

William Whiston's translation of the General Scholium to Isaac Newton's *Principia* in *Astronomical principles of religion* (1717)

This most excellently contrived System of the Sun, and Planets, and Comets, could not have its Origin from any other than from the wise Conduct and Dominion of an Intelligent and Powerful Being. And in case the Fixed Stars be the Centres of the like Systems, they that are framed by the like wise Conduct, must all be subject to the Dominion of *One Being*; especially while it appears that the Light of the Fixed Stars is of the same Nature with the Light of the Sun; and that all these Systems do mutually impart their Light to one another.

This Being governs all things; not as a Mundane Soul, but as the Lord of all Creatures; who on account of his Dominion over them, is usually stiled the *Lord God*, παντοκράτωρ or *Supreme Governour of the Universe*. For the Word *God* is relative, and hath Relation to subordinate Beings: [238] And the Word *Deity* imports the Exercise of that Dominion, not over his own Body, (as is the Opinion of those that make him the Soul of the World) but over those subordinate Beings. The *Supreme God* is an Eternal, Infinite, and Absolutely Perfect Being: But a Being that is never so Perfect, is not a *Lord God* without Dominion. For we say, *My God, Your God, the God of Israel*: But we don't say, *My Eternal, Your Eternal, The Eternal of Israel*: We don't say, *My Infinite, Your Infinite, The Infinite of Israel*: We don't say, *My Perfect, Your Perfect, The Perfect of Israel*: These Denominations of him having no relation to subordinate Beings. The Word *God* most frequently signifies *Lord*; but so that every Lord is not a God. The Exercise of Dominion in a Spiritual Being, constitutes a God: If that Dominion be Real, that Being is a Real God; if it be Supreme, the Supreme God; if it be fictitious, a false God. And the Consequence of the Exercise of real Dominion, by the true God, is this. That He is a Living, Intelligent, and Powerful Being; as it is the Consequence of the rest of his Perfections, that he is the highest or most perfect Being. He is *Eternal, and Infinite, and Omnipotent, and Omniscent*: That is, he endures from Everlasting to Everlasting, and is present from Infinity to Infinity; He governs all Things, and knows all Things that are done, or can be known. He is not Eternity, or Infinity, but an Eternal, and an Infinite Being. He is not Duration, or Space, but he is a Being that Endures, and is Present: He endures always, and is present every where; and by existing always and every where, he constitutes Duration and Space, Eternity and Infinity. Since every Particle of Space exists *al[239]ways*, and every indivisible Moment of Duration exists *every where*, 'tis evident the Framer and Lord of all Things cannot exist *never or no where*. He is Omnipresent, not only by his *Power*, but also by his *Substance*: For Power cannot subsist without Substance. All Things are † contained and move in him, but without his Suffering thereby. God suffers nothing by the Motions of Bodies, nor do they feel any Resistance by the Omnipresence of God. 'Tis well known, that the Su[240]preme God exists of Necessity; and by the same Necessity does he exist *always and every where*. Whence it is that he is entirely like himself, all Eye, all Ear, all Brain, all Arm, all Sensation, all Intelligence, all Action; but this in a way not at all like Men; in a way not at all like Bodies, in a way utterly unknown to us. As a Blind Man has no Idea of Colours, so have not we any Idea of the *Modus*, whereby God, most wise perceives and understands all Things. He

is entirely void of all Body and Bodily Figure; and therefore cannot be either seen, or heard, or felt; nor ought he to be worshipp'd under any Bodily Shape. We have the Idea's of his Attributes, but do not at all know what the Substance of any Thing is. We see only the Figures and Colours of Bodies, we hear only their Sounds, we feel only their outward Surfaces, we smell only their Scents, and we taste only their Savours; but we don't know their inmost Substances by any Sensation, or internal Reflection; and much less have we any Idea of the Substance of God. We know him only by his Properties, and Attributes, and the most wise and excellent Structures of his Creatures, and by final Causes; while we adore and worship him on Account of his Dominion. For a God, without Dominion, Providence, and Final Causes, is nothing else but Fate and Nature. And thus much concerning God; To discourse of whom, from the Appearances of Nature, does certainly belong to *Experimental Philosophy*.

† This was the Opinion of the Ancients: Aratus] *Let us begin with Jupiter: Let us begin with Jove: Let us Men never leave off discoursing of him: For every Concourse of People, every Assembly of Mankind, the Seas also, and the Heavens are all full of Jove. We all enjoy the Blessings of Jove: For we are also his Offspring.* Phænom. at the Beginning. Paul] *That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him; though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our Being; as certain also of your own Poets have said; For we are also his Offspring,* Acts xvi. 27, 28. Moses.] *Know therefore this Day, and consider it in thing Heart, That the Lord he is God, in Heaven above, and in the Earth beneath; there is none else,* Deut. iv. 39. Behold the Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens is the Lord's thy God; the Earth also, with all that therein is, x. 14. David.] *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy Presence? If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there. If I make my Bed in Hell, behold thou art there.* Psal. cxxxix. 7, 8. Solomon.] *Will God indeed dwell on the Earth? Behold the Heaven, and Heaven of Heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this House that I have builded?* 1 King. viii. 27. Job.] *Is not God in the height of Heaven? And behold the height of the Stars how high they are!* xxii. 12. Jeremiah the Prophet] *Am I a God at Hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret Places, that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill Heaven and Earth, saith the Lord?* xxiii. 23, 24.



Bibliographical details

William Whiston, *Astronomical principles of religion, natural and reveal'd. in nine parts: I. Lemmata; or the known laws of matter and motion. II. A particular account of the system of the universe. III. The truth of that system briefly demonstrated. IV. Certain observations drawn from that system. V. Probable conjectures of the nature and uses of the several celestial bodies contained in the same system. VI. Important principles of natural religion demonstrated from the foregoing observations. VII. Important principles of divine revelation confirm'd from the foregoing conjectures. VIII. Such inferences shewn to be the common voice of nature and reason, from the testimonies of the most considerable persons in all ages. IX. A recapitulation of the whole: with a large and serious address to all, especially to the scepticks and unbelievers of our age. Together with a preface, of the temper of mind necessary for the discovery of divine truth; and of the degree of evidence that ought to be expected in divine matters.* By William Whiston, M.A. Sometime Professor of the Mathematicks in the University of Cambridge. London: Printed for J. Senex at the Globe in Salisbury-Court, and W. Taylor at the Ship in Pater-moster-Row, 1717, pp. 237-40.

Commentary

This is a reprint with minor amendments (e.g., capitalisation) of the translation first published in Whiston's *Three essays* (1713).