

## Letter of July 18, 1978

(original of this letter was written in French)

### Note by author of this letter

I have been asked to furnish an English translation of the **July 18, 1978** letter in French I wrote Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. In doing so, I am obliged in conscience to warn the reader that some parts of this letter's **Conclusion** have been made obsolete by a subsequent proclamation of the Archbishop's, stating that "the Society of St. Pius X ... cannot tolerate among its members those who refuse to pray for the Pope or affirm that the *Novus Ordo Missae* is *per se* invalid."

Both he and all members of his Society are now, therefore, clearly members of John-Paul II's Conciliar anti-Church; and **Canon 1258** forbids Catholics to attend their Masses, receive the Sacraments from them, or in any active way participate in religious services with them.

Benjamin F. Dryden  
Route 1  
Cave City, Arkansas 72521  
U. S. A.  
**July 18, 1978**

Msgr. Marcel Lefebvre  
Séminaire International Saint Pie X  
Ecône  
CH-1908 Riddes (Suisse)

Monseigneur:

Since the month of **July, 1975**, I have been receiving, with my family, the valid sacraments administered by priests of your Society of St. Pius X. Out of gratitude and to give a bit of assistance to your work, which seemed to me solidly Catholic, I have translated into English the Constitutions of the Sisters, the Statutes of the Society, your admirable "Reflections on *Suspension a Divinis*", and several of your sermons.

It is not the detractions of your enemies – rather, it is meditation on your own words -- that has aroused in my mind disquiet, doubts as to your intention regarding the three principle weapons used now against the Catholic Church: **(1)** the pretended authority of Antipope Paul VI **(2)** that of his Conciliar Anti-Church **(3)** his anti-Mass, the *Novus Ordo Missae*. It would almost seem, if that were credible, that under the appearances of fidelity to the Church of the Ages, you are sowing, among the faithful, confusion and inability to resist these three weapons.

### **The Antipope** (some statements you have made)

... the Pope's personal attitude, which is more difficult to discover... (your *Declaration to the Press*, **August 2, 1976**)

How can a pope, a true successor of Peter, assured of the assistance of the Holy Ghost, preside over the Church's destruction, the most profound and extensive in her history... ? (*Ibidem*)

In all this work, what has been the Pope's role? His responsibility? Truly, it seems overwhelming, despite the desire to exonerate him of this frightful betrayal of the Church. (*J'accuse le Concile*, p10)

Paul VI's attitude, then, is not at all difficult to discover. Not only have you discovered it; the whole world has discovered it, and obliges you to agree "despite the desire to exonerate him." This desire, inspired by the Father of Lies, led you to utter publicly the untruth about his attitude, which is "difficult to discover." It also inspired you with the idea, immoral and deadly for the Church, of

“leaving this problem to theologians and historians” or else “to God and future true successors of Peter”; that is, you will combat the serpent’s tail, the Anti-Church’s prelates, without crushing the head, the antipope himself, as long as he has a bit of strength and a drop of venom with which to bite the Church.

Finally, that immoral wish led you to conjure away, under the words *problem* and *eventuality*, the Catholic Church’s legislation, prepared and promulgated for the present crisis, which is no longer an eventuality. In pronouncing their anathema against **Pope Honorius I** as a monothelite heretic, the *Sixth Ecumenical Council* and **Pope St. Leo II**, for our instruction, added to heresy another motive for the anathema: **simple negligence** of his duty to combat heresy. They sought thereby to set a precedent, in order to facilitate the Church’s defense against future antipopes. In order to keep this precedent perpetually in force, others inserted it into an approved liturgical book, the *Liber Diurnus*. The present Code (**1918**) upholds the authority of such books (**Canon 6.6**).

For **Paul VI** to be an antipope (not “the Holy Father”, nor “a true successor of Peter”, etc.) it suffices to recall the name of any stubborn, notorious heretic, still loaded with honors and quite confident that he will be neither excommunicated nor otherwise combated by **Paul VI**: Hans Küng, Karl Rahner, Raymond Brown, Charles Curran, Helder Camera, Mendez Arceo ... there is **no problem**; the only difficulty is which to choose from this litany of instances in which Paul VI has neglected to combat heresy, thereby laying upon all Catholics the obligation to combat him – him personally, as an antipope, under the same excommunication as **Antipope Honorius I**.

The present *Code of Canon Law*, prepared on the initiative of **St. Pius X** and promulgated by **Pope Benedict XV** to become effective in **1918**, thwarts, through its **Canons 2314.1** and **188.4**, all the wiles of **Antipope Paul VI**, of his Anti-Church, and of its accomplices among the clergy calling themselves traditional. It places them under anathema and deprives them of all authority over Catholics *sine ulla declaratione* -- that is, without awaiting the sentence of a tribunal.

#### **Canon 2314.1**

All apostates from the Christian Faith and every heretic or schismatic incur the following penalties:

- (1) *ipso facto* excommunication;
- (2) if they have been admonished and do not repent, they shall be deprived of any benefice, dignity, pension, office or other position which they may hold in the Church; they shall be declared infamous, and, if they are clerics, they shall after renewed admonition be deposed;
- (3) if they have joined a non-Catholic sect or have publicly adhered to it, they incur infamy *ipso facto*, and, without prejudice to the provision of **Canon 188, n.4**, if they are clerics and the admonition to repent has been fruitless, they shall be degraded.

#### **Canon 188, n.4**

Through tacit resignation, accepted by the law itself, all offices become vacant *ipso facto* and without any declaration if a cleric has publicly forsaken the Catholic Faith.

Far from being “difficult to discover”, **Paul VI’s** heresies are found **almost anywhere**. In the *United Nations*, it was the religion of Man and the denial of original sin. Among the decrees of *Vatican II*, which **Paul VI** approved and has imposed on you as a condition for lifting your *suspension a divinis*, we read that non-Catholic religions are means of salvation, and that it is good for Catholics to participate in worship with their “separated brethren”. There have even been published catalogues of these heresies; e.g., in abbé Georges de Nantes *Libellus Accusatorius* and in Fr. Noël Barbara’s *Fortes in Fide* (Vol. I, n.6). The heretic has been admonished and remains impenitent and pertinacious, since abbé de Nantes found the approaches to the Vatican barred by the police, and your suspension has not been lifted.

With **Paul VI's** schism, he himself has been at pains to advertise publicly and scandalously by imposing the *Novus Ordo Missae*, in contempt of the decree *Quo Primum*. He advertised it anew of **Mar 24, 1976**, in the Consistory, by opposing **yesterday's authority to today's authority**, and by arrogating to himself the right to define, among the numberless traditions, those which must be considered norms of faith, without concern for the definitions already made by true popes.

We see, then, that **Paul VI** is quite clearly excommunicated and deprived of all authority and has become an antipope through heresy and schism, in virtue of **Canons 2314.1** and **188.4**. That is why these canons remain hidden from public view, buried not only in the sepulchral silence of **Paul VI** and his Conciliar clergy, but even in the silence of the clergy supposedly traditional but really in collusion with the antipope. If the faithful would read these canons, the whole tragedy would be at an end. People would laugh on hearing **Paul VI** speak of "Our authority, willed by Christ".

There is an honorable exception. Father Noël Barbara has sought out, in St. Robert Bellarmine's writings, the theological scaffolding that was used in formulating these canons and has published it in an easily readable style. He has even quoted **Canon 2314**, though in an embryonic form, indicating that he may not have had the **1918** Code.

In the publications of the Society of St. Pius X, is the same silence observed? Yes. Subject to correction,<sup>1</sup> I find among them only one exception, one solitary exception, which calls attention to so general a silence as to make one suspect the existence of secret instructions. This exception is found in your Declaration of **August 2, 1976**:

In the same measure that a pope should withdraw from this Tradition, he would become schismatic, would withdraw from the Church. Theologians like St. Bellarmine, Cajetan, Cardinal Journet, and many others have studied this eventuality. It is, therefore, not something inconceivable.

And further on ...

On the other hand, it seems to us much more certain that the Faith taught by the Church for twenty centuries can contain no errors when it is absolutely certain that the Pope is truly Pope. Heresy, schism, *ipso facto* excommunication, invalidity of his election, are all causes from which it may sometimes result that a pope has never been or is now no longer Pope. In this case, a very exceptional one, of course, the Church would be in the situation she experiences after the death of a Sovereign Pontiff.

These are words that lightened hearts and aroused fair hopes; they do you honor. Yet the honor is somewhat tarnished by these considerations: (1) spoken nearly two years ago, the words have had no sequel; (2) this confirms the impression you spoke with some reluctance, yielding to external pressure and without taking the trouble to re-read the canons; (3) comparison of your words with the text itself of the canons shows inaccuracies that seem intentional, made on purpose to conceal from the public that these are laws, quite precise and obligatory, and to give the impression that, on the contrary, they are only the subtle, impractical speculations of some theologians.

Why, Monseigneur, do not you and priests of the Society explain thoroughly and clearly these canons, which strip all authority from the invaders of our buildings? Why, on the contrary, do you employ so much eloquence in treating a case that is today entirely theoretical, the case of a legitimate pope who might abuse his authority without losing it? Is not this kind of complicity a way

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<sup>1</sup> Since writing this letter, I have been informed that Fr. Peter Morgan, English Provincial of the Society of St. Pius X, made St. Robert Bellarmine's thesis known before Fr. Barbara.

of confirming the errors sown by **Antipope Paul VI**, that his authority exists and is willed by Christ?

### **The anti-Church** (some statements you have made)

We are suspended *a divinis* by the Conciliar Church and for the Conciliar Church, to which we have **no wish to belong**.

That Conciliar Church is a schismatic Church, because it breaks with the Catholic Church that has always been. It has its new dogmas, its new priesthood, its new institutions, its new worship, all already condemned by the Church in many a document, official and definitive. (*Reflections on Suspension a Divinis*, **July 29, 1976**)

This Conciliar Church is, therefore, not Catholic. To whatever extent **Pope, Bishops, priests** or faithful adhere to this new Church, **they separate themselves** from the Catholic Church. (Ibidem)

It would be so simple, if each bishop in his diocese placed one church at our disposal, at the disposal of faithful Catholics, telling them, "There is the church that is yours." And here, when we think that the bishop of Lille has given a church to the Moslems, I do not see why there should not be a church for faithful Catholics. After all, the **whole question would be settled**. That is what I shall ask of the **Holy Father**, if the Holy Father will receive me: "Holy Father, let us give Tradition a try." (Conclusion to the *Sermon at Lille*, **August 29, 1976**)

So simple? Really, Monseigneur, this makes my head swim. In just one month, from **July 29 to August 29, 1976!** You now find it quite natural, quite simple to celebrate the Mass of Jesus Christ on a footing of equality, if not of inferiority, and in sweet amity with Moslem worship and Conciliar worship, in the bosom of that schismatic Church to which you had no wish to belong, by authorization of that antipope, of those bishops, who, by adhering to the new Church, have separated themselves from the Catholic Church! The whole question would be settled!

Must we not rather, Monseigneur, change that conditional verb and say that the whole question **is** settled? That you have settled it by this act of adherence to the antipope and to his Anti-Church?

If they have joined a non-Catholic sect or have publicly adhered to it, they incur infamy *ipso facto*...

The answer to the question is that Monseigneur Lefebvre has committed the infamy of adhering to a non-Catholic sect, and that he has thereby separated himself from the Catholic Church, outside which there is no salvation. Even while effecting fear that the antipope might excommunicate you invalidly, even while claiming the right to appear before a tribunal made up exclusively of apostates, you have drawn down upon yourself a real and valid anathema.

In the forum of conscience, there may be whatever loophole, whatever excuses you like; into that forum none may enter but you, God and your confessor. But in the external forum, that infamy still weighs on you, on your work and on thousands of souls whose ideas it turns topsy-turvy and who are tempted to follow so execrable an example of adherence to the Anti-Church. This is a scandal which you must undo, first by a public abjuration and then by combating, with all the life and strength that remain to you, the false authority of the antipope and of his Anti-Church.

### **Novus Ordo Missae** (some statements you have made)

**I will never say** that this new *Ordo Missae* is heretical; **I will never say** that it cannot be a Sacrifice. I think that many priests -- especially those that have known the Old Ordo -- certainly say the Mass with the best of intentions. Far be it from me to say that everything in this *Novus Ordo* is bad; but **I do say** that this *Novus Ordo* opens the door to multiple possibilities, to division. (*Priests for Tommorrow*, **March 29, 1973**)

All these changes in the new rite are truly dangerous. For, little by little, especially in the case of young priests, who no longer have the idea of Sacrifice, of the Real Presence, of Transubstantiation,

and **for whom such has no meaning** -- these young priests **lose the intention** to do what the Church does and **no longer say valid Masses**.

Aged priests, certainly, when they celebrate according to the new rite, still have the same faith as ever. They have said Mass in the ancient rite so many years; they retain the same intention; it **may be believed** that their Mass is valid. But in proportion as these intentions fade and disappear, in the same proportion will Masses be **no longer valid**. (*From Luther's Evangelical Mass to the Novus Ordo Missae*, Florence, **February 15, 1975**)

This Conciliar Church is schismatic, because it has taken as a basis for its updating principles opposed to those of the Catholic Church, such as the new concept of the Mass expressed in numbers 5 of the Preface to (the decree) *Missale Romanum* and 7 of its first chapter, which gives the assembly a priestly role that it cannot exercise... ("Reflections on Suspension *a Divinis*", **July 29, 1976**)

The new Mass is a hybrid Mass, which is no longer hierarchical, but democratic, where the assembly has a greater place than the priest; it is therefore **no longer a real Mass** which affirms the Kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ. (*Sermon at Lille*, **August 29, 1976**)

I do not say that the new Mass is heretical; I have never said that. Neither have I ever said that this Mass is not valid in itself. But I hold that there are more and more invalid Masses because even the foundations of the Mass are changing. **I really think that this Mass is an equivocal Mass**, because it can be said by Protestants as well as by Catholics... (*The Church After the Council*, Rome, **June 6, 1977**)

The layman, Monseigneur, if he receives instruction from the clergy with docility and respect, nevertheless hopes for, and even has a right to receive, clear and consistent instruction. You have said three times that the new rite is neither heretical nor invalid. Yet it is based on principles opposed to those of the Catholic Church; do heresies exist, then, according to you, that are not so opposed? This rite is valid, yet is not a real Mass. Are not *valid* and *real* one and the same thing?

In such instruction, moreover, the layman seeks especially a solution to currently practical questions. Does the new rite bestow the grace of God? No, we are told, for two reasons: (1) It is not a valid sacrament because the form instituted by Christ has been changed: *pro vobis et pro multis* has become in English *for all men* or the equivalent in other tongues. (2) It is an illicit rite, **forbidden by St. Pius V**. It is a sin to be present at it, and sin excludes grace.

Now as to the first reason, you deny it flatly; and the second you pass over in complete silence. People note that your seminary and your opposition to **Paul VI** have only a weak motivation: the tendency to division, the tendency to invalid Masses, and the fact that Protestants accept the new rite. They conclude that it is hardly worth while to inconvenience themselves for so little; henceforth, they will attend the *Novus Ordo*. Your words are the cause of these acts of illicit worship; their effect is to send the sheep back to the wolf, who will devour them at will.

Others, more prudent, do some research. Can the old priest's good intention make valid a rite corrupted in the form? No.

For whichever of these is lacking, namely, the right **matter**, the **form** with **intention**, and priestly **ordination** in the celebrant, the Sacrament is not accomplished. (*De Defectibus*, p. xc in the *Missal of St. Pius V*)

And faith? Why does St. Pius V say nothing of that faith which is supposed to make valid the new rite of the old believing priest, while that of the young unbeliever is invalid for want of faith?

Because the minister in the sacraments operates instrumentally, he acts not by his own virtue, but by the virtue of Christ. But just as charity pertains to a man's own virtue, so does faith. Hence, just as it is not necessary for the accomplishment of the sacrament that its minister be in charity, but even sinners can confer the sacrament, as is stated above, so his faith is **not required**. But an

unbeliever can give a true sacrament, provided all other requisites be present which are necessary for the sacrament. (St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* III, Q 64, a 9c)

Hence, despite his unbelief, he can intend to do what the Church does, though he reckon it to be nothing. And such an intention suffices for the sacrament; because, as we have said (*ST*, III, a 8, ad 2), the minister acts in the person of the whole Church, from whose faith is supplied whatever is lacking in the minister's faith. (*Ibidem*, ad 1)

Is St. Thomas wrong? Or is your talk of intention and faith simply so much dust in our eyes, to make us forget that the new rite is invalid through a defect in the form and illicit in light of *Quo Primum*?

Finally, let us note, in our last quotation from St. Thomas, that the minister of the sacrament acts in the person of his Church. That good old priest, therefore, with his good intention in the new rite, does not exist. On the contrary, there is an excommunicated man, celebrating a non-Catholic rite as minister of the Anti-Church. In the absence of proof to the contrary, his intention will be that promulgated by the Anti-Church, to celebrate a commemorative meal, without Sacrifice, without Transubstantiation, and therefore without sacramental validity. If proof to the contrary existed, the Anti-Church's bishop would straight-away expel the good old priest.

### Conclusion

There, then, Monseigneur, is what has been disturbing me for two years. Your work is a beautiful garden, full of flowers, fragrances, and even tasty fruit; with good reason it attracts us, the flies. The seminary, the ordinations of new priests, the valid sacraments, the praises rightly accorded to the Mass of the ages, to the Church as she has always been and to her Tradition – all this rejoices our hearts. For all this, thanks are due to God. Nevertheless, in this garden, some ugly spider has spread its web. Each “Most Holy Father”, each respectful mention of “the Pope”, is a thread which binds to **Antipope Paul VI** all the flies that have forgotten the Apostolic precept: “nor say to him: God speed you” (**II John 10**).

To bind us to the Anti-Church and to suggest to us that it has some authority, there is a whole network of threads: your fear of being excommunicated by this Anti-Church; your appeal to approbation by a bishop of the Anti-Church to demonstrate that the Society is quite in order with Canon Law; frequent use of the expression “the Church” to designate, without distinction, now the Catholic Church, which is holy, now the Anti-Church, which is not, and now both at once, as if they were but one Church; the great currency accorded to a saying of the antipope, “the self-destruction of the Church”, without pointing out that this destruction is the work of the Anti-Church, not at all of the Catholic Church at whom it is aimed; and, finally, as a master-thread, your blasphemous idea of celebrating valid Masses in the bosom of the Anti-Church, as they are celebrated in other schismatic Churches (the Greek, the Russian, etc.).

Finally, to draw us slyly, gently toward the Anti-Mass, there are your sophisms regarding the celebrant's intention and faith as related to his age. There is your absolute silence on the other conditions necessary for validity and on **St. Pius V's** prohibition in *Quo Primum* of all new rites.

Should the flies frequent this beautiful garden, Monseigneur, in which there are so many perils for eternal salvation? Before **1958**, when you were a seminary professor or Bishop of Dakar under the authority of a Catholic Pope, would you not have answered, without hesitation, that we must avoid occasions of sin, especially occasions of mortal sin, whose wage is the eternal pains of Hell? Now, after twenty years, things are no longer the same; the flies, uncertain whether you would

answer in the character of gardener or of spider, must no longer seek advice of you, for it may prove either good or very bad.

The answer is to be sought in the law of the Catholic Church, **Canon 2261.2**:

The faithful may for any just reason ask the sacraments and sacramentals from an excommunicated person, especially if there is no other minister available.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, this is a concession to the need to receive the Sacraments. Before using it as authorization to enter your garden, we must seriously look for another priest and weigh, with great attention and prudence, the need for the Sacraments against the occasion of sin, against the danger of entangling ourselves in some sophism spun by the spider in your garden. Before and after entering, we must arm ourselves with prayer and vigilance against these dangers.

What about the priests of your Society? They may be considered under **two aspects**:

(1) Every priest is in the same case as the layman, since he has his salvation to work out. He is a fly, like the rest of us, with this difference, that he lives all the time in the garden, continually exposing himself to the occasion of adhering to the antipope, to the Anti-Church, and to the Anti-Mass. **Canon 2261.2** does not authorize him to live thus in the occasion of sin; he must separate himself from it in all haste.

(2) In whatever distinguishes him from the layman, and especially in his private and public teaching, the priest that obeys you is no longer a fly like the rest of us; he is likely to be considered a spider. As long as he recognizes your authority, Monseigneur, while you recognize that of the antipope and of the Anti-Church, we must suspect him of being likewise **an ally of Paul VI** and of the Conciliar Church. Such a suspicion, of course, is harmful to his apostolic work; but the layman who renounced this suspicion would expose himself to the danger of losing his soul. It is up to you, Monseigneur, to repair the scandal of your adherence; or else, it is up to the priest to separate himself from you.

What about you, Monseigneur? As a bishop and former seminary professor, you have no need at all to be instructed by me. If you make mistakes in theology and Canon Law that favor the Church's enemies, it is not through ignorance. Impossible! You have said that, to excommunicate you, a sin must be named. Here, Monseigneur, is that sin: It is adherence to the non-Catholic Conciliar sect, to its head, and to its rite, with full knowledge.

It is neither I, however, nor **Paul VI** who excommunicates you; it is **Pope Benedict XV**, through **Canon 2314.1** of the Code that he promulgated. I am that five-year-old child who can contradict a bishop (you said so, at Lille) by quoting the catechism. You did not say how the story ends. Can it be that God used that child to bring the bishop back to the path of salvation? It is with that wish that some have long urged me to write this letter and that I have written it.

(signed)

Benjamin F. Dryden

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<sup>2</sup> For a better application of this Canon, refer to Appendix.

## APPENDIX (July 18, 1980)

This letter, whose French original was mailed to Archbishop Lefebvre two years ago, would certainly have to be brought up to date if mailed today. Its **Conclusion** ought no longer to consider priests of the Society of St. Pius X as Catholics, from whom the Catholic faithful might licitly receive the Sacraments. For the Archbishop himself has officially proclaimed them members of the Conciliar Church, recognizing John Paul II as pope and the *Novus Ordo Missae* as a valid Mass. Refer to Msgr. Lefebvre's *The New Mass and the Pope*, published in *The Angelus*, **January, 1980**.

The letter's **Conclusion**, however, was **misleading, even in 1978**, wrongly suggesting, perhaps, to some readers, that **Canon 2261.2** allows reception of the Sacraments from non-Catholics despite its prohibition in **Canon 1258**. For the term *excommunication*, which, to many Catholics means expulsion from membership in the Catholic Church, is not so defined in the **1918 Code of Canon Law**.

*Excommunication* or *Anathema* is defined (**Canon 2257**) purely as a censure (corrective, medicinal penalty) by which one is excluded from the communion of the faithful with the effects enumerated in the subsequent Canons (**2258-2267**), which effects are inseparable from it. The excommunicated man is forbidden to receive (**2260**) or dispense (**2261**) the Sacraments, except by request of the faithful (**2261 .2**). He is forbidden to exercise the authority of any office (**2263**), but such exercise is not invalid unless sentence has been pronounced against him (**2264**). He is deprived of indulgences, suffrages, and the Church's public prayers; but there is no prohibition against praying for him privately, or even against offering Mass for him privately (**Canon 2262**).

All reference is omitted here to the *excommunicatus vitandus* because no one can become *vitandus* when **all offices are vacant**. For the same reason, until the Church's offices are filled again, no sentence of excommunication can be pronounced against anyone. That is, no one is excommunicated today **except automatically**, by the very nature of the offense or by provision of the law itself, without need for action by a tribunal or prelate (*ipso facto, ipso iure; excommunication latae sententiae*).

A person thus automatically excommunicated may or may not remain a member of the Catholic Church, according to the nature of the offense. Thus, one manufacturing false relics (**Canon 2326**) or profiteering from indulgences (**Canon 2327**), though *ipso facto* excommunicated, is presumably still a Catholic; and the faithful may licitly ask him for the Sacraments (**Canon 2262.2**).

On the other hand, the **sins of heresy and schism**, e.g., adherence to the Conciliar sect or doctrine, are of themselves **defections from the Catholic Church**, by which the sinner becomes a non-Catholic. Reception of the Sacraments from such a priest or attendance at his Mass (even a valid, Tridentine Mass) is common worship with a non-Catholic, affirming with him a unity of faith and discipline that does not exist. In effect, it is **adherence to his non-Catholic sect**; it is wrong in itself, quite independently of its prohibition in **Canon 1258** and of any excommunication. Essentially wrong, for the same reason, is worship in a group which, as a group, adheres to any heresy or non-Catholic sect. **What is essentially wrong is always wrong**, without exception, even in such urgent necessity as imminent death.

(signed)

B. F. Dryden

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