The Two Johns: An Anatomy of a Catholic Literary Relationship

John Dryden’s conversion to Catholicism was described by one contemporary as “a purchase… of no great losse to the Church.” This “purchase” changed the landscape of Dryden’s literary and political life, closing him off from the lucrative praises of the Restoration establishment and allying him with the “papists” he once, in works like *Religio Laici*, sought to marginalize from the contemporary cultural scene. His conversion also brought him deeper into contact with the work of Catholic apologists and controversialists, in whom Dryden found a source of both poetic material and the spiritual comfort of a convert whose embrace of a persecuted religion brought lowered expectations and a changing prospect of happiness and success. While familiar with royal confessors like Huddleston and Cocker, it was one Catholic writer in particular for whom Dryden held the highest regard for what he regarded as his grasp of the “truth,” but likewise his ability to present that truth in the starkest of terms: John Gother. A secular priest best known for his popular and often reprinted *A Papist Misrepresented and Represented* and his devotional *Instructions* to various groups, Gother was a writer Dryden admired enough to say “He was the only person, beside myself, who knew how to write English.” Using Dryden’s letters and later works, like *Threnodia Augustalis* and *The Hind and the Panther*, as well as Gother’s own devotional materials, this paper will explore the exact nature of Dryden’s compliment, and the anatomy of a relationship that was defined not only by its apparently shared stylistics, but also its focus on the proper expression of a native English Catholicism.

Scott Cleary

Iona College