

"On Controversies in Religion"

By Katherine Philips

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On Controversies in Religion

1 Religion, which true Policy befriends,
2 Design'd by God to serve Man's noblest ends,
3 Is by that old Deceiver's subtle Play
4 Made the chief Party in its own decay,
5 And meets that Eagle's destiny, whose Breast
6 Felt the same shaft which his own Feathers drest,ⁿ⁰⁰¹.
7 For that great Enemy of Souls perceiv'd,
8 The notion of a Deity was weav'd
9 So closely in Man's Soul; to ruin that,
10 He must at once the World depopulate.
11 But as those Tyrants who their Wills pursue,
12 If they expound old Laws, need make no new:
13 So he advantage takes of Nature's Light,
14 And raises that to a bare useless height;
15 Or while we seek for Truth, he in the Quest
16 Mixes a Passion, or an Interest,
17 To make us lose it; that, I know not how,
18 'Tis not our Practice, but our Quarrel now.

19 As in the Moon's Eclipse some Pagans thought
20 Their barb'rous Clamours her Deliv'rance wrought:
21 So we suppose that Truth oppressed lies,
22 And needs a Rescue by our Enmities.
23 But 'tis Injustice, and the Mind's Disease,
24 To think of gaining Truth by losing Peace.
25 Knowledge and Love, if true, do still unite;
26 God's Love and Knowledge are both Infinite.
27 And though indeed Truth does delight to lye
28 At some Remoteness from a common Eye;
29 Yet 'tis not in a Thunder or a Noise,
30 But in soft Whispers and the stiller Voice.
31 Why should we then Knowledge so rudely treat,
32 Making our Weapon what was meant our Meat?
33 'Tis Ignorance that makes us quarrel so;
34 The Soul that's dark will be contracted too.
35 Chimera's,ⁿ⁰⁰² make a Noise, swelling and vain,
36 And soon resolve to their own Smoak again.
37 But a true Light the Spirit doth dilate,
38 And robs it of its proud and sullen State;

39 Makes Love admir'd because 'tis understood
40 And makes us Wise because it makes us Good.
41 'Tis a right Prospect of things that we
42 Owe our Uprightness and our Charity.
43 For who resists a Beam when shining bright,
44 Is not a Sinner of a common height.
45 That State's a Forfeiture, and Helps are spent,
46 Not more a Sin, than 'tis a Punishment.
47 The Soul which sees things in their native Frame,
48 Without Opinion's Mask or Custom's Name,
49 Cannot be clogg'd to Sense, or count that high
50 Which hath its Estimation from a Lie.
51 (Mean forbid Things, which by mistake we prize,
52 And absent covet, but enjoy'd despise.)
53 But scorning these hath robb'd them of their Art,
54 Either to swell or to subdue the Heart;
55 And learn'd that gen'rous Frame to be above
56 The World in hopes, below it all in love:

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57 Touch'd with Divine and Inward Life doth run,
58 Not resting 'till it hath its Centre won;
59 Moves steadily until it safe doth lye
60 I' th' Root of all its Immortality;
61 And resting here hath yet activity
62 To grow more like unto the Deity;
63 Good, Universal, Wise and Just as he,
64 (The fame in kind, though diff'ring in degree)
65 'Till at the last 'tis swallow'd up, and grown
66 With God and with the whole Creation one;
67 It self, so small a part, i' th' whole is lost,
68 And Generals have Particulars engross'd.
69 That dark contracted Personality,
70 Like Mists before the Sun, will from it flie.
71 And then the Soul, one shining Sphere, at length
72 With true Love's Wisdom fill'd and purged Strength,
73 Beholds her highest Good with open Face,
74 And like him all the World she can embrace.

Footnotes

- n001 An allusion to Aesop's fable of The Eagle and The Arrow
- n002 A fabled fire-breathing monster of Greek mythology, with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail (or according to others with the heads of a lion, a goat, and a serpent), killed by Bellerophon. Source: Oxford English Dictionary