

Nevertheless, this volume reflects well on the series “St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History.” Well-written and almost immaculately edited, it reflects the highest levels of scholarship. It will be especially appreciated by those with an interest in early Reformed liturgy and prayer. Unfortunately, the list price puts it generally only in the reach of institutional libraries. However, it is available for considerably less from popular online retailers.

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Cotton Mather, *Biblia Americana, Volume 1: Genesis*, edited by Reiner Smolinski. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. Pp. xii + 1337. \$250.00, cloth.

Cotton Mather (1663–1728) was one of the most (if not *the* most) prolific writers of colonial America. As author of more than 450 books, Mather left an indelible mark on the social, religious, and intellectual culture of early-modern Americana. As the son of the distinguished minister and president of Harvard, Increase Mather, and the grandson of two distinguished ministers, John Cotton and Richard Mather, Cotton Mather was destined not only for the ministry but also for a life of learning. His native genius was as impressive as his pedigree: in 1674, when he entered Harvard College at the age of eleven he knew more Latin and Greek than the college required and was well ahead of his peers; in 1678, at the age of fifteen, Mather was Harvard’s youngest graduate and immediately began preaching in Boston churches. When Mather was at Harvard, Latin was the official language of college life and students were not allowed to use English in conversation with one another unless called upon to do so in public exercises of oratory. It was customary for students to take turns in morning prayer, translating, on the spot, portions of the English Bible into Greek and in the evening into Hebrew. There is little doubt that Mather became the foremost intellectual in Massachusetts and, arguably, in all the colonies, even surpassing his younger Puritan contemporary, Jonathan Edwards, who would later overshadow him. Mather owned the largest private library in the colonies; his father bequeathed to him all his books. This, combined with access to Harvard’s library, gave Mather access to the best books in America. To illustrate the importance of book learning in the Mather home, Cotton Mather records in his diary that his father once enlisted him to run upstairs with him to save his library when their family home was on fire in November 1676. Increase piled the most important books in Cotton’s arms and sent him downstairs and then began tossing books down the stairwell in an attempt to save them (see Michael G. Hall, *The Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather*, pp. 127-29).

These historical facts provide just a glimpse of the atmosphere into which Mather’s *Biblia Americana* was eventually born. Immensely learned in the thought of his day, both British and Continental, Mather cites thousands of sources throughout his works—415, for example, in his *The Christian Philosopher* alone. By the time Mather died in 1728 he was without peer in his intellectual prowess. Famed Mather historian Kenneth Murdock described him as “a well-bred amateur of many fields of knowledge” (Murdock, “Mather, Cotton,” in *Dictionary of American Biography*, 6:388). Indeed, Mather’s success was not confined to theological reflection—he has been called the first significant figure in American medicine and expressed interest (and even wrote extensively) on small pox (for Mather, medicine was a second vocation).

In 1693 Mather began his exegesis of the English Bible. In his diary he calls it “one of the greatest works that ever I undertook in my life” (*Diary of Cotton Mather*, 1:169). In 1714 he published an advertisement seeking subscription for the work, and two years later wrote to Antony William Boehm, “I can without vanity assure you that the Church of G-d has never yet had so rich an amassment of the most valuable things together tendered unto it.” It was America’s first Bible commentary, and one which, according to Mather’s son, would have consumed the life of an ordinary scholar; indeed, in a letter to Anthony Boehm on August 6, 1716, Cotton Mather expressed hopes for the completion of the *Biblia* amidst suggestions that he needed the help of catholic-minded Christians to bring the work to fruition.

For nearly three hundred years the *Biblia Americana* sat unpublished in six folio volumes (preserved in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society), presumably because other works of a similar nature were already published (the market was then saturated with huge commentaries) or perhaps because the work constitutes more or less an anthology of sources with Mather’s comments. Further, Mather seems to have edited and revised it continually, and, as such, it suffered from lack of organization. Its form, question and answer, was unusual for biblical commentaries in the Reformed tradition, and this too could have led to its obscurity. Rather than follow the usual pattern of chapter summary, lemma, and comment, Mather chose instead to structure the *Biblia* within a catechetical framework, marking sections with “Q” and “A.” To date, there have been few studies of this treasure trove of Puritan exegesis, most being confined to little-known articles and doctoral dissertations. Regardless of the reasons for being so long unpublished, a joint venture between the German publisher Mohr Siebeck and the American publisher Baker Academic seeks to mollify this neglect by publishing Mather’s entire *Biblia Americana* in a definitive and scholarly edition, comprising ten well-produced volumes.

Reiner Smolinski, who is spearheading the project, has spent his life studying British North America, and is immensely qualified to edit this definitive edition of Mather’s *Biblia Americana*. Smolinski’s “Introduction,” which is a book in itself, consists of over two hundred pages and introduces nearly every facet that has to do with the history and historiography of the *Biblia* on Genesis, including original advertisements for the work. Combined with a companion volume of essays on the *Biblia Americana* (published separately as *Cotton Mather and Biblia Americana, America’s First Bible Commentary: Essays in Reappraisal*), also edited by Smolinski and Jan Stievernann, readers can assess the whole gamut of Mather’s importance in early American thought. In the *Biblia* on Genesis, Smolinski has meticulously arranged and edited the text in such a way that Mather’s commentary will be more accessible to historians wanting to probe Mather’s genius. Smolinski’s annotations provide a window into Mather’s academic brilliance, and will help historians to better place Mather’s thought within the broader Atlantic commentarial tradition. This edition will further bring Cotton Mather to the fore of early-modern biblical scholarship, and justly set his place alongside such celebrated synoptic commentators as Matthew Poole, Matthew Henry, John Trapp, and William Gouge.

When one approaches the *Biblia* for the first time, several things become evident. First, Mather’s renowned learning was not overstated—he often reveals not only an intricate knowledge of Latin and the biblical languages but also an intimate awareness of rabbinic literature, the patristics, the so-called “canon” of Reformed writings, and the most current Enlightenment thinkers to date. Even a casual glance at the text on Genesis shows Mather’s reliance on such figures as Thomas Aquinas, Denys the Carthusian, Nicholas of Lyra, John Calvin,

Heinrich Bullinger, Henry Ainsworth, Johannes Cocceius, Johann Heinrich Heidegger, Joseph Mede, Johannes Piscator, and Francis Turretin, to name just a few. Second, Mather's use of Hebrew sources throughout the *Biblia Americana* deserves special notice—as Louis H. Feldman observed in his *Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, Mather's use of Josephus has been totally ignored in Mather biographies. Indeed, Mather comes up with some rather interesting conclusions about Josephus. He notes, for instance, in his lengthy introduction to his commentary on the Gospels that Josephus, a contemporary of Paul, actually knew the apostle and studied with him under Gamaliel. Mather was also aware of versions of Josephus's writings in Greek, Latin, and English, as well as the Latin translation of the paraphrase in Hebrew of the *Jewish War* called the *Josippon*. He knew of, and presumably read, all of Josephus's known works. Third, remarkably for someone who was so well versed in classical Aristotelian logic and metaphysics, Mather opted to place greater emphasis on history, geography, and the natural sciences; indeed, in seeking subscribers for his work Mather stressed that the *Biblia Americana* contained “an elaborate and entertaining history of what has befallen the Israelitish Nation, in every place, from the birth of our Great Redeemer to the very day.” Mather's foray into history is perhaps better articulated in his popular *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), his greatest published work. Fourth, Mather's intense passion for piety is evident in his work; he seems to be always looking for ways to twist and turn his discussion towards more pious ends. Indeed, Richard F. Lovelace's emphasis on Mather's pietism in his *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) seems well placed. Mather was, above all his theoretical postulations, a pastor and theologian of piety. Fifth, Mather's *Biblia Americana* grew out of his intense love for the Bible. This gigantic enterprise was an interpretation of the whole of Scripture in light of the best learning of his day. It was an attempt to view the Bible through the lens of reason, science, geography, history, and metaphysics, and, above all, faith. Sixth, Mather's *Biblia* is relevant for religious scholars today because it provides an example of a weaving or blending of the old world with the new or an attempt to harmonize pre-Enlightenment confessional theology with advances in the natural sciences. For instance, Mather's synoptic discussion of the days of creation reveals a hovering sense of commitment to his Puritan upbringing amidst an intense interaction with the then-popular philosophical currents on creation.

As a whole, Mather's *Biblia* is not a conventional commentary; one should consider it as a slight break within the Reformed hermeneutical tradition. It consists of massive amounts of minor details and synoptic information, collected, gathered, collated, and commented upon. It is a work of utter brilliance, and Smolinski's annotations are of equal merit and importance.

As most historians of the period know, Cotton Mather was one of the most complex personalities of his day. He has been accused of prejudice, bias, and egotism, all woven within a supernatural framework with undue credence to angels and demons (e.g., Mather claimed to have witnessed numerous angelic visitations—one in particular informing him of Christ's return in 1716; another example is Mather's involvement with the Salem Witch Trials). Peter Gay has quipped that if Mather had never existed no village atheist would have had the wit to invent him (Peter Gay, *A Loss of Mastery: Puritan Historians in Colonial America* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966], 58). Still, even with Mather's oddities, he has earned a bad rap. With the publication of the *Biblia* it is hoped that not only will Mather studies be revived once again, but that several stereotypes will finally be silenced, perhaps chief among them being the so-called “naval gazing” or excessive introspection of the Puritans. Rather, typical of

the Reformed orthodox who went before such as William Twisse, John Owen, or Richard Baxter, true learning was not only centered on the Bible and its insights for humanity but also implied a thorough awareness of contemporary thought. Puritans were not taught to be so absorbed with their own plight as to exclude interaction with the world.

One cannot read the *Biblia* without being impressed by the level of care with which Mather engaged his study. Though the *Biblia* is not a commentary by modern standards, it nonetheless is a masterpiece of astute theological devotion and reflection. Mather fully engaged the philosophical trends of the Continent and appropriated whenever possible their insights—all the while remaining committed to his theological convictions. As with Edwards, one may consider Mather a philosophical theologian (at least in the sense that he engaged in philosophical reflection). He was acutely interested in all the sciences known at the time. Indeed, his *The Christian Philosopher* (1721) was the first American book of natural theology with the design argument as its thesis.

Mather remains a much-understudied figure even though he has been the subject of numerous well-known studies within the past thirty years. Now, however, with the publication of this first edition of Mather's commentary on Genesis, Mather's genius is once more brought to the fore. The editors of this volume, an international team of experts in early American studies, project a series of ten volumes published over the course of a decade, an ambitious enterprise. This first volume introduces the project and offers Mather's *Biblia* on Genesis. This work will be treasured by students of American church history, colonial-era Puritanism, Christian responses to the Enlightenment, American intellectual development, and the history of biblical interpretation. Throughout Mather's writings his overarching aim was to convert others to a life of piety. Rather remarkably, in his diary Mather makes the incredible resolution to write a book a month, though, of course, he did not quite achieve that pace. Peter Gay wrote that Mather was so anxious to see his writings in print that he would rather lose his soul than misplace a manuscript.

In summary, the publishing of Mather's *Biblia Americana* provides scholars a telescope into the intellectual atmosphere of the third-generation Mathers. It shows how learned religious writers of the period engaged the English Enlightenment, what it meant to be au courant, and the ambiance of colonial biblical scholarship. The Mather project is indeed a major publishing event and one that should be welcomed by historians of American Puritanism and acquired by research libraries around the world. The project is as ambitious as Mather's renowned ego, and one wholly worthy of academic attention.

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Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*. New York: Free Press, 2010. Pp. 291. \$26.99, cloth.

In *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* Sam Harris, one of the champions of the new atheism movement, seeks to develop an objective and universal naturalistic morality, grounded in the sciences (particularly neuroscience, the area of Harris's doctorate) and free from both religious and pseudoscientific pretensions. God and religion