

# ISAAC NEWTON, SOCINIANISM AND “THE ONE SUPREME GOD”

STEPHEN DAVID SNOBELEN

... we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (1 Corinthians 8:4–6)

## 1. *Isaac Newton and Socinianism*

Isaac Newton was not a Socinian.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, he was not a communicant member of the Polish Brethren, nor did he explicitly embrace the Socinian Christology. What is more, Newton never expressly acknowledged any debt to Socinianism—characterised in his day as a heresy more dangerous than Arianism—and his only overt comment

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<sup>1</sup> The first version of this paper was written in 1997 as an MPhil assignment in History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge. I am grateful to Peter Lipton and my supervisor Simon Schaffer for their invaluable help at that time, along with David Money, who kindly refined my Latin translations. A later version of the paper was presented in November 2000 as a lecture in the Department of Early Hungarian Literature at the University of Szeged in Hungary. I benefited greatly from the knowledge and expertise of the scholars of the early modern Polish Brethren and Hungarian Unitarians associated with that department. I am particularly grateful to my host, József Barna, who translated the entire paper, word for word, into Hungarian. It was also a special pleasure to discuss things Socinian and Unitarian with Sándor Kovács and Lehel Molnar, two young ministers in the Hungarian Unitarian Church from Cluj/Kolozsvár, Romania. The much smaller 1997 draft was published as Snobelen 2003, *Newton*. In revising and expanding this paper, which represents my current views, I am indebted to József Barna, Michael Hunter, Scott Mandelbrote, John Marshall and the participants at the Munich Conference. For permission to cite manuscript material in their archives, acknowledgements are due to the Syndics of the Cambridge University Library, Cambridge, the Fondation Martin Bodmer, Geneva, the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, the Provost and Fellows of King’s College, Cambridge and Uppsala Universitetsbiblioteket, Sweden. Quotations from Newton’s unpublished papers enclose insertions in angle brackets and represent deletions as strike-outs. An increasing number of Newton theological manuscripts can be viewed online at: [www.newtonproject.ic.ac.uk](http://www.newtonproject.ic.ac.uk).

on this movement is negative. Nevertheless, both Newton's theology and religious life reveal a host of parallels with Socinianism. In this preliminary study, I demonstrate that Socinian analogies can be found in Newton's theology, historiography, textual criticism, biblical hermeneutics and even his natural philosophy. Nor are the parallels limited to areas of his thought, for Newton also adopted social strategies commonly employed by seventeenth-century Socinians. Additionally, Newton contemplated publishing an antitrinitarian work and met with at least one known communicant Socinian. Although the precise sources and motivations of the parallels are more difficult to assess, an appreciation of Newton's alignment with several features of Socinianism is crucial to making sense of a number of his pursuits—and this includes his intentions for the General Scholium to the *Principia mathematica*, one of the classic texts of the Scientific Revolution.

This paper begins with a brief introduction to the Socinians, along with a discussion of the difficulty of defining the term “Socinian” in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. I then move on to assess the consonance of Newton's theology with that of Socinianism. To do this, a thorough investigation of various sorts of evidence is needed. First, I demonstrate Newton's apparent openness to Socinianism by outlining his contacts with individuals associated with Socinianism, examining tolerant comments on Christologies compatible with Socinianism and analysing the contents of his library. This exercise will establish the plausibility of a sustained engagement with Socinianism. I then turn to a survey of Newton's writings to reveal a host of analogies with the thought of this heretical movement.<sup>2</sup> In addition to significant doctrinal parallels, I show that Newton shared a reformist doctrinal agenda with Socinians and that both his philosophy of history and his eschatology reflect this. Finally, I conclude that Newton—an eclectic thinker—utilised tools in his theological and intellectual apparatus that are either Socinian in nature or so close to Socinian that there is little appreciable difference.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> While tentative conclusions can be made now about the content of Newton's private theological papers, more definitive studies will have to await further advances in the textual work of the Newton Project.

<sup>3</sup> Two papers deriving in part from the original form of this paper, and which deal with aspects of Newton's engagement with Socinianism, have now been published. See Snobelen 1999, *Newton*, and Snobelen 2001, *God*.

## 2. *Defining Socinianism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*

Emerging in the 1560s from Erasmian, Anabaptist and Evangelical Rationalist currents of thought, the Polish Brethren were a product of the Radical Reformation.<sup>4</sup> In 1580 the Sienese theologian Fausto Sozzini aligned himself with the Brethren, bringing intellectual cohesion to the movement of which he became eponymous. Their doctrinal system of antitrinitarianism, mortalism and believers' baptism, along with others factors such as their rejection of mystery in religion, belief in the separation of church and state and pronounced anti-creedalism, branded the Socinians as heretics in the eyes of their orthodox contemporaries. Partly for this reason, after almost a century of uneasy toleration, the Catholics—with the complicity of the Calvinists—expelled the Brethren from Polish lands in 1660. This event, along with the dissolution of their Raków press in 1638, led to the development of a Socinian diaspora in the Low Countries, whence their publications filtered into England. Socinianism was a book religion both in its biblicism and erudition, as well as its steady output of Latin theological texts.<sup>5</sup> And while these books were anathematised by the orthodox, Socinian works proved popular in radical circles. Even though the lower clergy found the prices of these volumes out of their reach, they remained in steady demand in seventeenth-century England.<sup>6</sup>

Although Socinianism is rooted in specific historical and regional contexts, and while the movement enjoyed relative doctrinal stasis, the term “Socinian” came to mean many things in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and untangling these nuances is difficult. There are at least seven senses in which the word “Socinian” is used in the relevant literature: it can refer to the community of the Polish Brethren, the complete Socinian theological system, antitrinitarianism in general or of the Socinian variety, the rejection of dogmatism, the avowal of religious toleration, the application of reason to Scripture, or simply be used as an epithet for heresy, much like “Arian” or “atheist”.<sup>7</sup> What is more, to add to the confusion, not only were the terms Arian

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<sup>4</sup> On the early Socinians and the Radical Reformation, see Williams 1992, *Reformation*. See also Szczucki 1983, *Socinianism*, and Dán/Pirnát 1982, *Antitrinitarianism*.

<sup>5</sup> The press at Raków printed 500 titles in all by the time of its dissolution (Williams 1992, *Reformation*, p. 1175).

<sup>6</sup> McLachlan, H.J. 1951, *Socinianism*, p. 119.

<sup>7</sup> See also Trevor-Roper 1987, *Catholics*, pp. 95–96, 186–190, and Sullivan 1982, *Toland*, pp. 82–108 and Martin Mulsov's contribution to this volume.

and Socinian frequently used interchangeably, but Socinian Christology (which held Christ to be the literal Son of God miraculously conceived by the virgin Mary) was constantly conflated with humanitarianism (the belief that Christ was a *mere* man born of human mother *and* father).<sup>8</sup> This conflation may have at times been a deliberate attempt to radicalise Socinians further in the eyes of contemporaries. Whatever the reason, the historian must look beyond labels and common conceptions and misconceptions to the content of the theology.

Throughout the centuries precisely what has been viewed to be “orthodox” and what has been perceived to be “heresy” have often been in flux; in some cases ideas previously considered orthodox came to be regarded as heretical—and *vice versa*. For these reasons it is important for scholars of early modern Christian theology to adopt for historiographical and methodological purposes the recommendations that Walter Bauer made in the 1930s for early church history: namely, that “orthodoxy” and “heresy” should be used as categories that emanate from the *sociological* and *political* dynamics of the periods in which the labels were employed.<sup>9</sup> This is no less important for the study of Isaac Newton’s theology, as so many of his contemporaries employed a “slippery slope” argument for theological heterodoxy. That is to say, many assumed or contended for apologetic purposes that divergences from orthodoxy such as Arianism and Socinianism were only way stations along the path to outright infidelity and unbelief. One contemporary heresy watchdog, the Calvinist divine John Edwards, asserted that “in the very *Socinian* Doctrine it self there seems to be an *Atheistick* Tang.”<sup>10</sup> This aspersion is more than misleading for, while some Socinians employed reason in their theology to a somewhat greater extent than some members of orthodoxy, they were also generally more biblicist than Trinitarians. Unfortunately, many modern historians have adopted this unhelpful and unsophisticated metaphysical reductionism and have, for example, characterised Socinianism as presenting a “lower” Christology than orthodoxy. Sympathetic accounts of early modern dissenters will recognise the apologetic nature of the categories employed by their orthodox contemporaries and abandon the vertical

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<sup>8</sup> For a Socinian rejection of humanitarianism, see *Racovian Catechism* (1818), pp. 52–55.

<sup>9</sup> Bauer 1971, *Orthodoxy*. For more on Bauer’s challenge to scholarship, see Ehrman 1993, *Corruption*, pp. 7–9.

<sup>10</sup> Edwards 1695, *Thoughts*, p. 64.

metaphor that positions Trinitarianism at the top and Socinianism near the bottom (or at least much further down the scale than Trinitarianism). Rather than employ a scale-based classification, it is imperative that the theological “middle” of dissenting figures studied be recovered. As much as possible, the theological world must be seen from the perspective of the dissenters themselves, not their enemies. The author of the *Principia mathematica* did not see his Christology as “low” or somehow defective. Instead, he saw himself in the middle, with the orthodox Trinitarians on the right (who were to be blamed for adding to God’s truth) and the unbelieving Deists and atheists on the left (who were guilty of subtracting from it).<sup>11</sup>

Isaac Newton was an intellectual who came to passionately reject the doctrine of the Trinity. The Socinians were not only the largest, but also the most intellectually-sophisticated and vibrant antitrinitarian movement of his time. There is then, *prima facie*, sufficient reason to raise the question of whether Newton either was attracted to Socinian theology or appropriated it. Certain observers in Newton’s own day and shortly thereafter certainly thought so, even if their evidence was sometimes based on hearsay and a loose definition of Socinianism. In the second paper of his epistolary debate with Newton’s supporter Samuel Clarke, Gottfried Leibniz suggested that Newton adhered to a Socinian view of God.<sup>12</sup> Although Leibniz’s insinuation was based on a mistaken surmise (that Newton was limiting God’s foreknowledge), it is possible that the Hanoverian philosopher knew more about Newton’s private faith than he was willing to admit in print. After all, rumours about Newton’s antitrinitarian unorthodoxy had already begun to circulate.<sup>13</sup> Shortly after Newton’s death Voltaire referred to Newton as an Arian or Socinian.<sup>14</sup> David Hume applied the same two terms to him later in the same century.<sup>15</sup> Nor were these three philosophers alone.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Historians of dissent need not agree with the views of their subjects, or even have a view. The point I am making relates to historiographical method.

<sup>12</sup> Leibniz and Clarke 1956, *Leibniz-Clarke correspondence*, p. 19. The famous epistolary debate between Leibniz and Clarke took place from 1715 to 1716; it was first published in French and English in 1717.

<sup>13</sup> For evidence of this, see Snobelen 1999, *Newton*, pp. 412–415.

<sup>14</sup> Voltaire 1980, *Letters*, p. 43. Voltaire probably obtained much of his information on Newton and his circle from personal discussions with Clarke, with whom he became acquainted while in England in 1726 (Barber 1979, *Voltaire*, pp. 51–54).

<sup>15</sup> Hume 1963, *Hume*, p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> An example of a contemporary divine who accused Newton of Socinianism is considered below.

Yet, despite the suspicions raised in the eighteenth century, very little has been written since then on the possible associations of Newton's theology to that of Socinianism.<sup>17</sup> Some modern scholars have raised the possibility that Newton was either a Socinian or influenced by Socinianism, only to repudiate the idea quickly.<sup>18</sup> Even the partisan Unitarian historian Herbert McLachlan went on record to say that he did not think it likely that Newton was extensively involved with this movement.<sup>19</sup> For the most part, the possibility that Newton was engaged with Socinian theology has been ignored. Although Richard S. Westfall treats Newton's theological beliefs extensively, Socinianism is not listed in the index of his *Never at rest*, the leading biography on Newton.<sup>20</sup> Instead, Westfall tends to treat Newton's theology as *sui generis*. From a practical point-of-view, this myopia is not difficult to understand. Few historians are sufficiently competent in both Newton's voluminous manuscripts (which have only been substantially available since their 1991 publication on microfilm) and the formidable Latin Socinian corpus (which are difficult to access and still primarily untranslated). Also, some of the crucial evidence presented here has until recently either been unavailable or has remained unexploited by historians. Another deterrent to exploring a possible association with this greater heresy is the incontestable evidence that Newton—who, unlike the Socinians, believed in Christ's preexistence—was in some respects Christologically closer to Arianism than Socinianism.<sup>21</sup> This need not be an obstacle; as we will see, it was no stumbling block to Newton himself.

### 3. *Newton's Socinian Contacts*

Newton had contact with at least four men associated with Socinian thought. First, sometime around 1689,<sup>22</sup> he entered into theological dia-

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<sup>17</sup> But see Wallace 1850, *Antitrinitarian*, vol. 3, pp. 428–468; McLachlan, H.J. 1951, *Socinianism*, pp. 330–331; Christianson 1984, *Presence*, pp. 249–250. See also McLachlan, H. 1941, *Opinions*.

<sup>18</sup> Keynes 1947, *Newton*, p. 30; Manuel 1974, *Religion*, p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> McLachlan, Herbert, 1950, *Newton*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Westfall 1980, *Rest*.

<sup>21</sup> Added to this is the fact that while many historians have labelled Newton simply as an Arian, few have critically analysed Newton's Christology against the options available in his lifetime.

<sup>22</sup> Westfall 1981, *Rest*, pp. 488–493.

logue with John Locke, whose engagement with Socinianism is now beyond question.<sup>23</sup> The two must have been aware of each other's antitrinitarianism,<sup>24</sup> for one result of their friendship was Newton sending his confidant and fellow heretic his letters on the Trinitarian corruptions of Scripture for anonymous publication on the Continent (the "Two notable corruptions").<sup>25</sup> Locke's interest in Socinianism is confirmed by his library. By the end of his life he had acquired at least forty-three Socinian books—a library of Sociniana noteworthy for both its size and the range of its titles.<sup>26</sup> Locke began purchasing and reading such works as early as 1679.<sup>27</sup> Although Locke may not have agreed with every aspect of the Socinian Christology, several aspects of his theology parallel the doctrines of the Socinians, including his thneptychist mortalism.<sup>28</sup> It is also now clear that Locke was involved in antitrinitarian networks. Not only did he have personal contact with Socinians and English Unitarians, but he possessed an unpublished manuscript treatise on the Prologue to John's Gospel written by the Christological Socinian Jacques Souverain.<sup>29</sup>

The second example is Hopton Haynes. One of the officers who served under him at the Royal Mint, this theological radical not only worked closely with Newton in the affairs of the Mint, but they also worked together on things antitrinitarian. The two discussed antitrinitarian theology and, in 1709, Haynes produced for Newton a translation of the first part of his heretically-inspired "Two notable corruptions".<sup>30</sup> Two books published by Haynes after Newton's death con-

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<sup>23</sup> The best study of Locke's relationship to Socinianism is Marshall 2000, *Locke*, pp. 111–182. See also Snobelen 2001, *Socinianism*; Higgins-Biddle 1999, *Introduction*, pp. xlii–lxxiv; Wootton 1990, *Locke*.

<sup>24</sup> Although Locke appears to have adhered to a belief in the preexistence of Christ, his unitarianism is in many respects compatible with Socinianism (Marshall 2000, *Locke*, p. 178).

<sup>25</sup> Newton 1959–1977, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, pp. 83–149.

<sup>26</sup> See Harrison/Laslett 1971, *Library*, who do not, however, identify all Locke's Socinian works. Accounts of Locke's Socinian library can be found in March 2000, *Locke*, pp. 118–119 and Snobelen 2001, *Socinianism*, pp. 105–106.

<sup>27</sup> Marshall 2000, *Locke*, p. 144.

<sup>28</sup> Snobelen 2001, *Socinianism*, pp. 109, 114–115, 120–122.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall 2000, *Locke*, pp. 125–131. Samuel Crell arranged for the publication of Souverain's *Le Platonisme dévoilé* in Amsterdam in 1700. An English translation appeared the same year with the title *Platonism unweil'd*. A modern edition of the original French was recently published as Souverain 2004, *Platonisme*.

<sup>30</sup> Baron 1763, *Cordial*, Preface, vol. 1, p. xviii; Newton, Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, Yahuda MS 20; Haynes to John Caspar Wetstein, 17 August 1736, British Library Add. MS. 32,425, f. 388r.

firm that he was a Christological Socinian.<sup>31</sup> Haynes was involved in antitrinitarian networks that included both English Unitarians and Continental antitrinitarians. New evidence uncovered by Sándor Kovács in the Transylvanian Unitarian archive at Cluj/Kolozsvár, Romania has revealed that Haynes introduced the Transylvanian Unitarian Zsigmond Pálfi to Newton in 1701. This information comes from a 1736 letter written to the Transylvanian Unitarian István Ágh by the Socinian Samuel Crell, grandson of the Socinian luminary Johann Crell. Pálfi's visit to England came at the end of a three-year stint as student at the University of Leiden; Ágh was himself studying at Leiden in 1736. Both men went on to become bishop of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church.<sup>32</sup> It is hard to imagine that Newton's antitrinitarian collaborator at the Mint would have arranged the meeting between Pálfi and Newton had all three not been theological unitarians. Thus, Crell's letter suggests that knowledge of Newton's antitrinitarianism extended to officials within the Transylvanian Unitarian Church.

Most spectacular is Newton's meeting with Samuel Crell himself.<sup>33</sup> Several scholars have commented on the 1726 meeting between the two men.<sup>34</sup> New evidence now allows us to clarify and fill out the details of their relationship. Sometime late in 1725 Crell, who had been visiting England since childhood, made another trip there to see to the publication of his work on the Prologue to John's Gospel, which was eventually published in late 1726.<sup>35</sup> The principle argument of this book was that the traditional textual reading of John 1:1b, "and the Word was God" (*et Deus erat Verbum*), was a corruption of the original reading, "and the Word was of God" (*et Dei erat Verbum*).<sup>36</sup> By the summer of 1726 Crell had been encountering difficulties attracting subscribers for this work; he needed 200 and had obtained only fifty. A formerly-unavailable letter from Crell to Newton shows that a meeting was arranged between the two in July 1726.<sup>37</sup> Before the meeting,

<sup>31</sup> Haynes 1747, *Causa*; Haynes 1790, *Scripture*.

<sup>32</sup> Kovács forthcoming, Contributions.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Mulsow provides further light on Crell's travels in England in his contribution to this volume.

<sup>34</sup> Wallace 1850, *Biography*, vol. 3, pp. 471–473; Brewster 1855, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, pp. 389–390; Wilbur 1945, *History*, vol. 1, p. 576; McLachlan, H. 1950, *Newton*, pp. 15–16; Manuel 1963, *Newton*, p. 292 n. 53; Manuel 1968, *Portrait*, pp. 15, 386, 399 n. 22, 464 n. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Crell, S. [= Artemonium] 1726, *Initium*.

<sup>36</sup> Crell, S. [= Artemonium] 1726, *Initium*, sig. A2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Crell to Isaac Newton, 16 July 1726, Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek,



Crell sent Newton a list of propositions for the book, seeking Newton’s patronage. Nor did Crell shy away from revealing the main thrust of the work: “if only Christian Theologians had seen and acknowledged that Christ is nowhere in Scripture *expressly* called God ... so many controversies about the Deity of Christ would not have been stirred up”.<sup>38</sup> This unequivocally antitrinitarian statement implies that Crell knew Newton’s position—knowledge that may have come from Locke, with whom Crell had stayed in 1699.<sup>39</sup> Crell is careful to assure Newton that his name would not be revealed if he choose to support the publication, and closes by referring to their up-coming meeting a few days hence.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Crell opens the letter by reminding Newton that he was “not completely unknown” to Newton, who had “liberally” assisted Crell’s return to Germany some fifteen years earlier.<sup>41</sup> This indirect contact between the two men in or around 1711—significant in itself—was previously unknown.

Nor was the July 1726 meeting the only personal encounter between the two ageing heretics, for Crell later related in a letter to his correspondent Mathurin Veyssi re de la Croze that while in England, he had “spoken at different times” with Newton.<sup>42</sup> Also critical is the context in which Crell introduces Newton in his letter: after his listing of several English Unitarians, including William Whiston, James Peirce and Daniel Whitby.<sup>43</sup> Crell provides several details that derive

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Waller hs England & USA. This letter was traced too late to be included in the Royal Society’s official publication of the Newton Correspondence, which was completed in 1977. It appeared among a collection of thirty Newton letters purchased by Dr Erik Waller at the 1936 Sotheby’s sale of Newton manuscripts and bequeathed at his death to the University of Uppsala. A. Rupert Hall published an abbreviated translation of the letter, which was originally written in Latin, along with twenty-nine other Newton letters, in Hall 1982, *Newton*, p. 33. Hall, however, passes over its significance. It was my encountering of this letter in October 1996 that initiated the research that led to this paper. See Appendix I for a full translation of the letter.

<sup>38</sup> Crell to Newton, 16 July 1726.

<sup>39</sup> Locke 1981, *Correspondence*, vol. 6, pp. 459–460, 466–467, 495, 576–7577, 638. If Crell’s knowledge of Newton’s unorthodoxy had not come from Locke, it must have come from those in heretical clandestine circles who were aware of Newton’s antitrinitarianism—even if the general public was not.

<sup>40</sup> Crell to Newton, 16 July 1726.

<sup>41</sup> Crell to Newton, 16 July 1726. Newton’s past patronage of Crell helps explain why he was approaching Newton for support in 1726.

<sup>42</sup> Crell to M.V. de Lacroze, 17 July 1727, in: Lacroze (1742–1746), *Thesauri*, vol. 1, p. 105 (my translation).

<sup>43</sup> Crell to M.V. de Lacroze, 17 July 1727, in: Lacroze (1742–1746), *Thesauri*, vol. 1, pp. 104–105.

from his visits with Newton, including the latter's personal claim to him that he had written a commentary on the Apocalypse. He notes further that Newton "was very well versed not only in mathematics and natural philosophy, but also in theology and ecclesiastical history",<sup>44</sup> showing that they had discussed such topics. De la Croze is also told that Newton had "wished to read my book, and did read it, while it was going through the press, because it seemed to contain new things".<sup>45</sup> What is more, Newton is said to have placed ten guineas in Crell's hand—presumably to help advance the publication.<sup>46</sup> While Crell's work was published primarily with the financial backing of the radical Matthew Tindal,<sup>47</sup> since his library contained the volume, it is evident that Newton offered Crell the support of at least a single subscription—if not more. Newton's financial support of the period's leading Socinian theologian on at least two occasions must not be ignored.<sup>48</sup> If Newton met with other communicant Socinians, no records of such encounters have come to light. On the other hand, if Newton had met with other Socinians, this would not be surprising. Given his meetings with Crell and the support he offered him, it is notable that Newton did not believe Socinians were heretics. In a lengthy manuscript treatise on Church history, Newton observes that those in the early Church who believed in Christ's preexistence refused

<sup>44</sup> Crell to de Lacroze, 17 July 1727, in: Lacroze (1742–1746), *Thesauri*, vol. 1, p. 105.

<sup>45</sup> Crell to de Lacroze, 17 July 1727, in: Lacroze (1742–1746), *Thesauri*, vol. 1, p. 105.

<sup>46</sup> Jordan 1730, *Recueil*, p. 44. Jordan also records that the meeting between Newton and Crell lasted for two hours. Manuel gives the amount as one guinea (Manuel 1968, *Portrait*, p. 464 n. 24).

<sup>47</sup> McLachlan H.J. 1951, *Socinianism*, p. 29; Wallace 1850, *Biography*, vol. 3, p. 487.

<sup>48</sup> A mere meeting with a known Socinian does not in itself prove sympathy. During his stay in England during the mid-1720s, Crell also met with Trinitarians such as Daniel Waterland (Crell to de la Croze, 17 July 1727, in: Lacroze (1742–1746), *Thesauri*, vol. 1, p. 105). He is also said to have met with Archbishop John Tillotson (d. 1694) on a previous trip to England (Wallace 1850, *Biography*, vol. 3, p. 469). Yet, Crell's polite visits with learned orthodox churchmen would have been of an entirely different order than his visits with a fellow antitrinitarian. Waterland wrote in favour of the Trinity; Newton wrote against it. Crell continued to take an interest in Newton's theological views after Newton's death in 1727. In a letter he wrote on 28 September 1736 to William Whiston, Jr. (the son of the Newtonian William Whiston), Crell reported on the discovery of Newton's "Two notable corruptions" among the papers of Jean Le Clerc after the latter's death earlier that year (Crell to Whiston, Leicestershire Record Office, Conant MSS, Barker correspondence, vol. 2, letter 123A). A transcription of the "Two notable corruptions" (in the original English) taken from a copy Crell commissioned forms part of the collection at Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden (MS. Semin. Remonstr. Bibl. 12).

to call heretics those who did not, and, in addition, took the question of Christ's existence before his birth as being an *adiaphoron*. Newton opens one section in his Church history with the following statement:

The great charity of the first Christians is manifest by the communion of the ~~Churches of the circumcision (Jews)~~ & converted Jews & Gentiles. The converted Jews or Churches of the circumcision were by the unconverted Jews called the sect of the Nazarenes (Act. 2.5) & they were all zealous of the law (Act. 21.20 & Gal. 2.12,13) & when the dispersion of the Churches of the circumcision by the wars of the Romans was at hand, Matthew wrote his Gospel in hebrew for their use & therefore ~~I do not~~ the Nazarenes are not to be reconed among the hereticks.<sup>49</sup>

The Nazarenes, as Newton explains in this manuscript, did not believe Christ existed before his birth in Bethlehem. Although Newton crossed it out and chose a passive verb instead, his original words "I do not" are revealing. He goes on to point out that those "who believed that Jesus took his beginning from the Virgin Mary" and those "who believed that Jesus was before the world began ... conversed together as brethren & communicated with one another as members of the Church catholick till the days of Justin Martyr, without falling out about their different opinions."<sup>50</sup> Newton then says:

For when Justin had represented to Trypho the Jew that Christ was God before the world began, & was afterwards born & became a man, & Trypho put him upon proving this: Justin replied that tho he should fail in proving that Christ was God before the world began, yet if he could but prove that Jesus was the Christ of God, it was sufficient for the Christian religion, some of the Christians beleiving [sic] that Christ was only a man.<sup>51</sup>

In the next folio, Newton wrote:

The Christians ... who beleived that Christ was before the world began, were much the greater number in the days of Justin Martyr, but did not look upon the Christians of the other opinion as hereticks, or think the difference between the two opinions material to the truth of the Christian religion.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Newton, Fondation Martin Bodmer, Geneva, Newton MS, 5A, f. 1<sup>r</sup>. See also Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 85<sup>r</sup>, where Newton asserts that Christians in the early ages generally believed in the preexistence of Christ.

<sup>50</sup> Newton, Bodmer MS, 5A, f. 3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> Newton, Bodmer MS, 5A, f. 3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Newton, Bodmer MS, 5A, f. 4<sup>r</sup>.

That these historical discussions are also a gloss on affairs in his own day is made plain in a subsequent folio, where Newton asserts that

if any man cannot believe all this [i.e., the preexistence], yet if he belevies [sic] as much as the Nazarenes or primitive Christians of the circumcision beleived: the Churches have no (more) authority now to condemn & excommunicate him then they had in the Apostles days to condemn & excommunicate the churches of the circumcision in Judea over whome James the brother of our Lord was bishop.<sup>53</sup>

All of this helps explain why Newton had no trouble meeting with a Christological Socinian: the preexistence was neither an essential doctrine nor one worth dividing over.

#### 4. *Newton's Socinian Library*

The Polish Brethren also entered Newton's life in the form of several volumes of Socinian writings. Newton was no great bibliophile and his library, although respectable in size, was nowhere near as impressive as some of the great personal libraries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although it is certainly true that Newton did not agree with every book he owned or read, and while his Socinian library in no way competes with Locke's in volume or breadth, it is still significant that Newton included in his library at least eight titles by Socinian writers.<sup>54</sup> In Newton's day, there were at least three different motivations to induce a scholar to acquire Socinian books: to study Socinian theology in order to attack it; to provide impressive ornaments in a great literary collection; and curiosity or genuine sympathy for the teachings contained within these works. It hardly needs stating that Newton was no heresy hunter, much less a champion of orthodoxy. Nor was he the sort of man who sought to impress with his personal treasures. The evidence suggests that Newton was driven by the third motivation.

Newton's collection of Sociniana included four titles by Fausto Sozzini and one each by Johann Crell, Samuel Crell, Stanislaw Lubieniecki

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<sup>53</sup> Newton, Bodmer MS, 5A, f. 8<sup>r</sup>; cf. Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 96<sup>r</sup>. It is significant that these writings on the history of the Church date from the second decade of the eighteenth century, long after Newton became aware of Socinian teaching.

<sup>54</sup> McLachlan commented on the significance of Socinian books in Newton's library, albeit based on the incomplete and imprecise list provided in Villamil 1931, *Newton*. See McLachlan, H.J. 1951, *Socinianism*, p. 331.

and Jonasz Szlichtyng.<sup>55</sup> The four titles by Sozzini are controversial tracts, including one that treats the matter of Christ's pre-existence. The title by Johann Crell is a commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The work by Samuel Crell is the aforementioned treatise on the prologue to John's Gospel. The book by Lubieniecki is not primarily theological, but a compilation of records of comet sightings. As such, it served as a source for Newton's work on cometography.<sup>56</sup> Finally, Szlichtyng's work is a commentary on Hebrews. Newton's personal access to Socinian ideas was not limited to these eight explicitly Socinian books. He also possessed an antitrinitarian book by the Transylvanian Unitarian György Enyedi, whose ideas were in part shaped through cross-fertilisation with early Socinianism and whose work in turn is cited in the Polish Brethren's *Racovian Catechism*.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, Newton owned a copy of *The Faith of the One God*, which was made up of fifteen tracts by various Socinian-influenced English writers, including John Biddle, who has been described as "the Father of English Unitarianism". Finally, Newton's library included Christopher Sand's *Nucleus historiae ecclesiasticae*. While rejecting Socinian Christological formulations, the German Arian accepted other ideas from the Socinians, such as irenicism, and includes accounts of Socinians in his *Nucleus*. Sand was also on good terms with such Socinians as Andrzej and Benedykt Wiszowaty, grandson and great-grandson of Sozzini, the latter of whom edited Sand's posthumous *Bibliotheca antitrinitariorum* (1684).<sup>58</sup> This list, of course, represents the minimum of such books Newton possessed. In addition to these titles, Newton also had acquired an anti-Socinian publication by Edward Stillingfleet and a work written against Sand by George Bull.<sup>59</sup> Eight Socinian works might not appear to be many. Yet one must remember that these books were generally harder to obtain than orthodox works. These eight titles can also be compared to the relative paucity of books by figures of the Mag-

<sup>55</sup> See Appendix II for a detailed list based on Harrison 1978, *Library*.

<sup>56</sup> Newton's copy of Lubieniecki's work is dog-eared. See Appendix II. Newton's reading of Lubieniecki's work on comets may provide a limited example of Newton's use of a Socinian work for his natural philosophy.

<sup>57</sup> A note in Newton's hand on the fly-leaf indicates that Newton purchased this volume (as opposed to receiving it as a gift or inheriting it from someone). Harrison 1978, *Library*, item 557. On Enyedi, see Balázs/Keser 2000, *Enyedi*.

<sup>58</sup> Wallace 1850, *Biography*, vol. 3, p. 325.

<sup>59</sup> Harrison 1978, *Library*, items 1563 and 307.

isterial Reformation owned by Newton: a mere two works by Martin Luther and only one by John Calvin graced the shelves of his library.

There are no records of when Newton acquired this collection; the publishing dates, however, provide helpful *termini a quo*. While six of the volumes referred to above were published before Newton's birth, the following would have been acquired in Newton's active years: Sand (1669), Enyedi (1670), Lubieniecki (1681), Bull (1685), Biddle (1691), Stillingfleet (1697) and Samuel Crell (1726). References to both the Socinians and Sand in his "Two notable corruptions", along with another note on Sand in his theological notebook, document that his reading of these authors was well underway by 1690 at the very latest.<sup>60</sup> The fact that several of his Socinian books show signs of dog-earing confirms that these works did not sit idle.<sup>61</sup>

Newton was not restricted to the Socinian and semi-Socinian works in his own library. First, he had access to books by the Socinians at Trinity College, which held a range of such titles during the late seventeenth century.<sup>62</sup> Newton also had access to the library of Isaac Barrow, an opponent of Socinianism. Barrow owned Sand's *Nucleus* and *Interpretationes paradoxae quatuor Evangeliorum* (1670), the *Racovian Catechism* and Joachim Stegmann, Sr.'s *Brevis disquisitio*.<sup>63</sup> Locke's extensive library of Sociniana is crucial for the period from the late 1680s until Locke's death in 1704. It is possible that Locke granted Newton

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<sup>60</sup> Newton 1959–1977, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, pp. 84, 89; Newton, King's College, Cambridge, Keynes MS 2, f. 19<sup>r</sup> (this source, Newton's theological notebook, dates to c. 1684–1690). In Newton's brief reference to the Socinians in the "Two notable corruptions" he explicitly disagrees with one of their textual interpretations. It is difficult to determine whether this represents a genuine disagreement on this point, or if it was an attempt to cover his tracks. The word "Socinians" appears in a Latin text in Newton, Andrews University (James White Library), Berrien Springs, MI, ASC MS.N47 HER, p. 40. Although the term is in Newton's hand, the text is difficult to read in the microfilm reproduction and will thus have to be examined in the original in order to ascertain the nature of this example (which may form part of a quotation). On 26 November 2004, Scott Mandelbrote, my colleague in the Newton Project, announced to those of us attending the conference "Fausto Sozzini e la filosofia in Europa" at Siena that he had discovered a manuscript that allows us to be sure that Newton was reading Socinian works by the late 1670s. Mandelbrote intends to publish a paper on this important discovery.

<sup>61</sup> See Appendix II.

<sup>62</sup> Snobelen 1999, *Newton*, p. 385. In the late 1660s and possibly into the early 1670s, Newton's rooms were immediately underneath the Trinity College library.

<sup>63</sup> Snobelen 1999, *Newton*, pp. 384–385 (where the *Brevis disquisitio* is mistakenly attributed to John Biddle, who was in fact the translator).

access to this collection during the latter's several visits to Oates. For his London period, Newton's close friend Samuel Clarke, a near neighbour with whom he dined regularly and who published an antitrinitarian work in 1712, is important. Clarke appears to have possessed as many as two sets of the Socinian collected works, the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* (*BFP*).<sup>64</sup> Also, Clarke's patron Bishop John Moore held in his famous library roughly fifty Socinian titles represented in almost seventy copies.<sup>65</sup> Moore was rumoured to be an antitrinitarian working with Clarke and Newton,<sup>66</sup> and was among the small group sent copies of the 1713 *Principia*.<sup>67</sup> Since Newton's 1690 allusions to the Socinians and Sand were not to any works he himself owned, or at least to any books found in his library at his death,<sup>68</sup> it is clear that he was using a wider range of works than those cited above. If Newton was interested in Socinian teachings, on-going access to Socinian books may also explain why his library of Sociniana is relatively small and could even be described as defective. With Newton's access to Sociniana established, we now turn to consider whether ideas present in these works find parallels in Newton's thought.

### 5. *Parallels with Socinian Theology*

It is clear that the most important source for Newton's theology was the Bible. This biblicism was shared with the Socinians. Newton also rejected the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, while accepting the earlier Apostles' Creed, the language of which conforms closely to that of the

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<sup>64</sup> Snobelen 1997, *Library*. It is possible that one of the sets of the BFP that may have been Clarke's possession at his death (which came two years after Newton's) could have come from Newton's library. If so, there is no documentary evidence to confirm this and it is extremely unlikely that any ever will.

<sup>65</sup> Cambridge MS Oo.7.49, 40<sup>r</sup>, 60<sup>r</sup>, 198<sup>v</sup>, 199<sup>f</sup>, 215<sup>r</sup>; Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Add. D.81, 95<sup>v</sup>, 376<sup>r</sup>, 387<sup>v</sup>, 408<sup>r</sup>, 409<sup>r</sup>-409<sup>v</sup>, 414<sup>v</sup>, 443<sup>v</sup>, 454<sup>v</sup>, 455<sup>v</sup>; Bodleian MS Add. D.81\*, 108<sup>v</sup>, 266<sup>r</sup>. Samuel Clarke, who had been Moore's chaplain, was the chief cataloguer of Moore's library. Although there is no direct evidence that they were created by Newton, it is worth noting that Moore's set of the eight-volume *BFP* retains clear signs of the dog-earing that is characteristic of Newton's own books (Cambridge University Library, class mark 4.2.14-).

<sup>66</sup> Robert Wodrow 1842-1843, *Analecta*, vol. 2, p. 285; vol. 3, p. 461. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Moore was in fact an antitrinitarian, the rumours may reflect an awareness of contact between Moore and Newton.

<sup>67</sup> Newton 1959-1977, *Correspondence*, vol. 5, p. 413.

<sup>68</sup> Newton's reference to Sand is from Sand 1670, *Interpretationes*, pp. 376-377.

Bible. The same is true of the Polish Brethren.<sup>69</sup> Newton's exhaustive study of the biblical texts yielded many results that veered from received theology. The shared biblicism of Newton and the Socinians poses a challenge for the historian of Newton's theology, as allowances must be made for the possibility that some of the evident parallels may be the result of similar exegetical itineraries. For the moment I will put this possibility to one side and begin to examine the parallels. One of the most important set of these lies in the domain of Christology. These examples range from the general to the specific. Despite the fact that Newton, unlike the Socinians, believed in the premundane existence of Christ,<sup>70</sup> on many other points there is agreement. One constant theme that reverberates throughout the writings of both Newton and the Polish Brethren is the argument that only the Father is truly and uniquely God—based on such pivotal *loci biblici* as 1 Corinthians 8:4–6.<sup>71</sup> Early on, in the 1670s, the biblically-minded Newton had come to this conclusion, including as the second statement in a series of twelve statements on God and Christ the following: “The word God ⟨put absolutely⟩ without particular restriction to y<sup>e</sup> Son or Holy ghost doth always signify the Father from one end of the scriptures to y<sup>e</sup> other”. Statement ten amplifies this understanding of the Father as supreme God:

It is a proper epithete of y<sup>e</sup> father to be called almighty. For by God almighty we always understand y<sup>e</sup> Father. ~~Not that we hereby~~ (Yet this is not to) limit the power of y<sup>e</sup> Son, For he doth what soever he seeth y<sup>e</sup> Father do; but to ⟨acknowledg⟩ y<sup>t</sup> all power is originally in y<sup>e</sup> Father & that y<sup>e</sup> son hath no power in him but w<sup>t</sup> derives from y<sup>e</sup> father for ⟨he professes that⟩ of himself he can do nothing.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> When composing their own confessions of faith, both Newton and the Socinians often used the model of the Apostolic Creed. For Newton, see Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 29; Newton, Keynes MS 8; Newton, Yahuda MS 15.3, ff. 44–46. For a Socinian confession that uses the Apostles' Creed as a template, see Jonasz Szlichtyng's 1642 *Confession of Faith* in Williams 1980, *Brethren*, pp. 389–418.

<sup>70</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 1.4, f. 158<sup>r</sup>; Newton, Yahuda MS 15.3, f. 66<sup>v</sup>; Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 45; Newton, Bodmer MS, 5 and 5A. The extensive discussion of the preexistence in the latter manuscript shows that Newton was exercised by the subject—possibly as a result of his exposure to Socinian Christology.

<sup>71</sup> Williams 1980, *Brethren*, pp. 316, 392, 398; *Catechism* 1818, pp. 29, 34, 57, 151, 196; Lubieniecki 1995, *History*, p. 163; Crell, J. 1665, *Books*, pp. 13–22, 190, 214, 222; Newton, Keynes MS 2, f. XI; Newton, Keynes MS 8, f. 1<sup>r</sup>; Newton, Bodmer MS 1, ff 12<sup>r</sup>, 15.1, f. 29<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 14, f. 25. See also statements one and three for further clarification of Newton's position.



This is just the beginning. Newton’s understanding of the Father as a God of absolute dominion is also a feature of Socinian doctrine.<sup>73</sup> Newton shares with the Socinians a powerfully voluntarist conception of God, a corollary of the God of dominion.<sup>74</sup> Newton’s conclusion that Christ is God by virtue of role and office, but not by nature, is identical to Socinianism.<sup>75</sup> In holding that the unity between the Father and the Son was of a moral quality, rather than a metaphysical quality of essence, Newton also agrees with the Socinians.<sup>76</sup> Related to this, a conception of the relationship between God and Christ being one of shared monarchical dominion, as opposed to shared essence, can be found in both the writings of Newton and the Socinians.<sup>77</sup> The same is true of the characterisation of the doctrine of the Trinity as polytheism.<sup>78</sup> In contending that the term “Son of God” is semantically equivalent to the title “Messiah”, thus connoting no metaphysical or ontological import (as in consubstantiality with the Father), also Newton echoes an argument made before his birth by Johann Crell.<sup>79</sup>

Even Newton’s portrayal of the Holy Spirit as the spirit of prophecy may reveal Socinian affinities,<sup>80</sup> as may his use of the term *Deus Optimus Maximus* for the supreme God (a title of Ciceronian origin much used by the Polish Brethren).<sup>81</sup> When not touching on the preexistence specifically, Newton’s Christology could easily be mistaken for Socini-

<sup>73</sup> Newton, Bodmer MS, 1, ff. 11<sup>r</sup>–12<sup>r</sup>, 5B, ff. 7<sup>r</sup>–8<sup>r</sup>; Williams 1980, *Brethren*, pp. 391–394; *Catechism* 1818, p. 25; Lubieniecki 1995, *History*, p. 163. James E. Force has admirably demonstrated this key feature of Newton’s theology (Force 1990, *God*).

<sup>74</sup> Force 1990, *God*; *Catechism* 1818, pp. 25–28.

<sup>75</sup> Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 45; Newton, Bodmer MS, 5B, ff. 8<sup>r</sup>–9<sup>r</sup>; *Catechism* 1818, pp. 34–36, 55. For more on the Socinian rejection of the use of substantial or essential language to describe Christ’s relationship to God, see *Catechism* 1818, pp. 55–65, 127–167. The extensive coverage of this topic in the *Racovian Catechism* demonstrates its paramount importance in Socinian apologetics.

<sup>76</sup> Newton, Bodmer MS, 5B, f. 7<sup>r</sup>; *Catechism* 1818, pp. 154–133.

<sup>77</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 154<sup>r</sup>; *Catechism* 1818, pp. 35–36, 54–55.

<sup>78</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 154<sup>r</sup>; *Catechism* 1818, pp. 29, 33.

<sup>79</sup> Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 32; Crell, J. 1665, *Books*, pp. 156–157. The articulation of this argument by Locke in his *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), was one of a series of examples of putative Socinian doctrine in this work that elicited the charge of Socinianism. Many orthodox commentators saw in the designation “Son of God” an ontological import that confirmed Christ’s full deity, although at least one (nominal) Trinitarian, the Dutch Remonstrant Philip Limborch, also saw the terms “Son of God” and “Messiah” as synonymous (■see Snobelen 2001, *Socinianism*, pp. 99–100.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Manuel 1974, *Religion*, p. 61.

<sup>81</sup> Cambridge University Library MS. Add. 3965, f. 542<sup>r</sup>; cf. Williams 1980, *Brethren*, pp. 574, 588 n. 106, 665, 669 n. 42, 674, 682 n. 2. This observation should be tempered by the fact that this title was sometimes used by orthodox writers as well.

anism. Since Newton seldom raises the matter of the preexistence in his discussions of God and Christ, this means that most of what he writes on these topics is compatible with Socinianism.<sup>82</sup>

But there is need for caution. While it is true that most of what Newton says about God and Christ apart from the preexistence is compatible with Socinianism, most of Newton's Christology apart from the preexistence is also compatible with fourth-century Arianism. For example, Arians believed that only the Father is God in the absolute sense.<sup>83</sup> They also commonly deployed 1 Corinthians 8:6 to support this subordinationistic stance.<sup>84</sup> One of Newton's contemporaries associates the view that Christ was God by office not nature with both the fourth-century Arians and the modern Socinians.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, in the case of the Arians, there is unambiguous evidence from a range of Newton's manuscripts to demonstrate that he had researched their doctrines. From this it is possible to conclude with a reasonable degree of certainty that, in addition to his own scriptural exegesis, Arianism played a role in shaping his theology.

Nevertheless, several factors suggest that it would be wrong to conclude that Newton's Christology and Arianism are completely isomorphic. First, although Newton sometimes defends the Arians as an unjustly persecuted group in his historical writings, Newton never explicitly aligns himself with that party. Second, Newton's animus against the employment of metaphysical language in theology was directed towards Arians as well as Athanasians, as is made clear by the passage found among his drafts for his Church history:

In these disputes Arius & Athanasius had both of them perplexed the Church with metaphysical opinions & expressed their opinions in novel language not warranted by Scripture. The Greek(s) Church had to preserve the Church from these innovations & metaphysical perplexities ~~had innovat anathematized the nove & restore to her that peace wh anathematized~~ & 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. The Homousians ~~rejected~~ made the father & son one God by a metaphysical unity of substance: the Greek Churches rejected all meta-

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<sup>82</sup> More analogies between Newton's Christology and that of the Socinians is presented below in the section on the General Scholium.

<sup>83</sup> Wiles 1996, *Heresy*, pp. 10–12.

<sup>84</sup> Wiles 1996, *Heresy*, p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> Stephens 1722, *Persons*, pp. 3–5.

physical divinity as well that of Arius as that of Athanasius & Homø the Homousians & made the father & Son one God by a Monarchical unity, a unity of Dominion, the Son being subject to y<sup>c</sup> father receiving all things from the father, being subject to him, & executing his will & sitting in his throne & calling him his God, ffor & 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>86</sup>

In this passage, Newton not only condemns both Arius and Athanasius for “perplexing” the Church with metaphysics and novel language but, using the example of the ancient Greek Church, he contrasts the notions of “a Monarchical unity” and “a unity of Dominion” of God and Christ (which he views positively) with the formulations of both the Arians and the Athanasians.<sup>87</sup> Unlike many fourth-century Arians, Newton refused to speak of Christ’s nature as being of similar (*homoiosios*) nature to his Father. In his positive affirmations of belief, Newton completely rejects ontological descriptions of the relationship between the Son and God the Father. Newton did not believe it appropriate to discuss the substance of God and Christ; Arians ultimately did. Although the earliest Arians, at least, characterised the relationship between the Father and Son as one primarily of will, while the Athanasians characterised the relationship as one of essence, so that the early debate was between voluntary and ontological Christologies,<sup>88</sup> it is instructive that Newton himself viewed the Arians as having sullied their theology with ontology. In his de-ontologisation of God talk, Newton is closer to the seventeenth-century Socinians than the fourth-century Arians.

There is a third reason for caution. Evidence has already been cited to suggest that Newton believed the matter of the preexistence (or not) of Christ to be an *adiaphoron*. These statements hint at a reflexive element, suggesting that Newton himself was not sufficiently certain about the scriptural grounds of Christ’s preexistence to include it among the *fundamenta*. In the same series of passages where he discusses the charity of early Christians in tolerating both views, Newton also acknowledges

<sup>86</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 154<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>87</sup> In stressing a “monarchical” unity between the Father and Son, Newton is not only rejecting the ontological theory of the Constantinopolitan and Athanasian Creeds, he also appears to be aligning himself with early Christian dynamic monarchianism, as exemplified by Tertullian. Here it is important to note that Tertullian is a pre-Arian theologian.

<sup>88</sup> On this, see Gregg/Groh 1981, *Arianism*, chapter 5: “Divine will and divine nature as Christological options” (pp. 161–191).

that the Bible directly treats Christ's human birth and physical resurrection rather than any premundane existence:

And Justin supposes according to the doctrine of Orpheus, that this generation was not from all eternity but only before the world began, & that w<sup>th</sup> respect to this antemundane generation Christ is called the Son of God: whereas in scripture he is called the Son of God with respect to his miraculous birth of a Virgin & his resurrection from the dead, & there is no mention in scripture of any other generation of the Son of God. John tells us, *In the beginning was the Word*, but he doth not tell us that he was begotten before or in the beginning. This opinion came partly from the ~~Theology of the heathens~~ words of John by deduction & partly from the theology of the heathens & whether it be true or false we cannot know without an express revelation, nor is it material to the Christian religion. Sacred history begins with the creation, and what was done before the beginning we are not told in scripture, unless (perhaps) he was called the first born of every creature to denote the antemundane generation of his spiritual body.<sup>89</sup>

In both declaring that there is no explicit biblical avowal of a premundane generation of the Son, and that the doctrine cannot be determined true or false without the backing of the Word of God, Newton affirms that the doctrine should not be pressed as a *fundamentum*. His lack of a firm commitment to one view over another may help explain why two of his theological intimates left behind contradictory characterisations of this belief on this point.<sup>90</sup>

That Newton's irenic comments on what could anachronistically be called proto-Socinian theology in the early Church date from the early eighteenth century suggests Newton may have grown more receptive to Socinian thought over time. It is certainly noteworthy that Newton portrays the Arians positively in the 1670s,<sup>91</sup> and even in his "Two notable corruptions" and his "Paradoxical questions" of the late 1680s and early 1690s,<sup>92</sup> of roughly the same period, while speaking negatively

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<sup>89</sup> Newton, Bodmer MS, 5, f. 4<sup>r</sup>. This passage seems to suggest that Newton believed the biblical support for the preexistence of Christ to be tenuous.

<sup>90</sup> Hopton Haynes and William Whiston (Newton's successor at the Lucasian Professorship, with whom Newton eventually parted company) respectively classified Newton as a Christological Socinian and Christological Arian (Baron 1763, *Cordial*, Preface, p. xviii; Whiston 1728, *Records*, Part II, pp. 1076–1082). These different characterisations undoubtedly reflect in part the apologetics of Haynes and Whiston, who were themselves Socinian and Arian (or semi-Arian) in their respective Christologies.

<sup>91</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 14, f. 25<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>92</sup> In the latter writing Newton defends Arius against the hostile aspersions and insinuations of Athanasius (Newton, Clark MS; Newton, Keynes MS 10).

of the Socinians in the "Two notable corruptions", but goes on in his later years to attack the Arians for introducing metaphysics in religion while he simultaneously begins to show more charity towards the Socinian position. These apparent diachronic shifts may suggest an increasing disaffection with the Arian Christology and a growing warmth for a completely non-essentialist dynamic monarchianism—a position with greater affinities to Socinianism.<sup>93</sup>

The preexistence appears to sit lightly on Newton's Christology. Although Newton does go into detail when discussing many other aspects of his Christology, including those he held in common with both Arians and Socinians, there are no systematic discussions of Christ's preexistence in his surviving papers, only passing references (where, it is true, he affirms it). In examining much of the same manuscript evidence, historian of Arianism Maurice Wiles concurs that "[a]t times a Socinian Christ seems to be all [Newton] feels the need to affirm". Nevertheless, Wiles adds that although "one might describe his religious position as predominantly Socinian, there is no doubt that his overall theological position is Arian rather than Socinian".<sup>94</sup> This is a judicious conclusion.<sup>95</sup> Although formally Newton's Christology was Arian, he appears to have adhered to a practical Socinian Christology. Put another way, Newton's Christology stood on the Socinian side of Arianism rather than the orthodox side.<sup>96</sup> In at least one important respect, it was also further from orthodoxy than Socinianism. A defining moment occurred in the histories of the Polish Brethren and the Transylvanian Unitarians when between November 1578 and April 1579 Fausto Sozzini (not yet formally aligned with the Polish Brethren) debated the Transylvanian Unitarian bishop Ferenc Dávid on the ado-

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<sup>93</sup> Confirmation of this possibility will have to wait for both a more systematic survey of Newton's papers and the determination of more precise dates for each of Newton's manuscripts. A useful comparison can be made between Newton's twelve statements on the word "God" (Newton, Yahuda MS 14, f. 25<sup>r</sup>; c. 1670s), which includes a positive allusion to the Arian interpretation of the prologue to John and the twelve articles on God and Christ (Newton, Keynes MS 8; c. 1710s–1720s), which is more biblical in its language and which contains no direct or indirect allusion to Arian theology. Nevertheless, even in the earlier document, Newton explicitly states that the union between the Father and the Son is an "agreement of will and counsel" (Yahuda MS 14, f. 25<sup>r</sup>).

<sup>94</sup> Wiles, *Archetypal heresy*, p. 84.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Frank Manuel, who has written that Newton had "never settled into a fixed position" on the preexistence (Manuel, *Religion of Newton*, p. 57).

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Pfizenmaier has recently contended for the opposite position (Pfizenmaier, "Was Isaac Newton an Arian?", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 [1997]:57–80).

ration and invocation of Christ.<sup>97</sup> While Newton, like Sozzini, but unlike Dávid, held to a qualified adorant Christology,<sup>98</sup> Newton, like Dávid, but unlike Sozzini, affirmed a non-invocant Christology.<sup>99</sup>

But an evaluation of the relations of Newton's theology to that of Socinianism should not end with Christology and Trinitology. The affinities of Newton's beliefs with those of Socinianism are brought into more pronounced relief when we step back from Christology and view the entire doctrinal profiles of Newton and the Polish Brethren. Socinianism was a complete doctrinal system in which other unorthodox beliefs formed an integral part of the theological rationale. It is important to note, therefore, that the Socinians were also maligned for their view of Christ's atonement. This is not, as often claimed, a rejection of the atonement, but instead a different construal of the doctrine than that popular in orthodox theology. In his *De Jesu Christo Servatore* (1594) Fausto Sozzini rejected the orthodox satisfaction theory of the atonement, a theory that held that God's wrath was appeased or satisfied through Christ's death on the cross, a sacrifice that involved a sort of legal transaction in which Christ died as a substitute for humans. Sozzini held that the view that held that God was a wrathful deity who demanded the satisfaction of a legal transaction prior to granting atonement for the sin's of men and women was inconsistent with an understanding of God's grace. Instead, Sozzini argued that God has the right to grant atonement and eternal life freely, without any transaction. Sozzini believes it unjust for God to ask men and women to forgive each other freely, if he does not do so himself. There is in Sozzini's model of the atonement a greater stress placed on Christ's crucifixion as exemplary of an ethic of self-sacrifice to which humans should aspire.<sup>100</sup> In two related manuscripts Newton comes to similar conclusions. After

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<sup>97</sup> On this celebrated debate, see Williams 1982, *Issues*.

<sup>98</sup> Newton sharply distinguished between the worship of the Father as God and the worship of Christ in a secondary sense as Lord (Newton, Keynes MS 8, f. 1<sup>r</sup>; cf. Newton, Keynes MS 3, pp. 47-48; Newton, Sotheby's Lot 255.7, f. 2<sup>r</sup> [private collection]).

<sup>99</sup> Basing his reasoning on scriptural testimony, Newton affirmed that prayer should be directed to the Father in the name of the Son, but never directly to the Son (Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 48; Newton, Keynes MS 8, f. 1<sup>r</sup>). I am grateful to Mihály Balázs of the University of Szeged for his incisive analysis of the non-invocant theology in Keynes MS 8 and to József Barna for translating this document into Hungarian for the benefit of his colleagues in Szeged.

<sup>100</sup> For more on Sozzini's view of the atonement in *De Jesu Christo Servatore*, see Gomes 1990, *Faustus Socinus*.

affirming the biblical language of Christ’s blood washing away the sins of believers, Newton writes:

For a man to forgive ~~his enemies even~~ ⟨injuries⟩ without satisfaction ⟨made to him⟩ is no injustice. It’s an act of mercy & more commendable then to forgive ~~our~~ Enemies ⟨injuries⟩ upon satisfaction made. Its our duty to do so ~~a dut~~ & God has ⟨in effect⟩ commanded us to do it if we expect to have our sins forgiven. And that w<sup>ch</sup> is an act of mercy, a duty a ⟨commanded a commendable⟩ meritorious act in us cannot be injustice in God.<sup>101</sup>

On the same page Newton goes on to argue that “⟨it is ~~for~~ ⟨lawful for God as for us⟩ to forgive injuries without satisfaction of justice”.<sup>102</sup> While suggestive, Newton’s discussion of the atonement in these two manuscripts is insufficiently precise to allow much more clarification. It is also noteworthy that in his church history Newton includes “the ⟨nature of the⟩ satisfaction made by Christ” among a list of adiaphora “more difficult to be understood & not ⟨so⟩ absolutely necessary to salvation”.<sup>103</sup>

Both the Socinians and Newton were mortalists who saw the teaching of the immortal soul, like the Trinity, as an unwarranted and unscriptural obtrusion upon primitive Christianity.<sup>104</sup> Since Newton’s manuscripts only occasionally discuss the intermediate state between death and resurrection, it is difficult to ascertain whether he adhered to mortalism of the psychopannychist (soul sleep) or thnetopsychist (soul death, with eternal life given at the resurrection) variety. The latter position was that of both the Socinians and John Locke.<sup>105</sup> It is possible that Newton’s mortalist anthropology was too inchoate for him to be able to articulate the difference. Nevertheless, a statement of Newton recorded by the Scottish mathematician David Gregory may point to

<sup>101</sup> Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 36.

<sup>102</sup> Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 36. Cf. Newton, Sotheby’s Lot 255.7, f. 1<sup>r</sup> (private collection).

<sup>103</sup> Newton, Bodmer MS, 3, ff. 22<sup>r</sup>–23<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>104</sup> Williams 1980, *Brethren*, pp. 112–122, 363–365; Newton, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, Los Angeles, MS \*\*N563M3 P222, ff. 54<sup>r</sup>–56<sup>r</sup>, 76<sup>f</sup> (in this manuscript Newton associates belief in the immortal soul with Catholic saint worship); Newton, Yahuda MS 7.2e, f. 4<sup>r</sup>; Newton 1959–1977, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 336, 339. See also Bodmer MS, 3, f. 23<sup>r</sup>, where Newton includes in a list of adiaphora: “the state of the dead between death & the resurrection, the bodies w<sup>th</sup> which the dead shall arise”. For more detail, see Force 1994, *God*.

<sup>105</sup> On Locke’s explicitly thnetopsychist mortalism, see Snobelen 2001, *Socinianism*, pp. 114–115, 120–122.

thnetopsychism.<sup>106</sup> In his short manuscript “The Question stated about abstaining from blood”, Newton argues that Genesis 9:4–5 teaches that the Hebrew word *nephesh* (often translated “soul” in the King James Version) denotes a corporeal substance since it is equated with blood.<sup>107</sup> This physicalist notion of *nephesh* may also suggest thnetopsychism rather than psychopannychism. The denial of the eternity of hell torments, often a position ancillary to mortalism, was also a part of the Socinian system and rumoured to be of Newton’s as well.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, Newton and the Socinians both held to believers’ baptism, although there is no evidence to suggest that he submitted to it.<sup>109</sup> The Socinians argued for the separation of church and state, and Newton moved toward this position as well.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, a major tenet of Socinianism was their irenicism and advocacy of religious toleration.<sup>111</sup> This, too, is found in Newton’s writings.<sup>112</sup> Finally, Newton’s use of “A.C.” (Anno Christi) instead of “A.D.” when giving dates in the Christian era parallels Socinian practice.<sup>113</sup> This exercise in extending the parallels with Socinianism beyond positions centred around the Trinitological

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<sup>106</sup> “Ad Religionem non requiritur Status animæ separatus sed resurrectio cum memoria continuata”, which is translated in the Newton correspondence as follows: “Not a separate existence of the soul, but a resurrection with a continuation of memory is the requirement of religion” (Newton 1959–1977, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, pp. 336, 339).

<sup>107</sup> Newton, Sotheby’s Lot 232, f. 2<sup>r</sup>. This manuscript, which has remained in private hands since its sale at the 1936 Sotheby’s London auction of Newton manuscripts, was recently (and briefly) made available for public viewing when it was offered at the 3 December 2004 Sotheby’s New York auction of Newton papers. The auction catalogue reproduces the folio cited here (Quarrie 2004, *Sir Isaac Newton*, p. 43).

<sup>108</sup> Williams 1980, *Brethren*, pp. 105, 115, 119–120, 364; cf. *Catechism* 1818, p. 367; Whiston 1740, *Eternity*, p. 49. Since mortalism and the denial of the eternity of hell fire often go hand in hand, Whiston’s assertions are strengthened by the fact that Newton held mortalist convictions.

<sup>109</sup> Williams 1980, *Brethren*, pp. 21–22, 446–457, 624–625; *Catechism* 1818, pp. 249–262; Lubieniecki 1995, *History*, pp. 373–376; Newton, Keynes MS 3, pp. 1, 3, 9–11, 23, 31, 43, 44; Newton, Keynes MS 6, f. 1; 1; Newton, Bodmer MS, 2, f. 22<sup>r</sup>, 26<sup>r</sup>, 34<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>110</sup> Williams 1992, *Reformation*, pp. 1282–1284; Newton, Yahuda MS 39 (in this short treatise on persecution and toleration, Newton contends that the church has no authority to use the arm of the magistrate for the purposes of punishment). On the other hand, in his “Irenicum” Newton articulates a position compatible with Anglicanism, namely that the “[t]he King is supreme head & governour of the Church in all things indifferent, & can nominate new Bishops & Presbyters to succeed in vacant places & deprive or depose them whenever they may deserve it” (Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 22).

<sup>111</sup> Williams 1980, *Brethren*, pp. 291–302, 342–354, 559–581.

<sup>112</sup> Newton, Keynes MS 3; Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 154<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>113</sup> Although a minority usage, some orthodox writers also used “A.C.” Nevertheless, Newton’s use of “A.C.” is striking.



problematic is crucial. Not only are these additional theological positions more closely aligned with seventeenth-century Socinianism than ancient Arianism but, while differing in certain details, it can be said that Newton’s overall doctrinal profile displays broad agreement with the theology of the Polish Brethren.

### 6. *Antitrinitarian View of Church History*

Newton’s view of ecclesiastical history underpinned and justified his antitrinitarianism. For decades, Newton combed the weighty annals of the Christian church in an effort to deconstruct the received history of the Trinitarian party and assembled in its stead a history that took the perspective of the primitive Christian faith in the One True God—a perspective that had in Newton’s view been shunted aside by the malevolent and imperialistic forces of the Athanasian party. A pivotal aspect of this project involved explaining the origin of false doctrines through the distortion of the biblical message with Hellenic philosophy, abstruse metaphysics and the post-Apostolic creedal tradition. When we turn to consider the genesis of Newton’s view of Church history, one obvious answer would be his own innovation. After all, a legitimising *apologia historica* is a necessary corollary to the advocacy of a minority doctrinal position.

Yet the Arian Christopher Sand had trodden this path before Newton. That Newton both owned and read Sand’s *Nucleus historiae ecclesiasticae* (his copy is dog-eared) raises the possibility that he was consciously aligning himself with a historiographical tradition that had already been established. Christopher Sand (1644–1680), two years Newton’s junior, studied at Königsberg and Oxford. In 1664, less than a decade before Newton began his historical quest, Sand was searching the archives of Oxford and uncovering evidence for an antitrinitarian view of Church history.<sup>114</sup> Sand’s *Nucleus* was a work of immense learning that even earned the respect of the opponents of antitrinitarianism.<sup>115</sup> In the *Nucleus*, Sand sought to restore “the ‘Arian’ and ‘Arianizing’ currents in the history of Christianity”.<sup>116</sup> This conforms precisely with Newton’s own agenda from the 1670s into the 1690s. As with Newton’s

<sup>114</sup> Wallace 1850, *Biography*, vol. 2, p. 318, and Lubieniecki 1995, *History*, p. 17.

<sup>115</sup> Szczucki 1979, *Historiography*, p. 293.

<sup>116</sup> Szczucki 1979, *Historiography*, p. 292.

“Paradoxical Questions concerning y<sup>e</sup> morals & actions of Athanasius & his followers”,<sup>117</sup> Sand’s history is replete with references to Athanasius, the homoousians and the Arian party.<sup>118</sup> The importance of these parallels is heightened by the fact that Sand’s *Nucleus* appeared in 1669, only a few years before Newton became an antitrinitarian. But this is not all. Sand’s philosophy of history was almost certainly influenced by Socinian historiography and his works contain extracts from Socinian accounts of Church history.<sup>119</sup> But Newton also had direct access to the Socinian view of ecclesiastical history in their own writings and the parallels are remarkable.<sup>120</sup>

First, we see with both the Socinians and Newton an intense study of the early Church and an acute sensitivity to doctrinal anachronism and innovation. Both the Socinians and Newton were keen to restore the original doctrines of Christianity,<sup>121</sup> and both desired a “second” reformation. As with the Socinians, Newton contended that the corruption of language and the introduction of novel terminology were foremost among the causes of divisions among the early Christians.<sup>122</sup> In both the Socinian view of Church history and Newton’s own writings, the introduction of the unbiblical word *homoousia* and its use against Arius was seen as an lamentable stain on the Church.<sup>123</sup> The Socinians and Newton were united in concluding that one of the main corruptions

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<sup>117</sup> Newton’s “Paradoxical questions” exists in two versions, the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library MS and King’s College, Cambridge, Keynes MS 10.

<sup>118</sup> See the first and second books (liber primus and liber secundus) of Sand 1669, *Nucleus*.

<sup>119</sup> Pages 146–147 of liber primus of Sand’s work include references to the Socinians, Fausto Sozzini and Enyedi. Newton’s copy has 146 folded down (Trinity College, Cambridge, NQ.9.17).

<sup>120</sup> Examples of the Socinian view of church history can be found in the relevant sections of Stanislaw Lubieniecki’s *Historia Reformationis Polonicæ* (1685), along with Andrzej Wiszowaty’s *Narratio compendiosa* (c. 1668), in Lubieniecki 1995, *History*, pp. 80–87, 190–193, 199–201, 248–250, 275, 336–337. Wiszowaty’s *Narratio* was embedded in Sand 1669, *Nucleus* (where it first appeared in print), and thus available to Newton. A short example of Benedykt Wiszowaty’s antitrinitarian reading of the Christology of the early church is given in a footnote to the final edition of the Racovian Catechism (*Catechism* 1818, pp. 167–168). An excellent overview of the Socinian antitrinitarian philosophy of history, including a synopsis of Benedykt Wiszowaty’s “Medulla”, can be found in Szczucki 1979, *Historiography*, pp. 285–300.

<sup>121</sup> Williams 1980, *Brethren*, p. 560; Newton, Bodmer MS, *passim*.

<sup>122</sup> Jarmola 1990, *Origins*, p. 60; Newton, Bodmer MS, 5, ff. 1<sup>r</sup>–2<sup>r</sup>, 8, f. 1<sup>r</sup>; Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 154<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>123</sup> Lubieniecki 1995, *History*, pp. 248–249; Newton, Clark MS, *passim*; Newton, Keynes MS 10, *passim*.

of primitive Christian teachings was the introduction of Greek philosophy and metaphysics.<sup>124</sup> As seen above, for this Newton blamed both Athanasius and Arius.<sup>125</sup>

This antitrinitarian philosophy of history is exemplified in the work of Socinian Benedykt Wiszowaty, great-grandson of Sozzini. Lech Szczucki's summary of Wiszowaty's unpublished, but indicative, "Medulla" (c. late 1680s) is invaluable. An extremely apologetic work, it used testimony from the writings of the early church to demonstrate that the teachings of the Church had become corrupt (representing Greek philosophy as a chief culprit), but that the primitive truth (*primaeva veritas*) had been preserved by a theologically-pure remnant.<sup>126</sup> This, is, of course, an adaptation for antitrinitarian purposes of a standard Protestant historiographical motif.<sup>127</sup> For Wiszowaty only a chosen few can "discover the supreme good, which is divine truth; the masses, on the other hand ... will never chose 'the best things'".<sup>128</sup> Wiszowaty's vision of the true Church was that "of a minority, one defeated, persecuted and suffering, but one which nevertheless, dauntlessly convinced of the justice of its cause, passes on to succeeding generations the torch of divine truth".<sup>129</sup> The Socinian invective against the introduction of philosophy into the Church and their pronounced (and justificatory) remnant theology are startlingly reminiscent of positions Newton held.<sup>130</sup> That the plot of Newton's Church history manifests similar interpretative and apologetic contours to those of the Socinians is suggestive—

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<sup>124</sup> Lubieniecki 1995, *History*, pp. 274–278; Newton, Bodmer MS, 5A, ff. 1<sup>r</sup>–2<sup>r</sup>, 7<sup>r</sup>, 5B, f. 7<sup>r</sup>, 8, f. 1<sup>r</sup>; Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, ff. 79<sup>r</sup>, 97<sup>r</sup>, 154<sup>r</sup>, 170<sup>r</sup>. A manuscript treatise by the French Socinian Jacques Souverain among Locke's papers provides vivid parallels not only to Newton's belief that the original Gospel had been corrupted by Greek philosophy, but many other elements of Newton's antitrinitarian thought. See Souverain, "Some General Reflections upon The beginning of St John's Gospel", Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Locke e. 17, ff. 211–216. This manuscript is copied out principally in the hand of Locke's amanuensis Sylvanus Brownover, with some corrections by Locke himself. For more on Souverain and the strident attack on the Trinity in this manuscript, see Marshall, "Locke, Socinianism, 'Socinianism', Unitarianism", pp. 126–131. Since Locke had this manuscript in his possession (likely from the 1690s), Newton may have been granted access to it.

<sup>125</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 154<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>126</sup> Szczucki 1979, *Historiography*, p. 296.

<sup>127</sup> Szczucki 1979, *Historiography*, pp. 293–294.

<sup>128</sup> Szczucki 1979, *Historiography*, p. 294.

<sup>129</sup> Szczucki 1979, *Historiography*, p. 295.

<sup>130</sup> For Newton's view of the small remnant class, see Snobelen 1999, *Newton*, pp. 389–391.

especially since it was such a uncommon approach in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Remarkable parallels to Newton are also to be found in a small pamphlet published by the Englishman Paul Best, who had converted to Socinian opinions while travelling in central and eastern Europe and, during the English Civil War, was condemned to death for denying the Trinity.<sup>131</sup> In his sixteen-page tract *Mysteries discovered*, Best, who had studied at Cambridge a half-century before Newton, not only presents the standard Socinian positions that only the Father is truly God, but also argues that the Trinity is a central feature of the great apostasy predicted in the Apocalypse, and lays the chief blame for introducing the doctrine against the Latin Church.<sup>132</sup> Newton similarly integrated his antitrinitarianism into his interpretation of the Book of Revelation, implicating the Roman Church with the introduction of Trinitarianism.<sup>133</sup> The apocalyptic exegesis of both Newton and Best was shaped by that of the great Cambridge historicist exegete Joseph Mede, but the infusion of an antitrinitarian thrust represents a radical turn from the standard English Protestant anti-Catholic interpretation of the Apocalypse. Elaborating on his view, Best, who uses caustic language similar to that seen in some continental Socinian literature, writes that “we may perceive how by iniquity of time the reall truth of God hath been trodden under foot by a verball kinde of Divinity, introduced by the Semi-pagan Christians of the third Century in the Western Church, immediately upon the ceasing of the heathenish Emperors”.<sup>134</sup> By “the third Century in the Western Church”, Best apparently means the beginning of the fourth century A.D., as he goes on to state that the 1260-year apostasy of the Apocalypse commenced with “the first Nicene Council about 328”, and thus the “general Apostasy is expired, the mystery discovered, and the unity of God, *Zech.* 14.9. come upon the stage”; with this, apocalyptic Babylon is deemed fallen.<sup>135</sup> Taken from the Books of Daniel and Revelation, early modern Protestant inter-

<sup>131</sup> Best 1647, *Mysteries*. Best was released in 1648, apparently after being pardoned. On Best, see McLachlan, H.J. *Socinianism*, pp. 149–162 and my *New DNB* entry on Best.

<sup>132</sup> Best 1647, *Mysteries*, pp. 5, 10–13.

<sup>133</sup> As Westfall aptly wrote, “Trinitarianism stood at the center of his interpretation of the prophecies. It was the Great Apostasy foretold by God when men would fall away from the true worship into idolatry” (Westfall 1981, *Career*, p. 351).

<sup>134</sup> Best 1647, *Mysteries*, p. 11.

<sup>135</sup> Best 1647, *Mysteries*, p. 11. This can be compared with the periodisation of Stanislas Lubieniecki in Lubieniecki 1995, *History*, pp. 82, 415 n. 9 and 10.

preters regularly identified the 1260-year (day) period with the apostasy of the Roman Church. Best links the period with the ascendancy of Trinitarianism and thus it is significant that later in his pamphlet he speaks about a "third Reformation which succeeded the *Calvinian* upon the *Turkish* territories more remote from the Romish tyranny, especially, about *Anno* 1560, in *Transylvania, Lithuania, Livonia, and Polonia*", which, although he does not believe it is complete, he clearly associates with the rise of the Socinian church.<sup>136</sup> Newton also interprets the 1260 years in an antitrinitarian way. But Newton's approach displays an even more radical stance, as he completely decentres the Protestant Reformation and apparently even marginalises the Socinian Reformation of the late sixteenth century in placing the fall of Babylon and the preaching of the true (unitarian) Gospel far into the future.<sup>137</sup>

As with Newton and the continental Socinians, Best was outraged by those who set up new Creeds without warrant and inveighed against the Nicene Creed.<sup>138</sup> In a manner similar to Newton, the Athanasian Creed is also attacked, as is the introduction of the Greek term *homoousia*.<sup>139</sup> Like Newton, there is additionally a conception of a small, persecuted remnant class.<sup>140</sup> Best's fiery and densely-written pamphlet displays a blend of antitrinitarian theology and apocalypticism that compares well with Newton, even if this admixture is not commonly seen among continental Socinians. Although Best's *Mysteries discovered* was condemned to be burnt by the hangman, two copies of the tract were held at Trinity College in Newton's day.<sup>141</sup> Whether or not Newton read

<sup>136</sup> Best 1647, *Mysteries*, p. 15. For more on the Socinian notion of a "third reformation" after those of Luther and Calvin, see Lubieniecki's account of the reformation moving through Lutheran, Calvinist and Unitarian stages (Lubieniecki 1995, *History*, p. 89).

<sup>137</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 1. 3, f. 53<sup>r</sup>; Newton, Yahuda MS 9, f. 158<sup>r</sup>; Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 35. See also Newton, Ms. Locke c. 27, f. 88, which places the fall of Babylon and the preaching of the true Gospel around the time of the seventh trumpet; cf. Newton, Yahuda MS 7.2a, ff. 29<sup>r</sup>–38<sup>r</sup>. In one of his later apocalyptic chronologies, these events happen around 2060 A.D., 1260 years after 800 A.D. (Newton, Yahuda MS 7.3g, f. 13<sup>v</sup> and Yahuda MS 7.3o, f. 8<sup>r</sup>). It is possible that one reason why Newton looked to the future and discounted the Socinian reformation (of which he was surely aware) was because it was not ultimately victorious, having been suppressed by the Catholics in Poland in the early to mid-seventeenth century and afterwards forced to go underground. This may have helped confirm his belief that the time was not yet ripe for open preaching of the unitarian faith (cf. Snobelen 1999, *Newton*, pp. 391–393).

<sup>138</sup> Best 1647, *Mysteries*, pp. 5, 11, 12, 15.

<sup>139</sup> Best 1647, *Mysteries*, pp. 3, 14.

<sup>140</sup> Best 1647, *Mysteries*, p. 14.

<sup>141</sup> The Wren Library at Trinity College, Cambridge currently holds two copies

*Mysteries discovered*, Best, learned Cambridge scholar, Socinian theologian, apocalyptic exegete, Church historian, tolerationist and radical dissenter, offers one of the closest parallels to Newton's theology.

### 7. Antitrinitarian Textual Criticism

Textual criticism provides yet another parallel. Although textual criticism by itself does not signal theological radicalism (after all, there were Protestant and Catholic textual critics in the seventeenth century), Newton shared with the Socinians a desire to utilise textual criticism for specifically antitrinitarian ends. Many point to Catholic textual critic Richard Simon's publications of the 1680s and 1690s as effectively launching biblical textual criticism as a discipline. Sozzini and the Socinians, however, employed textual criticism a century before this. Yet while Simon used textual criticism partly as a tool to undermine the authority of the Bible (in order to assert the authority of the Church), the biblicist Socinians, believing that the Word of God did not contradict itself, were eager to use textual criticism to eliminate contradictions in order to undergird the authority of the Bible.<sup>142</sup> Like the humanist scholar Erasmus before them, the Socinians stressed the use of philology in the study of biblical doctrine. The Socinians were skilled textual critics and many of their conclusions were prescient.<sup>143</sup>

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of Best's *Mysteries discovered*. The shelf marks are Y.8.16<sup>5</sup> (old shelf marks: Z.7.23 and 5.17.a.2) and I.15.9<sup>11</sup> (old shelf mark Z.8.3; this copy is missing the final pages from page 15 on). Copy Y.8.16<sup>5</sup> is bound in a volume immediately after copies of Fausto Sozzini's *Tractatus de justificatione* (Raków, 1616) and John Biddle's *Twelve arguments* ([London], 1647). While neither copy of the pamphlet is listed in Hyde's 1675/76 manuscript catalogue of the library, both copies of *Mysteries discovered* (Z.7.23 and Z.8.3) are listed in the c. 1700 partial class catalogue of the Wren Library (Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. Add.a.109, pp. 446, 451). The lack of inclusion of the two copies in the Hyde catalogue does not necessarily mean that neither copy was at Trinity College during Newton's time there (1661–1696), as the Hyde catalogue does list Sozzini's *Tractatus de justificatione* (item 2710). Intriguingly, copy I.15.9<sup>11</sup> is dog-eared in a manner indistinguishable from the dog-earing of books known to be owned by Newton, with pages 12 and 14 turned down. If, as seems likely, Newton read Socinian books in Trinity College Library, it seems reasonably probable that Newton would have at least stumbled across copy Z.7.23—that is, if he did not seek out Best's work intentionally.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. *Catechism* 1818, pp. 17–18, 42.

<sup>143</sup> This can be confirmed by consulting Ehrman 1993, *Corruption*, which documents the many examples in which orthodox (proto-Trinitarian and Trinitarian) copyists adjusted the original readings of the New Testament to reflect the developing Trinitarian theology.

For example, following the lead of Erasmus, they understood that the *comma Johanneum* (1John 5:7) was a late textual corruption.<sup>144</sup> As in this case, much of their effort was devoted to purging post-Apostolic Trinitarian corruptions. Both the philological approach and the programme of identifying corruptions are manifest in the “Two notable corruptions”, the textual critical manuscript work on 1John 5:7 and 1Timothy 3:16 that Newton sent to Locke in 1690 for anonymous publication on the continent.<sup>145</sup> While he gently chides the Socinians for a particular interpretation in his single explicit reference to the Socinians in the manuscript,<sup>146</sup> this reference nevertheless confirms that Newton searched through Socinian writings for evidence. Sand is cited with approbation.<sup>147</sup> Nor was this treatise the product of a momentary fascination. Newton’s continued interest in antitrinitarian textual criticism is shown both by his contemplation of publishing the “Two notable corruptions” in the early eighteenth century and by his desire to read Samuel Crell’s book near the end of his life.

The “Two notable corruptions” is not a straightforward exercise in textual criticism: it is a deliberate attempt to expose unwarranted infiltrations of doctrinal *novae* into the sacred text. Newton’s description of the two verses in question as “corruptions” makes this intention plain. It is clear from the document that his goal was to remove two chief supports for the doctrine of the Trinity. As Westfall correctly observes, “it is hard to believe that anyone in the late seventeenth century could have read it as anything but an attack on the trinity”.<sup>148</sup> Although Newton asked Locke to suppress the writing before it was published, the timing of his composition of the “Two notable corruptions” during the English Unitarian-Trinitarian controversy, which commenced in 1687 with the publication of the Unitarian Stephen Nye’s *A brief history of the*

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<sup>144</sup> Crell, J. 1665, *Books*, pp. 186, 244; *Catechism* 1818, pp. 39–42; Williams 1992, *Reformation*, p. 645. While some Trinitarians, including Erasmus, suspected that the *comma* was an interpolation, many contended for its authenticity, partly because of its perceived apologetic value.

<sup>145</sup> The text of the “Two notable corruptions” is published in Newton 1959–1977, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, pp. 83–149.

<sup>146</sup> Newton 1959–1977, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 84. On the other hand, in his personal Bible Newton emended the end of John 3:13 “who is in heaven” to read “who was in heaven” (Trinity College, Cambridge, Adv.d.1.10<sup>2</sup>), an emendation supported by Fausto Sozzini, who in turn was relying on a suggestion made by Erasmus (Williams 1982, *Issues*, p. 319).

<sup>147</sup> Newton 1959–1977, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 89.

<sup>148</sup> Westfall 1980, *Rest*, p. 490.

*Unitarians, called also Socinians* in 1687, is significant. Had Newton's "Two notable corruptions" been published in the early 1690s—especially in the English version that Newton contemplated—it almost certainly would have been viewed as an intervention in the controversy.<sup>149</sup> It is difficult to imagine that such observations would have been wrong.

### 8. *Scriptural Hermeneutics*

Biblical interpretation offers further examples of consonance between Newton and the Socinians. Newton made several comments on the use of reason in interpreting the Scriptures that are reminiscent of Socinian exegetical principles. In a manuscript on time, place and God, Newton writes that "the human race is prone to mysteries, and holds nothing so holy and perfect as that which cannot be understood ... It is the concern of theologians that the conception [of God] be made as easy and reasonable as possible".<sup>150</sup> Newton believed that the Scriptures are reasonable and composed in the tongue of the common people.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, he was committed to the hermeneutic of interpreting more difficult passages with those more easily understood:

If it be said that we are not to determin what's scripture & what not by our private judgements, I confesse it in places not controverted: but in disputable places I love to take up wth what I can best understand. Tis the temper of the hot and superstitious part of mankind in matters of religion ever to be fond of mysteries, & for that reason to like best what they understand the least. Such men may use the Apostle John as they please: but I have that honour for him as to beleive [*sic*] he wrote good sense, & therefore take that sense to be his wch is the best.<sup>152</sup>

In one of his early prophetic manuscripts, Newton also lays down several "Rules of Interpretation" intended to determine "when an interpretation is genuine & of two interpretations which is the best".<sup>153</sup> Newton believed in the unity and simplicity of God's Word. In a direct allusion to his studies of nature, and in deployment of the parsimony

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<sup>149</sup> For background on this controversy, see Douglas Hedley's contribution to this volume.

<sup>150</sup> Cambridge University Library MS. Add. 3965, f. 546<sup>r</sup> (original in Latin; my translation); cf. Crell, J. 1665, *Books*, p. 245.

<sup>151</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 99<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>152</sup> Newton 1959–1977, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 108; cf. Newton, Keynes MS 5, ff. 1<sup>r</sup>–2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>153</sup> Newton, Yahuda MS 1.1a, f. 10<sup>r</sup>.



principle in hermeneutics, Newton writes that he chose biblical interpretations that “without straining reduce things to the greatest simplicity ... Truth is ever to be found in simplicity, & not in y<sup>e</sup> multiplicity & confusion of things”.<sup>154</sup>

These same methods were encouraged by Socinian theologians. An attack on mysteries in religion can be seen, for example, in Johann Crell’s railing against the cavils of Trinitarians who cry “mystery” when at a loss to align their extra-biblical doctrine with the Word.<sup>155</sup> As for the belief that the Bible was written for the common people, a positive affirmation of this sentiment is also found in Johann Crell’s writings.<sup>156</sup> Motivated by an antitrinitarian doctrinal agenda, the compilers of the Racovian Catechism contend that “more obscure passages of Scripture” are to be understood “by an attentive comparison of them with similar phrases and sentences of less ambiguous meaning”.<sup>157</sup> Similarly, Paul Best argues that the standard Trinitarian tactic is to resort to “difficult and figurative texts to confirm their inventions”, an approach he rejects in favour of a methodology in which “that which is most plain, common and commanded is the measure of that which is more difficult and obscure”.<sup>158</sup>

Although analogies to most of these hermeneutical principles and ideals can be found with varying degrees of regularity among the exegetes of the Reformation, and while the analogies may be partly explained by the fact that both the Socinians and Newton imbibed—either directly or indirectly—the philological culture of the Renaissance, Newton’s use of these principles is in several respects more characteristic of Socinians as opposed to orthodox interpreters or Renaissance humanists. Not only are these principles presented with particular force and vigour by both Newton and Socinian writers, and brought to the rhetorical forefront in a way not commonly seen among orthodox theologians, but with both Newton and the Socinians these methods are given a hard edge in a deliberately antitrinitarian apologetic. In explicit contradistinction to Trinitarian exegetes, the undercurrent behind these assertions of hermeneutic style by both Newton and the Socinians is that when these methods are employed with skill and acu-

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<sup>154</sup> Newton, *Yahuda MS* 1.1a, f. 14<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>155</sup> Crell, *J.* 1665 *Books*, p. 245.

<sup>156</sup> Crell, *J.* 1665 *Books*, p. 245.

<sup>157</sup> *Catechism* 1818, p. 18; cf. Zozzini 1594, *Jesu*, p. 261; Jarmola 1990, *Origins*, p. 62.

<sup>158</sup> Best 1647, *Mysteries*, p. 12.

men, the student of Scripture will arrive at the non-Trinitarian (i.e. pre-Trinitarian) truth of the Word. What is more, both the attack on the putatively defeatist invocation of “mystery” in hermeneutics, along with the positive assertion that the Bible is not only perspicuous but also reasonable in its meaning, are much more distinctively unorthodox.

Before concluding the overview of the hermeneutics of Newton and the Socinians, it is worth noting that some of Newton’s scriptural interpretative principles find striking analogies in his natural philosophical method.<sup>159</sup> Newton’s four “Rules of reasoning in philosophy”, published in the *Principia*, provide some examples. An affirmation of the unity of phenomena in the natural world and the inference of universal principles from specifics can be found in Rules II and III.<sup>160</sup> The Scottish mathematician David Gregory records a variant of this method he obtained from Newton:

The best way of overcoming a difficult Probleme is to solve it in some particular easy cases. This gives much light into the general solution. By this way Sir Isaac Newton says he overcame the most difficult things.<sup>161</sup>

This principle is similar to Newton’s hermeneutic in which the meaning of difficult texts is induced from those that are apparent. The simplicity reflex can also be seen in Newton’s study of nature, declaring in Rules I and III that “Nature is pleased with simplicity” and “wont to be simple”.<sup>162</sup> Finally, Newton’s aversion to the use of vain hypotheses in natural philosophy compares well with his opposition to the corruption of Scripture with metaphysics and philosophy. That this affinity of style between Newton’s hermeneutics and his natural philosophical method also extends to Socinian hermeneutics and his natural philosophical method perhaps should not be surprising. The parsimony principle is, after all, a light motif in the history of medieval and early modern philosophy and natural philosophy, and the Socinians were learned in philosophy as well as theology. It also appears that the rules of reasoning owe something to the Ramist Robert Sanderson’s *Logicae artis compendium* (1618), a text Newton owned.<sup>163</sup> Sanderson

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<sup>159</sup> In three articles, Maurizio Mamiani has explored the analogies between Newton’s hermeneutics and his natural philosophical method, suggesting that the former may have helped shape the latter. See Mamiani 1991, *Rhetoric*; Mamiani 2001, *Meaning*; Mamiani 2002, *Newton*.

<sup>160</sup> Newton 1968, *Principles*, p. 399.

<sup>161</sup> Gregory 1937, *Newton*, p. 25.

<sup>162</sup> Newton 1968, *Principles*, p. 398.

<sup>163</sup> On this, see Mamiani 2002, *Newton*. Mamiani argues plausibly that Newton’s

in turn may have appropriated hermeneutical principles from similar humanistic sources as the Socinians. Nevertheless, these added examples provide yet another instance of analogous ideas that might have served to reinforce Newton's awareness that in the Socinians he found kindred spirits.

### 9. Socinianism and the Scholium

When Newton published the second edition of the *Principia* in the early summer of 1713, he included among many additions and refinements to this great work an appendix that summarised in terse and compact prose some of the most significant and distinctive elements of his natural philosophy, ranging from his cometography and his inductive method to gravity to theology. This is the famous, yet still imperfectly understood, General Scholium. Aside from two brief natural theological comments in the first edition of the *Principia*, along with more elaborate statements on the same in the Queries he added to the Latin edition of the *Opticks* in 1706, Newton had never before dared to commit theological ideas to print. Theology makes up more than half of the General Scholium. Even more dangerous for a heretic, most of this is theology proper, as opposed to natural theology.

At the beginning of the theological section of the General Scholium, Newton articulates an expression of the design argument by stating that the "most beautiful System of the Sun, Planets, and Comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being." He goes on to say that "if the fixed Stars are the centers of other like systems, these, being form'd by the like wise counsel, must be all subject to the dominion of One".<sup>164</sup> He then describes this Being:

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

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sixteen rules of prophetic interpretation were based partly on Sanderson's *Logicae* and that elements of the prophetic rules were later adapted for the *Principia's* rules of reasoning. It is also possible that Newton accessed the *Logicae* directly when formulating the rules of reasoning, although the latter are closer to the prophetic rules than to the principles outlined by Sanderson.

<sup>164</sup> Newton 1968, *Principles*, vol. 2, p. 388.

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. The word *God* usually signifies *Lord*; but every lord is not a God. It is the dominion of a spiritual being which constitutes a God; a true, supreme or imaginary dominion makes a true, supreme or imaginary God. And 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>165</sup>

What were Newton's intentions in presenting this biblically-framed language at the end of his *Principia*? One of Newton's contemporaries claimed he knew. Basing his accusation on an intimate knowledge of Socinianism superior to that of all but a handful of specialist scholars alive today, in 1714 the Calvinist heresy-hunter John Edwards publically denounced the theology of the General Scholium, asserting that the argument that God is a relative term had been taken straight out of the thirteenth chapter of Johann Crell's *De Deo et ejus attributis* (*Concerning God and His attributes*).<sup>166</sup> What Edwards astutely identified in the General Scholium as antitrinitarian in this carefully-worded text can now be confirmed as such on the basis of Newton's less circumspect private theological papers.<sup>167</sup> While it is important to be cautious when treating the claims of an orthodox apologist, especially in an age when the term Socinian was so casually thrown about to smear theological opponents, Edwards' charge nevertheless has substance. In what follows, I will show that Edwards' assertion that the General Scholium contains language reminiscent of Socinianism is, if anything, an understatement.

The basic principle in the Trinitarian conception of God is an ontology of substance. Thus, the term "God" is seen as primarily absolute, referring to essence. For the Socinians, the single most important defining principle of God is sovereignty and dominion. For this reason, "God" or "a god" can either refer to a being with supreme and underived dominion or a being with shared, limited or delegated dominion. Thus, the term "God" is seen as primarily relative, con-

<sup>165</sup> Newton 1968, *Principles*, vol. 2, p. 389.

<sup>166</sup> Edwards 1714, *Remarks*, pp. 36–37.

<sup>167</sup> This is the primary purpose of my paper "'God of Gods, and Lord of Lords': the theology of Isaac Newton's General Scholium to the *Principia*" (Snobelen 2001, *God*). See also Stewart 1996, *Seeing*, and Force 1990, *God*.

noting rule and office in varying degrees. To support this contention, the Polish Brethren drew attention to *loci biblici* where ordinary human beings, such as rulers, are called God when acting as representatives of the supreme God (Psalm 82:6 being an example cited by Christ in John 10:34). It follows then that in the handful of times Christ is called “God” in the Bible the term need not be taken in an absolute, substantial sense. This is the apologetic corollary of the contention. Socinians held that the word God is used only of the Father in the absolute, underived sense, while it is used of Christ, angels and some humans in a relative or derived sense. In either case, the term obtains its meaning from dominion and power.

As Edwards intimates, Crell makes this very point in chapter thirteen of his *De Deo*, where he writes that the term “God” in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures is frequently qualified by an additional word or clause, “by which his *relation* is signified to others, as when God is said to be God of this or that” (my emphasis). He then goes on to elaborate:

From this, I say, it is easily understood, that that term is neither by nature particular, nor does it signify God’s essence itself. Indeed, such particular names in Hebrew do not permit additional clauses. For example, it is not said Moses or Jesus or Paul of this or that, except when the term son is implied (in the case of the names of women, daughter or wife). The essence of God is also from the number of absolute things, not of relative things. Why therefore is God so frequently called God of these or those? Certainly because the term God is principally a name of power and empire, to which is owed honour and veneration, and because it is customary to pay respect to parents. An additional clause of this kind therefore signifies that God is the most kind God of that, of which God is said to be lord and ruler, as the examples teach.<sup>168</sup>

The argument that the term God is primarily a word denoting power and empire is precisely the same as that presented by Newton in the above-cited lines from the General Scholium, where he writes that “[i]t is the dominion of a spiritual being which constitutes a God”.<sup>169</sup> Newton’s God was a God of dominion, and so it was with the Socinians. And, as Edwards correctly claimed, the presentation of God as a relative word is found not only in the passage quoted above, but in much

<sup>168</sup> Crell, J. 1630, *Deo*, chapter 13, “De nomine θεός,” columns 101–102. The underlined words correspond to the Latin material that John Edwards cited from Crell as evidence that Newton was using that Socinian author. Translations from Crell’s *De Deo* are my own, corrected by Dr David Money.

<sup>169</sup> A manuscript example of Newton’s characterisation of God as a God of dominion can be found in Newton, Bodmer MS, 5A, ff. 8<sup>r</sup>–9<sup>r</sup>.

of the preceding material in chapter thirteen of Crell's *De Deo*.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, Edwards also notes that Newton employs a title for God, *Deus summus* ("Supreme God"), that can also be found in the writings of both the Arians and the Socinians, who required the qualification *summus* "to distinguish the Father from the Son, who they hold to be an *Inferior* God".<sup>171</sup> Newton's private writings confirm that for him the "supreme" God is the Father alone.<sup>172</sup>

But Edwards could have continued. Several more analogies exist as well, not only in Crell's *De Deo*, but in other Socinian writings. In chapter twenty-three of his *De Deo*, Crell again presents the One True God (the Father) as a God of dominion:

God received dominion from no-one, because by his excellence of itself, not received from some other source, entirely on his own authority, he produced all things, by neither another's help nor command. Therefore he has might by himself, because he is lord of those things, and if any dominion deserves to be called natural, God's dominion over all things so deserves to be called with the highest justice. Yes, the dominion of God is supreme, and indeed absolutely supreme. Certainly since he received his dominion from no one, but—unlike all those who have some dominion—from himself, he is necessarily supreme lord of all things. Whereupon he is also called Lord of lords.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Crell, J. 1630, *Deo*, "De nomine θεός", columns 89–102.

<sup>171</sup> Edwards 1714, *Remarks*, p. 39. On page 40 of this same work, Edwards concludes that Newton must mean the Father when he uses *Deus summus*. The title *Deus summus* occurs three times in the original Latin of the General Scholium (the third example being added in 1726 to the note on space) (Newton 1968, *Principles*, vol. 2, pp. 389–390, 390 note b). For two examples of the title in Crell, see Crell, J. 1630, *Deo*, "De nomine θεός", columns 99 and 101. As Edwards' critique insinuates, what is crucial here is the combination of the use and the antitrinitarian intent of this expression.

<sup>172</sup> Newton, Sotheby's (1936) Lot 255.9, f. 2<sup>v</sup> (private collection); Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 43; Newton, Yahuda MS 14, f. 25<sup>r</sup>; Newton, Yahuda MS 15.3, f. 46<sup>v</sup>; Newton, Yahuda MS 15.5, f. 98<sup>r</sup>. In his manuscript treatise "Of the Church", Newton refers to the Father as "the supreme Lord" (Bodmer MS, 5A, f. 9<sup>r</sup>). In an annotation at the end of Query 31 in a copy of the 1717 edition of his *Opticks*, Newton speaks of the "one supreme Lord God", by which he means the Father (Manuel 1963, *Newton*, plate facing p. 117). Newton also uses the term "one supreme God" in Newton 1728, *Chronology*, p. 190. Although it is conceivable that one might use this title of the Father in a highly subordinationistic interpretation of the Trinity, Newton's use is thoroughly antitrinitarian. Thus, without the benefit of the added clarity of Newton's private papers, Edwards' conclusion that Newton used the expression *Deus summus* in an antitrinitarian way was correct. For additional examples of the antitrinitarian use of the title "the one supreme God" by the Socinians, see *Catechism* 1818, pp. 96–97.

<sup>173</sup> Crell, J. 1630, *Deo*, chapter 23, "De potestate Dei", column 166.

Crell’s explication of the True God’s absolute and underived dominion—His supreme dominion—closely matches Newton’s statement in the General Scholium that “a true, supreme or imaginary dominion makes a true, supreme or imaginary God”. The Latin expressions “*omnium dominus*” (“Lord of all”) and “*Dominus dominorum*” (“Lord of lords”) appear in both Crell’s *De Deo* and Newton’s General Scholium.<sup>174</sup>

Later in the same chapter, Crell expands on his conception of the God of dominion using concepts and even specific titles of God that appear in Newton’s General Scholium:

Therefore as the dominion of God is absolutely independent, both most great and most complete, and finally eternal: so also is the empire of God, or power of ruling and governing. Because the empire of God is independent, yes indeed because it is most great and most complete, for that reason it ought to be repeated, because He is called the only powerful one by Paul. For the word in Greek is *dynast*, a word that we have said denotes those who are able to have much influence over others on account of their power. God alone, however, is said to be “powerful one”, because He has empire alone by himself, and indeed over all things, and whoever has power (by himself, that is), has it either by His gift, or at least by His permission. It also pertains first to loftiness, then to breadth of the same empire, because he is King of kings, Lord of the dominant, Lord of hosts, God of gods, and finally God and head of Christ himself. It is said, he [Christ] is himself King of kings and Lord of lords, head of all principality and power, God of all things, or all beings, in this blessed age, seeing that he is lifted up by God himself over all things. From which it appears, the breadth of the divine empire was not lessened at all, when he handed Christ power over all things in heaven and earth—as we also said—from dominion above.<sup>175</sup>

Although many of the titles used of God in this passage ultimately derive from the Bible, it is striking how similar the second half of this passage is to the section in Newton’s General Scholium where superlative titles are used of God. The Latin versions of the biblical expressions “God of gods” (*deus deorum*) and “Lord of lords” (*Dominus dominorum*) appear in both this passage from Crell and in Newton’s General Scholium.<sup>176</sup> For both Newton and the Socinians, these titles ultimately refer to the Father alone as supreme deity and thus have

<sup>174</sup> Both these expressions also appear in Crell, J. 1630, *Deo*, chapter 10, “*De nomine Adon & Adonai*”, column 74.

<sup>175</sup> Crell, J. 1630, *Deo*, chapter 23, “*De potestate Dei*”, columns 173–174.

<sup>176</sup> Examples of the antitrinitarian use of the title “God of gods” can be found in *Catechism* 1818, pp. cviii, 35; that Newton used it in an antitrinitarian sense, applying

clear antitrinitarian import, even though Crell argues that since they are relative expressions, they can be used of Christ in a secondary sense. It is also notable that Crell uses the analogy of an empire to articulate both God's dominion and the way in which he communicates power and authority to Christ. This dynamic monarchianism has already been seen in Newton's "Of the Church", where Newton. Moreover, Crell's use of relational titles for God such as "God of gods" and "God of Christ", with which, as Crell puts it, God is said to be "God of this or that", is exactly what we see in Newton's General Scholium, where the term God is said to be defined by relations, as in "my God, your God, the God of *Israel*, the God of Gods, and Lord of Lords". Newton and Crell share an antitrinitarian nominalism.

Crell also deals with "God" as a term denoting authority, dominion and empire in his *De Uno Deo Patre libri II* (*Two books concerning One God the Father*):

... the name GOD, is in its own Nature common, and agreeth to all them, who have some sublime Empire, or eminent Power; as Princes and Magistrates on the Earth; in the Heavens, to Angels; and above all these, to Christ, the Head of all Angels, and King of kings; but by way of Excellency to that Supream and Independent Monarch, and attributed to him as proper.<sup>177</sup>

On the following page, he adds to this:

For he is accounted as Independent, who doth not depend on him, on whom only he can truly depend. Whence all the Idols of the *Gentiles*, are by vertue of these words, or rather, of the sens therein comprehended, simply excluded from true Godhead; since they were so far from truly depending on the Father, as that they were not believed to depend. But Christ is not excluded herefrom, because his dependence on the Father, in respect of his Divine Empire over all things, and Worship suitable to such an Empire, hath most evident proofs been demonstrated.<sup>178</sup>

The same argument about God being a term that relates to dominion and not essence is found at the beginning of the section on the nature of God in the Racovian Catechism:

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it to the Father exclusively, can be see from Newton, Yahuda MS 7.1k, f. 2<sup>r</sup>; Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 29; Newton, Bodmer MS, "Additional chapters," f. 73<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>177</sup> Crell, J. 1665, *Books*, p. 4. I am citing from the anonymous English translation of 1665.

<sup>178</sup> Crell, J. 1665, *Books*, p. 5.



WHAT do you understand by the term God?

The supreme Lord of all things.

And whom do you denominate Supreme?

Him, who, in his own right, has dominion over all things, and is dependent upon no other being in the administration of his government.<sup>179</sup>

Here it is clear that the term God is seen as equivalent to the term Lord, a word that more immediately conjures up the notion of dominion and power. The Racovian Catechism also discusses the difference between absolute and relative uses of the term “God”, with the former alone referring to the Father.<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, because for him the One True God is the Father, Newton’s presentation in the General Scholium of the “One” who unites thought his all-pervading dominion all of the planetary systems in the universe, and hence all of creation, is unitarian. The Socinians, too, used the term “(the) One” to describe the unipersonal God.<sup>181</sup>

But this is not all. In the third (1726) edition of the *Principia*, Newton added a note on the word “God” that expands his meaning:

Dr. *Pocock* derives the Latin word *Deus* from the *Arabic du* (in the oblique case *di*.) which signifies *Lord*. And in this sense Princes are called *Gods*, *Psal.* lxxxii. ver. 6; and *John* x. ver. 35. And *Moses* is called a *God* to his brother *Aaron*, and a *God* to *Pharaoh* (*Exod.* iv. ver. 16; and vii. ver. 1 [*sic*; 8]). And in the same sense the souls of dead princes were formerly, by the Heathens, called *gods*, but falsely, because of their want of dominion.<sup>182</sup>

In equating the term “God” with “Lord” (a word that straightforwardly refers to dominion), Newton once again stresses that the chief characteristic of “God” or “gods” is dominion. This attempt to present the terms “God” and “Lord” as equivalent mirrors the already-quoted lines from the Racovian Catechism on the God of dominion. The position that persons other than the True God can be termed “God” is a also standard Socinian position and it is expressed in the very same chapter of Crell’s *De Deo* specified in 1714 by John Edwards.<sup>183</sup> For both New-

<sup>179</sup> *Catechism* 1818, p. 25.

<sup>180</sup> *Catechism* 1818, pp. 34–35.

<sup>181</sup> Williams 1980, *Brethren*, p. 312. It is evident that Newton’s presentation in the General Scholium of the Oneness of God owes something to the language of the first-century Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus. On the classical substratum of the General Scholium, see Smet/Verelst 2001, *Scholium*.

<sup>182</sup> Newton 1968, *Principles*, vol. 2, p. 389 note a.

<sup>183</sup> Crell, J. 1630, *Deo*, “De nomine θεός”, columns 94–99.

ton and the Socinians, this conception of dominion also explained how the Son of God could be called God and not be “very God” in the Nicene formulation. Three out of the four biblical passages used by Newton in this note are also utilised by Crell for the same purpose in the same chapter of *De Deo*.<sup>184</sup> Additionally, the point about false and imaginary Gods can be located in similar form in Crell’s *Concerning One God the Father*.<sup>185</sup> Finally, the argument on the communicability of the term “God”, along with the scriptural references used by Newton in the note on God, can be found commonly elsewhere in the Socinian corpus.<sup>186</sup>

It is stunning that some of the closest parallels to Socinianism appear in one of Newton’s public documents. It is a testimony to Newton’s boldness that he went on to add further material that conforms to Socinian argumentation in the second version of the General Scholium in 1726 and that he did so after Edwards’ published attack of 1714. The close affinity of several aspects of the General Scholium were not only recognised by a theologically-alert observer in Newton’s own age, but can be confirmed through an expanded survey of Socinian texts. Whether or not Newton actually derived these ideas directly from Crell’s *De Deo* as Edwards claims, is impossible to confirm on the available evidence. Newton apparently did not own a copy of the work, although he certainly could have accessed it through Samuel Clarke’s copy of the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* around the time of the composition of the General Scholium. During Locke’s lifetime, he could have accessed Crell’s *De Deo* in one of the three editions Locke owned.<sup>187</sup> But, as already demonstrated, if Newton’s General Scholium is informed by Socinian arguments, these ideas need not have come from Crell’s *De Deo*. Whatever their precise source or sources, many of the theological ideas embedded in the General Scholium conform so closely to Socinianism that a contemporary observer could identify them as such, even without the benefit of the additional testimony adduced in this essay. Furthermore, whatever Newton’s beliefs at the time of the compositions of the General Scholium, because this document expresses nescience about the substance of God and only contains arguments that can

<sup>184</sup> Crell, J. 1630, *Deo*, “De nomine θεός”, columns 94–96, 99.

<sup>185</sup> Crell, J. 1665, *Books*, p. 5.

<sup>186</sup> Lubieniecki 1995, *History*, pp. 161–165; Williams 1980, *Brethren*, p. 104; Best 1647, *Mysteries*, pp. 2, 5, 8.

<sup>187</sup> This includes the edition published Locke’s copy of the *BFP*. See Harrison/Laslett 1971, *Library*, items 331, 877 and 3103.

be used to contend that Christ takes the name God in an honorific sense, while omitting any arguments that Christ in some way shared a similar nature to the Father, on paper the General Scholium contains arguments that can be used for Socinianism, but none that can be used specifically for Arianism. Perhaps this is one reason why Edwards raised the spectre of Socinianism rather than the fourth-century heresy of Arius. Even with the remaining uncertainties, it is possible to conclude that the single most important text in the history of science ends with an attack on the Trinity infused with arguments that mirror those of the leading heretical movement of the seventeenth century.<sup>188</sup>

#### 10. *Associations with a Greater Heresy*

Thus far I have avoided sustained engagement with the question of whether or not Newton consciously appropriated Socinian teachings. This paper has demonstrated the *plausibility* of such a scenario by pointing both to Newton's access to Socinian sources and the wide array of parallels between his theology and that of the Polish Brethren. It certainly would be understandable if Newton had been attracted to the Socinians' rich antitrinitarian scholarly culture, or if he had wanted to access the sophisticated argumentation of the most intellectually-advanced antitrinitarian movement of his age. It also possible that Newton was drawn to the Socinians in part because they were neither tainted by the Christological controversies of the fourth century nor corrupted by the metaphysics introduced into Christianity in that age. This is something that cannot be said of the Arians. Still, any claims for conscious dependence on the Socinians will remain circumstantial unless more direct evidence surfaces. Of course, since Socinianism was a proscribed heresy, it would hardly be surprising for the evidence to be both elusive and inconclusive if Newton had indeed appropriated some of their teachings. Partly for these reasons, the primary focus of this paper is simply to show that Newton's theology exhibits a remarkable range of points of contact with Socinianism. This in itself is useful, for, aside from some of his intimates, no-one in Newton's lifetime

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<sup>188</sup> Although I have considerably expanded the examples of parallels between Newton's theology and that of the Socinians in this paper since publishing "Isaac Newton, heretic" and "God of gods, and Lord of lords", those familiar with these two earlier studies will note that I have taken a somewhat more cautious approach in this paper.

knew much of anything about his theology. Knowing that his theology resembles that of the Socinians in many respects helps confirm that it would have been viewed as damnable heresy if it had become widely known. Nevertheless, the genesis of what could be called Newton's "Socinianesque" theology remains an important consideration. There are several possible sources: Newton's own independent exegesis, Judaic monotheism,<sup>189</sup> primitive Christian theology (including Arianism), Erasmusian biblical philology,<sup>190</sup> contemporary non-Socinian radical theology (including non-Socinian British Unitarianism), Socinianism itself, and combinations of these. Anyone familiar with Newton's private theological papers will take the first four possibilities as givens. For this reason, the last dynamic can be assumed, at least with respect to the first four possibilities. The fifth and sixth possibilities will be explored in what follows.

Elsewhere I have argued that Newton's beliefs show affinities with non-Socinian radical and dissenting theologies of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.<sup>191</sup> This includes both the movements of the continental Radical Reformation as well as British non-conformists from the Civil War through to the early eighteenth century. In the latter category the British Unitarians loom large. Much of the antitrinitarian argumentation of writers like John Biddle, who is often termed "the father of Unitarianism", and Stephen Nye, is isomorphic with that of Newton. Additionally, Newton's near intervention in the Trinitarian controversy of the late 1680s and early 1690s reveals that he shared some common reformist goals with the British Unitarians. Newton's anti-Athanasian "Paradoxical questions" is part of the same genre as the Unitarian Tracts of the 1690s. Newton owned at least one collection of the Unitarian Tracts and would have been familiar with the teachings of the movement that produced them—a movement that was developing its theology contemporaneously with Newton. It is also hard to avoid the conclusion that Newton must have responded positively to much of what is contained in the German Arian Sand's *Nucleus*, a work that

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<sup>189</sup> On Newton's relation to Judaism, see Goldish 1998, *Judaism*.

<sup>190</sup> Newton refers to the textual critical work of Erasmus numerous times in his "Two notable corruptions" and a related document (Newton 1959–1977, *Correspondence*, vol. 3, pp. 89, 94, 96–98, 100–109, 134, 136, 140). He also owned Erasmus's commentary on the Psalms, the 1668 edition of Erasmus' paraphrases on the New Testament and an edition of "Erasmus on the New Testament" (dated 1579), which has not been identified (Harrison 1978, *Library*, items 567, 568 and 569).

<sup>191</sup> Snobelen 2004, *God*.

we know he read carefully. The brief interval between the 1669 publication of the *Nucleus* and Newton's own espousal of antitrinitarianism is suggestive. But here it is worth noting that both Sand and the British Unitarians in turn owed theological debts to the Socinians. Moving beyond antitrinitarian contemporaries, Newton's mortalist theology can be compared favourably with that of seventeenth-century English mortalists such as Richard Overton.<sup>192</sup> His belief that he was part of a small, persecuted remnant is reminiscent of seventeenth-century British non-conformity.<sup>193</sup> All of this reveals a general orientation away from orthodoxy and towards dissent and heresy.

While allowances must be made for the Socinian penchant for wrapping their doctrines in an orthodox cloak,<sup>194</sup> it can also be argued that on at least four important issues, Newton was *further* from orthodoxy than the Socinians: his already-mentioned stance on the non-invocation of Christ, his belief that the true reformation of Christianity lay in the future, his powerful millenarian eschatology and his rejection of a personal devil. As already shown, Newton's non-invocant Christology places him on this point closer to the Transylvanian Unitarians than the Polish Brethren. While seventeenth-century Socinianism (unlike the pre-Socinian Polish Brethren) generally downplayed millenarianism in favour of a stance closer to Augustinian and Calvinist amillennial eschatology, the example of Paul Best does demonstrate that the combination of Socinian theology and Protestant prophetic thought was both possible and productive. Some later Unitarians, notably Joseph Priestley, also combined antitrinitarian and apocalyptic thought. The seventeenth-century Socinians apparently held to a literal, personal devil and literal, personal demons, even though it does not feature prominently in their systematic theology.<sup>195</sup> In contrast, Newton, like many early nineteenth-century Unitarians,<sup>196</sup> saw the devil as symbolic of human lust and the language of demon possession in the Bible as accommodated speech for human madness and the like.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Overton 1643, *Mans*.

<sup>193</sup> Scott Mandelbrote points to Newton's non-conformist sensibilities in Mandelbrote 1993, *Duty*.

<sup>194</sup> Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Socinians sometimes tried to appear as orthodox as possible to avoid verbal and physical persecution.

<sup>195</sup> *Catechism* 1818, pp. 7–8, 188.

<sup>196</sup> *Catechism* 1818, pp. 7–8.

<sup>197</sup> Snobelen 2004, *Lust*.

On the other hand, in some areas Newton was more theologically conservative than the Polish Brethren. This is seen not only in his adherence to the preexistence of Christ (a view shared by Trinitarians), but in other areas as well. One example is Newton's apparent belief that there is a role for the intervention of the monarch in the church.<sup>198</sup> Despite Leibniz' insinuation in the Leibniz-Clarke debate, Newton did not agree with Sozzini's contention that God's foreknowledge is less than perfect. On the contrary, Newton declares in the General Scholium that God not only fills time as well as space, but that he "knows all things that are or can be done".<sup>199</sup> Also, Newton did not follow the Socinians in their belief in the priority of the New Testament. While a concentrated focus on the New Testament can be seen in the theological writings of his friend John Locke, Newton's Christianity was thoroughly grounded in both the Old and New Testaments. In this Newton is nearer to the English Puritans and other Calvinists than the Socinians.

Even without evidence of direct linkages, there is substantial overlap between Newton's religious culture and that of both the Socinians and English Unitarians. Quite apart from the doctrinal analogies, Newton adopted a common strategy of many crypto-Socinians on the continent and in England: Nicodemism.<sup>200</sup> Newton's Nicodemite strategy of outwardly confirming to orthodoxy while secretly harbouring heretical beliefs mirrors that of such crypto-Unitarians as Stephen Nye, who came of age at the same time as Newton.<sup>201</sup> And Newton's Nicodemism was both passive and active, as he was not only a secret heretic, but his "Two notable corruptions" and General Scholium reveal that he was also actively engaged in an antitrinitarian reformist programme. His actions thus show that he was directly or indirectly a player in the subversive Socinian-Unitarian agenda in both the 1690s and the 1710s. In this light it is astonishing that some of the closest analogies with Socinianism are found in a document he released in the public sphere and that he went on to add to the General Scholium another parallel to Socinianism after being attacked for Socinianism. Here we must ask the question: why would he take such a risk if he was not genuinely

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<sup>198</sup> As mentioned above, despite the fact that much in Newton's "Irenicum" suggests that the Church and King are to exist in separate realms, Newton still speaks of a role for the King in selecting Bishops and Presbyters (Newton, Keynes MS 3, p. 22).

<sup>199</sup> Newton 1968, *Principles*, vol. 2, p. 389.

<sup>200</sup> For a detailed discussion of Newton's Nicodemism, see Snobelen 1999, *Newton*.

<sup>201</sup> Nye took his BA at Cambridge in 1665, the same year as Newton (*New DNB*).

sympathetic to an agenda that could be broadly construed as Socinian or Socinian-Unitarian? Without question, Newton was publically aligning himself with known Socinian and Unitarian positions. It was a bold enterprise.

Nevertheless, neither verbal parallels nor similarity of motive in themselves prove Socinian inspiration. It is also true that few individual doctrinal analogies between the theology of Newton and the Socinians are unique to Socinianism. The overall doctrinal profile, however, is strikingly close. Thus we return to the question, Whence this doctrinal profile? A *homogenetic* relationship between the theology of Newton and the Socinians is a real possibility. Such a genetic relationship would include the mediation of teachings through the thought of the Arian Sand and the British Unitarians, in which case the appropriation may not always have been conscious. A genetic relationship would make sense against the backdrop of recent studies of Newton's theology that suggest he was less of a theological autodidact than previously assumed. The aforementioned possibility of a subtle drift towards Socinianism as the years wore on would also make sense if there was a long-term genetic relationship. Still, there is an outside chance that the relationship was strictly *homomorphic*. If so, the parallels between the independently-developed theologies could be accidental artefacts of the common biblicism and anti-creedalism of Newton and the Polish Brethren. Newton's theology was hammered out primarily on the anvil of Scripture and this, combined with his rejection of post-Apostolic doctrinal novelty, undoubtedly contributed to the dramatic convergence between his beliefs and those of the Socinians.

It is my belief that a subtle combination of the two is the most likely scenario. Even if few or no parallels derived directly from his engagement with Socinianism, Newton's theology came to resemble Socinianism on many points and Newton surely would have been aware of this. After all, Newton owned and read Socinian books. It is hard to imagine that these writings had absolutely no impact on Newton; the circumstantial evidence that they did is powerful and compelling. What is more, as Edwards' attack demonstrates, a theologically-astute contemporary observer had no trouble identifying Newton's theology with Socinianism. If both Newton and his informed contemporaries could have seen the analogies, the line between direct appropriation (conscious or unconscious) and simultaneous discovery must have been very fine—if it existed at all. Newton may have in any case wished to conclude that his religion was shaped first and foremost by the Bible

(which it undoubtedly was), and that he was by no means a disciple of a contemporary theologian or movement—a defence expressed by some of the British Unitarians.<sup>202</sup> Newton's writings reveal no slavish dependence on any one theological tradition and this includes the Polish Brethren, as his differences from them attest. Newton was above all an eclectic theologian who added to his own innovation ideas from several theological streams, both orthodox and unorthodox. It is enough that this paper provides ample evidence to suggest that one of these streams was Socinian.<sup>203</sup>

Although Newton was neither a Christological nor communicant Socinian, he was certainly a Socinian in several of the senses common in his own day. This paper has shown that he was also much closer to doctrinal Socinianism than these general definitions. Whichever road he travelled getting there, Newton's theological system and religious ethos closely resemble those of Socinianism narrowly construed.<sup>204</sup> Isaac Newton is possibly the greatest figure in the history of science and certainly one of the leading intellectuals of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He is unquestionably the most significant figure to be associated with Socinianism. These facts alone demand that more work be done on the nature of the wide-ranging alignment of the religion of the author of the *Principia* with that of the Polish Brethren. One suspects that the last word has not been said on Isaac Newton and Socinianism.

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<sup>202</sup> Marshall 2000, *Locke*, pp. 113–114.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Snobelen 2001, *Socinianism*.

<sup>204</sup> This is similar to Marshall's conclusion about Locke and Socinianism in Marshall 2000, *Locke*.



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## Appendix I

Samuel Crell to Isaac Newton, 16 July 1726

*English translation*

Most Illustrious Sir

Not completely unknown to You, I, whose return to Germany fifteen years ago you liberally equipped with money, most humbly address you for the first time by means of a letter. The best and greatest God be your great reward! The book that could not see publication there, I have brought hither, the printing of which, as you see, two Printers and Booksellers have undertaken here, but with the stipulation that I find buyers for two hundred copies before the book goes to press. But thus far I have scarcely found buyers for fifty copies. Since certain persons have made promises, I turn to You, Most Illustrious Sir, and I present to You these Propositions, hoping for some promotion of this work from You, whereby the Printers might be incited, which I also seek with very humble entreaties. It appears that the book will not be without use, and it is secured against satiety and fastidiousness of style by its manifold variety of argument and clarity of expression. Its first and principal argument is that if only Christian Theologians had seen and acknowledged that Christ is nowhere in Scripture expressly called God, it would appear that so many controversies about the Deity of Christ would not have been stirred up. Therefore my book, if it does not restrain these controversies, will at least mitigate them somewhat, and will perchance contribute something. These Propositions indeed are not being made public and are being shown only to Men of moderation. Those who have begun to promote this work, do not wish their names to be revealed, and nor will Yours be revealed to anyone, Most Illustrious Sir, if you choose to give some money for some copies of it. I thought I would send this to you before by means of a letter, so that when the matter has been considered by you, meeting you personally next Monday, I may learn what you have decided concerning the matter.

To Your most Illustrious name

Your most devoted supporter  
Samuel Krell.

Written in London  
16 July 1726

*Transcription of Latin original*

Illustrissime Domine

Non prorsus ignotus Tibi, per literas primùm Te humillimè compello, quem ante quindecim annos redeuntem in Germaniam liberali viatico instruxisti. Deus opt. max. sit merces Tua magna! Librum qui ibi lucem publicam videre non potest, huc attuli, cujus impressionem, ut vides, duo hic susceperere Typographi iidemque Bibliopolæ, verùm eâ, lege ut emptores exemplarium ducentorum priùs inveniam quàm liber prelo subjiciatur. Sed hucusque nonnisi quinquaginta fere exemplarium reperire potui. Quidam promiserunt Quare me ad Te Illustrissime Domine converto, et has Tibi Propositiones exhibeo, sperans aliquam a Te operis hujus promotionem quâ Typographi incitentur, quod etiam precibus humillimis expeto. Liber non videtur fore inutilis, et est multiplici varietate argumenti ac stylo perspicuo contra satietatem et fastidia munitus. Quod primum præcipuumque ejus argumentum attinet, si jam olim Theologi Christiani vidissent et agnovissent, Christum nullibi in Scriptura expressè vocari Deum, non videntur tantas lites de Christi Deitate excitaturi fuisse. Ergo ad fluctus tales, si non compescendos, aliquantum saltem mitigandos, nonnihil forsitan liber meus contribuet. Propositiones verò istæ non fiunt publici juris, et nonnisi moderatis Viris ostenduntur. Qui opus hoc promovere coeperunt, nolunt nomina sua propalari, neque Tuum Illustrissime Domine, si in exemplaria ejus pecuniam aliquam impendere volueris, cuiquam manifestabitur. Hæc per literas ad Te præmittenda fuisse putavi, ut re à Te consideratâ, die Lunæ proximo ipse coram, quodcunque ea de re constitueris percipiam.

Illustrissimi nominis Tui

Cultor devotissimus  
Samuel Crellius.

Dab. Londini  
1726. d. 16. Julii.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Crell to Newton, 16 July 1726, Wallers autografsamling England och USA, Uppsala Universitetsbiblioteket. An abbreviated translation appears in Hall 1982, *Newton*, p. 33. I would like to thank Uppsala University for providing me with a copy of this manuscript letter and for granting me permission to reproduce its text. I am also grateful to Dr David Money (Cambridge) for helping correct my translation of the Latin.

## Appendix II

## Sociniana and Related Works in the Library of Isaac Newton

*Socinianism*

- CRELL, JOHANN. *Commentarius in Epistolas Pauli Apostoli ad Thessalonicenses. Ex prælectionibus Iohannis. Crellii Franci conscriptus à Petro Morskovio à Morskovv.* 8°, Racoviæ Typis Pauli Sternacii Anno à Christo nato, 1636. [458] H; M/F1-6; Tr/NQ<sub>9</sub>.114<sup>1</sup> [bound with 421; pp. 32, 38 turned down].1590-1633; *AB* 2:567; *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians. Edited by Peter Morscovius from the lectures of Johann Crell the Frank.*
- CRELL, SAMUEL. *Initium Evangelii S. Joannis Apostoli ex antiquitate ecclesiastica restitutum, indidemque nova ratione illustratum In isto Opere ante omnia probatur, Joannem non scripsisse, Et Deus erat, sed, Et Dei erat Verbum. Tum etiam tota 18. prima ejus Evangelii commata, & alia multa dicta Scripturæ S. illustrantur; & non pauca antiquorum Ecclesiasticorum ac Hereticorum loca ventilantur ac emendantur per L.M. Artemonium [i.e. S. Crellius].* 8°, [Amsterdam (i.e. London)], 1726. [459] H; M/A4-1;? 1660-1747; *AB* 3:487-488; *The beginning of the Gospel of John restored from ecclesiastical antiquity, and illustrated from the same source, by a new method. In this work it is proved particularly that John did not write, And the Word was God, but And the Word was of God. Then the entire first eighteen verses of that Gospel, and many other texts of Scripture are also illustrated; and not a few passages of ancient ecclesiastical writers and heretics are sifted and amended.*
- LUBIENIECKI, STANISŁAW. *Stanisłai de Lubienietki, Equitis Poloni Theatrum cometicum, duabus partibus constans.* 2 vols. F°, Lugduni Batavorum, 1681. Originally published: Amsterdam, 1667 in 3 vols. [985] H; M/A9-5 & 6; Tr/NQ<sub>11</sub>.6 & 7 [a few signs of dog-earing in vol. 1].1623-1675; *AB* 3:302-303; *Stanislaw Lubieniecki, Polish Knight, Comet Theatre, containing two parts.* This was a work on comets that may have reinforced Newton's own cometographical theory.
- SZLICHTYNG, JONASZ. *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Hebræos. Cum indice rerum locorumque Scripturæ.* 8°, Racoviæ, 1634. [421] Not H; M/F1-6; Tr/NQ<sub>9</sub>.114<sup>2</sup> [bound with 458; pp. 54, 314 turned up, p. 318 down; several other signs of dog-earing]. c.1592-1661; *AB* 3:50; *A commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. With an index of principle matters and places of Scripture.* Szlichtyng acknowledged that Johann Crell assisted him with this work.
- SOZZINI, FAUSTO. *De Iesu Christi Filii Dei natura sive essentia, nec non de peccatorum per ipsvm expiatione disputatio, adversus Andream Volanam.* Secundò edita. [Preface signed F.S., i.e. F. Socinus.] 8°, Racoviæ, 1627. [495] H; M/A3-14;? 1537-1604; *AB* 2: 336; *A disputation concerning the nature or essence of Jesus Christ the Son of God, and also on the expiation of sin by him, against Andreas Volanus.*
- . *De Unigeniti Filii Dei existentia, inter Erasmum Iohannis, & Faustum Socinum disputatio, A Socino iam ante decennium ex ipsius Erasmi scripto ... composita & conscripta: Nunc tamen primum typis excusa.* 8°, 1595. [496] Not H; M/A3-12; NQ<sub>9</sub>.54<sup>2</sup> [bound with 1385].1537-1604; *AB* 2:335; *A disputation between Erasmus Johannis and Faustus Socinus concerning the existence of the Only Begotten Son of God, now ten years past, put together and edited by Sozzini from the writing of*



*Erasmus himself: now however published for the first time.* This is the first edition. Johannis was at the time an Arian minister and the disputation was on Christ's preexistence (*AB* 2:374–378). This was the Socinian publication of the disputation; Harrison is thus mistaken to identify it as by Johannis, who produced his own edition of the dispute in 1585.

———. *Defensio animadversionum F. Socini in assertiones theologicas Collegii Posnaniensis de trino et uno Deo, adversus G. Eutropium canonicum Posnaniensem, ab eodem F. Socino conscripta.* 8°, Racoviæ, 1618. [1534] H; M/A3–19;? 1537–1604; *AB* 2:335–336; *A defence of the animadversions of Faustus Socinus on the theological assertions of the College of Posnania concerning the three and one God, against Gabriel Eutropius, Canon of Posnania, written by the same Fausto Sozzini.* Edited by Hieronim Moskorzewski.

———. *Refutatio Libelli, quem Iac. Wiekus Iesuita anno 1590 Polonicè edidit, De Divinitate Filii Dei, & Spiritus Sancti. Vbi eâdem operâ refellitur quidquid Rob. Bellarminus itidem Iesuita, Disputationum suarum Tomo primo, secundæ Controversiæ generalis libro primo, de eadem re scripsit.* 8°, 1594. [1385] H; M/A3–12; Tr/NQ.9.54<sup>1</sup> [bound with 496; several signs of dog-earing] 1537–1604; *AB* 2:335; *A refutation of a small book, which the Jesuit Jakob Wijek wrote in Polish in the year 1590, concerning the Divinity of the Son of God and the Holy Spirit, together with a refutation of what the Jesuit Bellarmin has written on the same subject.*

#### *Transylvanian Unitarianism*

ENYEDI, GYÖRGY. *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti, ex quibus Trinitatis dogma stabiliri solet.* 4°, [Groningen, 1670; originally publ. c.1598]. [557] H; M/A6–14; Tr/NQ.8.23 [‘Is. Newton pret. 6.’ on fly-leaf; a few signs of dog-earing]. 1533–1597; *Explanations of the places in the Old and New Testament, from which the doctrine of the Trinity is commonly established.*

#### *Continental Arianism*

SAND, CHRISTOPHER, Jr. *Nucleus historiæ ecclesiasticæ: cui præfixus est Tractus de veteribus scriptoribus ecclesiasticis.* (3 pts.) 8°, Cosmopoli [Amsterdam], 1669. [1444] H; M/A1–20; Tr/NQ.9.17 [a few signs of dog-earing]. 1644–1680; *AB* 3:318–328; *Nucleus of ecclesiastical history: to which is prefixed a tract on the ancient ecclesiastical writings.* This book contains material about and by Socinians.

#### *English Unitarians*

[BIDDLE, JOHN, et al]. *The Faith of the One God, Who Only Is the Father; and of One Mediator between God and Men, Who is only the Man Christ Jesus; and of one Holy Spirit, the Gift (and sent) of God; Asserted and Defended, in Several Tracts contained in this Volume; the Titles whereof the Reader will find in the following Leaf. And after that a preface to the whole, or an Exhortation to an Impartial and Free Enquiry into the Doctrines of Religion.* 4°, London, 1691. [604] H; M/H2–13; Tr/NQ.9.32. 1616–1662; *AB* 3:173–206. Biddle was an English Unitarian

who early on fell under the influence of continental Socinians, while still retaining some of his unique theological ideas. This title includes a total of fifteen tracts, including several by Biddle and Stephen Nye.

### *Notes*

Newton also owned several antitrinitarian works by Samuel Clarke and William Whiston, including the first and second editions of Clarke's *Scripture-doctrine of the Trinity* (1712; 1719) and Whiston's *Sermons and essays* (1709), *Primitive Christianity reviv'd*, 4 vols (1711) and *Historical preface* (1712). Most or all of these works were likely given to Newton by their authors. This annotated list has been adapted, corrected and expanded from the relevant entries in John Harrison, *The library of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge 1978). Item numbers (in square brackets), abbreviations and shelf marks listed after each item are from Harrison, and are explained in Harrison, *Library of Newton*, pp. 79–81. Following this are the author's dates, a reference to the relevant entry in Wallace, *Antitrinitarian biography*, 3 vols. (London, 1850) and, where the original title is in Latin, an English translation (often adapted from Wallace).