



BIBLIA AMERICANA
Cotton Mather

Volume 1: GENESIS

Edited, with an Introduction and Annotations, by Reiner Smolinski

Cotton Mather.

BIBLIA AMERICANA

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Volume 1

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Cotton Mather

BIBLIA AMERICANA

America's First Bible Commentary

A Synoptic Commentary on the
Old and New Testaments

Volume 1
GENESIS

Edited, with an Introduction and Annotations,
by
Reiner Smolinski

Mohr Siebeck
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For Tanya, Hannah, and Madeleine

My Advice to you is, That it be your Practice, to *Read the Sacred Scriptures* in the *PORISMATIC WAY*; Or, with a Labour to observe and educe, the *Doctrines of Godlineß*, which this inexhaustible *Store House of Truth*, will yield unto them that are seeking after it. Make a *Pause* upon every *Verse*, and see what *Lessons of Piety* are to be learnt from every *Clause*. Turn the *Lessons* into *Prayers*, and send up the *Prayers* unto the GOD, who is now Teaching of you.

Manuductio ad Ministerium (1726)

Acknowledgments

Cotton Mather's holograph manuscript "Biblia Americana" had a very long gestation period – considerably longer than the decade it took me to transcribe, edit, and annotate the first of ten-volumes, in which Mather's commentary is now going to be published for the first time. I have been frequently asked what possessed me to undertake this gargantuan project. A well-meaning friend, no doubt speaking from experience, pointed to several renowned compilers of Bible commentaries (let alone their editors) who did not live long enough to see the final volume through the press. With so much left to be done, the rumors of my premature elevation, I hope, are greatly exaggerated.

The origins of this project go back a good number of years. My friend and colleague Jesper Rosenmeier of Tufts University serendipitously bestowed upon me the content of several filing cabinets, which Kenneth B. Murdock had lovingly gathered for his splendid edition of Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1977). What Murdock had gathered here in the sixties and seventies – before word processors, the internet, and online databases became the tools of the academic trade – is a testimony to his labor of love, an obsession no less than a conviction that a scholarly edition of colonial America's most significant history was well worth the effort. Much the same motivation led me (in the early eighties) to work on Cotton Mather's "Triparadisus" manuscript at the AAS, a book-length essay on eschatology, which subsequently appeared as *The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of "Triparadisus"* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995). The initial transcription of this manuscript was undertaken, it is hard to believe, on one of the first home computers a poor student's budget could muster. The technological breakthroughs since then are mind-boggling. Without them, editing and annotating the "Biblia Americana" manuscript would hardly have been possible.

For support of my ongoing research on Cotton Mather's "Biblia Americana," I wish to thank the Department of English at Georgia State University for various research and travel grants, including a summer 2008 RIG grant, which allowed me to spend time writing rather than grading essays. I am grateful to my colleagues at the Massachusetts Historical Society for a W. B. H. Dowse Fellowship, to the Huntington Library for a Mayer's Fellowship, and to the American Antiquarian Society for a Kate B. and Hall J. Peterson fellowship. Moreover, I wish to thank Marcus A. McCorison Librarian and Curator of Manuscripts

Thomas G. Knoles; John B. Hench and Nancy Burkett (both retired); Caroline F. Sloat, Director of Book Publishing; and the many fine librarians on staff at the AAS for the collegial atmosphere and the stimulating lectures at the Society during my residence in Worcester. Every research library should have a Goddard-Daniel House to accommodate its fellows as royally as the AAS does! My heart goes out to Stephen T. Riley Librarian Peter Drummy and to Worthington C. Ford Editor Conrad E. Wright at the Massachusetts Historical Society for their professional support and the stimulating environment in one of the premier research libraries for colonial Americana materials. Thanks, Conrad, for the delicious food during the heady fellowship lunches! Thank you, Peter, for the many conversations and the coffee on those Saturdays when the library was undergoing renovation.

Apart from the quality time at the Huntington, the AAS, and the MHS, I had the privilege of accessing rare books at the Andover-Harvard Library, the Boston Public Library, the Harvard Divinity School Library, the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library and the Rare-Book Room of the Science and Engineering Library at UCLA, the university libraries of Tübingen, Mainz, and Berlin; and, closer to home, Pitts Theology and Woodruff Libraries at Emory, and Pullen Library at Georgia State University. Special thanks go to Margret A. Pitts Librarian Patrick Graham at Pitts Theology of Emory, and Margie Patterson (now retired) of Interlibrary Loans at Pullen Library. In this context, it is not remiss to praise Dean Lauren Adamson, Dean Nancy Seamans, and Provost Ron Henry (now retired) for their prescient investment in expensive online Humanities databases (EEBO and ECCO) – in the nick of time before the mortgage industry, AIG, and Wall Street took us to the cleaners on Sub-Prime Alley.

Over the innumerable hours during the vetting process, of collating the typescript against a digital version of the microfilm copy of the “Biblia Americana,” and during a marathon onsite vetting session of five weeks at the MHS, I benefited from the help of many kind individuals. Particular thanks go to Merit Kaschig, Florian Schwieger, Jan Saathoff and, especially, Damien Brian Schlarb, for their faithful support. Thank you Damien! And thank you Matthew Roudané and Randy Malamud for the gift of a graduate research assistant for the past several years. Without your and their help, the “Biblia” would still repose in a computer file. I am indebted to Heribert Dillmann of Niederbrechen (remember?), to Käthe Ristow of Mainz (on whatever cloud that good angel might now rest), to Jeffrey Walker of Oklahoma State University for the inspiring summer seminar on the *Magnalia*, to Mark Langley of Topeka for many valuable suggestions on the transcript and annotations, to my dear colleague Patricia Graves, who went the extra mile to make my writing more felicitous, to Ken Minkema and Adriaan Neele of the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale Divinity School for their support, to H. Clark Maddux of Austin Peay University and, especially, to Robert E. Brown of James Madison University, and to Jan Stievermann of

the University of Tübingen, for reading portions of the manuscript and for suggesting improvements; to Bernd Engler, rector of Eberhard-Karls Universität Tübingen, and to Jan Stievermann, for hosting and organizing the first ever International Symposium on Cotton Mather's "Biblia Americana" (October 23–25, 2008) in the Hohentübingen Castle of the University (Mather could not have wished for a setting or audience more illustrious).

Jan Stievermann, Assistant Professor of American Studies at Tübingen, Executive Editor of Cotton Mather's "Biblia Americana," and dear friend, deserves my particular gratitude. It is through his hard work that the Mather Symposium in Tübingen was made possible. Jan was also instrumental in introducing me to Dr. Henning Ziebritzki, Editorial Direktor of Mohr Siebeck, the Tübingen publishing house, which is bringing out the "Biblia Americana" in collaboration with Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Publishing Group. It is through the vision of Henning Ziebritzki and James Ernest, Editor of Baker Academic, that Cotton Mather's magnum opus is now being made available. Indeed, there's a time and season for everything – even if it takes nearly three-hundred years to get there.

My deep appreciation also goes out to several scholars who have given their "thumbs up" for our Mather project: To Dale C. Allison, Jr., of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, to Bernard Bailyn of Harvard University, to E. Brooks Holifield of Emory University, to David Lyle Jeffrey of Baylor University, to Donald K. McKim of Memphis Theological Seminary, to Robert Middlekauff of University of California, Berkeley; to Mark A. Noll of Notre Dame University, to Stephen J. Stein of Indiana University, to Harry S. Stout of Yale University for their sterling endorsements. I believe I can speak for all of my fellow editors – Jan Stievermann, Ken Minkema, Harry Clark Maddux, Rick Kennedy, Michael P. Clark, and Ava Chamberlain – when I extend our warmest thanks.

Two more paragraphs and we are done: I wish to thank the Massachusetts Historical Society for permission to edit and publish Cotton Mather's "Biblia Americana" manuscript, Linda Smith Rhoads, editor of the *New England Quarterly*, for permission to reprint major portions of my article "How to Go to Heaven or How Heaven Goes? Natural Science and Interpretation in Cotton Mather's 'Biblia Americana' (1693–1728), published in *The New England Quarterly* 81.2 (June 2008): 278–329; to Gaby van Rietschoten of Koninklijke Brill NV for permission to reprint a portion of my article "Authority and Interpretation: Cotton Mather's Response to the European Spinozists," which appeared in *Shaping the Stuart World, 1603–1714*. Eds. Alan I. Macinnes and Arthur H. Williamson. Leyden: Brill, 2006. 175–203. My special thanks go to Frau Anna Krüger of Mohr Siebeck for her expertise in all matters of the production.

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on you, Hannah, and Madeleine, when I “disappeared” in my study and was lost to you and the children in the interminable Mather bog. I am ready to take up my badge of shame. Hannah Sophie, dearest Hannah Montana, daughter after my own heart: how many times did I want to get away from the computer and spend quality time with you on the playground before you grew up to become a young person? Madeleine Marie, dearest Maddie Chatterley: how you tugged on my shirtsleeves and pleaded with me “to come down” and play with you? Oh, sweet child of time. I promise to do better. My siblings Irene, Horst, Gudrun, and Ute: so much anguish, so little time. My beloved parents, Horst and Anneliese Smolinski: I wished you had lived long enough to share in the pleasure of seeing my Hannah and Maddie grow up, and to feel the warm embrace of your grandchildren. Doch es kam alles ganz anders.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	IX
List of Illustrations	XVII
List of Abbreviations	XIX

PART 1: EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Section 1: "Biblia Americana": America's First Bible Commentary	3
Section 2: "Biblia Americana" in the Context of Early Enlightenment Science	77
Section 3: Cotton Mather: Theologian, Exegete, Controversialist	113
Works Cited in Sections 1–3	175
Section 4: Note on the Text and Editorial Principles	191

PART 2: THE TEXT

The OLD TESTAMENT, in the Order of the History	213
The NEW TESTAMENT, in the true Order of the History ..	242
The Introduction	269
The Old Testament	277
Genesis. Chap. 1.	302
Genesis. Chap. 1.	307
Genesis. Chap. 2.	420
Genesis. Chap. 3.	477
Genesis. Chap. 4.	510
Genesis. Chap. 5.	533

Genesis. Chap. 6.	579
Genesis. Chap. 7.	625
Genesis. Chap. 8.	641
Genesis. Chap. 9.	667
Genesis. Chap. 10.	693
Genesis. Chap. 11.	805
Genesis. Chap. 12.	838
Genesis. Chap. 13.	884
Genesis. Chap. 14.	886
Genesis. Chap. 15.	909
Genesis. Chap. 16.	919
Genesis. Chap. 17.	922
Genesis. Chap. 18.	943
Genesis. Chap. 19.	952
Genesis. Chap. 20.	961
Genesis. Chap. 21.	965
Genesis. Chap. 22.	992
Genesis. Chap. 23.	998
Genesis. Chap. 24.	1001
Genesis. Chap. 25.	1004
Genesis. Chap. 26.	1010
Genesis. Chap. 27.	1011
Genesis. Chap. 28.	1016
Genesis. Chap. 29.	1024
Genesis. Chap. 30.	1028
Genesis. Chap. 31.	1040
Genesis. Chap. 32.	1049
Genesis. Chap. 33.	1055
Genesis. Chap. 34.	1057
Genesis. Chap. 35.	1058
Genesis. Chap. 36.	1072
Genesis. Chap. 37.	1075
Genesis. Chap. 38.	1080
Genesis. Chap. 39.	1085
Genesis. Chap. 40.	1087
Genesis. Chap. 41.	1089
Genesis. Chap. 42.	1093
Genesis. Chap. 43.	1097
Genesis. Chap. 44.	1099
Genesis. Chap. 45.	1103
Genesis. Chap. 46.	1106
Genesis. Chap. 47.	1110

Genesis. Chap. 48.	1115
Genesis. Chap. 49.	1118
Genesis. Chap. 50.	1148
Appendix A: Cancellations	1157
Appendix B: Silent Deletions	1163
Bibliography	1165
Primary Works	1165
Secondary Works	1236
Index of Biblical Passages	1247
General Index	1285

List of Illustrations

Bound holograph manuscript, volume 1 (MHS)	53
Recto page [1r] of the holograph manuscript, volume 1 (MHS)	212
Verso page [96v] of the holograph manuscript – not in Mather’s hand . .	400
Samuel Bochart’s map of Eden	466
Athanasius Kircher’s <i>Arca Noë</i> (1675)	607
Recto page [201r] of the holograph manuscript	628
William Whiston’s <i>Compleat Collection</i> (1736): the Tower of Babel	828
Recto page [451r] of the holograph manuscript	1119

List of Abbreviations

AAS	American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols.
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> . 10 vols.
“BA”	“Biblia Americana” (holograph manuscript). 6 vols. folio. The Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston
BBH	<i>Biblich-historisches Handwörterbuch</i>
BBK	<i>Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon</i> . 29 vols. << www.bautz.de/bbkl >>
CBTEL	<i>Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature</i> .
CE	<i>Catholic Encyclopedia</i> . 16 vols.
DNSP	<i>Dictionnaire des Noms, Surnoms et Pseudonymes Latins De L’Histoire Littéraire du Moyen Age [1100 a 1530]</i>
DGRG	<i>Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography</i>
DGRBM	<i>A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology</i>
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> .
DUSE	<i>Dictionnaire Universel des Sciences Ecclésiastiques</i>
EJ	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i> . 26 vols.
ESTC	<i>English Short-Title Catalogue</i> (online).
HJP	<i>History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ</i> . 5 vols.
JH	<i>James Hastings’s Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols.
JPS	<i>Jewish Publication Society</i> (OT) 1917.
KJV	King James Version (1611)
KD	<i>Keil & Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament</i> . 10 vols.
KP	<i>Der Kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike in fünf Bänden</i> .
LXX	Septuaginta
LCD	<i>Lemprière’s Classical Dictionary</i>
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts
NJB	<i>The New Jerusalem Bible</i>
NPNFi	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> . (First Series). 14 vols.
NPNFii	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> . (Second Series). 14. vols.
NT	New Testament
OCD	<i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i>
ODCC	<i>Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i>
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
OT	Old Testament
PT	<i>Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society</i> , London.
SH	<i>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge</i> . 12 vols.
SBD	<i>Smith’s Bible Dictionary</i>
TJE	<i>The Jewish Encyclopedia</i> . 12 vols. << www.jewishencyclopedia.com >>

PART 1

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Section 1

“Biblia Americana”: An American Commentary on the Bible

It may be, God our Saviour will in His Time, dispose the Minds of some eminent and opulent persons, to cast a benign Aspect upon a work [“Biblia Americana”] which may hand down their Names with lasting Acknowledgments unto posterity. Be it as it will, I do with the greatest Acquiescence of Mind in the holy Dispositions of His Providence Leave all in His glorious Hands. (Cotton Mather, 1715)

Cotton Mather’s “Biblia Americana” has waited nearly three hundred years to be published. By cooperative agency of Mohr Siebeck and Baker Academic, it is finally brought “into the Light,” as Mather once expressed his hope for publication (*Diary* 2:332), in a ten-volume scholarly edition. Written between 1693 and 1728, “Biblia Americana” is the oldest comprehensive commentary on all the canonical books of the Bible to have been composed in British North America. With its more than 4,500 folio pages bound in six volumes, Mather’s holograph manuscript, which has remained almost unstudied in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society, represents one of the great untapped resources in American religious and intellectual history. Combining extensive discussions of biblical scholarship with scientific speculations and advice for practical piety, Mather’s scriptural interpretations reflect the growing influence of Enlightenment thought in America as well as the rise of the transatlantic evangelical awakening. His commentary also marks the beginning of historical criticism of the Bible in New England theology, a solid one hundred years before German Higher Criticism gained a permanent foothold in American theological seminaries. In his annotations Mather engages a vast array of source-texts, from the Church Fathers, medieval and Reformation theologians, Rabbinic scholarship, ancient history and geography, to the cutting-edge philological and philosophical studies of his period. “Biblia Americana” thus represents the greatest achievement of an American theologian before Jonathan Edwards.

In this General Introduction, I will address a number of issues that are relevant to Mather’s commentary on Genesis and to the ten-volume edition as a whole. Examining the nature and significance of “Biblia Americana,” Section 1 provides a sketch of Mather’s life, surveys the history of the manuscript’s composition, and explains his failure to publish the opus he deemed “one of the greatest Works, that ever I undertook in my Life” (*Diary* 1:169). Section 2

appraises his biblical interpretations in the context of the scientific revolution of the early Enlightenment: Newtonianism, the miracles debate, and philosophical accommodationism. Section 3 examines Mather's changing understanding of the Bible, his hermeneutical approach to the scriptures and doctrinal position on key issues, and his response to the historical and philological criticism of the Bible as text in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Finally, section 4 assesses the physical condition of the manuscript and outlines the editorial principles governing the entire project.

Among the Bible commentaries of Mather's time, "Biblia Americana" is unique in more ways than one. Even a cursory comparison of Mather's commentary with those of his English peers – Matthew Poole (1624–79), Simon Patrick (1625–1707), Samuel Clarke (1626–1701), and Matthew Henry (1662–1714) – uncovers major conceptual differences.¹ Mather abandons the standard approach and instead devises rhetorical questions for each chapter-and-verse annotation. He assumes a skeptical reader, incorporates excerpts from opposing camps of the hermeneutical debate, and tries to harmonize the new philological methods and scientific discoveries of his age with the Reformed exegesis of the Bible. Unlike his peers who compiled conventional commentaries, Mather elects to concentrate on those chapters and verses he deemed most in need of updating. He also abandons the traditional chapter summaries and reprinting of each verse, and adopts, instead, a dialogic question-and-answer method of presentation. For each annotation he devises a rhetorical question that brings specific topics and interpretative problems into focus. His answers are digests of the most pertinent philological, scientific, and theological debates of his day, often incorporating excerpts from opposing camps and his own judgment on the issues. Through the persona of his rhetorical interlocutor, Mather also voices the concerns of the most radical biblical critics of his period – Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676), Benedict Spinoza (1632–77), and Richard Simon (1638–1712) – and engages their ideas in a surprisingly constructive manner (see Section 3). It is another distinguishing quality of "Biblia Americana" as a Bible commentary and of Mather as an intellectually open-minded theologian that he does not necessarily seek to refute those who destabilize the authority of the scriptures, but allocates ample space to each arbiter, as if to provide a forum for Enlightenment debate. In many places his observations show unmistakable traces of modern skepticism – a new form of Pyrrhonism that he valiantly seeks to redress by reconciling the Bible wherever possible with all available modern insights into the natural sciences. In the philosophical battle between skeptical rationalism and revealed religion,

1 Matthew Poole, *Annotations Upon the Holy Bible* (London, 1683–85); Simon Patrick, *A Commentary Upon the Historical Books of the Bible* (London, 1695–1710); Samuel Clarke, *The Holy Bible, containing the Old Testament and the New, With Annotations and Parallel Scriptures* (London, 1690); Matthew Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (London, 1708–10).

Mather – like his contemporary Isaac Newton – merged facets of what Richard H. Popkin has defined as “empirical and rationalist thought with theosophic speculation and Millenarian interpretation of Scripture” to meet the intellectual challenges of his time.²

The range of subjects Mather engages in the “*Biblia*” is, quite simply, breathtaking. Beyond the more conventional concerns of biblical philology and academic theology, he ventures into the realm of natural philosophy and wrestles with the questions raised by the great scientific thinkers of his day such as René Descartes (1596–1650), Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727), or William Whiston (1667–1752). (See Section 2). Moreover, Mather frequently includes asides on specifically American topics such as Native American religions, culture, and medicines, as well as discussions of the flora and fauna of the New World. Occasionally, Mather’s answers grew into independent essays of ten or twenty pages that far exceed the immediate concerns of the biblical chapters and verses under discussion. With its breadth of topics and essay-length discourses, “*Biblia Americana*” in more ways than one resembles works such as Johann Heinrich Alsted’s *Encyclopaedia Septem tomis distincta* (Herborn, 1630) or Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Rotterdam, 1695–97, 1702) rather than such popular Bible commentaries as those by Matthew Henry or Matthew Poole. If “*Biblia Americana*” explodes the framework of conventional commentaries, it more than lives up to Robert Boyle’s call for a scholar-theologian to address the philosophic advances of his age in a biblical handbook: “I cannot but hope,” Mather quotes his friend and correspondent, “that when it shall please God, to stir up Persons of a Philosophical Genius, well furnished with Critical Learning, and the Principles of true Philosophy, and shall give them an Hearty concern for the Advance of His Truths, these men will make Explications, & Discoveries that shall be admirable.”³ How seriously Mather took the famous scientist’s call to arms is evident throughout “*Biblia Americana*.” In fact, in a missive to Dr. John Woodward of the Royal Society of London, Mather confesses his secret obsession. Referring to himself in the third person (ostensibly to appear as a disinterested observer), he explains that in spite of all his duties of composing sermons, ministering to the largest congregation in English America, and publishing more than two-hundred books, “neither these, nor *any* other obstructions could retund his passion for the Favourite Work of his, *Biblia Americana*.”⁴

Here, then, we find competing explanations of the Mosaic creation account and mechanistic theories of Noah’s flood; Cartesian rationalism and Newtonian science; miracles vs. natural causation; reason vs. revelation and verbal inspiration; problems of philological-textual transmission, lacunae, scribal errors, and

2 R. H. Popkin, *Third Force* (90–91).

3 Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius* (200).

4 Mather’s “Letter to Dr. John Woodward, Nov. 17, 1712,” in David Levin, “Giants in the Earth” (760).

interpolations; Spinozism; the Calling of the Jews; millennialism; Trinitarianism vs. Unitarianism; African slavery, Native American conversion, and captivity narratives; the origin of fossils, religious rituals, dogmas, and idolatry; pietism and world missions, and many more topics difficult to summarize. As he put it in the "General Introduction" to his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702),

I considered, That all sort of *Learning* might be made gloriously Subservient unto the *Illustration* of the *Sacred Scripture*; and that no *professed Commentaries* had hitherto given a thousandth part of so much *Illustration* unto it, as might be given. I considered, that Multitudes of *particular Texts*, had especially of later Years, been more notably *Illustrated* in the *Scattered Books* of Learned Men, than in any of the *Ordinary Commentators*. And I consider'd, That the *Treasures of Illustration* for the Bible, dispersed in many hundred Volumes, might be fetch'd all together by a Labour that would resolve to *Conquer all things*; and that all the *Improvements* which the *Later-ages* have made in the *Sciences*, might be also, with an inexpressible Pleasure, call'd in, to assist the *Illustration* of the *Holy Oracles*, at a Rate that hath not been attempted in the vulgar *Annotations*. (104)⁵

In short, "Biblia Americana" goes beyond the immediate concern of a commentary on the Holy Scriptures, because in digesting a whole library of ancient, classical, and Enlightenment research filtered through the screen of Reformed theology, Mather collects the most significant discoveries of the ages in *all* disciplines from literally hundreds of different tomes.⁶ Strongly invested in the traditional belief in a divinely organized universe of correspondences, hence the unity of all knowledge, he sought to bring together the combined learning of the different branches of human and divine knowledge.⁷ "Biblia Americana" was to become a clergyman's personal encyclopedia (in the absence of a college library), a one-stop shop where educated readers could interface with Pagan antiquity, Newtonian science, and Old-Time Religion.

As the most renowned member of a family dynasty of Puritan clergymen spanning four generations, Cotton Mather was the leading New England divine of his generation. He was one of the last Renaissance men who had the knowledge of the ages at his fingertips. Above all, he understood the need of his Reformed peers for a conservative guide to stir a safe course between the Scylla and Charybdis of the early Enlightenment. Mather intended his "Biblia Americana" to be this vademecum. If the effigy of Mather as America's "national gargoyles" is still railroaded through the popular press on occasions, there is little to support this grossly distorted caricature in his commentary on the Bible.⁸

5 Unless otherwise noted, all citation references to the *Magnalia* are to Kenneth B. Murdock's edition.

6 See "Bibliography of Primary Works" at the end of the present volume.

7 See J. Stievermann, "Writing to Conquer All Things" (263–97).

8 See K. Silverman, *Life and Times* (425); and D. Levin, "Monster" (157–76).

Quite to the contrary, a completely different Mather emerges from the manuscript pages: an urbane, erudite scholar-theologian who had long transcended narrow partisan exegesis by incorporating in his commentary the landslide of philosophical innovations of his age. In doing so, he not only demonstrated that American scholarship easily matched that of his European peers but also created a unique record of the hermeneutical, philological, and scientific debate then raging in Europe. His "Biblia Americana" is the product of his lifelong endeavor to synthesize and – if possible – to reconcile this new, threatening scholarship with his abiding faith in the authority of the Bible.

Samuel Mather (1706–85), Cotton Mather's son and heir to the pulpit of Boston's Second Church (Old North), did not exaggerate when he described his father's huge *Biblia* manuscript as

a Work the writing of which is enough constantly to employ a Man, unless he be a *Miracle of Diligence* the *half* of the *Threescore Years & Ten* which is the Sum of Years allowed us. I mean, his *Illustrations of the sacred Scripture*. The Doctor, from an Hint given by that very great and learned Man my Lord BACON, begun this Work in his *thirty first* Year, tho' he had before *some* Materials for it by him; and in his *fifty first* Year so finish'd it, as to publish his PROPOSALS for printing it, intituled, *A new Offer to the Lovers of Religion and Learning*. Ever since that Time to his *Death*, he was adding to it; so that now it is judged to be *by far the greatest Amassment of Learning that has ever been bro't together to illustrate the Oracles of GOD*.⁹

Indeed, "Biblia Americana" is an immense resource for students, scholars, and pastors interested in American religious and intellectual history. Our scholarly edition will make this work accessible to a wide audience. Before we can appreciate Mather's magnum opus and begin to understand its full import, we should review some of the highlights of his life and times.¹⁰

⁹ Samuel Mather, *Life of... Cotton Mather* (1729) 73. For Cotton Mather's proposal "A New Offer" (1713/14), see below.

¹⁰ There are several well-known nineteenth- and twentieth-century biographies of Cotton Mather's life in addition to the most recent one by K. Silverman (mentioned above): Rev. William B. O. Peabody, *Life of Cotton Mather* (1836) was published in volume VI of the highly popular "The Library of American Biography" series, edited by the Unitarian Jared Sparks, and designed for school use ("School District Library"). The biography went through at least three editions and reprints in its lifetime (1836, 1840, 1856). Rev. Enoch Pond, *The Mather Family* (1844), a partisan biographical history of the Mathers which is unabashedly apologetic as those of Pond's contemporaries are unashamedly disparaging. Rev. Chandler Robbins, *History of the Second Church, Or Old North* (1852) is intended as an encomium to the bicentennial of the Old North Church and its pastors. Barrett Wendell, *Cotton Mather: The Puritan Priest* (1891); Rev. Abijah Perkins Marvin, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (1892), and Ralph and Louise Boas, *Cotton Mather: Keeper of The Puritan Conscience* (1928). Wendell's biography, almost exclusively based on Mather's then unpublished diary, was written by the first professor of English and American literature at Harvard and reveals a remarkable sympathy for New England's roots and for Mather as a towering figure of the Puritan Priest; Marvin's *Life and Times* is a highly readable apologia by a Congregational minister in Winchendon, MA, and prolific author of American histories. Marvin views Mather's life through the lens of his pastorate. *Cotton Mather: Keeper of*

Cotton Mather (1663–1728)

The eldest son of New England's leading divine, Increase Mather (1639–1723) and grandson of the Massachusetts Bay Colony's spiritual founders Richard Mather (1596–1669) and John Cotton (1585–1652), Cotton Mather was born in Boston (12 Feb. 1663), educated at Harvard (B.A. 1678; M.A. 1681), and honored with a D. D. degree from the University of Glasgow (1710). As pastor of Boston's Second Church (Congregational), he stepped into the political limelight during the colonies' version of the Glorious Revolution, when Bostonians rose against the tyranny of James II and deposed their royal governor, Sir Edmund Andros (April 1689). During the witchcraft debacle (1691–93), Mather both warned the Salem judges against admitting "spectral evidence" as grounds for indictment and, instead, advocated prayer, fasting, and reassurance as antidotes to cure the afflicted, but he also wrote New England's official defense of the court's procedures, on which his modern reputation largely depends: *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (Boston, 1693). As the Lord's remembrancer and keeper of the Puritan conscience, he wrote the grandest of American jeremiads, his epic church history of New England *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702). Like his father a staunch defender of Puritan orthodoxy, Mather persuaded Elihu Yale, a Welsh merchant and practicing Anglican, to endow Yale University (1701, 1718) as the new nursery of Puritanism, when Harvard seemed to become too liberal under the influence of John Leverett and William and Thomas Brattle, Mather's erstwhile rivals. If such endeavors bespeak Mather's partisan politics on the one hand and his transcendent thinking on the other, it was his chiliastic credo that led him to champion Pietist ecumenism, his effort

the Puritan Conscience is one of the first psychoanalytic studies of Mather's life, written by the Boases, two professors of English at Wheaton College, Massachusetts. They translated for generalist readers the many controversies surrounding Mather's life into a highly readable journalistic account unencumbered by such traditional academic tools as a table of contents, footnotes, bibliography, or index. The fashionable psychoanalytic approach of the day, however, is not without its problems. Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals* (1971). This Bancroft-Prize winning biography of the Mather dynasty is one of the finest studies covering an entire century of Puritan hegemony in New England. David Levin, *Cotton Mather: The Young Life of the Lord's Remembrancer* (1978) – along with his collection of essays in *Forms of Uncertainty* (1992) – is a sympathetic, but forthright study of Mather's accomplishments and some of the controversies surrounding his life. Written as a college-level introduction, Babette M. Levy, *Cotton Mather* (1979) is a sympathetic discussion of Mather's life and principal works, still one of the best prologues for readers unfamiliar with his complex personality. Although not a biography per se, Richard F. Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather* (1979) is still unsurpassed as a study of Mather's theological impact on the development of American religion. Finally, Kenneth Silverman, *Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (1984) remains one of the most comprehensive studies of Mather's life. It is hoped that the appearance of the *Biblia Americana* in ten volumes over the next decade will inspire a new generation of scholars and biographers to reassess Mather's significance as scholar-theologian, an assessment that may well re-examine Jonathan Edwards's monolithic status as America's foremost theologian.

to unite not only all Christian denominations in New England, but also all Christians, Jews, and Moslems in the Orient and Occident, under the umbrella of his "Maxims of Piety" to hasten the Second Coming of Christ.

Likewise, his interest in the new sciences and in new medical theories distinguishes Mather from his American contemporaries. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London (1713) for his physico-theological contributions to the Society, his "Curiosa Americana." He popularized in his *The Christian Philosopher* (London, 1720/21) the new scientific theories of William Derham, John Ray, John Woodward, Robert Boyle, Thomas Burnet, William Whiston, and Sir Isaac Newton, and staunchly advocated a new germ theory and inoculation against smallpox – in the face of the united opposition of Boston's physicians during the epidemic of 1721. Whereas Increase Mather never quite made the transition into the Enlightenment, Cotton was well on his way; he represents the best of early Enlightenment thinking in colonial America. His contributions to the literature of the New England "Errand" are as diverse as his publications are prolific and inexhaustible. In all, he published more than 450 works on all aspects of the contemporary debate: theological, historical, biographical, political, and scientific.¹¹ It is therefore deplorable that Mather's reputation is still largely overshadowed by the specter of Salem witchcraft.

No single work of Mather's gargantuan publication record does justice to his long, productive career in New England's foremost pulpit, but several representative types afford a glimpse of his interior life and overall achievement. *The Diary of Cotton Mather* (1911–12, 1964) provides a more comprehensive insight into his volatile nature than his autobiography *Paterna* (1976), which (by and large) is extracted from his diary.¹² Often called his "Reserved Memorials," his diary is a Puritan document par excellence.¹³ It focuses on his inner life and on Mather as an instrument of divine providence. If his public persona in his sermons is overbearing and pompous by modern standards, his private persona in his diary can be modest, even unostentatious, yet passionately confessional and soul-searching. No doubt, baring his breast to public inspection was a risky business – if his Reserved Memorials were to fall into unsympathetic hands.

¹¹ Cotton Mather's son Samuel estimated the number of his father's publications at 382 (*Life* 67). The bibliographer of the Mathers, Thomas J. Holmes, raised the number of Cotton Mather's "known printed works" to 444, in *Cotton Mather: Bibliography* (1:ix). Keith Arbour identifies additional works in his article "Additions" (81–130). Some of Mather's largest manuscripts he had intended for publication were not printed until the twentieth century: *Diaries* (1911–12, 1964), *Angel of Bethesda* (1972), *Paterna* (1976), "Problema Theologicum" (1994), "Triparadisus" (1995). His largest manuscript, the tome he considered his most important work, is "Biblia Americana" (1693–1728).

¹² *The Diary of Cotton Mather* (1911–12), hereafter, *Diary* 1 and 2. *The Diary of Cotton Mather for the Year 1712* (1964), hereafter, *Diary* 3. *Paterna: The Autobiography of Cotton Mather* (1976).

¹³ D. Levin, "Misnamed Diary" (177–97) and L. A. Rosenwald, "Cotton Mather as Diarist" (129–61).

Revealing his most intimate thoughts, fears, and desires, Mather inadvertently invites modern readers to psychoanalyze and thus to misapprehend his record of meditation and introspection. For as he poured over his real and imagined sins, examined the promptings of his passions, and confided his musings to the privacy of his diary, Mather created a didactic ledger to measure his spiritual progress toward sanctification. Yet when read as a civic document intended for public consumption, his memoir becomes a goldmine for those who scour his confidential thoughts for hidden motives. Those not personally conversant with the nature of religious affections, with a Puritan's vulnerability in the process of introspection and self-humbling, with his psychological need to heighten his want of grace by deeming himself "the chief of sinners," – in short, those unaware of the psychological turmoil involved in the Puritan *ordo salutis* are likely to misjudge his acts of mortification and incessant confessions of vanity and pride as admissions of true character flaws: "*Proud Thoughts* fly-blow my best Performances!" (*Diary* 1:16), the young Mather early on confided to his diary as he consciously or unconsciously emulated St. Paul's confession (1 Tim. 1:15): "Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." The more he magnified his sin of pride and vanity, the greater his self-abasement; and the more intense his soul's agony, the more perfect his Augustinian *imitatio Christi*.¹⁴ Modern readers unacquainted with this quaint ritual are struck by this seemingly mechanical, if morbid, exercise. Unless read in small doses, Mather's private confessions may appear to be repetitious, formalistic, and ultimately insincere. Yet each of these exercises represents untold pangs of distress and breast-beating couched in the language of self-abnegation. Such, then, is his principal purpose of keeping a diary.¹⁵ The modern reception of his diaries is not the only source of his problematic reputation.

14 In his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Jonathan Edwards explained the psychological pitfall of one marooned in the cycle of religious introspection as follows: "[He] that is truly humble, and really sees his own vileness, and loathsomeness before God, the distance [from the sin of pride] appears the other way. When he is brought lowest of all, it does not appear to him, that he is brought below his proper station, but that he is not come to it; ... And this distance he calls pride. And therefore his pride appears great to him, and not his humility. ... The degree of humility is to be judged of by the degree of abasement, and the degree of the cause for abasement: but he that is truly and eminently humbled, never thinks his humility great, considering the cause. The cause why he should be abased appears so great, and the abasement of the frame of his heart so greatly short of it, that he takes much more notice of his pride than his humility" (*Religious Affections*, part 3, sec. 6, subsec. 3.2, in *Works* (2:333)). Benjamin Franklin, it is well known, poked fun at this spiritual exercise in his autobiography. "In reality there is perhaps no one of our natural Passions so hard to subdue as *Pride*," Franklin commented facetiously. "Disguise it, struggle with it, beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself. ... For even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my Humility" (*Autobiography* 76).

15 See D. Leverenz, *Language of Puritan Feeling* (esp. chs. 4, 6, and 7); P. Caldwell, *Puritan Conversion Narrative* (chs. 1–2); D. B. Shea, *Spiritual Autobiography* (chs. 3–6); J. O. King, *Iron of Melancholy* (1983), and J. H. Rubin, *Religious Melancholy* (1994).

Mather's mythic status still rests on his involvement in the Salem witchcraft debacle (1691–93) and on Robert Calef's unfounded allegation in *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (London, 1700) that the clergy incited the hysteria to recoup their political power in the colony. It is important to remember that the most educated theologians, philosophers, and scientists of the time believed in the existence of the demonic world as much as the common man did. Far from being the delusion of some gullible and superstitious few, the certainty of the invisible world was official dogma among all Christian denominations throughout the ages. The American colonies – Puritan or no – were no exception. Mather's most important publications on the supernatural include *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions* (Boston, 1689) and *Wonders of the Invisible World* (Boston, 1693). *Memorable Providences* mostly recounts the possessions and antics of the Goodwin children, the eldest of whom Mather observed in his own home and eventually cured through a regimen of fasting, prayer, and patient reassurance. While to modern readers the narrative smacks of singular gullibility, Mather's practical tests, careful observations, and experimental procedure in restoring the girl's mental health are – for the time – innovative treatments of the case. His second work on the topic, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, aimed at several purposes. On the one hand, the book served as New England's official defense of the court's verdict, which was consistent with the English witchcraft statutes of the time; on the other, it is Mather's contribution to pneumatology, with John Gaul, Sir Matthew Hale, Henry More, Joseph Glanvill, and Richard Baxter serving as some of his principal sources.

Before Mather excerpts the six most notorious cases of Salem witchcraft, he tries to protect himself and his account with the official endorsement of Lt. Governor William Stoughton (one of the Salem judges), with a disquisition on the invisible world, with a previously delivered sermon on the subject, and with his own experimental observations. Mather's *Wonders*, however, does not end without express caution against the use of "spectral evidence," a warning he had repeatedly sounded even before the first person was tried and executed on June 10, 1692.¹⁶ While exposing "Satan's plot to overthrow" New England's churches,

¹⁶ *The Return of Several Ministers Consulted* (June 15, 1692) strongly cautioned the Salem judges and magistrates against convicting anyone on the basis of "spectral evidence," incriminating evidence collected from witches who were believed to assume the shape of innocent individuals and invisibly torture their victims. Cotton Mather's authorship of *The Return* is all but certain, as is evidenced in his letter (May 31, 1692) to Judge John Richards, who had requested guidance in the matter ten days before the first victim was executed: "I must humbly beg you that ... you do not lay more stress upon pure specter testimony than it will bear. ... It is very certain that the devils have some times represented the shapes of persons not only innocent, but also very virtuous. ... I would say this: if upon the bare supposal of a poor creature's being represented by a specter, too great a progress be made by the authority in ruining a poor neighbor so represented, it may be that a door may be thereby opened for the devils to obtain from the courts in the invisible world a license to proceed unto most hideous desolations upon the repete and repose" of innocent individuals. Mather's letter to Judge John

Mather also recommended his father's caveat *Cases of Conscience* (Boston, 1693). What ties the various parts of *Wonders* together is Mather's millenarian theme of Christ's imminent Second Coming, for which he found proof in the devil's assault on New England. Robert Calef's politically motivated smear has been discredited by modern scholars, but Calef's charge of Mather's ambidextrous disposition seems warranted. For while Mather defended the court's verdict and justified the government's procedure, he also reiterated his opposition to the use of spectral evidence as grounds for indictment. *Wonders* appeared in print just when the trials were halting, but it remains, in his own words, "that reviled Book."¹⁷

His most enduring and, at once, most famous legacy is his epic *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), an ecclesiastical history of New England in the time-honored tradition of providence literature. In seven books of uneven length, Mather commemorated on an epic scale virtually every aspect of New England's formative period (1620–1698): the migration to and settlement of the colonies; their governors and ministers; the founding of Harvard; New England's Congregational church polity, synods and schisms; supernatural occurrences, providential rescues, exemplary deathbed confessions; Indian wars and captivities – all ostensibly demonstrating God's providential hand. From a literary point of view, Mather's Plutarchan biographies of New England's governors (book 2) and ministers (book 3) are of greatest value.¹⁸ Much of the information provided here cannot be found anywhere else. Puritan patriarchs are juxtaposed with heroes of biblical and classical antiquity, emulating their exemplary characteristics. Even though each life follows the pattern of a medieval hagiography, Mather does not fail to mention some of his heroes' shortcomings and how they overcame them. Since its appearance, *Magnalia Christi Americana* has been criticized for its lack of thematic unity, baroque flourishes, and uneven material. However flawed by modern standards, each of the seven books develops a specific interlocking thesis, unified by Mather's Virgilian theme of the mighty works of Christ in the Western hemisphere; Mather's baroque wordplay and rhetorical techniques – though outdated by the standards of his time – are entirely consistent with his own stylistic principles delineated in the *Magnalia* as well as in *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (Boston, 1726): to entertain with stylistic flourishes while instructing with nuggets of wisdom. Finally, Mather's consistent

Richards is reprinted in K. Silverman's *Selected Letters* (35–40). *The Return of Several Ministers Consulted* is reprinted in David Levin's *What Happened* (110–11).

¹⁷ The perennially popular subject of Salem witchcraft has been studied from many different theoretical approaches and angles. Among the best are the studies by G. A. Adams, P. Boyer and S. Nissenbaum, E. G. Breslaw, J. P. Demos, R. Godbeer, D. D. Hall (*Witch-Hunting*), C. Hansen, P. C. Hoffer, C. F. Karlson, G. L. Kittredge (*Witchcraft*), M. B. Norton, B. Rosenthal, M. L. Starkey, K. Thomas (*Religion*), R. Weisman.

¹⁸ See G. van Cromphout's "Plutarchan Biographer" and "Renaissance Humanist."

narrative voice and rhetorical intent unify his subject matter as the grandest of jeremiads that American Puritanism has brought forth.¹⁹

Out of Mather's Pietist impulse and scientific endeavor grew three strands of works, the best examples of which are his civic-minded *Bonifacius* (1710), his compendium of the new sciences *The Christian Philosopher* (1721), his medical handbook *The Angel of Bethesda* (wr. 1723/24, publ. 1972), his manual for the ministry *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726), and his definitive discussion of his eschatology in "Triparadisus" (wr. 1712, 1720–27; publ. 1995). Mather's *Bonifacius. An Essay Upon the Good, that is to be Devised and Designed, By Those Who Desire to Answer the Great End of Life, and to do Good While they Live* (Boston, 1710) represents the most comprehensive expression of his life's purpose: "Fructuosus," to be productive and serviceable to his fellow man.²⁰ A lifelong interest in the German Pietism of August Hermann Francke of Halle (Saxony) convinced Mather that specific practical advice rather than pious exhortations could engender social reform.²¹ Conceived as a manifesto for a benevolent society, *Bonifacius* outlines how each of society's classes – aristocracy, magistrates, ministers, physicians, lawyers, merchants, tradesmen, teachers, parents and children, servants, and slaves – can serve God by benefiting their fellow men. Far more than mere pious advice for doing good, yet never far from the Reformed tenet that works without grace are dead, *Bonifacius* is a manual for social reform, perhaps the best of the early self-help and reformist tracts that grandfathered the many benevolent and reforming societies of nineteenth-century America. *Bonifacius* was Mather's most popular book.²² Reprinted in many editions, *Bonifacius*, popularly known as *Essays to Do Good*, was the muse of young Ben Franklin's satiric *Dogood Papers* and yet his acknowledged guide and source of inspiration for the older Franklin's benevolent projects.²³

In typical Renaissance fashion, Mather was at home in virtually every discipline of human knowledge, ancient and modern. Though a theologian by vocation, he was a virtuoso of science by avocation, as his "Curiosa Americana" (1712–20) and his *Christian Philosopher* (London, 1720/21) attest. In the former, he describes in more than twenty-three separate epistles his pseudo-scientific observations of the American flora and fauna, ornithology, birth defects,

¹⁹ Mather is a highly self-conscious stylist, who defends his characteristic flair in *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Murdock ed. (100–02) and in his handbook for young clergymen, *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726) 44–47. For an analysis of Mather's style, see W. R. Manierre, "Cotton Mather and the Plain Style" (1958) and his "Verbal Patterns" (402–13). For a more recent study, see J. Stievermann, "Writing to Conquer All Things" (263–97).

²⁰ Samuel Mather, *The Life* (1729) 156.

²¹ See R. F. Lovelace, *American Pietism* (1979), O. Scheiding, "The World as Parish," and W. Splitter, "Fact and Fiction."

²² One of the best introductions to this work is D. Levin's edition of *Bonifacius* ("Introduction" vii–xxxii).

²³ See B. Franklin, *Autobiography* (9).

rattlesnakes, earthquakes, Indian customs, and many other American curiosities – natural and supernatural. Perfectly consistent with the European standards of the time, “Curiosa” also pioneers theories of psychogenic causes of disease and of plant hybridization, the earliest known account, which became the basis for the Linnaean system of botany.²⁴ The Royal Society of London bestowed upon Mather the prestigious title of F. R. S. (1713). He was only the eighth colonial American to be elected a Fellow. Like Increase Mather’s *Illustrious Providences* (Boston, 1684), Cotton Mather’s *The Christian Philosopher: A Collection of the Best Discoveries in Nature, with Religious Improvements* attempts to reconcile Scripture revelation with natural science and the teleological arguments of the day. But unlike his father’s earlier work, *Christian Philosopher* moves with ease between scientific explanations and theological justifications. In thirty-two essays ranging in subject from astronomy, meteorology, geology, mineralogy, botany, zoology, to biology, the book ends on human physiology, his longest chapter.²⁵ A work of his mature years and originally an integral part of “Biblia Americana,” *Christian Philosopher* reveals Mather’s enthusiastic embrace of Newtonian science which, though barely distinguishable from the arguments of early Deists, demonstrates the adaptability of Reformed theology to the philosophy of the early Enlightenment.

As an experimenter in medicine, Mather was as qualified as any medical practitioner in the Old and New World; he had turned to the study of medicine when his adolescent stammer seemed to render him unsuitable for the ministry. His lifelong interest and solid foundation in medicine is apparent in this single, most comprehensive medical handbook in colonial America, *The Angel of Bethesda* (wr. 1723/24, publ. 1972).²⁶ Its threefold purpose – religious, medical, scientific – is an outgrowth of his practical Pietism: to provide the indigent with medical advice in the absence of a physician. In sixty-six chapters (or Capsules, as he wittily calls them), Mather quotes from more than 250 of the best medical authorities and borrows remedies from the Galenical, chemical, and occult schools of medicine. Here loom large such worthies as Hippocrates, Galen, Paracelsus, Zoroaster, Plato, but also van Helmont, Boyle, van Leeuwenhoek, Malpighi, Harvey, and Sydenham. Each capsule follows the same pattern: (1) Mather’s pious improvement on the disease, followed by (2) its clear description and interpretation, and (3) the best-known remedies and dosages for the possible cure of the ailment. Yet Mather’s *Angel* is remarkable not for the singular medical lore characteristic for its time, but for its advanced

²⁴ See G. L. Kittredge, “Cotton Mather’s Scientific Communications” (18–57), C. Zirkle, “Plant Hybridization” (25–38); and O. T. Beall, Jr. and R. H. Shryock, *Cotton Mather: First Significant Figure in American Medicine* (48).

²⁵ Winton U. Solberg’s splendid introduction and annotations have made *The Christian Philosopher* (1994) accessible for modern readers.

²⁶ *The Angels of Bethesda*, ed. Gordon W. Jones (1972).

theories that are of continuing interest to modern medicine. Among still valuable recommendations are his prophylactic rules of temperate diet, physical exercise, and discouragement of smoking. His most enduring legacy, however, is his method of overcoming stammering, his benevolent treatment of psychiatric cases, his discussion of psychosomatic causes of illness, his immunological recommendations on inoculation against smallpox (eighty years before Edward Jenner developed his vaccine), and his disquisition on germ theory (animalcules) – long before Lister and Pasteur discovered their bacteriological approaches to preventive medicine in the nineteenth century. The warm, comforting, and understanding tone of Mather's *Angel*, its clear structure and consistent narrative voice, are characteristically embellished by his entertaining wit, nuggets of wisdom, and occasional metaphors and puns.

In light of his scientific achievements, one almost forgets that Cotton Mather was a pastor and minister first and foremost. Emphasizing the nearness of the Second Coming, he hastened to write his *Manuductio ad Ministerium. Directions for a Candidate of the Ministry* (Boston, 1726), a handbook for the young minister.²⁷ Short on sectarian ideology, Mather emphasizes religious tolerance and ecumenism under the auspices of his Maxims of Piety, the reconciliation of Independents, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Antipedobaptists, Lutherans, and Calvinists – all united at the Lord's Table (127). *Manuductio* also embodies Mather's educational principles for the gentleman minister: After the traditional classical languages, he recommends such modern languages as French and Spanish; he devalues the customary Aristotelian curriculum of rhetoric, logic, and metaphysics in favor of the new Cartesian logic implemented at Harvard, and advises students to spend their time on the study of the Bible, German Pietism, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, the new science, geography, ancient and modern history and biography, as well as music for refreshment and poetry for recreation.²⁸ His revealing recommendations on style (not an end in itself but a means to an end), composition of sermons, and polished oratory, evince just how far Mather had come in his old age: the minister of the future was to be above all a humane, liberal, erudite gentleman pastor, whose reformed Calvinism, humanistic scholarship, and polished grace did not neglect such practical matters as a balanced diet and physical exercise to offset the stress of his duties. Complete with a "must have" of the best books for a young theology student's personal library, *Manuductio* recommends such works as Thomas Lewis's *Origines Hebraeae: or, the Antiquities of the Hebrew Republic* (London, 1724–25), Edward Wells's *An Historical Geography of the Old and New Testament*

27 Perry Miller's assessment of *Manuductio* remains as useful as ever, in Thomas J. Holmes, *Cotton Mather: A Bibliography* (2:630–36). Informative annotations and translations are provided in K. M. Woody, "Cotton Mather's 'Manuductio ad Ministerium'" (3–48) and in Woody, "Supplement" (1–98).

28 See R. Kennedy, *Aristotelian & Cartesian Logic at Harvard* (1995).

(London, 1708, 1711–12), William Whiston's *A Short View of the Chronology of the Old Testament, and of the Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (Cambridge, 1702), Thomas Fuller's *History of the Worthies of England* (London, 1662), Edward Leigh's *Critica Sacra: Containing Observations on all the Radices of the Hebrew Words of the Old and the Greek of the New Testament* (London, 1639), Matthew Poole's *Annotations on the Holy Bible* (London, 1683–85), and Johannes Arndt's pious mainstay translated into Latin, *De Vero Christianismo* (London, 1708).

Cotton Mather's lifelong preoccupation with millennialism and its significance to his thought and work have only recently attracted full-scale attention. Beginning with *Things to be Look'd for* (Boston, 1691), he published more than fifty works in which eschatology played a major role. In fact, it is hard to read any of his writings without finding some reference to the imminence of Christ's Second Coming. Of his major works on that topic, three stand out: "Problema Theologicum" (wr. 1695–1703; publ. 1994), a 95-page manuscript reflecting the principal issues in Mather's early millennialism; "*Trip Paradise*," his definitive treatment of his millenarian theories (wr. 1712, 1720–27; publ. 1995) in response to the hermeneutical debate in Europe; and his "Biblia Americana," an unfinished critical commentary on the Bible, fortified with synopses of the best hermeneutical scholarship of the day. Unlike his earlier "Problema Theologicum" in which Mather advances an inchoate system of pre- and postmillennialist theories, his *Threefold Paradise* ("*Trip Paradise*") is his most comprehensive study of chiliasm.²⁹ As a hermeneutical defense of revealed religion, Mather's discourse seeks to negotiate between orthodox exegesis of the prophecies and the new philological and historical-contextual challenges to the Scriptures by such European scholars as Grotius, Hobbes, Spinoza, Whiston, and Collins. *Threefold Paradise* marks Mather's decisive break from the hermeneutical positions he had inherited from his intellectual forebears but also represents the culmination of his lifelong interest in eschatology, which lay at the core of his cosmology and which was the fundamental mainspring of his ministerial and theological office. Late in his life, Mather's exegesis underwent a radical shift from a futurist interpretation of the prophecies to a preterit position – from arguing that several signs of Christ's return were yet to be fulfilled to asserting that all signs had been given several times over. Part I of Mather's *Threefold Paradise* delineates the history and location of the Garden of Eden as evidenced in the Pentateuch, ancient histories, patristic literature, and contemporary travel accounts. Part II is largely a refutation of psychopannychism, that is, a rebuttal of the idea that the soul is dormant after the body's death and a defense of the soul's immortality. Part III is by far the longest and most valuable discussion and covers in twelve subsections

²⁹ See J. S. Mares, "Cotton Mather's 'Problema Theologicum'" (330–440), and R. Smolinski, *The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of "Trip Paradise"* (1995) and <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/48/>

a variety of topics affected by the hermeneutical revisionism then taking shape in Europe: the tradition of a literal conflagration of the Earth, his defense of a literal New Heaven and New Earth during the millennium, his allegorization of the conversion of the Jewish people, and his prophetic timetables calculating the millennial reign of Christ. “*Trip paradisu*” is Mather’s last word on the prophecies and rejects the old notion that New England represented the culmination of prophetic history in an American New Jerusalem.

“*Biblia Americana*”: Origin, Growth, and Significance

Like modern believers who live during a time of tremendous intellectual and religious turmoil, Mather lived during the early Enlightenment (1660s–1730s) when cosmological, scientific, and philological challenges had begun to destabilize the authority of the Bible as the Word of God: the Copernican cosmology and its heliocentric universe had just begun to displace the Ptolemaic geo-centrism that had governed the cosmology of Judeo-Christian believers since ancient times; Cartesianism laying the foundation of the modern empirical sciences had rejected the weight and authority of tradition as proof for all natural and supernatural phenomena described in the Bible; the new philological, historical, and contextual criticism of the Bible had begun to question the textual accuracy, transmission, and verbal inspiration of the Bible; and the new theories about the nature of light, gravity, and atomism posed tremendous problems to literalist readings of the Mosaic creation account – these new ideas required harmonization with orthodox interpretation if theologians were to survive this age of revolutionary uncertainty. Hence Mather’s predicament was not unlike that of modern believers whose faith in God and the inerrancy of the Bible is buffeted from all sides: creationism vs. evolutionism; divine revelation vs. human wisdom; verbal inspiration vs. philological and historical criticism; patriarchal authority vs. feminist and liberation theology; moral and ethic standards vs. philosophical relativism. Mather courageously faced these challenges head-on and invested more than thirty years of his life in devising ways to reconcile this new knowledge with the teachings of the Bible.

What makes this enormous “*Amassment of Learning*” commentary so compelling to modern scholars and believers is that he furnishes his readers with verbatim excerpts from both proponents and opponents on many controversial issues, allows them to present their case, withholds his own opinion until the end of each excerpt, and finally – after due consideration of all evidence – harmonizes old and new in his own synthesis generally delivered at the end of each annotation. “*Biblia Americana*” is therefore more than just another commentary on God’s Word. Unlike some of the most respected commentaries of the seventeenth through the early eighteenth centuries (Henry Ainsworth, Hugo Grotius,

Matthew Poole, Henry Hammond, Matthew Henry, Simon Patrick, William Burkitt, Augustine Calmet, Daniel Whitby, Philip Doddridge), Mather's "Biblia Americana" is a record of the historical debate in the marketplace of ideas. When compared with Jonathan Edwards's private "Notes on Scripture," "Miscellanies," or with his "Blank Bible," "Biblia Americana" pursues different strategies because Mather intended his commentary for public consumption – to provide generations of readers with up-to-date summaries of the critical debates and with means to reconcile their differences.³⁰ The plan for "Biblia Americana" was conceived in the late summer of 1693, the same year that Mather outlined his plans for his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (*Diary* 1:166). He aimed to gather into two folio volumes the most significant discoveries of the ages, scattered across the various disciplines, and appearing in hundreds of different tomes, but rarely accessible in a single location: "I considered, that Multitudes of particular Texts, had, especially of later years, been most notably *illustrated*, in the scattered Books of learned Men, than in any of the ordinary Commentators; and I considered, that the Treasures of *Illustrations* for the Bible, dispersed in the Volumes of this Age, might bee fetch'd all together by a laborious Ingenuitie" (*Diary* 1:170).

At the "Rate of *one Illustration*" per day, Mather intended over a period of seven years (an auspicious number signifying perfection) to fetch from the dispersed volumes of his peers "all the *Improvements*, which the *later Ages* have made in the Sciences," to include the "innumerable *Antiquities*, Jewish, Chaldee, Græcian, and Roman," to amass "in *one Heap*, Thousands of those *remarkable Discoveries of the deep Thing[s] of the Spirit of God*," and to incorporate "the delicious *Curiosities* of *Grotius*, and *Bochart*, and *Mede*, and *Lightfoot*, and *Selden*, and *Spencer*, and many more *Giants* in Knowledge, all sett upon *one Table*" (*Diary* 1:170, 231).³¹ By 1698, Mather hoped to entice potential buyers with a whole library of innovative research in an easily accessed digest form and with discoveries that had not yet found their way into the standard Bible commentaries of the time. He was sufficiently familiar with the exigencies of the marketplace when he advertised his American offering as complementing – not competing with – those of his English peers Matthew Poole and Matthew Henry, promising all along not to duplicate or undercut their commentaries (*Bonifacius* 202; *New Offer* 6). Yet Mather also made sure to point out in his *Magnalia Christi* that Poole "*left many better Things behind him than he found*," because Poole had lacked the resources to incorporate in his *Annotations* (1683–85) the "*many miscellaneous Criticisms, occasionally scattered in other Au-*

³⁰ One of the few studies to compare Mather and Edwards as biblical scholars is Stephen J. Stein, "Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards on the Number of the Beast" (293–315) and Stein, "Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards on the Epistle of James."

³¹ Nearly identical announcements appear in his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), ed. Kenneth B. Murdock (102–06); *Diary* (1:169–70, 229–31); *Bonifacius* (220–06), "Advertisement"; and, of course in his *A New Offer* (1714), see below.

thors" (*Magnalia* 105). Mather's "Biblia Americana" was therefore to supply that deficiency. In Feb. 1706, having added "very many Thousands" of illustrations, he took pride in his "Amassment," which he hoped "one day to send out" for publication (*Diary* 1:545). Yet three months later, Mather was worried that his failing strength might put an end to his plans. Exerting himself beyond measure ("doubtless a Disadvantage to my Health"), he added to his "Biblia" as many illustrations "in three Weeks" as he might have added in "so many Months." His exertions during these weeks of illness must have been exceedingly productive, for he recorded on May 28, 1706,

I finished my BIBLIA AMERICANA. So finished it, that there is no Necessity of my casting in any more, to my vast amassment of *Illustrations* upon the Divine Oracles; Tho' doubtless, I may be occasionally and continually adding thereunto, till the Manuscripts are dismiss'd out of my Hands for Publication. T'wil be two large Volumes in *Folio*; and I am now to wait upon the Lord, for His Direction, how to obtain a conveyance of the Manuscripts, into those Hands, that may publish them for the Service of His Churches. (*Diary* 1:563–64)

If Mather thought his optimistic appraisal was warranted after thirteen years (1693–1706) of scouring for fresh material and things left out of Matthew Poole's *Annotations*, he was quick to learn that his "Biblia Americana," in two volumes folio, was even harder to get published than his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), which was long mired in disputes with his agents and publishers.³² Things would turn out far different than expected for his Bible commentary.

On August 26, 1706, Mather petitioned his God in prayer to direct him "how and when" to ship the bulky manuscript over to England and to "raise up Encouragement for the Publication of it" (*Diary* 1:567). To those ends, Mather composed less than four weeks later an advertisement "as *Prodromous* and *Engaging* for that work" with the descriptive subtitle "AN AMERICAN OFFER to serve the Great Interests of Learning and Religion in Europe" (*Diary* 1:570). Nothing came of the matter. Nearly five years later, on his forty-eighth birthday (February 12, 1710/11), he again petitioned his God that "some, eminent and opulent Persons may be raised up; to forward the Publication of my *Biblia Americana*" (*Diary* 2:40), but a year later – again reviewing on his birthday

³² It took more than four years to see his *Magnalia* in print after Mather thought he had finished the manuscript. In March 1698, he recorded in his diary that he had received assurances in his prayers that his "*Church-History*" and his "*Confirmed Christian*" (now lost) "shall bee carried safe to *England*." But neither manuscript left his library until sometime after June 8, 1700, and he did not receive a printed copy of the *Magnalia* until Oct. 29, 1702 (*Diary* 1:254–55, 353, 445). On the *Magnalia*'s complex publication history and the book's reception, see T. J. Holmes (2:582–96), and K. B. Murdock, "The *Magnalia*" (26–47). On the controversies surrounding Mather's London agent John Quick, Parkhurst (his publisher), quality of paper, typesetting, and proofreading, see C. Greenough, "John Dunton's *Letters*" (20–58) and "A Letter Relating" (134–47); and, more recently, D. N. Deluna, "Cotton Mather Published Abroad" (esp. 153–56); and D. D. Hall, *Ways of Writing* (143–45).

the desiderata of the bygone year – he took stock of the “many more than a thousand” illustrations he had added to the existing store of annotations in the previous year, and promised himself “To write some Illustrations for the most part every Day” (*Diary* 2:162). Later that same year (Nov. 17, 1712), Mather decided to take matters in his own hands. He sent a missive to the English geologist Dr. John Woodward (1665–1728), erstwhile council member of the Royal Society of London, whose distinguished *Essay Toward a Natural History of the Earth, And Terrestrial Bodies* (London, 1695), Mather would subsequently put to good use in his “Biblia” (*BA* 1:490–91) and elsewhere. The first of several letters to Woodward, Mather tried to arouse the great geologist’s interest in the giant fossils of Claverack, which Dutch settlers had unearthed in 1705. Mather enclosed a detailed description of the bones for potential publication in the Society’s *Transactions*, but the main purpose of his letter was to recruit Woodward’s help to publish “Biblia Americana.”³³ Incorrigible punster that he was, Mather explained that the account of the giant fossils was “fetched from an amassment of treasures” (his “Biblia Americana”) which, he hoped, would not remain buried “like the subterraneous ones; and that the library in which they lodge may not be so like the horrid cellars of Indoustan, where your silver and gold, after they have been brought out of their subterraneous condition, and circulated thro’ the business of the world, again return into it, and are again buried by the covetous Mogols, and have no more to do on the face of the earth.” Perhaps concerned that Woodward might mistake his meaning, Mather became more explicit: “My meaning is, tho’ I need not explain what I mean, I wish they [the treasures in his “Biblia”] had the publication which they are waiting for, and that your presses would return to print something else besides your politics, and serve to better purposes than to vent the ill humors of your nation.” What follows next is an example of Mather’s torturous panegyric on his own importance from the perspective of a humble, third-person advocate:

There is an American friend of yours who, tho’ he never traveled out of America, has had the honor to be related unto one of your European universities, and has been desirous to oblige a number of the best people in Europe with a composure which now arises to two considerable volumes in folio, wearing the title of *Biblia Americana*. He had long since been of your excellent Boyle’s opinion, that *you should no more measure the wisdom of God couched in the Bible by the glosses and systems of common expositors, than estimate the wisdom He has expressed in the contrivance of the world by Magnus’s or Eustuchius’s Physics*; and agreed with him in hopes that

³³ Richard Waller, secretary of the Royal Society, published a synopsis of Mather’s disquisition on the giant bones of Claverack, in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 29 (1714–16) 62–63. Mather incorporated the full account along with his discussion of the giant Nephilim in his “Biblia Americana” (*BA* 1:582–99). See also D. E. Stanford’s contemporaneous accounts of the excavation of the mastodon bones in his “The Giant Bones of Claverack, New York, 1705” (47–61) and D. Levin’s reprint, in “Giants in the Earth” (762–70). See also my discussion in the next chapter.

learned men would go on to make more admirable explications and discoveries in that wonderful Book than what usually occurred in the vulgar (tho' very useful) *Annotations*. (Silverman, *Selected Letters* 110, 111)

Before giving Woodward an example of just the kind of scientific material he would find in the "Biblia Americana," Mather summarized the distinguishing qualities of this magnum opus. They included "the fairest hypotheses (and yours, my most honored Doctor!) of those grand revolutions, the making, and the drowning, and the burning of the world, are offered" along with "the meteors, the minerals, the plants, the animals, the diseases, the astronomical affairs, and the powers of the invisible world" – all conforming to the best theories of natural philosophy of the day (*Selected Letters* 112).³⁴ If that did not make the heart of a physico-theologian beat faster, then surely nothing would. For his scientific communications ("Curiosa Americana"), the Royal Society of London would, within a year's time, honor Mather by electing him a member of its distinguished body. It would even publish his celebrated *Christian Philosopher* (London, 1720/21). Yet helping him find a publisher for "Biblia Americana" the Society evidently did not.

The year following his letter to Woodward, Mather took pride in the "considerable Accession to our *Biblia Americana*," and having yet again added "many more Illustrations than Dayes in the Year" – in addition to the "Seventeen Books [he had] prepared for publication, and most of them actually published" during 1712 (*Diary* 2:178). Over the next year, Mather kept adding hundreds of new illustrations to his ever-growing collection, and just before turning fifty, he felt it was "now high time" and "to come into Action" that his "*Biblia Americana*, may be brought forth into the World." Mather therefore resolved to circulate "a Sheet, entituled, *A New Offer, to the Lovers of Religion and Learning*" (Boston, 1713/14) and thus to garner support through subscriptions from contributors at home and abroad (*Diary* 2:283).³⁵ Not to let things languish any longer, Mather set out to solicit support from several of his European friends and acquaintances. The first of several letters – all written between May, 1714, and November, 1715 – was addressed to the Rev. Thomas Reynolds (1667–1727), a Presbyterian minister at Weigh-House, Little Eastcheap (London), whose *Practical Religion Exemplify'd in the Lives of Mrs. Mary Terry and Mrs. Clissold* (London, 1712) Mather had been instrumental in reprinting in Boston (*Diary* 2:309).³⁶ Mather welcomed Reynolds's gift of £30 in support of the Society for Promoting Chris-

³⁴ See also K. Silverman, *Life and Times* (247–54).

³⁵ Mather's *A New Offer* (1713/14) is reprinted in full (below).

³⁶ W. C. Ford, the editor of Mather's *Diaries*, states that Mather's letter to Reynolds was "written in the spring of 1715" (*Diary* 2:309n2), but given Mather repeated worries about not receiving any response from Reynolds, Silverman's date of "c. May, 1714" (*Selected Letters* 147) is more likely. For historical background on Reynolds, see W. Wilson, *History and Antiquities* (1:157–69), D. L. Wykes, "Reynolds, Thomas (c. 1667–1727)."

tian Knowledge in America as well as his charity work in Southwark, which had much in common with Mather's Pietist *Orphanotrophium* (Boston, 1711). With such obliging connections, Mather could be fairly certain of a sympathetic ear with regard to his "Biblia Americana." His letter to Reynolds (c. May, 1714) suggests that Mather hoped to interest in his project London's Presbyterian clergy who, for a brief period, had joined with their English and American confreres, the Congregationalists, to form the United Brethren.³⁷ Emphasizing that the Puritan congregations of New England were ambitious "to be acknowledged as your *United Brethren*" and "to be bound up in one Bundle, of Life and of Love," Mather more than hinted that the gracious performances offered to God in the American hemisphere deserved nothing less than the loving support of the Brethren in the other: "Behold, now laid before you, *A New offer to the Lovers of Religion and Learning*, made by one of yours, at a Thousand Leagues distant from you." Mather evidently did not shy away from arousing ecclesiastical jealousies between Anglicans and Dissenters as a means to rally the United Brethren behind publishing Mather's Bible commentary: "Some eminent Persons in the Church to the Rites whereof we are Non conformists," Mather alluded to their Anglican rival, "have given me such a Prospect of Encouragement from them, for our, *Biblia Americana*, that if you should wholly cast it off, it may happen by their Means to make its way into the World. But, I think my Duty to you, obliges me to chuse, that it should rather be by yours" (*Diary* 2:312). There is no telling the mixed emotions of the Rev. Thomas Reynolds upon receiving Mather's imposing request, especially since Reynolds was expected to drum up support for the project and to find a bookseller willing to lay out his capital for the massive commentary. Reynolds did not respond until more than a year later.

As was usual with grand projects like the one Mather proposed, publishers were wary of committing resources when a reasonable return was not assured. And so, Mather set out to generate interest in advance by including a handbill in his letter to Reynolds to be circulated among his friends and correspondents. The Bible commentary was to be made available in two volumes, at the rate of "five Pounds of our Money, to the Subscribers." Booksellers might expect "Subscriptions for many more than one hundred setts of the Work; to be paid in upon their Arrival here [Boston]; if they will run the Risque thereof" (*Diary* 2: 310, 312). No doubt, the risk was all on the side of venture capital. Years earlier, Mather had also promoted "Biblia Americana" in his ecclesiastical history *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), in his do-good essay, *Bonifacius* (Boston, 1710), and then again in *A New Offer To the Lovers of Religion and Learning* (probably printed in early 1714). Through the latter circular, he tried to strike a bargain with reticent booksellers, by promising one set gratis to all

³⁷ See W. Walker, "The 'Heads of Agreement'" (4:29–52), and his *Creeeds and Platforms* (440–52).

those who "procure and send in *Subscriptions* for *Nine Sets* of this Work" (15). Mather asked Reynolds to approach his own publisher, the Presbyterian bookseller John Lawrence (c. 1684–c. 1714), at the Angel in the Poultry, to publish the "Biblia." However, Mather's clerical correspondent informed him in a long delayed missive of June 9, 1715, that Lawrence, in whom Reynolds "had Interest sufficient to entrust a Matter of such a Nature" had recently passed away. Worse yet, Reynolds in whose hands Mather's project was entrusted was "not yet able to get Subscriptions that might answer yours or the Booksellers Expectations." Besides quarrels among the United Brethren, the political unrest in Europe after the Peace of Utrecht (1713), and the turmoil of the Hanovarian succession upon the death of Queen Anne on August 1, 1714 – all betokened that Mather should wait for a more opportune time to publish his commentary (*Diary* 2:318).³⁸

Never putting all his eggs in one basket, Mather had also written to his Scottish friend and colleague the Rev. Robert Wodrow (1679–1734), minister of Eastwood and author of the esteemed *History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1721–22), with whom Mather maintained a long and productive correspondence until the end of his own life. From this letter of May 17, 1714 (which may well have crossed the Atlantic in the same ship with the missive to Reynolds), we learn that Mather had "sent unto Mr. Thomas Reinolds [sic], with two other ministers in London, and Mr. John Laurence, a bookseller at the Angel, in the Poultry there, my new offer of our *Biblia Americana*, and am waiting for their direction."³⁹ Wodrow's response was quick – considering the unreliable and frequently circuitous ways of transporting mail. From his answer, dated Dec. 11, 1714, we learn that "Your new offer, or *Biblia Americana*, I have endeavoured to spread up and down this country, that ministers may be acquainted with the noble design; and I am persuaded your undertakers at London will not want encouragement, if they shall, as I hope they will, engage" (Wodrow, *Correspondence* 1:628). Wodrow's long letter, however, also reported about the political and religious anxieties in the United Kingdom, the death of Queen Anne and accession of the Hanovarian George I, and the all-too-cozy relations between the Roman Catholic Houses of Habsburg and Bourbon on the Continent even while the Ottoman Turk was "ready to fall upon the Venetians" and stir up war again after their devastating defeat and the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) which, everyone had hoped, would put a stop to their aggression (Wodrow 1:630). It is to these political uncertainties that Reynolds would later allude

38 *The London Topographical Record* (1907) lists the dates for the bookseller John Lawrence as "1684–1704" (4:65). According to H. R. Plomer's *Dictionary*, John Lawrence, who frequently collaborated with the London printer John Dunton, "was still in business in 1711" (184). However, if the missive of the Rev. Thomas Reynolds to Cotton Mather (June 9, 1715) is correct, the bookseller John Lawrence "died several months ago" (*Diary* 2:318).

39 "Letter CLXXXVI" (Wodrow 1:626–27).

in his overdue letter to explain why there were no takers for “Biblia Americana” among the London printers and booksellers.

Meanwhile, impatient that his request had miscarried in one way or the other, Mather wrote to Sir William Ashurst (1647–1720), former Lord Mayor of London (1693–94) and subsequent governor of the New England Company (1696–1720). Mather’s letter (Nov. 17, 1714) included a copy of his *New Offer* advertising his “Biblia” along with the news that he had solicited many other subscribers “in these plantations” including “three Governors who are all of them uncommon literators.” Yet Mather also worried about his growing manuscript “ever getting without the walls of a private library” while the esteem for the New English colonials – Nonconformists to boot – was running low in Anglican England. His concern seemed especially warranted now that Mather had lost his influential friend and supporter in “the death of Mr. Matthew Henry, who diverse times offered me his best assistance for the publication of the work.” Unless some benefactors “of a moderate and catholic (and your) spirit in the Established Church” were to sponsor its publication, Mather broadly gestured toward Sir William, “Biblia Americana” would “remain where it is.” The only option left, Mather acknowledged, was to submit to the will of God and to await His pleasure (Silverman, *Selected Letters* 155). However, Mather did not bide his time, but tweaked providence as much as he could. This time (May 4, 1715), he wrote to Jeremiah Dummer (1681–1739), a prominent Harvard graduate with a doctorate from the University of Utrecht (1703), and New England’s colonial agent in London.

Asking Dummer not to hold against him the disagreeable squabbles they had had in the past, Mather tried to mollify “my *Pamphilus*” and cajole him into looking into the little matter of his “Biblia Americana” which was going nowhere among English Dissenters in London. Mather reports that he is “some what sure of having above an hundred Setts taken off” by subscribers among his countrymen at the rate of £ 5.00 “of our Money.” Yet he has “laid aside all Expectations of the Work Meeting with any Countenance, where according to common Sense ... [he] might most justly have expected it” since his esteemed friend the Rev. Thomas Reynolds deigned to disregard Mather’s repeated requests to secure a publisher for the commentary (*Diary* 2:313, 314). Again Mather was prepared to resign matters into the hands of God and therefore told Dummer that “you will not in the least Measure disoblige me, if you never take one Thought more about this Work,” while Dummer was busy with more important things. Lest “*Pamphilus*” take him at his word, Mather closes his letter by inviting Dummer to “bestow some Study on the Characters of true Love” and Christian charity (1 Cor. 13), according to which Mather endeavors “as a dying Man” to serve God by serving his fellow man (*Diary* 2:313, 315, 315).

Cotton Mather also wrote to Daniel Williams, D. D. (c. 1643–1716), an English Presbyterian clergyman, benefactor of Harvard, of the University of

Glasgow, of St. Thomas's Hospital, of a library in his name in London, and of various religious establishments in Scotland and New England.⁴⁰ The two clergymen shared many interests and had previously exchanged letters and books to strengthen their common ties. Given his largess, Williams was a likely promoter of the "Biblia." Mather's letter to Williams is of uncertain date, but the content suggests that it was written before Mather received Thomas Reynolds's negative response (dated June 9, 1715) about finding a publisher for the commentary. The series of letters Mather had sent to his friends in England and Scotland during the past twelve months had not yielded any positive news, and his urgency (if not impatience) in the matter comes to the fore in this rather formal missive: "You will pardon me," Mather wrote to Dr. Williams, "if I repeat my humble Wishes, that my Brethren, the Dissenters, would please to take into their consideration, whether it may conduce unto the best Interest, and their own, for our *Biblia Americana*, to meet with some countenance among them. I have diverse times addressed my excellent Friend Mr. *Reynolds*, for his Advice on that Head; and I have waited a Year and half, without the least Word of Return; which has held me in a little suspense, as to some Applications" (*Diary* 2:316). Mather's technique of pressuring Reynolds into responding seemed to have yielded some results since Reynolds's regrets arrived in Boston not too long thereafter. Reynolds's reply (June 9, 1715) indicates that an earlier missive in response to Mather's original request had miscarried. At any rate, he informed his Boston colleague that the Schism Bill (May 1714) outlawing Dissenters from serving as schoolmasters or educators in any capacity (unless they receive an Episcopal license) had stirred up considerable discontent and that "the publick Affairs are in such Distraction" at present, "that we scarce know where we are, and how matters are like to issue."⁴¹ The conflict between Whigs and Tories had reached such a high pitch, Reynolds reported, that "the City and [People] are obliged to be in Arms." Any hope to attract subscribers during this state of uncertainties was therefore to be despaired of, at least for now. When things improve, Reynolds promised, "I shall be ready to contribute what I can with the Rest of my Brethren to recommend your book that the publick may be obliged with the Benefit of it" (*Diary* 2:318). Nothing came of the matter as we learn from a missive nearly ten years later (April 22, 1724), in which Mather registers his disappointment that Reynolds no longer took "any further Notice of me (as for some years before indeed, he took very Little,)" no doubt alluding to the abortive attempt to enlist Reynolds's support of the "Biblia" (*Diary* 2:798).

But the story is not yet finished. In response to Sir William Ashurst's epistle (no longer extant), Mather felt encouraged to raise the issue once again (Oct. 18, 1715). He thought he had discovered between the lines "some Intimations" that

⁴⁰ D. L. Wykes, "Williams, Daniel (c. 1643–1716)."

⁴¹ On the vicissitudes of the "Schism Bill," see Novak (448–51).

Sir William desired more information about the commentary. "In obedience to your command," Mather gladly complied: "I have enclosed, a, *New offer*, which exhibits a brief Account of the Work." What follows is Mather's longest letter yet on the state of his "Biblia Americana." Here we learn that although he had published to date (1715) "more than 250 Books" of all sizes, on all manner of issues, and "in diverse Languages," yet nothing he had done so far came even close to his masterpiece. If potential subscribers only understood what a king's bargain "Biblia Americana" represented; if only they knew that his treasures had been distilled from "many copious and costly volumes," stripped of their "Superfluities," and amassed in his commentary, subscribers would surely welcome his labor of love and all the savings into the bargain. Lamenting the indifference and neglect with which his English brethren were treating their American confreres was almost too much for Mather:

I did not know, but that a Composure, which may pretend without Vanity to be the richest collection of the most valuable Treasures, in so little a Room, that ever the Ch[urch] of God was entertained withal, might hope for a favorable Reception, with people of Religion and Ingenuity. . . . Indeed the good-spirited Mr. [Matthew] Henry, several times, in his Letter to me express'd his Good-will to this undertaking; but, he is dead. The Surviving seem to be of the opinion, that a poor *American* must never be allow'd capable of doing any thing worth any ones regarding; or to have ever look'd on a Book. . . . Had not the work been in the English Tongue, my Correspondents in the most illustrious Frederician University [Halle, Germany] who have putt great Marks of their Favor upon me, would soon bring it into the Light. . . . It may be, God our Saviour will in His Time, dispose the Minds of some eminent and opulent persons, to cast a benign Aspect upon a work which may hand down their Names with lasting Acknowledgments unto posterity (*Diary* 2:331, 332).

Indeed, a dark tone of disappointment and a touch of resentment resonate in these lines, no matter how much he tried to sound upbeat and hopeful. Even his appeal to Ashurst's vanity that the names on the list of subscribers would adorn the pages of the "Biblia" and thus bestow lasting fame on its benefactors sound a bit half-hearted.

Mather explored other venues for potential publication as well. There was no telling if his long-standing ties with his Lutheran Pietist friends in Germany might not yield some unexpected patronage. To these ends he wrote a long letter to Rev. Anthony William Boehm (1673–1722), Lutheran chaplain to Prince George of Denmark (royal consort of England's Queen Anne), member of the London-based Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and Mather's principal channel of contact with his Frederician colleagues in Halle (Germany).⁴²

⁴² For biographical information on Boehm, see A. Mielke and S. Yelton, "Böhme, Anton Wilhelm" (31:159–74). For Mather's communications with his German Pietist friends in Halle (usually via Boehm), see K. Francke, "Cotton Mather" (57–67), "Further Documents" (31–66), and "Beginning of Cotton Mather's Correspondence" (193–95). More recently, O. Scheiding,

In this letter to Boehm (Aug. 6, 1716), Mather acknowledged his happiness that his *Magnalia Christi Americana* appealed to Boehm, asking him to forward the copy to their mutual friends in Halle. Mather made sure to draw his attention to the Pietist focus of "Biblia Americana" and to the indifference with which English Dissenters had treated his proposals for its publication. Among "the most valuable Things" in the "Biblia," Mather assured Boehm, "are those which such men as your [Johann] Arndt, and [August Hermann] Franck[e], and others of the like truest Erudition, have led into."⁴³ But book publishers in England had cold feet about "Biblia." Besides, Mather did not expect much more than indifference from men of "narrow Spirits" (London Dissenters) among whom, he wished, "learning were more esteemed and exemplified." Perhaps thinking of Francke's famous printing house in Halle, Mather added, "If this work ever see the Light, I expect, it will be from the Countenance and Contribution, of men of our *Universal Religion*; who will every way appear more and more in the several Forms of Christianity. And among such I entreat of you, that my, *new offer*, may be communicated" (*Diary* 2: 413). Indeed, Mather left out no contact, at home and abroad, no venue unexplored, no stone unturned to garner support for his brainchild. It would be devastating if it remained stillborn.

And now the rest of the story: Two months later, on a day set aside for fasting and prayer (Oct. 6, 1716), Mather appeared resigned to accept the inevitable: "I glorified the Lord this day, with the sweetest Acquiescence and Resignation, in the Case of the *Biblia Americana*, whereof I receive Advice this day, that the publication thereof, is to be despaired of" (*Diary* 2:376). The origin of this "Advice" is unclear, but may well have been given him – if not in a letter from Europe – then through the conduit of prayerful communication with heaven. Sometimes, however, acceptance and resignation are cold comfort, especially in this case. Less than two weeks later, he meditated on that sore once again. Searching for answers why God seemed pleased to reject the "elaborate Preparations of my Pen, to serve the Cause of Piety in the World," Mather appeared downcast: "Strange Frowns of Heaven have defeated the Publication of those things, which it cost me a World of hard Study, to gett ready for the Church of GOD. Now, what shall I do on these Occasions?" God knows best when to accept and when to bring forth the "Biblia" to be most useful to the interest of the Kingdom of God, Mather mused. He added,

And I would satisfy myself in my Oblations . . . and consider my sweet Acquiescence in His holy Pleasure to reject them, as a sweet Addition to my Oblations, and His Delight in them; and give a Demonstration, that the acquiring of a Name to myself (a Vile Idolatry!) is no End of my Oblations, in my patient and easy Bearing of it, and that they should be lost as to this World, and known unto Him alone. And I

⁴³ "The World as Parish" and Wolfgang Splitter, "Fact and Fiction," come to different conclusions about the significance of the correspondence between Mather and August Hermann Francke. 43 Mather's Pietist focus is highlighted in his *New Offer* (14, # XII).

would go on with all possible Industry to present as many Oblations to the Work of God, as I can; and cheerfully leaving to Him the Disposal of them. (*Diary* 2:378)

Although Mather did not succeed in placing his “Biblia” with a publisher at this time, he knew only too well that nothing was impossible for Him, who in His own time, would “dispose the Minds of some eminent and opulent persons” to come forward and publish Mather’s oblations. Such, then, appears to be his resolution to “go on with all possible Industry” and to continue to make his pen subservient to the interest of God.

Mather’s letter (Oct. 31, 1716) to Rev. Henry Walrond (d. 1724), a close friend in London and fellow millenarian, contains one of the few remaining references to Mather’s endeavor to find a publisher for his magnum opus. After updating Walrond on the growth of Boston’s seven churches of United Brethren – besides an Anglican, a Baptist, and a French church – Mather introduced the familiar subject. Mather is delighted to learn that a previous package of forty of his works had safely arrived for Walford’s personal use (or distribution) among his friends. “But indeed there are above two hundred more,” Mather pointed out, half-jesting about the matter close to his heart: “Altho’ some which are longer than any of these, (except the *Magnalia*,) and the *Biblia Americana* also (which are more than three times as big as the *Magnalia*,) and have cost me exquisite Elaborations, ly by unpublished.” Promising to send Walrond more care-packages of Mather sermons “from Time to Time,” he again shared his unhappiness about the state of his big commentary: “Tho’ I am, from very many parts of the world, sollicit for the *Biblia Americana*, yet, I have no Prospect of its being undertaken by the *London-Booksellers*, until the present Storms are over; which, I am so far from expecting, that I beleeve, the Times must grow yet more tempestuous” (*Diary* 2:416). The storms and tempests to which Mather refers appear to be the political turmoil in the wake of the demise of Louis XIV (d. 1 Sept. 1715), who occupied a not so minor place in Mather’s eschatological speculations about the Second Coming.⁴⁴ The work he forwarded to Walrond in that package was Mather’s freshly published *Lapis e Monte Excisus. Atque Regnum Dei*, his bilingual *Stone Cut out of the Mountain* (Boston, 1716), presaging the apocalyptic scenario of Christ’s Second Coming looming on the horizon.⁴⁵

The *annus mirabilis* came and went, but the world kept turning as it had done from the beginning. Two days after his fifty-fourth birthday (Feb. 15, 1716/17), he tried once again to interest men in high places in his heart’s project. This time he singled out the newly appointed Governor Samuel Shute (1716–23),

⁴⁴ See Mather’s *Shaking Dispensations* (Boston, 1715) and his millenarian “*Triparadisus*” (*Threefold Paradise*), 336.

⁴⁵ Mather also includes a copy of *Lapis e Monte Excisus* (1716) in his “An Appendix. Containing Some General Stores, of Illustration; and a Furniture which will richly Qualify a Person to be a Reader of the Bible,” a collection of twelve separate essays that Mather included at the end of “*Biblia Americana*,” following his commentary on Revelation.

through whom Mather hoped to curry favor with the governor's famous brother John Shute (1678–1734), the later Viscount Barrington, who (earlier in the century) had become instrumental in swaying Scotland's Presbyterians to support the union between the two kingdoms. The diary remains silent about Mather's success in the matter. We know of one more attempt – three weeks later (March 5, 1716/17) – in which Mather approached Sir William Ashurst once again on the subject of his "Biblia." This time around, Mather is much more direct if not forceful. The letter reiterates the main points of the missive Mather had sent more than a year earlier (Oct. 18, 1715), but also stresses the urgency of it: "I now grow so much in my encroaching Boldness upon you," he sounded his apologies, "as to add this unto it. The *Opus Ecclesiae*, which is now waiting for the Light, is a Work wherein all sorts of Persons will find themselves accommodated with Entertainments, which, if they have been agreeable and acceptable in a separate Exhibition, how much more will common sense tell any man, they must be so in a refining Amassment of them! In these Varieties, none of all the Readers, will be more gratified, and edified, then the more curious Philosopher, who is on all Occasions here treated with such Things as would be fore the Palats of a *Christian Virtuoso*." If Sir William were somehow able to "prevail with two or three Persons of Quality, to appear as Patrons and Favourers of a Work, so evidently Calculated for the Service of the Interests" of the Church, they would "thereby obtain the Monuments and Memorials of their generous Goodness which would be therefore due to them, and rais'd for them; the things desired, would be soon accomplished" (*Diary* 2:511). This is the last we hear of the matter.

Did Cotton Mather ever give up hope that his mighty commentary, "one of the greatest Works, that ever I undertook in my Life," would ever get published? (*Diary* 1:169). Evidently, the last time he mentioned his unpublished work in an extant letter to a European correspondent is dated Nov. 12, 1719. Congratulating his old friend Robert Wodrow on having found a publisher for the *History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1721–22), Mather glances with some noticeable envy at other colleagues whose works seem to prosper, while his own "Biblia" is languishing. Even his "dear Frankius" in Halle, Germany, Mather tells his Scottish friend, was singularly blessed in publishing his edition of the Greek New Testament "(for the publishing whereof our glorious Lord strangely supplied his expenses)." More often than not, God's inscrutable will was hard to accept, let alone penetrate: "While the glorious Lord has accepted me more than two hundred and ninety times to serve his kingdom with my mean pen, in publishing composures, many of which have cost me very little thought, and been the fruits of no long projection, he seems to pass a sentence of death on several preparations that have cost me much more study than those that have come abroad; especially the *Biblia Americana*. And if he will have them to lie for ever buried, I am entirely satisfied in his will, and wisdom, and justice; and his grace, in what has been already done, will be sufficient for me. However,

I will wait upon Him, with hopes that he who raises the dead will, in his own time and way, bring into the service of his kingdom what it has no occasion for" (Wodrow, *Correspondence* 2:502–03). If the thousands of additions, excisions, and revisions in the six hefty manuscript volumes are telling indications, Mather never allowed his "Biblia" to be buried in oblivion. Nor did he ever lay the work aside completely. His many disappointments notwithstanding, he kept adding ever more material until the end of his life. Some of the very last entries in "Biblia Americana" for which a date can be estimated were made in 1727, less than a year before his death, the day after his sixty-fifth birthday (Feb. 12, 1727/28). By 1728, "Biblia Americana" had swelled to its present size of more than 4,500 double-columned manuscript pages in six volumes folio – too costly an undertaking to charm even his most dedicated patrons in Britain.

A New Offer To the Lovers of Religion and Learning: Publishing by Subscription

It is high time to examine Cotton Mather's advertisement, which plays such a prominent part in his effort to publish "Biblia Americana." Printed in c. 1713/14, Mather's pamphlet *A New Offer* – like many of his other works – went through an extended gestation period and multiple incarnations. As previously mentioned, Mather conceived his "Biblia Americana" as early as 1693 and began promoting his commentary in his church history *Magnalia Christi Americana* (105–06), in his essay to do good *Bonifacius* (200–06), and then again in his millenarian "*Trip paradisu*" (94). The substance and whole paragraphs of his pamphlet thus evolved over a long time period of nearly twenty years. With some significant variations, it appeared for the first time in its complete form as an advertisement appended to his popular *Bonifacius* (1710). As a separate pamphlet, however, *A New Offer* was probably not printed until shortly after Feb. 7, 1713/14, when Mather resolved to publish "a Sheet, entitled, *A New Offer, to the Lovers of Religion and Learning*" and to send copies throughout the American colonies and to Europe (*Diary* 2:383).

[1]

A
New OFFER
To the Lovers of
Religion and Learning.

IT is *Agreed* by all true Christians, and most *Certain* to them, That we are *highly Favoured* of Heaven, with a Divine *Storehouse of Truth* in our SACRED SCRIPTURES.

The World has nothing in it comparable to this BOOK of GOD, and of Life. A Book, which all the Learning under Heaven may be well employ'd, for the *Illustration* of; and is never so well employ'd, as when so employ'd. The *Illustration* of it, is indeed the most *Serviceable* and the most *Entertaining* Thing, that can be offered unto them that have any Value, and Relish or Concern for that Knowledge, which is of all the most valuable, and that would be *Wise unto the best of Purposes*. [2]

It is a Passage of the Celebrated BOYL; "When I Consider, how much more to the Advantage of the Sacred Writings, and of Christian Theology in general, diverse Texts have been Explained, and Discours'd of, by the Excellent *Grotius*, *Masius*, *Mede*, and Sir *Francis Bacon*, and some other late great Witts (to name now no Living ones,) in their several Kinds, than the same Places have been handled by *Vulgar Expositors*, and other Divines; And when I Consider, that none of these Worthies, was at once a great *Philosopher* and a great *Critick*; I cannot but hope, that when it shall please God, to stir up Persons of a *Philosophical* Genius, well furnished with *Critical Learning*, and the Principles of true *Philosophy*, and shall give them an hearty Concern for the Advance of His Truths, these Men will make *Explications* and *Discoveries* that shall be Admirable. You shall no more measure the Wisdom of God couched in the Bible by the Glosses and Systems of common Expositors, than æstimate the Wisdom He has express'd in the Contrivance of the World, by *Magirus's* or *Eustachius's* Physicks."

This *Wise Man* was a *Prophet*, when he wrote those Lines. An Age of *Light* comes on; *Explications* and *Discoveries* are continually growing; which all that will but *shew themselves Men* cannot but imbibe with Satisfaction. The *Path of the Just One*, in His gracious Approaches to-[3]wards us, causes the *Light* which opens His Oracles unto us, to *shine more and more towards the perfect Day*. Doubtless the Pagan *Longinus* pleased his Jewish Empress, the brave *Zenobia*, when she read him admiring the *High Style* of *Moses* in that stately Stroke of the Creation; *God said, Let there be Light; And there was Light!* But how Admirable is that great Work of the *most High God*, which has given effectual Order for His Church in our Day; *Let there be Light in it, and let my Oracles be Illustrated!* And, *Lo, there is Light, and the Illustrations of the Sacred Scriptures are carried on to Wonderment!* The Instruments by whom this *Light* is brought down unto us, have of late been greatly Multiplied: *God has given His Word* of it, and *Great has been the Army of those that have published it*.

Anon, We have the Admirable WITSIUS Comforting of us, with his Report, of this Importance. *Neq; profecto Officio his suo defuerunt Illustres Animæ.* – "There have not been wanting those Illustrious Men," [*And Thou, my dear Witsius, not the least of them!*] "who have observed all the Solid Discoveries in *Philosophy*, all the Curious Researches of *Antiquity*, or that has occur'd in *Physick*, or in *Law*, relating to the *Sacred Scriptures*, and have applied it all with a signal *Dexterity* to the Illustration thereof: And so 'tis come to pass, that *Theology*, which had vast Riches of its own before, is now also enriched with foreign *Spoils*, and [4] appears with those Ornaments, which extort, even from them that are most of all disaffected unto it, a Confession of its most Charming Majesty."

The noble Service to Mankind, thus proposed, having been so far pursued, it is easy to imagine, that a Person of but common Abilities, [for He who now Writes may pretend unto no more;] applying himself unto it, may accomplish a very *Rich Collection of Illustrations upon the Sacred Scriptures*. An ADVERTISEMENT now comes forth, to Inform the Friends of Learning and Religion, that it is in some degree accomplished. An, *Opus Ecclesie*, is ready when it shall be call'd for.

No little Part of what has been Written on the great Intention of *Illustrating the Divine Oracles* has been perused. Some Hundreds of the *Latest* as well as the *Oldest* Writ-

ers that have had any thing looking that way, have been Consulted: If not for Number enough to have built an *Egyptian Pyramid*, yet so many, as to render the *Extract* alone which is now made from them, a sort of a *Library*.

Where small *Pamphlets*, as well as large *Volumns*, have made any valuable *Offerings* to the Service of the Sanctuary, they have not been wholly neglected. The *Names* of them, whose grateful Stores have been brought into this *Common Hive*, whether they be Dead or Living, are with all decent Ingenuity acknow-[5] ledged and eternized. Not only the *Rare Thoughts* of the more Illustrious Literators, who are known for *Stars of the first Magnitude* in the Catalogue of them that have *handled the Pen of the Writer*, but also the *Hints* occurring in Books that have made no Profession of serving this Cause, and many of them very *unsuspected ones*, have been seized for it. Many Thousands of those *Fine Thoughts*, whereof sometimes *One* or *Two*, or a very *Few*, have enabled the Writer to find some Acceptance in setting up for *Authorism*, are here together set upon the Table, in order to a Feast of *Fat Things full of Marrow, of Wines in the Lees well refined*. It cannot be presumed that the *Eye* of the poor Industry, which has laboured on this Design, has yet *seen every precious Thing*, yet, in the more than three Lustres of Years, which have run since it began the Undertaking, it has often *visited the Place of Sapphires*, and *found the Dust of Gold*, which is here to be exposed unto the more Sensible and Ingenious part of Mankind, when it shall be thought a time for it. And it may be easily supposed, that one of no more than a *Common Reach*, Conversing so much with such Things, may now and then also make a feeble Flight towards an *Illustration* of his own, that may deserve Attention. There is an *American Plant*, which alone, as *Hernandez* will with some Demonstration tell us, *Quicquid vitæ esse potest Necessarium, facile prestare potest*; it will answer [6] all the *Necessities* of Humane Life, yea, and supply the *Delicacies* of it also. It is possible, this *American Work*, may with as Universal an Accommodation, afford what may be *Necessary*, yea, and what may be likewise *Delectable* to them, who in acquainting themselves with the *Best of Books*, and Things, would have their Studies well accommodated. The *Collection* makes Two FOLIO'S, of some considerable Dimensions, which now lye ready for Publication: Hoping that *Vossius's* Complaint of another Country, will not always be true of *Ours*, That one can hardly get any thing Printed, but either *Quarrels* or *Trifles*; *Eristica et Nugalia, quibus nihil vendibilis, ut ipsi non dissimulant Typographi*.

It has been studied, that this Work might not interfere with the Large *Annotations*, begun by the Excellent POOL, and finished by some of his Brethren.⁴⁶ Those *Polan Annotations* have been left almost wholly unconsulted, in the Composing of this Work, that their Value and Vending may not suffer the least measure of Depreciation from it. Nor will the inestimable Performances of such as Mr. *Matthew Henry* lose the least Grain of their Esteem with the Faithful, by having this Work to wait, (if the Public please to have it so) as an *Appendix* upon them. These Composures will be singularly Useful to one another.

The Work is attempted by a Person so strictly adhering to the Principles of the *Christian* [7] *Religion*, professed in the *Reformed Churches*, that the Reader is perfectly released

⁴⁶ In his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (105), Mather makes the following pitch for his "Biblia Americana": "When the excellent Mr. Pool had finished his Laborious and Immortal Task, it was noted by some considerable Persons, *That wanting Assistance to Collect for him many miscellaneous Criticisms, occasionally scattered in other Authors, he left many better Things behind him than he found.*" K. B. Murdock ("End Notes" 381) points out that Mather's italicized passage is quoted from Matthew Poole's posthumously published *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, 2 vols. (1683–85) 1:A6v.

and secured from all Fear of his finding here, any dangerous *Innovations* in, or *Deviations* from, the *Faith once delivered unto the Saints*. Instead of that, he will very frequently find, that the most important Articles of our *most Holy Faith*, are here defended with a *New Force*, by setting in a *Clear Light* such Texts, as have not been observed heretofore to carry such Assertions in them, or have been encumbered with the Glosses which *Men of Corrupt Minds* have put upon them. Nevertheless, the *Attempt* is carried on, with such a *Catholick Spirit*, that it may be hoped no *Good Man*, will have any matter of just Offence given unto him. It is not a Work animated with the *Spirit of a Party*; and it may be hoped, that nothing but that ungenerous and contemptible Spirit, will cast the disdainful Eye of the *Scorner* upon it. Accordingly it is already come to pass, that very Eminent Persons, Divines of great Note, in the *Church by Law Established*, having been apprised of the Work, have generously offered their best Encouragements unto it. Numbers of the best Men among the *Dissenters* have expressed their Wishes, not without some Impatience for it. *Scotland* also invites it, expects it, requires it. In *America*, 'tis asked for, and waited for. And there may be some hope, That all *Impartial Christians*, of whatever Denomination or Subdivision in Christianity, will [8] reckon it, *An useful Work*. For indeed *Common Sense* will say, it must needs be *so*, if the *Books*, from which the *Best Things* are fetch'd, and laid here together, were *so*. And yet, there is more than *this*, to argue for it. Briefly, Men of *every Religion*, yea, and some of *no Religion* at all, have had *Spoils* taken from them, for the Enriching of this Work; And, why should not all good Men, who embrace the *True Religion*, tho' of different Perswasions in some lesser Points of it, Unite in the Enjoyment of the Riches?

To bestow the Censure of *Pride* and *Vanity*, on the proposing of such a Work for Publication, would be therewith to Censure and Reproach all Attempts in such a way to serve the Public. Most certainly 'tis no Trespass against the Rules of *Modesty*, to give the Public a Report and a Tender, of what has been thus prepared for it; but it would look like one against the Rules of *Equity*, to call it so. Most certainly, it is a *Modest* Thing, a *Sober*, a *Proper*; and a very *Lawful* One, for an *Honest Man* to desire, that so much of a short Life, as has been spent in such a Preparation, should not be *spent in Vain*.

The Pen, which all along this Work, pays all due Acknowledgments unto those, whom the Sovereign GOD furnished and honoured with the Treasures, which are thro' their Hands come into it, *seeks not its own Honour*; And if even the small Reputation of a little *Diligence* [9] and *Contrivance* be denied unto it, in this also it will Propound all imaginable Satisfaction. It would, if that had been possible, have kept the Authors Name under such a Reservation, that it must have been only a Retainer to *Placcius's* Treatise, *De Scriptoribus Anonymis*. It is content, that the Writer be Clouded with all possible *Obscurity*; and that it be left wholly unconsidered, whether he has ever given any Testimony of a tolerable Capacity for such a Work as this, by any *other Performances*; or, whether any considerable *Societies* in the World, have ever thought him Worthy of being *Theirs*. It has nothing to object against as many *Diminutions* and *Annihilations*, as the superiour Part of Mankind may think agreeable for him. He only desires, that the Oblations which he brings from those that may be accounted *Better than himself*, (and which he might, if he had pleased, have made in the most *common Methods*, to pass for, *His own*,) may find Acceptance with the Church, to which we all owe our *All*: And that AMERICA may at length, with a Benign and Smiling Aspect of her Lady-Mother upon her, come in to do something, for an Interest that must *have these uttermost Parts of the Earth for its Possession*.

Sometimes very mean Things, have on the score of their being *Far-fetcht*, had a Value set upon them, and not been look'd upon as too *Dear-bought*, when a great Price

has been given [10] for them. If a Work, which is a *Tree*, that grew on the Western side of the *Atlantic*, may on *that score* hope to be valued by good Men, in the *other Hemisphere*, there will be an accession of *this peculiar Circumstance*, that, *Gentlemen*, the *Fruits* upon it, or at least, the *Seeds* that produced them, were most of them, Originally *Your own*: And it cannot but be a *Pleasure*, if not a *Surprize* unto you, to find that so many of your *Best Things*, have passed over *the great and wide Sea* unto the *American Strand*. Nor will it be New or Strange, if some Things happened to be *Meliorated*, and made more *Sweet and Fine*, by passing over this mighty Ocean. Or, to address you under *another Figure*; The Writers whom you made much of, while you had them *at Home* with you in a more *separate Condition*, certainly, will not lose your Favour, for having *Travelled Abroad*, and now *Returned Home* in *Company*; tho' with their *Habit and Language* having something of an *American Change* upon it.

But, what brings this *Promiser*; that may be worthy of so much Expectation?

THIS is the TITLE of it. These Promises may be made in the *Title-Page* of it. Behold here, a *Communi Fax*, unto it. [11]

BIBLIA AMERICANA.⁴⁷

The SACRED SCRIPTURES of the OLD and NEW Testament; Exhibited, in the *Order of Time*, wherein the several and successive Occurrences, may direct the Placing and Reading of them: which Exhibition alone, will do the Service of a *Valuable Commentary*. With,

- I. A proper Notice taken of those Instances, wherein the most Polite and Pious Masters in *Philology*, have expressed their Wishes to see the *Common Translation* Amended and Refined.⁴⁸
- II. A Rich Collection of ANTIQUITIES, which the studies Researches of Inquisitive and Judicious Men in the later Ages, have recovered; for a sweet Reflection of *Light* from thence upon the Heavenly *Oracles*: Especially those wherein the *Idolatry*, the

⁴⁷ The substantive differences between Cotton Mather's *New Offer* (1713/14), reprinted here, and his advertisement of the "Biblia" in *Bonifacius* (1710) reveal that he made several significant changes in his "Biblia" manuscript during the four intervening years. Fifteen years later, Samuel Mather's "Advertisement," appended to his biography of his father, *The Life* (1729), suggests additional revisions during the last dozen years of Cotton Mather's life, especially in items I and II (*The Life* 185–86).

⁴⁸ In *Bonifacius* (203), item I reads, "The common *Translation*, with all due Modesty, Amended and Refined in those many Instances, where an Army of Learned and Pious Men in our Days, have with great *Reason*, Proposed it." In Samuel Mather's *Life* (184), item I reads, "THE sacred Scriptures of the Old and New-Testament exhibited, *In the Order of Time*, wherein the several and successive Occurrences may direct to the lacing and Reading of them: which Exhibition alone will greatly enlighten them, and do the Service of a valuable Commentary." Samuel Mather's emphasis suggests that the whole section on "The OLD TESTAMENT in the Order of the History," followed by "The NEW TESTAMENT, in the true Order of the History," at the beginning of "Biblia Americana," which appears in the present edition in *BA* (1:213–68) was added sometime *after* Mather began circulating his *New Offer* (1713/14). Also see the following note.

*Oeconomicks, the Politicks, the Agriculture, the Architecture, the Art of War, the Music, the Habits, and the Diets in the former Ages, may be referr'd unto.*⁴⁹

- III. The LAWS of the *Israelitish Nation* in these *Pandects of Heaven*, interpreted; and the *Original and Intention* thereof, rescued from the Mis-representations, that some famous Writers have put upon them. With a particular History of the City JERUSALEM, under its wondrous Vicissitudes, from the Days of *Melchizedeck*, down to Ours; and a Relation of [12] the present & wretched Condition, in which it waits, the *Time to favour the set Time to come on.*⁵⁰
- IV. The TYPES of the Bible, accommodated with their *Antitypes*: And this Glorious Book of God, now appearing a Field, that yields a marvellous Mixture of Holy *Profit and Pleasure*, in those Paragraphs of it, which have sometimes appeared the least Fruitful with Instruction.
- V. *Golden Treasures*, and *more to be desired than such*, fetch'd out of those very *unpromising Heaps*, the TALMUDS, and other *Jewish Writings*; not only to Illustrate the *Oracles* once committed unto the *distinguished Nation*; but also to demonstrate the Truths of *Christianity*.
- VI. NATURAL PHILOSOPHY call'd in to serve *Scriptural Religion*. The fairest *Hypotheses* of those *Grand Revolutions, the Making, the Drowning, and the Burning* of the WORLD, offered. The *Astronomical Affairs, the Meteors, the Minerals, the Vegetables, the Animals, the Diseases, the Anatomical Curiosities*, and what relates to the *Invisible World* of Good or Evil Spirits, mention'd in these immortal Pages, represented with the *Best Thoughts of our Times* upon them. To all which there is added, *The Christian Virtuoso*,⁵¹ with the Commentary of the more Modern and Certain Philosophy on, *His Work which Men behold*; Embellished with the Discoveries which *our Days at Length* have made of Things wherein the Glorious GOD of Nature calls for our *Wonders & our Praises*. [13]
- VII. The CHRONOLOGY of this admirable Book, every where cleared, from all its Difficulties; and the *Clock of Time* set right, in its whole Motion, from the Beginning which *He that Inhabits Eternity* gave unto it. Besides the most Accurate *Harmony of the Gospel*, that has yet been offered among them that *know the Joyful Sound.*⁵²

49 In Samuel Mather's biography, item II reads, "An *Emendation* of our present Version; from the Discoveries of the most learned Philologists from the earliest Ages of sacred Literature down to *Bochart, Calmet* and *Parker*: and a particular notice of those many Instances wherein our greatest Masters of the Original Languages have express'd their wishes to see the common Translation amended and refined" (*The Life* 1984). This item is an expansion of item I as it appears both in *Bonifacius* (203) and in *New Offer* (11).

50 In *Bonifacius* (204), items II and III appear in inverse order.

51 In *Bonifacius* (204), item VI does not mention "*The Christian Virtuoso*" or its contents. Item VI reads as follows: "*Natural Philosophy* call'd in, to Serve *Scriptural Religion*. The Fairest *Hypotheses* of those *Grand Revolutions, the Making, and the Drowning, and the Burning* of the World, Offered. The *Plants, the Minerals, the Meteors, the Animals, the Diseases, the Astronomical Affairs, and the Powers* of the *Invisible World*, mention'd in the *book* of GOD, represented with the *Best Thoughts of our Times* upon them." Since Mather specifically advertises *The Christian Virtuoso* in his *New Offer* (see above), he evidently designed *The Christian Virtuoso* – later published separately as *The Christian Philosopher* (London, 1720/21) – to be an integral part of "Biblia Americana."

52 This last sentence (the reference to the *Harmony of the Gospel*) is absent from the advertisement in *Bonifacius* (205). This difference may well suggest that between 1710 and 1713/14, Mather interleaved the long section "PROLEGOMENA to the HARMONY of the Gospels"

- VIII. The GEOGRAPHY of it *Survey'd*; the Scituation, especially of *Paradise*, & of *Palestine* laid out: With an Account how the *whole Earth* has been Peopled: And many Notable and Enlightening Things contributed unto this Work, by *Travellers* of unspotted Veracity, by whose *Running to and fro Knowledge has been increased*.
- IX. A sort of *Twenty-ninth Chapter of the ACTS*; Or, An elaborate and entertaining History, of what has befallen the *Israelitish Nation*, in every Place, from the Birth of our great REDEEMER to *this very Day*: And the present Condition of that Nation, the Reliques of the *Ten*, as well as of the *Two Tribes*, (and of their Ancient *Sects*,) yet existing in the several parts of the World, where they are now dispersed, at *this Time*, when their approaching Recovery from their sad and long Dispersion is hoped for.
- X. The HISTORIES of all Ages, brought in, to show how the *Prophecies* of this Invaluable Book, have had their most punctual Accom-[14] plishment, and strongly established *Conjectures*, (yet made with all due Modesty,) on such as yet *remain to be Accomplished*: In the Prosecution whereof, the Reader finds an entire *Body of Church-History*, brought into his Possession.⁵³
- XI. The true Doctrine of the CHILIAD, which more opens & breaks in upon the more considerate Enquirers, *as the Day approaches*, brought in as a *Key* to very much of the Wealth, which the Church of God enjoys in this *Book of the Kingdom*. Whereto are added, the most *unexceptionable Thoughts* of the ablest Writers on the *Apocalypse*; defecated from the more Arbitrary and less Defensible Conceits, of *overdoing Students* in the Prophecies.⁵⁴
- XII. Some *Essays* to Illustrate the *Scripture* from EXPERIMENTAL PIETY, or the Observations of *Christian Experience*. With many of the *Excellent Things*, observed in and extracted from the *Holy Scriptures that make Wise unto Salvation*, especially by the *North-British Expositors*, who with a penetrating and peculiar Search after Hints for *Christian Practice*, have been found worthy to *Open many Books* of the Bible.

And many Thousands of curious Notes, found scattered and shining, in the Writings both of the *Ancients* and the *Moderns*, laid here together, in a grateful Amassment of them.

All done with a most Religious & Inviolate and Perpetual Regard unto the *Principles of Religion*, which are the Life of the *Reformed Churches*. [15]

between the section on “The New Testament” and “The Four Gospels” at the opening of his commentary on the New Testament (“Biblia Americana,” vol. 6).

⁵³ In *Bonifacius* (205), item X reads “All *Appearances of Contradiction*, in the Pages fill'd from Inspiration, for ever taken away.” This item probably refers to Mather's essay “Some Remarks, relating to the *Inspiration*, and *Obsignation*, of the CANON” and “I. VATES. Or, Some Remarks upon the SPIRIT of PROPHECY.” Both of these sections are part of a series of essays entitled “Coronis” and “An Appendix. Containing Some GENERAL STORES, of Illustration,” which Mather appends to his commentary on Revelation.

⁵⁴ Items X and XI in *New Offer* (13–14) appear as a single combined item (item XI) in *Bonifacius* (205). The separation of “The true Doctrine of the CHILIAD” (item XI) from “The HISTORIES” (item X) and his additional references to the “*overdoing Students* in the Prophecies” in (*New Offer*, item XI) suggest that Mather was in the process of rethinking his eschatology. Compare Mather's “*Problema Theologicum*” (1703) with his “*Trip paradisus*” (1712, 1720–27).

By the Blessing of CHRIST, on the Labours
of an *American*.

In Two Volumns.

¶ The usual Method for the Publication of such a Work, has been, first of all to Publish PROPOSALS for SUBSCRIPTIONS: For who can Dream, that such *Bulky & Costly Things*, can unassisted, make their own way into the World? But in the present Case, the Distance of the Author from *Europe*, & the Abode of the Work in *America* till it may be sent over with some hopeful Encouragement, and the uncertainty of what may be the *precise Number of Sheets* which will be needful on the Occasion, will oblige to something a little *Unusual* in the way of Proceeding.

Understanding that the Work will make *Two Volumns* in FOLIO, it is proposed, That it shall be afforded unto Subscribers, at the same Rate, that *such Books*, of the *Quantity*, and in the same *Character*, have usually been afforded at: Which is a Rate so generally *Agreed* (and very seldom or little *Varied*.) that the venture of a more *Indefinite Subscribing* for it, need not be much scrupled at.⁵⁵

It shall also be insisted on, with the Booksellers, that whoever shall procure & send in *Subscriptions* for *Nine Sets* of this Work, shall have a Tenth *Gratis*. [16]

It is therefore PROPOSED, That the Persons who are Well-wishers to a Work of this Intention and Usefulness, would send in their *Names*, affixed unto the following Declaration.

When it shall please GOD, that the Work Entituled, BIBLIA AMERICANA, whereof the Public has been Advertised, in the New Offer to the Lovers of Religion and Learning; shall be Published, (and if it be done without unnecessary Delays,) the Subscriber will take off a Sett, (namely, The Two Volumns) at the Price assign'd by the Booksellers, with the Advice of Three unexceptionable Ministers of the City of London, within the general Rate which for a Work so Circumstanced has been formerly declared Reasonable.

Mather's *New Offer* employs most of the same advertising techniques found in the standard subscription announcements of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁵⁶ It differs, however, in several major points: the absence of endorsements by well-known English Dissenters, Anglican bishops, or scholars with academic affiliation in Oxford, Cambridge, or Edinburgh; the want of a list of distinguished subscribers appended to his advertisement; the lack of a representative sample page of his commentary to vouch for print and paper quality; and (most of all) the nonexistence of an experienced and effective London agent with leverage among influential churchmen.

As is well known, financing costly publications by subscription became the preferred means of sponsorship in seventeenth and eighteenth-century

⁵⁵ Samuel Mather advertised his father's "Biblia" in "Three Volumns in FOLIO" for "between Three & Four Pounds Sterling; and in *New-England Money* according as the Exchange shall then be" (*Life* 186).

⁵⁶ See especially D. Farren, "Subscription" (93–154).

Britain and its American colonies.⁵⁷ Subscription – a form of advance payment of a share of the publisher's expense – began to replace the traditional mode of bankrolling publications through outright grants or gifts by well-heeled benefactors or aristocratic patrons whose largess was commemorated in sumptuous panegyrics of one sort or another. In its eighteenth-century context, Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopædia* (London, 1728) defined the new meaning of *subscription* as follows: "Subscription, in the Commerce of Books, particularly signifies an Engagement a Person enters, to take a certain Number of Copies of a Book going to be printed; and the reciprocal Obligation of a Bookseller or Publisher, to deliver the said Copies on certain Terms."⁵⁸ The English lexicographer John Minsheu (1560–1627) is generally credited to be the first author to employ subscription as means to pay for the publication of his *Ductor in Linguas, The Guide Into Tongues* (London: John Browne, 1617), a polyglot dictionary in eleven languages.⁵⁹ This is not the place to rehearse the familiar history of subscription publication. It may suffice to single out some aspects of this relatively new form of commercial patronage to help us appreciate why Cotton Mather ultimately failed to publish his "Biblia Americana." As we learn from his "Secunda Epistola Lectori" (*Ductor* A3r-A5r) and from his separately published "Catalogue" (1617), John Minsheu went about charming subscribers like an expert. He first obtained official affidavits from Oxford and Cambridge scholars and testimonials from vice-chancellors of the university – all affirming the expert quality and usefulness of his polyglot dictionary. With these letters of support and "*His Maesties Letters Patents*" in hand, he approached the highest orders in the Church of England, Britain's escutcheoned nobility, judges and barristers at London's "*honourable Societies of the Innes of Court*" (A4v), physicians, merchants, and other moneyed aristocrats up and down the kingdom – more than four hundred subscribers whose names, titles, or occupations were neatly printed in his "CATALOGUE and true note of the *Names* of such *Persons* which . . . have received the *Etymologicall* Dictionarie of XI. *Languages*" (London, 1617). The impressive list of subscribers is headed by "The KING. The QUEENE. The PRINCE" followed by a long train of subjects from the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, bishops, earls, barons, knights, lords and ladies, esquires, all the way down to mere commoners of mercantile renown.

If Minsheu's formula of success found eager imitators by such theologians, lexicographers, and natural philosophers of note as Brian Walton, Matthew Poole, William Turner, John Tillotson, Nehemiah Grew, and many many oth-

⁵⁷ See especially the studies by S. L. C. Clapp, R. G. Silver, R. H. Carnie, and D. Farren (esp. 42–92).

⁵⁸ Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopædia* (2:141, second pagination).

⁵⁹ See S. L. C. Clapp (205–16).

ers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,⁶⁰ then Cotton Mather's *New Offer, To the Lovers of Religion and Learning* was stillborn: not a single armorial appellation, worshipful vice-chancellor or rector – let alone archbishop or maecenas – appears in his advertisement for "Biblia Americana" to endorse or subscribe to Mather's commentary. Not that he was insincere in emphasizing that "very Eminent Persons, Divines of great Note, in the *Church by Law Established* ... have generously offered their best Encouragements unto it. Numbers of the best Men among the *Dissenters* have expressed their Wishes, not without some Impatience for it. *Scotland* also invites it, expects it, requires it. In *America*, 'tis asked for, and waited for" (*New Offer* 7). However, no names of these well-wishers or patrons appear anywhere in his advertisement. Even the honor that would induce others to have their name associated with respected patrons on subscription lists – as illustrated in Minsheu's "Catalogue" (1617), Brian Walton's "Proposition" (1652/53), or Matthew Poole's "Advertisement" (1676) – is missing for want of takers.

Effective advertisement methods of the period also included specimen pages to illustrate the quality of print, paper, and content – provided in William Turner's proposal for publishing by subscription his *Remarkable Providences* (1695), in Abel Swall's "Proposal for Printing by Subscription *Cambden's Britannia*" (1693), in John Hudson's "Proposals For Subscription to Thucydides" (1695), a bilingual Greek and Latin edition; in Andrew Burrell's "Proposals for Printing by Subscription" (1738), his Hebrew and Chaldaic dictionary; or in Daniel Bellamy's "Proposal for Printing by Subscription, *A Paraphrase On the Books of the New Testament*" (1747). Mather was unable to supply specimen pages simply because he had not yet secured a London publisher. From the viewpoint of subscribers, yet another useful measure well illustrated in Brian Walton's "Proposition" was to identify and name treasurers to ensure orderly collection and disbursement of down-payments by subscribers, proofreaders to correct errors in typesetting and printing, and agents or "undertakers" who would supervise the entire project from beginning to end – none of these crucial abettors were available to Mather while he was still scouting for an experienced London agent willing and eager to see to it that a sufficient number of subscriptions would entice a reliable publisher to take on "Biblia Americana." Finally, without a printer-publisher, Mather was not able to pinpoint in his *New Offer*

⁶⁰ Several examples of successful subscription advertisement stand out: Brian Walton's advertisements for the six-volume London Polyglot, *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* (1653–57) in "A Brief Description" (1652/53) and "Propositions" (1652/53); Matthew Poole, "Brief Description" (1667) and "An Advertisement" (1676) along with Cornelius Bee's countersuit in "Mr. Bee's Answer to Mr. Poole's Second Vindication" (1668); William Turner's proposal for his *Remarkable Providences* (1695); John Tillotson, "Proposals For the ... Works of ... Isaac Barrow" (1682); Nehemiah Grew's proposal to republish "*Musaeum Regalis Societatis*" (1679/80).

the necessary representatives in London, Oxbridge, and Edinburgh with whom subscribers could place their orders or pay their first installment.⁶¹

How much friends in high places and personal contact mattered can be seen in the case of Brian Walton's magnificent *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* (London: Thomas Roycroft, 1653–57), which reprinted in parallel columns the Bible in Hebrew, Samaritan, Greek (Septuagint), Latin (Vulgate), Chaldaean (Aramaic), Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic, Persian, along with the Targums Onkelos, Jerusalem, and Jonathan Ben Uzziel – from the best manuscript copies yet. His biographer reports that the renowned diarist and botanist John Evelyn (1620–1706), well connected with John Pearson (principal editor of the nine-volume *Critici Sacri* [London, 1660]), started promoting Walton's polyglot Bible sometime in late November 1652. "Before the close of that year [Feb. 1652/53], subscriptions to the value of near 4000*l.* were obtained; and, soon afterwards, were more than doubled." The most famous linguists and theologians of the day – John Worthington, John Selden, James Ussher, Edward Pococke, Henry Hammond, John Lightfoot, Thomas Gataker – were all involved in one way or the other in the supervision of the project and their approbation virtually guaranteed success of the huge project.⁶² No such illustrious promoters were at hand for Mather's "Biblia Americana."

How then did Mather succeed in finding a London agent and publisher for his *Magnalia Christi Americana*? At the distance of 3,300 miles (5,300 km), Mather turned to the Rev. John Quick (1636–1706), minister in Bartholomew Close, Smithfield, whose pious tract *Young Man's Claim unto the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* (Boston, 1700) Mather had been instrumental in reprinting in Boston. Perhaps, Mather hoped thus to oblige his Presbyterian colleague in London to see the manuscript of the *Magnalia* through the press (*Diary* 1:364). The story is well known.⁶³ A personal friend of Increase Mather from his London days, John Quick – as it turned out – was neither a man of influence with London publishers nor a man of persuasive powers among London Dissenters. Cotton selected him because of his father's obliging relationship with Quick.⁶⁴ As is apparent from his letter to Cotton Mather (Oct. 10, 1701), Quick tried hard to negotiate with London bookseller-publishers for the best conditions he could get for the *Magnalia*:

⁶¹ See Brian Walton, "Propositions" (83r). When Samuel Mather advertised his father's "Biblia" in 1729, he included the following: "SUBSCRIPTIONS will be taken by *Samuel Gerrish, Daniel Henchman* and *Thomas Hancock* Booksellers, in *Boston*; and as soon as there shall appear sufficient Encouragement, the *Manuscripts* will be sent to *London* to be Printed there, with all convenient Expedition, and Care will be taken of the Paper, Printing and Binding, that it be suitable to such a Work" (*Life* 186).

⁶² Henry John Todd, *Memoirs* (ch. 2, esp. pp. 31 and 44–65)

⁶³ See Greenough, "A Letter" (134–47); Murdock, "The *Magnalia*" (27–29, 35); Silverman, *Life* (152, 157–58); Deluna (154–56).

⁶⁴ See Murdock, *Increase Mather* (198, 323).

1. 100 Guineas or so many Books well-bound. 2. Six of ye larger Paper richly bound for your Patrons. 3. To be put into ye Presse immediately. 4. Every sheet to be brought to me hot from ye Presse to be revised & corrected. 5. The Paper & character to be ye same with my printed Proposals. 6. not one to be sold off till all your Books were first delivered to me. 7. The best chart of New Engl. The best Topographical Delineation of Boston, & your effigies' in mezzotinto to be præfix'd to ye whole work.⁶⁵

Whether or not Quick was an effective agent or too concerned with negotiating the best deal he could get for his Boston colleague is anyone's guess. At least Mather, in time, thought not (*Diary* 1:400, 427). Nonetheless, Quick's letter demonstrates that Mather had difficulty controlling the transactions from afar – events that would ultimately lead Robert Hackshaw (the owner of reams of inferior paper) to strike a deal with Thomas Parkhurst (the London publisher) and Parkhurst to print the *Magnalia* on low-quality paper and without proofreading the printed sheets. Mather apparently never received a farthing for his pains.

Did he learn from his mistakes when a dozen years later he began to circulate his *New Offer* to drum up subscribers and publishers for his "Biblia Americana"? Unfortunately not. Mather proceeded in the same manner he was want to do along. As mentioned earlier, he wrote to the London divine John Reynolds, whose *Practical Religion Exemplify'd* Mather had previously republished in Boston (1713), and overwhelmed him with letters and messages at second and third hand to orchestrate the little matter for him (*Diary* 2: 206, 309–12). That Mather was a more proficient preacher and author than businessman is readily apparent from how he went about publishing his works abroad. As one recent critic put it, "All evidence suggests that Mather never cultivated any sustained direct relations with London publishers but, instead, relied on friends and relatives to secure connections and negotiate for him" (Deluna 151). Indeed, the publication history of Mather's *Magnalia* well anticipates how he would later go about trying to find patrons for his "Biblia Americana." Still, the main problems were the size of his Bible commentary and the conditions of the publishing market.

The Root of All Evil

One of Mather's most sympathetic biographers, the Rev. Abijah Perkins Marvin (1813–89) estimated the comparative size of "Biblia Americana," in his posthumously published *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (1892). Marvin approached the subject by beginning on familiar ground. The first ever published folio volume on a New England press was *A Compleat Body of Divinity*

⁶⁵ Greenough ("A Letter relating" 141). For John Dunton's rare "Proposal" to publish the *Magnalia*, see Greenough, "A Letter relating" (287–88, note 296).

(Boston: Printed by B. Green and S. Kneeland for B. Eliot and D. Henschman, 1736), a collection of 250 sermons on the Westminster Catechism, by Samuel Willard (1640–1707), revered pastor of the Old South Church in Boston, and acting president of Harvard (1701–07). This mighty volume consists of 914 folio pages in double columns, 134 lines per page, and “about 8.4 words” per line. According to these averages, Marvin calculates that “this gives 1,028,798 words” in Willard’s *Compleat Body* – “short lines and breaks in the pages and headlines are not counted.” This relatively large size was not unusual for the time, Marvin argues, as can be seen by comparing Willard’s folio volume with Mather’s own *Magnalia Christ Americana* (1702), which at that time was too large for any of the New England presses and had to be published in London: “In the *Magnalia*, there are 661,848 words, more or less, or nearly seven tenths as many as in” Willard’s sermon collection (Marvin 500).⁶⁶ From another source we learn that Willard’s *Compleat Body* was published by subscription, “the earliest work of learning to be financed in this manner” in New England, “by a coalition of Boston booksellers” and “some 630” subscribers.⁶⁷ If it took that many subscribers and several publishers and printers to issue Willard’s single-volume folio of 914 pages and a little over one million words, how much would it have taken to publish Cotton Mather’s “Biblia Americana,” which Abijah Marvin estimates at “2,888,000 words”? (Marvin 500). Modern computer technology allows us to refine Marvin’s estimate somewhat. From the current transcriptions of the manuscript, we can gather the following numbers: 4,583 holograph manuscript pages in double columns, folio (half or quarter pages, including snippets, counted as such), averaging 635 words per manuscript page, totaling 2,910,205 words more or less. Marvin’s estimate is right on target. Put in another way, “Biblia Americana” is nearly three times larger than Willard’s *Compleat Body* and four-and-one-third times bigger than Mather’s *Magnalia*. In terms of cost, if Mather’s agent is correct and the *Magnalia* “will cost about 600 *lb.*” in 1701 Pound Sterling (*Diary* 1:400), then his “Biblia,” considerably more than 4 ½ times larger and costlier thirty years later, would have run to at least £2,600 – a sizable fortune for a Boston clergyman. Put in yet another way, the retail-price index (purchasing power) for £600 in 1701 had risen to £756, 3s, 11d, by 1728, the year of Mather’s death; for £2,600 in 1701 money, the retail-price index had

⁶⁶ Marvin’s calculation here does not quite measure up. The *Magnalia* is about six (not seven) tenths the size of Willard’s *Compleat Body*.

⁶⁷ D. D. Hall, “Learned Culture” (1:427); S. A. Green points out that “the number of subscribers’ names in the ‘Body of Divinity’ is about 450,” but many individuals took 4, 6, 7, even 18 copies of the work (“Books Published” 20, 21). Likewise, according to Green (21), Thomas Prince’s *Chronological History of New England* (1736) was published the same year as Willard’s, but was considerably smaller (only 400 pages) and took its author and publisher eight years to gather 750 subscribers to publish the work in 1736 (21). Also see the studies by D. Farren (53) and R. G. Silver (163–78).

risen to £3,276, 16s, 11d.⁶⁸ In July, 1728, Mather's entire estate – without his prized library – was appraised at only "£245, 5s, 10d" (Silvermann, *Life* 428).⁶⁹ Clearly, Mather's personal resources fell far short of covering on his own the expense of publishing his beloved "Biblia" even if he had wanted to.

Drawing on the North American Imprints Program (NAIP), Hugh Amory has compiled a useful table of data of leading authors, an index that illustrates how Mather dominated the Boston publishing market for nearly three decades.⁷⁰ During the period of 1701–1710, Mather tops the record with 95 titles, which represent 26.91% of all works of a personal authorship published in English North America (WPA), or 15.83% of all North American imprints (NAIP). The figures for Increase Mather, who is second in line, amount to only one-third of those of his son: 29 titles, or 8.22% (WPA), and 4.83% (NAIP). During the same decade, the five most productive authors – after the two Mathers – published only from 5 to 12 titles. In the next decade (1711–1720), Cotton Mather again tops the list with 129 titles, or 23.33% (WPA), representing 15.23% (NAIP). Second in line is his colleague Benjamin Wadsworth with 42 titles, or 7.59% (WPA), representing 4.96% (NAIP). Increase Mather comes in third with 36 titles, 7.59% (WPA), or 4.25% (NAIP). Finally, during the decade of 1721–1730, Cotton Mather heads the list for a last time with 96 titles, or 12.77% (WPA), amounting to 7.95% (NAIP). Benjamin Colman, Mather's colleague at the Brattle-Street Church, comes in a distant second with 26 titles, which represents 3.46% (WPA) and 2.15% (NAIP).⁷¹ These numbers are revealing in several ways. Although Cotton Mather dominated the Boston book publishing market for thirty years with the largest number of works by an individual author, his books represent a decreasing percentage of the total number of publications of all National American Imprints (NAIP) over the same period. This overall decline does not come as a surprise. During the first three decades of the eighteenth century, an ever increasing number of book publishers and printers set up shop in English North America to meet the diversifying needs of the population. The demand for newspapers, broadsides, almanacs, works of a political nature, and government printing competed in the publishing market in ever larger proportion with such genres as sermons, poetry, schoolbooks, academic

⁶⁸ This calculation is based on L. H. Officer, "Purchasing Power of British Pounds from 1264 to Present" (Feb. 2, 2010).

⁶⁹ J. H. Tuttle, in "Libraries of the Mathers" (296), quotes the value of the estate as £235. 10s. 10d.—£10 less than Silverman does.

⁷⁰ See H. Amory, "A Note on Statistics" (1:504–18). The North American Imprints Program (NAIP), a database accessible through the American Antiquarian Society (Worcester), provides more accurate data on early American imprints than the hitherto standard bibliography, C. K. Shipton and J. E. Mooney, *National Index of American Imprints through 1800* (1969). See also S. E. Morison's discussion of printing and bookselling, in *Intellectual Life* (112–32).

⁷¹ Amory, "A Note on Statistics" (1:517).

dissertations, hymnals, and Psalmbooks.⁷² Furthermore, the number of books exported from London to English North America also showed a steady increase throughout the eighteenth century. During the fifty-year period (1701–50), the total is 73,202 books. Of this total, nearly one third (29.4%) or 21,498 books went to the New England colonies alone.⁷³

Given these market conditions, how did Mather manage to publish more than 450 works that could have kept at least one Boston book publisher in business for several years without taking on projects by any other author? That he was one of the most popular preachers in Boston is well known; he and his father presided over a congregation of more than 1,500 members – the largest in the American colonies. Preaching at least three sermons per week potentially supplied the publishing market with plentiful homiletic discourses, and many of Mather's sermons were printed by popular demand. Covering the expense of printing trendy sermons was generally handled in several different ways. Occasional sermons on such topics as executions of criminals, natural disasters, Indian attacks, epidemics, funerals, or annual elections of governors and magistrates, were sought-after reading materials. For instance, Boston printer-publishers like Timothy Green or Daniel Henchman would frequently have someone take shorthand notes or request from a clergyman copies of the sermons that particularly resonated with their parishioners and print them at their own expense.⁷⁴ Public discourses on the executions of murderers or pirates, homilies on Boston fires, Indian raids, and on Indian or Barbary captivities were subjects in great demand, and publishers could count on tidy profits by venturing into print on their own. The expense for funeral sermons was generally underwritten by family members or friends of the deceased. The last sermon of a dead minister or a selection of his best discourses was customarily paid for by the clergyman's parishioners. Several incidents in Mather's diary offer interesting insights into how many of his works were published at no expense to the author. His *Parental Wishes and Charges* (Boston: Timothy Green, 1705) is a case in point: "I knew not presently how to procure the Publication of this little Book," he confessed in his diary in June 1705; "for the Method wherein I expected it, mett with some odd Obstructions. But I committed it unto the Lord; and entreated, that He would accept my Endeavour to serve Him. Immediately the Obstruction vanished; and I gave the Book unto the Printer." Prayer and providence – rather

72 On these genres, Amory's figures represent a period of 150 years, 1640–1790 ("Note" 1:511).

73 Amory, "Note" (1:514). See also S. Botein, "The Anglo-American Book Trade before 1776" (48–82).

74 Isaiah Thomas, the famous printer and president of the American Antiquarian Society, relates that Timothy Green was not always successful in recouping the expense of speculating in the publishing market: "Large quantities of these sermons lay on hand as dead stock; and, after his decease, they were put into baskets, appraised by the bushel, and sold under the value of common waste paper," in *The History of Printing in America* (1:185).

than firm knowledge of publishing exigencies – appear to be Mather's principal means of publishing his discourses.⁷⁵ His trust in supernatural agency, however, does not mean that he did not incur any expense or that he would sit idly by. It was his habit to purchase copies of his own sermons from the printer and to give them away to his parishioners in his weekly pastoral visits. "I hope, to make special Use of it, in my pastoral Visits; in which usually I give away half a dozen Books, more or less, every Day that I make them" (*Diary* 1:517–18).⁷⁶ Several other such cases can be cited to illustrate how Mather relied on his faith in divine providence to sponsor the publication of his sermons: His diary for Sept. 1713 records that he was at a loss what to preach on at the Thursday lecture. What he could not generate in a state of wakefulness was revealed to him in a dream, and the sermon and its delivery were well received by the congregants: "Some of my Neighbours desired a copy of the Sermon, that they might give it unto the Public. The Subject is the most important in the World; and the Sermon will be an agreeable Engine for me to employ on many Occasions, when Books of Piety are to be dispensed. So I fitt the Discourse for the Press; and give it unto the Bookseller" (*Diary* 2:241). *What should be most of all thought upon* (Boston: T. Green, for D. Henchman, 1713), the title of the sermon in question, instructed his readers how to prepare for death and the state of the soul in the hereafter. It was in much demand, and he gave away many copies during his pastoral visits.

Mather's biographers and historians of the period have frequently commented on his immoderate desire to get published, an obsessive compulsive addiction, they argue, that is of a kind with his inordinate vanity.⁷⁷ However accurate their diagnoses, they fail to consider that publishing homilies was the best available means at the time of reaching out to an audience beyond his immediate parish. Churches today rely on TV shows, radio stations, phone-a-thons, dial-a-prayer, mass-mailings, and the internet to spread their message far and wide, but the most efficient medium in seventeenth and eighteenth-century New England was the printed sermon.⁷⁸ Mather's two-part discourse *Family*

75 On this issue, see D. N. Deluna, "Cotton Mather Published Abroad" (145–72).

76 Mather also resolved that when his *Cares about the Nurseries* (Boston, 1702) was published, he would "take off two or three every Week, and scatter them in the Families where I make my Visits in the Neighbourhood" (*Diary* 1:421). Similarly, he decided "to purchase forty-shillings worth" of his *The Cure of Sorrow* (Boston, 1709) to be given away to those who suffer from "sorrowful Circumstances of Affliction" (*Diary* 2:20, 21). See also (*Diary* 2:685).

77 See S. E. Morison, *Intellectual Life* (195–97); P. Gay, *Loss of Mastery* (58–60); Silverman, *Life and Times* (37–38, 197–201, 402–03); W. C. Ford, "Preface" (xv–xvi); D. N. Deluna (145–50).

78 H. Amory's "Note on Statistics" reveals that for the period of 1640–1790, the sermon was the most popular genre in New England, averaging 2705 different titles, second only to the number after government imprints of 3372 titles (511). In "Religious publishing in England, 1650–1695," Ian Green and Kate Peter point out that "in the 1690s as much as the 1650s, work on 'divinity' comprised half of the output of English presses" (4:67). See also G. Parry,

Religion (Boston, 1705), a discussion of practical piety and the benefit of family prayer, illustrates his purpose:

And I printed a thousand of them. These I bound up in Bundles that had convenient Parcels in them; and printed a short Letter to be added unto each of the Bundles; entreating the Person, whose Name I inserted with my Pen, to find out what *prayerless Families* there may be in the Town where he lives, and to lodge these Essayes of Piety in them. So I concerted with some of my Friends a way to convey a Bundle to every Town in all these Colonies, and unto some other Places. Lord, accept my poor Endeavour, and lett there be good and great Effects of it; I pray thee! I pray thee! Thus I see the Lord employing me in *Services for Him, not in one or two Congregations only but in all His Congregations, from one end of the Countrey to the other.* (*Diary* 1:520)⁷⁹

If his mass-distribution bespeaks his farsightedness as a clergyman for whom the world is his parish, then the common criticism of Mather's alleged vanity to see his name in print ought to be re-assessed in light of how a great communicator availed himself of the standard mass-media of his day. Or, if Benjamin Franklin be here allowed to speak from experience, the once deadly sin of vanity (*o felix culpa!*) may be productive of good: "I scare ever heard or saw the introductory Words, *Without Vanity I may say*, etc. but some vain thing immediately follow'd," Franklin told his son William in 1771. "Most People dislike Vanity in others whatever Share they have of it themselves, but I give it fair Quarter wherever I meet with it, being persuaded that it is often productive of Good to the Possessor and to others that are within his Sphere of Action: And therefore in many Cases it would not be quite absurd if a Man where to thank God for his Vanity among the other Comforts of Life."⁸⁰ Be that as it may, Franklin – like Mather before him – knew best how to turn a vice into a virtue.⁸¹

Mather's effectiveness as an admired preacher can be seen in several other instances in which his homily was published by popular demand. During his Thursday lecture (April 6, 1699), he preached a sermon on one of his favorite subjects: how children and parents can do good by their mutual love and respect. The discourse was well liked by the "great Assembly of people," he remembered. "And, behold, as I come out of the Meeting-house, the Book-sellers come to mee, entreating that they may have a Copy of these two Sermons, when the next

"Patronage and printing" (4:174–88) and C.J. Sommerville, "Distribution of Religious and Occult Literature" (220–25).

⁷⁹ T.J. Holmes (1:368–75) shows that Mather's *Family Religion* and several of its variants went through at least three editions and eight different impressions. The sermon was published in London (1707, 1709, 1713), translated into the Algonquian tongue by the Rev. Jonathan Mayhew (1673–1758), missionary to the Wampanoags on Martha's Vineyard, and reprinted the last time in 1747.

⁸⁰ Franklin, *Autobiography* (1–2).

⁸¹ For a comparative study of the two New Englanders, see M. R. Breitwieser, *Cotton Mather and Benjamin Franklin* (1984).

shall bee delivered, for to bee published unto the Countrey. Thus mercifully and wonderfully does my Lord Jesus Christ, continue to employ mee the vilest of Men, in precious Opportunities of serving Him!" (*Diary* 1:296–97). His FAMILY WELL ORDERED; or An Essay to render Parents and Children happy in one another (Boston, 1699) was published by Benjamin Green and John Allen. In this case as in many others, Mather's sermons were sought-after by publishers and parishioners alike, perhaps lulling him into a false sense of security that the productions of his pen would always find a ready market. The popularity of execution sermons such as *The Valley of Hinnom* (Boston: J. Allen, for Robert Starke, 1717) and its sequel *Febrifugium: An Essay for the Cure of Ungoverned Anger* (Boston: J. Allen, for Benjamin Gray, 1717) again illustrate how he did not have to exert himself to find a willing publisher at home. Mather relates that his execution sermon on Jeremiah Fenwick, who had killed his neighbor with an axe, was in such high demand that in five days "the Bookseller sells off an Impression of near a thousand which he printed of the former essay, and now he comes to me for the Latter," even though the bookseller-publisher had at first turned down his *Febrifugium* (*Diary* 2:462). Surprising success stories like this one or like that of his *Words of Understanding* (Boston: S. Kneeland, for J. Edwards, 1724), a collection of several memorial sermons he preached on the death of his renegade son Increase ("Cressy"), lately drowned in the West Indies, proved to Mather time and again that he could trust in providence to intervene in his behalf. For when he gave to the bookseller Cressy's memorials "and with a considerable Expence enabled the Bookseller to publish them," his efforts "to do some good at his Death" were blessed with surprising success. "A strange Hand of Providence made such an Accession from others, to my Disbursements," Mather reported, "that I could add a third Sermon, to the Book, wherein I may yett more notably serve the Designs of Piety" (*Diary* 2:776–77). Clearly, then, Mather could rest assured that his sermons, tracts, and books – if placed in the service of his God – would always be in high demand. Boston's booksellers and publishers always appeared to be on the lookout for the productions of his pen. And if the press did not always recognize a winner from the start, Mather, apparently, could count on the collective good will of his congregation, or the generosity of one of his well-to-do parishioners, whom providence would stir up to foot the bill.⁸² More importantly, his ease of finding sponsors in New England may explain (in part) why he failed to secure subscribers for his magnum opus, "Biblia Americana," in Old England.

His fame in New England as a soul-searching preacher – though by no means acquired without tremendous effort – accounted in great measure for his publishing success at home. Here he had the kind of groundswell support

⁸² R. G. Silver ("Financing" 163–78) provides a useful list of forty-eight Mather sermons and the names of their sponsors, who covered the expense of publishing his homilies.

necessary to get things in the press – none of that existed in England. He may well have been a household name among his many European correspondents and among those of the Royal Society who sponsored the publication of his *Christian Philosopher*;⁸³ he may well have found ready sponsors for his reprints in England of *Memorable Providences* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1691) and of *Wonders of the Invisible World* (London: John Dunton, 1693), his books on witchcraft, a subject notoriously popular on both sides of the Atlantic;⁸⁴ he may well have found patrons of sorts for his *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1702) in John Hackshaw and Thomas Parkhurst, both of whom took advantage of Mather's desperation: the former by ridding himself of reams of cheap paper in exchange for one hundred copies of the *Magnalia* he would sell in America; the latter by printing the manuscript of the first full-fledged church history of New England for which a sufficiently large market existed in Old and New England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland – no matter who the author.⁸⁵ John Oldmixon's old gibe that Cotton Mather was "a Man of Fame in his Country," but (by implication) unknown in England, may well explain the rest of the story.⁸⁶ In depending on Rev. John Reynolds to orchestrate the publication of his "Biblia Americana," Mather in essence trusted in the good will and business skill of his London colleague. Gaining the confidence of hundreds of subscribers on behalf of someone who lived in faraway America was no easy task. There was no telling if a clean copy of the manuscript would be ready in time or what might happen to it when shipped across the Atlantic. Success of the whole business transaction was built on personal trust and a strong relationship among the author, agent, subscriber, and (ultimately) publisher. Mather's request therefore posed no inconsiderable burden for Reynolds. No wonder Reynolds discontinued his correspondence with his American colleague after telling Mather that times were too uncertain for such publishing ventures (*Diary* 2:309–12, 317–19, 798).

All of these impediments contributed to Mather's failure to publish his "Biblia" during his lifetime. What may well have been the deciding factor in the whole matter was the competition from rivaling Bible commentaries by lead-

⁸³ See K. Silverman, "Mather's Foreign Correspondence" (172–85); Silverman's introduction to his *Selected Letters* (1971); and T. Prince, "Preface," in Samuel Mather, *Life* (1).

⁸⁴ See Deluna (156–60).

⁸⁵ See Greenough ("Letter relating" 134–47).

⁸⁶ John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America* (London, 1708) 1:108. See also K. B. Murdock, "The Magnalia" (30). In contrast to Oldmixon's view is that of the Rev. Thomas Prince of Boston, who relates that Mather's "vast Correspondence, and the continual Reports of Travellers who had conversed with Him, had spread his Reputation into other Countries: And when about Fourteen Years ago I travelled abroad, I cou'd not but admire to what Extent his Fame had reached, and how inquisitive were Gentlemen of Letters to hear and know of the most particular and lively Manner both of his private Conversation and publick Performances among us" ("The Preface," in S. Mather, *Life* 1).

ing divines, whose works were published and republished in Mather's lifetime. There were just too many worthy commentaries on the English publishing market. For instance, the prized nine-volume commentary *Critici Sacri, sive Doctissimorum Virorum in SS. Biblia Annotationes & Tractatus*, edited by John Pearson et al. (London, 1660), contained the annotations by such giants as Münster, Fagius, Vatablus, Castalio, Clarius, Drusius, Grotius, Masius, L. and J. Cappellus, Scaliger, Casaubon, and many more. *Critici Sacri* was republished in Frankfurt (1695) and Amsterdam (1698), and was conceived as a companion to Brian Walton's London Polyglot *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* (1653–57). The huge London edition of *Critici Sacri* sold for £13, 16s, and was probably unaffordable for the average clergyman of Mather's time. Matthew Poole's labor of love to synopsize the *Critici Sacri* and issue a more affordable five-volume work, his *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque S. Scripturae Interpretum* (London, 1669–76), was therefore a splendid idea. It sold for £ 5, 10s – less than half the price of the *Critici Sacri* – and 3,800 sets of Poole's *Synopsis* (vols. 1–4) were sold even before volume five appeared in print.⁸⁷ Poole's brazen performance promptly resulted in a lawsuit by Cornelius Bee, the principal undertaker of the *Critici Sacri*. It was settled in Matthew Poole's favor.⁸⁸ Yet providence restored justice in its own way, and five pirated editions of Poole's *Synopsis* appeared in Frankfurt (1678), Utrecht (1684), and again in Frankfurt (1694, 1709, and 1712).

Likewise, Matthew Poole's *Annotations upon the Holy Bible* (London: John Richardson for Thomas Parkhurst, 1683–85), a two-volume commentary in English for the common reader, had gone through its fourth edition by century's end (Edinburgh, 1700–01) and is still reprinted today. Matthew Henry's acclaimed *An Exposition of All the Books of the Old and New Testaments* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1708–10) had attained its 10th edition by the end of the eighteenth century and remains as popular as ever. Simon Patrick's *A Critical Commentary Upon the Historical Books of the Old Testament* (London: 1694–1727) and its expanded version, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase of the Old and New Testaments* (London: 1727–60), included the commentaries by William Lowth, Daniel Whitby, and Richard Arnald. In its final version, Patrick's commentary (which went through at least five editions before 1800) was, perhaps, the only rival to Matthew Henry's popular *Exposition*. Lesser-known commentaries on the whole Bible, still reprinted in Mather's lifetime, included John Mayer's five-volume *A Commentary upon the Bible* (London, 1653), John Trapp's five-volume *Annotations upon the Old and New Testament*

⁸⁷ See S. A. Allibon, *Critical Dictionary* (2:1622). The Rev. Dr. Steven Dilday deserves our gratitude for currently translating into English and publishing Matthew Poole's *Synopsis Criticorum* (2007–).

⁸⁸ See Matthew Poole, "Just Vindication" (1667), and Cornelius Bee, "Mr. Bee's Answer to Mr. Poole's Second Vindication" (1668). For a discussion of the issue, see "Poole, Matthew," in S. A. Allibon's *Critical Dictionary* (2:1621–23).

(London, 1654–1662), and Samuel Clarke's *The Holy Bible, containing the Old Testament and the New, With Annotations and Parallel Scriptures* (London, 1690).

Cotton Mather's "Biblia Americana" also faced stiff competition from commentaries on the New Testament. By the end of the eighteenth century, Henry Hammond's *A Paraphrase and Annotations Upon all the Books of the New Testament* (London, 1653) had gone through seven editions, William Burkitt's *Explanatory Notes, with Practical Observations on the Four Evangelists* (London, 1700) through seventeen (!) editions,⁸⁹ Samuel Clarke's *Paraphrase on the Four Evangelists* (London, 1702) through ten editions, and Daniel Whitby's *A Paraphrase and Commentary on the New Testament* (London, 1703) through seven editions.⁹⁰ The London book market was simply not ready to take on yet another huge Bible commentary – British or no.⁹¹

Biblia Americana: Composition, Structure, and Sources

Anyone who merely glances at the holograph manuscript of the "Biblia Americana" at the Massachusetts Historical Society will be startled by the sheer bulk of the six folio volumes and the seemingly endless reams of double-columned sheets, interleaved with hundreds of half- or quarter sheets – even snippets of paper – pasted in the margins, and interpolated with thousands of textual revisions, erasures, excisions, and emendations. And yet, there is method to this seeming madness. To be sure, the bulky manuscript that Mather left behind at his death looks more like a rough draft than the cleanly edited copy he would have sent to his London publisher sometime after 1715 or 1716 had he succeeded in garnering the necessary subscriptions from hundreds of individuals or outright gifts from wealthy patrons. Perplexing to newcomers, the holograph manuscript is a revelation to those who discover Mather in the process of drafting, rethinking, and reshaping his ideas over a period of thirty-five years. Four recognizable stages or phases of Mather's composition and revision process,

⁸⁹ Advertising "Biblia Americana" for publication after his father's death, Samuel Mather added that his father's would "not interfere with the Works of the Excellent POOL, BURKITT, or HENRY: It being the constant study of the Author to avoid it" (S. Mather, *Life* 186).

⁹⁰ For the various editions of the Bible commentaries listed here, see Thomas H. Horne, *Manual* (253–67, 297–307), and Thomas R. Preston, "Biblical Criticism" (99–107).

⁹¹ T. J. Holmes (2:735) points to the saturation of the London market as the principal reason for Mather's failure to attract a London publisher: "It is clear that the Biblia Americana failed of publication not through defects in its literary or scholarly qualities, for the manuscript never left Boston, and was not viewed by any London publisher. The great work called for a large outlay of capital, which was not forthcoming. Matthew Henry's Exposition of the Old and New Testament ... had already advanced far in its publication. ... That work being in course of publication ... may have been a factor in discouraging new heavy undertakings of capital for what seemed to be another work of similar nature."

each with its own characteristic features, can be identified and assigned to four distinct periods:

- Stage I: Aug. 1693 to May 1706
- Stage II: May 1706 to the end of 1711
- Stage III: 1711 to Feb. 1713/14, 1716
- Stage IV: Feb. 1713/14, 1716 to end of 1728

Stage I: During this first stage of development (beginning sometime in the Fall of 1693 and most likely ending in May of 1706), Mather extracted from hundreds of books, sermons, treatises, and pamphlets whatever appeared to be serviceable to his purpose of compiling a Bible commentary, a digest of old and new and a whole library of innovative research and discoveries that had not yet found their way into the standard commentaries of the time. He recorded his findings on blank folio leaves of imported paper, creased them vertically in the middle to create a bi-columnar division, and creased them yet again on the right- and left-hand side to create margins, one to one-and-one-half inches wide. He gathered these blank leaves into fascicles of different sizes, partitioned them according to the division of books, chapters, and verses in the Authorized Version (without Apocrypha), and jotted down his annotations in the approximate location for every chapter and verse of every Bible book. Mather assigned ordinal numbers to each new gloss to track the sequence and order in which he recorded every notation. These Arabic numerals can be traced throughout the holograph manuscript. They appear in the left- and right-hand margins of the leaves depending on the respective column or location in which the annotation of the biblical verse occurs. For the most part, these numerals are recorded vertically and occur at the beginning of each new gloss. However, these figures are given only in about one third of all manuscript entries.

Mather's sequential enumeration of every new gloss in the first stage of composition is an important key to gauging the relative time period in which the entry was made. One of the lowest extant numbers is 33 and distinguishes Gen. 4:23, 24 (*BA* 1:518) as one of the earliest extant annotations he recorded in "Biblia," perhaps as early as the Fall of 1693 when he began his opus. Significantly, a much higher number, 4849, introduces an extract from William Whiston's *A Short View of the Chronology of the Old Testament* (London, 1702) and appears early on in the "Biblia" in the section entitled "The Old Testament" (*BA* 1:277), preceding his commentary on Genesis. The publication date of Whiston's book – assuming that Mather received the copy shortly after its appearance in London – accords with the end of the first composition stage: May 1706 (*see below*). One of the highest numbers in all of "Biblia" is 5096 and appears in one of Mather's annotations on Deuteronomy. This figure comes close to the upper limit, because Mather discontinued the practice of numbering his annotations in the spring of 1706, when he stitched up the fascicles into larger

batches to be shipped to England (*see* below). To be sure the final tally cannot be ascertained until all volumes of the “Biblia” have been edited. However, an exact count may never be known with absolute certainty because many of the numerals governing the sequence of his glosses were recorded in the manuscript’s gutter, were lost in the binding through perforation and defacement, or were eliminated altogether when Mather excised whole sheets and fascicles of older commentary that had been removed to be published separately or superseded by more up-to-date material.

A preliminary examination of the six bound folios at the Massachusetts Historical Society has established that Mather’s numerals range from 1 to not much above 5,100 and are, with slight variations, more or less evenly distributed throughout the whole set. The predominant numbers for Mather’s annotations on the Pentateuch, for instance, are distributed in the 2,000, 3,000, and low to mid-4,000 range, but many numerals are below 1,000 as well. The same holds true for his commentaries on all the other OT books. Even in his glosses on the NT (vols. 5–6), all numbers are evenly distributed – except, perhaps for his annotations on Revelation in which the numbers in the 4,000 range predominate. The wide dispersion of these numerals therefore indicates that Mather did not concentrate his annotations on any one part or book of the Bible before moving on to others, but jotted them down as he distilled them during his wide reading. However, it is well to remember that only about one third of all glosses in the entire “Biblia” manuscript is designated with such figures, a fact that limits their entry to the period between 1693 to 1706.⁹²

This first stage of composition appears to have come to an end in May, 1706, when Mather recorded in his diary, “I finished my BIBLIA AMERICANA. So finished it, that there is no Necessity of my casting in any more Tho’ doubtless, I may be occasionally and continually adding thereunto, till the Manuscripts are dismiss’d out of my Hands for Publication” (*Diary* 1:563, 564). In September of the same year, he composed a prospectus of the “Biblia” entitled “AN AMERICAN OFFER *to serve the Great Interests of Learning and Religion in Europe*” (*Diary* 1:570), which Mather intended to send to London “by the Fleet now going for *England*” (*Diary* 1:570). Thereafter, he appears to have laid his commentary aside for nearly five years, for his diary mentions neither his prospectus nor any additions to his stock of annotations until his forty-ninth birthday (Feb. 12, 1711–12). This silence does not mean that he did not add to his collection when he came across useful material during his reading. What it does suggest is that while he was waiting for his prospectus to arouse interest among potential subscribers and publishers in England, his additions during

92 In the introduction to his edition of *The Christian Philosopher* (xxxvi–xxxix), Professor Solberg presents a substantially different rationale for the development and sequence of Mather’s annotations throughout “Biblia.” However, since Solberg does not appear to examine the function of Mather’s ordinal numbers, Professor Solberg’s conclusion seems unreliable.



Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society

this five-year period may have been minimal – or at least not large enough to be included in his annual review of achievements, which Mather was in the habit of recording in his diary on or just before the day of his birthday.

Furthermore, physical evidence demonstrates that Mather (or his amanuensis) stitched the contiguous leaves of his manuscripts into fascicles of coherent segments or bundles to safeguard their orderly arrangement and to send them off the moment his London publisher would call for their delivery shortly after 1706. This stitching process was done rather haphazardly. After all, the fascicles and bundles were intended to stay in place only until the London typesetter would take them apart during the typesetting process. Remnants of the fine thread that held the sheets and fascicles in place and most stitching perforations are still visible in the gutter and on the spine of the holograph manuscript. Unfortunately, this stitching and binding process defaced the notations of many ordinal numbers Mather had recorded in the gutter of the recto and verso pages. They were perforated in such a fashion that their mutilation rendered many figures illegible. To make matters worse, a second (or rebinding) process – occurring in the early nineteenth century – obliterated many more of the ordinal numbers in the gutter because the coarse twine and thick needle used during that occasion perforated many figures and rendered many more indecipherable.⁹³

Stage II: The second stage of Mather's composition process appears to have begun in earnest after a hiatus of about five years (May 1706 to the end of 1711). His diary entry for February 10, 1711–12 records that he had added "some Illustrations for the most part every Day" amounting to "many more than a thousand" during the course of the previous year (*Diary 2:162*). Significantly, Mather did not dismantle the bound fascicles he had intended to send to London by the fleet going to England (Sept. 1706). He was therefore unable to resume the sequential numbering of his glosses because many of these numerals were lost or covered up in the tightly stitched gutter of the fascicles. Since these numerals were now inaccessible without taking the binding apart, Mather elected to discontinue his practice of tracking his entries. Besides, excisions and erasures of older numerical entries or removal and replacement of existing leaves during the revision process necessitated constant renumbering, a procedure that would have been ever more impractical as the number of his entries increased exponentially over time. Mather responded to this challenge as follows: Whenever a new entry was recorded on an existing leaf, he overwrote the ordinal number of the old entry with thick inky loops to render the numeral illegible. However, he was able to do so only with those numerals that were not covered up in the gutter of the binding. (Those that were covered up in the

⁹³ See my description of the holograph manuscript in *Note on the Text*.

binding – unless perforated and defaced by the thread or twine – are completely legible in those places where the thread and twine fell apart and unraveled the binding.) Moreover, he interleaved additional sheets or half-sheets as needed to accommodate longer supplementary entries for which no room was left on the original leaf. It is for these reasons that the second stage of composition can be safely distinguished from the first.

Additional evidence to identify the stages of composition can be found in Mather's advertisements of the "Biblia." These ads appear in three separate places and were composed during three different time periods: in *Bonifacius* (1710), in *A New Offer* (1713/14), and in Samuel Mather's biography *The Life* (1729). Items VII in *New Offer* (13) and item VIII in Samuel Mather's *Life* (185) differ from their counterpart (item VII) in *Bonifacius* (205) in one important phrase that is absent from the "Advertisement" in *Bonifacius*: Mather adds, "the most accurate *Harmony of the Gospel* that has yet been offered." This added phrase refers to "PROLEGOMENA to the HARMONY of the Gospels," a gathering of 10 folio pages which Mather interpolates between the sections on "The New Testament" and "The Four Gospels" at the opening of his commentary on the New Testament (vol. 5 of the bound folios). A digest of William Whiston's *A Short View of the Chronology of the Old Testament, and of the Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (1702), the Prolegomena helps Mather explain the intertextual relationship of the synoptic gospels, and was inserted in the "Biblia" sometime after 1710 (the publication date of his "Advertisement in *Bonifacius*) but before the spring of 1713/14, when he published his handbill *A New Offer* to be sent to potential subscribers and publishers. No doubt many other additions – not otherwise specified – were made during this period.

Stage III: The third stage is much more difficult to determine. It probably commenced sometime in 1711, when he again added "many more than a thousand" illustrations, paused for a while after he published his handbill *A New Offer To the Lovers of Religion and Learning* (after Feb. 1713/1714), and ended in October, 1716, when heavy-hearted, he came to accept the inevitable: publication of the "Biblia Americana" "is to be despaired of" (*Diary* 2:376). Evidence for this third stage, which drastically impacted the content of the "Biblia" manuscript, can be allocated in several ways. A comparison of the *Advertisement* for the "Biblia" in *Bonifacius* (200–06), published in 1710, and of Mather's handbill *New Offer* (1–16), published in the Spring of 1713/14, reveals several clues in the list of twelve items, which Mather highlights as the most notable features of his Bible commentary as it existed at that time. Most of the twelve items are identical (with some minor variation) in syntax and content in both documents – except for some curious differences in items I and II, VII and VIII, and X and XI. These differences may well explain the major changes which Mather made in the holograph manuscript during this period (1711–1714, 1716).

Let me begin in inverse order: Items X and XI in *New Offer* (13–14) appear as a single, combined item (item XI) in *Bonifacius* (205–06). The two items differ from each other in that “The true Doctrine of the CHILIAD,” originally part of item X, “The *Histories* of all Ages” (*Bonifacius* 205), constitutes a completely separate item, item XI, in the *New Offer* (13–14). Furthermore, the added reference in this item to “more Arbitrary and less Defensible Conceits, of *overdoing Students* in the Prophecies” (*New Offer*, item XI) suggests that Mather was in the process of rethinking his eschatological system. He appears to gesture toward the revisions of his millennialist interpretations which, by 1713, were evolving from his earlier inchoate system he had outlined in “*Problema Theologicum*” (1703) and were moving toward a revision that did not become fully enunciated until he arrived at his final pre-millennialist system he discusses in sections 1–8 of his “*Triparadisus*” (1720–27).⁹⁴ Dealing with such diverse topics as a single (rather than double) conflagration at Christ’s Second Coming at the beginning of the thousand-year reign, a naturalist description of the conflagration, and a “Golden Key to open the Sacred Prophecies,” Mather revised these exegetical issues in his Bible commentary on Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Matthew 24, 2 Peter 3, and on Revelation. These topics became the basis of “*Triparadisus*” (part III) which (by and large) he extracted from the “*Biblia Americana*” and intended as a separate publication. It is during this stage that he probably added his *Lapis e Monte Excisus. Atque Regnum Dei* (Boston, 1716), a millenarian interpretation of Dan. 2:45, the stone cut out of the mountain that fills the whole earth. Mather inserted a published copy of this bilingual treatise on the Second Coming into an appendix of thirteen essays attached to the end of his commentary on the Revelation. This appendix is entitled “Appendix. Containing some GENERAL STORES, of Illustration, and a Furniture which will richly Qualify a Person to be a READER of the BIBLE.” His *Lapis e Monte Excisus* thus forms the second essay under the heading “II. The SPIRIT, and PURPOSE, of the *Sacred Scriptures*.”

Stage IV: Comparing Mather’s “*Biblia*” advertisement in *Bonifacius* (1710) with the one in *A New Offer* (1713/14) and the one in Samuel Mather’s *The Life* (1729) reveals that Cotton Mather undertook several significant changes in the “*Biblia Americana*” in the last dozen or so years of his life (1715–28). This is especially the case for items I, II, and VI. The substance of items I in *Bonifacius* (203) and in *New Offer* (11) is quite similar and suggests little more than stylistic changes. However, in Samuel Mather’s *Life*, composed fifteen years after the *New Offer*, the following supplement to item I identifies a major addition to the “*Biblia*” manuscript: “THE sacred Scriptures of the Old and New-Testament exhibited, *In the Order of Time*, wherein the several and successive Occurrences

⁹⁴ See J.S. Mares, “*Problema Theologicum*” (333–58) and R. Smolinski, *Threefold Paradise* (21–59).

may direct to the lacing and Reading of them: which Exhibition alone will greatly enlighten them, and do the Service of a valuable Commentary" (*The Life* 184). This completely new item refers to the two-part section "The OLD TESTAMENT, in the Order of the History," followed by "The NEW TESTAMENT, in the true Order of the History," a separate fascicle which Mather added to the commentary as a prolegomena to "Biblia Americana" (*BA* 1:213–68). This new section of nearly thirty nine manuscript pages (folio) contains a unique chronology of all historical acts mentioned in the OT and NT. Since the biblical authors generally do not narrate the historical episodes in their chronological order, Mather hopes to furnish his readers with a basic key to the sequence of unfolding events, to identify parallel events occurring during the same period yet related sequentially (or in other parts of the Bible), and to supplement the incomplete detail given by one author with the fuller (or alternate) version given by another. The two-part section of "the Order of the History" was added sometime after the spring of 1713/14 and now precedes "The Introduction" (*BA* 1:269) and consists of a sheaf of paper of identical size and watermarks.⁹⁵

Additional changes in the "Advertisement" in Samuel Mather's 1729 biography (item II) appear significant. Item II reads, "An *Emendation* of our present Version; from the Discoveries of the most learned Philologists from the earliest Ages of sacred Literature down to *Bochart, Calmet* and *Parker*: and a particular notice of those many Instances wherein our greatest Masters of the Original Languages have express'd their wishes to see the common Translation amended and refined" (*The Life* 184). This description is an expansion of item I in *Bonifacius* (203) and in *New Offer* (11), but appears as item II in the biography (184). It emphasizes Mather's increasing concern with philological and textual challenges to the Bible as the Word of God, with the dogma of verbal inspiration and its problems, and with textual transmission emerging from his study of the London Polyglot.⁹⁶ Discussions of these topical issues are interspersed throughout the "Biblia"⁹⁷ and are based in part on Samuel Bochart's *Opera Omnia. Hoc Est Phaleg, Chanaan, et Hierozoicon* (1675), on Dom Augustin Calmet's *Commentaire littéral sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament* (1707–16) and his *Dictionnaire Historique, Critique, Chronologique, Géographique, et Littéral de la Bible* (1722), and last but not least – a work much after Mather's own mind – on Bishop Samuel Parker's *Bibliotheca Biblica* (1720–35).

Of the innumerable emendations, interpolations, interlineations, erasures, and excisions to which Mather subjected the holograph manuscript of the "Biblia" during its long gestation period, the final substantive changes appear among the most significant. These alterations were made sometime after 1715 and

⁹⁵ See my "Note on the Text."

⁹⁶ See Section 3: "Cotton Mather: Theologian, Exegete, Controversialist" in the introduction to the present edition.

⁹⁷ See my discussion in Section 3.

in the years following 1724. Again, let me begin in inverse order. A comparison between item IX in both *Bonifacius* (205) and *New Offer* (14) and item X in Samuel Mather's *Life* (185) demonstrates that Samuel Mather's 1729 advertisement of the "Biblia" reflects the modifications his father made during the final decade of his life. The history of the Jews of the Diaspora, their conversion, and ultimate return to the Holy Land was as much a mainstay in the pre-millennialist eschatology of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as was the quest to discover the Ten Lost Tribes and their expected return to Palestine. The occurrence of these events just prior to the Second Coming was a crucial element of Cotton Mather's unfolding literalist scheme and alluded to in item IX in the advertisements of both *Bonifacius* and *A New Offer*. Significantly, the concluding phrase "when their [the dispersed Jews] speedy Recovery from their Sad and Long Dispersion is hoped for" is absent from Samuel Mather's 1729 "Advertisement" (*Life* 185, item X) and reflects that Mather abandoned this millennialist tenet. Mather's diary for 1712, 1724, 1725/26 and his "*Trip paradisus*" provide important clues to what happened during one of his mystical communications with heaven, on 21 June 1724, while he wrestled with his God for more privileged knowledge about the state of Christ's millennial kingdom:

The glorious Lord has led me into fuller Views than I have ever yett had, and such as I have exceedingly longed for and asked for, of what shall be the true State of Things in His Kingdome. And I am now satisfied, that there is nothing to hinder the immediate Coming of our Saviour, in these Flames, that shall bring an horrible Destruction on this present and wicked World, and bring on the new Heaven, and the new Earth, wherein shall dwell Righteousness. I purpose quickly to write on these things. In the mean time, I would in all holy Conversation and Godliness, mightily endeavour to maintain such a Disposition of Mind, as the tremendous Descent of my glorious Lord, is to be entertained withal. (*Diary* 2: 733)

The work that Mather promised himself to write on these new insights turned out to be "*Trip paradisus*," his mature eschatological theories, which he also recorded in "Biblia" (1724–1727), but from which he never fully got around to expunging his old, discarded conjectures.⁹⁸ "*Trip paradisus*" was not completed until the winter of 1725/26 or even as late as 1727 (*Diary* 3:91n, 2:811, "*Trip paradisus*" 326).⁹⁹ The hermeneutic changes he undertook during this final revision process include a single, universal conflagration of the earth at Christ's Second Coming, a full restoration of the earth during Christ's thousand-year reign, the repopulation of the millennial earth by the offspring of the "Changed Saints,"

⁹⁸ Mather's eschatology, his changing views on the conflagration, the conversion of the Jewish nation, and the state of the New Heavens and New Earth during the millennium appear in *Threefold Paradise* (1995).

⁹⁹ A letter to Thomas Prince (Feb. 11, 1726/27) shows that Mather was now ready to have the holograph manuscript of "*Trip paradisus*" copied by a scribe to be sent to London for publication (Silverman, *Selected Letters* 415–16).

and a literal cubic New Jerusalem of gigantic proportions visibly floating in the heavens. Curious as his new conjectures are, perhaps the most significant changes in his eschatology of his late years are his abandonment of the literal conversion of the world's Jewry and of the expectation of their return to the Holy Land. In his old age, Mather became an allegorist (much to the dismay of Increase Mather, Samuel Sewall, and Thomas Prince) on this eschatological crux of the period. Henceforth he argued that spiritual Israel (Christ's Redeemed) – not carnal Jewry – was intended by the Apostle (Rom. 11). Interestingly, Mather's old, literalist scheme is still in place in "Biblia" (BA, Rom. 11) but his new allegorist interpretation is fully developed in "Triparadisus" (295–318). A related change, though not yet fully expunged from all places in his commentary in "Biblia," is his reconfiguration of the state of the New Heavens and the New Earth and the nature of their occupants. This emendation is also indicated in Samuel Mather's 1729 advertisement and promises subscribers of the "Biblia" a fresh discussion of "the State of the Church and World in future Ages to the End of Time," the world *during* Christ's thousand-year reign (*Life* 185, item XI). This announcement is completely absent from the advertisements published years earlier in *Bonifacius* (205–06) and in *New Offer* (14). Mather's new theories on the millennial New Heavens and New Earth are fully formulated in "Triparadisus" (244–94), but were mostly based on his new annotations in "Biblia" (BA, Isa. 17–30, 60, 65, Dan. 7, Acts 3, Rev. 19, 21–22).

Perhaps of greatest interest is that Cotton Mather's celebrated *Christian Philosopher* (London, 1720/21), his thirty-two essays on natural science, published by the Royal Society of London, originally constituted an integral part of "Biblia Americana" – probably as an appendix rather than as dispersed essays. This assertion has been made several times before. Perry Miller's claim that "*The Christian Philosopher* was culled out of the *Biblia*," though dismissed by Winton Solberg, may be correct after all – although neither historian supplies conclusive evidence for their respective positions.¹⁰⁰ Much new evidence of Mather's initial intent can be gleaned from his advertisements in *Bonifacius* (204, item VI), *A New Offer* (12, item VI), and in Samuel Mather's *Life* (184–85, item VII). First the evidence from Mather's correspondence: In a missive (c. Aug. / Sept. 1715) to his brother, the Rev. Samuel Mather at Whitney (Oxfordshire), Cotton Mather requests that he "would not lett my *Christian Virtuoso* be lost" and that he forward it to "Dr. Woodward's hand, into the Repository of the Royal Society" in case Samuel could

¹⁰⁰ P. Miller, *New England Mind* (441) and W. U. Solberg, "Introduction" (xxxvi–xl). T. Hornberger appears to be the first to argue that "there is some evidence that it [*The Christian Philosopher*] was originally a part of Mather's vast collection of materials of the ill-fated *Biblia Americana*" ("Notes 134). Hornberger's evidence is based on Mather's letter (Oct. 18, 1715) to Sir William Ashurst (*Diary* 2: 332). Much more conclusive documentation can be found in Beall and Shryock, *Cotton Mather* (40–42); in Beall, "Early 'Curiosa Americana'" (367–68, 371), and in R. P. Stearns, *Science* (412).

not find a publisher for it himself (*Diary* 2:324). Similarly, Cotton specifically praises his "*Christian Virtuoso*" in a letter written to Sir William Ashurst a few weeks later (Oct. 15, 1715), in which Cotton hopes to enlist Sir William's patronage for the "Biblia Americana." Cotton points out that his "Biblia" deserved to be published all the more because "one considerable Article in the work, namely *The Christian Virtuoso*, one would think, might procure some subscribers to it, among the members of the Royal Society, which have allowed my Relation to them" (*Diary* 2:332). If Mather's letters to his brother (Aug. / Sept.) and to Ashurst (Oct. 15) are correctly dated, then Mather had already sent the manuscript of *The Christian Virtuoso* (the title before *The Christian Philosopher* was published by the Society) to England while he still advertised his *Christian Virtuoso* as "one considerable Article" in his Bible commentary. The publication of the "Biblia" was all the more called for, Mather thought, because it included *The Christian Virtuoso*, his treatise on natural science, which would be particularly appealing to Sir William and the members of the Royal Society.

There is other external evidence to suggest that the essays in *The Christian Philosopher* were designed to be an integral part of "Biblia Americana." As previously noted, the substantive changes in "Biblia Americana" in the last decade of Mather's life are also reflected in his advertisements of the commentary. The description of Item VI in *Bonifacius* (1710) and that in *A New Offer* (1713/14) suggests that Mather began to work on the essays of the *Christian Virtuoso* sometime after 1710 and probably finished them before the spring of 1714, for they are not mentioned in *Bonifacius* (204), but appear in *A New Offer* (12): "To all which there is added," Mather complements item VI on natural philosophy, "*The Christian Virtuoso*, with a Commentary on the more Modern and Certain Philosophy on, *His Work which Men Behold*; Embellished with the Discoveries which *our Days at Length* have made of Things wherein the Glorious GOD of Nature calls for our *Wonders & our Praises*." However, this supplement to *New Offer* (1713/14) is again removed from the 1729 advertisement in *Samuel Mather's Life* (184, item VII). This external evidence indicates that henceforth he elected to publish "Biblia" without his essays he had gathered into his *Christian Virtuoso*. The decision made good sense. The thirty-two essays forming this collection had just been published under the title *The Christian Philosopher* (1720/21) by the most prestigious body of scientists Mather could imagine. Clearly, he tried everything in his power to promote the publication of the "Biblia" from afar. He approached every potential subscriber, patron, and potentate; he left no stone unturned. When his pleas with heaven remained unanswered, when providence seemed to consign his commentary to oblivion (an unacceptable fate, no doubt), Cotton Mather tried to salvage what he could by publishing his labor of love piecemeal – still hoping against hope that "God our Saviour will in His Time, dispose the Minds of some eminent and opulent persons, to cast a benign Aspect

upon a work ["Biblia Americana"] which may hand down their Names with lasting Acknowledgments unto posterity."

The main divisions of the extant holograph manuscript as they appear today:

"Biblia Americana"

Old Testament: c. 2,853 ms. pages (folio)

New Testament: c. 1,730 ms. pages (folio)

Total: c. 4,583 ms. pages (folio)

Old Testament:

Chronology	
OT: in the Order of History	c. 22 ms pp.
NT: in the Order of History	c. 15 ms pp.
Introduction	c. 3 ms pp.
Chronology of the OT	c. 16 ms pp.
Genesis	c. 405 ms pp.
Exodus	c. 154 ms pp.
Leviticus	c. 153 ms pp.
Numbers	c. 110 ms pp.
Deuteronomy	c. 118 ms pp.
Joshua [MAP: Holy Land]	c. 46 ms pp.
Judges	c. 50 ms pp.
Ruth	c. 7 ms pp.
1–2 Samuel	c. 111 ms pp.
1–2 Kings	c. 162 ms pp.
1–2 Chronicles	c. 125 ms pp.
Ezra	c. 24 ms pp.
Nehemiah	c. 24 ms pp.
Job	c. 100 ms pp.
Psalms	c. 309 ms pp.
Proverbs	c. 115 ms pp.
Ecclesiastes	c. 69 ms pp.
Canticles	c. 44 ms pp.
The Messiah	c. 15 ms pp.
Isaiah	c. 163 ms pp.
Jeremiah	c. 61 ms pp.
Lamentations	c. 32 ms pp.
Ezekiel	c. 90 ms pp.
Some further Thoughts	c. 2 ms pp.
Daniel	c. 80 ms pp.
Hosea	c. 25 ms pp.
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 4 ms pp.
Joel	c. 10 ms pp.
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 1 ms p.
Amos	c. 18 ms pp.
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 2 ms pp.
Obadiah	c. 3 ms pp.
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 1 ms p.

New Testament:

On the NT	c. 1 ms pp.
MAP of Countries & Places in NT	
The NT (Introduction)	c. 6 ms pp.
Prolegomena, to the Harmony of the Gospels	c. 10 ms pp.
The Four Gospels	c. 10 ms pp.
Matthew	c. 244 ms pp.
Mark	c. 58 ms pp.
Luke	c. 130 ms pp.
John	c. 143 ms pp.
MAP: Apostles' Travels	
Case of Conscience conc. Blood	c. [8 pp.]
Historia Apostolica	c. 34 ms pp.
Acts	c. 122 ms pp.
Appendix to Acts	c. 104 ms pp.
Romans	c. 65 ms pp.
1–2 Corinthians	c. 156 ms pp.
Galatians	c. 30 ms pp.
Appendix to the Galatians	c. 6 ms pp.
Ephesians	c. 40 ms pp.
Appendix to the Ephesians	c. 6 ms pp.
Philippians	c. 22 ms pp.
Appendix to the Philippians	c. 2 ms pp.
Colossians	c. 20 ms pp.
Appendix to the Colossians	c. 2 ms pp.
1–2 Thessalonians	c. 21 ms pp.
1–2 Timothy	c. 39 ms pp.
Titus	c. 7 ms pp.
Philemon	c. 5 ms pp.
Hebrews	c. 51 ms pp.
James	c. 20 ms pp.
1–3 Peter	c. 32 ms pp.
1–3 John	c. 24 ms pp.
Jude	c. 7 ms pp.
Revelation	c. 191 ms pp.
Coronis	c. 16 ms pp.
An Essay for a further Commentary, on the Sacred Scriptures	c. 6 ms pp.

Jonah	c. 11 ms pp.	Some Remarks, relating to the	
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 1 ms p.	Inspiration of the Canon	c. 2 ms pp.
Micah	c. 13 ms pp.	Appendix	
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 2 ms pp.	I. <i>Vates</i> , the Spirit of Prophecy	c. 16 ms pp.
Nahum	c. 4 ms pp.	II. The Spirit, and Purpose of	
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 2 ms pp.	the Sacred Scriptures	c. [26 pp.]
Habakkuk	c. 7 ms pp.	III. Measures, Weights, Coins	c. 2 ms pp.
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 1 ms p.	IV. Things done by Ezra for the	
Zephaniah	c. 8 ms pp.	Restoring of the Scriptures	c. 4 ms pp.
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 1 ms p.	V. <i>Antiqua</i> , Sabians, Magians	c. 7 ms pp.
Haggai	c. 5 ms pp.	VI. <i>Patriarcha</i> , the Religion	
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 1 ms p.	of Noah, considered	c. 4 ms pp.
Zechariah	c. 26 ms pp.	VII. <i>Scripturae Nucleus</i>	c. 8 ms pp.
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 3 ms pp.	VIII. <i>Synagoga</i>	c. 4 ms pp.
Malachi	c. 16 ms pp.	IX. <i>Sibyllina</i>	c. 4 ms pp.
Hutchinsonian Hints	c. 1 ms pp.	X. <i>Chaldeus</i> , Targums	c. 3 ms pp.
Parenthesis, or the		XI. <i>Psalmes</i> , Music, Poetry	
Condition of the Jews	c. 62 ms pp.	of the Hebrews	c. 5 ms pp.
		XII. <i>Kiriath-Sepher</i> , Manner	
		of Writing	c. 3 ms pp.
		XIII. <i>Expectanda</i> , State of Things	
		in the Kingdom	c. 4 ms pp.
OT Total	c. 2.853 ms pp.	NT Total	c. 1.730 ms pp.

This table of contents not only lists the major subdivisions that follow the order of books in the King James Version but also references Mather's individual essays in the prolegomena and appendixes of the "Biblia" and may thus serve as a preliminary guide to the entire collection.

Apart from the four identifiable stages of composition that shaped the growth of the "Biblia," the extant manuscript is also distinguished by a didactic Q-&A technique, which allowed Mather to cast his commentary into the form of a dialogue. This ancient method of debate, in which an interlocutor poses rhetorical questions to be answered by a wise respondent, was still popular in Mather's time and can be found in works as ideologically disparate as Francis Turretin's *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (Geneva, 1679–85) and Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (London, 1730).¹⁰¹ No doubt, Mather was familiar with this didactic teaching device as much as any of his college-educated peers trained in the classics of Greece and Rome. If anything, he had put it to good use in the several catechisms he wrote for children as well as for adults. For instance, in *The Man of God Furnished. The Way of Truth, Laid out;*

¹⁰¹ Tindal explained his modus operandi as follows: "The Manner of debating a subject Dialogue-wise, (as this between *A. & B.*) was esteem'd by the Ancients the most proper, as well as most prudent, Way of exposing prevailing Absurdities; & *Tully's* two *Discourses, de Naturâ Deorum*, and *de Divinatione*, both levell'd against the Superstition of his Country-men; are living Monuments of the Expediency, and Usefulness of this way of Writing. And certainly, the Reader may be better entertain'd thus, than by that dry way of Objection and Answer, with which Controversies are usually manag'd" ("Preface" 1v).

with a *Threefold Catechism* (Boston, 1708), he insisted that instructors should betimes implant in children the principles of religion, but "the way of instilling the *Christian Religion*, by Catechising, or a conference carried on with *Question and Answer*, is very Necessary, and highly Agreeable to awaken the *Attention*, and Enlighten the *Understanding* of the *Catechumens*; this also is the confession of all, who have considered, but how *Mankind* is to be dealt withal" (1). Mather was particularly fond of this method of engaging his audience, as his son Samuel well knew from experience. In fact, Samuel's father deemed it such an efficacious tool that "he tho't the *Spirit of Grace* might fall upon them [the catechumens] in this Action" of acquiring divine knowledge through Q & A that "they might be seiz'd by HIM and held as His Temple thro' Eternal Ages" (*The Life* 18). Little wonder then that Mather put it to good use throughout his Bible commentary: every gloss is introduced by a rhetorical question that allows the author to supply the answer.

Mather's Q-&-A method was also advantageous in several other ways: It allowed him to break away from the rigid framework of traditional Bible commentaries, enabled him to explore specific philological, historical, and cultural issues that transcended the immediate context of a given chapter and verse he glossed, and it helped him to turn individual annotations into separate essays which – though anchored in the particular biblical locus – could be transferred at will and fitted to suit other forms of discourse. The "Biblia Americana" thus became his database, an encyclopedia of universal knowledge that could be consulted for diverse purposes. Mather embraced this expedient more or less self-consciously in, for instance, his commentary on Gen. 21:1 on the birth of the Patriarch Isaac:

Q. Our learned *Heidegger* supplies us, with many rich *Illustrations* upon the Matters of the *Patriarchs*. To Translate or Transcribe the whole of his *Exercitations*, would not answer the Design of the Work, we are upon; which is, To make a Collection of the *Finer Thoughts*, wherewith Men of Erudition, have Illustrated the Sacred Scriptures. And yett, rather than scatter them asunder, to be lodg'd at their several Texts, we would chuse to have the *Finer Thoughts* of our *Heidegger* as much together, as a *Particular Subject* will allow. Wherefore, what you find more observable in him, concerning the affairs of ISAAC, and his Two Sons; Lett us have all here together, if you please, in one Entertainment?

A. It shall be so.

Mather's lengthy "Answer" (see *BA* 1:965–84) is digested from Johann Heinrich Heidegger's אֲבוֹתַי רַאשֵׁי דֵּי אֲבוֹתַי *De Historia Sacra Patriarcharum Exercitationes Selectae* (Amsterdam, 1667–71), a two-volume analysis of Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki's celebrated commentary on the Chumash and Talmud. Mather's lengthy gloss ("Answer") forms an independent essay of nearly ten pages folio in which he examines Rashi's cabalistic readings of Isaac's name, Sarah at age ninety nursing her son, Isaac's weaning, growth, travels, and the story of his

offspring, along with many related issues that rupture the tight framework of conventional commentaries. Indeed, this approach allowed Mather to explore his topic from diverse angles and to add extrinsic material as needed without scattering his energies. Better yet, he did not have to break up his sources into fragments or individual references and disperse them across the more than 4,500 pages of the “Biblia.”

This approach is even more efficient than it appears at first glance. As previously noted, Mather compiled his commentary over a period of more than thirty five years. During this long gestation period, the “Biblia” grew from approximately 5,100 individual annotations (1693–1706) to more than three times this number by the end of 1728. Mather added new material from hundreds of different sources, excised superseded glosses, and replaced them with more trenchant and up-to-date annotations. If he had intended a conventional commentary, then he would have had to recast periodically every chapter-and-verse annotation to accommodate these changes and to streamline them into a single coherent narrative for each chapter as new data became available. No doubt, this time-consuming effort would have generated multiple versions of nearly identical glosses along the lines of what can be found in some of the religious writings of Sir Isaac Newton.¹⁰² Instead, Mather could add new annotations on the same verse by simply formulating yet another Q & A, and by adding them to the existing gloss. That is why multiple (but dissimilar) explanations on the same chapter and verse can be found side by side or appended to the end of the chapter. This procedure was also advantageous from yet another perspective. It allowed readers to select the desired material or to skip unwanted portions without having to read through a continuous narrative from beginning to end. Furthermore, it saved reams of expensive paper, which otherwise would have been discarded.

A note of caution may here be in order lest we judge Mather's method of digesting and extracting his source material as intellectual dishonesty or plagiarism – proprietary conventions that were not nearly as narrowly defined in his day as they are today. In his effort to reconcile the new discoveries in the natural sciences and philosophy with the standards of Reformed exegesis, Mather is less concerned with the identity of the authors of his sources than with the significance of their discoveries: not *who* they are, but *what* they have to say. In this respect, Mather's “Biblia Americana” has much in common with the centuries-old tradition of compiling catenae, florilegia, or anthologies of biblical commentaries much prized by scholars throughout the ages. The invaluable *Εὐαγγελικὴ Προπαρασκευή*, or *Preparation for the Gospel* (4th c. CE), by Eusebius

¹⁰² See for instance Newton's exposition on 2 Kings 17:15–16 (Yahuda MSS Iand 21, Ms. 437, HRC 130) or his “Three bundles of notes ... related to ‘Theologiae Gentilis Origines Philosophicae,’” dating to c. 1680s and early 1690s (Yahuda Ms. 17). They are made available through the magnificent AHRC Newton Papers Project, by R. Iliffe and S. Mandelbrote <http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/prism.php?id=44>

Pamphili (c. 260–c. 340), bishop of Caesarea, or the *Catena Aurea* (Golden Chain), by St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74), or the nine-volume catena *Critici Sacri, sive, Doctissimorum Virorum in SS. Biblia Annotationes & Tractatus*, edited by John Pearson et al. (London, 1660) and subsequently digested by Matthew Poole in his *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque S. Scripturae Interpretum* (London, 1669–76), are some of the best-known compilations in Mather's time. Indeed, this genre allowed him to distill the "*Finer Thoughts*" into his commentary and nurture his penchant for philological problems of the Bible as text, for scientific discoveries, for social and cultural matters such as food, clothing, monuments, and customs of the ancients, and for pagan gods, rituals, heroes, myths, and peoples (including Native Americans) not commonly found in the conventional Bible commentaries of his time.

Not unusual for the time, verbatim extracts and close paraphrases were integrated with merely passing references to authors or works. This indiscriminate handling of intellectual property occurred in virtually all works of this genre. An example or two from the "Biblia" may suffice here to illustrate my point. In one instance, an exposition of the Psalms, Mather quotes a long passage from Basil Kennet's English translation of *Pensées de M. Pascal sur la religion, et sur quelques autres sujets* (1670) to serve as an annotation on the Psalms. After duly acknowledging the French philosopher and scientist Blaise Pascal (1623–62) and the title of his work, Mather comments, "It were easy for me in the way of Reading to make myself such a Master of these, and many more the like *Thoughts*, that my Reader should consider them, as no other than *Mine*, in the Proposing thereof. But I am not seeking & serving *my own* esteem in the World; it is the Service of *Religion* that I aim at; and I am desirous, that every one, whom God ha's employ'd as an Instrument of Good in that Service, may be duely acknowledged & remembred" (*BA*, Ps. 2:12).¹⁰³

Perhaps more to the point, Mather makes the following self-conscious acknowledgement at the conclusion of his commentary on Job:

Tho' I have chosen to putt these Observations, very much into my own Expressions, (and if I had imitated a great Part of those who sett up for *Authorism*, I might easily have made them to pass for *my own*;) yett I must own my honoured Master [*George*] *Hutcheson*, as the author of the Hints, which have afforded them. If any Acknowledgments at all belong to me, they are only those of a little *Industry*. But indeed we, both of us desire, *He* in the *Paradisian World*, and I hastening (as I hope) unto it, that instead of any Acknowledgments paid unto us, we may be *Nothing*, and they be all paid unto the Glorious Lord, from whom we have *Received*, all that we have *Offered* unto *Him*, & unto His People.

It is possible that sometimes in our *Illustrations* on this, & on other Parts of the Sacred Scripture, when I have been enriched with many good Thoughts together,

¹⁰³ Mather's long extract is from Basil Kennet's translation of Pascal, *Thoughts on Religion, and Other Subjects* (London, 1704) 87–92.

from one Man, I have not remembred always to *Quote* him, every Time I have *Us'd* him. Yett, I hope, no *such Writer* ha's gone without Proper Acknowledgments; nor indeed, any one been left wholly unmentioned, that ha's been useful to me. (*BA* Job, at the end)

Readers of the post-romantic era do not take lightly to the loose handling of conventions dear to our own age. After all, intellectual property and its commodification are protected by international copyright-laws and patents. But we must not forget that catenae and Bible commentaries throughout the ages were not shaped by romantic notions of originality or novelty, than by the compiler's purpose to place his productions in the service of God. Erudition, not originality, was in vogue; research, not invention, was considered proof of intelligence. Thus biblical commentaries then and now contain layers of paraphrases and citations at second, third, even fourth remove in which the wisdom of the ages becomes – without attribution – the common property of all, the collective heritage of mankind.

“Biblia Americana” Volume 1: Genesis and its Main Sources

Since each of the ten volumes of the forthcoming edition of “Biblia Americana” contains an analysis of Mather’s main source material synopsisized in the respective volume, a basic summary of his principal works digested in his commentary on Genesis (volume 1) will suffice here. The “Bibliography of Primary Works” at the end of the present volume provides the best overview of *all* sources abstracted, digested, cited, referred to, or otherwise mentioned in Mather’s gloss on Genesis. The majority of these works – it is important to realize – are quoted at second or third hand, whether or not they were part of the Mather family libraries or otherwise accessible to him at nearby Harvard. Borrowing books from private collections of relatives, colleagues, friends, and neighbors was yet another important means of enhancing the availability of sources for “Biblia Americana.” The works in the “Bibliography” identified with a bullet • were (at one time or the other) part of the Mather family libraries.¹⁰⁴ Those marked with a diamond ♦ were available at the Harvard College library as established in *Catalogus Librorum Bibliothecae Collegij Harvardini Quod est Cantabrigiae in*

¹⁰⁴ See “Catalogue of Dr. Cotton Mather’s Library Purchased by Isaiah Thomas” and “Remains of Mathers’ [*sic*] Library Folio & 4to. Purchased by I. Thomas” (MS copies at the AAS). J. H. Tuttle’s bibliography “Libraries of the Mathers” (1910) is still the best (albeit incomplete) source for the remains of the Mather family Libraries. Since its first publication a century ago, this bibliography of works in Cotton Mather’s personal library has been updated (by hand) with more than five hundred additional titles, the updated copy has not yet been published but is accessible at the AAS in Worcester. See also H. J. Cadbury’s fine analysis “Harvard College Library and the Libraries of the Mathers” (1941).

Nova Anglia (1723) and *Supplementum* (1725).¹⁰⁵ The origin, growth, dispersion, and loss of the huge collection of books and manuscripts in the Mather family libraries are well known; Julius H. Tuttle published his findings more than a century ago and traced the descent of the family libraries from the small collection brought to Massachusetts in 1635, by the Rev. Richard Mather (1596–1669), Cotton Mather's paternal grandfather, to the dispersal of the whole family's collection after the death of the Rev. Samuel Mather (1706–85), Cotton Mather's only surviving son, at the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁶

A word or two about the size of Cotton Mather's private library is in order before we can appreciate the significance of the works he digested in "Biblia Americana." No complete account of Mather's library exists because no inventory of its holdings or value was made at his death in 1728 – ostensibly to keep the prized collection from falling into the hands of his creditors.¹⁰⁷ However, John Dunton (1659–1733), a London printer and bookseller who visited Boston in 1686, went into raptures at the sight of Cotton Mather's library, which Dunton extolled as "the Glory of New-England, if not of all America" and "the best sight I had in Boston."¹⁰⁸ If the accumulated hoard of books merited such praise when young Mather was barely twenty-three, there is no telling what Dunton's ecstasy would have been like on seeing "between two and three thousand" volumes, the estimated size of Mather's private collection in 1700 (*Diary* 1:368). This estimate rose to "many more than Thirty Hundred Books" some years later, Cotton related in his autobiography (*Paterna* 42). Roughly one hundred years after Dunton's enthusiastic appraisal, Samuel Mather (1736–1813), Cotton Mather's Tory grandson who had inherited the huge libraries his father and grandfather left behind, had this to say about the prized collection:

My Father's Library was by far the most valuable Part of the family Property. It consisted of 7000 or 8000 Volumes of the most curious and chosen Authors, and a prodigious Number of valuable Manuscripts, which had been collected by my Ancestors for five Generations.

According to Samuel G. Drake, former president of the New England Historic-Genealogical Society, Cotton Mather's grandson believed that the

¹⁰⁵ Both of these catalogues are reprinted in the edition by W. H. Bond and H. Amory, *The Printed Catalogues of Harvard* (1996): 3–118.

¹⁰⁶ T. J. Tuttle, "Mather Libraries" (269–312).

¹⁰⁷ Mather inadvertently inherited considerable debts through his third wife, Lydia Lee George, a wealthy widow whom he married in 1715. Their prenuptial agreement may well have protected Mather's library from the auction block when his wife's ostensible wealth turned out to be encumbered by her deceased husband's creditors (*Diary* 2: 708, 745; Silverman, *Life and Times* 287, 383, 427–28).

¹⁰⁸ John Dunton, "Letter to George Larkin" (March 25, 1686), in *Letters written from New-England* (75). The untrustworthiness of Dunton's *Letters* is discussed in C. N. Greenough, "John Dunton's *Letters*" and "John Dunton Again."

value of the library amounted to “at least *eight thousand pounds sterling*.”¹⁰⁹ No doubt a sizable fortune in its day, this tidy sum, however, does not represent the true value Cotton himself put open “the Darling of my little Enjoyments . . . so very dear to me above all temporal Possessions” (*Diary* 2: 708, 745). For when he contemplated the conflagration he expected at Christ’s return, his bibliolatory almost got the better of him: “In the Midst of the *Desolations*, there has been scarce any thing, that some whom I know, would more beg to be spared, than the *Libraries*. Their most Pathetic Cry would be, *Oh! Spare the Libraries!*” The destruction of the 700,000 thousand volumes in the Alexandrian library, the loss of the library of Pergamus, the fire that destroyed more than 120,000 volumes in the library of Constantinople, and the transference of the famous Heidelberg library to the Vatican, “Tis as bad as *burnt*.” But that collection, too, “is quickly to be *Burnt* in a *Fire* more desolating than that which laid waste the Tower of *Shechem*” (“*Trip paradisus*” 241, 242). Indeed, the ravages of fire – so detrimental to the wooden edifices of the day – had decimated his father’s own collection once before. As Cotton Mather remembered the great fire of Boston, Nov. 1676, his father’s “own House also took a part in the Ruines: But by the Gracious Providence of God, he lost little of his Beloved Library: Not an Hundred Books from above a Thousand; Of those also he had an immediate Recruit, by a Generous Offer which the Honourable Mrs. Bridget Hoar made him, to take what he Pleas’d from the Library of her Deceased Husband” (*Parentator* 127). Books were treasured possessions to those who knew their value and rarity. No greater gift could be bestowed on either of the two Mathers than to supply their libraries with vellum-bound tomes of theology, history, or sacred geography – even bundles of sermon notes and manuscripts of unpublished scholarship.¹¹⁰ These became heirlooms, lovingly preserved and prized by generations of descendants. In more ways than one, the treasures of his family libraries are represented in Mather’s commentary on Genesis – the first of the ten-volume collection.

Only representative examples need here be treated. The “General Index” at the end of the present volume itemizes every reference to the authors and their works Mather relied on, along with the location of their citation references. Among the principal sources in Mather’s annotations on Genesis are works old and new. They are here classified according to their genre, because their use is (by and large) determined by the specific nature of the Book of Genesis: the *Primeval Story*: the Hexaemeral tradition, the garden, the genealogies, the flood, and the table of nations. The *Patriarchal Story*: the cycles of Abraham, Jacob, Esau, and God’s dealings with the patriarchs. The *Joseph Story*: the story of Jacob’s family, their travels, and Joseph’s rise to prominence in Egypt. In

¹⁰⁹ S. G. Drake, “Introductory,” *History of King Philip’s War* (1862) xxiii.

¹¹⁰ See especially *Diary* (1:214, 343, 368, 447, 532, and 2:2).

terms of genre, Mather's commentary on Genesis is dominated by works on chronology, natural science, geography, history and travel, Reformation and Post-Reformation literature, Patristic literature and Judaica. Given the nature of Genesis, these genres share many of the same concerns and frequently intersect and overlap with related works.

Chronology

The principal work of chronology Mather relies on in Genesis is William Whiston's *A Short View of the Chronology of the Old Testament, and of the Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (Cambridge, 1702), a state-of-the-art chronology based on the Masoretic texts, and a revision of Archbishop James Ussher's *Annales Veteris Testamenti, À Prima Mundi Origine Deducti* (London, 1650). For many of the faithful, Ussher's chronology was tantamount to holy writ; it not only identified the exact day and time when God created the universe and thus provided a fixed point from which all other dates could be firmly established, but also determined the calculations for generations thereafter, when Ussher's chronology became an integral part of the King James Version until the end of the nineteenth century.¹¹¹ Successor to Sir Isaac Newton's Lucasian chair of mathematics at Cambridge, Whiston (1667–1752) attempted to reconcile the many chronological and genealogical difficulties in the Septuagint, Masoretic, and Samaritan texts of the Bible. Mather and his peers were well familiar with these difficulties, and Whiston's astronomical calculations, based on the "Mathematical Canon" of Claudius Ptolemy's *Amalgest*, appeared to offer the best solution to this problem. What makes Whiston's *Short View* so attractive to theologians of the period is that Whiston also draws on the chronologies of Martino Martini (*Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima* [1659]), of Sir John Marsham (*Chronicus Canon Aegyptiacus Ebraicus Graecus* [1672]), of Philippe Couplet (*Tabula Chronologica Monarchiae Sinicae* [1686]), and of Simon de la Loubère (*Du Royaume de Siam* [1691]) – ponderous tomes which aimed at reconciling the ancient chronologies of the Chinese, Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Chaldeans with those of the Hebrews. Mather digested the more than five hundred pages of Whiston's *Short View* into twelve compacted folio pages and was truly grateful for "such a Treasure of Good Thoughts" because Whiston's work had "putt an End unto Thousands of Disputations" (*BA* 1:277, 300–01).

¹¹¹ As the venerable archbishop put it, "In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth, *Gen.* 1. *v.* 1. Which beginning of time, according to our Chronologie, fell upon the entrance of the night preceding the twenty third day of *Octob.* in the year of the Julian Calendar, 710," or 4004 BCE (Ussher, *Annals* 1).

Science

Mather's commentary on the Mosaic creation account is one of the longest sections in the "Biblia" on Genesis and draws on the following works: Thomas Pyle's *Paraphrase with Short and Useful Notes on the Books of the Old Testament* (London, 1717); William Whiston's *New Theory of the Earth, From its Original, to the Consummation of all Things* (London, 1696), which responds to Thomas Burnet's Cartesian *Telluris Theoria Sacra* (1681) and its later incarnation *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (London, 1691); Erasmus Warren's *Geologia: Or, A Discourse Concerning the Earth before the Deluge* (London, 1690); Richard Bentley's *A Confutation of Atheism From the Origin and Frame of the World* (London, 1693); Nehemiah Grew's *Cosmologia Sacra* (London, 1701); John Edwards' *Discourse concerning the Authority, Stile, and Perfection of the Old and New Testament* (London, 1693–95); Edmund Dickinson's *Physica Vetus & Vera* (London, 1702), and Robert Hooke's *Lectures and Discourses of Earthquakes and Subterraneous Eruptions*, in *Posthumous Works* (London, 1705). Mather digests the relevant portions of these works and incorporates them in his commentary on Genesis 1 and 2. In doing so, he presents his readers with a spectrum of explications, which ranges from the more traditional accounts of Thomas Pyle, Robert Hooke, Erasmus Warren, and John Edwards to the cutting-edge explications of Thomas Burnet, William Whiston, Richard Bentley, Nehemiah Grew, and Edmund Dickinson. Mather clearly favors the Newtonian expositions of Whiston, Bentley, and Grew, in part because they leave ample room for miracles to offset the laws of nature. But he is also fascinated with the atomistic approach of Dickinson, who valiantly struggles to reconcile Gassendi's atomism and Descartes' vortices with Burnet's mechanism and to keep the whole from surrendering to pure Deism. The philosophic positions of these authors (and Mather's response) are the subject of a detailed analysis in Section 2: "Biblia Americana" in the Context of Early Enlightenment Science.

Geography

Samuel Bochart's learned *Geographia Sacra. Phaleg De Dispersione gentium & terrarum divisione facta in edificatione turris Babel; Pars Posterior: Chanaan De Colonijs & sermone Phoenicum* (Caen, 1646) was the standard work on the geography of OT at least until the end of the eighteenth century. This magnificent work and its companion, *Hierozoicon Sive bipertitum opus De Animalibus Sacrae Scripturae* (London, 1663), an interpretative handbook on all the animals of the scriptures, were prized possessions by theologians and natural philosophers of all stripes who turned to the Bible for explanations on the dispersion of peoples and nations after Noah's flood and on the multitude of new species they discovered

in hitherto unexplored regions. An eminent Huguenot scholar, theologian, and Orientalist, Bochart (1599–1667) was the foremost authority on biblical geography and zoology of his time. He had read and incorporated every conceivable source and quoted lengthy excerpts to document his analyses. His *Phaleg*, *Chanaan*, and *Hierozoicon* went through at least five editions until the end of the eighteenth century. Cotton Mather's own copy of Bochart's *Geographia Sacra* came from the collection of the Rev. Samuel Lee (1625–91), a short-time resident of New England, whose library was advertised in "The Library of The Late Reverend and Learned Mr. Samuel Lee" (Boston, 1693) after Lee had perished in a dungeon of a French privateer, waiting to be ransomed.¹¹² Although greatly indebted to Bochart's *Geographia Sacra*, Lee was put off by his French colleague's pompous erudition: He "is certainly a learned author," Mather quoted Lee's Latin inscription, "but not one of the best judgment, and too verbose in the least necessary trifles. Also, he often shows off how much he has read, when it is hardly necessary. He could even have reduced his lengthy work to a tenth of the size" (BA 1:804). If this critique bespeaks the kind of professional jealousy that even men of the cloth were known to harbor, then Lee, Mather, and most of their contemporaries relied on Bochart without compunction. Mather's commentary on Genesis, ch. 10 (BA 1:711–804) is a good case in point. It is greatly indebted to Bochart's folio volumes, as is Samuel Lee's geography of Eden, a lost manuscript, which Mather had digested and incorporated in his commentary on Genesis, ch. 2 (BA 1:444–64) and in "*Trip paradisi*" (93–106). Mather's extracts from the geographies of Bochart and Lee were supplemented with summaries from Pierre-Daniel Huet's *Traité de la Situation du Paradis Terrestre* (Paris, 1691), which appeared in an English translation under the title *A Treatise of the Situation of Paradise* (London, 1694), and from Edward Well's *An Historical Geography of the Old Testament* (London, 1711–12). If these standard geographies did not supply his wants, Mather resorted to André Thevet's *Cosmographie de Levant* (Paris, 1556), Adriaan Reland's "De situ Paradisi terrestris" (1706–08) and Joseph Pitton de Tournefort's popular *Voyage du Levant* (1717), translated into English and appearing under the title *A Voyage into the Levant* (London, 1718). These post-Reformation geographies, it goes without saying, relied as much on each other as on the medieval and ancient geographies and histories by Stephanus Byzantius, Abu Abdullah Mohammed Ibn al-Sharif Idrisi (Nubian Geographer), Ammianus Marcellinus, Pomponius Mela, Claudius Ptolemaeus, Dionysius Periegetes, Strabo, Josephus Flavius, Pliny, Diodorus Siculus, Herodotus, Hesiod, Homer, Manetho, and Berosus whose works were known to reach beyond pre-history into the age of myth.

¹¹² See S.A. Green, "An Early Book-catalogue" (542), and T. Hornberger, "Samuel Lee" (341–55).

Medieval, Reformation, and Post-Reformation Theologians

Because of the specific nature of the first book of the Pentateuch, the category of medieval, Reformation, and Post-Reformation theologians is sparsely represented in Mather's commentary on Genesis. Among the major theologians of the medieval period – Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux, Rupert of Deutz, Denys the Carthusian, Jean Gerson, Hugh of St. Victor, Nicholas of Lyra – only Aquinas, Denys, Hugh, Rupert, and Lyra are referred to in the “Biblia” on Genesis. Thomas Aquinas and Lyranus have the largest number of hits – Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and Lyranus's *Postilla* are here represented with second-hand comments on social and historical matters. Much the same is true for the great Renaissance Humanists and Reformers: Marsilio Ficino, Johannes Reuchlin, Jean Calvin, Martin Luther, Heinrich Bullinger, Peter Martyr (Vermigli), Philipp Melanchthon, Huldrych Zwingli, Theodor Beza, Wolfgang Musculus – in declining order – receive only some attention, usually in terms of secondary references to historical matters. Post-Reformation theologians and their spiritual offspring in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries do much better in this respect. They are here listed in alphabetical order, but the frequency of their appearance in Mather's commentary on Genesis differs widely: Henry Ainsworth, Pierre Allix, Roberto Bellarmine, Jacques Bonfrerius, Johannes Buxtorf (father and son), George Calixtus, Dom Augustin Calmet, Jacobus and Louis Capellus, Hieronymus Cardano, Isaac and Meric Casaubon, Johannes Cocceius, Ludovicus De Dieu, Joannes Drusius, Pierre Du Moulin, Louis Ellies Du Pin, John Edwards, Paulus Fagius, Robert Fleming, Wolfgang Franzius, Nicholas and Thomas Fuller, Johannes Glasius, Hugo Grotius, Theodor Hackspan, Johann Heinrich Heidegger, Pierre-Daniel Huet, Johann Heinrich Hottinger, Jeremiah Jones, Francis Junius, Pierre Jurieu, Isaac La Peyrère, Joachim Langius, Cornelius à Lapide, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étables, Jean LeClerc, Johannes Leusden, John Lightfoot, Hiob Ludolphus, Andreas Masius, Joseph Mede, Giovanni Stefano Menochius, Joannes Mercerus, Arias Montanus, Sebastian Münster, Paulus Orosius, Simon Patrick, Conradus Pellicanus, Valentinius Benedictus Pererius, Dionysius Petavius, August Pfeiffer, Johannes Piscator, Edward Poccocke, Matthew Poole, Humphrey, John, and Matthew Prideaux, Claudius Salmasius, Jacques Saurin, Joseph Justus Scaliger, Valentin Schindler, John Selden, Thomas and William Sherlock, John Spencer, Richard Simon, Joannes Temporarius, Agostino Tornielli, Alfonso Tostado, Immanuel Tremellius, Francis Turretin, Gerardus Johannes Vossius, Ludovicus Vartomannus, Franciscus Vatablus, Compegius Vitringa, William Henry Vorstius, Dionysius and Gerard Joannes, and Isaac Vossius, Johann Christoph Wagenseil, and William Whiston. This list only represents a cross-section of the most significant authorities cited, referred to, or otherwise mentioned in Mather's commentary on Genesis. But even at this stage it is clear that Cot-

ton Mather's Reformed position did not keep him from citing the works of Roman Catholics, Jesuits, Lutherans, even from well-known heretics, without hesitation. The old gibe that he refused to quote from Roman Catholic authors may thus be laid to rest.

Of the many authors mentioned here, the Swiss Reformed theologian and Hebraist Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633–98) deserves to be singled out. As a close associate of the Dutch Reformed theologian Johannes Cocceius (1603–69), perhaps the leading proponent of covenant theology of his day, Heidegger was entrusted with composing the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675), designed to unite the Reformed churches of the Swiss cantons. Mather's interest in Heidegger mainly centered on the two-volume תַּאֲרֵי אֲבוֹתָיִם *De Historia Sacra Patriarcharum Exercitationes Selectae* (Amsterdam 1667–71), a study of Rashi's *Aboth* and of his commentary on the Pentateuch by the renowned philosopher Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040–1105). Heidegger's polyglot study of every conceivable aspect of the Patriarchal economy is one of Mather's principal sources. It supplied him with choice glosses from Rashi, Nachmanides, Maimonides, Ibn Ezra, and many other Talmudic commentators, which Heidegger fortified with citations from the Church Fathers and from his contemporaries. Mather digested Heidegger's thousand-page *Historia Sacra Patriarcharum* into little less than seventy pages and dispersed them throughout his commentary on Genesis.

Patristic Literature

The Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church are well represented in Mather's commentary on Genesis. Their names are listed according to the frequency of their occurrence, with St. Augustine at the top of the list with 114 and St. Gregory of Nyssa with 3 references at the bottom. The numerals in parentheses signify the number of times they are cited or referred to: St. Augustine of Hippo (114), Eusebius of Caesarea (100), St. Jerome (77), St. Chrysostom of Constantinople (35) Origen of Alexandria (34), St. Epiphanius of Constantinople (26), Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian (26), Theodoret of Cyrrihus (24), St. Ambrose of Milan (25), St. Clement of Alexandria (25), St. Cyril of Alexandria (22), St. Athanasius of Alexandria (21), St. Irenaeus of Lyon (12), Lactantius (11), St. Justin Martyr (11), St. Eustathius of Antioch (9), St. Cyprian of Carthage (7), St. Gregory I, the Great (7), St. Basil of Caesarea (6), St. Gregory of Nazianzus (6), St. Gregory of Nyssa (3). The majority of the ancient Fathers are quoted at second hand, even though editions of their main works were generally accessible at Harvard during Mather's lifetime.

Judaica

Perhaps most revealing are Cotton Mather's many citations (at first and second hand) from Jewish historians and Rabbinic commentators. The large number of references to the Talmud, Mishnah, Midrash, Zohar, and Targums, along with citations from medieval Jewish travelers, indicates that Mather's commentary on Genesis covers the whole range of available resources to enrich his "Biblia Americana." Of the most important Jewish commentators on the Pentateuch, Mather cites or refers to Rashi's commentary on the Chumash and Talmud 71 times, to Maimonides' *Moreh Nebuchim* and *Mishneh Torah* 60, to Abraham Ibn Ezra's classic commentary on the OT 78 times, to Nachmanides 26 times, to David Kimchi's extant commentary on Genesis 20 times, to Isaac Abarbanel's huge commentary on the Hebrew Bible 19 times, to Bachya (Bechai) ben Asher 8 times, to Yaakov's *Baal HaTurim*, a commentary on the Pentateuch, 6 times; and to *Midrash Tanchuma*, an Aggadic midrash on the Pentateuch, attributed to R. Tanchuma bar Abba, 6 times. The Aggadic *Midrash Rabbah* occupies a significant place with 114 references; the *Pirke de R. Eliezer*, by R. Eliezer ben Hyracanus, is mentioned nearly 50 times; such standard commentaries and histories by Philo Judaeus and Flavius Josephus 61 and 120 times respectively;¹¹³ individual tractates from the Babylonian Talmud are cited 59 times; the *Zohar*, or *Book of Splendor*, appears on 10 separate occasions; and the *Targums Hierosolymitanus*, *Jonathan ben Uzziel*, and *Onkelos* – almost exclusively based on Brian Walton's *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta* (London, 1653–57) – are cited or referred to 26, 44, and 30 times respectively. Finally, Rabbi Benjamin Tudela's valuable *Itinerarium*, a twelfth-century travelogue of the Middle East and Mediterranean world, is represented with 18 references. In short, Cotton Mather's keen interest in the classic works of Jewish commentators and in those of Christian Hebraists – whether quoted a first or second hand – is a testimony to his extraordinary erudition as an American theologian. His participation in the transatlantic community of scholars and in the transference of their philosophic ideas – whether ancient or modern – has largely gone unrecognized. And yet, the diverse sources Mather relied on in his commentary on Genesis represent only a sampling of his interests and of his vast learning. The full extent of what he amassed in his commentary on the whole Bible will be better known only after the remaining nine of our ten-volume edition of the *Biblia Americana* have been published.

With this promise of things to come, why did Mather choose to give his life's work the provocative title *Biblia Americana*? This choice is all the more momentous if we remember that the term "American" (at least until the

113 On this topic, see L. H. Feldman, "The Influence of Josephus on Cotton Mather's *Biblia Americana*" (122–55).

mid-1750s) signified "Native American," rather than "American of European descent." Until less than a century ago, the designation "Native American" was anything but flattering. It pejoratively signified "Indian" or "savage," as the indigenous populations were labeled by European explorers from the moment of first contact. Cotton Mather, to be sure, was no exception. It is therefore all the more noteworthy that Mather appears to be the first descendent of European colonists to designate himself an "American."¹¹⁴ The issue is an interesting one in terms of American identity formation, when European colonists and their descendents began to embrace their New World identity as more than a purely geographic signifier. Certainly, the Puritan origins of the American Self are well known – even long before Sacvan Bercovitch underscored these origins in his study which appeared a year before the bicentennial celebration commemorated America's political independence from Britain. In Mather's case, more than mere pride of place in the hierarchy of spiritual elites (the elect) appears to be involved. In his millennialist tract "Problema Theologicum" (c. late 1690s–1703), Mather protested against Joseph Mede's exclusion of the American hemisphere from the blessings of Christ's millennial kingdom, at a time when many chiliasts believed that the Messiah's rule would be limited (for most of his thousand-year reign) to the realm of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions as they were known to the apostles. This geographic limitation excluded not only most of Asia but also all of America and the as yet undiscovered islands of the world. Mather was vehemently opposed to this curtailment: "I that am an *American*," he countered in his tract, "must needs be Lothe to allow all *America* still unto the *Devils* Possession, when our Lord shall possess all the rest of the World" (412). "It was never intended that the Church of our Lord, should be confined always within the Dimensions of *Strabo's* Cloak; and that, *All the World* [Matth. 24:14] should always be no more, than it was, when *Augustus* taxed it" (*Theopolis Americana* 46).¹¹⁵ Mather insisted that at the Second Coming, Christ's kingdom would also extend to the New World – no matter what Joseph Mede conjectured.

What, then, is specifically "American" about "Biblia Americana"? One of Mather's principal aims in his commentary is to demonstrate that theologians in the English colonies of North America fully participated in the European debate. He corresponded with a large number of English and continental theologians – even as far as India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka).¹¹⁶ His own private

114 See his biography of John Eliot, *The Triumphs of the Reformed Religion, in America* (Boston, 1691), "Dedication" (sign. A6r) and *Magnalia Christi Americana* (105)

115 See R. Smolinski, "*Israel Redivivus*" (372). The passage from Mather's manuscript "Problema Theologicum" (68) appears in J. S. Mares, "Edition" (412).

116 See Mather's *India Christiana* (Boston, 1721), a letter in Latin which Mather had sent (in 1717) to the German Pietist Bartholomew Ziegenbalg (1683–1719), who had translated the scriptures into Tamil and served as a missionary in the Danish settlement of Tranquebar (SE India). K. Silverman has examined Mather's foreign correspondence and other missives in *Selected Letters*.

library and that of Harvard furnished him with up-to-date publications. More significantly, Mather incorporated in his "American" commentary specifically American subjects, which he later gathered in his "Curiosa Americana," his scientific communications with the Royal Society of London, some of which were published (in excerpts) in the Society's *Proceedings*. In "Biblia Americana" Mather brings to bear on biblical exegesis his knowledge of Native American religious practices and beliefs, their origin, methods of time-keeping, Indian creation stories and accounts of the Flood, and Indian medicine; American flora and fauna, ornithology (esp. the Passenger Pigeons) and entomology; rattlesnakes, earthquakes, and volcanoes; and his collection of American fossils, experimental observations about plant hybridization, and thoughts on African slavery. Significantly, Mather rejected the age-old belief in Noah's curse of Ham as the cause of his dark-skinned African descendents. Instead, he embraced a theory of skin pigmentation and climatic influences as the origin of the different skin colors of mankind (*BA* 1:672, 674–75, 698–99; *BA* 2, Exod. 21:16).¹¹⁷ If this enlightened view suggests that he was well ahead of his time, then Mather's opposition to the slave trade and to the crime of "man stealing" deserves equal credit. In short, Cotton Mather's "Biblia Americana" is a unique record of scholarship in the English colonies which is only now becoming available to a community wider than that of academics with access to microfilms or to the holograph manuscript at the Massachusetts Historical Society.

117 See J. Stievermann, "Genealogy of Races."

Section 2

“Biblia Americana” in the Context of Early Enlightenment Science: How to Go to Heaven, or How Heaven Goes?

Cotton Mather, Puritan New England’s eminent theologian, historian, and virtuoso of natural philosophy, took a leading role in introducing what is now called the new science to colonial North America. Mather, historians have established, not only popularized Newtonian science from his Boston pulpit but also embraced much of the early Enlightenment scholarship of the day.¹ Of a decidedly empirical bent, he studied the works of his European peers, supplied the Royal Society of London with his own American offerings (his “*Curiosa Americana*”), and hailed scientific affirmations that traced God’s providential hand in the physical universe.² In his much admired *The Christian Philosopher*, published for the Royal Society of London (1720/21), he set out to establish “that *Philosophy* [i.e., natural science] is no *Enemy*, but a mighty and wondrous *Incentive to Religion*” and “that PHILOSOPHICAL RELIGION” exhibits “a most sensible *Character*, and victorious *Evidence* of a *reasonable Service*.” Let us be thankful, for “Behold, a *Religion*, which will be found *without Controversy*; a

1 Among the most important discussions are G. L. Kittredge, “Scientific Communications”; T. Hornberger, “The Date, the Source,” “Cotton Mather’s Annotations,” “Notes,” and “Samuel Lee” (esp. 352–53); P. Miller, *New England Mind* (1953); O. T. Beall and R. H. Shryock, *Cotton Mather* (1954); R. P. Stearns, *Science* (150–61, 403–26); G. W. Jones, “Introduction,” *Cotton Mather: The Angel of Bethesda* (xii–xl); P. Vartanian, “Cotton Mather”; J. Jeske, “Cotton Mather: Physico-Theologian”; W. U. Solberg, “Science and Religion in Early America” and “Introduction” to *The Christian Philosopher* (xix–cxxxiv); M. P. Winship, *Seers of God* (1996); and, of course, the assessments of Mather’s interest in natural science by R. Middlekauff, *The Mather* (1971) 279–304; D. Levin, *Cotton Mather* (91–94); and K. Silverman, *The Life and Times* (243–54, 405–10).

2 Of the several collections of “*Curiosa Americana*” that Mather sent to London, only a small handful were abstracted in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*. Mather’s First Series (1712), synopsis in “*An Extract of several Letters from Cotton Mather*” (62–71), include his description of giant bones found at Claverack, his disquisition on the “*Shittim Wood*” used for Noah’s Ark, Indian medicines, on American turkeys and Passenger Pigeons, on the psychosomatic power of the imagination, monstrous births, miraculous cures, Indian calendars, rainbows and parhelia, earthquakes, hurricanes, hieroglyphics, and many other curiosities that he ultimately incorporated into his “*Biblia Americana*.” The value of Mather’s “*Curiosa Americana*” is assessed by Beall and Shryock (42–50), Stearns (405–25), and Silverman (*Life and Times* 244–49).

Religion, which will challenge all possible Regards from the *High*, as well as the *Low*, among the People." God be praised for "a PHILOSOPHICAL RELIGION: And yet how *Evangelical!*" (7, 9).³

Mather's words of wonder convinced Raymond Phineas Stearns to conclude that in colonial New England, "there was no conflict between science and religion, nor were there any controversies of this nature either in colonial America or in the homeland."⁴ Likewise, in his superb edition of *The Christian Philosopher*, Winton U. Solberg asserts that "Mather always saw harmony rather than conflict between science and religion" (xxxiii). Mather's *Christian Philosopher* has thus become the hallmark of a widely accepted concord between faith and fact in early America. Such a consensus is not surprising, for Mather self-consciously sought to emulate natural theology's design argument as expressed in the works of Robert Boyle, John Ray, John Harris, George Cheyne, and William Derham – all of which Mather mined and copied into his American text. In fact, these five authors alone account for nearly fifty percent of Mather's *Christian Philosopher*.⁵ Invariably, their voluntarist belief in nature's divine order imposed by an all-wise God who can rescind nature's laws at will shapes the writers' selection of evidence as much as it colors the logic of their inferences. There is simply no room for blind chance in the Great Chain of Being, no species to which God had not assigned its particular place and purpose, no survival of the fittest or extinction, no natural catastrophe that God had not ordained at the beginning of time to accomplish His eternal plan. No wonder, then, the circular reasoning driving their teleology precluded any conflict between science and faith.⁶

But Mather's celebration of natural theology, however emphatic in the works he intended for public consumption, is much less certain and forthcoming in the unexpurgated record of his evolving thought. His massive commentary on the Bible, "Biblia Americana," thus becomes the litmus test for determining the degree to which Mather was committed to reinterpreting scripture in the light of early Enlightenment science. Otho T. Beall and Richard H. Shryock are not altogether off the mark when they suggest that "in the 'Biblia [Americana]' Mather had examined the Scriptures in terms of science, whereas

3 All page references to this work are to the Solberg edition. Hornberg's article "The Date of Mather's Interest in Science" (413–20) proves that that interest was not confined to the minister's old age.

4 Stearns (160) comes to the same conclusion as Perry Miller does in his *New England Mind* (437–38).

5 In his "Recapitulation of Mather's Sources," Solberg tabulates the number of lines Mather culls from his principal sources (*Christian Philosopher* 465).

6 R. Westfall details the pitfalls of circular reasoning among the physico-theologians of the day in his *Science and Religion* (49–69). T. Hornberger, in *Scientific Thought* (82); R. Middlekauff (*Mathers* 284); and more recently M. P. Winship, in "Prodigies" (93n, 105), are distrustful of this display of surface harmony in early Enlightenment America.

in *The Christian Philosopher* he reversed this by surveying science from a religious perspective" (*American Medicine* 50). If the theologian in Mather is at odds with Mather the natural philosopher, if his belief in God's capacity to suspend nature's laws clashes with the Cartesian view that these laws and matter operate autonomously, then the most productive way to examine those contradictions, I would suggest, is to turn to those passages in his exegetical commentary in which Mather was at greatest pains to collate Scripture and Nature into one seamless volume. In "Biblia Americana," as he weighed in on a number of hotly contested issues of his day – the creation story, Noah's flood, and such miraculous events as the confusion of tongues at Babel, the ten plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and Joshua's arrest of the sun – Mather wavered between public affirmations and personal misgivings. After all, it is one thing to welcome the breath-taking discoveries of the age, yet quite another to reconcile them with the traditional interpretations that are directly affected by these breakthroughs.

Science and the Six Days of Creation

Mather's commentary on the Book of Genesis alone consists of nearly 430 folio pages, arranged in double columns. Its bulkiness is not really surprising; the early Enlightenment's revolutionary discoveries posed significant challenges to theologians and believers of all stripes who sought to harmonize the old with the new. In his commentary on the Mosaic creation account (Hexaemeron), Mather draws on a vast variety of ancient and modern sources and cites creation myths from Chaldea, Egypt, Greece, and Rome in the same space as typological and mystical readings from the Talmud, Targums, the early Church Fathers, and Renaissance and Reformation commentators. He incorporates up-to-date pre-Newtonian and Newtonian explanations from such contemporaries as Lord Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale; from conservative and Latitudinarian divines such as Robert Fleming, Pierre Jurieu, and Thomas Pyle; and from physico-theologians and natural philosophers such as Robert Hooke, Edmund Dickinson, Nehemiah Grew, Richard Bentley, William Whiston, and Sir Isaac Newton. Over a period of more than thirty years, Mather gathered serviceable excerpts from their writings, but he seemingly had no intent to order the selections by chronology or significance. The sequential arrangement of Mather's source material should therefore not be read as his endorsement of one account above another but as his delight in the richness of the Mosaic Hexaemeron and in the multiplicity of explanations it called for.

Unfortunately, dating his various entries is fraught with difficulty. Identifying the publication dates for his countless sources is easy enough, but they only allow one to approximate the relative date for each entry in the bound manuscript volumes. Mather initially numbered each new entry in sequential order.

Yet he was forced to abandon this counting method long before he had filled his six volumes. Renumbering thousands of entries was therefore an inefficient and never-ending process.⁷ Only in rare cases did Mather juxtapose old with new entry, for he intended a state-of-the-art commentary that would rival those of his English peers. Nonetheless, Mather's evolving intellectual position can be gauged from his frequent asides and his dissatisfaction with those neoteric philosophers who, in his opinion, crossed the line.

Mather's scientific explanations excerpted in his "Biblia Americana" demarcate the periphery of legitimacy he allows his commentators to probe from the center of conventional interpretations. The range of authors he included is as revealing as his critique of their theories, for the spectrum of views he considered suggests the degree to which he was willing to allow biblical authority to be questioned as he explored early Enlightenment science in the work he thought the crowning achievement of his life. In treating the Mosaic Hexaemeron – in more than seventy folio pages in double columns (*BA* 1:302–476) – Mather sampled ancient cosmogonies, early Enlightenment science, and philological and textual disputes about the authorship of the Pentateuch.⁸ During his lifetime, the biblical creation story was experiencing unprecedented challenges, with Peripatetics pitting their theory of the eternity of the universe against those of conservative physico-theologians who insisted that God had created the universe out of nothing, with Copernican heliocentrism replacing the ancient Ptolemaic geocentric cosmogonies, and with Cartesian mechanism and the immutable laws of nature contesting the venerable miracles and providentialist views of conventional literalists. The sudden explosion of knowledge and the formation of new fields of inquiry – physics, chemistry, botany, geology – disrupted the usual progress of biblical exegesis and demanded the attention of the brightest and the best.⁹

Mather's first extract concerning the Creation (*BA* 1:303–06), written in a hand different from that of the remainder of his holograph manuscript, is from Thomas Pyle (1674-c. 1756), an Anglican clergyman and prebendary of Salisbury, whose two-volume *Paraphrase with Short and Useful Notes on the Books of the Old Testament* (London, 1717) was accessible to Mather at the Harvard College library.¹⁰ In his preface, Pyle announces, "*I have had all just Regard to those Modern Discoveries, and vast Improvements in Philosophical Knowledge ... yet*

7 See my discussion of this issue in Section 1.

8 Mather does not paginate his "Biblia Americana" holograph manuscript; all recto and verso paginations refer to those permanently established in the present edition.

9 See Mather, *Christian Philosopher* (18–19); A. D. White, *History of the Warfare* (1:171–208); I. B. Cohen, *Birth of a New Physics* (1985); A. R. Hall, *From Galileo to Newton* (1963); G. McColley, "The Ross-Wilkins Controversy" (153–89); R. Westfall, *Science and Religion* (70–145); M. C. Jacob, *Newtonians* (143–200). F. C. Haber, *Age of the World* (1959); P. Rossi, *Dark Abyss of Time* (1984) and *Birth of Modern Science* (2007); C. C. Albritton, Jr., *Abyss of Time* (1980).

10 *Catalogus Librorum Bibliothecae Collegij Harvardini* (1723) and *Supplementum* (1725) 111.

have I endeavoured so to express every Circumstance, as not (directly and explicitly) to clash with any one particular Hypothesis or Opinion."¹¹ Pyle's distinctly Newtonian bent never seriously compromises conservative exegesis of the Mosaic creation story, and his determination to keep the Battle of the Books out of his commentary appeals to Mather. With Pyle at his elbow, Mather predictably rejects the ancient Peripatetic heresy of a universe that was not created by God but had always been in existence; frowns upon such Necessitarians as Thales and Cicero who, while conceding that an Efficient Cause had formed the universe, asserted that its matter was preexisting and eternal; and decries the modern Cartesian disciples of Democritus and Epicurus, who insisted that an infinite number of imperishable atoms coalesced through blind chance or immanent mechanical laws to form countless worlds in a vacuum of immeasurable proportion. Mather quotes Pyle's disclaimer:

The World did not exist from all Eternity, by Necessity of Nature, nor did it, or any Part of it, come into being by chance and Fortune, but all things whatever, whether Visible or Invisible, Material, or Immaterial were in the beginning created, by the Power of that infinitely Wise, Good, and Alsufficient being whom we call GOD. (BA 1:303)¹²

Adding no commentary of his own, Mather allows Pyle's voluntarist cosmogony to uphold the flag and staff for conformist theologians. The harmony between science and religion so carefully controlled in Pyle's excerpt foreshadows much of what Mather would later do in his *Christian Philosopher*.¹³

11 Pyle, *Paraphrase* (1:A6v). Pyle situates his commentary between the radical scholarship of the French Oratorian Richard Simon (1638–1712) and the Dutch Arminian theologian Jean LeClerc (1657–1736) on the one hand and, on the other, the conservative commentaries of the celebrated Nonconformist Henry Ainsworth (c. 1571–1622), of the Bishop of Ely Simon Patrick (1625–1707), of the Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells Richard Kidder (1633–1703), and of Presbyterian minister Matthew Henry (1662–1714). In his *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678), Richard Simon denied the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and postulated that groups of public writers periodically recast and updated much of the OT to accommodate their specific historical exigencies. Likewise, in his anonymous *Sentimens de quelques Théologiens* (1685), appearing in a partial English translation as *Five Letters* (1690); and in his *Genesis* (1693), translated as *Twelve Dissertations* (1696), LeClerc questioned the verbatim inspiration of the prophets and argued that Moses authored only parts of the Pentateuch. For detail, see section 3 of this introduction.

12 Pyle, *Paraphrase* (1:2). Years later, Mather refutes Aristotle's argument about the eternity of the universe with a counterargument from George Cheyne's *Philosophical Principles* (1705) 95–98: "That the Quantity of *Light* and *Heat* in the *Sun* is daily decreasing. It is perpetually emitting Millions of *Rays*, which do not return into it. ... 'Tis true, the Decrease of the *Sun* is very inconsiderable. It shews that the Particles of *Light* are extremely small, since the *Sun* for so many Ages has been constantly emitting Oceans of *Rays*, without any very sensible Diminution. However, 'tis from hence evident, that the *Sun* had a Beginning; it could not have been from *Eternity*; *Eternity* must have wasted it: It had long ere now been reduced unto less than the *Light of a Candle*" (*Christian Philosopher* 40).

13 See Mather's *Christian Philosopher* (18–42, 89–95).

With the old familiar story of the Creation thus firmly in place, Mather felt reassured to tackle the controversial *New Theory of the Earth, From its Original, to the Consummation of all Things* (London, 1696), by Anglican polymath William Whiston, Isaac Newton's fellow Arian and successor to the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics at Cambridge. Whiston's *New Theory*—like the avalanche of refutations that followed in its wake—was spawned by Thomas Burnet's popular *Telluris Theoria Sacra* (1681) and its later incarnation in English, *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (London, 1691).¹⁴ Mather had repeatedly mocked Burnet's thesis that the earth's surface was, in their day, the mere ruins of the antediluvian crust that had collapsed in upon vast subterranean caverns filled with the ocean's waters.¹⁵ If this "Burnettian Romance" could be drowned in ridicule, Whiston's *New Theory* was not so easily dismissed: "Learned Men of late used several *Essayes*, all not with *equal Success*, to rescue the Inspired Writings of *Moses*, from the *Hardships* that have been put upon them," Mather guardedly prefaces Whiston's abstract. "You must not expect, that I declare myself, how far *I* concur, with every Point, that shall bee offered. And I will also leave *you*, to the same Liberty that I take *myself*" (BA 1:337–38). Mather's half-hearted disclaimer and hedged praise for Whiston's *New Theory*, however, barely conceal the dilemma of New England's foremost virtuoso: his interest in the new natural sciences conflicts with the received exegesis of the Mosaic Hexaemeron.

Whiston had postulated that the great Chaos of the First Day, as described by Moses (Gen. 1:1–5), refers to the creation of our sublunary earth alone; the foundation of the universe, Whiston argued, was the product of an antecedent event, one not covered by Moses. In pondering the possibilities, Mather finds some logic in Whiston's position. How could the celestial bodies proceeding from a single center traverse such "Immense Distances" as to arrive at their "vastly *Remote Seats*" in outer space in so short a time as "a *few Hours*" of the First Day, he asks as he critiques the standard creation story, especially if the centripetal force of universal gravitation (Newton's Second Law of Motion) pulls all moving bodies toward "the common Center of *Gravity*"? Even if a thousand years were allowed for each of the six days of Creation, the magnetic property of matter would countermand the velocity of bodies wafting across space. Mather muses,

Now, if instead of the, *Vis Centripeta*, a *Vis Centrifuga*; instead of *Mutual Attraction*, a *Mutual Repulsion* or *Avoidance* were found to bee [a neat summary of our era's big-bang theory], the standing unchang'd Law of *Nature*, and Property of *Matter*,

¹⁴ See K. Collier, *Cosmogonies* (68–91), and M. H. Nicholson, *Mountain Gloom* (184–270). By 1755, Whiston's *New Theory* had gone through at least six editions, with Burnet's *Sacred Theory* through at least seven by 1759. James E. Force argues that "By 1700," Burnet's *Theory* "had stimulated thirty replies," in *William Whiston* (35).

¹⁵ See my *Threefold Paradise* (94) and Mather's commentary on Noah's Flood (Gen. 8:19), in BA 1:662–63.

this might have look'd like possible. But, when the contrary Force of *Gravitation* obtains, and that, as far as wee have any Means of knowing, *Universally*, there is now no *Room* for such an *Imagination*. . . . In fine, This *Fancy*, that the *Heavenly Bodies* proceeded originally from the *Terrestrial Chaos*, and cast themselves off from it every *Way*, supposes the *Earth* to bee the *Center* of the *World*, or of all that *System* of *Bodies*, and them to bee placed in a kind of *Circumference* every *Way* about it. But this *Prolemaic* System of the *World*, must not hope, at this *Time of Day*, to bee entertained with considerate *Men*. (*BA* 1:342, 343).¹⁶

Suddenly, the tidy arrangement of the Mosaic Hexaemeron, no doubt pleasing in its poetic simplicity, seemed strangely outmoded and inadequate when examined within the context of the new theories. Though sacrosanct among the faithful for millennia, the old Mosaic order strained the credulity of physico-theologians like Mather as they wrestled with the problem of squaring religion and science according to one common denominator.

In the early Enlightenment, then, the hoary model of the cosmos began to lose force as the new science developed alternative concepts of space and time, hitherto the purview of theology. Mather grappled with the implications of Whiston's *New Theory*: To allot to Almighty God the "disproportionate" five out of six days to create the earth alone, yet "crouding into *One single Day*" the formation of our sun, moon, stars, and the rest of the vast cosmos – this disorderly arrangement is not only against reason but also disrespectful of God's sublime wisdom, he reasoned. If anyone were to propose such a flawed cosmogony, it would "bee look'd on as Marks of *Unskilfulness, Foolishness, & Imprudence*, in parallel Cases; & for which *Meer Men*, could not escape the most severe and Indecorous Imputations" (*BA* 1:344).¹⁷ If the lopsided allocation of activities during the first five days of Creation failed to prompt discerning minds to question the perfection of the Grand Scheme, Mather went on, then God's labors recorded for the sixth day, plainly "too Numerous for so short a Space," should certainly do

¹⁶ Whiston, *New Theory* (pt. 1, sec 4, pp. 37, 38); See also Mather's *Christian Philosopher* (89–90). On 23 December 1714, Judge Samuel Sewall recorded the following comment in his diary: "Dr. C. Mather preaches excellently from Ps. 37. Trust in the Lord &c. only spake of the Sun being in the centre of our System. I think it inconvenient to assert such Problems" (*Diary* 2:779); I wish to thank Kenneth P. Minkema for drawing my attention to Sewall's remarks. Whether Sewall persuaded his old friend Cotton Mather to abandon his acknowledgment of Copernicus' heliocentrism is not known, but the published version of Mather's Thursday lecture, *Pascentius* (1714), omits all references to the topic. Sewall's disapproving remark illustrates that Copernicus was not universally embraced in New England, even among the educated elite. Grant McColley (153–89) traces the conquest of Copernican heliocentrism in Britain from the late Renaissance to the end of the seventeenth century; Dorothy Stimson's still useful *Gradual Acceptance of the Copernican Theory* (85–106) does so for continental Europe; and Donald Fleming's "Judgment upon Copernicus" (2:160–75) does so for New England. Fleming's article especially demonstrates that although Copernican heliocentrism was readily discussed in almanacs and at Harvard in the last three decades of the seventeenth century, Copernicus and Kepler did not triumph over Ptolemy's geocentrism until the early eighteenth century.

¹⁷ Whiston, *New Theory* (pt. 1, sec. 5, p. 45).

so. In that brief period, God had supposedly fashioned earth's animals, including Adam; given Adam's latitude to exercise his dominion over other animals by naming each species by virtue of its nature; dropped Adam into a "Deep Sleep" (which must have lasted "more than a *Few Minutes*") during which God shaped the protoplast's rib into Eve and healed the wound, then giving the pair time enough to "know" each other, identify their food, and learn God's Law; and, finally, permitted the arch marplot of Eden to wriggle himself into the couple's confidence and precipitate their Fall and expulsion – all in a single day of twenty-four hours, according to "the vulgar *Hypothesis*" of things! (*BA* 1:347, 343).¹⁸

"Now, tho' *God* Almighty can do all things in what Portions of *Time* Hee pleases," Mather readily concedes, "*Man* cannot. Hee must have *Time* allow'd him, in Proportion to the *Business*, that is to be done. But behold here, Business enough allotted into the *Sixth Day*, to require no small Part of a *Year*, for the Dispatch of it!" (*BA* 1:347).¹⁹ Even if Adam were created in a state of maturity and with full knowledge and understanding of his assigned tasks, their sheer number would encompass a lifetime, not a day.²⁰ How, then, can a rational solution be devised if God's creation is constrained by his own physical laws? "It is an Indecent Thing to Recurr unto *Pure Miracle*, for the *Acceleration* of them, into the Space of *Twenty Four Hours*," Mather affirms with reference to Whiston, violates "the *Lawes of Motion*, [which] were now already Stated and Fixed in the World" (*BA* 1:347).²¹ In this Cartesian vortex, no elbow room seems left for God's special providence to arbitrate between inherent necessity and temporal exigency.

If Mather's digest of Whiston's *New Theory* is correct, Whiston did not wholly subscribe to Newton's theological voluntarism, which held that the Creator may contravene the course of nature at any time (though he rarely does).²² Although Whiston does not yet confine the omnipotent God or his

¹⁸ Whiston, *New Theory* (pt. 2, bk. 2, ch. 3, pp. 88, 89, 90).

¹⁹ Whiston, *New Theory* (pt. 2, bk. 2, ch. 3, p. 90). This rationalist explication was not original to Mather (or Whiston, his source) either. For Simon Patrick, bishop of Ely, in his introductory commentary on Gen. 3, raised the same issue: "All which could not be performed so speedily as some have imagined: for tho God can do as he pleases in an instant, yet man cannot; and God did not in one Day create the World. And, besides that some time was necessary for the transacting all these things; it is not likely the Devil would immediately set upon *Eve*, as soon as the Command was laid upon them; but rather let it be a little forgotten. And if the time be observed when he assaulted her, it will much confirm this Opinion, which was in the absence of her Husband; for that we cannot easily believe to have been upon the same Day they were created," in *Commentary upon the First Book of Moses, called Genesis* (London, 1695) 59.

²⁰ Whiston, *New Theory* (pt. 2, bk. 4, ch. 1, pp. 227–28).

²¹ Whiston, *New Theory* (pt. 2, bk. 2, ch. 3, pp. 89, 90).

²² In his classic *Adventures of Ideas* (140–59), A. N. Whitehead describes two contrasting views of nature's laws as they obtained in much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: (1) *Theological voluntarism* is the metaphysical idea that an omnipotent God endowed matter and nature with principles of motion that are passive and therefore completely dependent on God's volition; that since the properties of matter (atoms) are extension, impenetrability, and

immutable will to the immanent laws of nature, as Descartes had been wont to do, the protoplast – the crown of God's creation – is ostensibly subject to the limitations of his humanity. Whiston's reasoning thus implies that matter or atoms (though indivisible and having extension) are *not* inert substances, as Isaac Newton insisted they were, but are instead endowed with active, self-sufficient principles (energy) that are inherent in nature and governed by mechanical laws whose sole constraint is that of their own constitution.²³ Immutable and mutually interdependent, these laws comprise reality to the seeming exclusion of any interference by an external agency that might suspend their integrity. Mather's illustration about God's omnipotence and Adam's impotence therefore identifies a fissure in the texture of Newtonianism, which in the works of such Enlightenment philosophers as Blount, Toland, Leibniz, Hume, Reid, Priestley, and Hutton widened into an unbridgeable gap.²⁴

The Abyss of Time and the Limits of Newtonianism

Quaint yet faintly modern as Whiston's conjecture may appear from the safe distance of hindsight, it caused havoc among theologians of all persuasions, for in it they witnessed the Mosaic Hexaemeron crumble before their very eyes. Granted, Whiston was not the first physico-theologian to take issue with the

inertia, the motion of matter originates in God, the prime mover; that an active principle sustains motion and activity in nature by counteracting resistance; that this active principle is the source of gravity; finally, that the causes or laws of nature are therefore superimposed from the outside and are completely dependent on an omnipotent deity, who can abrogate or suspend these natural laws at will (miracles) to modify their course. (2) *Immanence* is the view that activity and motion are inherent principles in matter and nature, that all movement in nature is governed by autonomous laws that constitute the interdependence of all activity in nature; that these immanent laws are so embedded in the structure of nature that they cannot be disrupted, that any disruption of the laws of nature (miracles) is impossible because it contradicts the principles of reason, order, and perfection – the attributes of God. Essentially voluntaristic, Newtonianism gave way in the eighteenth century to the view of immanent activity in nature that was essentially mechanistic, which is to say Cartesian. For according to René Descartes, the laws of nature were decreed by God and are – like his volition – immutable and universally efficient. That is why miracles contradicted God's immutable will – unless (perhaps) they were embedded in God's grand scheme from the beginning. Helpful analyses of these Enlightenment transformations appear in F. Oakley's "Christian Theology and the Newtonian Science" (433–57), J. E. McGuire's "Neoplatonism" (95–133), H. Guerlac's "Theological Voluntarism" (219–28), P. M. Heimann's "Voluntarism and Immanence" (271–83), and in E. B. Davis' "God, Man and Nature" (325–48).

²³ See n. 32.

²⁴ See J. D. Collins' *Descartes' Philosophy* (48–52), E. B. Davis ("God, Man" 332–34), and Heimann ("Voluntarism" 275–83). I agree with Force (*Whiston* 32–53), that Whiston's broadly defined principles of biblical exegesis are Newtonian in spirit; however, I argue that Whiston frequently bends or disregards his avowed principles to facilitate his own views of natural theology.

Bible's uneven distribution of activity during the six creative days, even if those days were (as they were for him) each a thousand years long. Many of the ancient and medieval Church Fathers and Protestant Reformers disputed the issue as well. They posited either an instantaneous creation or a creation occurring over six literal days. Among those who insisted on an instantaneous creation are Philo Judaeus (*De opificio mundi* 3.13–14), Origen (*Contra Celsum* 6.60–61), St. Athanasius (*Orationes tres contra Arianos* 2.19.48–49), St. Hilary (*De Trinitate* 12.40), and St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* 1:355–57, Q 74, A 1–2).²⁵

The views of St. Augustine (354–430), bishop of Hippo, seem to have been unsettled during his lifetime. For instance, in *De genesi contra Manichaeos* (1.10.16; 1.14.20–21), he appears to uphold a creation of six literal days (of twenty-four hours each), but in *De Genesi ad litteram* (4.33.52; 4.34.54; 5.3.6; 5.17.35) and in *Liber imperfectus de genesi ad litteram* (7.28; 9.31), referencing the apocryphal Sirach 18:1, he affirms a simultaneous creation of all things at once. “Creation,” Augustine explained in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, “did not take place slowly in order that a slow development be implanted in those things that are slow by nature; nor were the ages established at the plodding pace at which they now pass. Time brings about the development of these creatures according to the laws of their numbers, but there was no passage of time when they received these laws at creation” (4.33.52, 141–42). Besides, since all natural processes – germinating seeds, cultivating roots, hatching eggs, growing feathers, learning to fly – take considerably longer than a single day and are dependent each on the other, the hexaemeral division must be seen as merely a didactic structuring device: “Thus we might say that the creation of things took place all at once and also that there was a ‘before’ and ‘after,’ but it is more readily understood as happening all at once than in sequence” (4.34.54, 143). If St. Augustine’s muddled explication did not encourage one unified theory in the Christian Church, another, earlier variant seemed to have resolved the matter for many latter-day theologians. Perhaps drawing on the Talmudic tradition of Elias the Prophet, St. Irenaeus (c. 130–200), ancient bishop of Lyon, insists that the world was made in six days and will terminate (according to Ps. 90:4 and 2 Pet. 3:8) in as many thousand years (*Adversus haereses* 5.28.3). The latter supposition seemed particularly persuasive, for it not only confirmed the tradition of the Prophet Elias but also clearly circumscribed the time limit God had set for man’s history on earth from Creation to Judgment Day.²⁶

²⁵ The reference to the Alexandrian exegete Philo Judaeus (c. 20 BCE–c. 50 CE) appears in *Works of Philo* (4); the respective references to the Alexandrian Church Father Origen (c. 185–c. 254) appear in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (4:600–01), hereafter *ANF*; and in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graecae* [PG 012]; to the bishop of Alexandria St. Athanasius (c. 296–373), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (4:374–75), hereafter *NPNFii*; to St. Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315–67), in *NPNFii* (9:228); and to St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74), in *Summa Theologica* (1:355–57).

²⁶ St. Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (*Fathers of the Church* [hereafter *FOC*] 84:45–141); *De Genesi ad litteram* [PL 34]. *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (41:141–42, 143);

Controversy about the true nature of the Hexaemeron flared up periodically, notably during the Reformation. Perhaps to control excessive individualism among those now guided by faith alone, Protestant Reformers were given to greater literal-mindedness than St. Augustine. They insisted that God created the universe in six literal days. Martin Luther, in *Lectures on Genesis* (Gen. 1:27), avowed "six natural days," which his Swiss colleague John Calvin (*Institutes* 1.14.2, 22) confirmed, adding, "it would have been no more difficult for him [God] to have completed in one moment the whole work together in all its details than to arrive at its completion gradually by a progression of this sort." Calvin clearly wanted to have it both ways, for in his *Commentary on Genesis* (Gen. 1:5, 2:3), he called out the "error of those . . . who maintain that the world was made in a moment" yet reminding himself that to God "one moment is as a thousand years." Speaking for the Reformed of Puritan New England, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) and its successor *The Savoy Declaration* (1658), opted for "the space of six days," presumably intending a literal period of twenty-four hours each.²⁷

In Mather's generation, even the great Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727) struggled with the problem of creation chronometry. In an extant fragment dating back to 24 December 1680, he debated this issue with Thomas Burnet, his old friend in Cambridge, just months before Burnet published his divisive *Telluris Theoria Sacra* (1681). Though Mather had no way of knowing, Newton wrote to Burnet that the six days of creation were not each merely twenty-four hours in duration but considerably longer because the earth's diurnal revolution at that time could "have been very slow, soe yt ye first 6 revolutions or days might containe time enough for ye whole Creation."²⁸ Burnet had penetrated the underlying logic of his friend's self-serving argument but pretended to be puzzled by Newton's intriguing solution – introducing shifting concepts of time before time began. In his letter of 13 January 1680/81, Burnet rejoined, "I infer

Liber imperfectus de genesi ad litteram [PL 034], *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis* (FOC 84:143–88). For St. Irenaeus (*Adversus haereses* 5.28.3), in *ANF* 1:557. For the Talmudic tradition of Elias the Prophet and its many proponents, see (Soncino) Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 97a, Avodah Zarah 9a, and Rosh HaShana 31a. According to this ancient tradition, here expounded by Tanna debe Eliyyahu [Elias], "The world is to exist six thousand years. In the first two thousand there was desolation, two thousand years the Torah flourished, and the next two thousand years is the Messianic era." How widespread this belief had become in Mather's time can be seen in Archbishop James Ussher's famous *Annales Veteris Testamenti* (1). According to Ussher's calculations, God created the world on the night preceding Sunday "Octob. 23." 4004 (BCE) before the birth of Christ. Ussher's chronology was incorporated into most editions of the *King James Version* at least until the late nineteenth century. For Mather's six-thousand-year timetable, see my *Threefold Paradise* (60–78, 319–47).

27 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (ch. 1, on Gen. 1:27), in *Luther's Works* (1:5, 69). For John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1:161, 182); for *Commentary on Genesis*, see *Calvin's Commentaries* (1:78, 105). For *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and *The Savoy Declaration* (ch. 4), see W. Walker (*Creeds* 372).

28 Newton to Burnet, 24 December 1690, letter 244, in Newton (*Correspondence* 2:319, 322).

from this, yt as ye distinction of 6 dayes is noe physical reality soe neither is this draught of the creation [Moses' Hexaemeron] physical but Ideal, or if you will, morall. Seeing it is not physically true yt ye Sun Moon & Stars were made at yt time, viz. 5 or 6000 yeares since when ye Earth was form'd. And if it bee Ideal in one part, it may in some proportion bee ideal in every part."²⁹ Sir Isaac, Burnet was quick to underscore, had thereby allegorized the creation, thus snatching it out of the realm of scientific consideration.

Newton, however, could not concede that he had offered a wax-nosed interpretation. In responding to Burnet, he reclaimed his scientific credentials: "You may make ye first day as long as you please," he patiently explained, "& ye second day too if there was no diurnal motion till there was a terraqueous globe, that is till towards ye end of that days work. And then if you will suppose ye earth put in motion by an eaven force applied to it, & that ye first revolution was done in one of our yeares," the earth could have achieved 365 revolutions in "the 183d year." Despite his best attempts, however, Newton was clearly becoming mired in the quicksand of his own mechanistic conjecture and felt compelled to return to the safe ground of divine teleology. Natural causation alone could not sufficiently account for the earth's diurnal motion, he emphasized, for none but "God gave the earth it's [*sic*] motion by such degrees & at such times as was most suitable to ye creatures."³⁰ Paradoxically, by resorting to supernatural agency when the going got rough, Sir Isaac appears to be disavowing the Enlightenment cosmogony that dares to speak his name: Newtonianism, a concept that among his Deist disciples came to signify a rationalist and mechanistic universe devoid of miracles.³¹

Justifiably apprehensive of ecclesiastical backlash, Newton does not rush in where angels fear to tread. Deeply religious, he desperately clung to the Bible as God's revealed Word. But to resort to dogmatism was out of the question; to miracles, only in extraordinary cases. It was much easier for him to sacrifice the letter as long as the spirit of the Hexaemeron was preserved.³² Newton's response to Burnet's epistle is highly revealing and deserves to be quoted at length:

²⁹ Burnet to Newton, 13 January 1680/81, letter 246, in Newton (*Correspondence* 2:324). More than ten years after his correspondence with Newton, Burnet publicly recapitulated his objection to Newton in his *Archaeologiae Philosophicae* (1692) 277–329. Charles Blount was only too glad to oblige Burnet by translating into English those parts of Burnet's Latin work that were most serviceable to his Deist argument; see Blount's *The Oracles of Reason* (1693) 52–76.

³⁰ Newton to Burnet, January 1680/81, letter 247, in Newton (*Correspondence* 2:333–34).

³¹ In his article "Newton's Rejection of the 'Newtonian Worldview'" (3:89), Edward B. Davis perceptively argues that Sir Isaac's adherence to voluntarism and to miracles that "correct" the course of nature disqualifies him from being a "Newtonian" and relegates him to the status of a theist or precursor to the Enlightenment.

³² In his *Principia* (1686; 3rd ed. 1729), Newton asserts an omnipotent and omniscient God whose absolute freedom of will can contravene nature's laws at any moment (*Sir Isaac Newton's* 2:544–46). So, too, in his *Opticks* (1704; 4th ed. 1730), Newton outspokenly defends God's

As to Moses I do not think his description of ye creation either Philosophical or feigned, but that he described realities in a language artificially adapted to ye sense of ye vulgar. Thus where he speaks of two great lights [Gen. 1:16] I suppose he means their apparent, not real greatness. So when he tells us God placed those lights in ye firmament, he speaks I suppose of their apparent not of their real place. . . . So when he tells us of two great lights & the starrs made ye 4th day, I do not think their creation from beginning to end was done ye fourth day nor in any one day of ye creation nor that Moses mentions their creation as they were physicall bodies in themselves some of them greater then [*sic*] this earth & perhaps habitable worlds, but only as they were lights to this earth.³³

Newton thus ingeniously saves the day by distinguishing between the "real" (literal) creation outside time and ken of man, and its "apparent" (visible) manifestation as it might appear to an eyewitness on earth "if he had then lived & were now describing what he saw."³⁴ The formation of the two great lights spoken of in Gen. 1:16 therefore did *not* take place on the fourth day; instead, at that time, they simply became visible to the naked eye through the mist of the earth's hazy atmosphere. The Mosaic creation of the fourth day was thus no more than an optical illusion.

Newton's phenomenological solution thus amounts to a "middle way" between the grammatical and allegorical sense of Scripture, a didactic narrative of events that Moses adapted to the needs of the uneducated masses recently freed from Egyptian slavery. Newton explains,

Omit them he [Moses] could not without rendering his description of ye creation imperfect in ye judgment of ye vulgar. To describe them distinctly as they were in them selves would have made ye narration tedious & confused, amused ye vulgar & become a Philosopher more then a Prophet. He mentions them therefore only so far as ye vulgar had a notion of them, that is as they were phænomena in our firmament, & describes their making only so far & at such a time as they were made such phænomena."³⁵

Sir Isaac's strategy of accommodation, then, is at once philosophically plausible and theologically sound, yet it also discloses how he wrestled with angels to make the Mosaic Hexaameron safe for the early Enlightenment's new science.

William Whiston sought his own way out of Newton's bind. He speculated that the earth had not set into its diurnal rotation until the conclusion of the

ability to "vary the Laws of Nature, and make Worlds of several sorts in several Parts of the Universe" (*Opticks*, bk. 3, part 1, Quest. 31, esp., p. 404). See also H. G. Alexander's *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence* (xvi–xviii, 11–12, 17–19, 29–30, 42–43, 87–89). For discussions of Newton's theology, see F. E. Manuel, *Religion of Isaac Newton* (1974); Richard H. Popkin, "Newton as Bible Scholar" (103–18); E. B. Davis, "Rationalism" (3:135–54); and R. Smolinski, "Logic of Millennial Thought" (259–89).

33 Newton to Burnet, January 1680/81 (*Correspondence* 2:331).

34 Newton to Burnet, January 1680/81 (*Correspondence* 2:333).

35 Newton to Burnet, January 1680/81 (*Correspondence* 2:333).

sixth day: "That tho' the *Annual Motion* of the *Earth*, commenced at the Beginning of the *Mosaic Creation*; yett its *Diurnal Rotation* did not, until the *Fall of Man*" (*BA* 1:346). Whiston's scheme, then, does not begin the twenty-four-hour day until the end of the sixth day, and thus God had world enough and time to enact the foundation of the whole universe. Like Newton, Whiston lambastes the pious for allowing their blind zeal to outpace their reason. "Suppositions ten thousand times more disproportionate and unaccountable, when ascrib'd to God Almighty, are easily believ'd," he cautions. "So far can Ignorance, Prejudice, and a misunderstanding of the Sacred Volumes carry the Faith, nay, the Zeal of Men!" In sum, "The Vulgar Scheme of the *Mosaick Creation*, besides the disproportion as to time, represents all things from first to last so disorderly, confusedly, and unphilosophical, that 'tis intirely disagreeable to the Wisdom and Perfection of God."³⁶ Mather must have deemed such radical criticism grist for the mills of his Deist contemporaries, who championed purely mechanical laws, and therefore he silently passed over this part of Whiston's critique.

This, then, was the state of the debate in Mather's time when he synopsized Whiston in "Biblia Americana." A good deal of the discussion took place in private correspondence and among groups of adepts and did not emerge in the published treatises of the day; that is, until William Whiston, Newton's protégé and frequent confidant, stood exposed in the limelight of his *New Theory of the Earth*. No doubt, the Christian virtuoso in Mather felt attracted to Whiston's daring theory, even as his theological self felt alarmed and overwhelmed by the plethora of its dangerous implications. "As for a *Judgment* upon this Description of the *Creation*," Mather puns uneasily at the conclusion of his summary, "I will præsume to make *None*, at all; I leave it unto *Men of Judgment*." And yet, his better judgment as a Puritan theologian finally gains the upper hand as he pronounces his verdict: "The *Theories* of the *Creation*, (particularly what I last offered you), invented by our Modern Philosophers, do certainly make too bold with the *Mosaic*, and *Inspired History* thereof. It were a Noble, and a Worthy Work; to Illustrate that History, and rescue it from the præsumptuous Glosses, that many *Neotericks* have made upon it" (*BA* 1:357). Although Mather welcomes Whiston's theory insofar as it furnishes new methods of updating time-worn explanations, he cannot accept the end to which Whiston's logic finally carries him: the collapse of the Mosaic Hexaemeron as he knew it.³⁷

³⁶ Whiston, *New Theory* (pt. 2, bk. 2, ch. 3, pp. 79–104; pt. 1, sec. 5, pp. 56, 57; sec. 6, p. 64).

³⁷ Middlekauff (*The Mathers* 285–86, 298–304) aptly describes Mather's fascination with Whiston's *New Theory* but also shows how Mather's enthusiasm for "Reasonable Christianity" waned when he realized that the elevation of human reason was less productive of making disciples for Jesus Christ than for John Toland and his Deist disciples.

Atomism and Allegory in a Clockwork Universe

Two or three additional extracts in Mather's commentary on the first chapter of Genesis deserve brief mention; they bring to light how he tried to blunt the radical attacks on the Hexaemeron with more congenial assessments by likeminded physico-theologians. Richard Bentley's *A Confutation of Atheism From the Origin and Frame of the World* (London, 1693) is next in chronological appearance.³⁸ Mather condenses this Boylean lecture, delivered on December 5, 1692, into little more than seven tightly packed folio pages (*BA* 1:384–99). True to the spirit and intent of Robert Boyle's endowment, Bentley applies a design argument to a construct that could still arouse hostility among English and continental theologians, the Copernican universe.³⁹ According to Mather, Bentley's teleology had fully absorbed Sir Isaac Newton's voluntarist theory of the planets' gravitational rotation:

The concentric Revolutions of the Planets about the *Sun*, proceed from a *Compound Motion*; a *Gravitation* towards the *Sun*, which is a constant Energy infused into Matter, by the Author of all Things; and a Projected, Transverse Impulse, in *Tangents* to their several *Orbs*, that was also Imprinted at first by the Divine Arm upon them, & will carry them around, until the End of all Things. (*BA* 1:385)

For Newton and Bentley, as for Mather, God's invisible arm was most discernible in "the constant Property of *Gravitation*, That the *Weight* of all Bodies around the *Earth*, is ever proportional to the Quantity of their *Matter*." Newton's theory, Mather asserts, was now mathematically proven "beyond all Controversy," primarily because Newton did not enervate, but fortify Mather's teleology (*BA* 1:393). To Mather, Bentley's *Confutation* was perhaps the most valuable of the modern theses, for it reinterpreted Descartes' mechanistic principles of natural law in terms of gravitational properties inherent in matter (though Newton was loath to call it immanent) but explains this universal force in terms of active principles whose power to attract and repulse is necessarily sustained by God's volition, which upholds cosmic harmony through secondary causes.⁴⁰ Bentley did have it both ways.

That our planetary system could never have formed out of Chaos simply through blind chance or accidental concretions of atoms seems all too obvious to virtuosi of Mather's caste. Bentley's nautical trope, which Mather heaves on board of his "Biblia Americana," makes this supposition abundantly clear. Like

³⁸ Although Bentley's eight Boylean lectures were published separately (sermons 1–6, in 1692, and 7–8, in 1693), collected and revised editions appeared in 1699, 1724, and 1735.

³⁹ See G. McColley ("Ross-Wilkins" 153–89), D. Stimson (*Gradual Acceptance* 85–206), D. Fleming ("Judgment" 160–75); J. B. Rogers et al., *Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (165–71); A. R. Hall, *From Galileo To Newton* (1963); A. D. White (*History* 1:134–209).

⁴⁰ For a helpful discussion of Newton's theist position on the properties of matter, see E. McMullin, *Newton on Matter and Activity* (1978).

widely dispersed atoms in limitless space, two ships placed at “opposite *Poles*” drift rudderless on the world’s oceans. How many “thousands of Years” would it take for these vessels to collide, for inert particles to coalesce? Besides, “the Atoms may not only fly side-ways, but over likewise, and under each other; which makes it many Million times more Improbable, that they should interfere, than the *Ships* in our Supposition ... so that the Concourse of our Atoms to produce a Regular World, is vainly expected, even in an endless Duration” (*BA* 1:397).⁴¹

Bentley’s Newtonian cosmogony, as digested by Mather, rests on divine volition, which directs and sustains a finely tuned system that could never have evolved by chance. Even if it had, Mather knowingly relates, the planets could never have attained their elliptic motion around the sun; even if they had, their orbit would have rapidly deteriorated if merely self-sustained.⁴² Contrary to what Ralph Cudworth and his fellow “Epicureans” opine about principles that are active and immanent in corporeal substances, “*Gravitation* is not Essential, and Inherent unto *Matter*.” For if gravity and “Reciprocal Attraction” were inherent properties, Mather continues, our planetary system could never have arisen, because the atoms dispersed the world over would have compacted into “one huge sphaerical Mass, which would bee the only Body in the Universe” (*BA* 1:398).⁴³ Clearly, then, the old familiar story of an all-powerful God maintaining control at the center was infinitely more reasonable than the alternative, but now it could be retold in updated versions made fashionable in language acceptable to the Royal Society. Thus Mather took infinite satisfaction that “the Power of *Gravity* perpetually acting in the present Constitution of the System of the Universe, is an Invincible Argument for the Being of a *GOD*” (*BA* 1:398).⁴⁴

⁴¹ Bentley, *Confutation* (bk. 7, ch. 2, pp. 18, 22, 23).

⁴² In his *Christian Philosopher* (46), Mather cites William Molineux’s *Dioptrica Nova* (1709) 273, in affirmation that “*Chance*, or dull *Matter*, could never produce such an harmonious *Regularity* in the Motion of Bodies so vastly distant [as Jupiter is from the sun]: This shews a Design and Intention in the *First Mover*.”

⁴³ Bentley, *Confutation* (bk. 7, ch. 2, pp. 20, 21).

⁴⁴ Bentley, *Confutation* (bk. 7, ch. 2, pp. 29–31); Bentley himself relies on Newton’s “System of the World” (bk. 3) of *Principia Mathematica* (*Sir Isaac Newton’s* 2:397–626). The debate between the Newtonian voluntarists and Cartesian mechanists carried over into the eighteenth century and is the main focus of the famous Clarke-Leibniz correspondence, *A Collection of Papers* (1715). For instance, in his first letter (November 1715) to Caroline, Princess of Wales, the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz charged the Newtonians with subverting the foundation of natural religion: “According to their doctrine, God Almighty wants to wind up his watch from time to time: otherwise it would cease to move. He [God] had not, it seems, sufficient foresight to make it a perpetual motion. Nay, the machine of God’s making, is so imperfect, according to these gentlemen; that he is obliged to clean it now and then by an extraordinary concourse, and even to mend it, as a clockmaker mends his work; who must consequently be so much the more unskilful a workman, as he is oftener obliged to mend his work and to set it right. ... [But] I hold, that when God works miracles, he does not do it in order to supply the wants of nature, but those of grace. Whoever thinks otherwise, must needs

But it is high time to move to Mather’s next digest on the first chapter of Genesis. The oldest of his seventeenth-century cosmographies – though not the first – copied into Mather’s folio manuscript is an excerpt from Lord Chief Justice Matthew Hale (1609–76), whose *The Primitive Origination of Mankind, considered and examined according to the Light of Nature* (London, 1677) supplied Mather with a witty allegory about the philosophical controversy of the time. A great artist hides an intricately designed clockwork mechanism that had been configured to show “the various Phases of the *Moon*, the motion & place of the Sun in the Ecliptick, and diverse other curious Indications of Cœlestial Motions” (BA 1:401). One by one, natural philosophers of various schools of thought come forward to theorize the origin of this marvelous automaton, the likes of which they had never seen before.

The Epicurean atomist predictably hypothesizes, “*That this was nothing but an accidental Concretion of Atoms, that happily fallen together, had made up the Index, the Wheels & the Ballance; and that being happily fallen into this Posture, they were put into Motion.*” A Cartesian, with his focus on vortices in motion, speaks next, charging his predecessor with having insufficiently accounted for the engine’s self-propulsion: “*there is a certain Materia Subtilis,*” he insists, “*that pervades that Engine and the moveable Parts, consisting of certain globular Atoms apt for Motion; they are thereby, & by the Mobility of the globular Atoms put into Motion.*” The Stoic philosopher objects that the regular motions of the clockwork, which reflect the movement of time and of the celestial bodies “*was wrought by some admirable Conjunction of the Heavenly Bodies, which formed this Instrument and its Motions, in such an admirable Correspondency to its own Existence.*” The fourth, true to his Platonic philosophy, swears that “*the Universal Soul, or Spirit of Nature . . . hath formed and set into Motion this Admirable Automaton, and regulated & ordered it with all these Congruities we see in it.*” Finally, an Aristotelian, who favors self-existence and eternity of the universe, dismisses the new-fangled theories of his fellow contestants as preconceived fancies: “*The Short of the Business is,*” he contends, “*this Machina is eternal, & so are all the Motions of it, & inasmuch as a Circular Motion hath no Beginning nor End, this Motion that you see both in the Wheels & Index, & the successive Indications of the Cœlestial Motions is eternal and without Beginning*” (BA 1:401).⁴⁵

When all is said and done, Mather’s watchmaker comes forward, reveals to his skeptical philosophers the origin and intricate motions of his machine, and derides his “Philosophical *Enthusiasts*” for their “fancied Explications, & unintelligible *Hypotheses.*” Sounding faintly like a seventeenth-century Deist, Mather’s clockwork mechanist turned theist has the last laugh: He celebrates

have a very mean notion of the wisdom and power of God” (H. G. Alexander, *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence* (11–12). Mather admired Leibniz as “*One of the greatest Wits of Europe*” (BA 1:596).

45 Matthew Hale, *Primitive Origination of Mankind* (bk. 4, ch. 6, pp. 340–42).

the congruity and reasonableness of the Mosaic narrative, which “renders all the Essays of the Generality of Heathen Philosophers to be vain, inevident, & indeed inexplicable Theories, the Creatures of Fancy & Imagination, & nothing else” (*BA* 1:402).⁴⁶ This popular story encapsulates for Mather the theoretical confusion of contemporary skeptics who are not satisfied with the literal and grammatical sense of Genesis 1. More significantly, the story discloses Mather’s conservative position, for when natural philosophy conflicts with theology and tradition, he clearly privileges divinity, the crown of all disciplines. But the final verdict is not in yet.

John Edwards’ three-volume *Discourse concerning the Authority, Stile, and Perfection of the Old and New Testament* (London, 1693–95), Nehemiah Grew’s *Cosmologia Sacra* (London, 1701), Edmund Dickinson’s atomist *Physica Vetus & Vera* (London, 1702), and Robert Hooke’s posthumous *Lectures and Discourses of Earthquakes and Subterraneous Eruptions*, in *Posthumous Works* (London, 1705), supply Mather with additional proof of how ancient and modern science was consistent with the Mosaic creation account. Mather distills Edwards into one (101r), Grew into two (67r–68v), Dickinson into eleven (77r–87v), and Hooke’s into two (105r–106v) manuscript pages – authors appearing in Mather’s annotations as their works fell into his hands. Mather treasured Edwards, Grew, Dickinson, and Hooke for their deft use of pagan lore and their defense of the authority of tradition even as René Descartes had dismissed the ancients for lacking empirical proof. Of the four mentioned here, Dickinson’s Latin treatise, closely argued and densely documented, is perhaps the most interesting. He adopts the popular Renaissance stance of attributing the atomic philosophy of the ancient Greeks to none other than Moses who, having inherited it from Adam through an uninterrupted line of oral tradition via Methuselah, Noah, Heber, and Abraham, taught it to the Egyptians and, via the later Democritus, to the Greeks. They added their own admixture, Dickinson argues, and thus gravely corrupted Moses’s original account (*BA* 1:357–83).

According to Dickinson’s curious *Physica Vetus & Vera*, the Creator instructed our protoplast in paradise in the principles of the corpuscular philosophy and taught him that miniscule corpuscles, or atoms, are the building blocks of all matter and the “keyes of Nature” (*BA* 1:362). Although invisible to the naked eye, these atoms are neither “*Absolutely Indivisible*” nor all of the same shape or size, for when God formed universal matter out of nothing, these particles were totally disordered, unformed, and separated by “empty Spaces” between them. God’s spirit imprinted on these particles a concourse of motion, “that *Force* which we call *Nature*” (*BA* 1:368), and directed atoms of the same agreeable size and figure “to join, and stick together, in *Bodies*” and gradually cohere into a vast mass of molecules. Through a centrifugal motion that sepa-

⁴⁶ Hale (*Primitive* 341, 342).

rated atoms of diverging shape from one another, God allowed these "*Pilulae*," "*Globuli*," "*Bracteolae*," and a fourth element difficult to name, to form the elements of fire, water, air, and earth (perhaps even a fifth that became part of the vast firmament). Fire and light came into existence when the *Pilulae* (small, round, subtle, and swiftly flying) separated from the other molecules; water was formed when the *Globuli* (less subtle and larger in size) separated from the grosser molecules of different contours; air took shape when molecules shaped like sticks (*Bracteolae*) were allowed to move freely with plenty of space between them; finally, the element earth, by its very constitution denser, heavier, and amorphous, was different from all the others. From these elements compounding into different molecules, God shaped the whole universe.

But if atoms are the building blocks of the universe, Mather wondered with Dickinson's *Physica Vetus* at his side, how come they are not mentioned in the Hexaemeron? And if the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Babylonians, and Greeks received their philosophy directly from Moses, how come theirs differs from that in Genesis? Easy: The word *atom* was known by different names to different peoples, Mather argued. For what Democritus calls *atoms*, some called *waters*, *sand*, *dust*, or *particles*. What Thales called *water*; Pherecydes called *earth*; Pythagoras called *monads*; Aristotle *minute corpuscles*; Anaximander *hyle*. Adding to the confusion, these terms were not the only ones used by the ancients to describe the prima materia of the universe. For what some called *the many*, Anaximander also called *the infinite*, Heraclitus *smallest fragments*, *motes*, or *dusty particles*; Empedocles *fragments*, Asclepiades, *molecules*; Xenocrates *invisible magnitude*, and so on and so on – until the divine philosophy substantially preserved for the first thirty-five centuries was utterly garbled among the pagans. What about the original among the Hebrews?

If we should particularly instance in, *Hyle*, as the *Egyptians* called it, or, *Ile*, as the *Phoenicians*: Tis true, we don't plainly find the Original of it, in the Writings of *Moses*; but we must not imagine that the Sacred Writers have all the *Terms of Art* used among their Philosophers. And yett it is very probably, That *Hyle*, or *Ile*, may be found in the Hebrew /חִיּוּל/ *Hhiul*, which signifies, *The Sand*; and *Philo* countenances this Conjecture: which is confirmed by the *Hiule*, wherein *Hyle* is rendered in the *Arabic* Tongue, which is the Daughter of the Hebrew. How agreeably indeed, are *Atoms* called *Sands*, as well for their *Exility*, as for their *Fluidity*? And how agreeable is it, for the same to be called, *Waters*? The oldest of all the *Egyptian* Philosophers, namely *Taautus* (whom the *Greeks* called *Hermes*) affirmed all things to be formed, ἐκ τοῦ ἄμμου, *out of Sand*, which was as much as to say, *out of minute Particles*. ... The Ancient Hebrewes applied also, the Name of *Dust*, unto this *First Matter*. A Fitt Name for any *Multitude*! (BA 1:365)⁴⁷

47 For a useful summary of Dickinson's argument about Moses as an atomist, see Collier (149–65); D. B. Sailor, "Moses and Atomism" (3–16), supplies the historical background.

But here's enough to demonstrate the origin of all philosophy. This plethora of theories and explanations was still useful to defend the Mosaic creation account at the turn of the century. And Dickinson's *Physica Vetus & Vera* allowed Mather to demonstrate how the wisdom of God, preserved in various states of corruption, passed through the dispersal of Noah's sons to all the nations of the earth. Rightly understood, then, what were the wise men among the ancient Greeks? But Moses dressed in Attic garb.⁴⁸

If Mather the Christian virtuoso felt comfortable mentioning Thales, Anaximander, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, and Diodorus Siculus, in the same breath as Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, and Newton, he emerges as an early Enlightenment theologian who, like the Cambridge Platonists, stands with one foot in each camp, the ancients and moderns. But to call Mather a "transitional figure," worse, "unoriginal," as some Whiggish historians are prone to do, is to impose expectations that are clearly ours, not his. He was a pastor by vocation and, at best, a natural philosopher by avocation. He did not bow to romantic notions of originality but made novelty subservient to tradition. Yet in scanning the heavens, he manifestly struggled to maintain a theocentric orbit even as he gravitated toward the trajectory of new cosmogonies rising in the Northern hemisphere.

"How Did the Giant Find the Way Hither?"

Signs of storm and stress become visible all over "Biblia Americana" when Mather moves beyond the grand outline of the Mosaic creation story, which (he reluctantly admits) is not intended to be a scientifically accurate explanation in the first place, but merely an account of what an eyewitnesses might have seen or what Moses or any other prophet might have adapted to the simple understanding of an illiterate people (*BA* 1:344). If Burnet and Whiston could be trusted, Moses did not intend to impart a philosophically precise description but, rather, to instill awe and piety in a fractious people: "the *Mosaic Creation* is not a Nice and Philosophical Account of the *Origin of All Things*," Mather cites William Whiston's *New Theory* affirmatively, "but an Historical and True Representation of the Formation of our single Earth, out of a confused *Chaos*, and of the successive & visible Changes thereof, each day, till it became the Habitation of Mankind" (*BA* 1:338, *see also* 340, 358).⁴⁹ In this and similar passages from

⁴⁸ Dickinson's excavations among the ancient Greeks are heavily indebted to Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) and to Theophilus Gale's four-volume *Court of the Gentiles* (1669–78). *See also* J. R. Jacob, "Boyle's Atomism" (211–33); C. A. Patrides, "Introduction," *Cambridge Platonists* (1–42); and S. Hutton, "Decline of *Moses Atticus*" (68–84).

⁴⁹ Whiston, *New Theory*, pt. 1, p. 3.

Whiston, Mather more or less consciously echoes the much maligned Baruch Spinoza, whose *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Amsterdam, 1670) postulated that the Bible "has nothing in common with philosophy [i.e., natural science], in fact, that Revelation and Philosophy stand on totally different footings."⁵⁰ Mather, differing from Spinoza and the Hobbsean materialists, is not yet ready to designate natural philosophy and theology as wholly autonomous disciplines. Still, like the rationalist theists, he concedes that attributing all natural phenomena – however awe-inspiring they might appear on the surface – to God testifies more to a writer's piousness than to his knowledge of natural philosophy. And for this reason, he gave scientific explications full consideration. His commentary on the Noachic Flood is a good case in point.

As mentioned above, Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (London, 1686) was among the most controversial explanations of the flood in Mather's day. To account for the massive quantity of water necessary to inundate the entire globe, Burnet posited that the antediluvian earth was entirely "smooth, regular, and uniform; without Mountains, and without a Sea," for the entire body of water was kept in subterranean caverns. There was nothing miraculous about the Noachic Flood, the Cartesian Burnet proudly pointed out, because the pillars supporting the earth's crust were eroded by the subterranean oceans and thus caused the earth's surface to collapse into the great abyss of which Noah spoke. Our present mountains and islands are therefore nothing but the remnants of the antediluvian crust now jutting out of the deep.⁵¹ Mather and most of his colleagues on both sides of the watery abyss ridiculed this "Romance" for its lack of scriptural support. Burnet's "Abyssinian" hypothesis was not original either, Mather wittily puns, because Burnet had dug it up from the Italian Franciscus Patritius, whose *Della retorica dieci dialoghi* (Venice, 1562) had attributed the original version to "an Abyssinian Philosopher in Spain; who quoted the Annals of *Ethiopia* for it" (BA 1:625). The ancients still held sway over Mather and most of his peers – even if the modern Cartesians developed empirical proof to the contrary – and natural philosophers of his era were still relying on layers upon layers of source citations at second, third, or even fourth remove.

Mather also rejects William Whiston's explanation of the Flood in *The New Theory of the Earth* (London, 1696), because Whiston's deus-ex-machina of a comet passing too close to the earth and thus causing the inundation described in Genesis 7 is, Mather insists, "altogether *Arbitrary*" and unsatisfactory (BA 1:626).⁵² Moreover, again with no scriptural support, Whiston had attributed

⁵⁰ Benedict Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1883) 9. For Mather's view of Spinoza, see Section 3 in the present introduction.

⁵¹ My citations are from the second edition (1691) of Burnet's *Sacred Theory* (bk. 1, ch. 5, p. 51, and ch. 6, pp. 66–77).

⁵² *New Theory* (1696), pt. 2, bk. 4, chs. 4–5, pp. 300–82, and "Appendix, Containing a New Theory of the Deluge," *New Theory* (1737) 459–78.

the cataclysmic flood of fire at the Second Coming (2 Peter 3) to the same comet. Dr. Robert St. Clair's alchemical theory, in *The Abyssinian Philosopher Confuted* (London, 1697), which sounds faintly like Burnet's, does not fully satisfy Mather either. Noah's deluge, St. Clair had hypothesized, was caused by "a Conflict of contrary Salts, *Acid* and *Alkali*, in the bowels of the Earth": tremendous volumes of acidic gases had forced out all the waters from Burnet's subterranean caverns and, reacting with the air, had precipitated the great rains that, before they ceased, had covered the "top of the Highest Mountains." Mather effortlessly extracts St. Clair's explanation but adds no comments of his own, perhaps because the vast amounts of water necessary to cover the highest mountains on earth by fifteen cubits (Gen. 7:19–20) were still left unaccounted for (*BA* 1:627).⁵³

John Ray's *Miscellaneous Discourses concerning the Dissolution and Changes of the World* (London, 1693) was much more serviceable in this respect. Written by a highly respected English botanist, the popular work went through at least three editions; its erudition supplied Mather with a good deal of information he would otherwise have had to dig up on his own. Citing at second hand Athanasius Kircher's famous *Arca Noë, in tres libros digesta* (Amstelodami, 1675), Mather wonders if a transmutation of one element into another, of air into water, might "make a Bulk of *Water*, of æqual Quantity" sufficient to inundate the entire globe.⁵⁴ This "Peripatetical Condensation and Rarefaction," however, was as old as Aristotle, had been resurrected by Descartes, and was then affirmed by the Jesuit Kircher, whose Latin citation Mather deliberately leaves untranslated to shield the untutored. "But the Sacred Scripture mentions not the *Conversion of the Air into Water*," and therefore, "we will rather consider the Causes of the *Flood*, which are there more expressly mentioned." Mather, however, does agree with Ray to disagree with Edmund Halley's hypothesis that all the water the rivers combined discharge into the seven seas amounts to "Half an *Ocean of Waters*" annually (*BA* 1:630, 631).⁵⁵ But this idea, previously postulated by the Italian mathematician Giovanni Battista Riccioli and disputed by Sir Isaac Newton, is considerably less satisfying than those put forward by Robert Hooke, John Ray, Thomas Burnet, and by the great Sir Isaac himself: that God might have displaced the gravitational center of the earth and moved

⁵³ Mather cites St. Clair's "To the Reader," *Abyssinian Philosopher Confuted* (C6r-C7r, pts. 2, 3, 5). Thomas Jefferson, too, rejected the idea that the Noachic Flood could have covered the highest mountains of the earth, in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Query 6, p. 31). The Renaissance debate about the flood is aptly treated in D. C. Allen's distinguished *Legend of Noah* (1963) and in N. Cohn's *Noah's Flood* (1996).

⁵⁴ Ray's *Miscellaneous Discourses* (64–65); Ray had cited Athanasius Kircher's *Arca Noë* (1675), bk. 2, ch. 5, p. 132, on the air-into-water hypothesis.

⁵⁵ Edmund Halley's hypothesis is discussed in *A Discourse concerning Gravity, and its Properties*, in *Miscellanea Curiosa* (1705) 1:304–25.

it closer to the middle of the then populated hemisphere.⁵⁶ "And a Change of its Place, but the two Thousandth Part of the *Radius* of this *Globe*, were sufficient to bury the Tops of the Highest Hills under Water" (*BA* 1:633).

With such weighty proponents on its side, the theory of the earth's gravitational shift seemed so much more respectable than that of the Yorkshire antiquarian Abraham de la Pryme or that of the Dutch theologian Petrus Serarius, who had revived the Stoic notion of "a mighty *Flood* once foretold from a Conjunction of the *Planets* in *Pisces*," a speculation that was as unworthy as that of the heretic Isaac de la Peyrère, whose *Prae-Adamitae* (Amsterdam, 1655) claimed that Noah's Flood was not universal at all but merely local and confined "unto *Palestine*," that is, the horizon the patriarch then deemed the extent of the world (*BA* 1:638–40, 646–48, 651).⁵⁷ Still, this idea enjoyed considerable currency among such moderns as Isaac Vossius, Georg Kirchmaier, Edward Stillingfleet, Baruch Spinoza, Thomas Burnet, Erasmus Warren, John Ray, and William Whiston, while the famous Father Marin Mersenne and Johann Adam Osiander, his Lutheran colleague in Germany, would allow the waters to rise no more than 150 feet or just enough to set the ark afloat.⁵⁸ Not even the traditions

56 See Giovanni Battista Riccioli, *Geographiae et hydrographiae reformatae* (1661); Newton dismisses Halley's theory in *A Treatise* (1728) 10–28; Hooke's discussion appears in his "Discourse V," in *Posthumous Works* (1705) 321–22, 346–50, 411–12; Burnet's appears in *Sacred Theory* (1691), bk. 2, ch. 3, p. 195; Ray's argument appears in *Miscellaneous Discourses* (98–99); and Newton's theory of the gravitational shift of the globe appears in *A Treatise* (10–28).

57 Mather here draws on Letter VI (14 September 1700) by Abraham de la Pryme (1671–1704), a Yorkshire antiquarian and minister at Hull, in "A Letter of the Reverend Mr. Abr. De la Pryme to the Publisher" (1700): 683–85. Isaac de la Peyrère, *Prae-Adamitae* (1655); my reference is to the English translation, *Men before Adam* (1656), bk. 4, chs. 7, pp. 239–44.

58 Among the seventeenth-century physico-theologians who excluded America from Noah's flood or rejected its universality are Isaac de La Peyrère, in *Men Before Adam* (bk. 4, chs. 7–9, pp. 239–58); Isaac Vossius, *Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi* (1659) 53; Georg C. Kirchmaier, *De diluvii universalitate* (1667) 3–60; Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Sacrae*, 3rd ed. (1666), bk. 3, ch. 4, pp. 542–43; Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise* (35), rejected the global Flood, because "Noah thought that beyond the limits of Palestine the world was not inhabited"; Thomas Burnet, *Sacred Theory* (bk. 2, ch. 8, pp. 272–73), argues "that there was a stock [of survivors] providentially reserv'd there [America], as well as here [Old World], out of which they [postdiluvians] sprung again." Erasmus Warren, in *Geologia* (1690) 292–96, and in his *A Defence of the Discourse* (1691) 165–69, 172–75, 190–97, 209, limits the Flood to the height of 15 cubits from the ground up but not surpassing the high mountains. John Ray, *Miscellaneous Discourses* (99–100), excludes America from the Noachic flood because it was "in all probability unpeopled at the time." Ray repeats this assertion in his *Three Physico-Theological Discourses* (1693) 122, but rephrases this paragraph in the third edition (1713) 118–19, where he argues that confining Noah's Flood to the Old World would be so much more reasonable "and delivers us from that great and insuperable Difficulty of finding eight, nay, twenty two Oceans of Water to effect it: For no less is requisite to cover the whole Terraqueous Globe with Water, to the Height of fifteen Cubits above the Tops of the highest Mountains." William Whiston, *New Theory of the Earth* (1737) 138, 405, argues that both China and America were excluded from Noah's flood because they were not part of the known world in Noah's day. Earlier in the seventeenth century, the French philosopher Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), in his *Les preludes* (1634) 1–135, 210–28, and in his *Quaestiones* (1623), pt. 1, cols. 799–920, 1007, 1013, 1513–72,

of the flood found among the Indians of North, South, and Central America, or those among the faraway Chinese, could entirely drown Noah's critics, who downgraded the deluge to a purely local event. "We attempt several Wayes to solve the *Phenomena of the Flood*," Mather confesses in his "Biblia Americana," "and provided our *Hypotheses* have no *unscriptural Extravagancies* in them, tis not amiss to produce them" (BA 1:658). After all, a bit of truth may lie at the bottom of each supposition. Thus armed with his selection criteria, Mather kept scouting for other discussions of the Noachic flood that might yet elucidate the mysterious origins of the massive amounts of water that were supposed to have covered the highest mountains the world over by more than fifteen cubits. Perhaps if the flood could be confined to the Old World, or if the Mosaic story merely intended an inundation of the lower parts but not of the tops of the mountains, the biblical account might yet be saved from the province of the miraculous and harmonized with the researches of the natural philosophers. Mather seemed to have found just the right sort of model in Erasmus Warren's *Geologia: Or, A Discourse concerning the Earth before the Deluge* (London, 1690).

Rector of Worlington, in Suffolk, England, Erasmus Warren (fl. 1680–1714) tried to rescue Noah's global Flood out of the hands of critics who sought to confine it to a merely local event in Palestine. Biblical commentators, Warren argued, are grossly mistaken in supposing the highest mountains on earth were covered by water upward of fifteen cubits (Gen. 7:19–20): "They were indeed but *Fifteen Cubits* high in all, above the Surface of the Earth," Warren insisted. "Not, that they were no where Higher, than just *Fifteen Cubits*, above the Ground; they might in most Places, be Thirty, Forty, Fifty Cubits High, or more." The mountains were indeed covered "*Fifteen Cubits upwards*," but only "on their *Sides*, not above their *Tops*: the Bottoms of them stood so deep in the Waters" (BA 1:659). Although disallowing any Mosaic hyperboles in this account, Warren asserted "that in the Holy Style, to *Cover*, does not always mean, To *Surmount*, and *Over-top*, and *Over-whelm*," but "Sometimes, it means, only to *Surround* the Object, or to be *About* it in great Abundance" (BA 1:690). Moreover, Warren posited that stores of water were hidden in the sides of the

1607–1712, and pt. 2, col. 3, clung to the old notion of supercelestial waters crashing in upon the earth. Mersenne still embraced Ptolemy's geocentric universe and asserted that vast quantities of waters – even to the edge of the universe – lay beyond the solid sphere of the firmament nearly 14,000 terrestrial semi-diameters distant from the earth. This ancient idea continued to enjoy a certain degree of popularity in updated fashion, for even John Ray maintains in his third edition of *Three Physico* (1713), Discourse 2, ch. 2, pp. 114–18, that the watery vapors in the lower parts of the air amounted to eight oceans of water. A displacement of the earth's center of gravity pressing on the subterraneous caverns filled with water could have easily triggered the biblical flood. Finally, Johann Adam Osiander (1626–97), distinguished German Lutheran theologian, explores whether Noah's flood was universal, whether it covered the mountains, and whether America was populated before the flood, in his highly respected *Commentarius* (1676–78) 1:186, 192–95, quaestio 2, 3–4. For much helpful background, see D. C. Allen, *Legend* (chs. 4–5) and N. Cohn, *Noah's Flood* (ch. 4).

mountains and would burst open to drown anyone trying to climb their peaks. "And in this Way," Warren congratulated himself, "we are supplied with *Waters* enough, without a Recourse, either to the *Burnettian Romance*; or, to a *New Creation of Waters*; or to *Super-Cæstial Waters*; or to a Change of the greatest Part of the *Mass of Air* into *Water*; a Change, which it seems, is hardly yett justified by *Experiment*; tho' the Lord *Verulam* allows of it; *Descartes* subscribes to it; and our Admirable *Boyl* himself, leaves it undetermined" (*BA* 1:663).⁵⁹

No matter what its merits, Warren's linguistic retrenchment did not entirely satisfy Mather as he hoped to find other theories more in harmony with the biblical account. Whether or not Mather fully subscribed to Warren's theory, along with that of Mersenne, that Noah's Flood did *not* cover the tops of mountains – some of which were higher than 15,000 feet – he decidedly shared his conviction that the inundation was universal in its extent. Too much irrefutable fossil evidence discovered almost daily – even in America – spoke in its favor. The bones of the antediluvian Nephilim, a race of giants who, the offspring of fallen angels, consorted with the daughters of men (Gen. 6:4), were found the world over, Mather insisted. These "Antediluvian Giants" were no mere political tyrants, thugs, or highwaymen – "*Giants for Quality* only, and not for *Quantity*" – as Becanus had argued in his *De Gigantomachia* (1569), Temporarius in his *Chronologicarum demonstrationum* (1596), and the ancient Alexandrian Philo Judaeus in his *De Gigantibus* (c. 30–50 CE) – but giants of tremendous size (*BA* 1:585).⁶⁰ David's Goliath was puny in comparison to the gargantua whose

59 Mather's source is Warren's *Geologia* (300–301, 325–26, 332–33). Mather (via Warren) also brushed aside the old notion that the flood was caused by the transmutation of one element into another, of air into water, as the ancients had believed: Aristotle, *De mundo* (1.392b, lines 5–12; 5.396b, line 25–397a, line 5); Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* (1.11, lines 4–5); Plato, *Timaeus* (49c, lines 4–5); Philo Judaeus, *De Somniis* (1.20, lines 4–5) and *De aeternitate mundi* (19.103, lines 5–6), in *Works* (366, 718–19); and Heraclitus, *Allegoriae* (40.12–13). In the late Renaissance, Sir Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam (1561–1626), still maintained this ancient philosophical mainstay, that the element air can turn into water, as his experiments seemed to confirm several times over, in his oft-reprinted *Sylva Sylvarum* (1627), century 1, experiments 27, 76–82, pp. 8, 24–26. The great René Descartes (1596–1650) agreed with his colleague across the English Channel and affirmed that the particles of air can change into water, in his *Principia Philosophiae* (1644), pt. 4, art. 48, pp. 218–19. Finally, the admirable Robert Boyle (1627–91) felt his experiments were inconclusive, in *Nova Experimenta* (1661), experimentum 22, pp. 103–20, esp. pp. 108–10. Even our New England Muse, Anne Bradstreet (1612–72), weighed the question in her *Quaternions* (1650), whether the element air could be transmuted into water. See Bradstreet's "The Four Elements" (ll. 437–38), *The Works* (30–31).

60 Mather was particularly incensed at his colleague, Jean LeClerc, who argued in his *Twelve Dissertations* (1696), diss. 2, p. 78, that the word "*Nephilim* seems to import Robbers They that after the Septuagint and vulgar Translation have translated it *Giants*, have indeed own'd themselves to be of their Opinion, but have brought no Arguments to prove it." Mather alludes to the well-known accounts of the Flemish physician and antiquarian Joannes Goropius Becanus (1519–72), who in his "De Gigantomachia" (lib. 2), in *Origines Antwerpianae* (1569) 207–12, describes several young men and a woman nine and ten feet tall. The work by Joannes Temporarius, also known as Jean du Temps (born c. 1535), French jurist, mathematician, and

bones were lately dug up near Albany, New York, Mather proudly announces in his "Biblia Americana." A "prodigious *Tooth*" weighing "Four Pounds and Three Quarters" and a thighbone "Seventeen Foot long," judged by anatomists to be of human origin, unmistakably corroborated the existence of these biblical giants no less than it testified to the inundation of the American hemisphere, which John Ray had excluded because no-one lived there: "For, I beseech you," Mather queried his doubting Thomases, "How did the *Giant* find the Way hither?" What Dutch settlers had unearthed at Claverack, New York, in 1705 were, we now know, the fossilized bones of a mastodon – a species of antediluvians nowhere mentioned in the Bible (*BA* 1:586, 590–94).⁶¹

That Mather and all the other eyewitnesses mistook the remains as proof of the biblical Nephilim is really not to the point – for virtually all authorities of his time agreed that the bones were of nonhuman origin and belonged to the giant race of the Emims, Anakims, Rephaims, or of Og. The Claverack bones were too big to be those of an elephant – well-known in Mather's time – and too far away from the Atlantic shore to be the bones of whales, so he argued.⁶² That Mather and his compeers interpreted fossil evidence through the prism of their biblical beliefs may strike modern readers as quaint, if not amusing; however, the "mistake" is not Mather's but ours. Not developed until the early nineteenth century, the science of paleontology had yet to classify such giant fossils of

geographer, is *Chronologicarum* (1596), in which the author traces the word "Nephilim" to Scythian origin. Finally, Philo Judaeus strips these giants of their tall stature and allegorizes them as "men ... born of the earth" – hedonists who hunt after carnal pleasure (*De gigantibus* 13.60), in *Works* (156).

⁶¹ Mather's transcribed Governor Joseph Dudley's letter (10 July 1706) and his own thoughts on the giant bones of Claverack into "Biblia Americana" (1:582–99) and mailed a copy of the missive, along with his disquisitions on giants in his first package of "Curiosa Americana" (1712), to Richard Waller, secretary of the Royal Society, who published a synopsis in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 29 (1714–16) 62–63. D.E. Stanford reprints various contemporaneous accounts of the excavation of the mastodon bones in his "Giant Bones" (47–61); and D. Levin reprints Mather's commentary on Gen. 6:4, in "Giants in the Earth" (762–70).

⁶² For the race of giants, see Gen. 6:4, Num. 13:33, Deut. 2:10–11; 3:11; Josh. 12:4. Robert Plot (1640–96), keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, professor of chemistry at Oxford, and celebrated comparative anatomist, employs the same method that Mather would use thirty years later. When a large "thigh-bone (supposed to be of a *Woman*)" and several large molars were dug up in a London churchyard and elsewhere, he surmised that these fossils might be the remains of an elephant brought to London in Roman times. Yet providence decreed that while he was composing his *Natural History of Oxford-shire* (London, 1676), Plot had the opportunity to compare his fossils' anatomy with that of a young live elephant then publicly displayed in Oxford. Much to his surprise the elephant's bones were "not only of a different shape, but also incomparably bigger than *ours* [Nephilim fossils] ... If then they [fossils] are neither the bones of *Horses*, *Oxen*, nor *Elephants*, as I am strongly perswaded they are not, upon comparison, and from their like found in *Churches*: It remains, that (notwithstanding their extravagant magnitude) they must have been the bones of *Men* or *Women*" – like those of the "Sons of *Anak*" or of the "*Titans*, and of high *Giants*" as those mentioned in the apocryphal "Judith 16.v.7" and "Baruch 3.v.26" (*Natural History*, ch. 5, pp. 135–36, sec. 164, 167, 168).

extinct species or even coin the term *dinosaurus*, though their bones had been found since classical times.⁶³ Perhaps more revealing than lacking the benefit of our hindsight is Mather's strategy of employing empirical proof to validate the more perplexing phenomena of the Bible without resorting to supernatural causality. For when threatened by evidence to the contrary, he did not become dogmatic or abusive by dismissing his critics as blaspheming atheists, as some lesser lights were prone to do; nor did he resort to metaphor and allegory until clear evidence to the contrary ruled out any literal reading of the Bible.

Just how much science and religion made common cause during much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is evident in the assiduousness with which Mather pursued a rational and natural explanation of these giant Nephilim. The discovery in the 1660s of microscopic organisms (*animalculae*) in a drop of water prompted Robert Hooke, Anton van Leeuwenhoek, Marcello Malpighi, Francesco Redi, William Harvey, and other natural philosophers of note to develop germ theory, that microorganisms in fluids are responsible for causing disease. This new theory dealt a mortal blow to the Platonic concept of the earth's plastic nature, that primitive life forms generated spontaneously from the putrefaction of organic matter or from an inherent spiritual power.⁶⁴ Mather, with his training in the medical arts, applied the new germ theory to his consideration of the Mosaic Hexaemeron. Speculating that the giant's tremendous size might be explained through natural causation, he formed a postulate akin to a rudimentary understanding of modern generation: "The *Microscopical Inquisitions*, have made it more than probable; That the *True Seeds of Animals*, floating in their *Suitable Vehicle* [seminal fluid], have, lying in a *Space* much less than the Naked Eye can discern, the whole *Bodies* of the *Animals*, even to all their *Nerves* and *Fibres*: which afterward *Grow* as aforesaid, until their original *Stamina* can be no further carried out" (*BA* 1:595). God may have implanted in the seed of our first protoplast an "original *Stamina* ... much larger than others, and capable of being drawn forth, to the most *Gigantic Extension*." Or God may have "some of these *Gigantaeon Stamina*" enter man's body through the food chain and there slumber until God ordered them to grow. Or God, from

63 Mather also drew on the accounts of his Hispanic and Dutch colleagues such as Agostin de Zárate's *Historia del descubrimiento y Conquista del Perú* (1555), bk. 1, ch. 5, that giants lived among the ancient Peruvians; José de Acosta's *Naturall & Morall Historie* (1604), bk. 1, ch. 19, pp. 62–63; bk. 7, ch. 3, pp. 501–02; and on Joannes de Laet's *Notae ad dissertationem* (1643) 83. How the ancients in the Old and New World interpreted giant fossils is explored in A. Mayor's *First Fossil Hunters* (2000) and in her *Fossil Legends* (2005). See also P. Semonin's *American Monster* (15–61, 362–91).

64 For the changing fortune of the concept of plastic nature in Mather's time, see Collier (428–47); W.B. Hunter, "Doctrine of Plastic Nature" (197–213); and R. Rappaport, *When Geologists were Historians* (105–35). Useful historical background on the evolution of germ theory is found in C. Dobell's *Anthony Leeuwenhoek* (1932) and in J. Farley's *Spontaneous Generation* (1977).

the beginning of the world, may have embedded in the seminal fluid of man microscopically small, yet fully formed, animalcules of these giants that upon penetration of the female ovum might grow to colossal proportions though fathered by parents of common size (*BA* 1:597).⁶⁵ Conjectures of this nature were indeed commonplace among the physico-theologians of the period, and Mather drew on the most respected authorities he could muster to harmonize biblical exegesis and scientific inquiry.⁶⁶

That he did not become complacent in his quest for collating the Book of Scripture with that of Nature becomes apparent just a few tightly packed, folio-sized columns later. Coming across a chapter on animal generation of hybrids in Dr. James Drake's *Anthropologia Nova* (London, 1707), Mather was forced to toss out what had seemed to be the key to unlocking the mystery of the giant Nephilim: "But, oh! the palpable *Darkness*, under which we are languishing!" Mather bewailed his losses. "After I have given you, so fair an *Hypothesis*, as at first I thought it, about the *Generations* carried on in the *Animal World*, I must now run the Hazard of destroying it all again." Leeuwenhoek's conjecture that fully formed yet microscopically small replicas of man or beast were lodged in the seminal fluids of every animal species somehow did not mesh with Drake's discussion of hybrids and their inability to procreate:

[T]he most common of all these Animals, of mix'd Breeds, is the *Mule*, begotten by an *Ass*, upon the *Mare*. If this *Hypothesis* be true, the *Sperm* of an *Ass*, is full of *little Asses*, and the being nurs'd by a *Mare* should never make *Mules* of them; because the Species is praedetermined, and the Creature is not only form'd, but living. ... I know some Endeavour, to get over this Objection, by fancying that the different *Matrix* may have so much Effect, as to alter the Figure of the Animal so far, as may account for these *Mixt Appearances*. But this is so poor, so unphilosophical a shift, that it is not worth an Answer; and they might with as good Authority perswade me, that an *Orange-tree* translated from *Sevil* to *England*, would bear *Apples*; and so vice versa. (*BA* 1:598, 599)⁶⁷

With such empirical evidence to the contrary, Mather and his peers had only two choices: suspend their judgment until new discoveries would set the record straight, or fall back on the outmoded notion that God had endowed

⁶⁵ See also *BA* 1:349–52. For information on how the seeds of plants and animals contain minuscule replicas of each species' complete body, Mather relies in part on Whiston's *New Theory* (1696), bk. 4, ch. 1, pp. 224–25, 228, which in itself is an extract from Richard Bentley's fourth Boylean lecture (June 6, 1692), published in *A Confutation of Atheism* (pt. 2, pp. 3–36).

⁶⁶ See also Mather's annotation on Gen. 3:15 (*BA* 1:485), where he digests George Garden's *Miscellanea Curiosa* (1705–07) 1:143–49, in affirmation of how the female ovum is inseminated. Garden's authorities include such noteworthy contemporaries as Harvey, Malpighi, Perrault, R. de Graef, Leeuwenhoek, Swammerdam, and others.

⁶⁷ Mather's extracts are from *Anthropologia Nova* (1707), vol. 1, bk. 1, ch. 25, pp. 334–36 (misnumbered 352), by James Drake, MD (1667–1707), fellow of the College of Physicians of the Royal Society, whose work explores (among other things) new theories of generation and hybridization.

matter with a generative plastic power that blindly formed various types of organisms.⁶⁸ "However old and exploded, the Opinion of a *Plastick Power* be," Mather laments with Drake at his elbow, "I must however embrace it; even tho' I know not exactly wherein it lies: at least, till I meet with somewhat more sufficient to Resolve my Doubts, than hitherto I have done" (*BA* 1:599).⁶⁹ Mather, it is clear, was not afraid to examine scripture in light of contemporary empirical evidence and, as necessary, to renegotiate his interpretative stance if time-rooted tradition did not square with the natural philosophy of his day. Those who went before him were his guides, not his masters. Yet if errors were uncovered, they must be attributed to his guides, not to the Bible or its holy prophets.

Biblical Miracles, Natural Phenomena, or Poetic Hyperbole?

Through a number of exemplary cases, we can gauge the extent to which Mather has crossed the threshold into the Enlightenment. He clearly vacillates between miraculous explanations and purely natural causation in treating wondrous biblical events, generally juxtaposing old and new paradigms in an effort to arrive at the most intellectually compelling opinion to present to the educated men he expected to form the core audience for his sustained scholarly effort. With few exceptions, however, his conservative affirmations of biblical miracles generally outnumber – though they do not necessarily outweigh – the critiques he excerpts from Cartesian materialists. Such is the case with his commentary on the confusion of tongues at Babel, the ten plagues of Egypt, and the parting of the Red Sea. Mather was well aware of the controversy these stories prompted, and he commonly alludes to, or names, the primary contestants in the contemporary debate about them. The principal target of his guarded defense of miracles appears to be Jean LeClerc's *Twelve Dissertations out of Monsieur Le Clerc's Genesis* (London, 1696), an English translation and synopsis of the most controversial revisionism of his colleague's Latin commentary on the Pentateuch (1693–95).

⁶⁸ The idea of the "*Plastick Power*" of nature is derived from Plato's concept of *anima mundi* (*Timaeus*), the theory that nature is endowed with a spiritual power that orders and shapes the size and growth of all biological life forms. Revived by the Cambridge Platonists to combat Cartesian materialism, the vitalist theory made a brief comeback but was largely discredited by the end of the seventeenth century. In Mather's time the English botanist John Ray (1627–1705) was one of its principal proponents in his popular *Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1691), esp. pp. 31–40; Mather employs Ray's vitalist argument at some length in his *Christian Philosopher* (essay 26). For a helpful sketch of the concept's short-lived resurgence in the seventeenth century, see W. Hunter (200–03) and R. Rappaport's "Geology and Orthodoxy" (1–18).

⁶⁹ Drake, *Anthropologia* (1:352).

Mather had long admired LeClerc's scholarship but was frequently put off by his denial of miracles and radical demythologizing of the Bible. Although not the first to do so, LeClerc had rejected the traditional reading that the confusion of tongues at Babel "was all transacted on the sudden." The Mosaic account does not detail the events, LeClerc argued, but conflates "the Occurrences of several Ages ... in a few lines." Interpreters therefore wrongly assume an instantaneous alteration of the original language. "Discord and Dissention" among the people – not the miracle of new languages – are here meant (Gen. 11:7); their disagreements led to their separation and isolation from one another and thus "their Languages came to be changed" over a long period of time.⁷⁰ Mather is clearly ill at ease with the spread of such trenchant rationalism among Europe's leading theologians who eschew miracles for measured changes over myriads of generations; yet his defense of this venerable miracle is tepid, or hollow, at best: "Father *Simon*, and *Leclerc*, have embraced this [new] opinion," Mather comments ruefully, "but ... tis better to own the *Miracle*." So, too, after condensing into two paragraphs another critic's rationalist dismissal of miracles, Mather halfheartedly remarks, "I don't acquiesce in [Compegius] *Vitringa's* Notion" (*BA* 1:808, 807).⁷¹ If Mather here speaks out of both sides of his mouth, he perhaps unwittingly finds himself in bed with such notorious Deists as Charles Blount and Thomas Browne, whose anonymously published *Miracles, No Violations of the Laws of Nature* (London, 1683) and, respectively, *Miracles, Work's* [sic] *Above and Contrary to Nature* (London, 1683) ostensibly defend biblical miracles, but do more to spread the ideas of Hobbes and Spinoza than to refute them.

Much the same unintended effect occurs in Mather's commentary on the ten plagues of Egypt and the parting of the seas in the Exodus saga. Again he appears to target the likes of Jean LeClerc, who bring to bear purely naturalist explanations on the Israelites' passing through the Red Sea.⁷² Sly Moses, LeClerc

⁷⁰ Jean LeClerc, *Twelve Dissertations*, diss. 6, sec. 5, pp. 177–79. Richard Simon offers much the same rationalist interpretations on this text in his *Critical History of the OT* (1682), bk. 1, chs. 14–15 pp. 97–107; however, Mather's trusted friend, Simon Patrick, bishop of Ely, is unwilling to go as far as his continental colleagues and offers a more conservative middle ground. God did not give the people new languages, Patrick maintained, but merely confused their memory of the "Original Language which they spake before, as made them speak it very differently: So that by the various Inflections, and Terminations, and Pronunciations of divers Dialects, they could no more understand one another, than they who understand *Latin*, *Italian*, or *Spanish*; tho these Languages arise out of it" (*Commentary upon ... Genesis* [1695] 227).

⁷¹ Mather draws on Compegius Vitringa (1659–1722), the famous Dutch Hebraist, professor of Oriental languages and theology at Franeker, who argues in *Observationum sacrarum* (1683–1708) that "one language" (Gen. 11:1) is a figure of speech suggesting "unison" or "harmony." In defense of God performing a miracle, Mather cites Louis Ellies Du Pin (1647–1719), the ecclesiastical historian and doctor at the Sorbonne, whose *Dissertationes Historiques* (1711), vol. 1, diss. 3, ch. 2, p. 240, asserts that nothing is impossible for God, who can (if he pleases) form new tongues in people's brains and extinguish all traces of their former one.

⁷² Jean LeClerc decries the fondness of the vulgar for prodigies as positively harmful to the Holy Scripture: "To believe often without any Reason, that God alter'd the ordinary Course

alleged, had carefully studied the ebb and tide of the Red Sea so that "he might easily go from one Shoar to another upon the dry ground; and that being a Cunning Man, he vented among the ignorant Multitude, as a Prodigy what happened according to the ordinary Laws of Nature."⁷³ To rebut such Deist claims, Mather draws on *Cosmologia Sacra: Or a Discourse of the Universe* (London, 1701), by Dr. Nehemiah Grew (1642–1712), an English botanist, physician, and member of the Royal Society with decidedly Cartesian leanings. He derives from Grew a definition of miracles broad enough, ironically, to accommodate Jean LeClerc: "Unto a *Miracle*, it is requisite, that the *Cause* be *unknown* to us, either in *itself*, or as to the Manner of its *Operation*. The *Effect* also must be extraordinary, for the Limitation of *Time*, and *Place*, and other Circumstances. And the Design of it, must be something that is *Good*, and *Great*, and *Necessary*."⁷⁴

In framing a construct broad enough to allow for the possibility that the parting of the seas was an ordinary side effect of seasonal or inter-tidal changes, Mather (via Grew) paradoxically demystifies his own definition of miracles, rendering it nearly null and void. God maintains the "perfect Order" of his great machine through the Laws of Nature ("Second Causes"), Mather concedes; it would therefore be "not becoming His Divine Wisdome and Majesty, to do any thing, [I will add, *Ordinarily*,] without some Use of these Causes."⁷⁵ Mather's bracketed insertion is revealing; he clearly feels the need to reinforce Grew's demarcation between extraordinary and ordinary events, between genuine miracles and mere environmental conditions whose causes (though perfectly natural) are not easily discernable to awestruck believers – especially to those in climes far different from that of ancient Egypt. But in dwelling on secondary causes, Mather rationalizes these miracle stories and deprives them of their power to inspire faith in the supernatural.

This much is evident as Mather goes on to discuss Grew's explanations for the ten plagues of Egypt. Aaron's rods "were not converted into *Real Serpents*" in his contest with Pharaoh's magicians but "only invested with the phantastic Image of a Serpent." God would not be so wasteful as to create an authentic snake, endow it with a brain and organs digestive and procreative, only to transmute it "into its former [wooden] State again." Likewise, the plagues that infected the land started in the water, struck all marine animals – including "the *Hippopotamus*, and *Crocodile*" and amphibians – "with a *Dysenteric Murrain*," and so contaminated the waters with their bloody excrements that all turned

of Nature" is detrimental "because it fills the Minds of Men with a superstitious Credulity, exposes the Sacred History to the Contempt and Laughter of Prophane Men, and makes them disbelieve true Miracles and Prodigies" (*Twelve Dissertations*, diss. 13, p. 320).

73 Jean LeClerc, *Twelve Dissertations*, diss. 13, p. 321.

74 BA 16r (on Ex. 7:1). Nehemiah Grew, *Cosmologia Sacra*, bk. 4, ch. 5, pp. 194, 195, 196. Mather is similarly intrigued by John Locke's definition of miracles in *A Discourse of Miracles* (1706) 217–29, which Mather excerpts for inclusion in his annotation on Matth. 4:25.

75 BA 16r (on Ex. 7:1). Grew (194–95).

red. Likewise, tiny eggs of lice mixed with dust, swarms of pesky flies, locusts, hail, and darkness – not wanting “their Natural Causes” – were carried into Egypt by a “Hot African Wind” and accompanied by “a Shower of Dust, such as often happens in such Countreyes,” during the hot season of the year. Finally, reproaching Josephus Flavius for daring to compare Moses’ crossing the Red Sea to Alexander’s wading through the Pamphylian Straits at Phaselis, Grew opts for a “strong *East-Wind*” dividing the Red Sea and freezing the waters “with so Thick an Ice, as to bound them like a Stone Wall on both sides of the Way” and a warm “*Western Wind*” miraculously melting the ice and drowning Pharaoh’s pursuing armies. Mather’s sole remark on Grew’s rationalist explication speaks volumes: “This brings too much Nature into the Matter.”⁷⁶ In spite of Grew’s loud plea for the admissibility of miracles (and of Mather’s effort to tone down Grew’s naturalist explications), the outer wall has been breached, the momentum toward a paradigm shift, toward the gradual demystification of the Bible, is clearly irreversible – even as Mather tries to recover the purity of miracles by supplying an array of annotations ranging from conventional miracles to time-honored typology in his subsequent commentary on Exodus (chs. 7–9). Clearly, like Newton before him, Mather navigates a safe middle passage between the Scylla and Charybdis of natural philosophy and conservative exegesis. Yet Mather’s halfhearted disapproval lays bare his ambidextrous approach, one that looks forward and backward but one that can never again admit of pure miracles without substantial qualification.

Perhaps one final example may be sufficient to gauge Mather’s commitment to the natural philosophy of his time and its impact on the miracles of the Bible. Could science and religion really be harmonized? A case in point is the hotly debated miracle that facilitates Joshua’s victory over the five kings of the Amorites in their clash with Joshua’s army near the Valley of Ajalon (Joshua 10:1–14). Though the Jehovah of Armies had already decimated many of the Amorite warriors by hurling great hailstones on them (so the story goes), survivors beat a hasty retreat as the sun began to set. At this moment, Joshua petitions God to arrest the progress of the sun and moon so that he might vanquish his foes. “And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. *Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord harkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel*” (Joshua 10:13–14 KJV). In Mather’s time, few scriptures elicited as much controversy as the miraculous arrest of the sun and moon in Joshua’s day. Both ancients and moderns were equally divided about this extraordinary phenomenon.

⁷⁶ BA 16r, 17v (on Exod. 7:1) and Grew (195); see also Josephus Flavius (*Antiquities* 2.16.4–5), in *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (1733), *Complete Works* (64–65).

As an aid to appreciating Mather's views on the topic, a quick review of the controversy is in order. Significantly, there was no unanimity among Jewish interpreters, whom Mather could have consulted in his own copies of Daniel Bomberg's famous edition *Biblia Rabbinica* (Venitiae, 1516–17, 2nd ed., 1547), or Sebastian Münster's *Hebraica Biblia, Latina Planeq. Sebast. Munsteri Tralatione* (2nd ed., Basileae, 1546), or Matthew Poole's invaluable *Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque S. Scripture Interpretum* (Londini, 1669–76) – all of which Mather relied on extensively throughout "Biblia Americana." Whereas Rabbi Solomon Jarchi (Rashi), Rabbi David Kimchi, Rabbi Ibn Ezra, and the Babylonian Talmud (Avodah Zarah 25a) insisted on a miracle that testified as much to their Ptolemaic cosmogony as to God's power to suspend the laws of nature, the twelfth-century Rabbi Moses ben Maimon – highly esteemed by Jews and Christians alike – opted for a metaphoric explanation in his *Liber [More Nevochim] Doctor Perplexorum* (Basileae, 1629). The sun did *not* stand still, because the Hebrew expression *tamim* means *perfect* and signifies the "longest day in the summer" or the summer solstice. The supposed miracle in Joshua's day is therefore simply "*ka-jom tamim*," or what people perceived to be "the longest possible day."⁷⁷

Christian interpreters similarly divided into camps of literalists and metaphorists. John Calvin, for instance, acknowledged the debate in his commentary on Joshua yet upheld the literal miracle even in light of Maimonides's linguistic accommodation. In Mather's generation, Archbishop James Ussher, Matthew Poole, Matthew Henry, and Simon Patrick, and many others besides William Derham, insisted that nothing short of a miracle had taken place in Joshua's day.⁷⁸ Even though the universe was governed by natural laws, they argued, the creator was not bound by them and could suspend them at any time. The list of early Enlightenment authorities who spurned the letter of Joshua's purported miracle is significantly shorter and includes such famous authorities as the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, founder of historical-contextual criticism of the Bible, the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, and a few lesser lights.⁷⁹

77 Those who upheld Joshua's miracle are digested in *Mikraoth Gedoloth: Joshua* (72–74); the Rabbinic apocrypha *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (ch. 52, pp. 423–24), even proposes a duration of "thirty-six hours" for this miracle; Maimonides was available to Mather in Johannes Buxtorf's Latin translation, *Rabbi Mosi Majemonidis Liber מורה נבוכים Doctor Perplexorum* (1629), pt. 2, ch. 35, p. 292; *Guide for the Perplexed* (224).

78 John Calvin, *Commentaries on Joshua* (152–55); James Ussher, *Annals of the World* (London, 1660) 28 [26]; Matthew Poole, *Synopsis Criticorum* (1669–76) 3:964–68, and his *Annotations* (1683–85) 2:428–29; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Bible* (1689) 2:47–48; Simon Patrick, *Commentary on the Historical Books of the OT* (1727) 2:36–37; William Derham, *Physico-Theology: Or, a Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (1713), 4th ed. (1716), bk. 2, ch. 3, p. 43.

79 Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Vetus Testamentum* (1646) 1:106, and Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise* (33–34).

Mather's annotations on Joshua 10:12–14 testify to his philosophical torment: he is clearly torn between the letter and the spirit, the authority of tradition and Newtonian science. Among his earliest comments on the miracle of the sun's arrest is his dismissal of Hugo Grotius' linguistic accommodation in *Annotationes in Vetus Testamentum* (Paris, 1646), which Mather leaves untranslated from his Latin original. Halting the course of the sun and moon in mid-heaven is not a miraculous contravention of the natural order, Grotius insisted, echoing Maimonides, but a Hebrew metaphor for the longest day in summer. If Mather did not like this argument at first, he was intrigued by the solution offered by Stephen Nye, whose *Discourse concerning Natural and Revealed Religion* (London, 1696) distinguished between historical verity and poetic license: "The Criticks and Rabbins, take notice, that it is not said by the *Historian*, that *Joshua* commanded the *Sun* and *Moon* to *stand still*, but hee recites the Words of a certain Book (supposed to bee a *Poem*) written by one *Jasher*; in which the *Poet* ... introduces *Joshua*, as requiring the *Sun* & *Moon* to stand still, while hee destroy'd the Enemies of the Lord: which indeed was an elegant Fiction, & very proper in a *Poem*, that was written on such an Occasion." The poet's explanation, Mather agreed with Nye, "should not be strained further than it will naturally bear; that is, not be Understood as a real matter of Fact."⁸⁰ And yet, perhaps to wrench this miracle out of the grip of modern atheists, Mather interpolates the testimony of pagan poets: for if the Greek poet Callimachus (285–246 BCE) allows the sun to stop its chariot to observe "a *Chorus* of Nymphs"; if Herodotus's *Euterpe* cites the ancient Egyptians as proof for the sun's changing her course; if the Rabbis in the Talmud, the Geneva-born diplomat and classical scholar Ezechiel Spanheim, the French Bishop of Avranches Pierre-Daniel Huet, and Dr. William Jackson, president of Corpus Christi College (Oxford), confirm its historicity, and if Archbishop James Ussher "thinks he can demonstrate, that this Remarkable *Phaenomenon* of the Sun, fell out in the Year, 2555" Anno Mundi (c. 1450 BCE), then these weighty authorities simply cannot be ignored.⁸¹

⁸⁰ BA 18r–20r (on Josh. 10:12). Stephen Nye, *A Discourse concerning Natural and Revealed Religion* (1696), pt. 2, sec. 12, pp. 202–03.

⁸¹ BA 18r–20r (on Josh. 10:12, 13). Mather here leans on Simon Patrick's commentary on Joshua 10:12–14 (*Commentary* [1727] 2:36–37). Callimachus, *In Dianam* (ll. 181–82), *Callimachus* (2:9–18); Herodotus (2.142) reports of the Egyptians that "there were four times when the sun rose out of his wonted place – twice rising where now he sets, and twice setting where now he rises – and, say the priests, nothing became different among the Egyptians" (*History* 193–94); Ezechiel Spanheim's commentary on his edition of Callimachus, *In Callimachi Hymnos observationes* (1697); Pierre-Daniel Huet's anti-Cartesian *Abnetanae Quaestiones de Concordia Rationis et Fidei* (1690), bk. 2, ch. 12, sec. 27; Thomas Jackson's *Collection of the Works* (1653), vol. 1, bk. 1, ch. 15, p. 48; Ussher's *Annals* (1660) 28 [26]. The page number in brackets is a misnumbering for p. 28.

Mather wrestled with this miracle for quite some time. If the author of Joshua cites the heroic book of Jasher as evidence for Joshua's miracle, then the celestial event is not a history of what had actually happened but a poetic celebration of Joshua's military victory, not a philosophic account, but poetic hyperbole. "The Scriptures were not written with a Design to teach us Natural Philosophy," Mather concedes, "but to shew us the way how to Live and Dy well. They might therefore use popular Forms of Speech, neither affirming nor denying the philosophical Truth of them To have rectified the vulgar Conceptions of Men, concerning all the *Phænomena*, which upon Occasion are mentioned in the Scriptures, would have required a large System of Philosophy, & have rendred the Scriptures a Book unfit for common Capacities. And the New Theory of Nature [Copernicus, Kepler], would have seemed as incredible to most men, as Miracles themselves. How Incredible does the Rest of the *Sun*, with the Motion of the *Earth*, seem to all Men but Philosophers?" Mather's final concession – here cribbed from Robert Jenkin's third edition of his popular *Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion* (London, 1708) – echoes the dicta of Galileo, Hobbes, Spinoza, Burnet, Whiston, and Newton and illustrates that Enlightenment science and the inerrancy of the Bible were increasingly difficult to reconcile.⁸²

Although Mather is supremely unwilling to sever the ties between natural philosophy and theology, as Spinoza recommended in 1670, his commentary in "Biblia Americana" not infrequently moves in that direction. For Mather, the debate is not about whether the Bible is right or wrong but whether the biblical message and linguistic vehicle are in agreement. The Hebrew prophets used the language and concepts of the vulgar to instruct the people – or as Galileo has it, the Bible teaches people how to go to heaven, not how heaven goes.⁸³ Theologians of Mather's time therefore had to learn the art of distinguishing between intended meaning and the ancients' prejudices, between language and scientific verity, between the form in which a truth was expressed and the intended truth itself. In this manner, then, Mather is able to reconcile the venerable tradition of the Bible with Newtonianism, yet he does so frequently at the cost of separating the letter of the Word from its spirit. If Mather's interest in science inevitably affects the way he interprets Scripture, his theological purview determines even more so how he marshals his empirical evidence. Conservative in his theology yet welcoming of all manner of new learning, he is – perhaps not surprisingly – more audacious in employing the new sciences as an exegetical

⁸² BA 18r–19v (on Josh. 10:12); Robert Jenkin's *Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion*. (1708) 2:211–12.

⁸³ In his "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina" (1615), Galileo Galilei defends his own orthodoxy by attributing this radical accommodationism to Cardinal Baronius, whom he quotes as saying "that the intention of the Holy Spirit is to teach us how one goes to heaven and not how heaven goes" (*Galileo Affair* 96).

tool than most of his peers who supplied American pulpits until the Revolution. So, too, few (if any) traces can here be found in “Biblia Americana” to validate the popular caricature of Mather as an old witch doctor and diehard bigot; instead, his grand project allows him to reclaim his rightful place in the early Enlightenment in America and in the transference of European scholarship to the colonies.

Section 3

Cotton Mather: Theologian, Exegete, Controversialist

During the early modern era, the cosmological and philosophical revolutions precipitated by Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza not only challenged the traditional biblical cosmology, but also called into question the integrity of the scriptural texts and the harmony of the two testaments. Of course, for the majority of ordinary believers, the Good Book remained the Word of God. In the Protestant camp, the scientific revolution caused many academic theologians to reappraise the Bible in terms of a new hyper-literalism, as a quasi-scientific source of knowledge and storehouse of literal facts that could be held to the new standards of empiricism. The more radical minds of the period, however, began to push for a separation of science and religion as two distinct fields of human inquiry, because the Bible seemed to address moral, not mathematical truths. For them, Galileo's famous observation that the Bible taught believers about divine redemption, not about the laws of physics, rang all too true. This dramatic qualification of the Bible's mandate, however, could not but impact other claims that were equally invested in the authenticity of the Bible, in textual transmission, and verbal inspiration.

To those who believed that every word in the Holy Scriptures was divinely dictated, the very idea of research into such matters was shocking. If the seal of God's imprimatur were broken, how was Truth to be certified? If the Word turned out to be more human than divine, what was to become of faith in a transcendent God? The rise of biblical criticism in the seventeenth century thus contributed to eroding the authority of the Bible. In turn, the subversion of divine authority went hand in hand with the elevation of human reason, with confidence in man's judgment, and with his emancipation from dependence on tradition. Biblical criticism therefore lies at the root of what is called the Enlightenment and the evolution of modernity in Western culture. It is still widely believed that modern biblical criticism was an invention of radical German theologians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Johann David Michaelis (1717–91), Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74), and Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) are generally cited as the main representatives of German "Higher

Criticism” which, in the second half of the nineteenth century, would seep into English and American seminaries and lead to the great division between theological liberalism and a programmatically anti-modernist literalism. While German Higher Criticism certainly took the philosophical and historical analysis of the Bible to a whole new level of sophistication and radicalism, the origins of this method lie in seventeenth-century England, France, and the Netherlands – long before the German rationalists began to dominate the discipline.¹

When James I acceded to the throne of England in 1603, no one seriously doubted (or dared to question) the authority of the Bible as the Word of God, the divine inspiration of its prophets, their supernatural visions, dreams, and voices. When the last of the reigning Stuarts was laid to rest in 1714, the Good Book, in the eyes of a growing number of fair-minded scholars, had irrevocably lost its epistemological infallibility. Textual variants, lacunae, repetitions, interpolations, and anachronisms signified to the foremost scholars of the age that textual origin and transmission was anything but certain or trustworthy, that the Bible’s verbatim inspiration and divine dictation were simply pious myth, that revelation’s exclusive object was obedience to God, not disclosure of rational knowledge about nature. The Mosaic Hexameron, once believed to be a scientifically unassailable account of what had happened a mere six thousand years ago, by the beginning of the eighteenth century seemed little more than an abridged allegory adapted to the needs of an ignorant audience best managed by tales of wonder and miracles that aimed at enforcing law and order on a fractious people. If at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Moses was still held to be the author of the Pentateuch, by century’s end, the Mosaic authorship could no longer be maintained without serious qualification. The followers of Spinoza now argued that the Hebrew lawgiver wrote little more than the tables of the law and ordinances; remainder of the Pentateuch was of considerably later origin.² The credibility of the New Testament fared hardly better. At the beginning of James I’s reign, theologians were still convinced that the Holy Spirit had dictated every word of the New Testament to the Apostles and Evangelists. By the time Queen Anne was laid to rest, radical Deists claimed that the New Testament texts had been manipulated by competing sects and that the canon was the result of factional strife, which by the time of the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) had barred from canonization more books than it actually retained.³

1 See especially K. Scholder’s *Birth of Modern Critical Theology* (17–85), H. Frei’s *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (17–154), H. G. Reventlow’s *Authority of the Bible* (194–334), G. Reedy, S. J., *The Bible and Reason* (1985), R. E. Brown’s *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (esp. chs. 2, 4–5), J. Sheehan’s *The Enlightenment Bible* (27–117), and D. Sorkin’s *Religious Enlightenment* (1–22).

2 The scribe Ezra (5th-c. BCE) either rewrote the lost books from memory after the Babylonian captivity (2 Esdras 14:21–22) or compiled and adapted the surviving fragments to be edited and updated by later generations of public writers.

3 Among the principal seventeenth-century skeptics are the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, (*Leviathan* [London, 1651], part III, chs. 33, 37); the French critic Isaac La Peyrère

It is safe to say that the hermeneutical revolution in the wake of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), of Isaac La Peyrère's *Prae-Adamitae* (1655), and especially of Benedict Spinoza's *Tractatus Philosophico-Politicus* (1670) seriously ruptured the Bible's hitherto impregnable status as the Divine Oracle of God.⁴ Theologians on both sides of the English Channel lashed out in pious rage at these latest manifestations of atheism; yet try as they might, no individual or concerted effort could impede the subversive critique of the scriptures once the followers of Hobbes, of La Peyrère, and of Spinoza had begun to infiltrate the marketplace of ideas. Terms of derision became the favorite smear by which orthodox clergymen tried to rein in their colleagues who followed Hobbes, Spinoza, and Deism. Even the French Oratorian priest Richard Simon (1638–1712), best known for his classic *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678), and the Dutch Arminian professor of ecclesiastical history Jean LeClerc (1657–1736), notorious for his assault on the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures in his *Sentimens de quelques Théologiens de Hollande* (1685), branded each other “Spinozists.” Through this mutual defamation, both clergymen tried to render themselves immune to the charge of heresy. In debating these unprecedented challenges to the authority of the Bible, physico-theologians and natural philosophers re-examined their evidence, pored over timeworn dogmas, and launched in the process the beginnings of modern biblical criticism.⁵ What

Prae-Adamitae [n.p. 1655], translated as *A Theological Systeme* [London, 1655] and *Men before Adam* [London, 1656], bk. III, chs. 1–5, pp. 129–163; bk. IV, chs. 1–2, pp. 200–18); the English Quaker Samuel Fisher (*The Rustick's Alarm to the Rabbies* [London, 1660], esp. Exercitation II, chs. 2–3, pp. 11–105); the Jewish philosopher Benedict Baruch Spinoza (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [1670], esp. chs. 1–2, 6–8); the French Oratorian Richard Simon (*Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* [Paris, 1678], English transl. *A Critical History of the Old Testament, in Three Books* [London, 1682], esp. bk. I, chs. 1–8, 16–23); the Dutch Arminian Jean LeClerc (*Sentimens de quelques Théologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire du Vieux Testament* [Amsterdam, 1685], partially translated as *Five Letters Concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* [n.p. 1690], esp. Letters 1–2, pp. 9–150; and LeClerc's more moderate *Genesis, sive, Mosis prophetae liber primus* [Amstelodami, 1693], excerpted and translated as *Twelve Dissertations Out of LeClerc's* [sic] *Genesis* [London, 1696], Dissert. 3, pp. 105–141); and the English Deist John Toland (*Amyntor: Or, A Defence of Milton's Life* [London, 1699], esp. pp. 18–81). See also R. H. Popkin's *Third Force* (1992), *Scepticism and Irreligion* (1993), and *The History of Scepticism* (2003), and L. M. McDonald and J. A. Sanders, eds. *The Canon Debate* (2002), esp. part 3.

⁴ To be sure, neither Hobbes, nor La Peyrère, nor Spinoza was the first to challenge the Bible's sacrosanct status. Their textual criticism and rejection of Moses as author of the Pentateuch, and their argument that most of the Pentateuch and many of the other OT texts were compilations and redactions of older (but lost) manuscripts rested on the daring investigations of such predecessors as the German theologian Andreas Karlstadt (1486–1541), the Flemish Priest Andreas Masius (1514–73), the Portuguese Jesuit Bento Pereira (1535–1610), the Flemish Jesuit Jacques Bonfrère (1673–1642), the Dutch Oratorian Johannes Morinus (1591–1659), the Huguenot scholar Louis Cappellus (1585–1658), and the Dutch Jurist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). See H.-J. Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung* (28–53).

⁵ See Jean LeClerc's anonymous *Sentimens de quelque Théologiens Hollande* (1685). Unless otherwise noted, my references are to the translated abstract *Five Letters Concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (1690). LeClerc's charges against Simon's Spinozism appear in *Five Letters*