantism,
3. tempered by the moderate Anglican view of Roman Catholicism, and
4. followed by a summary of the Anglican theory of the Reformation.

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[1]Johnson in Wilkin, I, liii.

5. His formal confession of Anglicanism.

6. The Anglican attitude toward controversy, conviction that religion is to be enjoyed rather than disputed, reliance upon reason, and position regarding heresy.

7. A discussion of his early heresies and a further discussion of the problem,

8. followed by a justification of the Anglican theory of heresy.

9. The famous oh altitudo passage, which concerns the nature of faith

10. and is developed with reference to the Scriptures.

What is remarkable about these pages is that in combination with a relatively few key passages elsewhere in the work they form a concise and complete statement of the whole Anglican attitude discussed in previous chapters. And since they are phrased in language memorable for its sensitivity, richness and musical beauty, it is not hard to see why Rose Macaulay chose the work as the finest of all Anglican apologies.

Browne breaks into his subject abruptly, somewhat in the poetic manner of Donne:

> For my Religion, though there be severall circumstances that might perswade the world I have none at all, as the generall scandall of my profession, the natural course of my studies, the indifferency of my behaviour, and discourse in matters of Religion, neither violently defending one, nor with that common ardour and contention opposing another; yet in despight hereof I dare, without usurpation, assume the honorable stile of a Christian....

Because of the great importance of Browne's science, critical interest in recent times has fastened on the phrase "generall scandall of my profession." It has been shown that physicians were considered religiously suspect as a class, and so the contention has been put forward that the main purpose of the Religio is to justify both the

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profession of medicine and more broadly the pursuit of science. To argue that this was not Browne's purpose would be foolish, but it does not follow that it was his only purpose. Equal weight should be attached to the second trait that might draw censure upon him, "the indifferency of my behaviour, and discourse in matters of Religion," which in context suggests that Browne is not identifying this with the first ground.[1]

One thing which has not often been properly appreciated in Browne is his finely honed and delicately effective irony, of which this passage is a good example. Taking the statement as a whole, it does not seem that Browne is too seriously concerned about either the reputation of physicians or the charge of indifferency; rather he is adopting a hesitating and submissive tone, "yet in despight hereof I dare, without usurpation, assume...," with tongue in cheek. How naive, he suggests, are those who will condemn a profession in wholesale fashion, almost as naive indeed as those who view as indifferent those who do not choose to bellow with distorted zeal and fracture the precarious unity of Christendom. While on the surface Browne appears to be on the defensive, he has actually begun to insinuate the Anglican case. His technique throughout is that of the Parthian bowman, or more exactly, that of the swordsman who strikes home so swiftly and skillfully that his opponent does not realize he has been hit. The real emphasis here is upon the phrase

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[1] Religio, p. 5. For the reputation of physicians see Paul H. Kocher, "The Physician in Elizabethan England," HLQ, X (1947), 229—250. For emphasis upon Browne's defense of science see Gosse, pp. 26-27. In his commonplace book Browne once mentioned this prejudice against doctors; "Though in point of devotion and piety, physicians do meet with common obloquy, yet in the Roman calendar we find no less than twenty-nine saints and martyrs of that profession...." (Wilkin, IV, 416.)

"honorable stile of a Christian," which suggests the Anglican argument that common Christianity must be preserved, that what joins men together as Christians should be dwelt upon instead of the trivialities which separate them. Browne rather subtly contrasts the man who prides himself on being a simple and honest Christian with the bickering, bloody Christian partisan who is forever "violently defending one" of the small segments of the church under the illusion that it is the whole.

In the next part of the sentence Browne sketches briefly and effectively the manner in which he has arrived at his belief:

> not that I meerely owe this title to the Font, my education, or Clime wherein I was borne, as being bred up either to confirme those principles my Parents instilled into my unwary understanding; or by a generall consent proceed in the Religion of my Countrey: But that having, in my riper yeares, and confirmed judgement, seene and examined all, I finde my selfe obliged by the principles of Grace, and the law of mine owne reason, to embrace no other name but this....

This, as has been pointed out previously, is an explicit rejection of both fideism and scepticism and is an assertation of the goodness of human reason. More pertinently it is a clear enunciation of the Anglican principle, adapted to so many purposes, that religious commitment must ultimately be based either upon reason or upon pure chance. Close parallels to this passage may be found in Anglican churchmen. There is Chillingworth's:

> To the belief hereof I was not led partially, or by chance, as many are, by the prejudice and prepossession of their country, education, and such like inducements; which, if they lead to truth in one place, perhaps lead to error in a hundred; but having with the greatest equality and indifferency, made inquiry and search into the grounds on both sides, I was willing to impart to others that satisfaction which was given to myself.

There is also the statement of the Anglican bishop Robert Sanderson that he was led to his convictions:

> not so much from the force of custom and education, to which the greater part of mankind owe their particular different persuasions in point of religion, as upon the clear evidence of truth and reason after a serious and impartial examination of the grounds as well of popery as Puritanism, according to that measure of understanding and those opportunities which God hath afforded me.

Browne is thus early committing himself, in rather good company, to the cause of rationality in religion if not to rational religion.[1]

Yet having thrown emphasis heavily upon reason, Browne immediately shifts to a consideration of charity, pointing out that religion is not exclusively an affair of the head:

> neither doth herein my zeale so farre make me forget the generall charitie I owe unto humanity, as rather to hate then pity Turkes, Infidels, and (what is worse) the Jewes, rather contenting my selfe to enjoy that happy stile, then maligning those who refuse so glorious a title.

Not only is this a noble thought and an echo of an equally fine declaration in the Book of Common Prayer, but it is also the second attack in the paragraph on that blind "zeale" which the Anglicans looked upon with disgust and horror. It should be noted too that the phrase "generall charitie I owe unto humanity" intensifies the irony of the previous "indifferency of

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[1]Religio, p. 5; Chillingworth, p. iii; Sanderson in Anglicanism, ed. More and Cross, p. 15. Sanderson (1587-1663) was a Laudian in as much as he was "by the Favour of Dr. Laud, made Chaplain to his Majesty King Charles I which Blessed Prince took great Satisfaction in Conversing with him," according to Walker, Pt. ii, 104. Hunt, I, 309-310, calls him a moderate Calvinist, which is further evidence that Laud did not always reject those who differed from his doctrinal ideas.

my behaviour" passage.[1]

In the next section Browne identifies himself as a Protestant, "because the name of a Christian is become too generall to expresse our faith, there being a Geography of Religions as well as Lands...." Here can be detected a slight tinge of disapproval, but more prominently displayed is the Anglican acceptance of things as they are, the belief that for better or worse particular national churches are the basic organizing units of Christendom. Browne continues:

> To be particular, I am of that reformed new-cast Religion, wherein I mislike nothing but the name, of the same beliefe our Saviour taught, the Apostles disseminated, the Fathers authorised, and the Martyrs confirmed....

That "wherein I mislike nothing but the name" furnishes us with a sign-post, for it is certainly the Anglican objection both to the term Protestant and the Roman appropriation of the title Catholic. The Anglicans were not overly fond of the word Protestant because of its connotations of disunity, contentiousness and lack of continuity. The attitude which they believed it both described and fostered was aptly described by a later, less elegant Anglican, Samuel Butler, as characteristic of those Puritans who:

> Call fire, and sword, and desolation,
> A godly, thorough Reformation,
> Which always must be carried on,
> And still be doing, never done;
> As if Religion were intended
> For nothing else but to be mended.

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[1]Religio, p. 5. See the third collect for Good Friday: "Merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live: have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word." In Liturgical Services...set forth in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, p. 119.

In Browne's passage may also be detected the usual Anglican claim that their religion was based upon the simple teachings of Christ and the primitive church as developed by the early Fathers. Browne describes the nature of the Reformation in terms quite like those of Laud. The Church had decayed to such an extent that it required "the carefull and charitable hands of these times" (the adjectives are revealing) to restore it to "its primitive integrity."[1]

Yet the Anglican had to define more exactly the kind of reformed religion he held to, for it was quite unlike the continental variety. Browne, consequently, carefully separates himself from extreme Protestants (and Romanists too) in a skillful passage:

> Yet have I not so shaken hands with those desperate Resolutions, who had rather venture at large their decaied bottome, then bring her in to be new trim'd in the dock; who had rather promiscuously retaine all, then abridge any...as to stand in diameter and swords point with them: we have reformed from them, not against them; for omitting those improperations and terms of scurrility betwixt us, which onely difference our affections, and not our cause, there is between us one common name and appellation, one faith, and necessary body of principles common to us both....

There could be no more compact statement of the Anglican feelings toward the Roman Church or of Anglican insistence upon the unity of Christian belief, that "one faith, and necessary body of principles" which unites Christians the world over. That Rome is Christian is of more moment than that she is erroneous. Therefore, says Browne, of the Roman Catholics, "I am not scrupulous to converse and live

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[1] Religio, pp. 5-6; Butler, Hudibras in The Poetical Works of Samuel Butler, ed. George Gilfillan (Edinburgh, 1854), I, 8.

with them, to enter their Churches in defect of ours, and either pray with them, or for them." There is no "rationall consequence" in calling such actions pollutions, "we being all Christians, and not divided by such detested impieties as might prophane our prayers." As for the Roman ceremonial, it is dangerous only to the ignorant. "Holy water and Crucifix (dangerous to the common people) deceive not my judgement, nor abuse my devotion at all." This is precisely the attitude toward ceremony, so disturbing to the Puritan mind, adopted in the Prayer Book and by Anglican clergymen.[1]

It is not surprising, then, to find Browne agreeing with Laud that bodily motions in prayer are an important part of devotion, and at the same time commenting ironically on the rather boorish zeal of the Puritans:

> I am, I confesse, naturally inclined to that, which misguided zeale termes superstition; my common conversation I do acknowledge austere, my behaviour full of rigour, sometimes not without morosity; yet at my devotion I love to use the civility of my knee, my hat, and hand, with all those outward and sensible motions, which may expresse, or promote my invisible devotion.[2]

Here, as in Laud, the implicit ground of the argument is that because body and soul are fused together in man, the activities of the body should be utilized to aid the worship of the spirit. I suspect that Browne's description of his "behaviour full of rigour, sometimes not without morosity" is a playful jab at Puritan dead-seriousness, as well as an objection to their prideful claim that their behaviour was more godly than that of the prelatical party.

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[1] Religio, pp. 6-7.

[2] Religio, p. 7.

With surface innocence Browne describes his behaviour in a way bound to enrage the Puritans. "I should violate my owne arm rather than a Church, nor willingly deface the memory of Saint or Martyr." This in a period when the Puritan was only too willing to strip and denude the churches of England and when he looked upon saints and martyrs in the sense intended here as abominations in the eyes of the Lord. "At the sight of a Crosse or Crucifix, I can dispence with my hat, but scarce with the thought and memory of my Saviour..." is a rather telling blow at the Puritan failure to distinguish between symbol and thing signified, a failure which frequently resulted in gross impiety. Browne does not, of course, defend the Roman Catholic sacramentals, but feels bound to admit that there is "somewhat of devotion" in them, and that it ill suits religious men to mock at them. "At a solemne Procession I have wept abundantly, while my consorts, blinde with opposition and prejudice, have fallen into an excesse of scorne and laughter..." Which excess, Browne seems to ask, the excess of misguided zeal or the excess of contemptuous laughter is more to be deplored?[1]

On this note Browne summarizes and also defends the whole Anglican position on ceremonial:

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[1]Religio, p. 7. Browne does not speak much more specifically of forms of worship. He was, we know, fond of church music: "Whosoever is harmonically composed delights in harmony; which makes me much distrust the symmetry of those heads which declaime against all Church musicke. For my selfe, not only from my obedience, but my particular genius, I doe imbrace it." Religio, p. 91. See a similar statement in Hooker, II, 159-162. See also Sencourt, p. 124 for a description of Browne's joy at the return of Anglican ceremonial with the Restoration. Sencourt summarizes material scattered through Browne's letters to his son Tom in 1660-1661. The letters are in Wilkin, I, 2-15.

> There are questionlesse both in Greek, Roman and African Churches, solemnities, and ceremonies, whereof the wiser zeales doe make a Christian use, and stand condemned by us, not as evill in themselves, but as allurements and baits of superstition to those vulgar heads that looke asquint on the face of truth, and those unstable Judgements that cannot consist in the narrow point and centre of virtue without a reele or stagger to the circumference.

This is an excellent example of Browne's delicate irony, for it is a dull reader who does not see that the indictment of "vulgar heads" and "unstable Judgements" is aimed as surely and effectively at the Puritans as at the ostensible target, the Roman Catholics. This exposure of Puritan provincialism is a shrewd turn to the argument.

Browne next returns to his survey of the Reformation in preparation for his confession of Anglicanism. Here he follows the Anglican interpretation to the letter. The Reformation was not a single movement but a series of separate actions taken by particular national churches, "every Countrey proceeding in a peculiar Method, according as their nationall interest together with their constitution and clime inclined them...." Some countries proceeded "angrily and with extremitie," others, and Browne is clearly referring to England, separated from Rome "calmely, and with mediocrity, not rending, but easily dividing the community, and leaving an honest possibility of a reconciliation...." Like Laud Browne is willing to close the breach with Rome, but like the archbishop he knows that "though peaceable Spirits doe desire" such a reconciliation, they may in truth "with the same hopes expect an union in the poles of Heaven."[1]

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[1] <u>Religio</u>, p. 8.

Having identified himself first with the Christian and then with the moderate Protestant cause Browne proceeds to "draw into a lesser circle" by making a complete, almost formal, confession of Anglican faith:

> There is no Church wherein every point so squares unto my conscience, whose articles, constitutions, and customes seeme so consonant unto reason, and as it were framed to my particular devotion, as this whereof I hold my beliefe, the Church of England, to whose faith I am a sworne subject, and therefore in a double obligation, subscribe unto her Articles, and endeavour to observe her Constitutions.[1]

Those who believe, as does Gosse for instance, that Browne's adherence to the Anglican communion was superficial face great difficulties here. This is a confession which consciously goes beyond what would be required of an Anglican layman; Browne maintains in the strongest and least equivocal terms his devotion to the Anglican ideal and Church. Either this statement is to be taken seriously or we must accept the only alternative, that Browne is deliberately lying. The words will bear no other interpretation.

Browne adds in typical Anglican fashion:

> No man shall reach my faith unto another Article, or command my obedience to a Canon more: whatsoever is beyond, as points indifferent, I observe according to the rules of my private reason, or the humor and fashion of my devotion, neither believing this, because Luther affirmed it, or disapproving that, because Calvin hath disavouched it. I condemne not all things in the Councell of Trent nor approve all in the Synod of Dort. In briefe, where the Scripture is silent, the Church is my Text; where that speakes, 'tis but my Comment; where there is a joynt silence of both, I borrow not the rules of my Religion from Rome or Geneva, but the dictates of my owne reason.

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[1] Religio, p. 8.

Rather than being qualifications, these statements make more definite the Anglican nature of the confession. Here is a perfectly "orthodox" expression of Anglican independence, the desire of that church to work out its destiny free from the dominating influence of any foreign body whatever. "No man shall reach my faith unto another Article" does not show Browne's reason chaffing at the bit, but his acceptance of the present theological settlement and his Anglican objection to any higher degree of definition of dogma than is found in the Articles. Especially interesting is the rejection of the authority of the Synod of Dort, which is one of the clearest tests of a man's agreement with Laud. Also evident is the desire to steer a middle course between Calvinistic Geneva and Rome, expressed by means of the figures characteristic of Anglican divinity. There is in the examples just that slight leaning toward Rome which we would expect of a Laudian in a period in which the greatest danger facing the Church was internal. Not a word, not an implication, not a single deduction in this passage would meet with Laud's disapproval. Browne would run far greater risk, had he been a clergyman, of being charged with Arminianism in Parliament than being brought before Laud at Lambeth.[1]

But having defended in such clear terms the independence of the English Church, Browne thinks it wise to point out that this independence

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[1] Religio, pp. 8-9. See Donne, Sermons, VIII, 311: "And keep me ever in the armes, and bosome of that Church, which without any tincture, any mixture, any leaven of superstition, or Idolatry, affords me all that is necessary to salvation, and obtrudes nothing, enforces nothing to be beleeved, by any Determination, or Article of hers that is not so."

is relative not absolute. The English Church is not a new creation but a religious body stabilized by centuries of Christian experience and wisdom. He refuses to accept the computation of the "Nativity of our Religion from Henry the eighth, who though he rejected the Pope, refused not the faith of Rome...." The political break did not destroy the continuity of the Church at all. Browne also believes that the Pope, if only as a temporal ruler, is entitled to decency of language. Not with the Puritans will he stir up passions by calling the Pope "Anti-christ, Man of Sin, or whore of Babylon." Such crude language is well enough for influencing the vulgar, but wise men know "that a good cause needs not to be patron'd by a passion, but can sustaine it selfe upon a temperate dispute." This is another of many thrusts at blind zeal.

No sooner has Browne turned his attention to disputes in religion, than he sees that the subject demands careful treatment. He begins with a comment which has been variously interpreted as showing religious scepticism or looseness of religious fiber, but which in reality is common to Anglican teaching. "I could never divide my selfe from any man upon the difference of an opinion, or be angry with his judgement for not agreeing with mee in that, from which perhaps within a few dayes I should dissent my selfe." The key word is opinion, which limits the remark to non-essential matters. Browne's statement is exactly parallel to Chillingworth's, "I will think no man the worse man, nor the worse christian, I will love no man the less, for differing in opinion from me." That Browne is thinking of the distinction of fundamentals and non-fundamentals here is seen by a similar passage

later in the work which spells out the details:

> I cannot fall out or contemne a man for an errour, or conceive why a difference in opinion should divide an affection: for controversies, disputes, and argumentations, both in Philosophy, and Divinity, if they meete with discreet and peaceable natures, doe not infringe the Lawes of Charity. In all disputes, so much as there is of passion, so much there is of nothing to the purpose.... The Foundations of Religion are already established, and the principles of Salvation subscribed unto by all, there remaine not many controversies worth a passion, and yet never any disputed without....

In this passage Browne is merely defending the Anglican contention that disputes in non-essentials should never result in a breaking of Christian unity. To call Browne's Anglicanism "an astonishingly loose and mobile affair" as Dunn chooses to do on the basis of this statement is unperceptive and unhistorical.[1]

Browne continues, as we might expect, by elaborating upon the Anglican view of controversy. "I have no Genius to disputes in Religion," he says, pointing out that there is no reason for every man to engage in controversy. In a justly famous passage he explains:

> Every man is not a proper Champion for Truth, nor fit to take up the Gantlet in the cause of Veritie: Many, from the ignorance of these Maximes, and an inconsiderate zeale unto Truth, have too rashly charged the troopes of error, and remaine as Trophees unto the enemies of Truth: A man may be in as just possession of Truth as of a City, and yet bee forced to surrender; 'tis therefore farre better to enjoy her with peace, then to hazzard her on a battell....

Two points call for comment in this passage. It is a typical example of Anglican sagacity in its recognition of the complexity of truth. Throughout it has been shown that the Anglican theologians possessed an

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[1] Religio, pp. 9-10; Chillingworth, p. 481; Religio, p. 80; Dunn, p. 42.

intellectual acuteness and a scholarly appreciation of the dangers of zeal unbacked by solid theological learning that led them to render to their equally well trained Roman opponents a kind of professional respect. The same point that Browne makes here was developed by Laud during his trial, when he was charged with a leaning toward Romanism because he omitted from the Scottish Book of Canons a clause that a minister would be deposed if found negligent in the conversion of Papists. Laud argues:

> I did think then, and do think yet, that it is not so easy a work, or to be made so common, but that it is, and may be much fitter for some able selected men to undertake. And if any man think God's gifts in him to be neglected (as men are apt to overvalue themselves), let them try their gifts, and labour their conversion in God's name. But let not the Church by a Canon set every man on work, lest their weak or indiscreet performance hurt the cause and blemish the Church.

Taylor comes even closer to Browne's passage when he observes that every cause seems persuasive if it is defended by "witty advocates" who "put on such semblances of truth as will...make peace more safe and prudent, and mutual charity to be the best defense." Furthermore, Browne's argument is also highly Anglican in its claim that religion is not primarily a set of formulas to be debated but something to be "enjoyed" in the largest sense of the word. It is but another indication of the Anglican rejection of a precisely formulated theology.[1]

The only way in which religion may be enjoyed, continues Browne, is through the adoption of a temperate and commonsensical attitude toward doubts. "If...there rise any doubts in my way, I doe forget

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[1]Religio, p. 10; Laud, III, 325; Taylor, Works, V, 559.

them, or at least defer them till my better setled judgement and more manly reason is able to resolve them." Man's reason, "his best Oedipus," will "upon a reasonable truce" find a way to dispose of difficulties. Then follows the well-known sentence:

> In Philosophy where truth seemes double-faced, there is no man more paradoxicall than my selfe: but in Divinity I love to keepe the road, and, though not in an implicite, yet an humble faith, follow the great wheele of the Church, by which I move, not reserving any proper poles or motion from the epicycle of my owne braine; by this means I leave no gap for Heresies, Schismes, or Errors....

Despite the attention this passage has received it is little more than the usual Anglican argument that heresy is not an error of the understanding but of the will. Browne claims that if he has the sincere intention of following the Church, any errors he may fall into cannot be counted heresy in him. Yet, and this is the point which has given rise to suspicions, he goes on to confess that his "greener studies" were "polluted" with two or three heresies which he describes. This disturbs both Gosse and Dunn. Why, if Browne is so orthodox, does he devote space to these unorthodox speculations, and why does he treat them so off-handedly? Before answering this objection, it will prove interesting to examine with care the nature of his youthful heresies.[1]

The first heresy, commonly called mortalism, "was that of the Arabians, That the soules of men perished with their bodies, but should yet bee raised againe at the last day." Browne points out, however, that he did not conceive of an absolute death of the soul, but rather something very similar to the Socinian sleeping soul. The reasoning which made such a belief attractive to him was that:

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[1] Religio, p. 10; Gosse, p. 31; Dunn, p. 42.

> it is but the merits of our unworthy natures, if wee sleepe in darkenesse, untill the last alarum: A serious reflex upon my own unworthinesse did make me backward from challenging this prerogative of my soule; so I might enjoy my Saviour at last, I could with patience be nothing almost unto eternity.

Johnson was the first, to my knowledge, to notice the subtlety of the phrase "almost unto eternity," when he observed, "He [the reader] has little acquaintance with the acuteness of Browne, who suspects him of a serious opinion, that any thing can be 'almost eternal'...." It is difficult to believe that this is a very serious heresy, since there is in it no denial of immortality. It is actually a practical solution to the problem of the state of the soul between death and judgment once the doctrine of purgatory has been rejected. This very problem disturbed the conscience of John Evelyn, who once wrote to Taylor for advice. Taylor proved tolerant of the sleeping soul theory, holding it entirely possible that the soul:

> may be immortal, and yet not beatified till the resurrection. For to be, and to be happy or miserable, are not immediate or necessary consequents to each other. For the soule may be alive, and yet not feele; as it may be alive and not understand; so our soule, when we are fast asleep....And the Socinians, that say the soule sleepes, doe not suppose that she is mortal; but for want of her instrument, cannot doe any acts of life.

The Anglicans, in accord with their whole theological vagueness, never did define the status of the soul between death and judgment. I am not convinced that Browne's opinion would be judged formal heresy by Laudian divines.[1]

His second heresy, "that of *Origen*, that God would not persist in

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[1] *Religio*, p. 11; Johnson in Wilkin, I, xxiii; Taylor, *Works*, I, lxvii.

his vengeance for ever, but after a definite time of his wrath hee would release the damned soules from torture," was more serious. It should be noted, however, that this heresy was based upon a charitable contemplation "of the great attribute of God, his mercy" and perhaps would be looked upon with some leniency by divines opposed to predestinarian rigor. Also, it is of a nature purely speculative and could result in no discreditable action, a point which Browne is careful to make by saying, "I found therein no malice." All in all, though unorthodox, this heresy was not apt to call Anglican vengeance upon Browne's head.

The third heresy, which he "did never positively maintaine or practice, but have often wished it had been consonant to Truth, and not offensive to my Religion," was prayers for the dead. Browne makes it clear that he did not think such prayers were efficacious, but merely loved them as memorials. "'Twas a good way me thought to be remembered by Posterity, and farre more noble then an History." Here Browne displays extreme caution, and an evident desire to conform to the spirit of Anglican teaching as well as the letter, for there was no definite Anglican prohibition against such prayers, and they have since been adopted by that Church. The truth is that the Anglicans were confused and undecided on this subject. The trouble was that prayers for the dead were closely associated with the doctrine of Purgatory. Although Article XXII which deals with purgatory had in its original draft a clause condemning prayers for the dead, the clause was not retained in the final version. On the one hand, the Anglicans had to face the argument that if there is no purgatory, prayers for the dead are

foolish. Indeed, Alexander Ross seized upon this point in attacking Browne. "If the dead for whom you prayed were in heaven, your prayers were needless...but if these dead were in hell, your prayers were fruitless." The Anglicans not only disliked clear-cut propositions such as this, but also were embarrassed because they had not abandoned the idea of some vaguely conceived middle state. Furthermore, they had to face the difficult fact that the ancient churches and Fathers they admired so greatly had so prayed. Taylor can, therefore, say only that such prayers:

> the church of England did never condemn by any express article, but left it in the middle; and by her practice declares her faith of the resurrection of the dead, and her interest in the communion of saints, and that the saints departed are a portion of the catholic church, parts and members of the body of Christ; but expressly condemns the doctrine of purgatory, and consequently all prayers for the dead relating to it.

Browne was undoubtedly adopting what he believed would be the position expected of a prudent Church of England man, one unwilling to cross the unmarked boundary between the allowable and the prohibited. He does not, out of regard for the difficult position of the Church, avail himself of his full legal rights. This case should be closely studied by those who believe that Browne was taking advantage of any loophole available to him.[1]

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[1]Religio, p. 12; Ross in Finch, p. 117; Taylor, Works, VI, 196. Laud is equally vague on this subject. In arguing the question of purgatory with Fisher he merely observes that patristic citations dealing with prayers for the dead do not prove the Romanist contention, for "most certain it is that the ancients had, and gave, other reasons of prayer for the dead than freeing them out of any purgatory." He says nothing of the position of such prayers in the English Church. (Laud, II, 385.) Bicknell, p. 276, is my authority for the composition of the Article on purgatory. On pp. 278 ff he discusses the whole problem of the middle state in Anglican theology. A fine example of Anglican caution on this touchy subject is seen a century later when Dr. Johnson prays for his wife in this way: "And, O LORD, so far as it may be lawful in me, I commend to thy fatherly goodness the soul of my departed wife; beseeching thee to grant her whatever is best in her present state, and finally to receive her to eternal happiness." Boswell's Life of Johnson, ed. Mowbray Morris (New York, 1910), I, 133.

What then can be said of these heresies in general? They are all, as Dunn observes, anti-Calvinistic in tendency and cannot in any way be twisted into attacks on Anglican theology. Only the second would certainly be considered heresy by the majority of Anglican bishops. Browne's intention to follow the ways of his Church is seen in the moderate nature of these "heresies" as well as by the fact that he had, after all, abandoned them. But this is only the negative importance of Browne's argument. Actually he discusses the heresies in order to present vividly the whole Anglican theory of heresy, for after detailing the theological views he held, he goes on to argue that since he did not maintain these views with "pertinacity," since he did not endeavour "to enveagle any mans beliefe," since he neither "revealed or disputed" them, they were not heresies in him but "bare Errors, and single Lapses of my understanding, without a joynt depravity of my will." This strictly Anglican argument is characteristically followed by another objection to Puritan temperament. Browne speaks with pitying scorn of those who "have not only depraved understandings but diseased affections, which cannot enjoy a singularity without a Heresie, or be the author of an opinion without they be of a Sect also."[1]

Browne now turns to the subject of heresy. His personal confession, it will be observed, is developing into an Anglican apology. He now expands upon the idea that heresies cannot be extirpated. Previously he has noted that "heresies perish not with their Authors, but, like the river Arethusa, though they lose their currents in one place, they rise

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[1] Religio, p. 12. See Dunn, p. 62.

up againe in another...." Now he says more bluntly:

> That Heresies should arise, we have the prophecy of Christ, but that old ones should be abolished wee hold no prediction. That there must be heresies, is true, not onely in our Church, but also in any other....

This is a clear enough statement of the Anglican theory of the erring church. And equally Anglican is Browne's next remark: what is really deplorable is not the fact of heresy, but the division which too close attention to theological minutiae leads to. Browne dwells on the splintering tendency in Protestantism, complaining that "heads that are disposed unto Schisme and complexionally propense to innovation" carry their disposition wherever they go and are not content until they "subdivide and mince themselves almost into Atomes." Then turning to the Anglican solution to the problem, he argues persuasively that difference of opinion must be tolerated, for men of "singular opinions and conceits" live in all ages. Unless we wish to accept the atomization of the church, we must grant men freedom in things "untouch'd, unimagin'd, wherein the libertie of an honest reason may play and expatiate with security, and farre without the circle of an heresie." In brief, Browne is here presenting the Anglican case for agreement in fundamentals and freedom in all else.[1]

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[1]Religio, pp. 10 and 13. Gosse's belief (p. 31) that Browne is unorthodox in denying that heresies can be destroyed is mistaken. Not only was such an opinion orthodox, it was almost commonplace. See, for example, I Cor. 11:19 and Laud, II, 220. Even more striking is Hooker, II, 187-189: "The weeds of heresy being grown unto such ripeness as that was, do even in the very cutting down scatter oftentimes those seeds which for a while lie unseen and buried in the earth, but afterward freshly spring up again no less pernicious than at the first.... So manifestly true is that which one of the ancient hath concerning Arianism, 'Mortuis auctoribus hujus veneni, scelerata tamen eorum doctrina non moritur.'"

Not only does Browne carefully distinguish heresy from simple intellectual error, but he also protects his orthodoxy by means of formulas of submission to the Church. Both in the preface to the Religio and at the end of his book on faith he formally submits his speculations to the judgment of his superiors. The second of these, for example, reads:

> This is the Tenor of my beleefe, wherein, though there be many things singular, and to the humour of my irregular selfe, yet, if they square not with maturer Judgements, I disclaime them, and doe no further father them, than the learned and best Judgements shall authorize them.

Such a formula is no more than an application of the Anglican theory of heresy, and was used by more than one theologian of that Church. Hooker says of his great work:

> All things written in this booke I humbly and meekly submit to the censure of the grave and reverend Prelates within this land, to the judgment of learned men, and the sober consideration of all others. Wherein I may happely erre as other before me have done, but an heretike by the help of Almighty God I will never be.

Laud exhibits the same kind of intellectual caution when he says of a doubtful point:

> And this I will adventure to the world, but only in the nature of a consideration, and with submission to my mother, the Church of England, and the mother of us all, the Universal Catholic Church of Christ: as I do most humbly all whatsoever else is herein contained.

Again we find that the Religio is strikingly similar to major Anglican apologies, even in relatively unimportant points.[1]

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[1]Religio, p. 75; Hooker, obverse of title page in Works, I; Laud, II, 252. See also Religio, p. 4 and Laud, I, 190 and II, ix.

In the next section comes the famous oh altitudo passage which has been discussed from various points of view in this paper. As far as Anglicanism is concerned it is only necessary to point out that the consequences of the argument, namely that "those wingy mysteries in Divinity, and ayery subtilties of Religion, which have unhing'd the braines of better heads, they never stretch the Pia Mater of mine," is perfectly consistent with the strong Anglican reaction against elaborate theologies or prying into the secrets of God. The whole passage is a lyrical expression of Browne's wondering awe at his faith. It is the kind of faith which Chillingworth describes in this manner:

> To those that believe, and live according to their faith, he gives by degrees the spirit of obsignation and confirmation, which makes them know (though how they know not) what they did but believe: and to be as fully and resolutely assured of the gospel of Christ, as those which heard it from Christ himself with their ears, which saw it with their eyes, which looked upon it, and whose hands handled the word of life.[1]

Browne cannot be troubled by "wingy mysteries" because as an Anglican he accepts them as mysteries and does not strive to penetrate them. This attitude is made even more explicit in the next section where he speaks of faith in this manner:

> 'Tis true, there is an edge in all firme beliefe, and with an easie Metaphor wee may say the sword of faith; but in these obscurities I rather use it in the adjunct the Apostle gives it, a Buckler; under which I perceive a wary combatant may lie invulnerable.[2]

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[1] Religio, p. 13.

[2] Religio, p. 14.

A medal contrasting the active, confident, positive religious warrior, say the Puritan or the Romanist, and the wary, cautious Anglican trusting to the buckler of faith in a world gone mad might well be struck as the emblem of the religious situation of the early seventeenth century. Browne next allies himself to the cause of Christian scepticism. This has been discussed in detail elsewhere. Here it may be observed that the key phrase "to understand a mystery without a rigid definition" is certainly close to the center of Anglican theology.

This concludes the analysis of the first ten sections of the Religio. The Anglican nature of it is so evident that further comment would be superfluous. And if we examine Browne's treatment of Scripture and the nature of salvation, the same conclusion will be forced upon us: Browne is from first to last an Anglican thinker.

Browne's Views on Scripture and Salvation

To isolate Browne's attitude toward the Scriptures is no easy task, for he never makes a precise formulation of his views on this difficult subject. It is, consequently, necessary to pick up hints here and there, refraining above all from the error of taking any single reference as determinative. As mentioned earlier, the difficulties posed by Biblical interpretation faced all reasonable and intellectual Christians, not those alone who were interested in the new science. The problem has existed from the days of the Fathers to the advent of modern methods of criticism and increased understanding of the nature of the text, and it is foolish to look upon Browne as raising new issues or suggesting novel expedients.

The first indication of Browne's attitude, if not read in the context of the whole work, seems to be completely fideistic and literalistic. He mentions several examples of Biblical statements which cannot be accepted by the reason. Some of these involve internal contradiction, such as:

> I doe believe there was already a tree whose fruit our unhappy parents tasted, though, in the same Chapter, where God forbids it, 'tis positively said, the plants of the field were not yet growne, for God had not caused it to raine upon the earth.

Others, such as the punishment of the serpent with its anatomical difficulties, are found questionable scientifically. Browne says, apparently without reservation, that he believes all these things true, "which indeed my reason would perswade me to be false; and this I think is no vulgar part of faith, to believe a thing not only above, but contrary to reason. . . ." But even this statement is not as strong as it appears at first glance. Browne significantly does not say that because the Biblical statements are true, the conclusions of reason or observation must be false. He does not in the Religio, or anywhere in his scientific work, take Scriptural material as determinative in questions wherein the reason is competent. To regard him as a fideist or a literalist on the basis of this section would mean that the great rational theologian Chillingworth should also be called a fideist, for he says quite clearly:

> Propose me any thing out of this book, and require whether I believe it or no, and seem it never so incomprehensible to human reason, I will subscribe it with hand and heart, as knowing no demonstration can be stronger than this—God hath said so, therefore it is true.

Both men are agreed in defending the validity of faith as an order of experience and the Bible as the repository of spiritual truth. But both are too conscious of the difficulties of Biblical interpretation to suggest that the Scriptures afford either a certain system of theology or a storehouse of perfect knowledge in all disciplines. Their solution is simply to accept the truth of everything in Scripture without specifying the sense in which they are to be construed.[1]

In the course of the Religio Browne brings forward various Scriptural ambiguities. It must be understood, however, that he is not raising new difficulties but merely making references to commonplaces of the time. Some critics seem to have seriously been misled by this and in supposing originality and daring rather than simple reference have shifted the whole center of gravity in Browne's discussion. If we do not pay heed to the conventional nature of these topics, it is easy to imagine that Browne is planting doubts in tender minds, whereas he is really defending the religious standpoint.

Great light has been shed on this subject by Strathmann's valuable study of the scepticism of Sir Walter Ralegh. He has analyzed

[1]Religio, p. 15; Chillingworth, p. 481. Browne's first reference is to Genesis 2. Hunt, I, 362 mentions this as a well-known difficulty, but I confess I cannot see the problem, since vv.6–14 appear to resolve the contradiction. The second reference is to Genesis 3:1 and 14. It might be mentioned that while the solution of the Anglicans is not unlike the double-truth doctrine of Pomponazzi, they were not nearly such fervent supporters of philosophy, nor did they ever apply the principle to such a weighty matter as immortality. See Harald Höffding, A History of Modern Philosophy, trans. B. E. Meyer (New York, 1955), I, 15-16, and Pomponazzi "On Immortality" in The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, ed. Ernst Cassirer et al (Chicago, 1948), pp. 377-381.

the considerable body of Elizabethan free-thought and the orthodox replies to this literature. In a summary of the main points brought forward by the anti-Christian writers Strathmann mentions: no creation of the world, no day of judgment, no resurrection, no immortality of the soul, no hell, and no providence. They attacked the Bible ruthlessly, especially the chronology and the miracles. Strathmann reports that:

> favorite points of attack on the Scriptures are the miracles of Moses and (less commonly) of Christ, which are attributed to human skill not supernatural power; the story of Noah and his Ark, which is found impossible; and the destruction of Sodom, which is explained by natural causes. In general the atheist attributes to nature what belongs to God.

With this controversial background in mind it seems probable that Browne is attempting a defense against this attack rather than promoting it. On the larger points, such as providence, immortality, resurrection, and so on, he is explicitly Christian. In the sections now to be considered he is trying to analyze the various kinds of Biblical objections and meet them.[1]

That Browne was consciously setting himself up as an opponent of the freethinkers is seen by the way in which he opens his remarks, "The bad construction and perverse comment on these paire of seconde causes... have perverted the devotion of many into Atheisme...." The atheist is one who has forgotten "the honest advisoes of faith," and has turned instead to the limited certainty of passion and reason. Browne does not attempt to minimize the force of the attack on religion. "There is," he

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[1] Ernest A. Strathmann, Sir Walter Ralegh: A Study in Elizabethan Skepticism (New York, 1951), pp. 86-87. See Dunn, p. 65, for an interpretation which presupposes Browne's originality.

says, "as in Philosophy, so in Divinity, sturdy doubts and boysterous objections, wherewith the unhappiness of our knowledge too neerely acquainteth us," and he confesses that he has had personal experience of these difficulties. But they have not proved strong enough to weaken his faith, and he wishes to point out how they may be overcome. In effect, although not formally, he divides the material into: trivialities, doubtful interpretations, miracles which admit natural explanations, and serious contradictions, and proposes a solution for each kind of difficulty.[1]

Many questions Browne dismisses at once as trivial—the state of Lazarus' soul between his death and new life, the final disposition of Adam's most famous rib, the season of the creation, and so on. These are but a "bundle of curiosities...which are not worthy our vacant hours, much lesse our more serious studies." Somewhat similar are those minutiae which are "no points of Faith, and may admit a free dispute" or which are open to various interpretations. The exact mode of Judas' death is an example of the first, while the Roman proof of guardian angels from Acts 12:15 exemplifies the second. All of these are considered by Browne unworthy of serious consideration; he mentions them only to clear the argumentative ground.[2]

Miracles which are denied on natural grounds are more important. Examples are "Bitumen and Naphta" as chemical causes of the miracle of Elijah and the "combustion" of Gomorrah, and the argument that

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[1] Religio, p. 27.

[2] Religio, p. 30-33.

manna is the purely natural substance described by many historians and scientists. Browne himself had been bothered by these and conquered them "not in a martiall posture, but on my knees." But now he believes he can offer a rational justification for this reliance upon faith, and interestingly enough he does not say definitely that he has in these instances positively rejected the natural explanation. Instead he insists that the truth or falsity of such matters is of no importance. What is dangerous in the habit is that the Devil "by demonstrating a naturality in one way, makes us mistrust a miracle in another." Browne expresses this thought most powerfully in:

> Thus the Devill played at Chesse with mee, and yeelding a pawne, thought to gaine a Queen of me, taking advantage of my honest endeavours; and whilst I laboured to raise the structure of my reason, hee striv'd to undermine the edifice of my faith.

This is but "the Rhetorick of Satan," a technique which imposes only upon the logically and religiously naive. "I confesse," says Browne, "I have perused them all, and can discover nothing that may startle a discreet beliefe." Again he speaks with gentle mockery of "heads carried off with the wind and breath of such motives." What Browne is arguing here is an application of the fundamentals theme; we must not witlessly surrender the citadel of faith because distant and useless outworks seem to have been taken from us.[1]

Some difficulties Browne admits are serious, but believes that they can be met by reason. The main problem which he mentions is that of the Flood. Around this topic many objections clustered, some

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[1] Religio, pp. 27-29.

rather trivial, others exceedingly difficult. Strathmann has described the long and complicated history of this topic, a history which extends beyond Browne, beyond the Renaissance even. Disputes about the capacity of the Ark may strike us as silly, but the theory that the Flood was only a "particular inundation," that the distribution of animal life throughout the world contradicts the Biblical account, and finally that the congregation of all species in one place was improbable, were serious matters and were deserving of an answer by Christian thinkers. Of course, Browne was too competent a biologist to deny the validity of these scientific objections, and he could not answer them directly, for there was no possible counter-argument. What he does is to defend the general validity of the Bible in an interesting way.[1]

Browne's line of defense is double. His first argument is that objections to individual miracles should not make us doubt the possibility of miracles. Events in Scripture which seem unlikely or fabulous to the human mind are all readily admissible if we "conceive a divine concourse or an influence but from the little finger of the Almighty." Those who on principle are unwilling to accept miracles cannot avoid accepting the greatest miracle of all, the creation of the world:

> For this is also a miracle, not onely to produce effects against or above Nature, but before Nature; and to create Nature as great a miracle as to contradict or transcend her. Wee doe too narrowly define the power of God, restraining it to our owne capacities.

Browne here falls back on learned ignorance, with its insistence upon the incommensurability of infinite and finite. If we grant the existence

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[1] Religio, p. 31; Strathmann, pp. 185-192.

of an infinite God we can limit in no way the effects proceeding from him, and thus miracles become logically acceptable.[1]

Browne's second line of argument is a development of the proposition that men are erring, and is especially revealing of his whole complex method of interpreting Scripture. That we experience difficulty in understanding Scripture, that many places seem obscure or contradictory to us, should not surprise us, Browne asserts: "It is impossible that either in the discourse of man, or in the infallible voyce of God, to the weakenesse of our apprehension, there should not appeare irregularities, contradictions, and antinomies...." Such difficulties, in other words, are not in the text but in the minds of men, and so the controversies demonstrate the fallibility of human understanding, not that of the Divine Word. What trust, asks Browne in another place, can be put in "the conclusions and fallible discourses of man upon the word of God?"[2]

This is the solution of the Christian scepticism practised by Taylor and the other Anglican apologists. It is quite different from literalism, for no claim to a personal or group understanding of the text is made. On the contrary the Anglican case for reliance upon clear fundamentals alone is based in large part upon this very ambiguity of the Scriptures. Browne separates himself from the "literall commentators" on the ground that:

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[1]Religio, pp. 30 and 38.

[2]Religio, pp. 30 and 33.

> unspeakable mysteries in the Scripture are often delivered in a vulgar and illustrative way, and being written unto man, are delivered, not as they truely are, but as they may bee understood; wherein, notwithstanding, the different interpretations according to different capacities may stand firme with our devotion, nor bee any way prejudiciall to each single edification.

And in yet another place he makes explicit the suggestion in the above that he is not totally opposed to allegorical readings:

> and truely for the first chapters of Genesis, I must confesse a great deale of obscurity; though Divines have to the power of humane reason endeavoured to make all goe in a literall meaning, yet those allegoricall interpretations are also probable, and perhaps the mysticall method of Moses bred up in the Hieroglyphicall Schooles of the Egyptians.[1]

In the light of these statements Browne's attitude toward Scripture can hardly be called fideistic. His solution is typically Anglican in its recognition of human weakness as the source of the difficulty. He does not confuse Genesis with a scientific textbook in either the manner of the literalist or the atheist. He does not adopt any set rule of interpretation, either literalist or allegorical, but endeavours to read each text in an edifying manner and to keep his attention fixed upon the broader meanings and truths of the Christian revelation. Although his method here is neither original nor perhaps very convincing to modern readers, there is little doubt that he intended it as a defense of the Bible as a religious document against the attacks of the atheists. Browne is on the

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[1]*Religio*, pp. 59 and 46.

side of the Anglicans, if not the angels.[1]

Browne's views on salvation follow the Anglican conception from beginning to end. He starts out with the familiar "narrowing of the gates" theme, which is one of the identifying marks of Anglican thought. Though the bridge to salvation is narrow, says Browne, "yet those who doe confine the Church of God, either to particular Nations, Churches, or Families, have made it far narrower than our Saviour ever meant it." Like Laud he is distressed by the provinciality of many Protestants and keeps his eye on the whole church. Those who "wrap the Church of God in _Strabo's_ cloake, and restrain it unto Europe" cut off uncharitably and without justification large Christian communions in Asia and Africa. Rather than do this, Browne argues, we should strive for an understanding based upon fundamentals, "nor must a few differences, more remarkable in the eyes of man than perhaps in the judgement of God,

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[1]My argument that Browne is consciously opposing the freethinkers is strengthened by the fact that his digression on atheism occurs in the middle of this discussion of scriptural difficulties. Browne's belief that there are strictly speaking no atheists has been attacked by Ziegler, who says, "To use a Brownian paradox Sir Thomas Browne is in a way an atheist because he believes there is no atheism." (p. 48). Dunn, p. 67, also thinks that Browne's views on this subject are "too broad for a churchman who loves to 'keep the road,' too broad certainly for plain accuracy." However, the basis of Browne's contention, namely that religion is a proper differentia between man and beasts was upheld by many orthodox thinkers. Father Robert Parsons, who wrote an extremely influential book against atheists, commonly called the _Books of Resolution_, is quoted by Strathmann, pp. 67-68, as making the same point. Bacon's aphorism, "a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion," reflects the general opinion of the day. Both Parsons and Bacon agree with Browne that Epicurus was not really an atheist. (Bacon, "On Atheism," _Selected Writings of Francis Bacon_, ed. Hugh G. Dick (New York, 1955), pp. 44-45.) See Hooker, II, 19; Donne, _Sermons_, VIII, 225, 328 and 332; Chillingworth, p. 549; and Taylor, _Golden Grove_, p. 262.

excommunicate from heaven one another." Browne then presents skillfully the mutual damnation dilemma so useful to Anglican thinkers:

> 'Tis true we all hold there is a number of Elect, and many to be saved, yet take our opinions together, and from the confusion thereof there will be no such thing as salvation, nor shall any one be saved; for first the Church of Rome condemneth us, wee likewise them, the Sub-reformists and Sectaries sentence the Doctrine of our Church as damnable, the Atomist, or Familist reprobates all these, and all these them againe.

In brief, all thoughts of the universal Church are forgotten while "particular Churches and Sects usurpe the gates of heaven, and turne the key against each other...."[1]

Like the Anglican theologians Browne refuses to involve himself in the technicalities of salvation, contenting himself with an acknowledgment of man's inability to penetrate the secrets of an infinite God, trusting to the goodness of that God. On the day of judgment we may expect to see "strange and unexpected examples both of his justice and his mercy," so unable are we to foretell His actions. In practice it is best to hoe our own gardens. So Browne likes to reflect on his "owne unworthinesse" and only dares to hope that he may be "but the last man, and bring up the Rere in Heaven." Salvation, he admits, is through "the mercy and beneplacit of God, before I was, or the foundation of the world," but nothing farther can be drawn from this fact, because man has no way of investigating the infinite. Browne's elaborate confounding of the predestinarian theory, already discussed in the first part of this paper, employs the same argument as Donne's:

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[1] Religio, pp. 71-72.

> memory can go no farther than the creation; and therefore we have no means to conceive or apprehend anything of God before that. When men therefore speak of decrees of reprobation, decrees of condemnation, before decrees of creation; this is beyond the council of the Holy Ghost here... for this is to put a preface to Moses his Genesis....

Browne is happy to brush the whole matter aside as impertinent and foolish.[1]

Nor will he attempt to determine the relation between faith and works in the scheme of salvation. After the fashion of the English Church he accepts the necessity of each and speaks with some bitterness of those who transform a relatively simple practical teaching into a mass of subtleties:

> Insolent zeales, that doe decry good workes and rely onely upon faith, take not away merits: for depending upon the efficacy of their faith, they enforce the condition of God, and in a more sophisticall way doe seem to challenge Heaven.

Browne simply has no patience with men who mouth about faith and faith alone. Granted, he says, that "true faith, and such as God requires" is not only the mark but the means to salvation, yet "where to finde this, is as obscure to me, as my last end." This theoretically perfect faith does not exist on earth; here men must be content with what measure of faith they have, live according to that faith by practicing works of mercy, and hope for their salvation through God's mercy. Without charity "Faith is a meer notion, and of no existence." Browne here shows the Anglican emphasis upon practicality over against theory. His views on faith and works are similar to those expressed by Taylor:

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[1]Religio, pp. 73-74; Donne in Husain, p. 108.

> Believing is the least thing in a justifying Faith. For Faith is a conjunction of many Ingredients; and Faith is a Covenant, and faith is a law, and Faith is Obedience, and Faith is a work.... Alas! the niceties of a spruce understanding, and the curious nothings of useless speculation, and all the opinions of Men that make the divisions of heart, and do nothing else, cannot bring us one drop of comfort in the day of tribulation.... But that only is Faith that makes us to love God, to do his will....

Browne says nothing concerning salvation which wanders from the beliefs of Laudian divines.[1]

This discussion of the Religio is admittedly incomplete. It is a shame to say nothing of Browne's charity or to investigate none of his fascinating speculations on all manner of subjects. But all these, attractive and beautiful as they are, do not affect the nature of his religious persuasion. Surely enough material has been presented to show that theologically and temperamentally he was one of that great body of churchmen who pledged their allegiance to the Church of England. From a romantic point of view there is some loss involved, for we can no longer present Browne as either a rebel or an independent. But this disadvantage is more than offset by the increased clarity his writings possess once we read them in their proper setting. If this reading is accepted, the Religio will move from the class of charming but somewhat eccentric writings into its just position beside the works

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[1]Religio, p. 74; Taylor, Golden Grove, p. 205. See also Laud's refusal at his trial to determine the relations between faith and works: "Well! now at last I see the bottom of this charge: and I see too, that too many men are shy of 'good works;' and for fear more should be attributed to them than is fit, refuse to acknowledge that which is due unto them. But sure I am there is a command, and more than one, expressly, in the text, for the doing of 'good works,' and that 'without any distinction.'" (Laud, III, 329.) See also Hooker, I, 261.

of Hooker, Laud, Chillingworth and Taylor, to form a part of the heritage of the Church of England to which Browne was devoted throughout his life. I cannot help but feel that he would approve of the change and be proud of his company.[1]

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[1]It might be added that what information we have about the personal habits and practice of Browne confirms this interpretation. The Anglican rector, John Whitefoot, who was Browne's friend for a good part of his life, wrote of him: "In his religion he continued in the same mind which he had declared in his first book...his Religio Medici, wherein he fully assented to that of the church of England, preferring it before any in the world....He attended the publick service very constantly, when he was not withheld by his practice. Never missed the sacrament in his parish, if he were in town. Read the best English sermons he could hear of, with liberal applause; and delighted not in controversies." (Wilkin, I, xlv-vi) Fortunately we are able to show that this was more than conventional praise, for we possess by chance some resolutions Browne made for his personal use only, and from these we learn that Browne actually was prevented from attending services by his practice and that this bothered him. A touch like this in the Whitefoot report strikes us as honest and accurate rather than conventionally unctuous. From these same resolutions we learn that Browne was a man of more than ordinary piety. He had the custom of "calling upon God in a solemn formed prayer" seven times a day, of praying shortly everywhere so that "no street or passage in this city...may not witness that I have not forgot God and my Saviour in it," and of praying whenever he caught sight of a church. See the whole list of resolutions in Wilkin, IV, 420-421.

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