

# THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF DOMINION IN ISAAC NEWTON'S THOUGHT

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**Abstract.** In this paper I intend to assess the theological implications of the concept of dominion as elaborated by Isaac Newton in his unpublished papers drafted concomitantly with the General Scholium to the *Principia Mathematica*. My research will focus especially on Newton's drafts on Church history from the Yahuda Ms 15. I will highlight the notion of dominion as underlying on the one hand the specific articulation of the unity of the Deity, while on the other framing the unipersonal character of God. Based on his reading of early Christian literature, Newton described the understanding of the unity between the Father and the Son in the primitive Church using monarchical terms: the Father and the Son are called one God due to their common dominion over the same monarchy – this conception constitutes the premise for Newton's antitrinitarian outlook. The theological consequence of this view emphasizes a unipersonal understanding of God. Moreover, the manner in which Newton's view of the unity of the Deity is elaborated in his theological writings enables us to avoid any fallacious doctrinal suppositions regarding the heterodox character of his theology.

**Keywords:** Isaac Newton, theology, antitrinitarianism, dominion of God, unity of the Deity

## Introduction

Since the dawn of the Reformation the traditional alliance between theology and metaphysics was brought into discussion from a dialectical standpoint in regard to scholastic theology. The fusion between Christian doctrine and Hellenistic thought was already manifest in Christian antiquity. Clement of Alexandria, whom Isaac Newton labelled “a great admirer of Plato” when disputing his explanation of the engendering of the Logos before creation, is only one example.<sup>1</sup> Clement is illustrative for the beginnings of the Alexandrian catechetical school. Here, as Newton suggested, the metaphysical encroachments on the theological scholarship of Christian writers led to the doctrinal fissure of the early fourth century. In Reformed theological milieus the words of the Apostle Paul, “beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy

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and vain deceit” (Colossians 2:8), were interpreted in favour of the principle of *sola Scriptura*. Certain novel directions can be discerned in the seventeenth century. Reconciliation between metaphysics and theology seemed to be the appanage of the ‘New Philosophy’, while for others metaphysics remains just a ‘vain Philosophy’.<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hobbes used this Biblical epithet in his *Leviathan* to argue against the ancient metaphysics from which Christian theology had to be purged.<sup>3</sup> The radical reformed theologians of the seventeenth century viewed this debate as an opportunity to reconsider the primitive Christian doctrine. The controversies surrounding the union between Christian doctrine and Greek philosophy reached a climax in England towards the end of the seventeenth century when, according to Stephen Nye and Jacques Souverain, the advent of the alteration of Christ’s message from the New Testament canon is to be pinpointed. Their antitrinitarian views relied on historical and philological scholarship, considering ancient metaphysics as the vehicle for the corruption of genuine Christianity. Nye and Souverain developed an antitrinitarian exegesis of the Johannine prologue (the key argument of the Trinitarians), challenging the sense of the *Logos* in the fourth Gospel. For them the goal of John the Apostle was not to affirm the eternal divinity of Christ, but rather to confute the Cerinthian heresy. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the language of the fourth Gospel generated a ‘Platonic captivity’ of the Christian profession over the centuries.<sup>4</sup>

Newton’s unpublished manuscripts demonstrate his interest in the history of the early Church, which he read inclusively in terms of the dialectic between theology and metaphysics, as I will show later. In the spirit of the Scripture’s normative bearing, Newton states that “all the old heresies lay in deductions, the true faith was in the text”.<sup>5</sup> Newton’s theological language from his post-1700 unpublished papers is predominantly monarchical. This is also the case of the General Scholium to the second edition of the *Principia* (1713), the first public pronouncement regarding the theological foundations of Newton’s natural philosophy. Here, Newton defines God as the ‘Lord God of dominion’ and the Deity as ‘the dominion of God’. One year later, in the postscript to *Some brief critical remarks on Dr. Clarke’s last papers* (1714), the English divine John Edwards (1637 – 1716) questioned the heterodox character of Newton’s ‘wild jargon’ from the Scholium: ‘Dominion is not so fit word to express the Deity’.<sup>6</sup> Edwards raised the spectre of Arian and Socinian tenets in the General Scholium when he referred to Newton’s statement concerning the word ‘God’ as a relative term and his use of the epithet ‘*Deus summus*’.<sup>7</sup>

In this paper I intend to reconstruct the theological implications of the concept of dominion in Newton’s last papers on the history of the Church. My claim is that in devising and elaborating this notion, Newton identified the original understanding of the unity of the Deity in the primitive Church as a unity of dominion. Consequently, in developing this conception, he did not follow Arian or Socinian tenets, but elaborated it on the model of monarchical unity. This constitutes Newton’s antitrinitarian premise, as I found it in his last papers. I chose the post-1710 writings from the large corpus of Newton’s manuscripts for their overlapping with the General Scholium, its various drafts, draft fragments and reworking drafts. I do not suggest here that Newton’s ‘God of dominion’ from the second edition of the *Principia* was designed to be an antitrinitarian message. Rather, his claims in the General

Scholium are about God's operation in the physical world.<sup>8</sup> In a forthcoming paper on the Enlightenment legacy of the General Scholium, Mordechai Feingold warns against the over-interpretation of the antitrinitarian import of the Scholium, emphasizing that Newton's heterodox view was not as critical for the composition of the General Scholium as it is commonly assumed.<sup>9</sup> He is challenging here the thesis that Newton's General Scholium was read in connection with Trinitarian debates throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Despite all these historical reconstructions, the unpublished papers of Isaac Newton (to which we have access today<sup>11</sup>) put forward for consideration the intimate connection between his antitrinitarianism and the 'God of dominion' from the 1713 and 1726 editions of the *Principia*.

In a paper published in 1990, James E. Force argued that the concept of dominion has a unifying role in Isaac Newton's thought, as the metaphysical underpinning for his theology, science, and politics. Regarding the antitrinitarian character of Newton's theology, Force followed Richard Westfall in his assumption that the source of Newton's God of dominion could be his Arianism, "clearly" articulated in the General Scholium.<sup>12</sup> Arianism, the teachings of the Alexandrian priest Arius (c. 280 – 336) and his followers, was a subordinationist doctrine of the divine hypostases, conceiving their relationship as a *trias* of "unequal glories".<sup>13</sup> That Newton developed an Arian theology has become somewhat of a commonplace in Newtonian scholarship.<sup>14</sup> Maurice Wiles speaks of the Arian character of Newton's theology, at the same time suggesting the existence of certain Socinian elements of his Christology.<sup>15</sup> At a glance, this labelling game might seem like a critical point. An Arian theology mixed with Socinian Christological elements (most importantly, the rejection of the pre-existence of Christ) would lack the efficient instrument of creation. In turn, a Socinian theology with Arian Christological elements would deny the unipersonal character of the Unitarian God.<sup>16</sup> In this paper I also emphasise that Newton's antitrinitarian stance cannot be labelled Arian. Its premise is grounded in the conception of the Deity as a monarchical unity, thus a unity of dominion. As we will see in this paper, Newton denied both fourth century Homoousian and Arian theologies. Stephen Snobelen also discussed the theological aspects of the God of dominion from the General Scholium, emphasizing a "unitarian presentation of God" in the addendum to the *Principia*. He used the term "unitarian" (distinct from Unitarian) to refer generally to a non-Trinitarian theological position that treats God as a single person (the Father alone is the supreme God).<sup>17</sup>

A considerable portion of Newton's writings on Church history is devoted to the doctrinal disputes of the first Christian centuries. His interest in this period lies in the development of novel articles of faith within the various confessions of the early Church. Newton's research is primarily historical; it does not seek to validate a particular theological view. The best way to gain a clear understanding of the meaning of "Deitas est domination Dei" from the General Scholium is by analyzing Newton's use of the term Deity in his unpublished theological writings. We can identify two meanings of the term *Deity* in Newton's case: on the one hand, it expresses God's dominion over creation; on the other, it explains the unity between the Father and the Son along the lines of a radical monotheism. It is therefore highly relevant to place his understanding of the unity of the Deity within the context of the ante- and post-

Nicene Fathers, since Newton usually appealed to ancient Christian writers in explaining his own conclusion on the topic.<sup>18</sup> According to Newton, the unity of the Deity, understood as a unity of dominion, accounts for the fact that the Father and the Son are called one God. This occurs on the basis of a monarchical relationship, meaning their common dominion over the world. As I stated before, this conception constitutes Newton's antitrinitarian premise. At the same time, the unipersonal understanding of God reveals the Father's monarchy relative not only to the world, but also to the Son.

### ***Dominion in the General Scholium***

In the third Book of the first edition of the *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687) Newton formulated a natural theological statement describing God as the architect of the system of the Sun and planets: "God therefore set the planets at the different distances from the sun so each one might, according to the degrees of its density, enjoy a greater or smaller amount of heat from the Sun".<sup>19</sup> In the following two editions of his magnum opus (1713, 1726), Newton elaborated this type of argument, which was widely accepted by contemporary natural philosophers, in the General Scholium, the new addendum to the "Third Book". Here, in possibly the most famous of all Newton's writings,<sup>20</sup> he formulates his well-known argument from design: "This most elegant system of the sun, planets and comets could not have arisen without the design and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being"; therefore, all natural elements should be "subject to the dominion of One".<sup>21</sup>

The statement regarding "the dominion of One" (*Unius dominio*) and the argument from design from the Scholium are not restricted to the general bounds of natural theology, but are developed in the following excerpts, where they are brought in connection with Biblical references, and thus receive theological connotations.

This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all: And on account of his dominion he is wont to be called *Lord God παντοκράτωρ* or *Universal Ruler*. For *God* is a relative word, and has a respect to servants; and *Deity* is the dominion of God, not over his own body, as those imagine who fancy God to be the soul of the world, but over servants. The supreme God is a Being eternal, infinite, absolutely perfect; but a being, however perfect, without dominion, cannot be said to be Lord God; for we say, my God, your God, the God of *Israel*, the God of Gods, and Lord of Lords; but we do not say, my Eternal, your Eternal, the Eternal of *Israel*, the Eternal of Gods; we do not say, my Infinite, or my Perfect: These are titles which have no respect to servants.<sup>22</sup>

"The dominion of One" is identified with the dominion of the God of Scriptures, "the God of Israel, the God of Gods, and Lord of Lords" (Deuteronomy 10:17, Revelation 19:16); "The intelligent and powerful Being" who governs the universe is for Newton the *Pantokrator* of the Apocalypse of John (1:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:15; 21:22), and the Deity is not indicative of the substance of the Godhead, but of God's dominion over creation. Newton adds other Biblical references in his notes to

the term 'God' (Psalms 82:6; John 10:35; Exodus 4:16; 7:1) and divine omnipresence (Acts 17:27–28, Deuteronomy 4:39, 10:14, Psalms 139:7–8, I Kings 8:27; Job 22:12; Jeremiah 23:23–24). In the 1726 edition he adds John 14:2; Psalms 139:9; Job 22:13–14.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Stephen Snobelen defined Newton's General Scholium as a "theologically charged appendix" to the second edition of the *Principia*.<sup>24</sup> The notion of dominion as elaborated here is associated with the concept of 'Lord God of dominion, Dominus Deus, dominatio Dei', as an expression of God's actual sovereignty or providence over the physical universe and human history. It also constitutes the premise for all the perfections of a living and acting God: "it is the dominion of a spiritual being which constitutes a God; [...] from his true dominion it follows, that the true God is a Living, Intelligent and Powerful Being; and from his other perfections, that he is Supreme or most Perfect."<sup>25</sup>

### Newton on the Unity of the Deity

According to Isaac Newton, in order to explain why Christ is called God, the Homoousians (the fourth century group of theologians who conceived the unity between the Father and the Son as an essential unity or a unity of substance), resort to a metaphysical conceptual pair (οὐσία – ὁμοούσιος) forbidden by Scripture. The monotheistic character of the Christian profession is thus brought into question by the elaboration of the theory of consubstantiality, explained by Latin theologians as a substantial unity of the Father and the Son, due to their translation of the Greek ὁμοούσιος as *unius substantiae*. For Newton, the decision of the Nicene Synod in the year 325 to define the unity between the Father and the Son using the term *homoousios*, whose conceptual origin lies in polytheistic religions, appeals to a language inappropriate for Biblical theology. Therefore, "the grand occasion of errors in the faith has been the turning of the scriptures from a moral & monarchical to a physical &/ metaphysical sense, & this has been done chiefly by men bred up in the \metaphysical/ theology of the heathen Philosophers \the Cabbalists & Schoolmen/." Likewise, the unity between the Father and the Son must be understood and expressed according to the moral and monarchical language intrinsic to Scripture: "when therefore the Father and Son are called God, we are to understand it not metaphysically but in a moral monarchical sense".<sup>26</sup>

Newton explains the process of the corruption of the original Christian monotheism in the fourth century by employing ontological categories supplied by ancient metaphysics in the doctrinal formulas. He comes up with several reasons against the use of the term *homoousios*, for example that it is nowhere to be found in the Bible, and therefore it is not revealed, the fact that it would give rise to the possibility of conceiving the Logos as an emanation from the substance of the Father, and that the term is ambiguous and it leaves room for interpretation. Moreover, Newton brings into discussion the fact that the origins of the Arian controversy in the first decades of the fourth century are to be found in Gnostic concepts and he assimilates the language of the Homoousians to a heretical tradition (of Cataphrygians and Sabbelians). Regarding the validation of *homoousios* in the year 325, which was once the ground for Paul of Samosata's excommunication, Newton decries the introduction of this term against the convictions of the majority of the Synod in Nicaea – since it

was adopted for the sole purpose of opposing Arius' views. The adoption of this term was approved through the intercession of Emperor Constantine I, not yet baptized, consequently not having the quality of a council member. Additionally, the Latin translation of the term *homoousios* as *unius substantiae* led to such misunderstandings on the part of the Council of Nicaea in the West, that the Eastern Churches were charged of Arianism by the West and the Western Churches were charged of Sabellianism by the East.<sup>27</sup>

According to Newton, talking about God's substance, since "we have any idea of the substance of God"<sup>28</sup>, or conceiving the relationship between the Father and the Son in terms of substance (either consubstantial or subordinated to one another) leads inevitably into idolatry. Such a language denotes remnants of pagan religions, where "not only their Gods but even the souls of men & the stars [are] of one substance w<sup>th</sup> the supreme God & yet were Idolaters for worshipping them/."<sup>29</sup> Thus, to consider that the elements or the parts of creation are of one substance with the Creator represents the expression of pagan idolatry. Similarly, the worship of Christ motivated by his consubstantiality with the Father distinguishes itself by no means from idolatry, even if Christ is considered a divine being created before the world or nothing more than a mere human. For Newton, the danger of the theory of consubstantiality resides in the illusion that it preserves Christian monotheism. Consubstantiality is not to be confounded with dominion, since it negates the worship of the Father and transforms it into a form of idolatry, but the only valid principle for considering the Father and the Son one God is their unity of dominion.

And \he/ that is of this opinion may beleive Christ to be of one substance with the father without making him more then a meer man. Tis not consubstantiality but power & dominion w<sup>ch</sup> gives a right to be worshipped. And to worship a consubstantial being \wholy/ destitute of power & dominion \is/ worshipping a vanity & by consequence idolatry.<sup>30</sup>

The only criterion Newton views as valid for arguing in favour of the unity of the Deity between the Father and the Son is dominion. Christ can be worshiped in respect of the power and dominion received from the Father for his redeeming sacrifice.<sup>31</sup> The Son's divinity is not ontological, but rather delegated, to the extent that He receives His dominion from the Father, and as such shares with Him dominion over the world.

Two main consequences derive from this conception of the unity of the Deity: on the one hand, both Athanasius and Arius were mistaken in regard to the issue of the unity between the Father and the Son, by substituting the criterion of dominion prevalent in the tradition of the first centuries of Christianity with 'metaphysical opinions'; on the other hand, Newton identifies the one true God or the Pantokrator of the Scholium with the Biblical Father. From the perspective of the dialectics between theology and metaphysics, Arius and Athanasius are placed in the same theological camp. In Newton's view, the two Alexandrines proposed a theological language in which speculation and innovative concepts altered the original content of Christian belief. Newton highlighted that after Nicaea the Eastern

Churches, being more cautious with regard to theological language, condemned both Athanasian as well as Arian doctrines for fear of a revival of Sabellianism and polytheism.

The Greeks to preserve the Church from these innovations & metaphysical perplexities & put an end to the troubles occasioned by them anathematized the \novel/ language of Arius in several of their Councils, & so soon as they were able repealed the novel language of the homousians, & contended that the language of the scripture was to be adhered unto.<sup>32</sup>

Beyond the obvious anti–Athanasianism of Newton’s drafts and their occasional pro–Arianism (predicated on the Antiochian features retained in the theology of the priest from Baucalis), both protagonists of Nicaea can be reproached for subverting the monarchical language of the primitive Church. A careful reconstruction of Arianism would uncover a syncretistic system in which Biblical sources are filtered and highlighted through the concepts of ancient philosophy (especially Platonism and Middle Platonism), with consequences especially for Christology and Soteriology. In the description of the category of divine transcendence, Arius uses a concept of Medioplatonic origin, *arretos*, to state that the Father is inexpressible.<sup>33</sup> In Christian theology this term initially appears in Clement of Alexandria, that “great admirer of Plato”, who made “the Word to be the omnipotent power & wisdom & Idea of the father”. For Newton, it is evident “by these instances that Pla\to/nism began to spread much in the Churches before y<sup>e</sup> end of y<sup>e</sup> second century. And therefore we need not wonder if it prevailed in y<sup>e</sup> fourth”. As Newton presents it, there is a common ground between the conception of Clement and that of Arius, but the dispute from the beginning of the fourth century concerning how the Logos is generated becomes an issue that exceeds the boundaries of the Church of Alexandria.<sup>34</sup> Opposed to Arian divine inexpressibility, Bishop Alexander’s *Logos* becomes the reason for the Father’s communicability, without which God would be ἄσοφος καὶ ἀλογος (wisdomless and wordless). In order to reach such conclusions, the Alexandrian theologians resorted to a language at one point used by heretics such as Montanus, Sabellius and Paul of Samosata, who, in turn, adopted it from the Gnostics.

[T]he son of God arose from the father as a river \from the fountain/ a tree from the root & a ray from the sun & y<sup>t</sup> he was the internal wisdom reason & word of the ffather without w<sup>ch</sup> the father was ἄσοφος & ἀλογος. ffor this was the \common language/ of Montanus & Paul of Samosat & Sabellius & had its rise from the Gnosticks who considered their Æons as such emissions & called them Ennoia, νους, λογος σοφια δυναμις & such like \attributes/ powers & vertues.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, after the anti–Arian consensus of Nicaea, the Eastern Churches tried to reinstate the ‘Monarchical’ jargon and, concurrently, the conception that the unity of

the Deity is a unity of dominion. Once more, Newton asserts the unity of dominion as the only valid principle for calling the Father and the Son one God.

Arius & Athanasius had both of them perplexed the Church with metaphysical opinions & expressed their opinions in novel language not warranted by scripture. [...] the Greek Churches rejected all metaphysical divinity as well that of Arius as that of the Homousians & made the father & son one God by a Monarchical unity, an unity of Dominion.<sup>36</sup>

The Father and the Son are divine because they rule together over the same dominion. God cannot be conceived of separated from His dominion, and the Deity, as Newton states in the General Scholium, is precisely the expression of God's dominion over the world. Being adopted into the Deity, the Son could be called God, because 'there are Lords many and Gods many', and to give the name of God to angels and kings "is not against y<sup>e</sup> first commandment", but this does not affect the radical monotheism of Newton's theology. His explication of the 'Monarchical unity' of the Deity pertains also to the domain of politics. The Father and Son are called one God by a unity of dominion, "the Son receiving all things from the father, being subject to him, executing his will, sitting in his throne & calling him his God, & so is but one God w<sup>th</sup> the ffather as a king & his viceroy are but one king. ffor the word God relates not to the metaphysical nature of God but to his dominion."<sup>37</sup> This perspective attempts to preserve the unipersonal character of God, rejecting the emerging Trinitarian language of the post-Apostolic period, and committing to an earlier emphasis on God's oneness. For Newton, this is the language peculiar to early Christianity before its corruption through metaphysical concepts.

The Church catholick during the two first Centuries accounted the unity of the Deity monarchical, & were zealous against a metaphysical unity.<sup>38</sup>

The unity of the Father and the Son is founded on their common sovereignty over the world. In other words, it is not the unity of divine substance or the character of divine hypostases that determine the unity of the Deity, but the dominion over the same monarchy. Similarly, the term 'God' does not refer to the divine perfections, nature or substance, but 'has a respect to servants', underlying the monarchical character of the Deity. Newton's linguistic argument in the General Scholium (see note 3) implies a theological ground concordant with his non-Trinitarian outlook. That 'God is a relative word' is a statement more broadly elaborated in his theological and historical draft writings.

The word *God* is relative & signifies the same thing with Lord & King, but in a higher degree. As we say my Lord our Lord your Lord, the King of Kings, & Lord of Lords the suprem Lord, the Lord of the earth the servants of the Lord, serve other Lords, so we may say my God our God, your God, the God of Gods, the supreme God, the God of the earth the servants of God serve other Gods: but we do not say my infinite our infinite your infinite, the



infinite of infinites, the infinite of the earth, the servants of the infinite serve other infinites. Where the Apostle told the Gentiles that the Gods which they worshipped were not Gods, he did not mean that they were not infinites, (for the Gentiles did not take them to be such:) but he meant that they had no power & dominion over man.<sup>39</sup>

The similarity with the paragraph from the General Scholium is obvious. Newton constructs his argument by emphasising the dialectical relationship between dominion and metaphysics in conceiving of the Deity: “father or son be called *God*, they take the name in a metaphysical sense as if it signified Gods metaphysical perfections of infinite eternal omniscient omnipotent whereas it relates only to Gods dominion to teach us obedience.” It is precisely this approach that situates him among the radical reformers in regards to the rejection of any metaphysical approaches to the discourse about God. The theological dimension of the concept of dominion shows that the statements regarding God from the General Scholium are not simply general philosophical definitions, but propositions with a thorough theological grounding and a theological stake. Like Newton, his disciple, Samuel Clarke, asserted in a polemical work that ‘God’ is a relational term expressing dominion, because “tis Dominion only, that makes God to be God to us”.<sup>40</sup> The former Rector of St. James’ Westminster contends “the Scripture so frequently uses the Word παντοκράτωρ, Supreme over all, as equivalent to the Title, *God*”.<sup>41</sup> The synthesis of Newton’s conception of the Deity can be traced in the claim from the General Scholium that “the Deity is the dominion of God”. Furthermore, the unity of the Deity – the unity between the Father and Son – is founded on the unity of the dominion, and this monarchical criterion which was established in the ancient Church is intrinsic to the view endorsing God’s oneness.

#### **Lord God Pantokrator**

In his unpublished *Irenicum*, Newton states “idolatry is a breach of the first and greatest commandment”.<sup>42</sup> For a non-Trinitarian perspective on the Godhead the worship of the true God is directed to the Father only. Newtonian exegesis identifies the Biblical God with a unipersonal God: 1 Corinthians 8:6 “To us there is but one God the Father of whom are all things and we of him, and one Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things and we by him. That is, we are to worship the father alone as God Almighty & Jesus alone as the Lord the Messiah the great King the Lamb of God.” John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16 (1 John 4:12) “God whom no eye hath seen nor can see. He is ὁ πατήρ ὁ παντοκράτωρ the father almighty in dominion, the first author of all things who bears a fatherly affection towards all his offspring, & reigns over them with a universal invincible irresistible dominion.” John 10:30; 14:9–11; 17:18, 21–23 “I and my Father are one. I am in the Father, and the Father in me. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. Therefore, these do not denote an essential unity, but only a moral one.”<sup>43</sup> The Greek παντοκράτωρ (rendered by Newton as ‘almighty’), that figures in the General Scholium as ‘imperator universalis’, is attributed solely to the Father in Newton’s writings. This word is mentioned nine times in the Biblical book most cited by Newton, the Apocalypse of Saint John. Here, the references to God and

Christ are at times interchangeable, but Newton employs this term in relation to God the Father only.

We are to worship the father as God almighty maker of heaven & earth & the son as the Lord Jesus Christ who was slain for us & hath redeemed us with his blood. For this form of worship is plainly prescribed to us in the Apocalyps where the scene of the visions is in the Temple & God the father is represented sitting there upon his throne that is, above the Ark between the Cherubims, & the son is represented in the form of a Lamb receiving the book of prophesy from him that sitteth upon the throne.<sup>44</sup>

Newton interprets not only the text of the Apocalypse, but also the Patristic sources for Pantokrator in this non-Trinitarian sense. He identifies the use of this term in the primitive Church in Ignatius Theophorus, Bishop of Antioch. In an epistle addressed to the Magnesians, Ignatius writes: “There is one god, \the/ almighty, who manifested himself by his son Jesus Christ who is his word, not spoken but substantial (real).” Newton underlines in his translation the numeral one and selects another fragment from the epistle of the Apostolic Father in support of his non-Trinitarian exegesis: “Preaching to them that were addicted to polytheism, the one & onely true God, his father.”<sup>45</sup> In the entirety of the Biblical texts, Newton identifies the one and only God as being the God of the Jews, of whom the Old Testament speaks, which is the same as the Father of whom Jesus Christ speaks in the Lord’s Prayer.

We must believe that he is the ff{ather} to whom the Lords prayer is directed & whose dominion is celebrated saying Our father w<sup>ch</sup> art in heaven or who art highly exalted in dominion [...] And whilst this prayer was composed under the law we must beleive that this \father almighty, this universal uncontrolable/ Monarch is the God of the Jews.<sup>46</sup>

The one true God is described as almighty – Pantokrator. Newton again associates this main attribute of God the Father also to a concept pertaining to the domain of politics, the one of monarch. In this view, the ‘hallowed be thy name’ phrase in the Lord’s Prayer is interpreted as “the glorious & sacred name of the \supreme/ king of y<sup>e</sup> universe”.<sup>47</sup> God as king (יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ *YHWH mlk* – Yahweh is king or Yahweh reigns) of the heaven and earth is a widely accepted theologumenon in Jewish and Christian religious traditions. Its origin can be traced back to the Hebrew texts (especially, Deuteronomy, Psalms and Isaiah), and over generations it received Messianic connotations. In this respect, Gospels assumed the theme of ‘the kingdom of God’, and the Revelation equates the kingdom of God with the kingdom of Christ. When referring to the worship due to God, Newton employed a distinction between the attribute of Creator, assigned to the Pantokrator, and that of Redeemer, ascribed to the Son, in accordance with the first commandment of the Decalogue and the practice of the primitive Church. “We are forbidden to worship two Gods but we are not forbidden to worship one God, & one Lord: one God for creating all things & one Lord for redeeming us with his blood.”<sup>48</sup> Confusion between the proper worship of

the Father and that of the Son leads to patripassianism (or Sabellianism) and polytheism, and the Homoousian jargon does not account for this inadequacy. Furthermore, the doctrine of consubstantiality elaborated in the fourth century implies more than the use of a language influenced by metaphysical theologies or gnostic currents; it also exhibits the potential tendency towards polytheism.

Newton draws on pre- and post-Nicene sources to explain the double meaning of the term God employed in Patristic literature: ὁ Θεός, as an individual, relates to God, and Θεός designates a species. Similarly to the General Scholium where he states ‘*god* is a term of dominion’, in a post-1710 manuscript Newton writes: “this is the signification of Θεός. Ὁ Θεός is an individual & signifies the supreme God when limited to no other sense: Θεός is a species (as Origen & Epiphanius tell us) & \may/ signify any divine Being w<sup>th</sup> dominion. For Elohim, Θεός, Deus, God are words of \dominion & have/ the same signification w<sup>th</sup> \the word/ Lord but in a higher degree.”<sup>49</sup> Here, Newton alludes to an ancient polemic (revived in early modern antitrinitarian debates) over the term ‘God’ attributed to the Logos in the Johannine prologue. Most probably, he has in mind Origen’s commentary on the Gospel of John and Epiphanius’ “Against Origen” from the *Panarion* of the bishop of Salamis.<sup>50</sup> The Deity, having no reference to the property of a substance, is an expression of dominion. The use of *homoousios* to designate the relationship between the Father and the Son does not necessarily presuppose the condition of ontological divinity, but rather that the same species applies to two beings (intelligent substances) characterized by dominion. The Father and Christ are called God, but only the Father is “an infinite, eternal, omniscient, immortal & invisible spirit”.<sup>51</sup> The Father and the Son are two distinct substances of the same species or nature; this assumption presupposes neither their substantial unity, nor the divine quality of the Son grounded on ontological considerations, but on the criterion of dominion.

The word ὁμοούσιος w<sup>ch</sup> was used by y<sup>e</sup> Nicene Council w<sup>ch</sup> is here translated Consubstantial, was by the Latines improperly translated unius substantia. ffor unius substantia may signify two things of one & the same common substance: but the words ὁμοούσιος & consubstantial were always taken by the ancient Greeks & Latines for two substances of one & the same essence nature or species.<sup>52</sup>

The inaccurate Latin rendition of *homoousios* as ‘unius substantiae’, namely attributing a common substance to the Father and the Son, later constituted the underlying premise for the doctrine of tripersonal consubstantiality. The peril of consubstantiality therefore lies in the idolatrous origin of this metaphysical language. Thus, consubstantiality does not validate Christ’s ontological divinity. The danger of this theory resides in the idolatrous origin of such metaphysical language.

Newton traced the idea of the Logos being consubstantial with the Father back to the heretical views of the Gnostics, who maintained that “the Word of God was his λόγος ἐνδιάθετος ἢ προφύρμιος”, the inherent reason and wisdom of the Father. On this account, the Logos was begotten by “emission, efflux, dilatation or

projection” from the Father’s substance. Such claims were also made regarding the Holy Ghost and the angels. These conceptions originated in both the figurative language of the Hebrews, as well as in pagan metaphysics:

the Jews gave the names of evil spirits to diseases & to vices \& erroneous opinions/ & so Solomon spake of Wisdom as a Person & Orpheus Plato & Philo \& some of the Gnosticks/ gave y<sup>e</sup> name of λόγος to the wisdom of God considered as a Person. And the Ideas of the Platonists Sephiroths of the Cabbalists & Æons of the Gnosticks are nothing else then the thoughts notions actions powers \names/ attributes \or parts/ of the Deity turned into persons & sometimes into the souls of men.<sup>53</sup>

The interpretation of the Wisdom of God as divine hypostasis of the Logos seems to be inadequate for Newton. Congruent with his unipersonal outlook and contrary to a metaphysical view of the divine substance or substances, Newton asserts the latter’s unity and immutability. God “is simple & not compound”, nothing can be separated from Himself, “nor is there any thing in him w<sup>ch</sup> can be emitted from any thing else.”<sup>54</sup> What Newton identifies as the origin of the language of consubstantiality – the notion of an emanation from the divine substance is, in fact, a remnant of pagan theology, foreign to primitive monotheism, undertaken by the ‘oeconomy’ of the Apologists. In *Tempus et Locus*, a draft treatise from 1690s, he states the indivisibility of the divine substance and, at the same time, the sovereign character of God.

The most perfect idea of God is that he be one substance, simple, indivisible, live and making live, necessarily existing everywhere and always [...] a substance which by own presence discerns and rules all things.<sup>55</sup>

Considering the distinction Newton makes between the substance of the Father and that of the Son when he reviews the emerging homoousian language of the fourth century, I believe that we can associate that ‘one substance’ from the early-1690s draft and that ‘dominion of One’ from the General Scholium with a unipersonal theological outlook. Consequently, the Pantokrator at the end of the *Principia* refers to the Father only.

## Conclusion

For Newton, the theory of consubstantiality does not validate Christ’s ontological divinity. As we have seen, the reason why the Son is called God hinges on his dominion with the Father over the same ‘monarchy’, and not on the divine quality of his substance: the Father and the Son are called one God because of their common dominion over creation. This seems to be the theological premise for Newton’s antitrinitarian outlook. His account of the Son’s divinity is predicated upon his understanding of the development of the unity of the Deity in the first centuries. The primitive Church, for Newton, sanctioned the unity of the Father and the Son in terms of dominion: “one God with the Father as a King and his viceroy”. At the same time, the concept of dominion highlights the nature of God’s presence in the physical

world as the Monarch of Creation: “for the word God relates not to the metaphysical nature of God, but to his dominion”.<sup>56</sup> The development of the concept of dominion in the theological manuscripts provides a subtle underpinning for the unipersonal character of the God from the General Scholium. By means of this concept, Newton also formulates his perspective on the Deity as a manifestation of God’s dominion: “the Deity is the dominion of God”.

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<sup>17</sup> Snobelen, S. D., (2001): 169-208.

<sup>18</sup> For Newton's engagement with Patristic literature see Mandelbrote, S., "'Then this nothing can be plainer': Isaac Newton reads the Fathers", in *Die Patristik in der frühen Neuzeit*, eds. G. Frank, T. Leinkauf and M. Wriedt (Stuttgart: Friedrich Fromm Verlag, 2006), 277-97.

<sup>19</sup> The 1687 edition of the *Principia* reads: "Collocavit igitur Deus Planetas in diversis distantiiis a Sole, ut quilibet pro gradu densitatis calore Solis majore vel minore fruatur." Newton, *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (London: 1687), 415. In the second and third editions of the *Principia*, the word 'Deus' was removed and replaced with a passive verb: "In diversis utique distantiiis a Sole collocandi erant Planetæ: The Planets, of course, had to be set at different distnaces from the sun." The English translation was provided by Bernard Cohen in Newton, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. I. B. Cohen and Anne Whitman, assisted by Julia Budenz (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 814. See the discussion in Snobelen, S. D., "The Theology of Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica*: a preliminary survey", *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 52 (2010): 388.

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<sup>25</sup> Newton, (1729), 389.

<sup>26</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 97<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.1, ff. 7–11<sup>r</sup>; Keynes MS 11, f. 1<sup>r</sup>. See the diplomatic transcription of MS SL255.3.

<sup>28</sup> Newton, *Principia* (1729), 390; (1999), 942.

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<sup>30</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 98<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.7, f. 154<sup>r</sup>; MS SL255.7, f. 2<sup>r</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> For Arius’ theology and the legacy of ancient philosophy in his theology, see Hanson, R. P. C., *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318 – 381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, second edition, 1997), 84-98; Williams, R., *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, Third edition [1987, 2001, 2002], (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, third edition, 2002), 101.

<sup>34</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 87<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.3, f. 48<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.7, f. 154<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.7, f. 154<sup>r</sup>; Keynes MSS 3, p.29; 8, f. 1<sup>r</sup>. See 1 Corinthians 8:5.

<sup>38</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.3, f. 45<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 98<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> See the discussion in Snobelen, S. D., (2001), 186-187.

<sup>41</sup> Snobelen, S. D., (2001), 186-187.

<sup>42</sup> Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> Newton, Keynes MS 8, f. 1<sup>r</sup>; Yahuda MS 15.7, f. 138<sup>v</sup>; Bodmer MS ff. 18–19<sup>r</sup>. Bodmer MS in Ducheyne, S., (2012), 242: “Ego et pater unum sumus. Ego in patre & pater in me. Qui videt me videt patrem. Sed his non denotatur essentialis unitas sed moralis tantum.”

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