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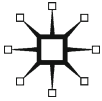
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**Alexander Pope's
Catholic Vision:
"Slave to no sect"**

G. Douglas Atkins

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ALEXANDER POPE'S CATHOLIC VISION

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Preface

This book instances what I am terming an *essayistic criticism*. By that I mean a literary commentary intended and written for the once-called common reader, now perhaps an *uncommon* reader who, even if an academic and a specialist, nevertheless has interests not narrow and confined but large and familiar. My hope is that just as essays—as opposed to “definite” articles and monographs—appeal to what all men and women share, so this writing about a great poet will hold inclusive interest. Essayistic criticism, as I understand it, does not eschew special knowledge; it may, in fact, proceed in, through, and by means of it—always to broader, more fundamental, and more universal matters of human understanding. The appearance is less scholarly than informed, more informal in style than academic. I am not so much interested in persuading you as in elucidating the poems of Alexander Pope. The form of such commentary as I attempt to describe is, then, the essay, which bears, willy-nilly, a certain tentativeness and presents a character of humility. There is a course of discovery that the essay rather happily follows, instead of a strictly linear and distinctly argumentative manner and design deriving from a thesis to be proved, not a perspective to be explored. Throughout the book you hold in your hand, I *essai* to write in the spirit with which Pope wrought his great works.

Unlike the argumentative article, the staple of academic commentary, which is straightforward and rational, designed to persuade, the essay, in which form I write, proceeds in the *a posteriori* fashion that Pope himself advocated; it is