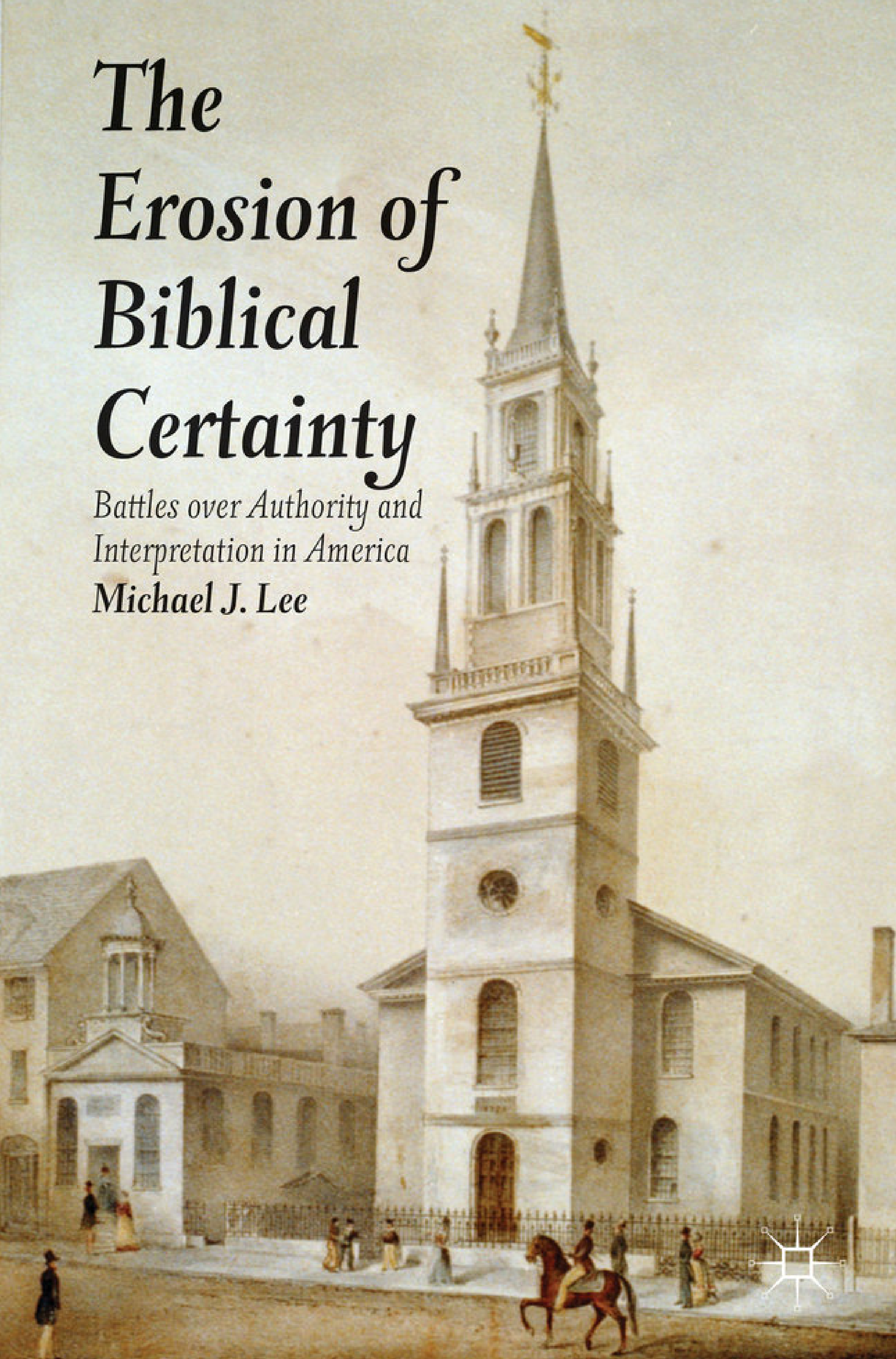
The Erosion of Biblical Certainty

Battles over Authority and Interpretation in America

Michael J. Lee



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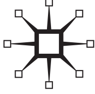

THE EROSION OF BIBLICAL CERTAINTY
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To Heidi

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Introduction

Historians commonly agree that the understanding of the Bible as a supernatural text conveying both spiritual and historical truths came under devastating assaults from the natural sciences and German historical critics in the nineteenth century. By the late nineteenth century, among many intellectuals, the image of the Bible as a supernaturally inspired and infallible text eventually crumbled under the relentless assaults of secularizing forces—so the story goes. *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty* corrects this narrative. I argue that in America, the road to skepticism was ironically and unintentionally paved by the Scriptures' defenders. From the eighteenth to the first half of the nineteenth century, theologically conservative Americans defended the Bible from critical attacks. However, the Bible's able and ardent defenders altered their conceptions of revelation to preserve their faith in light of changing standards of plausibility. In doing so, they gradually yet radically undermined the traditional understanding of Holy Writ by denuding it of its supernatural nature. That is to say, skeptics were not solely responsible for knocking the Bible off its throne. Some of the fault lies with the Scriptures' Protestant apologists.

Traditionally, Protestants *knew* that the Bible was infallible because they believed that the Holy Spirit supernaturally allowed the faithful reader to recognize the Scriptures' divine nature. This intuition was privileged and available only to believers. In the early eighteenth century, deists argued that spiritually granted knowledge was hopelessly subjective and therefore must be rejected. If the Bible were examined by empirically verifiable and universally accessible criteria, then one must conclude that it was just one among several ancient religious texts. Therefore the Bible's accounts of miracles were no more reliable than fantastic fables recorded in numerous pagan mythologies. In response, a few forward-thinking eighteenth-century American Christian thinkers defended the Bible on the deists' own terms. They argued that by the eighteenth-century standards of empirical evidence, especially historical evidence, the accuracy of the biblical record was as plausible as any other ancient document. Gradually the Bible's apologists shifted the basis of belief from a personal faith empowered by the Holy Spirit to the more defensible and culturally respected position of empirical evidence.

By the early nineteenth century, American Christians rested comfortably in the knowledge that history vindicated the authenticity of the Bible. American biblical scholars such as Joseph Buckminster, Andrews Norton, and Moses Stuart also came to understand that in order to ascertain the authentic meaning of the Bible, one needed to contextualize his or her interpretation of the sacred text in the world of the biblical writers. They used their historicized interpretation to affirm their convictions, such as the authenticity of miracles. However, these conservative apologists were utterly unprepared for the critique of nineteenth-century German biblical scholars, such as D. F. Strauss, who historicized the Bible with results far more radical and disturbing than the Americans could have anticipated. Strauss interpreted the biblical text as the product of a people with a primitive worldview rather than as a timeless revelation that could be understood by Christians of any age or culture. Strauss concluded, to the outrage of most Christians, that Jesus's miracles were culturally conditioned myths. Because the eighteenth-century American Christians had so inextricably tethered their defense and interpretation of the Bible to historical examination, their nineteenth-century children struggled to formulate an adequate response to the German historical critics.

The Erosion of Biblical Certainty demonstrates that from the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, conservative American biblical scholars, for the purpose of defending the notion of a supernatural Bible, gradually became increasingly naturalistic in their understanding of revelation. They continuously appropriated the cutting-edge tools of the age—naturalistic and empirical modes of interpretation—to confirm revelation's supernatural nature. In doing so, they conceded that the Bible was accountable to outside authorities and needed to be reconciled to new fields of knowledge. Every critique necessitated a new defense and adaptation. Increasingly, the Bible's nature became determined less by theology and more by ancillary disciplines such philology and history. Eighteenth-century Americans confidently grounded their defense of the Bible in reason and evidence. After all, they were certain that the Bible was true. What had they to fear from subjecting it to examination? And their defense was effective. However, the nature of reason and evidence evolved. The standards of plausibility changed. Tragically, the apologists failed to consider fully the effect this would have on the conceptualization of the nature of revelation. My book argues that the eroding belief in the Bible was not exclusively the result of the efforts of the skeptics who examined the Bible under the harsh light of critical examination. Rather the Bible's most able and vigorous defenders played a key role in the demise of its authority.

The scholarly examination of the rise of biblical criticism usually focuses on Europe. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European skeptics such as Thomas Hobbes, Benedict Spinoza, Jean Le Clerc, Richard Simon, and deists challenged the factual accuracy and historical reliability of the biblical text by raising issues of its authorship, transmission, canonical status, historical authenticity, and inspiration. They pointed out internal inconsistencies of the biblical text, questioned the claims of the fulfillment of prophecy, and challenged the possibility of miracles. In short, they interpreted the Bible by the same rules they used for ordinary ancient texts. Historian Jonathan Sheehan observes that in Europe, the Bible's readers, in response, altered the manner in which they understood Scripture. Interpreters increasingly relied on disciplines such as philology and history, rather than theology, to access the Bible's meaning. Similarly, theologian Hans Frei notes that before the eighteenth century, "precritical" readers assumed that the Bible, as inspired revelation, accurately related historical events. In response to the critical attacks on the historical validity of the biblical narratives, he writes, some Christians conceded that the Bible did not accurately relate historical events but merely spiritual truths. Increasingly, some interpreted the Bible's narratives as products of a primitive culture and therefore it ceased to be a historically reliable record.[1]

Scholars argue that the Bible's authority on matters beyond theology proper, such as history and science, eroded. Many Christians previously assumed that cosmological or historical truths needed to conform to a fairly literal reading of the Bible. By the eighteenth century, the interpretations of the Bible began to need to conform to the conclusions of history and science. Revelation became subject to empirical and nontheological disciplines. The order of authority and interpretation changed directions. People once interpreted the world through the Bible. By the eighteenth century, they tended to interpret the Bible through a diverse and growing body of new knowledge.[2] This shift affected both the proponents and enemies of the Bible. For the skeptics, history and science repudiated the Bible, but the Bible's defenders used those disciplines to vindicate the Scriptures.

Though the changes in the status and interpretation of the Bible in the European context have received ample attention, historians have tended to neglect the understanding of the Bible in early America. *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty* examines how learned Americans dealt with the new and often unsettling ideas. They predictably resisted some of the most radical claims. However, many demonstrate a remarkable and surprising

degree of openness. They appropriated far more than one might have anticipated.

When historians have examined the understanding of the Bible in America, they have focused on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, giving the impression that until the nineteenth century, Americans simply did not deal with the critical problems regarding the Bible.[3] For example, Jerry Wayne Brown's *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America* argues that American biblical criticism was the result of Harvard graduates going to study in Germany in the early nineteenth century.[4] Thus biblical criticism was a German tree planted in New England soil. However, the soil had been prepared in the previous century. My book argues that the critical examination of the Bible in America began not in the nineteenth but the eighteenth century.

Though few historians of early America have addressed the issue of the interpretation of the Bible, several have noted that in the eighteenth century, American church leaders generally moved in more rationalist directions.[5] For example, Michael Winship examines the American Puritan reaction to Enlightenment thought in *Seers of God*. Winship contends that under pressure to adapt his understanding of providence to conform to the new standards of natural science, Cotton Mather, to varying degrees, adapted his beliefs to the image of a regular, predictable, natural world.[6] Winship discusses how Mather altered his interpretation of nature. I argue that similar pressures altered how Mather, and those who came after him, interpreted the Bible.

Robert Brown's *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, a rare exception to the neglected history of early American biblical interpretation, notes that Edwards was keenly aware of the development of critical European biblical scholarship. Brown argues that in Edwards's battles against the deists, he increasingly subjected the Bible to historical examination. In doing so, Edwards conceded that the Bible emerged from a historically distant and alien world and needed to be interpreted through historical interpretive tools.[7] Other eighteenth-century American figures also increasingly subjected their interpretation of the Scriptures to empirical examination. Though they did so for conservative ends, they paved the path for the historical critical interpretation of the Bible of the nineteenth century.

As the century wore on, biblical scholars generally became increasingly rationalistic and naturalistic in the understanding of the Bible. Though they maintained a belief that the Bible was divine revelation, the supernatural oracle of God, and a book unlike any other, they continuously adapted their conception of revelation to fit the prevailing intellectual standards. The Bible, they believed, needed to be defensible and plausible

by contemporary standards. However, in doing so, they were tacitly admitting that the interpretation of the Bible was accountable to outside authorities and needed to be reconciled with the conclusions of a variety of other fields of knowledge. The Bible might be eternal and unchanging, but it became clear that its interpretation, like the intellectual currents of the ages, was far more fluid. It is this process of change that this book seeks to trace.

My first two chapters consider various ways in which American Protestants confronted the challenges to the Bible and how they appropriated rationalistic and empirical tools of biblical interpretation. In Chapter 1, I discuss Cotton Mather, who was one of the first Americans to address directly the deistic threat. He attempted to refute the deists and defend the Bible on empirical and rational terms. In trying to reconcile his understanding of revelation with advances in natural philosophy and history, his interpretation of the Bible evolved in some startling ways and he made some radical concessions, putting him at odds with his Puritan tradition.

Chapter 2 examines early-eighteenth-century intellectuals who attempted to defend the Bible with history. Jonathan Edwards and Jonathan Dickinson stand out as the most prolific and influential. Dickinson and Edwards attempted to "prove" the supernatural nature of the Bible by demonstrating that the events it recorded could be verified by commonly accepted standards of historical examination. Though history provided a useful defense, they acknowledged that the alliance created some troubling consequences. Traditionally, Christians were "absolutely certain" that the Bible was accurate. Both Dickinson and Edwards acknowledged that historical evidence, by its very nature, could only rise to the level of "high probability." Though the probability was sufficiently high to warrant an assent to faith, it fell short of the unquestioned assurance to which Christians had been accustomed. Ultimately, they argued belief required faith beyond evidence.

The third chapter examines the Dudleian Lectures at Harvard College during the second half of the eighteenth century. The annual endowed lectures were devoted to the discussion of revealed and natural religion and defended the Bible against skeptical attacks. The lectures essentially argued that the Bible met the standards of rational examination. As with Edwards and Dickinson, history proved to be central to their apologetic task. The biblical narrative met the standards of any historical test, they argued. Therefore, the lecturers reasoned, the Bible must be true. The lectures were by design conservative, but I trace subtle but profound shifts through five decades of lectures. The earlier lectures maintained the balance that Edwards articulated. Empirical proofs were useful, but

ultimately the Holy Spirit, in theory, granted knowledge of the Bible's nature and meaning. However, as the century wore on, the recognition of the role of the Spirit declined. In the later lectures, the speakers examined revelation almost exclusively on objective and empirical grounds.

American Protestant intellectuals had grown comfortable defending the Bible with history. However, since the seventeenth century, European critics and scholars, using a historicist hermeneutic, had interpreted the Bible in a radically naturalized manner, which undermined its traditional status. Americans confronted these challenges for the first time in the early nineteenth century. In Chapter 4, I examine Joseph Stevens Buckminster, who published the first American edition of Johann Jakob Griesbach's Greek New Testament. By comparing a multitude of conflicting biblical manuscripts, Griesbach demonstrated that the very text of Holy Writ itself was subject to the degradations and corruptions of history. In the process of transcription, the text of the Bible had been altered. This assertion certainly undermined traditional notions of inspiration.

In the fifth chapter, I examine the writings of the Unitarian Andrews Norton. Like the Dudleian lecturers, Norton believed that history validated the authenticity of the Bible. Put simply, he argued that the New Testament writers met the standards of historical reliability: they testified to miracles, and therefore, the accounts of miracles authenticated the Bible's divine authority. Norton built his confidence on the Bible's authority almost exclusively on the evidence of history. Arguing against the Calvinists, he believed that any understanding of the Bible must be based on externally verifiable evidence rather than inner religious experiences or Spirit-led intuitions, which were too subjective and beyond rational scrutiny. By interpreting certain passages of the Bible in their historical and cultural context, he argued that Calvinists had radically misinterpreted the biblical authors' original intent. However, late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century German theologians, or Neologians as they came to be called, also historicized the Scriptures, but in ways that went far beyond what Norton found acceptable. They examined the Bible as a product of a particular historical and cultural environment. Primitives, they believed, erroneously saw miracles in natural phenomena. The factuality of the historical record could not be trusted, they concluded. Thus the German critics, using the tools of history to support their own naturalist metaphysical views, radically undermined the foundation of the Unitarian apologetics. One should note that the Germans were not using history in any neutral sense. Rather, naturalism lay at the heart of their interpretation. History had once been the vital ally of the Bible. A metaphysically naturalistic history now became a threatening enemy.

In Norton's attempts to defend the supernatural status of the Bible, he left the Bible vulnerable to the attacks of the Neologians. Unlike earlier thinkers such as Edwards, Norton believed that the Bible needed to be subject to strict empirical and especially historical examination. He left no room for a Spirit-enlightened interpretation. He, and others, built their faith on the foundation of history. In the hands of the Neologians that foundation would crumble beneath them.

When critics began to assault the supernatural status of the Bible, American Protestant intellectuals were forced to find new ways to defend their sacred text. They domesticated and adopted the hermeneutical tools of one generation of heretics and incorporated them into a new, broadly accepted Protestant conception of revelation. In doing so, they transformed their own standards, altering their own notion that the Bible was a timeless and unchanging revelation.

Why did Americans so widely and readily embrace history as an interpretive tool in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? Mark Noll and others have argued that America suffered severe social disruptions and upheavals in the era of the Revolution and early republic. In addition, the Great Awakening undermined traditional religious authorities by placing greater emphasis on the individual's reception of God's grace. By midcentury, Americans by and large were averse to submitting to established hierarchies, tradition, inherited governments, and the authority of state churches. The Second Great Awakening, which began in the 1790s, accelerated the erosion of traditional religious authority. New religious sects proliferated with seemingly endless variety, often led by charismatic figures who claimed a more authentic interpretation of Holy Writ. Americans were increasingly free to choose their religious leaders and, in effect, choose their interpretation of the Bible. Hermeneutical options seemed to grow without limits.[8]

During the upheaval, Noll argues, American clergy turned to Scottish Common Sense philosophy and moral philosophy. According to Norman Fiering, its proponents believed that "God's intentions for man, His expectations of human beings as moral creatures, could be discovered independently of the traditional sources of religious authority, through a close investigation of human nature."[9] Ethics could be studied and taught like any objective physical science. Previously, Puritans taught that only the grace of God allowed one to understand the Scriptures truly and behave righteously. Common Sense however taught that one did not have to be among the elect to act virtuously. Fiering writes that moral philosophy was "uniquely suited to the needs of an era still strongly committed to traditional religious values and yet searching for alternative modes

of justification for those values."[10] With the multiplication of Christian sects and the erosion of traditional deference to ecclesiastical and social authorities, Common Sense philosophy became the convenient glue that held theologically diverse and independent-minded populations together. People naturally recognized the authority and authenticity of the Bible, leaders argued, by common and innate principles. Many believed that this common and minimal belief in the Bible was necessary for the functioning of society.[11]

For similar reasons, American biblical interpreters turned to history. This book argues that in an expanding, free marketplace of hermeneutics, American Christian leaders increasingly found in history a potential authoritative guide to regulate and bring order to ever-abounding interpretative options. Religious leaders could no longer base their power on the authority of a magisterium, the coercive power of the state, or even tradition. However, the universal accessibility of history became a means by which leaders hoped they could adjudicate between interpretive conflicts and discover an authentic interpretation of the Bible. Furthermore, as its proponents continually stated, historical arguments were accessible to the common senses of all intelligent, reasonable, and unbiased minds.

Part I

The Eighteenth Century

The Battle against Skepticism and Rationalizing the Bible

PROLOGUE

THE EUROPEAN BACKGROUND

RADICAL CRITICS AND RATIONAL DEFENDERS OF THE BIBLE

RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS, BY THEIR VERY NATURE, TEND to be conservative. Christians have generally believed that God is timeless and above the vicissitudes of history. Therefore, unlike temporal human affairs, his nature and by extension his revelation should be eternal and unchanging. However, beginning in the eighteenth century, a few British American Protestants were compelled to alter their conception of Holy Writ. They increasingly put greater confidence in what they believed to be more empirical tools of analysis, such as history, philology, and natural science. As the naturalistic modes of examination gained prestige and credibility, the validity of supernaturally grounded insights gradually receded. Why this radical shift? First, they believed that in order to withstand the assaults from European skeptics, the Bible needed to be verified by evidence. Second, they were influenced by Anglican thinkers who sought not to undermine the Bible but rather to understand revelation through the lenses of what were regarded as recent philosophical advances. Therefore, in order to understand why Americans felt the need to naturalize their understanding of supernatural revelation, it is necessary to consider the European ideas that were applying enormous pressure on the Americans' understanding of the Bible.[1]

John Locke (1632–1704) cast an enormous shadow over the eighteenth century. He influenced both the latitudinarians, who advocated a religiosity characterized by balance, order, toleration, and reason, and the deists, who used his ideas to dismiss the Bible as a viable source of truth.[2] Locke lived in a time of political conflict caused in large part by

disagreements over a common understanding of reason and doctrine. Disgusted by the excesses of the Interregnum's clericalism, sectarianism, and enthusiasm, he sought religious tolerance. To this end, he attempted to establish definitive criteria to examine issues of fact and articulate a critical method of interpreting Scripture.[3] In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke argued that only empirical investigation, based on the senses, could yield trustworthy data. Therefore he discounted the reliability of innate ideas, personal revelations, or enthusiasm, which were by their nature private and subjective and therefore could not be examined in the public realm. Knowledge of this sort had often been a source for the assertions of religious certainty and therefore was the cause of much intractable disagreement and conflict.[4] As an alternative, Locke sought to secure belief on a reasonable and universally accessible foundation.

Locke believed reason was a procedure as opposed to a predetermined set of dogmatic truths. Thus he tried to construct a method of inquiry that any reasonable person could employ independent of theological loyalties. The Bible, Locke believed, should not be simply accepted on faith or authority but interpreted on the basis of universally accessible standards of reason and language. For Locke, that meant the meaning of a Scripture passage lay in the intent of the author and the historical circumstances. He ruled out typological or spiritual knowledge, which could not be examined or verified by a theologically neutral reader. However, Locke was not a deist. Although many parts of the Bible were "above reason," they could never be contrary to reason. Some aspects of Christian revelation clearly required faith. Reason alone could not lead to the most important religious truths, but reason, he believed, should regulate faith.[5]

Isaac Newton (1643–1722) also changed the way many people understood the Bible. As Locke attempted to uncover and describe the precise ways in which the mind operates, Newton examined the laws that govern the physical world.[6] The body of Newton's scientific labors transformed the way in which educated Europeans (and their colonial American counterparts) understood their universe. Newton's *Principia* (1687) demonstrated that the motion of physical objects and heavenly bodies was measurable, regular, and predictable. The laws of the universe were subject to precise mathematical treatment and discoverable through careful empirical observation. Although some of his followers viewed the world as an enormous machine, driven by impersonal forces, Newton did not. His system required the constant activity of the deity. Newton also believed that God could suspend his laws to allow for miracles. Deists, on the other hand, believed that miracles were impossible because they violated the laws of nature.

In Newton's wake, some sought to find God's fingerprints on the design of the elegant machine of the world. These physico-theologians, as they were commonly called, published numerous works in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In 1692, Robert Boyle institutionalized the steady progress of physico-theology by endowing a series of lectures for the purpose of *proving* the truth of Christianity against "infidels" by using the principles of Newtonian science. For example, Newton wrote a series of letters to the Anglican philologist Richard Bentley explaining how his theories of the order of the universe could be used as evidence of a divine creator. Bentley turned the letters into the first series of Boyle Lectures, which he delivered in 1692. They were published under various titles, including *The Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism* (1693). (Years later, Bentley was appointed Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, in 1717.) Important physico-theological works that influenced American defenders of the Bible include Boyle's *Christian Virtuoso* (1690), John Ray's *Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1691), William Whiston's *A New Theory of the Earth* (1696), and William Derham's *Physico-Theology* (1713).[7]

Similarly, Anglican latitudinarians, influenced by Locke, attempted to shore up the reliability of the Bible on the basis of history. Skeptical deists tried to challenge the historical reliability of biblical accounts. For example, Anthony Collins had the audacity to question whether Jesus truly fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. The skeptic Thomas Woolston argued that the Gospel accounts of miracles should be interpreted as allegories because he believed that miracles were preposterous. In response, latitudinarians argued that the Gospels conformed to the standards of historical examination because reliable witnesses testified to the validity of miracles, which authenticated divine inspiration.[8] Nathaniel Lardner wrote *The Credibility of Gospel History* (1724–43) in an attempt to refute Collins and Woolston by corroborating the New Testament from independent sources. Thomas Sherlock wrote one of the most elaborate defenses of the veracity of the Apostles' testimony of Jesus's resurrection in *Trial of the Witnesses* (1729). Archbishop John Tillotson was particularly influential in America. Barbara Shapiro and Gerard Reedy note that historical "proofs" could only rise to the level of high probability rather than absolute certainty. Nonetheless, the latitudinarians believed that highly probable evidence warranted faith.[9] Although latitudinarians and physico-theologians elevated the role of reason, they did not question or undermine the importance of faith. Most English rational Protestants believed reason could only "confirm" faith rather than discover new spiritual truths independently. Nonetheless, according to Hans Frei,

these men represented the beginnings of a new approach to understanding the Bible. Previous generations tended to believe that the truth of the Bible was guaranteed by the Bible itself. They assumed the authority of Scripture and then sought evidence that affirmed their belief. However, in response to skeptical attacks, latitudinarians subjected revelation to independent investigation to test its veracity.[10]

La Peyrère, Hobbes, Spinoza, Simon, Le Clerc, and the Bible

Newton, Locke, and the latitudinarians believed that reason, the evidence of nature, and history affirmed the authenticity of Scripture. A few seventeenth-century thinkers, such as Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), and Benedict Spinoza (1632–77) drew more radical conclusions by challenging the common understanding of the Bible. Christians generally believed that God supernaturally inspired the writers of the Bible. Though there were various theories of inspiration, most agreed that Scripture presented an accurate record of historical events.[11]

La Peyrère challenged this conventional view. In his book, *Prae-Adamitae* (published in Latin in 1655 and in English as *Men before Adam* in 1656), he argued that the creation account in Genesis was incorrect and incomplete. La Peyrère contended that people must have existed before Adam. There were, he believed, two creations. God first created the Gentiles and then he made Adam, the father of the Jewish people. This theory, he believed, cleared up inconsistencies. For example, this explained how Cain found a wife and built a city after he murdered his brother.[12]

To support his contentions, La Peyrère attempted to overthrow the traditional understanding of the Old Testament. He was one of the first seventeenth-century critics openly to reject the Mosaic authorship of most of the Pentateuch. Much of the extant Old Testament, he believed, was not the original but copies and redactions compiled from various sources by several editors. He pointed out several anachronisms in the Pentateuch that would have made Mosaic authorship unlikely. Furthermore, he noted textual evidence of truncations, repetitions, and omissions in the Pentateuch.[13]

La Peyrère posited that Moses recorded the exodus out of Egypt, the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, and the forty years of the Exodus. Moses also must have written a history of the Jews from the creation of Adam to his own time based on oral histories and ancient manuscripts. In composing his histories, Moses emphasized material that was relevant to

contemporary Jews and summarized the rest. Later compilers edited in an even more cursory manner. La Peyrère believed that various editors introduced corruptions, contradictions, flaws, and obscurities in the text.[14]

If spurious authorship were not disturbing enough, La Peyrère also attempted to explain away miracles as natural events. For example, the author of Joshua 10:1–14 wrote that God stopped the progress of the sun and moon after the Israelites defeated the Amorites so that the Israelites could completely vanquish their enemy. La Peyrère believed that the light was not due to the sun standing still in the sky. Rather a nearby mountain reflected the rays of the sun.[15] Furthermore, La Peyrère did not believe that the flood of Noah covered the earth as most believed. He contended that the flood was only local to Palestine. His radical interpretation was in part influenced by the explosion of new knowledge emerging from the studies of the distant histories of pagan nations. Scholars such as Scaliger, Saumaize, and Bochart discussed historical accounts of the ancient world beyond the biblical record.[16] Some were perplexed because civilizations in distant lands, such as America, China, and India, had historical records that predated the flood. Thus, La Peyrère concluded, they could not have been annihilated by a global deluge. Moreover, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century explorers' discoveries of new lands and peoples challenged long-held views of the world based on the Bible. Historian David Livingstone writes that La Peyrère's whole project was rooted in his passion to find a persuasive account of the origin of the native people of America. Richard Popkin asserts that the existence of the New World and its inhabitants challenged the conventional view that the Bible contained a universal history and led some to question "whether the Bible [was] adequate as an account of how the world developed."[17] Seventeenth-century British cartographer Robert Morden wrote regarding the recent flood of accounts of foreign lands, "According to the more accurate observations and discoveries of more modern authors, all former geographies are greatly deficient and strangely erroneous."[18] The wide dispersal of humanity and pagan historical annals that appeared to predate the biblical record caused La Peyrère to question the prevailing interpretation of Genesis. He believed that if the population of the entire world had been wiped out, Noah and his descendants could not have had time to repopulate the distant lands in the time allowed by the biblical chronology.[19]

Understandably, most Protestants found such critiques of the Bible disturbing. When Protestants conceptualized how the Spirit of God inspired the writers of the Bible, they minimized the human element. Most believed that God placed ideas in the minds of the writers. Some held that God inspired every word and detail of the Scriptures and the

writers were practically taking dictation.[20] Likewise, the American Puritans emphasized the role of God in inspiration. Cotton Mather wrote that the Holy Spirit "dictated the Sacred Scriptures." Mather's nephew, Thomas Walter, wrote that because the Scriptures were divinely inspired, they were "INFALLIBLE." Though the "Modus or Manner" varied, he held that "all the Writers of the Old and New Testament wrote under the Direction & Conduct of the Spirit of GOD." Some writers were swept up in uncontrollable "rapturous Enthusiasm" and their bodies convulsed. Others, such as historians, maintained a sober spirit. Regarding historians, "whose Inspiration is the most questioned," Walter maintained that the Holy Spirit acted by first "Supervising & overruling their Pen, that no Error might be committed by them, securing them from the least Hallucination, or Mistake," and second by "Keeping them under a Restraint from Writing what had not an immediate Concurrence & Tendency to the Design of the *Holy Spirit* in that History."[21]

The contention that the Bible's inspired authors culled various sources and then later editors corrected and amended their work seemed to be at odds with some versions of Protestant conceptions of divine inspiration, such as the one articulated by Walter. How could a text be inspired (or possibly even dictated by God) if it had been edited and rewritten several times, centuries after the death of the original writer? If the original writing was inspired, why would it need to be edited? Did not editing tamper with and corrupt the original inspired text? La Peyrère's views challenged the understanding of the Bible as containing a universal history of human origins. Not surprisingly, many responded to La Peyrère's *Prae-Adamitae* with indignation. Historian Colin Kidd writes that La Peyrère's work "ignited one of the largest heresy hunts of the age." Within a year of the publication of his book, more than a dozen refutations appeared. Popkin writes that La Peyrère was "regarded as perhaps the greatest heretic of the age, even worse than Spinoza who took over some of his most challenging ideas." According to Anthony Grafton, everyone, it seems, hated the book and many made a point of declaring their outrage in print. La Peyrère was imprisoned but was released after he supposedly recanted his views. However, La Peyrère's recantation did not end such ideas. He was only one of many skeptical voices in the seventeenth century. Regarding his legacy, Livingstone writes, "In his wake it became harder to accept the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch uncritically; it became harder to approach ancient sacred texts with unalloyed reverence; and it became harder to ignore extrabiblical data in scriptural hermeneutics."[22]

Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) similarly charged that many of the books of the Bible could not have been written by their supposed authors. The

Pentateuch, for example, could not have been written by Moses as both church tradition and the biblical text claimed. Hobbes asserted, like La Peyrère, that the books were not compiled in their received form until long after the divinely inspired lawgiver had died. He concluded that the Pentateuch was compiled during the period after the Maccabean revolt, when the temple of Jerusalem and its holy books had been destroyed.[23]

Like La Peyrère, Hobbes utilized apparent contradictions in the Scriptures in his attempt to challenge the prevailing understanding of the Bible. Deuteronomy described Moses's death and burial. Hobbes wrote, "It is therefore manifest, that those words were written after his interment. For it were a strange interpretation, to say *Moses* spake of his own sepulcher." Hobbes also drew attention to geographical anachronisms. The Pentateuch made references to events and circumstances about which Moses could never have known. Hobbes observed that Genesis 12:6 states, "And Abraham passed through the land of the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh, and the Canaanites was [*sic*] then in the land." Hobbes concluded that the passage must have been written by someone who knew that the Canaanites were *not* in the land. Why else would he make note of such a detail? Hobbes believed that Moses could not have been the author because he died before the Jewish people came to the land of Moreh and expelled the Canaanites. Many of the books of the Old Testament must have been written long after the death of their supposed author, he argued. Hobbes believed that the Bible needed to be subject to "the Laws of Nature." Then all men who have the use of "natural reason" would be obligated to follow those parts of the Bible, which they find reasonable. However, this put the Bible on an equal level with "all other Morall Doctrine consonant to Reason; the Dictates whereof are Laws, not *made*, but *Eternall*."[24]

After challenging the authorship and therefore the trustworthiness of the Scriptures, Hobbes questioned "from *whence the Scriptures derive their Authority. . . How we know them to be the Word of God. . . Why we beleeve them to be so*." He answered that the question itself was wrongheaded because it was couched in inappropriate terms. Christians believed that "the first and originall *Author* of them is God," but Hobbes reasoned that no one could truly know that the Bible is God's words "but those to whom God himself hath revealed it supernaturally." Since Calvinists believed that *only* the elect by faith can know that the Bible is God's word, Hobbes sought to ground the authority of the Bible on coercive authority. Rather than asking questions of the Bible's divine authorship, Hobbes asserted that the more relevant question was "*By what Authority they are made Law*." He concluded that the Bible was authoritative, not because it was

written by God, but because "the Common-wealth of the Church" made it so for the people. He concluded, "It is not the Writer, but the authority of the Church, that maketh a Book Canonicall." Hobbes did not necessarily dispute that some people knew by faith that the Bible was revelation and that their interpretations were accurate. However, because such ideas were a matter of private revelation, there could be no way to discriminate between one interpretation and another.[25] Like Locke, he discounted private intuitions and sought to ground revelation on universally accessible criteria such as history, textual analysis, and natural reason. Unlike Locke, Hobbes also grounded authority on state power.

Hobbes believed that the state established biblical authority. Spinoza sought to undermine the theological basis of political authority by attacking the trustworthiness of the Bible in his *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670). Spinoza disturbed almost everyone. Among the various epithets that greeted the publication of Spinoza's work were "harmful and vile," "most pernicious," and "atheistic." Historian Jonathan Israel writes that Spinoza was "the chief intellectual bogeyman and symbolic head of philosophical deism and atheism."[26] Leslie Stephen observed, "The whole essence of the deist position may be found in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico Politicus*."[27]

Spinoza observed that Christians had vested the words of the Bible with supreme supernatural authority for most of their history. Competing Protestant factions grounded their authority on their interpretation of the Scriptures. In order to preserve and justify their own cause, factions accommodated and manipulated biblical passages to fit their philosophical or theological system. He wrote, "All men parade their own ideas as God's Word, their chief aim being to compel others to think as they do, while using religion as a pretext . . . [T]he chief concern of theologians on the whole has been to extort from Holy Scripture their own arbitrary invented ideas, for which they claim divine authority."[28] Various groups merely replaced one interpretation with another. Other than by way of the sword, Spinoza claimed, no hermeneutic could trump another.

Spinoza believed theology lay at the heart of the endless battles of hermeneutics. Like Hobbes, Spinoza believed that most theological interpretations of the Bible were based on inner intuitions. Instead, interpreters needed an objective and universally accessible method independent of religious persuasions or revelation:[29]

> I hold that the method of interpreting Scripture is no different from the method of interpreting Nature, and is in fact in complete accord with it . . . To study Scripture, you must compile data . . . [B]y allowing no other principle or data for the interpretation of Scripture and study of its

> contents except those that can be gathered only from Scripture itself and from a historical study of Scripture—steady progress can be made without any danger of error, and one can deal with matters that surpass our understanding with no less confidence than those matters which are known to us by the natural light of reason.[30]

He believed that the Bible had to be stripped of its privileged and supernatural status and read like any other book if one sought to recover its authentic meaning. He claimed that historical context, not theology or private intuitions, would elucidate the meaning of the text. He wrote, "I deliberately resolved to examine Scripture afresh, conscientiously and freely, and to admit nothing as its teaching which I did not most clearly derive from it."[31] This, he believed, was the only objective and neutral method of interpretation. (It is worth noting that Spinoza imposed his own anachronistic standards of metaphysical naturalism onto the Bible.[32] He seemed to be blind to his own bias.)

To ensure that the modern interpreter did not insert his own subjective or theological reading into the biblical text, Spinoza asserted that the tools for interpreting Scripture must be based on Scripture. "This," he declared, "is the universal rule for the interpretation of Scripture, to ascribe no teaching to Scripture that is not clearly established from studying it closely."[33] Traditionally biblical interpreters, he argued, erroneously imported their modern anachronistic theology into the text, which was often alien to the world of the biblical writer. Instead points of ambiguity could be made clear by looking to Scripture. For example, if a word's interpretation was unclear, the interpreter should compile all the possible uses of the word from the Scriptures and apply the meaning closest in culture and most consistent to the spirit of the text.[34] Only examination of the language in its historical context could shed light on the meaning and usage of words.

Spinoza insisted that the Bible must be treated just like any other ancient text. However, this challenged many of Christianity's most sacred certitudes. When pressed to validate the authority of the Bible, Christians often assured themselves by looking to the supposed miracles recorded in the Bible. Spinoza asserted that the miracles never violated the ordinary processes of nature. By looking at the historical and cultural context of the ancient Jews, he noted that they attributed all natural events to the will of God. This was the nature of their narrative style. Spinoza claimed, "Jews never make mention of intermediate or particular causes nor pay any heed to them, but to serve religion and piety or, as it is commonly called, devoutness, they refer everything to God."[35] One also needed to take into account the linguistic style of the biblical writers as well as their

historical context. He wrote, "For the proper understanding of the reality of miracles, it is important to be acquainted with the diction and metaphors affected by the Hebrews. He who does not pay sufficient attention to this will ascribe to Scripture many miracles which Scriptural writers never intended as such."[36] Only when the interpreter understood words and passages as the Hebrew mind and culture would have used them could he recover an authentic interpretation. Modern interpreters erroneously believed that references to the actions of God were divine interventions that suspended the laws of nature. Because the writers of the Old Testament lived in a primitive culture, Spinoza asserted that "whatever the Jews did not understand, being at that time ignorant of its natural causes, was referred to God. Thus a storm was called the chiding of God, thunder and lightning were called the arrows of God."[37] Therefore, biblical accounts of miracles should not be taken at face value. For example, like La Peyrère, Spinoza offered an alternative naturalistic explanation for the miracle of the sun standing still in the sky. Because Joshua was a soldier and not a man of science, he could not comprehend modern cosmology and therefore he wrongly believed that the sun moved across the sky. One needed to interpret the text from the perspective of the writer rather than try to reconcile the biblical text to a modern cosmological understanding. Spinoza suggested that recent hail storms refracted the light of the sun. Thus Joshua thought that the sun stood still in the sky. He asserted, "The gift of prophecy did not render the prophet more learned, but left them with beliefs that they previously held." Biblical revelation was not inaccurate, but rather it was correct in the historical context. This nuance would be of little comfort to those who held a traditional view of revelation.[38]

The interpreter of any ancient text needed to recover as much specific historical context and the author's personality as possible for a proper understanding. The Bible was no exception.[39] Of course there would always be gaps in knowledge, as many of the records of history were lost. Spinoza was implicitly suggesting that a total recovery of the true meaning of the Bible remained beyond reach. Reading Holy Writ naturalistically yanked it down from heaven, and, in the process, the words of God became smudged with the dirt of earth and seemingly less trustworthy.

La Peyrère's, Hobbes's, and Spinoza's challenges to the traditional understanding of the Bible were certainly disturbing. According to theologian John Woodbridge, these men were considered by many to be marginal scholars, outsiders, or heretics. Thus they could be dismissed. However, Richard Simon, a Catholic priest, and Jean Le Clerc, a Protestant scholar from a respected family, were harder to ignore. They

attempted to preserve the authority of the Bible in light of recent criticism by incorporating Spinozist critiques. Although Simon and Le Clerc were making similar claims, they engaged in a lengthy debate (from 1685 to 1687), in which they mutually branded each other as Spinozists. Woodbridge observes that the debate between Simon and Le Clerc "shook the confidence of the leading members of the Republic of Letters in the complete infallibility of Holy Writ."[40]

Simon took seriously Spinoza's allegations against Mosaic authorship while still attempting to protect biblical authority. Simon offered his "public scribe hypothesis." He agreed that Moses only wrote the commands and the ordinances. The rest of the Pentateuch was compiled by editors and scribes who gathered historical annals to compose the history of creation and the patriarchs. Simon believed that the editors were inspired. Though he offered his hypothesis to defend the authority of the Bible, most were disturbed by his claims.

Simon argued that the Scriptures were not perspicuous as Protestants contended. Rather, one needed to study the church fathers and other ancient writings approved by the Catholic Church to uncover the true meaning of Scripture. Thus Mosaic authorship was less essential.[41] (Simon was drawing upon a longer tradition. Since the 1520s, Catholic writers had been criticizing Protestants for their inability to concur on the meaning of Scripture.) Le Clerc, on the other hand, argued that only reason and historical evidence could uncover what he believed to be the "fundamental" doctrines contained in the Bible. He heavily criticized Simon's public scribe hypothesis as a fiction that had no grounding in historical evidence. Instead Le Clerc postulated that the real author "might have been an honest Israelite, who collected all the writings of Moses and added to them some other facts, taken out of some ancient and credible books."[42] Whereas Simon believed that the editors were authorized by Moses and inspired by the Holy Spirit, Le Clerc made no such concessions. The Bible was reliable to the extent that the writers were good recorders of history. Its accuracy and authority did not need to resort to unverifiable supernatural claims.[43]

Le Clerc defended the authority of the Scriptures by building an apologetic on reason and history. He denied the divine inspiration of all sections of the Bible except those passages where God spoke directly. Other parts of Scripture were trustworthy, not because the authors were supernaturally guided by God, but because they were historically reliable witnesses. Whereas the major ideas of the Bible were from God, the words and details were not necessarily true. Le Clerc believed that reason should evaluate Scripture to separate the essential tenets from the

words and details that were negligible. Although he challenged conventional views of inspiration, he was trying to protect biblical authority by incorporating modern criticism. Historian Jonathan Israel contends that in light of Spinoza's attacks, Le Clerc carved out of the Bible a "drastically diminished but clear, proven, and . . . indisputable sphere" of truth "established beyond doubt by means of the new historico-critical method of Bible exegesis."[44]

Deists

Le Clerc and Simon believed that the only way to preserve the authority of the Bible in light of the modern critiques, apparent anachronisms, and evidence of later interpolations was to abandon an older view of Scripture and inspiration. Most Christian contemporaries believed that in this bargain, they gained too little and sacrificed too much. Deist skeptics thought they did not go far enough.

Deism is a problematic term. Robert Sullivan argues that the term *deism* is so elusive that it should be taken merely as a label of convenience rather than a reference to a precise system of thought.[45] Indeed, the so-called deists held a variety of views, some contradictory. Nonetheless, these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century skeptics were united by some common beliefs or tendencies. Building on the work of critics such as Hobbes and Spinoza, deists claimed to analyze Scripture by autonomous reason in order to demonstrate that the Bible did not present unquestionable truth. It was a book like any other.[46] Following a radicalized version of Locke's epistemology, they did not believe that there could be any truths "above reason." Accepting only empirically demonstrable or reasonable knowledge, deists rejected biblical revelation. They began with the presupposition that all miracles were impossible. When the Bible was examined historically and naturalistically, the deists believed the book revealed the same flaws, errors, and corruptions as any other ancient text. For Locke, reason regulated religious assent. For the deists, reason was revelation's ultimate judge.[47] They were united by their opposition to the privileged status of the Bible as special revelation.

Deists had two main critiques of Christianity. First, they questioned how a perfectly good God could limit for so long his special revelation to a tiny and isolated fraction of the race. They held instead that the Bible was only a specific instance of what God had made known universally. The Bible was simply one expression of the universal religion of nature. Second, they challenged the reliability of the testimony of historical events recorded in the Bible. In a world that was increasingly understood

to be governed by natural law, accounts of miracles became less credible in the eyes of the deists.[48]

Lord Herbert of Cherbury, one of the earliest deists, opposed all supernatural claims to knowledge in his *De Veritate* (1624). He asserted that knowledge derived from the Bible was only probabilistic and unreliable. Only demonstrable truths were certain. The authority of written revelation depended on the trustworthiness of its author and therefore its validity could never be trusted with certainty. In *De Religione Gentilium* (1645), he advocated a natural religion, or a religion derived exclusively from reason and the observation of nature. Natural religion, he claimed, could affirm only five religious principles. These were a belief in the existence of the Deity, the obligation to reverence such a power, the identification of worship with practical morality, the obligation to repent of sin, and divine recompense in this world and the next.[49] The deists generally believed that the Bible was true to the extent that it affirmed these universal principles found in almost all religions. These ideas were available to all cultures through natural reason and the observation of nature.[50]

Skeptics, such as Charles Blount, John Toland, Anthony Collins, and Matthew Tindal, also dismissed much of the Bible as false. Blount, in *Religio Laici* (1683) and *Oracles of Reason* (1693), reduced biblical prophecies and pagan oracles to the same level by arguing that both were cryptic, required faith, and were beyond rational analysis. Accounts of miracles proved nothing, for pagan texts also recounted supernatural events and primitive minds could easily mistake natural phenomena for miracles. He borrowed from La Peyrère and argued that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch. Toland, in *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696), argued that miracles and biblical revelation were neither logical nor empirically defensible, for they were not consistent with experience, and revelation was beyond the reach of reason. In *Nazarenus* (1718), he argued that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were merely products of cultural traditions. True Christianity was merely the religion of nature. Collins's *Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724) attacked the biblical text and prophecies in particular as irrational and incomprehensible. If the prophecies of the Old Testament were interpreted by the same standards one used to interpret any other text, Collins argued, they could not refer to Jesus. Tindal, one of the most influential critics, attacked the credibility of the Bible by arguing that it was a historically unreliable document. Because the Bible was such an ancient book, passages had been corrupted over time. As a result, some parts were obscure or incomprehensible. Since historical knowledge was less reliable than mathematical truths or knowledge derived from experience, the

biblical stories should be judged against what one knew to be true. In other words, those passages that diverged from natural religion were to be dismissed as corruptions.[51]

Against these challenges, American thinkers defended the very foundation of their faith. They did not retreat behind past certainties or protect their belief in a private faith that hovered safely over skeptical attacks. All the critics of the Bible rejected a spiritually granted understanding of the Bible as a basis of its special status and authority. As Hobbes and others noted, this was only useful for private knowledge. They argued that it needed to conform to the same empirical standards by which one examined other artifacts of history and ancient literature. Furthermore, the Bible needed to be reconciled with the growing body of knowledge of natural philosophy and history. Many of the Bible's defenders were happy to oblige, confident that revelation would stand up to any scrutiny. They would in varying degrees fight the battle head on. However, their battles would leave their understanding of the Bible transformed in ways they never anticipated.

CHAPTER 1

AMERICAN PURITANS, RATIONALISM, AND REVELATION

COTTON MATHER NATURALIZES THE SUPERNATURAL

IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, THE AMERICAN Puritan Cotton Mather (1663–1728) looked toward Europe from his side of the Atlantic and saw dangerous storms rumbling over the horizon. European skeptics and deists were questioning the unique status of the Bible as divinely inspired revelation. Until the late eighteenth century, deism was primarily a European matter.[1] However, Cotton Mather, one of the most erudite and prolific American Puritans, kept abreast of the intellectual developments in Europe. He feared that before long, the European contagion would infect American souls. Well before most of his American contemporaries fully assessed the situation, Mather believed that the Bible needed to be defended. To this end, he marshaled new tools of analysis that would have been foreign and possibly even disturbing to his eminent Puritan grandfathers and father. By the last decades of his life, he selectively appropriated for the defense of the Bible methods and conclusions that had been associated with its heretical enemies. For example, Mather interpreted some of the miracles recorded in the Bible in light of the so-called new learning in such a way that potentially challenged their supernatural character. When considering the authorship of the Old Testament books, Mather even utilized some of the interpretive tools associated with Benedict Spinoza (1632–77) and concluded that Moses did not author some parts of the Pentateuch. His evolving biblical hermeneutic is evidenced in a variety of his writings but is most clearly and fully articulated in his massive

and unpublished biblical commentary, the "Biblia Americana," on which he continually worked from 1693 until his death in 1728.[2]

Mather was not an eccentric working in isolation but was rather part of a broader shift. In response to both philosophical and scientific developments in Europe of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as well as pressure to defend their beliefs against deist critics of the Bible, Puritans, like the latitudinarians, began to articulate an "evidential" defense of the authority and genuineness of the Bible.[3] This was a departure from the approach of traditional Reformed theology. For example, in the sixteenth century, John Calvin argued that "the highest proof of Scripture derives from the fact that God in person speaks in it." The Christian should follow the model of the inspired writers who did not "dwell on rational proofs." The Bible affirmed itself.[4] Furthermore, Calvin believed that God confirmed the meaning and authority of the Bible by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. (One should not oversimplify Calvin's hermeneutic. True to his humanist training, Calvin was willing to draw upon many disciplines, such as languages, classical studies, philosophy, and science, to explore the meaning of biblical texts.) However, by the eighteenth century, most Protestants gradually moved away from an understanding of Scripture that rested on the direct influence of the Holy Spirit on the reader. Instead, the Bible, Protestant intellectuals believed, needed to be subject to the rules of interpretation and verification common to any text.[5] Mather adapted his understanding of the Bible to keep up with the evidentiary temper of his age.[6]

Skeptics and critics challenged the Bible's nature, but disputes over the interpretation of the Bible were nothing new in the history of Christianity. Although Christians bitterly and often violently disagreed over the Bible's interpretation, few openly questioned its authority, accuracy, or authenticity. All believers shared broad assumptions about the nature of the Bible: it was a book unlike any other, God inspired his holy pen men to record revelation, and the Holy Spirit preserved the transmission of the Bible over hundreds of years. Eighteenth-century Protestants also believed that the Bible was not only true in matters of salvation but also accurate in its record of geography, chronology, and history. It seemed unfitting for the inspired word of God to contain errors. According to Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, Calvin and Luther had a high view of the Scriptures' truth but allowed for the possibility of minor factual errors. However, their successors, the Protestant Scholastics, "made the Bible an impregnable fortress defended by a theological theory in which every verse was the truth from God's own mouth whispered into the ear of his scribes. In short, the Bible was inerrant."[7]

Furthermore, Puritans believed that the Holy Spirit guided their reading of the Bible and enabled the believer to recognize that the Scriptures were the words of God. Puritans believed God graciously bestowed to his people what Jonathan Edwards called a "spiritual sense." Geoffrey Nuttall notes that the English Puritans believed that the Holy Spirit illuminated and enlightened their understanding as they read the Bible and allowed them to recognize the Bible's divine origin. Similarly, literary scholar Lisa Gordis argues that Puritan leaders were uncomfortable with the notion that readers "interpreted" the Bible. Instead, they emphasized the Spirit's operation on the hearts of the believers. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, C. Leonard Allen, and Richard Hughes argue that the Puritans, as biblical "primitivists," were wary of subjective human invention in the process of reading and interpreting the Bible. Thus Puritans claimed that they minimized the role of the human interpreter. The pastors merely pointed to the self-evident meaning of the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Puritans generally sought to exclude human authorities, "artes," and institutions from their interpretations.[8] Harry Stout observes that Puritan pastors gave the impression that God was speaking through the sermon. For example, Puritan pastor John Rayner warned, "If any minister will preach trash and toyes, traditions of men instead of the pure word of God, their works shall be burnt."[9]

This is not to suggest that Puritans were irrational enthusiasts. There were radical tendencies that emphasized the direct inspiration of the Spirit and the authority of subjective experiences. However, most believed the Spirit's work on the heart was always mediated through the biblical text and conformed to social hierarchy and reason.[10] Furthermore, reason and particularly Ramist logic (discussed further in the following paragraphs) disciplined their interpretations. However, Puritans did not consider Ramist logic to be one of several viable interpretive options. Rather, Puritans believed that it was simply *the* method of uncovering God's order of the universe. Thus, with the benefit of the combination of the Holy Spirit and their logic, Puritans enjoyed a high degree of certainty that the Bible was the authentic revelation of God and they understood it correctly.[11]

Beginning in the late seventeenth century, a number of European scholars challenged basic assumptions about the Bible's supernatural and unique status. Men like Thomas Hobbes, Benedict Spinoza, Isaac La Peyrère, and Richard Simon examined the text of the Old Testament and interpreted contradictions and anachronism as evidence of later interpolations.[12] They also dismissed the biblical accounts of miracles as the expressions of "primitive" writers. Other skeptics or deists attempted to undermine Christian authority by pointing out the historical,

anthropological, and human (as opposed to divine) origins of the Bible. Thus, by reading the text through naturalistic interpretive lenses, they tried to reduce the status of Holy Writ to merely one ancient religious text among many.[13] In light of mounting skeptical attacks, Christians were compelled to defend not only their particular interpretation of the Bible from other Christians but the status of the Bible itself as sacred revelation.

Cotton Mather Responds to Deism

Between 1700 and 1712, Cotton Mather wrote three essays that attacked deism and defended the authority of biblical revelation.[14] Over the span of 12 years, Mather's answers to the same challenge evolved. His interests in the natural sciences and attempts to defend revelation against deists compelled him to place religion on increasingly evidentiary grounds. Several scholars have pointed out that over the decades of the early eighteenth century, Mather grew increasingly rationalistic and empirical.[15] One should also note that between 1693 and 1697, Mather composed the *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702). In it, he continued the long Puritan tradition of reading the Scriptures typologically. Believing that the Bible and history needed to be interpreted theologically and spiritually, not just literally, he read the history of Puritans in New England as a new Israel. Typological interpretations required the reader to impose theological views and spiritual insights that could go beyond intention of the human author. Thus Mather's turn toward empirical and universally accessible modes of interpretation was important but not totalizing.[16]

In *Reasonable Religion* (1700), Cotton Mather attempted to defend Christian revelation with arguments that even a deist could accept. He presumed neither that skeptics believed that God revealed himself in the Bible nor that the Holy Spirit enlightened their minds. Instead, departing from the traditional Puritan approach, Mather made his appeal on the grounds of reason. Writing in the spirit of latitudinarians such as Tillotson, Mather argued that reason was common to all human beings regardless of their spiritual state.[17] Like Locke (or even Le Clerc), he attempted to construct a foundation for revelation on the basis of universally accessible evidence rather than privileged spiritual knowledge.

On the first page of the treatise, Mather stated that he could write the piece as a traditional sermon or jeremiad and make a spiritual appeal. However, he noted that the "form" in which an "exhortation" is "rendered" could make a claim "more Irresistible & Ungainsayable." Mather proposed that, "instead of saying, *Shew yourselves Regenerate Christians*, we will only say, *Shew yourselves Rational Creatures*." Mather would make

a reasonable, rather than a spiritual, appeal. By way of contrast, around the same time Solomon Stoddard argued that rational arguments could not persuade, for they offered only probabilistic arguments. Instead, pastors should seek to convict by preaching about hell.[18] Stoddard would rather have people flee to God in fear than go to him by reason. Mather took a different road. Man was essentially both "*Animal Rationale*" and "*Animal Religiosism* [*sic*]." He pointed out that deists proudly believed that all truth claims, especially religious ones, should be based solely on reason and thus the Bible should be dismissed. Mather chose to appeal to the skeptics' love of reason, arguing, "He that is not *Religious*, is not worthy to be counted *Rational*." Unaided natural reason, Mather claimed, led one to believe beyond doubt in biblical revelation. Therefore, he who rejects the Bible is not rational and therefore not truly human but rather is a "brute." In "sinning against God, the sinner does not act like a reasonable man." Mather challenged the deist to be consistent with his own high standards of reason: "I summon you to the Bar of your own Reason; certain I am, that you will be dreadfully Condemned at that Bar." Mather did not believe he needed the intervention of the Holy Spirit to convict the deists. Their own reason was sufficient for the job: "Scripture is Reason, in its highest elevation."[19]

To this end, Mather marshaled arguments for the authority of the Bible. The elegant order and balance of the universe required a creator. He pointed out how Christ perfectly fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. Honest men of high moral standing, who had no incentive to deceive, recorded the miracles of Christ. Mankind universally believed that there is a God and shared a common moral sense. This demonstrated to Mather that God left his imprint on his creation. Winship observes that in *Reasonable Religion*, Mather, following latitudinarian trends, defended the reasonableness of belief on the historical evidence of public witnesses. In doing so, he shifted the grounds of argument from "dogmatic certainty and private illumination to a moral, probabilistic certainty arrived at from weighing matters of public documentation."[20]

Mather also appealed to natural religion or natural theology. In general, natural theology held that unaided reason reflecting on nature could arrive at some general conclusions about God and point to divine revelation. Natural religion, the belief system of the deists, granted legitimacy only to the conclusions drawn from reason and evidence. Mather used natural religion for apologetic purposes.[21] He claimed that the "Works of Creation, are enough to satisfy the Reason of any man." From creation, a reasonable person could infer the perfection and fear of God, who wrote his moral law in nature. God implanted in man the ability to read the

law of God like "Hieroglyphics." This basic natural religion was possible because Mather believed that God had blessed all people with reason as "an innate Faculty in the Mind of man."[22] Mather did not begin with the Bible and then move to observe how nature or reason confirmed the Scriptures. Rather, like the deists, he started with reason and the observation of nature. He then made reference to the biblical verses as they confirmed what one could infer naturally.[23]

Two years later, Cotton Mather's father, Increase Mather, published his own antideist essay, *A Discourse Proving That the Christian Religion Is the Only True Religion*. Increase Mather specifically cited Spinoza and Blount as the objects of his attack. He too discussed natural religion. Increase Mather affirmed that natural religion could lead pagans to genuine knowledge of spiritual truths. All nations utilizing the "Light of Nature" consent to some religion or God, which demonstrated that there must be a God. The "light of natural reason," or conscience, affirmed that the moral dictates of the Bible are agreeable to reason. His point in discussing natural religion was to argue that pagan religions were but a shadow of the Christian revelation. Natural knowledge affirmed the truth of the Bible and pointed to the need for divine revelation.[24]

The similarities between Increase Mather's and Cotton Mather's discourses are obvious. However, there are subtle differences. Increase Mather emphasized that unaided reason could only arrive at *some* spiritual truths and the incomplete nature of the pagan religions only testified to the shortcomings of reason and the need for special revelation. Cotton Mather, of course, believed this as well. In 1699, Cotton Mather, in *The Everlasting Gospel*, affirmed much of what his father said: "Mere Natural Reason, without Revelation, both External and Internal Revelation, would never understand the Mysteries of a Sinners being made Righteous."[25] However, a year later, in *Reasonable Religion*, Cotton Mather elevated reason and devoted very little space to discussing its inadequacies.[26] He argued that deists did not believe because they were *not* sufficiently reasonable. Of course Cotton Mather held that unbelief was an offense to God, but in his treatise, he described it as a violation against reason. In "*Sin* men offer violence" not unto God but "unto the principles of *Reason*."[27] This is not to suggest that Cotton Mather was flirting with deism, but in 1700 he seemed to experiment with and enlarge the traditional scope and power of reason.[28]

Nine years later, in 1709, Mather revisited the looming danger of deism in his treatise titled *A Man of Reason*. According to Perry Miller, "the contrast between it and his first foray of 1700 [*Reasonable Religion*] indicates the deepening of his concern."[29] Mather attacked skeptics more

explicitly this time. Unlike his previous treatise, this work specifically singled out particular writers. Mather critiqued John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Charles Blount, though he refused to call them by name.[30] Perhaps he was afraid that he would inadvertently direct weak and curious readers to dangerous texts. Three years later, in his 1712 tract, he apologized for having to repeat the heresies of the skeptics in his attempt to refute them, and he wrote that he would keep his summary of their ideas to a minimum.[31]

Again, in *A Man of Reason*, he repeated the arguments from natural religion and praised the powers of reason: "There is a *Reasonable Spirit in Man, and the Inspiration of the Almighty has given him an understanding*; and there are certain *Principles of Reason*, which every Man does *naturally* and *ordinarily* bring with him into the world." He asserted, "GOD who has furnished us with *Reason*, has required us, to be obedient unto the *Dictates of Reason*. To Man, He says, Let Reason be thy Guide; Never go against well-enlightened Reason."[32] In *A Man of Reason*, Mather gave no sense of the problem posed by those who claimed reason as their guide yet came to a divergent conclusion than those who followed the Holy Spirit. Those who claimed to follow reason yet arrived at a heretical position utilized faulty reason.

Not only could reason, unaided by divine inspiration, teach man about the nature of God, but it could also show man how to live a relatively moral life.[33] Some universal moral principles were, as Mather put it, "mathematically certain." He called these moral imperatives the "MAXIMS of REASON." For example, he pointed out "*The Golden Rule of Reason*" required "a Man do unto others, as he would own it reasonable for others to do unto him." He wrote, "You may easily bring a Man to own this Rule, as to own that Three and Four make Seven." He also wrote "Reason Judges of what is *Mathematically True* or *False*. It judges as often, and as clearly, what is *morally Good*, or what is *morally Evil* . . . Indeed, there are very many, who do not actually discern, what is *morally Good* or *Evil*, *Right* or *Wrong*; But so there are many, who do not actually discern *Mathematical Truth* from *Falsehood*."[34] It is significant that Mather compared spiritual truths with mathematics. (Incidentally, Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza all took mathematics as their model of certainty.) Mathematics was universally true and accessible regardless of one's culture or spiritual condition, Mather believed. Intuitively apprehended mathematical truths (for example 2 + 2 = 4) had long been understood as a type of certain truth, as distinct from the merely probabilistic knowledge given by empirical evidence.[35] It required neither the special revelation of the Bible nor spiritual insight granted by the Holy Spirit. It only required

unbiased intelligence. Mather believed "it is a Rule engraven by the Hand of GOD, upon the Reason of Mankind."[36] These were "*Common* and *Innate Principles*." Mather wrote, "There is an Eternal Difference between Good & Evil; between Right and Wrong. 'Tis constituted by GOD: GOD has inwrought those Principles in the Reasonable Spirit of Man."[37]

In theory, the deist should be able to agree with Mather's conclusions if he followed the dictates of reason. In the treatise Mather introduced every "MAXIM OF REASON" with the words "Hear now my Reasoning." His phrasing echoed the distinctive voice of the Old Testament prophets who would typically begin with the phrase "Hear now . . ." and proceed to deliver the pronouncements of God. Here, Mather equated the voice of God with reason. The two terms were virtually interchangeable in his essay. "If we do not keep *Reason* in the *Throne*, we go to Dethrone the Infinite GOD Himself. The voice of *Reason* is the *Voice of* GOD."[38] Certainly, Mather never claimed that pagan religions could save. Nor did he believe that one could come to the grace of God by reason alone. And of course one could not come to specific knowledge of Christ without special revelation. However, his language gave much greater potency to natural knowledge and reason than earlier Puritans like his father.

In 1712, Cotton Mather, at the prompting of a fellow Christian, felt compelled once again to lash out against deists in a treatise titled *Reason Satisfied: and Faith Established*. A fellow New Englander urged Mather to combat the deists "before Deistical Notions grow Epidemical." Mather rehashed many of the same arguments. He again relied on evidence that was available to "*all reasonable people*."[39]

Though he deliberately avoided rehearsing specific deist attacks, the nature of his defense suggests that he was responding to critics who challenged the long-cherished assumption that the Bible accurately recorded historical events. Deists argued that the Bible was historically unreliable and the resurrection of Christ was an irrational fable. Cotton attempted to defend the authenticity of the Bible and the resurrection by arguing that the events could be historically verified. He did not rely on the presupposition of the sacred status of the biblical account in order to prove the empty tomb. In the earlier two essays, Mather suggested that historical arguments affirmed the validity of the Bible, but he was much more thorough in 1712. If he could offer "irrefutable proofs" for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, he believed all people would be compelled to conclude that the Bible was indeed revelation. "This will prove," he concluded, "That he has reason to be a Christian."[40] Again, Mather sought to defend and interpret the Bible on purely historical and empirical grounds that

anyone could affirm regardless of his or her spiritual state or theological persuasion.

Mather began by arguing that sources with no sympathy for the cause of the Apostles, "*Roman* and *Pagan* Historians" and Jews, affirmed that Jesus was crucified as the Gospel recorded:[41] "[The empty tomb] is a thing so unquestionable, that the *Jews* themselves make no Question of it. I take a *Confession* from these perpetual & implacable *Adversaries*, to carry an Irrefutable *Conviction* with it. It is very sure, The Body of our JESUS, was on the *Third* Day missing from the *Sepulcher*."[42] Mather noted that he found it necessary to make sure that extrabiblical sources affirmed the biblical claims. Valid proofs, he believed, could not be self-referential. The testimony of the Bible alone was not sufficient proof.

The historical circumstances also made fabrication "impossible." Mather noted that Roman guards were placed around the tomb and the disciples would not have had the courage or the ability to overpower them and steal the body. The adversaries of Christianity, he observed, could have easily stopped the spread of the faith by producing the body of Jesus. Mather argued that the historical circumstances offer no other possible explanation, making the case for the resurrection "*Incontestable*." He repeated his contention that all skeptics would affirm the validity of the biblical account if they were not "Unreasonable." [43] Once again, he made the claim that if people did not believe in the historical accuracy of the biblical account, the fault lay with their intellect or irrational disposition rather than a shortage of evidence. The historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ was comparable to other commonly accepted historical events: "You Believe that there were *Caesars at Rome*, and that there are such Countreys & Persons as you never saw your selves, nor have seen any others that have seen them . . . You have much greater proof of a Risen Savior, than you have of many, many other Things, which yet you Believe without the least scruple in the world."[44] He did not resort to spiritual knowledge. Historical evidence alone affirmed the events of the Bible.

Mather likely picked up his historical defense of the New Testament from sources such as Hugo Grotius and Tillotson, who defended the historical accuracy of the biblical account by examining the credibility of the witnesses.[45] The latitudinarian historical defense of the Bible was part of a growing trend toward probabilistic thinking. The Anglicans who defended the Bible by the use of historical evidence argued that the evidence could lead to high probability but not absolute certainty. Apparently, Mather never picked up this nuance. He maintained the language of certainty while using historical evidence.[46]

Though in some passages he was confident that he could prove the validity of Christianity, in other writings, he was ambivalent. He seemed to retreat from or at least temper his praise of the role of reason and evidence in the understanding of the Bible and theology.[47] He warned that those who attempted to refute deism solely on the basis of reason inadvertently aided the heretics by repeating and summarizing their "Blasphemies." He feared that a purely reasonable examination of the evidence would not necessarily lead to faith in the Bible but to heresy: "It rather Heartens and Hardens, rather than refutes the Blasphemies. And it will, if you, O Tempted Souls, pay them the Honour of too formal a *Disputation*."[48] Because belief was a spiritual matter, formal disputations alone were not necessarily effective. Here he blamed evil spirits, not defective reason, for unbelief.[49] He advised that the deist (or the Devil, for the two were interchangeable in both Mather's mind and prose) must be "*Immediately* Repel[led]" rather than engaged in an honest and lengthy debate: "The most proper thing you can do [to deists] is *Immediately* Repel them, with Direct and Formal *Contradictions* to them. A *Quick Repute*, with the most contrary *Acknowledgement of a Risen Saviour*, thereby Excited in you, will be the bravest way of *Quenching these Fiery Darts of the Wicked One*. Your Savior will bless this Method of Resisting the Devil, by causing him, in his own Time, & perhaps in a little Time, to *Flee from you*."[50] The enemy was not only the deist but the Devil. In this passage, the skeptic could be saved not by rational arguments but by divine intervention, for this was a spiritual matter.[51] Here, much of Mather's argument for the Bible rests on faith, spiritual senses, and experience. He wrote that one knew the Bible was true because of the comfort and joy provided by the experience of being a Christian. Furthermore, the Bible was so beautiful and lovely that it could only be written by God. God was truthful and honest, and he could not compose a false book. Mather wrote, "Perhaps we can't see the Reason: But Reason says, The Scripture is a Revelation from GOD: And Reason says, what God has Revealed, must be Reasonable."[52] In this convoluted sentence, he stated that reason could only take one so far. The rest of the journey required faith. Yet he could not dispense with the language of reason.

Five years later, Mather in *Icono-Clastes* (1717) rebuked various forms of "Idolatry" commonly ignored by Christians. Reason is a gift from God, but he warned, "*Reason* is *Idolized*, When Men will set *Reason* above *Revelation*. When Men will Receive nothing that is *Reveal'd* from GOD, Except they can fathom it by *Reason*."[53] He noted that Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* was a prime example of the idolatry of reason. In the face of deist challenges to revelation, Mather initially fought back with

reason and evidence. However, he was not naively optimistic. He knew that unchastened reason was dangerous and could lead to skepticism. This should by no means be interpreted as a rejection of reason. He often restated Locke's dictum that although Christians do not accept anything against reason, there are certainly many things above reason.[54] At some points, Mather seemed to be enamored by reason. However, he was also aware of its dangers.

Puritans had always tried to strike a balance between reason and revelation. Historian John Morgan, in his examination of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English Puritan attitudes toward reason and learning, concludes that although Puritans had a high view of the capacities of reason, in regard to its application to faith, they emphasized across the spectrum "first and foremost the distortions which reason would undoubtedly produce in reaching beyond its capacity." They were concerned that "natural reason could not see through the gloom of its own corruption." They did not denigrate reason, but they sought to ensure that reason did "not stray from its appointed path." People, Puritans feared, were constantly tempted to expand the role of reason beyond its appointed place. Reason must remain subservient to faith.[55] Mather, while remaining rooted in his Puritan heritage, spoke of reason with greater confidence at times.

Manuductio ad Ministerium

A decade later, Mather showed little ambivalence about the role of reason and natural philosophy in the interpretation of the Bible in *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726), his guide for the education of young men preparing for the ministry. Historians have noted that one of the most notable features of the handbook is Mather's rejection of both scholastic and Ramist logic.[56] Through Ramist logic, New England Puritans understood the world and interpreted the Bible. It reigned in New England until the early years of the eighteenth century. The scholarship on Ramist logic is extensive.[57] In brief, the logic continually dichotomized an idea until it was broken down into its elemental parts, moving from the general to the specific. For Puritans, this logic was the design of God rather than a particular man-made method of interpretation. It allowed men to see the divine order in the universe. In following it, one's mind conformed to God's direction. Harvard College taught its young students the Ramist method to interpret all ideas in general, but particularly the Bible. Perry Miller wrote, "In New England, when the Word of God was 'resolved logically,' when a text was analyzed into its arguments, it was 'sown asunder' by the Ramist method of dichotomy." Literary scholar Edward H. Davidson notes that in Puritan sermons, which were based on Ramist

logic, the interpreter typically began with an axiomatic starting point, which in all cases was a biblical text. In Ramist fashion, he separated the passage into component parts and he logically deduced God's meaning.[58]

Mather had nothing but "Contempt of the Vulgar Logic, learnt in our Colleges, as a sort of meer Morology [or foolish talking]."[59] He scathingly wrote, "The most valuable thing in Logic, and the very Termination of it, is, The Doctrine of the Syllogism. And yet it is notorious that . . . all *Syllogizing* is only to confirm you in a *Truth which* you are already the owner of." Mather asked why anyone would want "to weave any more cobwebs in your Brains, to what purpose is it?"[60] He went on to argue that logicians merely "exhibit in the pompous Form of an Art, what everyone does by mere *Nature* and *Custom*."[61] Mather complained that logic neither advanced nor clarified knowledge. It merely rephrased obvious truths into pretentious and elaborately complicated formulas. Mather complained that this logic brought nothing new to the Bible. But that was the point. The Ramist method avoided bringing other sources of information into the interpretation of the Bible. Because there was no authority higher than the Bible, Scripture interpreted itself.[62]

Mather rejected Ramist logic. But what should take its place? Literary scholar Gustaaf Van Cromphout observes that Mather, in the *Manuductio*, abandoned Ramist logic in favor of "a clearly Cartesian outlook" or geometric patterns of thought in its "structure and its attitude towards authority, whether ancient or modern."[63] A geometric argument makes its starting point a proposition having axiomatic validity. Subsequent propositions are based on the starting axiom. Unlike most Puritan thinkers, Van Cromphout notes, Mather did not make his axiomatic starting point the word of God.[64] Rather, on the first page of the *Manuductio*, he started with a universally accepted and verifiable axiom of life: the inevitability of death. "The Contemplation of DEATH shall be the FIRST Point of the Wisdom that my Advice must lead you to." Mather, through a chain of reason, deduced that if one contemplates one's death, one would inevitably seek to "live unto God."[65] Mather certainly believed that the Bible was absolutely true. However, he chose not to use the Bible as his axiomatic starting point as did typical Puritan sermons. Equally Cartesian, according to Van Cromphout, was Mather's "substitution of reason for the ancients as the source of authority."[66] Just as he did in his antideist essays, Mather sought to establish a basis for the authority of the Bible on evidence available to all reasonable individuals.[67]

Perhaps one reason Mather rejected Ramist logic and argued in a Cartesian mode in the *Manuductio* was his growing concern with the challenges of skepticism.[68] Historian Rick Kennedy argues that leaders of

late-seventeenth-century Harvard adopted Cartesian logic in response to their growing fears of the threat of skepticism.[69] Ramist logic emphasized logic as the basis of a dialectic. The ultimate purpose of the logic was "simply discoursing well." According to Ramist logic, a dialectic resolved itself when one side won the argument. Thus all questions regarding truth could come to an end that was both certain and satisfying. As Walter Ong observes, "you knew you were right because no one could prove you wrong."[70] Ramist logic was quite useful to Puritans in a post-Reformation world. Protestants and Roman Catholics engaged in debates about the interpretation of the Bible and authority, but both sides accepted fundamental ground rules such as the inspiration and unique status of the Bible. However, Ramist logic had little effect on skeptics who denied the supernatural status of the Bible. Kennedy writes, "Ramist logic, like Aristotelian logic, had no epistemology capable of answering the increasingly prevalent skepticism of the seventeenth century and could not 'win' debates against the skeptics."[71] Perhaps Mather was preparing future pastors for a day when one could not take for granted that all assumed that the Bible was the word of God. The next generation of students would need arguments that would begin with universally accessible axioms.

Perry Miller argues that Mather replaced the Ramist mode of thinking with a Newtonian understanding of the world. Mather declared in the *Manuductio*, "Experimental Philosophy is that, in which *alone* your Mind can be at all established."[72] Mather wrote that the empirical examination of the world "if well pursued, would Compel you to come in to a Strong Faith, wherewith you would give Glory to Him, on all Occasions."[73] By a Newtonian method, he intended that the Bible should be empirically interpreted, examined, and verified by the light of independent fields of study such as natural philosophy.[74] By contrast, years earlier, in 1709, Mather, in his *Man of Reason*, argued that spiritual and moral truths were as intuitively certain as mathematical principles. In the *Manuductio*, he shifted and grounded the certainty of Christian revelation on the empirical evidence of the physical universe.[75]

Cartesian and Newtonian modes of thought are clearly not entirely compatible. Cartesian philosophy generally valued pure abstract reason, while Newtonian thought trusted empirical evidence. However, Mather borrowed from both modes of thought without being entirely consistent. By turning to them, Mather seemed to be seeking a way to ground his interpretation of the Bible on a basis of knowledge independent of the Bible and spiritual experiences. He was seeking to understand Scripture on universally accessible standards.

In doing so, Mather was following a larger trend in the changing conception of the Bible. Historian Peter Harrison argues that the emergence of early modern science in the seventeenth century developed in conjunction with a positive reappraisal of the scientific value of the Bible. Protestant scientists believed the Bible and the natural world confirmed one another. Furthermore, early modern Protestant exegesis shifted from symbolic and allegorical readings of Scripture toward a more literal treatment of the Bible. Interpreters viewed the Bible as a storehouse of verifiable facts rather than mystical or spiritually granted insights.[76]

Beginning in the late seventeenth century, Mather became increasingly interested in and influenced by the methods of natural philosophy. His interest in reason and evidentiary apologetics is clear in his three antideist essays. Scholars Raymond Stearns, Michael Winship, and Jeffery Jeske note that as Mather explored the new sciences, he increasingly understood the universe as mechanical, empirical, and less mysterious. Otho T. Beall Jr. claims that by 1712 "the supernatural explanation of various phenomena was not always satisfactory to him, and he was moving toward a greater objectivity." Jeske argues that Mather's interest in science was essentially secularizing and leading to a mechanistic view of the world and deism. Mather's positive reception of the physico-theologians unintentionally "facilitated Puritan orthodoxy's evolution towards mechanism and Deism."[77] However, the extent to which Mather's newfound rationalism challenged and threatened his more traditional view has been a matter of some dispute. Winston Solberg and Pershing Vartanian believe that rationalism and piety complemented one another in Mather's thought. Vartanian writes, "Piety and rationalism never competed for dominance in Mather's thought. They emerged together and matured together and each was rooted in the other, thereby exerting a reciprocal influence upon the other."[78]

Not coincidentally, just as Mather examined the Bible rationally and scientifically, he also examined the natural world though the Bible. In *The Christian Philosopher* (1721), he attempted to consolidate and digest the recent discoveries of natural philosophy and show how they glorified God and confirmed the Bible's authority. Mather was the first American to write a book of natural philosophy with the design argument as its thesis. As such, he was the primary conduit by which American colonists learned about the new sciences.[79] He declared that the book "will demonstrate that [natural] Philosophy is no enemy, but a mighty and wondrous incentive to religion." He wanted to exhibit "the works of the Glorious GOD in the Creation of the World."[80] As he stated in the *Manuductio*, natural philosophy would strengthen faith by verifying revealed religion.

In the *Philosopher*, Mather explained the natural world from a Christian perspective. However, his interest in natural philosophy had a reciprocal effect. Science, along with other sources of knowledge such as philology, geography, and history, altered the way Mather interpreted the Bible in the "Biblia Americana."[81]

"Biblia Americana"

In 1693, after concluding that none of the available biblical commentaries were adequate, Cotton Mather resolved to write his own and dedicated himself to writing at least a few lines every morning. He tried to gather the best illustrations of sacred texts from "the scattered Books of learned Men" by keeping current with European scholarship. By plodding along at his gargantuan task, he hoped to compose "one of the greatest Works that ever I undertook in my Life."[82] In several large bound volumes of blank books, he wrote his dense script in double columns to maximize his use of space, often leaving blank pages so that he could elaborate and update his entries at a later date. As he came across new material, he inserted glosses in the margins and pages of various sizes into the bound books. Beginning in 1706, he made several failed attempts to try to find a publisher.[83] Part of the problem was that Matthew Poole and Matthew Henry had already published biblical commentaries in England in 1676 and 1708, respectively.[84] But the manuscript suffered from a more serious problem: its monstrous size—six volumes of more than a thousand pages each. Publishing such a work would have been an enormously expensive venture, and Mather could not find a publisher willing to invest in the project. Though deeply discouraged, Mather never gave up on the project. He continually revisited and revised his manuscript, adding to its size, updating it as he encountered new discoveries and philosophies from Europe. His son, Samuel Mather, recorded that Cotton continued to labor over his biblical commentary until his death in 1728.[85]

Even in his biblical commentary, Mather was haunted by the challenges of skepticism. As in the antideist essays, Mather addressed on evidentiary grounds recent skeptical questions about the Bible's authenticity. Though in some writings, such as *Icono-Clastes* and *Reason Satisfied*, Mather related some caution and ambivalence over the use of reason and evidence, at other times, he was quite certain that disciplines such as natural science and history could both affirm the divine nature of the Bible and aid in its proper interpretation. One can see the same tension in the "Biblia." Interpreting the Bible through these fields of knowledge yielded mixed results. At some points, empirical evidence strengthened traditional views of the Bible. Any reasonable person would be compelled

to admit the Bible's true nature. However, at times, the evidence of history and natural science forced Mather to abandon some older certainties about Scripture and adopt new interpretations that skirted close to the claims of the skeptics he was fighting.

The Bible and Natural Philosophy

In the hands of the deists, the Newtonian image of the universe as regular, predictable, and measurable challenged the notion that God supernaturally intervened in the operations of the cosmos. Even if one were not a deist, the new image of the cosmos at least strained a literal interpretation of some miracles. For example, Joshua 10:13 records that God causes the sun to stand still in the sky. John Calvin, like many others, argued that the passage could only be interpreted literally.[86] But skeptics such as Spinoza and La Peyrère denied that the recorded event described an actual miracle.[87] Mather discussed this passage and several interpretations in his *Biblia Americana*. In some places, he appeared to believe that the event literally happened. In other passages, he denied that God suspended the laws of nature using naturalistic and historical explanations. Mather noted that he was intrigued by the solution offered by Stephen Nye, who in his *Discourse Concerning Natural and Revealed Religion* (1696) argued that the account of the miracle referred to a poem rather than a literal account. Summarizing Nye, Mather wrote, "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 and Moon to stand still." Apparently agreeing with Nye, Mather wrote that the poetry "should not bee strained further than it will naturally bear; that is, not be understood as a real matter of fact." Poetry, being a different genre than history, needed to be interpreted by different standards.[88] Thus the poetic genre of the record liberated Mather from the burden of reconciling the biblical account with modern cosmology.

On an earlier page, in his attempt to explain the issue of the sun, Mather referred positively to Robert Jenkins. Summarizing Jenkins, Mather wrote that the "scriptures were not written with a design to teach us natural philosophy but to show the way how to live and be well." The biblical writers used "popular forms of speech, neither affirming nor denying the philosophical truth of them." They were written for the "vulgar conceptions of men." Explaining Copernicus and Kepler to the ancients would have been impossible.[89] Mather explained that biblical interpretation needed to take into account the culture of the writer. God accommodated his revelation to the primitive state of the audience.

Yet Mather was neither consistent nor comfortable with this conclusion. Though Mather agreed with this historical hermeneutic on some pages, at other points, he broke with this view. On the same page, he also defended an interpretation of the event as a miracle. Mather cited pagan sources such as the Greek poet Callimachus and Herodotus who recorded instances when the sun stopped. He also noted that Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656) "thinks he can demonstrate" that a number of pagan sources independently testify that the sun stopped in the sky "in the year, 2555." These records, Mather believed, referred to the same instance of the miracle recorded in Joshua.[90] Although in this section Mather defended the miracle, interestingly, he sought to ground it in extrabiblical, historical corroborating evidence. This small section was written upside down on the lower right-hand section of the page, suggesting that it was written at a different time. It seems that Mather wanted this section to be physically and intellectually distinct from the rest of the page. However, he did not cross it out as he did with many other sections of the "Biblia." Even if new ideas persuaded him to abandon older interpretations, he seemed to be unwilling to delete it from both the pages and his mind.

On the following page, Mather again defended miracles. He noted that the biblical account presciently implies a heliocentric model of the universe. In reality, the sun does not move across the sky, but the orbit of the Earth makes the sun appear to move. Spinoza and others argued that the biblical writers naturally perceived the events within their own primitive perspective.[91] Mather argued that the description of the sun standing still in the sky anticipated and contained the heliocentric conception of the universe. If the writer had a geocentric view, explained Mather, then Joshua would have only commanded the sun to stand still. But he commands the moon to halt as well. He asked, "Why did he command the moon to stand still as well as the sun?" Mather asserted that if the Earth ceased to rotate, the sun as well as the moon would appear to stand still. Thus Mather argued that the motion of the Earth was implied in the biblical passage and proved the inspiration of the Bible.[92]

Mather seemed both indecisive and tortured. In order to reconcile some biblical passages to modern cosmology, he had to argue that they were written in a historical context by people who were ignorant of modern science. Thus they were not lies, but they were true from the perspective of the writers. To be clear, early modern Reformed Protestants were not all necessarily opposed to the notion that God accommodated his message to the cultural limitation of the audience in matters of science. However, they did not question the validity of the recorded miracles.

Explaining away miracles as the expression of primitive minds seemed to erode the veracity and dignity of the biblical account. Furthermore, such interpretations leaned uncomfortably close to heretics such as La Peyrère, Spinoza, and Hobbes. Mather was never at ease with such views, and he kept affirming the literal and miraculous nature of the biblical events as well.[93]

Prisca Theologia, the Bible, and Pagan Mythologies

Just as Mather used history to explain away apparent discrepancies between the Bible and modern science, he also used historical evidence to affirm the authenticity of the Bible. In *Reason Satisfied*, he briefly argued that pagan religions contain some truths that are Christian in origin: "There is indeed nothing Excellent in any Religion, but it was Borrow'd from the Christian Religion and is an Ingredient of it."[94] Mather was drawing on a long tradition that the best pagan writings were influenced by "ancient theology" or *prisca theologia*. *Prisca theologia* was developed first by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Lactantius, and Eusebius to show that ancient religions and philosophers borrowed from God's revelation. Subsequently, others such as Hugo Grotius and Theophilus Gale continued to carry on this argument. Proponents of *prisca theologia* claimed that non-Christian traditions taught vestiges of true religion. Typically, they alleged that that all human beings were originally given knowledge of true religion by the Jews or oral traditions going back to patriarchs such as Adam, Enoch, or Noah and his children. This knowledge was subsequently passed down to thinkers such as Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, and the Brahmins and Druids. Over the ages, God's pure revelation had been corrupted, distorted, and degraded.[95]

Mather wrote that the source of many pagan creation accounts was "originally from the Scriptures and so those notions will much help to confirm the divinitie of those glorious writings" and that a "collection of passages . . . illustrate[s] this matter."[96] The "general opinion of the ancient gentiles was that the world was made out of chaos, a disordered and disorganized mass of matter, without form and void." He noted that ancient historians and poets also believed that the world began at night. "To the Chaos and water the Ancients added another concurrent principle, namely night. That the world had its beginning from night (or erebus) and chaos was an Universal tradition both of such poets as Orpheus, Livy, Hesiod, Homer and others. And such philosophers as Epicurus, Thalos, Plato, and all the Grecians." Mather believed that ancient references to night were merely a variation of the Hebrew creation story: "What is this but a testimony to that passage in Gen. 1.2 Darkness was

on the face over the deep." He wrote, "The deep is their chaos and the darkness is their night." The similarities, Mather believed, confirmed the historical accuracy and antiquity of the Genesis account.[97]

Though Mather saw similarity as evidence of a common origin and proof of the Bible's authenticity, others drew conclusions that challenged the Bible's unique status. In his commentary on Leviticus, Mather wrote, "There has been an opinion very plausibly maintained and with a vast variety of learning laboriously defended by such learned men as [John] Marsham, and [Athanasius] Kircher, and [John] Spencer, that the Egyptians were they who had the first rules and rites of religion among them; and that not only the religious rites of other nations, but of the Israelites themselves were derived from the Egyptians."[98] John Marsham in his *Canon Chronicus* (1672) noted that eight or nine centuries before Moses wrote the Pentateuch, Egyptians established religious rituals and rites similar to those of Israel. Thus he concluded that Moses derived his laws from the Egyptians. John Spencer in *De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus* (1685) argued that Moses constructed the rites recorded in the Pentateuch to break the primitive Israelites of the polytheism, idolatry, and superstitions that they had acquired from living in Egypt. Lamb and oxen, for example, were sacrificed during rituals because these animals were deemed sacred by the Egyptians. Moses was trying to teach the Israelites that these were no divinities since they could be sacrificed. Furthermore, the fests were instituted as counter attractions to similar ones among the gentiles, not because they were pleasing to God or suited to his worship, but because they were adapted to the childish tastes of the Israelites, argued Spencer.[99]

Mather could not accept such views. The implications were far too troubling. The deists Toland and Tindal used Marsham's and Spencer's reconstructed histories to argue that there existed a natural religion above and beyond its particular manifestations in different cultures. Christian revelation was merely a corruption of the original religion.[100] The notion that Moses borrowed his ideas from pagans rather than the reverse Mather called "a monstrous distortion." To counter this view, Mather summarized the work of Hermann Witsius, an orthodox Calvinist professor at Leiden and Hebraist of considerable learning whom Mather called an "Excellent man of God." Witsius, in *Aegyptica* (1683), agreed that the Israelites repeatedly fell into the superstitions and idolatries of surrounding nations, yet he claimed that the Egyptian and Hebrew rites were in fact different. When they did agree, it was likely based on reason that was universal to man or tradition based on corrupted memories of God's original institution.[101]

Mather believed that he used the tools of history to defeat the threatening notion that the Pentateuch was derived from pagan sources rather than the revelation of God. However, the nature of Witsius's arguments introduced possible cracks in Mather's defensive wall. Mather called the historical arguments of Marsham and Spencer "plausible." Witsius (and by extension Mather) argued that the Egyptians in all "likelihood" borrowed from the Hebrews rather than the reverse. Mather could offer no overwhelming or definitive reason Witsius's interpretation was better than the alternative. By opening the Bible to historical examination, comparing it alongside other ancient traditions, Mather was treating it like any ancient historical document. This is not to say that he was turning into a follower of Spinoza. He clearly believed the Bible was a unique book. Also, historical arguments could only make probabilistic claims. There is little evidence that Mather embraced or fully understood the nature and limitations of probabilistic thinking that would become more prevalent in Europe. However, in arguing against Spencer and Marsham and utilizing Witsius, these elements were sneaking into his arguments.

Chronology and the Problem of China

In his commentary on Genesis, Mather also addressed concerns that the historical account might be untrue or the chronology inaccurate. During the seventeenth century, the writings of men such as Martino Martini, Athanasius Kircher, and Isaac Vossius brought to light evidence that the ancient Chinese and Egyptians had historical records that predated the biblical account. Credible pagan histories seriously challenged the Bible's chronology and the belief that it related an encompassing and universal history. Historian Colin Kidd observes that the "study of universal history chronology became one of the foremost disciplines of the early modern period. It tackled questions of fundamental importance to the identity of Christendom, and it attracted some of Europe's foremost minds."[102] It attracted one of America's best minds as well. Mather confidently wrote, "It may prove a good preparatory unto the illustrations upon the Bible to have the CHRONOLOGY of the Old Testament briefly secured and explained, and exposed unto us?" When writing about the chronology of Genesis, Mather cribbed from Whiston's *A Short View of the Chronology of the Old Testament*.[103] Whiston confirmed, with pagan sources, the events recorded in the Bible. The affirmation of the secular and extra-biblical accounts Mather considered proof of the authority and accuracy of the Bible. For example, Mather noted that the works of Ptolemy and Xenophon confirmed the Babylonian captivity: "By the comparison of [Ptolemy's] canon with Xenophon, and with the sacred writers, we have

an exact account of the space during the 70 years captivity of the Jews in Babylon, and the time of its solution under the crown of Persia; which otherwise we had been but very imperfectly acquainted withal. This canon does exactly agree in every thing with the chronology of the Old Testament. It is an authentic record always to be relied upon."[104] Both supported the accuracy of the Bible, affirming the belief that the history of the Bible encompassed the history of the entire world.[105]

Mather took his explorations for chronological evidence as far as China. Possibly influenced by the works of Joseph Scaliger and Samuel Bochart, he attempted to reconcile biblical and pagan history. In 1658, Martino Martini, a Jesuit missionary in China, published an account of Chinese history. However, Martini's history raised problems. He wrote that China's first monarch, Fohi, began his rule in 2952 BC. However, in 1654, Archbishop James Ussher published a chronology of the Bible (based on the Vulgate) that dated the creation of the world in 4404 BC and Noah's flood in 2349 BC. If the dates were correct, the Chinese appeared to have had a continuous history that preceded the flood by several centuries. Isaac Vossius solved this dilemma by using the Septuagint, which allowed for an earlier date for the flood and by which biblical and pagan history could thus be reconciled. The challenges of the Chinese chronology seemed to affirm the skepticism of La Peyrère. He argued the flood was not universal and pointed to the Chinese who had a history that preceded the flood as evidence. Martini also doubted the universality of the flood based on his admiration of the Chinese historical records.[106]

Mather was well aware of the challenges posed by the discrepancy between the Chinese chronology and the biblical history. However, he believed that the Chinese chronology corroborated the authenticity of biblical history, writing that the "Chinese Chronology when rightly understood, is exactly agreeable, to what we draw from the Hebrew Text of the Old Testament." Mather noted that the astronomical calculations of Giovanni Domenico Cassini (1625–1712), an Italian mathematician and astronomer, showed the Chinese histories to be erroneously dated 500 years too early. Furthermore, Mather noted that the recorded lives of the kings were unnaturally long. He suggested that the accounts of their lives were "collateral" and not "successive." Mather confidently concluded, "If the Chinese Annals be thus adjusted, the Length of the Reigns and the Lives of their Monarchs, will very exactly agree, with the Duration of the Lives of Men, in the same Ages recorded in the Sacred Scripture." By reconciling the Chinese annals with the Bible, Mather concluded that Noah founded China: "Fohi, the founder of the Chinese

monarchy was the same with Noah." He observed that the adjusted dates of Fohi aligned with the life of Noah: "Chinese histories affirm that Fohi settled in the Province of Xensi; which is the most North-West Province of China, and very near to Mount Caucasus, upon which the Ark rested, & from which Noah must descend, to go thence into China." Furthermore, Mather noted parallels between the Chinese accounts and the Bible. Chinese records noted that Fohi was surrounded by a rainbow and "carefully bred up seven sorts of Creatures, which he used to sacrifice, to the Supreme Spirit of Heaven & Earth." Mather believed that the children of Noah passed these stories onto their children. Of course pagans corrupted the original stories, but the degraded mythologies still contained a kernel of the truth.[107]

Though the newly "discovered" Chinese history caused many like Martini to modify their interpretation of the Bible to challenge the universality of the flood and biblical history, Mather maintained a more conservative interpretation. He was not guided by a purely empirical spirit. At times, he interpreted the information in a way that supported his theological loyalties. Nonetheless, Mather felt the need to reconcile the Bible with a pagan history. Early and medieval Christians assumed the Bible recorded a complete history of the world. They of course were aware of chronicles of pagan peoples that recorded times older than the Bible. Augustine and the church fathers simply dismissed them as liars or demonic creations. Their annals were fantasies and human stories and thus could not pose a challenge to the divine revelation.[108] However, by the eighteenth century, not even Mather could so cavalierly dismiss the challenge of the Chinese history. He had to contrive, however tortuous, an explanation. The Bible and pagan history needed to be reconciled.

History and Philology

The chronology of the Old Testament contained other apparent contradictions, and Mather knew that the Bible was vulnerable to attacks from critics. He was confident that inconsistencies could be solved with rigorous reasoning and investigation. The chronology of Judah, the brother of Joseph and son of Jacob as recorded in Genesis, presented some particularly difficult challenges. The story appeared to relate an impossible scenario. If so, then the biblical account was inaccurate. In the biblical narrative, Judah's oldest son, Er, married Tamar. Er died and then Onan, younger brother of Er, married Tamar in his brother's place, but Onan also died. Rather than waiting for the youngest brother Shelah to come of age, Tamar seduced her father-in-law Judah and bore him Pharez and Zara. Pharez begat Herzon and Hamul. According to one reading of this

biblical account, all these events—four generations—took place within a 22-year time frame. This was clearly impossible. Mather believed he could save the Bible from the appearance of absurd contradiction and error. The apparent contradiction was based on a linguistic misunderstanding, Mather submitted. The readers of the Bible misinterpreted the Hebrew phrase "at that time." He explained, "It seems to be little more than a Particle of Transition, or a common Way of introducing a New Branch of an History, like the English Particle, *Now*."[109] Under the new interpretation, the events describing the growth of Judah's family were not restricted to 22 years. Throughout the manuscript, Mather looked to philology to come to a more accurate understanding of the ancient texts. By comparing the use of a term or phrase with other examples in the same genre, textual critics believed they were able to find a more precise meaning. The meaning of words needed to be derived from an examination of the text rather than imposed from the modern and therefore foreign culture.

Mather confronted other chronological challenges with biological and environmental explanations as well. Mather wrote, "Ahaz is no more than twenty years old, when he began to reign, he reigns not quite fifteen years before his son Hezekiah begins to reign. Yet Hezekiah himself was not more than twenty five years old. Whereas it will follow that Hezekiah was born when his father was hardly eleven years old." This history appeared to describe a biological impossibility. Mather began by conceding that "this would be thought strange in our age and climate." To resolve the contradiction, he suggested a biological and environmental explanation. He wrote, "Possibly the inhabitants of those hotter communities come to maturity sooner than in ours." He speculated that the hot environment of the Middle East allowed its inhabitants to procreate sooner. To support his speculation, he offered an example from the region: "Tis very certain that Mohomist in Arabia in the region bordering on Judah, married one of his wives when she was but six years old. And bedded her in two afterwards. But there have not been . . . examples in the more northern regions, of as Early Ability for procreation, as that in Ahaz."[110] Therefore Mather concluded that Ahaz, and all people of the Middle East, physically matured sooner than modern people. Mather believed that, based on the evidence, Ahaz could father a child at the age of 11.[111] He argued that though the narrative initially defied all common sense and reason, the interpreter should be cautious of importing alien values into the interpretation of a text from a different time and people. By drawing an example from people living in Arabia, he assumed that neighboring

ancient cultures could shed light on the marital practices and biology of Jews in the time of Ahaz.

Though this part of Mather's writing seems ponderous and unimportant, it is significant. Mather responded to the challenges of biblical authority with what he believed to be reliable sources of truth: historical and empirical evidence. If extrabiblical authorities confirmed the truth of the Bible, then the Bible was accountable to these external authorities. Furthermore, his work implied that the full meaning of the Bible was not self-evident to the average contemporary reader. The Bible was a strange book produced by an alien and distant culture very different from early-eighteenth-century Europe or New England. History and knowledge of the surrounding cultures and languages shed light on the Bible's meaning. He was by no means historicizing the texts in the manner of Spinoza or Hobbes, who used the primitive culture of the Jews to dismiss claims of the miraculous in the narrative. However, Mather was arguing that the writers were informed by their distinct world. Thus the Bible must be read in their historical context.

Mosaic Authorship

However, Mather discovered that reading the Bible in its historical context raised as many problems as it solved. The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch had been contested since antiquity, but it became one of the most troubling controversies of the age as skeptics, intentionally or not, cast doubt on the authority of the Bible. As Mather was aware, men like La Peyrère, Hobbes, Spinoza, Le Clerc, and Simon questioned whether Moses wrote significant parts of the Pentateuch. Mather acknowledged that there were perplexing questions about the matter of authorship. As with other issues in the "Biblia," his answers were not consistent, suggesting that he was conflicted or his ideas were evolving. When addressing apparent anachronisms, Mather, in some sections, adamantly rejected the notion of later editors or interpolations by resorting to intellectual contortions to defend Mosaic authorship. For example, Genesis 12:6 narrates an apparently historical event when Abram passed through the Moreh. The author mentioned that, at the time, the Canaanites were *still* in the land. Hobbes, Spinoza, Le Clerc, and Simon all agreed that this section could not have been written by Moses because the Canaanites were expelled from the land after Moses's death. Mather defended the Mosaic authorship of this verse against "Spinosa" and "Simon, the author of Five Letters." He escaped from this dilemma by referring to Walter Cross, a London preacher who wrote *The Thagmical Art* (1698). By reconfiguring the Masoretic accent points, Cross retranslated apparently anachronistic

verses to support Mosaic authorship. He argued that the Canaanite in the verse actually referred to an individual person rather than the whole nation. Though exotic and farfetched, this solution satisfied Mather.[112]

Recall that Hobbes, Le Clerc, and Simon believed that Moses wrote only the laws and commandments, and public scribes or a later editor collected and edited his writings. La Peyrère, Simon, and Le Clerc believed that Moses cobbled his accounts together by drawing upon a variety of sources, some of which were pagan in origin. For example, Simon believed that Moses used Chaldean accounts of the Creation and the Flood to construct his account. Le Clerc believed that Moses used ancient memoirs as source material for his writings. These theories did not necessarily contradict inspiration, but in the minds of many, they undermined the Bible's supernatural status.[113]

Mather wrote that skeptical critics of the Bible would naturally wonder how Moses accurately recorded the most ancient events such as the creation of the world. Mather proposed an explanation. From "Adam to Moses, the course of Tradition in the families of the faithful, ran so easily and . . . along, as to render the truth of it unquestionable." An accurate oral history of the events through the generations was plausible and granted the Christian a "greater assurance of *Inspiration*." Thus Moses composed the history of the world through various sources. In trying to posit the means by which Moses could have written his ancient history, Mather seemed to be both arguing against and borrowing ideas from La Peyrère, Le Clerc, and Simon. Mather still believed that as the editor and compiler of the oral histories of the people of God, Moses was inspired. He certainly did not imply that Moses used pagan sources. But this was not the dictation theory of inspiration.[114]

Elsewhere Mather relented and accepted that later interpolators edited the Pentateuch. In his commentary on the book of Numbers, Mather affirmed that for centuries, "Public Scribes" collected the works of Moses in public annals and then extracted, rewrote, and updated sections from these now lost sources to create the Pentateuch, all under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He wrote that the Pentateuch "long after the death of Moses, underwent Interpolations from the Pens of Inspired Persons. Ezra, Revising this Book, might add this, of what was done at the Red-Sea, & at the Brooks of Arnon." Elsewhere, he wrote that Moses probably only left "an abridgement of Ancient History" and a "Naked Chronology of the first times." He conceded, "There may be certain lesser Passages, or Sentences added at later ages to the Pentateuch, by some Inspired hand. The last chapter of Deuteronomy was evidently so." However, Mather added that most of the Pentateuch was still written by Moses.[115]

In the final section of the "Biblia," Mather inserted an essay titled "Ezra, or the Things Done by Ezra, for the Restoring and Preserving of the Sacred Scriptures." Mather wrote that Ezra was the most likely editor of the Pentateuch and other parts of the Old Testament. This freed Mather to abandon his earlier appeals to grammatical acrobatics. In the essay, he conceded that Genesis 12:6 (the reference to the Canaanite) was not written by Moses. This was a radical statement for Mather to make. Mather was breaking not only with his own conservative community but with his own claims elsewhere.

He also allowed that Ezra interpolated passages when necessary in order to "render the Scriptures as intelligible as possible unto the People." Mather reasoned that names, places, and customs had become incomprehensible to the postexilic Jews. Furthermore, Ezra transcribed the Hebrew text "into the Chaldee Character" and dropped the "old Samaritan Character, wherein Moses & the Prophets had recorded the Oracles of God." In other words, the original revelation had been altered and edited. Reiner Smolinski writes, "Such drastic alternations did not disturb Mather because God's Word needed to be made intelligible to his people and therefore required updating."[116] For Mather, the revisions only affirmed that God inspired his word and cared for his people. Nonetheless, this was a radical reversal. One can imagine that he would have shocked conservative Puritans if the "Biblia" had ever been published. Perhaps Mather felt free to write these opinions down because he had given up hope of seeing his work in print.

Conclusion

Mather probably believed that he and other Christians successfully answered skeptical challenges. For every question skeptics brought forth, Mather was able to provide an empirical and reasonable answer. But every defensive countermove also altered the conception of the Bible. Mather did not believe that he and his contemporaries could, like previous generations, assume the sacred status of the Scriptures and then find evidence that confirmed the Bible's excellence. For example, Calvin did not feel the need to defend or prove the authenticity of the Bible on empirical grounds. Rather, Calvin believed that the believer recognized the truth of Scripture.[117] Mather lived in a more complicated world. To defend the authority of the Bible against the attacks of skeptics, he attempted to buttress the Bible on evidence universally accessible to intelligent and reasonable individuals. In doing so, Mather made the Bible, to some degree, accountable to authorities beyond the Bible and personal spiritual convictions. Sometimes, these authorities forced him to yield older certainties

such as Mosaic authorship. By no means did he become a skeptic. He remained orthodox all his life and still believed that the Bible was God's supernatural revelation. But his understanding of revelation changed. Mather warned New England Puritans, "Reason is idolized, when Men will set Reason above Revelation."[118] He did not make an idol of reason, but its influence was growing.

In general, attempts to combat infidelity and ground Christianity on rational and empirical grounds left a mixed legacy. Ralph Cudworth's *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) supposedly produced more atheists than it saved from unbelief because most who read it saw that Cudworth's arguments against atheism and for Christianity were weak and flawed. His description of atheism seemed stronger than those arguments he made for Christianity.[119] Samuel Clarke, in his 1704 Boyle Lecture, asserted that "no article of the Christian faith is opposed to reason." He attempted to demonstrate the existence of God and morality by mathematical *reasoning*. To doubt such laws was as absurd as to question if "a square is not double to a triangle of equal base and height."[120] Anthony Collins charged that no one doubted God's existence until Clarke tried to prove it. Benjamin Franklin claimed that the Boyle Lectures persuaded him to become a deist. He wrote, "For the arguments of the deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations."[121] Perhaps the attempt to reconcile the Bible to the new standards of evidence necessitated either that the Bible be stripped of its mystery or that mystery be significantly reduced.

Chapter 2

Defending the Bible and Unintended Consequences

Jonathan Edwards and Jonathan Dickinson Battle the Deists

Cotton Mather was one of the first Americans to recognize the threat of deism and skepticism. He attempted to defend the Bible's authenticity by drawing upon recent European discussions of geography, history, chronology, philology, and natural philosophy. Others in America also felt compelled to defend revelation in subsequent years. Jonathan Dickinson (1688–1747) and Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), 25 and 40 years younger than Mather respectively, selectively appropriated empirical and rational arguments for their cause against the deists. Both began to utilize newly developing notions of epistemology and verifiability, characteristic of their Anglican latitudinarian contemporaries across the ocean.

In seventeenth-century England, people from many disciplines began to believe that in the realm of fact, there were degrees of probability or certainty rather than two sealed compartments, one for truth of demonstration and the other for opinion. English thinkers concluded that only mathematics and a few logical and metaphysical principles were capable of demonstrable proof in the strictest sense. In the realm of religion, latitudinarians, in their quest for tolerance and a broad interpretation of Christianity, grew comfortable describing beliefs in probabilistic terms. Latitudinarians began to believe that though some truths, such as self-evident intuitions or mathematical proofs, were "certain" or above doubt, the vast majority of the propositions in the world were merely "probable." These truths did not rise to the level of "certainty," yet reason and

evidence could be compelling enough to persuade an impartial and rational individual to be "morally certain" and thus assent to a proposition.[1]

Appropriating the new epistemology of probability and certainty, Dickinson claimed that he could defend the Bible and revelation on terms even a deist would find persuasive. However, his attempts to convince deists on the grounds of reason and evidence exposed fissures in his epistemology. Edwards also *selectively* utilized certain strains of evidential and probabilistic arguments. He was also sensitive to the new challenges of rational and historical criticism, and he knew they needed to be answered. However, he was unwilling to fight the battle on deistic grounds. Doing so, he believed, would concede the argument.[2] Though he acknowledged the utility of evidential arguments, he placed his faith in the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Edwards was the last of a generation of premodern American thinkers. He took Puritan ideas as far as the Enlightenment could go. Dickinson was one of the first representatives of a new generation of modern critical thinkers who began to move his conception of the Bible from a spiritual to an empirical one.

JONATHAN DICKINSON'S EMPIRICAL AND RATIONAL DEFENSE OF THE BIBLE

In the early eighteenth century, Jonathan Dickinson was one of the most influential Presbyterians in America. He was the founding president of an institution that would eventually become Princeton University, though he only served for one year as he died prematurely. Nonetheless, he made significant contributions to American and European thought before his untimely death. Jonathan Edwards described Jonathan Dickinson as "learned and very excellent." Some across the Atlantic took notice of his intellectual abilities as well. The Scot John Erskine compared the two American Jonathans when he wrote, "The British Isles have produced no such writers on divinity in the eighteenth century as Dickinson and Edwards."[3] Though largely forgotten, in his time Dickinson was respected at home and abroad.

Like Cotton Mather before him, Dickinson sought to defend the authority of the Bible against deists, aiming his attacks on "Hobbs, Blount, Collins, or any of their admirers."[4] Also like Mather, he produced a series of antideist publications. In 1732, he published *The Reasonableness of Christianity* in which he attempted to defend the authority of Scripture and the uniqueness of Christian revelation against the critique of rationalistic skeptics.[5] Thirteen years later, in 1745, he revisited the theme and expanded his original arguments in *Familiar Letters to a Gentleman*.[6] In both works, he offered a defense of revealed religion based on

evidence and reason. Dickinson's works differed from Mather's in at least one important respect. In his two works, Dickinson divided knowledge into two categories: probabilistic and certain. According to Dickinson, some propositions, based on evidence and reason, were absolutely beyond any doubt; other propositions did not meet the threshold of complete certainty. Instead, they were highly "probable" or very likely to be true.[7]

Probability and Certainty

By discussing Christian revelation though the categories of certainty and probability, Dickinson was following European developments. For example, Hugo Grotius attempted to find a rational basis for Christianity in his *Truth of the Christian Religion* (1624, translated into English in 1680 by Simon Patrick). Grotius concluded that religion required lower standards of proof than mathematical demonstrations or immediate sensations, both of which were the most reliable sources of knowledge. Grotius believed that a reasonable person, free from passion or prejudice, should conclude that Christianity was true because the Bible was reliable. Many of Grotius's arguments were based on the historical accuracy of the Bible. The biblical authors who related historical events were such reliable observers that "there was no need that the [biblical] histories should be dictated by the Holy Spirit. It was sufficient that the writer had a good memory concerning the things he had seen or that he was careful in transcribing the ancient records." Sound history, believed Grotius, could almost rise to the level of certainty. The Bible, therefore, could be trusted because it was based on sound history.[8]

Grotius influenced many Englishmen such as William Chillingworth, who claimed that man could never claim "absolute infallibility." The vast majority of beliefs, including Christian faith, rose to the level of "moral certainty" at best.[9] John Locke systematized and summarized many of the seventeenth-century intellectual moves toward probabilistic knowledge in religion. In his immensely influential *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), he argued that there existed three levels of truth. *Intuitive knowledge* directly perceived the agreement or disagreement between two ideas. *Demonstrable knowledge* consisted of a strict and rigorous deduction based on intuitions such as mathematics. Demonstrable knowledge was less certain than intuitive knowledge. *Knowledge derived from the senses* was less certain than demonstrative knowledge, yet still worthy of assent.[10]

Anything other than ideas that came by intuition, demonstration, or sensation was "Faith, or Opinion, but not Knowledge." Thus Locke believed faith was less reliable than knowledge. According to Locke's criterion, ideas derived from historical testimony did not belong to the

realm of knowledge but to that of belief or opinion. This of course made Locke look as if he questioned the reliability of biblical revelation, as it was based on historical testimony and not on intuition or sensation. Intuitive, demonstrative, and sensible truths "will always be certainer to us, than those conveyed to us by *traditional revelation*." However, Locke did not intend to undermine revelation. Most ideas in the world were probabilistic, but probable information was capable of rising extremely close to the level of certainty. He believed that the biblical accounts were probably true.[11]

One could trust in the probable truth of the Bible based on the credibility of the biblical reporters. But the probability of the truth of the Bible was less certain than truths conveyed by one's own senses. Therefore, Locke concluded, Noah had a greater certainty of the deluge because he witnessed it with his own senses than a person who read an account of it in the Bible. The "assurance of its being a Revelation, is less still than the assurance of his Senses." Locke believed that revelation, provided that it did not violate reason (and he believed it did not), should be trusted because reason has determined that "such a Testimony . . . comes from one who cannot err, and will not deceive." He concluded that the probability that the events recorded in the Bible were true was extremely high.[12] Dickinson was one of the first Americans to move toward acceptance of probabilistic knowledge. His reading of John Locke certainly would have introduced him to these concepts. It should escape no one's attention that Dickinson's *Reasonableness of Christianity* shared the same title as Locke's more famous book.[13]

As discussed in the introduction, Locke believed that reason affirmed Christianity. Deists were not convinced. Skeptics, such as John Toland, Anthony Collins, and Matthew Tindal dismissed much of the Bible as false. Toland, in his *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696), argued that miracles and biblical revelation were neither logical nor empirically defensible. Miracles were not consistent with experience, and revelation was beyond the reach of reason. Collins's *Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724) attacked the biblical text, and prophecies in particular, as irrational and incomprehensible. Tindal, one of the most influential critics, attacked the credibility of the Bible by arguing that it was a historically unreliable document. Because the Bible was such an ancient book, argued Tindal, passages had been corrupted over time. As a result, some parts were obscure or incomprehensible. Since historical knowledge was less reliable than mathematical truths or knowledge derived from experience, the biblical stories should be judged against what one knew to be true. In other words, those passages that diverged

from natural religion were to be dismissed as corruptions.[14] Behind these skeptics, hovered Spinoza, who attempted to shoot holes in the historical accuracy of the Old Testament.

In both of Dickinson's apologetic works, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* and *Familiar Letters*, he tried to encourage the faith of Christians and, especially in the *Letters*, he tried to appeal directly to the deists on terms they could understand. General truths about God and religion, most of which a deist could affirm, Dickinson categorized as truths. The particular issues unique to Christian revelation he tended to describe as probable. For Dickinson, the subtle distinctions were intended to be encouraging, rather than discouraging. Following the Anglican trend to legitimate probabilistic knowledge as an adequate warrant for belief, Dickinson hoped to strengthen and encourage the faithful. In theory, he believed probable truth was almost or functionally as trustworthy as truth and therefore worthy of assent.

The Reasonableness of Christianity

Dickinson acknowledged that people took various paths to belief. However, he clearly believed some paths were superior. He was opposed to the many who believed out of "blind" faith. As the liberal pastor Thomas Foxcroft wrote in the introduction to *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, ignorant and uncritical believers were "stupidly led by Education, popular Fashion, publick Establishment, [or] Antiquity."[15] In other words, many believed because they unreflectively followed what they were taught to believe. They passively accepted the common notions of their community without question. Dickinson believed that man's power of reason and intellect allowed him to transcend his community, environment, and history. Man was, by God's design, a reasonable creature. Dickinson wrote, "He who has made us rational Creatures, expects from us a reasonable Service; and cannot be pleased with that faith, practice, or hope, that is grounded on education, or common opinion; and not the result of rational reflection, or inquiry." The belief that the Bible was the authoritative word of God could not be accepted on the basis of feeling or tradition. He wrote, "It must *not* take for granted, that the *Scriptures* are a *Divine revelation*; that is yet to be *prov'd*. But [one] must consider, whether we cannot by the *light of nature*" determine the accuracy and authority of the Bible.[16] The powers of unassisted human reason and evidence must establish the truth of Christian revelation.

Dickinson's attempt to establish by the "light of nature" that "the Scriptures are Divine revelation" had roots in a Reformed tradition as well as latitudinarian influences. Reformed thinkers typically divided the

evidences of the validity of the Bible between what they called *internal* and *external* evidences. Internal evidences were intuitive. The Christian, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, could perceive the Scripture's majesty, purity, efficacy, wisdom, perfection, power, and harmony. In other sermons Dickinson preached, in typical Calvinist fashion, that the Holy Spirit transformed the mind, taste, and perceptions of the believer. The Spirit opened the believer's eyes, allowing the believer to perceive a new reality.[17] By the external evidences, Reformed thinkers believed that reason, reflecting on the natural order of the visible world, pointed to the existence and general attributes of God.[18] Advocates of external evidence also looked to miracles and fulfilled prophecies to defend the authority and uniqueness of Scriptural revelation. Traditionally, Reformed thinkers believed that reason and evidence could never deduce Christian truths on their own, and ultimately they believed that internal evidences were superior and external evidences could never serve as a substitute.[19]

However, within the context of *The Reasonableness*, Dickinson put greater emphasis on the external evidences. He generally avoided appeals to the internal witness of the Scriptures because they carried little weight with the skeptics he was trying to win over. (Recall that Spinoza and Hobbes argued that only those enlightened by God were convinced of the Bible's divine nature and meaning.) In this regard, he showed affinity with latitudinarian trends. He was possibly influenced by Charles Leslie's immensely popular *Short Method with the Deists* (1721), which utilized a similar approach. Leslie, an Anglican clergyman, claimed that he intentionally did not argue on the basis of internal evidences because he was dealing "with deists who were scoffers." Leslie continued, "Some other topic must be found out for them to persuade them by the plain principles of reason, to which they only appealed, and of which indeed only they were capable."[20]

Dickinson wrote *The Reasonableness of Christianity* as a series of sermons in which he attempted systematically to refute deism. He started with general principles of religion and then delved into more specific arguments as he proceeded. For example, he began with the existence of a God. The first step took the form of a Thomist argument for an unmoved mover. This type of argument became popular among the latitudinarian natural theologians and physico-theologians. John Ray made such a move in his *Wisdom of God* (1691), which was one of the lengthiest and most elaborate proofs of God based on the evidence from nature. Many other latitudinarians followed suit. Locke also expressed similar ideas about the evidence for God, found in nature, in his *Reasonableness of Christianity*.[21]

Dickinson was clearly familiar with the literature of the natural theologians and Locke.[22]

Dickinson based his proof of the existence of God and his nature on evidence derived from the created world and attempted to use the evidence of natural history and cosmology. The evidence of the physical universe, believed Dickinson, pointed to the undeniable conclusion that there could only be one God. The perfect balance and beauty of the world also reflected the nature of this singular and supreme God.[23] Describing the vastness and the perfect balance of the Newtonian universe machine, he marveled, "The prodigious magnitude and amazing extent of the Universe do loudly proclaim the Infinite nature of its glorious Author." He challenged the deist, "How came the parts of the Earth to cohere together, and not separately fly in the boundless space?" Such a Newtonian model of creation pointed to a creator: "For had not the whole plan of these amazing works, been before the Architect, He could not have contriv'd and dispos'd all the innumerable parts with such admirable glory, and surprizing harmony."[24]

Dickinson used unequivocal language when describing the proofs for the existence of God and his nature. For example, regarding God's immortality and eternal preexistence, he wrote, "The Eternity of God is *Ungainsayably evident* from the works of Creation. We are not capable of a *greater certainty of anything whatsoever*." Elsewhere he wrote, "We have *demonstrative evidence* of His Eternal Power and Godhead." He went on to say, "We may be *infallibly certain*, that there is a God, Infinite in Holiness, Justice, Goodness, and Truth."[25] Phrases such as "unquestionably evident" and "infallibly certain" were typical of the bold descriptions that garnished his treatise. Any contradiction to these points, he stated, would be "utterly impossible," "altogether impossible," "absolutely impossible," and "the most palpable absurdity, and the boldest affront to common sense."[26] The propositions of which he could confidently boast were those grounded on evidence, reason, and natural religion. "This is a truth so plainly legible in the law of Nature, that the most barbarous Heathen and salvage [*sic*] pagan have always assented to it and it's even impossible for a rational mind to refuse an assent. Therefore, since God is the creator, should we not assent to worship him?"[27] These general principles were propositions accessible by common reason, independent of revelation. Not coincidentally, they were also the same general propositions that deists could affirm.

As soon as the arguments progressed to address the particular issues of Christian revelation or the truth of the Bible, Dickinson's language suddenly shifted. Gone were all the bold, strong words of absolute and

unequivocal proof. They were replaced by the confident, yet nonetheless cautious and hedged language of probability. For example, he set out to argue the proposition that the human race was sinful and Christ, in particular, died for its deliverance. He wrote, “The method I propose to myself, in discoursing upon these Propositions, is to distinctly shew, that they are not only *revealed truths*, but also *consistent* and *agreeable* to the light of reason.”[28] In Lockean fashion, Dickinson sought to demonstrate that revelation did not contradict reason. Reason and evidence did not pose an obstacle to the possibility that revelation could be true. However, the lack of contradiction did not necessarily lead to positive proof. It simply cleared obstacles and opened the way for the possibility that it was true.

For example, when discussing man’s fall from grace, Dickinson wrote, “The state that we find ourselves in, makes the account of this matter in the third of Genesis *very probable*.” Based on reason and evidence, Dickinson could not conclude that the Eden story in Genesis should be interpreted as literally true: “I shall not concern my self with that debate, whether this story be literally, or allegorically to be understood.”[29] However, he could *conjecture* that it was *reasonable* to conclude that man was originally made holy and fell by his own volition: “It is a natural and rational *supposition*, that our first Parents, through the power of temptation, were guilty of disobedience against God; and thereby both for themselves and their posterity, lost the innocence and happiness of their first state.” He established with *certainty* that there is a God and he is holy (a proposition that deists commonly held), but there existed a strong *probability* that man is sinful and fallen. He reasoned that Christ was the means of salvation because “we can’t find a more *probable* reason for our lost miserable circumstances . . . Here let the Deist try his skill: Let him without the assistance of revelation, draw up a perfect system of the laws of nature. Let him consult the means of restoring our lost innocenc[e].” Dickinson argued that the alternative propositions put forward by the deists or other religions were *less likely* than the solution described in the Bible. Dickinson challenged the skeptic, “Either assign some more probable cause of it; or forever ly [*sic*] under the just imputation of *obstinacy* and *unreasonableness*.”[30]

However, the lack of an alternative explanation does not necessarily make the atoning work of Christ on the cross, the central and unique tenant of Christianity, true. Christianity was merely more probable than the alternatives. He believed he offered “strong probabilities of the truth of Christianity; which cannot but reflect a convincing light, into the mind of every serious and impartial enquirer.”[31]

History and the Bible

Dickinson also attempted to persuade skeptics of the veracity of the Bible on the basis of history. He believed that as historical documents, the Gospels could rise to the level of verifiability of any other profane historical document. By the seventeenth century, Anglican scholars began to distinguish between various kinds of history. Dickinson wrote his defense of the Bible during a time when the canons of historical evidence were changing. According to Arnaldo Momigliano, until the seventeenth century, history—meaning classical history—was primarily valued for its didactic uses. The examples from history could instruct its students in morality or literary style. These "exemplar" historians or "philosophical" historians tended to uncritically honor classical history texts. They were less concerned with accuracy.[32]

Due in part to the influence of antiquarians (those who explored nonliterary evidence such as inscriptions, coins, and statues rather than literary texts), people writing about the past began to place greater value on original sources and critically judged and evaluated them. Edward Gibbon applied these principles to his monumental *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), and subsequent historians also followed Gibbon's example.[33] Physical evidence from the past could be more objective than literary sources, they came to believe. Testimonies could also be accepted, but historians developed various criteria by which they evaluated the bona fides of the witness. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, both historians and antiquarians sought the truth of the past by the best methods of research and the most reliable evidence. Their work was marked by deep erudition and new standards of evidence, which James Turner has called "philological antiquarianism." By establishing various criteria of authenticity, probability, and reliability, certain kinds of history rose while less reputable accounts fell.[34] These standards were eventually applied to biblical accounts.

In the seventeenth century, some added the weapon of history to the arsenal of biblical apologetics. History, of course, could only rise to the level of high probability. For example, the English mathematician and astronomer Seth Ward (1617–89) in 1652 defended the historical accuracy of the Bible. He began by asserting that demonstration and proof were unnecessary and assent to historical matters was different from assent to mathematical propositions. He proposed that the Scriptures could be evaluated and verified by the same standards that one used to examine other histories. If one were to doubt the history related in the Bible, he reasoned, one would also have to reject all secular history as well. By the standards of seventeenth-century historiography, Ward argued that

no reasonable person could doubt the historical accuracy of the biblical report any more than one could doubt the accepted history of Rome or France.[35] As previously discussed, Grotius, in *The Truth of the Christian Revelation*, argued that that the New Testament was reliable because the account was "testified by a sufficient Witness, living in the time when they came to pass."[36]

By the late seventeenth century, the criteria for determining the credibility of historical reports (secular or sacred) were popularly known and commonly agreed on. John Locke summed up many of the intellectual moves of the century. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he argued that testimonies could achieve various degrees of probability. Knowledge derived from one's own senses was most reliable, of course, but at times, the testimony of others could achieve a high degree of reliability and probability. Historical knowledge, of course, depended on testimony, but not all testimonies were equally trustworthy. Locke believed that one needed to weigh carefully several factors to determine the relative merit of testimony. Obviously, reports should be free of internal contradictions. The trustworthiness of a historical report or testimony depended on the quality of the witness. For example, a historical testimony should ideally come from an eyewitness or someone with access to eyewitness accounts. Naturally, a report became less reliable with every step it was removed from the original testimony. A reporter should demonstrate good judgment and integrity and be free from any obvious bias, deception, or motive to lie. Furthermore, empirical evidence, such as physical monuments, also added credibility to a testimony. The veracity of public events could be more easily confirmed than private events occurring in the presence of a few. If possible, independent and disinterested accounts should corroborate a testimony. In the best-case scenario, historical testimony could achieve a high degree of probability free from most doubt but fell short of the absolute certainty of a mathematical equation. But assent to historical accounts could be reasonable.[37]

Dickinson also went to great lengths to prove that the New Testament should be accepted as historically reliable and therefore the miracles it recorded should authenticate the divinity of Christ. Like his English counterparts, he argued that the Bible met the empirical standards of any history. For example, the character of the disciples made them trustworthy witnesses. Therefore, "these things therefore loudly proclaim the innocency and sanctity of their lives." Furthermore, by examining the circumstances, Dickinson concluded that the authors of the Gospels had little reason to fabricate. They had little to gain, for they faced persecution for what they preached and wrote.[38]

The Gospels also met another essential standard of reliable history. The events were public. The accounts were rapidly and widely disseminated. If a witness attempted to fabricate the history, he would quickly be called out as a liar, because the events were so well known. In fact, he claimed that it would be easier to "corrupt our Magna Charta, frame a new body of Laws for England, trump them upon us, and wheedle us into the belief, that these are and always have been the Statutes of the Nation" than imagine that the writers could have successfully deceived people.[39]

The firsthand nature of the accounts also added to their historical validity. He argued that the disciples were eyewitnesses. "Our Lord's Miracles were not matters of speculation . . . but matters of fact, that came under the immediate cognizance of their senses; such as they could see, hear, and feel; and be ascertained of, by all possible means of certainty." As Locke would argue, accounts based on firsthand physical senses increased credibility. Furthermore, their testimony was confirmed by a number of other sources including adversaries or those who had no vested interest in the success of Christianity. Dickinson pointed out that Josephus and Tacitus attested to the factuality of certain parts of the Gospels.[40] Thus he argued that the disciples were reliable and trustworthy witnesses by the prevailing standards of history.

Dickinson believed that Scripture needed to be subjected to the examination of reason, evidence, and history for the benefit of the true faith. If Christian revelation were not affirmed by rational and universal standards but rather based primarily on uncritical faith in a written record, Dickinson feared that Christians would be little different from Muslims, who trusted in their written revelations. He addressed the issue of the Qur'an in response to deist critics who argued that the Muslim revelation was a plausible competitor to the Bible as divine revelation. Historian Gerald R. McDermott notes that the Qur'an became a useful weapon in the deistic arsenal. For example, in 1730, the deist Matthew Tindal wrote, "[Christians] do the greatest honor to the Scriptures who suppose it deals with men as rational creatures, and therefore admit not of any of its doctrines without a strict examination. Those who take a contrary method would, if they lived in Turkey, embrace Mahometanism, and believe in the Alcoran." Matthew Tindal argued that most Muslims ignored the laws of nature in their interpretation of the Qur'an. Instead, they blindly submitted to their holy book. In doing so, Tindal claimed, they were little different from most Christians who also followed their holy book with unquestioning obedience and without submitting their interpretation to rigorous reason.[41] In response to perhaps Tindal's or similar deistic critiques, Dickinson dismissed "the Alcoran," the holy text

of the "Mahometan religion." In *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, he did not reject the book on theological or spiritual grounds, at least not in so many words. Rather, Dickinson rejected the Muslim holy book because, as he put it, the Qur'an lacked "evidence of its Divine authority."[42] By "evidence," Dickinson meant that unlike the Bible, the Qur'an and other pagan texts could not be confirmed by contemporary standards of history and evidence that seventeenth- or eighteenth-century thinkers used to judge the veracity of any historical documents. The Qur'an and purported pagan divine revelations were "romantick and fabulous Histories."[43] Dickinson, in part, agreed with Tindal. Like the deist, he too asserted that Muslims believed out of "tyranny" and "superstition" rather than reason. If they would only dispassionately examine the evidence for their holy book, they surely would reject it on evidential grounds. Also like Tindal, Dickinson believed that Christians erroneously behaved like Muslims when they believed out of blind obedience. However, the Bible, unlike the Qur'an, Dickinson argued, could be amply affirmed by objective historical evidence. Otherwise, Dickinson reasoned, there would be little to distinguish the two purported claims to revelation. True, the evidence demonstrating the biblical revelation was superior to that supporting the Qur'an, he believed. Yet the biblical evidence, though strong in Dickinson's mind, was still only probabilistic in nature. Without intending to, Dickinson had in effect conceded that full certainty of biblical truth could exist only within the Christian community, grasping Christians only by faith. For the world at large, belief in biblical revelation depended on the force of fallible and contestable historical argument. However, the evidence that demonstrated that the biblical revelation was superior to the Qur'an was only probabilistic in nature.[44]

Charles Leslie, in his *Short and Easy Method with the Deists* (1697), made a similar point. He argued that based on historical evidence, the Bible was clearly divine revelation whereas pagan myths and the Qur'an were a mass of silly fables. Leslie concluded that the Bible met the highest standards of historical reliability. In contrast, the Qur'an and pagan fables failed.[45] One should note that all involved in these debates lacked the modern concept of myth as developed by Eichhorn and his successors, which would have allowed them to see the Old Testament stories as something other than historically accurate, deceitfully false, or idiotically primitive.

Dickinson did not make a theological argument. Rather, his claims were primarily logical and evidential. He attempted to defend authority of the Bible on historical grounds.[46] Implicit in his argument was the belief that the Bible could be examined like any profane historical

document. Within the limits of his *Reasonableness of Christianity*, Dickinson believed he was trying to take on the deists on their own empirical terms. This is not to say that Dickinson was playing completely into the hands of the deists, but he was doing so far more than he saw. Though confident that the battle for Christianity could be won on evidentiary and rational grounds, he simultaneously held the Bible to be a unique and sacred book and work of God that was also supernatural and mysterious. After all, much of his evidence pointed to a divine author orchestrating the composition of the Bible.

The Familiar Letters

Thirteen years later, in 1745, Dickinson revisited the issues of skepticism and the truth of the Scriptures. He wrote a series of letters to a supposedly open-minded deist who sought to become a Christian and wanted to engage in an honest conversation. Dickinson collected the letters in a book titled *Familiar Letters to a Gentleman, upon a Variety of Seasonable and Important Subjects in Religion*. Dickinson engaged in a sophisticated argument, yet he attempted to do so in a concise and comprehensible manner. Thus it was suitable for a larger audience, and this possibly contributed to its popularity and longevity. Between 1745 and 1842, the *Letters* went through six editions in America and five in Scotland.[47]

Unlike Cotton Mather's antideist tracts written decades earlier, Dickinson claimed that his *Letters* was not written primarily for a Christian audience. As he did in the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, he attempted to argue that a thorough examination of the evidence demanded that a reasonable and impartial person conclude that Christianity was true.[48] Again, he limited the vast majority of his arguments to empirical evidences and reason in the first half of the book.

The *Letters* was not merely an epistolary restatement of the arguments presented in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. Dickinson wrote the *Letters* under new challenges. During the years intervening between the two publications, what has become known as the First Great Awakening arrived on American shores. In the 1730s and '40s, revivalist preachers such as George Whitefield called American people to turn to God. Often, the revivalist preachers caused sensational and deeply emotional reactions.[49]

Dickinson wrote and published the *Letters* as a response to the skeptical criticism of the Awakening and offered what he believed to be a definitive and unimpeachable response to the deistic critics. For the sake of the skeptic, Dickinson once again claimed that he would eschew appeals to emotional and personal extraordinary experiences. He declared, "A

pathetic Declamation cannot be received for argument." Rather, he confidently declared to the deistic skeptic, "Faith must be built upon Evidence, that will reach the Understanding, as well as the softer passions of the Soul." Dickinson boldly challenged the skeptic, "Make you a demand as large, as you or they can contrive. And whatever rational Evidence you are pleased to ask for, shall be at your Service."[50] Though he appreciated the work of some of the revivalist preachers as genuine works of God, he thought many were harming the reputation and stability of the Bible as revelation. Dickinson's deistic debating opponent pointed out that the revivals created a climate of epistemic chaos that neutralized any claim to divine revelation or authoritative interpretation. Some advocates of the revivals argued that their intensely emotional experiences were divine in origin and signs of the reality of God. How could anyone, the deist asked, trust the testimony of numerous individuals who claimed to have direct contact with God and therefore authoritative knowledge? The deistic debate opponent pointed out that only those who experienced God directly could know with certainty that their experience was valid. Anyone else would have to trust by faith the word of the witness of God's extraordinary internal works. Who then was one to trust? The deist's answer was no one.

Dickinson acknowledged that the certainty of belief was challenging in the time of the revivals and agreed that the excesses of the Awakening could undermine the religious authority.[51] Dickinson wrote, "The irregular Heats and Extravagancies of some late Pretenders to extraordinary Attainments in Religion, their imaginary divine Impulses, and extatick Raptures, with other Effects of their disorder'd Fancies, have cast such a Blemish upon the Christian Profession."[52] Dickinson took issue with the basis of much of the popular faith in the time of revivals. He denounced those "who professedly receive Gospel revelations." They "may in pretense preach CHRIST, but do miserably abuse, torture and pervert the Scriptures, to their own and others Destruction."[53] Their emotional, subjective, and undisciplined interpretations of their experiences and Scripture were harmful, he believed.

Interestingly, Dickinson's deistic debate opponent (either intentionally or unintentionally) reiterated a version of the arguments made by Thomas Hobbes 75 years earlier. Recall that Hobbes argued that there was no way to discern the validity of one private revelation or revelation of one particular group over another. Therefore, Hobbes sought to ground revelation in universally accessible criteria such as history, textual analysis, natural reason, or coercive state power. Private revelation was only authoritative to the person who received the private revelation.[54]

Similarly, Dickinson believed that religious truths needed to be grounded in universally accessible and objective standards that transcended individual experience. Even when Dickinson affirmed the extraordinary experiences of Christians, he argued that those experiences should be subjected to the test of reason and evidence.

In the early correspondence of the *Letters*, Dickinson repeated many arguments from his earlier work. For example, the historical record of the miracles should be trusted. The Bible was composed by people of disparate times and places and temperaments, and yet the message of the Bible was consistent. In the third letter, he also pointed out that the prophecies of the Old Testament accurately predicted the birth and the ministry of Christ. Dickinson was quite satisfied with the evidence. He confidently summarized, "Upon the whole, there is no Evidence wanting, to leave the Unbeliever inexcusable,—There is Evidence every Way sufficient, to satisfy the Mind of an impartial Enquirer after Truth."[55] Thus the objective evidence pointed to the probabilistic conclusion that divine power guided the writing of the Bible.

In the fourth letter, Dickinson expressed frustration that even after laying out all the evidence, the deistic debate partner could only be, as the deist put it, "almost perswaded to be a Christian." The deist was willing to concede "a *strong Probability*, that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, Savior of the World." In response, Dickinson continued to elaborate on the evidences from prophecies and miracles. By the fifth letter, the deist still could not "see how these Arguments . . . can admit of a rational and consistent Answer." The deist asked Dickinson to help "get rid of those Doubts" that still "[hung] upon his mind."[56] After exhausting all the evidentiary proofs Dickinson could muster, the deist still persisted in a state of doubt. He found the Bible to be plausible, but the evidence fell short of convincing him to believe.

The reaction of the deist interlocutor should not have been entirely surprising. After all, Dickinson believed his evidence was by its very nature highly probable rather than certain. The deist agreed, but he needed more. Dickinson wrote, apparently exasperated, "Do you deal thus with your self in other Cases, of infinitely less Importance? Do you harass your Mind with Doubts about other Things which are clearly evident to you, only because you meet with some Difficulties which you cannot readily solve?—This were the way to down-right Skepticism, in every Thing which falls under your own Being and all your rational Powers; as well as every Thing you see, hear or feel."[57] Dickinson conceded that despite the best of his arguments and evidence, there might always be some persistent doubts in matters of faith that could never be entirely

eliminated. All propositions, Dickinson warned the deist, were potentially subject to doubt if one approached life with this degree of skepticism. Dickinson responded, as Locke argued, that most fields of accepted knowledge, including historical and religious knowledge, by their nature could not rise to the same level of certainty as mathematics or intuitions. Nonetheless, sufficient evidence warranted assent. Rather than attempting to eliminate all doubt, Dickinson took a different tack: "This then should be the Method in the Case before you . . . examine thoroughly, seriously and impartially, whether the Evidence for the Truth of Christianity be such, that you have Reason to believe it; and that it would be unreasonable, not to believe it true."[58] After examining the evidence, Dickinson believed that it would be more reasonable to believe in Christianity than the alternative.

Ultimately, Dickinson conceded that the light of nature could not bring the deist skeptic to a saving knowledge of God. The weighing of probabilities of various options was "not the principal Direction" the seeker of God should take. Rather, the deist must "experience the Power of Christianity in [his] own heart." He warned, "Reject this Advice; and it is impossible, that you should be rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the Faith." Dickinson then went on for several letters to describe the "internal evidences" for the faith. By these he meant the transformations of one's "appetites," "feelings," "affections," and "desires." He wrote, "By this you will have the Witness in your self, a Transcript of the Gospel upon your Heart."[59] He argued that the unregenerate were like men born blind who have no notion of color: "But is it reasonable in a Man that was born blind, to conclude, that because he himself has no Idea of Light and Colours, therefore no Man ever saw the Sun?" Unbelievers were incapable, in their present state, of seeing "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God."[60] (Dickinson's claims were similar to Edwards's more elaborate discussion of the illuminated knowledge that he called the "new sense" or "spiritual sense.") Dickinson did not retreat from the language of evidence. Against those who would accuse him of advocating enthusiasm, he argued that the internal transformations of the soul should be interpreted as evidence to be examined to make an objective judgment. Pointing to the "comfort, peace, and joy of a religious life," he submitted that "the Truth of Christianity is brought to be a matter of sensible Experience."[61]

The manner in which Dickinson framed the issues in his two apologetical pieces reveals some tensions and unresolved inconsistencies. He started out both works by arguing that he would prove the truth of God's supernatural revelation, the Bible, on entirely empirical and reasonable

grounds. Dickinson argued, in the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, that there were two orders of reliability. By pointing out that those truths that even the deists acknowledged to be true were certain but the particularities of the Christian revelation were but merely "plausible," he exposed Christian revelation to vulnerabilities—vulnerabilities that the deists exposed. These minimal truth claims, which corresponded to deism, were beyond doubt. Christianity, though extremely likely, was not beyond doubt. In the *Letters*, he began to frame the evidence for the nature of God in the language of certainty. But a deist would not have disputed this image of God. However, biblical revelations were subject to question. Only the Christian, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, could embrace biblical revelation and Christianity free of doubt. By engaging directly with the deist, Dickinson demonstrated that the evidence for the Bible fell short of his own standards of certainty. By the end of the *Letters*, Dickinson admitted that evidence and plausible knowledge cannot bring a skeptic to a saving knowledge of God. Dickinson was conceding that by the most modern standards, biblical revelation was less reliable than other forms of knowledge.

Dickinson's use of probabilistic knowledge led him to an even more radical departure from his orthodox and conservative tradition. He took to heart Hobbes's and Spinoza's critiques that most parties of Christians believed that their interpretation was granted by God and they based this certainty on an inner testimony. Dickinson acknowledged that attempts to transcend the countless subjective intuitions on an evidentiary basis could only yield probabilistic conclusions. But he conceded that even his own biblical interpretations were highly likely at best.

In two publications pertaining to the so-called subscription controversy, Dickinson hinted at his belief that all interpretations of Scripture were probabilistic. In 1721, a group of Presbyterians wanted to force all Presbyterians pastors to subscribe to a set of doctrines and codes of behavior. Though the points of subscription were fairly moderate, Dickinson objected that Christians should avoid granting undue authority to "humane invention" such as the Westminster Confession. He wrote that although the Scriptures were infallible, interpretations were not. Catholics, Protestants, Arminians, Calvinists, Arians, and Socinians all based their claims of truth on Scripture. According to Dickinson, they all have "an equal claim to impose their interpretations." Hundreds of "contradictions" could be "collected" out of various "interpretations" of the Bible. Yet they cannot all be correct. He submitted that the Reformed and Presbyterian understanding of the Bible was *highly probable*. But Presbyterians had no right to impose their "*Opinions* and *Interpretation*," even on

heretics, because interpretation was always probable: "Interpretations of Scripture, must necessarily blend Light and Darkness, Truth and Falsehood together." Absolute certainty of the meaning of the Bible lay just beyond human reach. This is not to suggest that Dickinson gave up and became a relativist. He still believed his convictions were likely truthful interpretations. However, his confidence fell short of demanding assent from others.[62] Rhetorically, this was a far cry from the Puritan language of "opening" the Scriptures, which denied "human artes."

Dickinson, and most of his contemporaries, did not think of probabilistic arguments as necessarily weak. Many accepted that moral certainty or high probability was an acceptable foundation for assent. However, historian Gerard Reedy notes that even some latitudinarians had misgivings about defending the Bible with probabilistic arguments. Unlike conclusions drawn from "sense or necessary reason" some knew that "moral certainty" could not remove all doubt or "compel" assent like a geometrical theorem. Rather, it could only persuade and ask a free response. "Moral arguments," wrote Tillotson, cannot be "of necessary and infallible efficacy, because they are always propounded to a free Agent who may choose whether he will yield to them or not." Though many latitudinarians used probabilistic arguments, Reedy suspects a pervasive nervous anxiety lurking behind their writings.[63]

Other American Christians, during the same era, were also opposed to the use of historical arguments to prove the Bible for similar reasons. Solomon Stoddard, the venerable maternal grandfather of Jonathan Edwards, hated them precisely because of their probabilistic nature.[64] Stoddard's writings demonstrate that he was well versed in the typical historical proofs such as the character of the authors, the testimony of miracles, and the fulfillment of prophecies. He conceded that these "arguments are preponderating and do outweigh all Objections that are brought against the Authority of them." However, according to Stoddard, "men cannot believe [the Bible] to be infallibly true upon *probable* arguments; *Probable* Arguments must be looked on but as *probable* and not *convincing*." He wrote, "Twenty Probabilities will not make a thing Certain. Probabilities may make a thing legally certain, but not infallibly so. Where there be but probabilities, there is a possibility of the Contrary. Many probabilities make a thing more Probable, but they do not amount to a demonstration."[65] Rather, "it is only the *certain* Knowledge of their authority that can be the foundation of Faith or any other Grace." Men must have "infallible Arguments for loving God and believing His Word." The foundation for the believer's certainty in the Bible must be the "self-evidencing light in the Word of God; there are such things

Revealed there as can be made known by none but God."[66] According to Stoddard, certainty in the divine nature of the Bible cannot come by natural means: "This truth can not be known but by faith, reason may argue something for it, but not conclusively. It will be a thing 'probable' short of the grace of God." Historical evidence could not "satisfie the heart" or "assure the soul."[67]

Furthermore, Stoddard noted the dangers of building belief in the Bible on naturalistic foundations. As previously discussed, the historical arguments for revelation's validity made the Bible vulnerable to skeptical comparisons to the Qur'an. Stoddard noted that Muslims also claim that the Qur'an was true because of plausible historical evidence: "This is no more than a Turk will say for his religion . . . many profane men have this historical faith." Recall that Dickinson argued that the Bible simply had better historical evidence than the Qur'an. However, Stoddard believed that subjecting the Bible to historical examination put it on par with other ancient texts that claimed to be divine. Therefore, the conviction that the Bible was revelation could not be based on "natural reason" or "common illumination."[68] It needed a completely unique and supernatural foundation to be distinct from other claims of revelation. Stoddard's aversion may have rubbed off on Jonathan Edwards. Though Edwards employed historical argument in his defense of the Bible, he was certainly less optimistic about its efficacy than Dickinson.

Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest theological and philosophical mind of the colonial era, confronted the same intellectual challenges as Dickinson. Edwards was deeply concerned about the threat of deists, particularly their attack on the authority and accuracy of the Bible, and deistic critiques affected his understanding of the nature of revelation. More than 25 percent of Edwards's notebooks called the "Miscellanies" treated deism or issues raised by the deists.[69] Edwards considered the deists worse than "heathens" who had no access to the Bible. The deists, who defiantly rejected revelation, were "absurd, brutish and monstrous in their notions and practices."[70]

Though Edwards and Dickinson reacted to similar deistic critiques of the Bible and lived in the same intellectual milieu, Edwards responded differently than did Dickinson. Dickinson initially and confidently attempted to defend the Bible by rational and empirical standards without resorting to the supernatural agency of God. Edwards never attempted to separate the rational and empirical from the spiritual interpretation of the Bible. The two faculties were inseparably linked in his

mind. Edwards believed in a unitary model of the self in which the head and the heart worked in conjunction. In 1746, in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Edwards described the mechanisms of the mind with respect to salvation. Where scholastic anthropology had divided the soul into faculties of "understanding" (perception and speculation) and "will" (choice and action), Edwards used the term *heart* to avoid what he perceived to be a false division of ratiocination and emotion. In responding to God, the entire being acted in unity; the emotion and intellect were integrated in their assent.[71]

This integrated reaction was particularly important to Edwards's understanding of how Christians read the Bible. As a Reformed Protestant, the literal and historical truth of the Bible formed the basis of his approach to the interpretation of Scripture.[72] The factual or what he called the "notional" content of the Bible was available to all intellectually able readers, regardless of their spiritual state. (By "notional," Edwards meant the propositional content of the object of understanding.) However, Edwards was far more concerned with the "spiritual sense of the Scripture."[73] God granted the believer a new perception. Edwards called it a "new sense" or "spiritual sense."[74] The "new sense" was a gift, mediated by the Holy Spirit and granted exclusively to the redeemed. The Christian, with "new senses," could perceive the excellency, holiness, glory, and beauty of God and divine things. Unbelievers, lacking the "new sense," were blind to the spiritual realities of the world and the Bible. Therefore, only the sanctified mind could perceive the beauty and harmony in the Scriptures. The words of the Bible "themselves are an evidence of their own divine authority."[75]

Edwards believed that though one could arrive at a factual or notional knowledge of the religious teachings of the Scriptures by natural and rational faculties, such natural knowledge did not suffice for salvation. It was probabilistic and lacked the certainty that came from spiritually illuminated knowledge.[76] That only the regenerate could perceive the spiritual truths of the Bible was one of the chief criticisms of skeptics such as Spinoza and Hobbes. It was private and therefore could not be considered a universal or reliable truth, according to skeptics. Edwards asserted that the excellencies of the Scriptures were evident for all to see. If the unregenerate did not recognize the divine majesty, beauty, and harmony of the Bible, the fault lay not with the Scriptures but with the reader. Sin could "blind the mind," just as "natural temper oftentimes very much blinds us in secular affairs; as when our natural temper is melancholy or jealous, cowardly, and the like." Though illuminated knowledge was privileged knowledge, it was the perception of something real

nonetheless.[77] Rather than attempting to naturalize or despiritualize his interpretation or understanding of revelation, Edwards argued that the spiritual perception was a legitimate form of sensory information.

However, Edwards believed there were limits to the spiritual sense. One could not recognize the divine nature of the Bible without the aid of the Holy Spirit, but one could not rely solely on inner spiritual light. On this matter, Edwards and Dickinson shared similar concerns about individualistic excesses. Edwards was quick to point out that the self-evident and intuitive perceptions of the divine nature of the Scriptures were not irrational or enthusiastic. The recognition of the divine authorship of the Bible was rational. He believed that the reader should conclude that the "consistency, harmony, and concurrence of the train of actions" were the product of a "rational" and "divine mind." The Spirit of God acted on the believer only in conjunction with the Bible. The Bible and rational theological conclusions were essential.[78] He preached, "Such is the nature of man that no object can come at the heart but through the door of the understanding: and there can be no spiritual knowledge of that of which there is not first a rational knowledge. It is impossible that any one should see the truth or excellency of any doctrine of the gospel, who knows not what doctrine is."[79] Furthermore, Edwards did not believe illuminated knowledge granted the Christian reader the ability to discern the meaning of the Bible in isolation. Edwards studied the Bible within a Reformed tradition of interpretation. He read the Bible with commentaries such as those written by Matthew Poole (1624–79), Matthew Henry (1662–1714), Moses Lowman (1680–1752), Phillip Dodridge (1702–51), and others. Likewise, individual believers needed to read within the godly community and the tradition of orthodox interpretations. Spiritually guided apprehension of divine matters and the Bible needed to be disciplined with reason and evidence.[80]

Edwards always maintained his firm belief in the priority of the spiritual sense. On this point, he never wavered. However, Edwards grew concerned with deistic attacks on the factual authenticity of scriptural history. In response Edwards increasingly found it necessary to rely on evidential arguments in his engagement with critical issues, far more than he might have preferred.[81] The world was changing, and Edwards adapted. As did Dickinson, Edwards developed apologetic arguments against those who attacked the authority and accuracy of the Bible. Reason, evidence, and history, he contended, confirmed the authenticity of Scripture. But Edwards was clear that such rational and evidentiary knowledge was inferior to true knowledge, which came by the aid of the Holy Spirit.

In his essay "Religious Affections," Edwards wrote that God granted evidence of revelation: "But it is certain, that such an assurance is not to be attained by the greater part of them who live under the gospel, by arguments fetched from ancient traditions, histories and monuments." Evidence and histories could not be the primary means by which people were convicted of the truth, for the vast majority did not have access to such scholarship. Furthermore, assent based merely on proofs and rational arguments, Edwards claimed, was insufficient: "The gospel of the blessed God does not go abroad a begging for its evidence." Rather, "it has its highest and most proper evidence in itself." The new sense allows the believer certain knowledge of the truth of the Bible. However, such reasonable arguments "may be greatly serviceable," he wrote; "they may be in some respects subservient to the begetting of saving faith in men."[82] He believed a rational and evidentiary defense of the historical reliability of the Scriptures alone was not sufficient for salvation. At best, it could demonstrate the high probability of historical claims, believed Edwards. A scholar could clear up philosophical and factual errors that stood in the way to salvation, but ultimately the perception of the divine authority of revelation was a gift from God.[83]

In this regard, Edwards differed from latitudinarians who asserted that probable standards sufficed for true religious knowledge. Nonetheless, selectively and cautiously, Edwards resorted to rational, historical, and probabilistic arguments to defend the historical accuracy of the Bible in light of deist attacks.

Recall that the deists generally argued that all propositions needed to be submitted to the authority of reason and be consistent with experience. By these standards, deists ravaged the Bible as incomprehensible, irrational, and fictitious. Tindal, for example, attacked the rational adequacy of religious forms of knowledge because only propositions confirmed by intuition, self-evidence, or philosophical demonstration should be trusted. Edwards countered these claims by arguing that the skeptics confused two distinct types of reason. In some cases, Edwards wrote, reason "is intended the same as argument or evidence . . . as when we say we should believe in nothing without reason or contrary to reason . . . or against evidence." However, skeptics believed as if "evidence and divine revelation [were] entirely distinct, implying that divine revelation is not of the nature of evidence or argument."[84]

Edwards also argued that Tindal's standards of truth were too restrictive.[85] Edwards pointed out that Tindal and his deistic kin were excluding an entire category of accepted knowledge: reliable testimony. Following Locke, Edwards, like Dickinson, pointed out that people generally trusted

the testimony of witnesses if the integrity and honesty of the reporter could be ascertained, even if the testimony defied expectations.[86] Most commonly accepted knowledge was based on testimony: "I say, all that is known by the experience of mankind, is known only by one or more of these testimonies excepting only the existence of that idea, or those few ideas, which are this moment present in our minds, or the immediate objects of present consciousness. And yet how unreasonable would it be to say, that we must first know these things to be true by reason, before we give credit to our experience of the truth of 'em." Only a very few propositions, argued Edwards, could be known by Tindal's narrow standards. Such standards would lead to the rejection of almost all knowledge of history or of foreign lands since both depended on the testimony of reliable witnesses. As a general proposition, Edwards argued that historical testimonies were morally certain or generally reliable.[87] For the same reasons that people trusted credible witnesses for historical accounts, the truth of the Bible could be reasonably trusted.

Edwards, like the latitudinarians, went on to argue that the rules of mathematical certainty could not apply to historical records. The historical evidence for the Bible was not mathematically demonstrable, but people in general relied upon testimonial knowledge, even if its comprehension and certainty were only probable or partial. Echoing voices such as Grotius and Locke, Edwards argued that biblical history needed different standards for different kinds of evidence. He argued, "'tis a particular sort of evidence." Requiring all knowledge to rise to the level of mathematical or philosophical certainty was unrealistic.[88]

The Historical Accuracy of the Bible

Edwards attempted to make the case that the proofs for the reliability of the Bible were rational and based on universally accessible evidence, meeting the new intellectual standards of the deists and the contemporary age. Like Dickinson and the latitudinarians, Edwards built a case on historical evidence, which he knew was probabilistic by nature. Many of the assaults on the Bible's historical accuracy centered on the Pentateuch. Recall that Hobbes and Spinoza questioned the purported authorship of its books. Simon and Le Clerc, seeking to defend the integrity of divine revelation against skeptical attacks, argued that the bulk of the Pentateuch was compiled by later editors. Their attempts to buttress the eroding trust in the Bible were of little comfort to their more conservative readers.[89]

The proposition that Moses did not write the Pentateuch suggested to the typical eighteenth-century Christian that the book was a fraud. Eighteenth-century Protestants believed that the writers of the Bible were

conduits of God's word. The authority of the holy text depended on the inspiration of the writer. If the connection between the prophetic author and the text were broken, the credibility of the Bible was irredeemably damaged. Protestant defenders of the Bible also needed to preserve the notion of a continuous, uncorrupted, and uninterrupted line between the original text and the series of accurate copies leading to the ones Christians held in their hands. As Locke reasoned, describing the general standards of historical reliability, a testimony lost a degree of reliability with every step it was removed from the original testimony: "any Testimony, the farther off it is from the original Truth, the less force and proof it has." He added, "And the more hands the Tradition has successively passed through, the less strength and evidence does it receive from them."[90] Though Moses's original manuscript did not survive, Christians typically believed that they had accurate copies. But if they possessed redactions compiled hundreds of years after Moses wrote the originals and from a variety of sources, Protestant confidence in its inspired authority would be drastically challenged. At the close of the eighteenth century, Thomas Paine summed up much of the skepticism of the deists and the anxiety of the Christians that had been building up for the past century or so in his *Age of Reason* (1794). He believed he could undermine the credibility of revealed religion by questioning the historical evidence of the Bible and Mosaic authorship in particular. He argued that if you could "take away from Genesis the belief that Moses was the author" the foundations of Christianity would crumble and revelation would become nothing more than "an anonymous book of stories, fables, and traditionary or invented absurdities, or down right lies."[91]

Edwards responded to the questions regarding Mosaic authorship in a relatively polished but unpublished essay titled "Whether the PENTATEUCH was written by Moses."[92] Within the essay, what Edwards does not argue is as striking as what he does argue. Edwards generally avoided theological arguments. He did not appeal to providential agency or to the intuitive holiness of the Scriptures apprehended by Christians with a new sense of the heart. Rather, Robert E. Brown argues that Edwards's "effort to explain the genesis of the Pentateuch is probably the most striking example of a purely historical approach among his writings."[93] Edwards tried to demonstrate that the Pentateuch met contemporary standards of historical credibility.

Spinoza charged that the Pentateuch should be divided between the laws and the history. Moses might have written a small and primitive legal code, but the priest Ezra acted as an editor and compiled Moses's work and inserted a narration of historical events to explain the context

for readers after the Babylonian exile. Spinoza concluded that the bulk of the Pentateuch was written much later than Moses, and what Moses did write was far different from the books' present form. Enemies of revealed religion such as Charles Blount and Voltaire popularized these ideas.

In an attempt to defend the Mosaic authorship against Spinoza and his ilk, Edwards began his argument by calling attention to the unified style of the Pentateuch. The five books formed one continuous narrative, suggesting that it was the work of a single author. The legal and historical sections fit seamlessly together, noted Edwards. They grew "together as several parts of a tree."[94]

Edwards also argued at great length that Moses had every reason to integrate the history with the legal portions. Moses knew he was writing for posterity. Edwards wrote, in probabilistic language, that it is "*reasonably* to be *supposed* that he would write these for the use of the children of Israel in after generations." Moses wanted the people to remember and reenact their history through annual rituals such as the Feast of Tabernacles or the Passover. However, such rites would have no meaning without the historical context: "Now 'tis impossible to understand all these particular precepts about the Passover without an history of that affair." Therefore one could conjecture that Moses wrote the historical and the legal sections together: "I say, there is such a dependence between these [laws] and the history, that they can't be understood without the history."[95]

Edwards argued that because of the unified nature of the books, there was simply no need for Spinoza's hypothesis that the historical sections were later grafted onto an original legal code. A unified legal and historical document made more sense. All the parts appeared to be "connected, interwoven, blended, inwrought, and incorporated." Edwards surmised that it was unlikely that Pentateuch was "artificially patched and *compacted* together afterwards" from several different sources. Based on the historical evidence, Edwards speculated, "It seems impossible to impartially and carefully view the manner of their connection, and to judge otherwise."[96] Though it was plausible that a single author did not write the Pentateuch, Edwards argued that it was more reasonable to conclude that he did.

In 1753, five years before Edwards's death, Jean Astruc, in his *Conjectures sur les memoirs*, also attempted to defend the notion of Mosaic authorship (or editorship) of Genesis. However, unlike Edwards, Astruc observed that the style of Genesis was in fact *not* unified. Astruc believed he discovered two independent narrative strands. Moses, Astruc hypothesized, wove together older narratives. This theory accounted for the

apparent contradictions and repetitions pointed out by skeptical critics like Spinoza, yet preserved a notion of Mosaic authorship. Astruc's theory laid the basis for the later "Documentary Hypothesis," which argued that later post-Mosaic editors cobbled together the Pentateuch out of four distinct sources. There is no evidence that Edwards knew of Astruc's work. However, it seems unlikely that Edwards would have been persuaded by it. Because Edwards's reading was ultimately both guided and limited by his theological commitments, he would not or could not see what Astruc perceived as evidence of multiple sources.[97]

Edwards also argued that, by the standards of eighteenth-century historiography, Moses was a qualified witness and recorder of the events of the Pentateuch. He was clearly an eyewitness to many of the critical events on the journey to Canaan. In his "Blank Bible," Edwards argued that Moses "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." This "wisdom of the Egyptians" was a common early modern notion. Advocates of *prisca theologia* believed that the Egyptians and others possessed remnants of God's revelation, albeit in a degraded and incomplete form. This "wisdom" included an oral history of the world handed down from generation to generation.[98] The fragility of this type of history, argued Edwards, required a great deal of training and care. Therefore, Edwards postulated that this education might have prepared Moses "for writing the history of the world from the beginning."[99] A written record of history was ultimately more reliable, and Edwards believed Moses knew this, though Moses charged the people to teach their children through oral tradition. Moses still valued written records.[100] The permanence of the ancient written record also assured the sensibilities of those looking for reliable historical evidence.

Edwards may have demonstrated that the Pentateuch was not a compilation, but he also admitted that this did not prove that it was written by Moses. Edwards therefore pointed to stylistic evidence from the text itself as evidence of a single author who wrote during the time of the Exodus, and Moses was the most plausible candidate. During the wilderness travel of the Israelites, the author of the Pentateuch consistently referred to being on "this side" of the Jordan. Edwards wrote, "This style is used nowhere else in any part of the history of the Old Testament; elsewhere the eastern side of the Jordan is evermore called 'the other side of the Jordan.' " The evidence suggested a firsthand witness, which strengthened its reliability by modern historical standards. Of course this evidence could not prove that the contemporary author was Moses, only that it was likely him. As is the nature of all historical evidence, it was probabilistic. Edwards's manuscript suggested the tentativeness of this proof when he

wrote that the argument was "~~almost enough~~ indeed well nigh sufficient alone to determine the matter." He originally wrote "almost enough" and apparently crossed it out later, suggesting that at one point, he was still uncertain about the probabilistic nature of these arguments.[101]

Edwards also argued that the Pentateuch was a reliable historical record because the written record was preserved and uncorrupted for centuries. The historical record, argued Edwards, was stored and preserved in the Ark of the Covenant, which was one of the most important monuments of the people. It was preserved until the time of the Babylonian captivity. The critic had every reason to believe that the record of Moses would be stored, not only because the Pentateuch stated it, but also because the preservation of public records was a common practice in the ancient world. Edwards wrote, "It appears by profane history to have been the manner of the nations of old to keep the ancient histories of their nations, and their genealogies, and acts of their gods in their temples, where they were committed to the care of their priests as sacred things, which in all probability was in imitation of the example of the Israelites in keeping the Mosaic history, which Moses committed to the care of priests, to be laid up in the sanctuary as a sacred thing." Such record keeping was a common custom and therefore there was a greater likelihood that the Israelites in fact did preserve the record.[102] Thus Edwards buttressed his claims by pointing to similar customs in neighboring contemporary civilizations.

Edwards argued that a later forgery was highly unlikely. He found it implausible that Ezra, or someone like him, could have created a compiled forgery of the Mosaic books after the Babylonian captivity, as Spinoza claimed. The contents of the books were public and well known and honored among many disparate Jewish communities. The books of Moses were kept alive in the public memory though rituals and public recitations. Edwards called these rituals "monuments or memorials." Recall that memorials and monuments were one of the cardinal categories of historical verifiability. He noted the existence of other monuments such as the ark, Aaron's rod, and the brazen serpent. These memorials fixed the memory of the history in the minds of the Jews. Edwards notes that even the preserved books themselves were a kind of memorial.[103] Edwards argued that if the Jewish people knew that there was a short and fragmentary book by Moses, why would they not honor it? Spinoza claimed that the original writings of Moses were largely forgotten and therefore Ezra could have presented his redacted version as authentic. Edwards found it unlikely that such an important book could be wholly lost. Copies must have existed. Also, the style of writing of the Pentateuch differed from Ezra's known work. If the Israelites of the time of Ezra knew

of the book of the law, argued Edwards, it would be unlikely that they would accept Ezra's new version as authentic. They surely would have seen it as a forgery.[104]

Edwards also argued that the Pentateuch, in its complete form, must have existed before the Babylonian captivity because the Samaritans also possessed a copy of the books of Moses. The Samaritan version was written in the ancient Phoenician or Hebrew characters, whereas the Jewish version, after the Babylonian exile, was written in Chaldee letters, which were natural to them after years of captivity. If the Samaritans took the Pentateuch from the Jews after the captivity, their version would have been in Chaldee letters. That their version was written in Hebrew was "a strong argument that they took it from the Jews before the captivity, and not afterwards."[105]

Confirmation by other contemporary sources also marked a document or witness as historically authentic according to the standards of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century historiography. Edwards spilled a great deal of ink recounting examples of ancient pagan affirmations of the Bible. For example, regarding the writing of the Pentateuch and the recording of a national history, Edwards wrote, "And the ancient records of the neighboring heathens, particularly of the Phoenicians, show that the priests of the Jews had such a history in keeping, giving an account of the creation of the world, etc., even so long ago as the days of the judges. This appears by Sanchoniathon's history, wherein he mentions many of the same facts, and confesses that he had them from a certain priest of the God *Jao*."[106] Furthermore, based on his reading of Theophilus Gale's *Court of the Gentiles*, Edwards noted that "many things also that the heathens attributed to their God Bacchus were taken from the history of Moses." The Egyptians also took the events of Moses and attributed them to their God Osiris. The distorted fragments found in pagan sources based on the real historical events concerning Moses affirmed for Edwards that the Pentateuch recorded actual events.[107] He also observed that Clement of Alexandria and heathen writers, such as Justin of Trogus Pompeius, Pliny, Juvenal, Tacitus, and Dionysius Longinus, affirmed the historical events.[108]

Elsewhere in the *Notes on Scripture*, based on his reading of Grotius and Bochart, Edwards noted that there existed many pagan stories similar to the account of Noah and the flood. For example, the Persian holy book, the *Zend-Avesta*, affirmed the integrity of the Pentateuch. The *Zend-Avesta*, according to Edwards, contained many accounts that were in the Pentateuch such as the creation account and the deluge. Edwards reasoned that Zoroaster must have taken the stories from the Pentateuch

before the time of the captivity of the Jews in Babylon. Therefore, he reasoned, the historical parts of the books could not have been added by Ezra or someone like him after the return from the exile.[109]

Accounts of the Tower of Babel also appeared in many pagan sources. Edwards referred to Henry Widner when he wrote, "There is a most noble authentical confirmation of the Mosaic history." Widner noted a "city or country retained the name Babel, or 'confusion.' " Surely these were "evident vestigia or characters" of the original truth of the biblical account. The real historical events had been imperfectly passed down among the pagan nations. Edwards believed that they were evidence of the truth of the biblical accounts.[110] McDermott referred to this as Edwards's "trickle-down theory of revelation." Any residual truth in pagan religions, cultures, philosophies, or histories must have been passed down from Noah and his descendants or from contact with the Jews.[111]

Christians, Edwards argued, could rest assured that the Pentateuch they possessed in the eighteenth century was the same historical witness of the events that Moses himself wrote. Based on the standards of history, it was as reliable a historical document as any in the world. The criticisms of the likes of Spinoza or Tindal were without merit.

The Spiritual Sense

Edwards undeniably took the deistic critics and the weight of historical evidence seriously. He attempted to follow English discussions on the matter as closely as possible. Though working in relative isolation, his research, readings, and criticism were remarkably thorough, synthesizing a variety of European texts.[112] His exposure to deist criticism certainly made him more sensitive to both the perils and promises that history brought to the Bible, but ultimately, he believed that rational arguments about the Bible were incapable of giving a spiritual and thereby genuine understanding of the Bible. Edwards's historical defense of the Bible must be seen in the context of his larger hermeneutics. Both Scripture and history must be interpreted with new senses.[113]

Edwards's belief that Christian hermeneutics depended on spiritual senses can be seen in his unfinished "Harmony of the Old and New Testament." Kenneth Minkema has drawn scholarly attention to this unfinished "great work" on which Edwards had been laboring for some time and never finished due to his premature death. The work would have been Edwards's most comprehensive statement on the interpretation of the Bible and refutation of deistic attacks on divine revelation. He had at least five hundred pages of it drafted, and Minkema pieced together its various parts that were in manuscript form. The great work was to

be composed of three parts: prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament, types or prefigurations of Christ in the Old Testament, and a harmony of the Old and New Testaments.[114]

The various "Miscellanies" that would have been the substance of the first part on prophecies and fulfillment pointed to Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah and their fulfillment by Christ. On this topic, Edwards wrote nearly three hundred folio pages. He carefully studied the biblical text and analyzed ambiguous words, exhaustively citing ancient and modern sources. As his driving point, he argued that all the prophecies of the Old Testament were exactly fulfilled by Christ.[115] In the second section on typology, he gathered extensive examples to demonstrate how God "abundantly prefigured and typified . . . the Messiah and the things appertaining to his kingdom" in the Old Testament.[116] For example, Edwards declares the temple in ancient Israel to be a type of Christ. He also identified Moses's rod, the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, and the cloud of glory accompanying Israel in the wilderness as "types and symbols" of Christ's presence. He imaginatively writes that the infant Moses, floating on the water, was a type of the church: "This ark seemed weak, made of those things that were very weak and despicable, hereby fitly representing Christ, who became a mean, weak, despised man."[117] The final section, the Harmony of the Old and New Testament, was the least developed. In it, he intended to show that the entire Bible was unified in its teaching and spirit. The Old Testament "harmonize[s] with doctrines, precepts, etc. of the New." Minkema writes that perception of harmony was dependent on the "spiritual sense," given by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "Through the spiritual sense, Edwards linked all the meanings of biblical texts through an 'analogy of faith' by conforming them to the saving doctrines of Christianity."[118] Edwards wrote, "The whole of Christian divinity depends on divine revelation, for though there are many truths concerning God and our duty to him that are evident by the light of nature, yet no one truth is taught by the light of nature in that manner in which it is necessary for us to know it." He went on to say, "It signifies nothing for us to know anything of any one of God's perfections, unless we know them as manifest in Christ." The "light of nature" could teach some general moral principles, but true knowledge of God came only by revelation. And only by spiritual illumination could the Bible be understood.[119]

Edwards confronted the modern skeptical attacks on the Bible but did not do so on the rationalistic terms of the deists.[120] The power of the argument of his proposed great work, the "Harmony of the Old and New Testament," was the demonstration of a single divine mind, guiding the

writing of various men of different temperaments in diverse times and circumstances into a single beautiful message. He wrote on the assumption that the unregenerate could comprehend the notional content of the Bible but only the Christian, empowered with spiritual senses, could see the beauty, unity, and harmony of the divine author that he was attempting to illustrate and articulate.

Peter Gay criticized Edwards for being incapable of writing history in the Enlightenment style of Hume, Voltaire, and Gibbon, all of whom removed God as an active agent of history. They instead emphasized human autonomy and naturalistic explanations for historical development. For example, Voltaire believed that history contained no inherent meaning. Rather, historians imposed significance on the past according to their own bias. However, Avihu Zakai, John F. Wilson, and Michael J. McClymond argue that Edwards never intended to write a history that divorced God from earthly events. He wrote history with an explicitly theological purpose. He tried to understand history from the perspective of God's purpose: the redemption of the world. Ultimately, in Edwards's mind, God's purpose and meaning in history was more important than the actual events, though the historical accuracy of the record was still essential. Nevertheless, Wilson observes that in parts of his histories, he demonstrated careful and precise analysis of details and appeals to evidence and authorities, as clearly demonstrated in his work on the Pentateuch. Indeed, Edwards appealed to historical evidence, which was universally accessible to the natural senses. However, he used history to point to spiritual truths that were available to those with spiritual senses.[121]

Edwards was never ultimately beholden to the methods of history or empirical examination. He never had any intention to follow them wherever they may lead. For example, when Edwards looked at the Hebrew custom of record keeping and found that surrounding pagan nations also had a similar custom, he naturally concluded that the pagan nations borrowed from the people of God. He probably never entertained the possibility that the Bible borrowed from pagan sources. However, others read the evidence in the opposite direction. They believed that the Bible could have just as easily borrowed from pagan sources, and likely did so. For example, Ralph Cudworth, John Marsham, and John Spencer believed that Moses got his ideas of monotheism and theology from the Egyptians.[122] J. D. Michaelis (1717–91) also saw similarities between the Jews and their neighbors and concluded that sacred Hebrew poetry borrowed liberally from neighboring pagan nations.[123] Edwards used history, but he was ultimately accountable to a higher authority.

Furthermore, Edwards noted (as Dickinson eventually discovered in his exchanges with the deist) that historical and probabilistic evidence, especially historical evidence, had its limits. Regarding the efficacy of historical evidence, Edwards wrote, "How do I know when these histories were written? Learned men tell me these histories were so and so attested in the day of them; but how do I know that there were such attestations then?" One could never be completely certain with historical evidence. Therefore, Edwards reasoned, probabilistic evidence could not sufficiently persuade someone to give one's life over to saving faith. It could never sufficiently assure one to "run the venture of the loss of all things, and of enduring the most exquisite and long-continued torments, and to trample the world under foot, and count all things dung, for Christ."[124] Genuine faith and assurance of the truth of the Bible was not a matter of arguments. Saving knowledge came from the spiritual senses.[125]

Conclusion

Edwards and Dickinson, like Cotton Mather before them, stood at the vanguard of the American Protestant confrontation with deist attacks on the Bible. In their lifetime, this battle was primarily a European phenomenon, but both presciently understood that its dangers could come to American shores. Most of the early-eighteenth-century learned defenses of biblical revelation were produced by European churchmen. Edwards and Dickinson were two of the few Americans of their generation prepared to build a defense against deistic assaults and evaluate the various European (especially English) responses.

They differed in subtle and important ways on the role of reason and evidence. Dickinson believed reason and evidence could lead to total certainty on general matters of natural religion. Issues specific to Christian revelation were highly probable. Edwards could agree to a degree. Evidences such as history could at best lead the inquirer to a probabilistic conclusion that the Bible was revelation. However, the new spiritual senses could lead one to an absolute certainty.

Consider the way they both dealt with the challenge of Islam. They both considered the religion idolatrous and barbaric. Both believed that the miracles recorded in the Qur'an could not be historically confirmed. In contrast, the miracles recorded in the New Testament were confirmed by their public nature and the integrity of the authors. However, they differed in their use of Islam in their arguments in subtle ways. Recall that Dickinson wrote that the seeker of truth must be open to reason and evidence. Most importantly, one must objectively and honestly examine the evidence for one's own faith. Otherwise, one would be no better than

a Muslim who refused to see the faults of the Qur'an. In other words, the Christian could be surer of his faith because he was more self-critical, objective, and empirical. He did not rely on habit or passive acceptance. Edwards would not necessarily have disagreed with this point. In his *Religious Affections*, he too noted that Muslims believe out of habit. Indeed, some so-called Christians do so as well. However, he then asserted that reason and evidence alone will not save. Rather, one needs the Holy Spirit and the internal evidences that transcended empirical examination.[126] McDermott observes that Edwards used Islam to rebut deist claims. Islam demonstrated that unassisted reason will only lead to absurd notions. The Islamic part of the world had been given revelation. They had a notional knowledge of the Bible, but they lacked the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they "fell away into Mahometanism."[127] This is not to say that Dickinson believed in reason and evidence and Edwards did not. Rather, the differences between them were a matter of emphasis. Edwards believed a reasonable man unassisted by grace could never see the Bible as revelation. Dickinson, though inconsistently, optimistically embraced the potential of logic, reason, natural history, and history to affirm biblical revelation.

Not all agreed with Edwards and Dickinson on the necessity of the Spirit. In 1728, Reverend Thomas Pender, a minister of Elizabeth City, Virginia, preached a sermon at Trinity Church in New York, which he published as *The Divinity of the Scriptures, from Reason and External Circumstances*. In it, he insisted that the Christian needed to divest himself of all prejudice and partiality to his own religion. He must instead objectively examine the evidences for the validity of the Bible. Like Dickinson, Pender believed that if the Christian simply relied on his inherited religion, "this might justify any Mahometan to adhere to that religion taught them by their Parents." Pender insisted that he would not "prove" the divine origin of the Bible by referring to the text of the Scriptures. That, he believed, amounted to a "scandalous arguing in a circle." Instead, following typical latitudinarian proofs of the Bible, he confined his arguments to universally accessible evidences: "We have a Religion which needs not be afraid to stand at the Bar of Reason, and submit the Cause to the most Impartial Decision." Throughout his defense, he remained true to his principles. He never granted the Bible a privileged status. And he never argued that the Spirit needed to enlighten the mind. That too, he believed, would be a form of circular reasoning and could not persuade a skeptic. He remained convinced that the sheer power of evidence should compel belief.[128] His evidentiary approach would become more typical in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 3

The Triumph of Rational Religion in America

Revealed and Natural Religion at Eighteenth-Century Harvard

Cotton Mather, Jonathan Dickinson, and Jonathan Edwards kept current with European historical and philological scholarship regarding the Bible to varying degrees. However, interest in the study of biblical Hebrew and Greek declined precipitously among Americans who came after them. Although the first few generations of Puritans in New England honored biblical scholarship, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the study of the biblical languages declined in colleges.[1] In contrast, scholars in England were interpreting the Bible by more sophisticated historical methods. For example, Robert Lowth argued that the biblical interpreter must be more sensitive to literary genres and historical contexts. His insights were largely lost on his eighteenth-century American counterparts.[2]

Americans no longer vigorously studied biblical languages in the second half of the eighteenth century, but they did not cease to ponder, discuss, and debate the nature of the Bible. Fearful of the threat of deism, some American Christians continued to focus their energies on defending revelation by evidential means. As the eighteenth century progressed, some Christians continued to place greater confidence in the potential of unassisted reason, and they subjected the Bible to empirical examination, confident that natural reason would always affirm supernatural revelation. In the process, their interpretations of the Bible grew gradually more naturalistic. By the end of the century, appeals to supernatural aid in interpretation gradually diminished among them. This is not to say that these rational and evidentiary-minded Christian thinkers became

crypto-deists. They had no intention of eroding the authority of the Bible. On the contrary, they tried to strengthen the authority of Scriptures in light of mounting attacks. Nonetheless, interpreting the Bible by increasingly natural and empirical means affected the way they understood Holy Writ. American Protestants began to treat the Bible *more* like any other book.

The growth of this rational approach to spiritual knowledge was most strongly and conspicuously evident in the close-knit community of Harvard's professors and its graduates who pastored in eastern Massachusetts.[3] Changes in the understanding of the Bible in this group during the second half of the eighteenth century can be traced in the Dudleian Lectures at Harvard. The lecturers sought to shore up the intellectual foundations of Protestantism and defend the authority of the Bible from its skeptical enemies, the primary enemy being the deists, as many of the lectures were keen to point out. As John Barnard, one of the lecturers wrote, the lectures were established to defend Christianity from "everything that might have a tendency to overthrow, or corrupt, and debase it."[4] The lecturers had reasons to be concerned. The threat of deism and skepticism continued to grow in America during the eighteenth century.[5] In the early years, the lectures conveyed the typical balance between empirical evidence and the role of the Holy Spirit in the understanding of Scripture. By the end of the century, the balance tipped decidedly in the direction of evidence, universally accessible by all people. Reference to supernatural guidance in the interpretation of the Bible all but disappeared.

By the late eighteenth century, American colleges founded to train the nation's orthodox ministers had become, contemporaries observed, dens of deism.[6] Accounts of Yale College, Dartmouth College, the College of William and Mary, the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University), and Harvard College all raised alarms.[7] By the last decade of the century, Harvard's spiritual state was in such disarray that the school's comparatively liberal leaders felt compelled to take a tough stand. In 1791, they banned and publicly burned Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* while presenting each incoming student with a copy of Richard Watson's *Apology for the Bible*, a polemic against Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* that, they hoped, would inoculate vulnerable young minds against the contagion of deism.[8] In the early decades of the nineteenth century, however, deism had all but disappeared from the American scene. Historians have offered several explanations for its sudden demise. Some argue that, because deists had not organized into a coherent religious sect, when their charismatic leaders died off, deism perished with them; others note that the pietistic Christianity popularized

during the Second Great Awakening was particularly hostile to deism.[9] If, however, we examine one of the purported hotbeds of deism—Harvard College—another possibility emerges: deism disappeared because, at least in some important arenas, it had quite handily vanquished its foe.[10]

Even as early as 1718, Cotton Mather was arguing that Christians needed a more modern, robust, and potent defense against the infidel than the traditional recourse to spiritually apprehended intuitions. The weapons of the deist enemy, reason and evidence, could be used to defend revelation, he boasted: "How gloriously do we pursue our Victory over Infidelity! We have seized the Enemies Cannon, & we now turn it all upon themselves."[11] In 1759, Ezra Stiles, who would later become president of Yale, wrote to Thomas Clap, the school's current president, that it was time to take the offensive against deism: "Deism has got such Head in this Age of Licentious Liberty that it would be vain to try to stop it by hiding the Deistical Writings: and the only Way left to conquer & demolish it, is to come forth into the open Field & Dispute this matter on even footing—the evidences of Revelation in my opinion are nearly as demonstrative as Newton's Principia, & these are the Weapons he used."[12] Similarly, in the mid-eighteenth century, John Witherspoon, president of the College of New Jersey, said, "It is true, that infidels do commonly proceed upon pretended principles of reason. But as it is impossible to hinder them from reasoning on this subject, the best way is to *meet them upon their own ground,* and to show from reason itself, the fallacy of their principles."[13]

Mather, Stiles, and Witherspoon were all confident that the tools of reason and evidence would defeat deism and vindicate revealed religion. Their intent to meet the deists "upon their own ground" was a departure from the traditional Puritan approach. Although the Puritans valued reason, learning, and logic, they were concerned that human knowledge could overstep its bounds in spiritual matters; therefore, they depended on the guidance of the Holy Spirit when interpreting the Bible. Jonathan Edwards, who articulated the Puritan convictions of his ancestors, argued that only those who were granted "new senses"—that is a sense beyond the five with which man was naturally endowed—could comprehend the spiritual meaning of the Bible.[14] Men like Stiles and Witherspoon argued, to the contrary, that the Bible could and should be open to examination and verification like any other historical text. Evidence of the Bible's veracity would therefore, at least in theory, be available to any reasonable person: Christian, deist, or pagan.

Presumably a proponent of the art of rational discourse, Judge Paul Dudley (1675–1751), chief justice of the Superior Court of Massachusetts,

entered the fray in 1750 when he endowed an annual lecture series, subsequently known as the Dudleian Lectures, to be delivered at Harvard College. If Thomas Barnard Jr., who gave a lecture toward the end of the century, is correct, Dudley had modeled his bequest on the lecture series (launched in 1692) underwritten by Irish natural philosopher Robert Boyle to promote scholarly proof of the existence of God.[15] In his will, Dudley stipulated that, over four years, the lectures would rotate through four topics: natural religion, revealed religion, the "Romish" church, and the validity of the ordination of ministers.[16] I will be confining myself to the first two topics—natural and revealed religion—to investigate the ways in which the debate between those two camps evolved over the course of the second half of the eighteenth century.

The Controversy between Revealed and Natural Religion

The Harvard community's theological temperament in the second half of the eighteenth century must be understood against the backdrop of controversies surrounding the Great Awakening, which flourished between roughly 1740 and 1744.[17] In the wake of that sweeping movement, New England split into three major factions. The New Divinity men, heirs of Jonathan Edwards, believed that true spiritual knowledge was a supernatural gift from God. Only the Holy Spirit could illuminate and reveal the genuine meaning of the Scripture. The liberals, led by Charles Chauncy (1705–87), who was a minister of the First Church in Boston, propounded an increasingly rational theology that posited a benevolent God and a human race both morally and intellectually capable.[18]

Chauncy derided "enthusiasm," claims of "divine inspiration," "heated imagination," and "phrenzy"—all of which had been evident during the Great Awakening. He and his followers, who tended to reject Calvinism's doctrines of the inherited sin of Adam and the imputed righteousness of Christ, insisted that religion be of good order, reasonable, and an encouragement to virtuous behavior. Historian Alan Heimert writes that opponents of the Great Awakening believed that "man is—or should be—a rational being, one who derives his standards of virtuous behavior from an observation of the external world."[19] Edwin Gaustad elaborates: "Revelation was not cast aside, not yet; but in that ever-delicate balance between revealed and natural theology, the latter for [Chauncy] weighed more heavily. Natural laws, natural truths, and natural religion were respectable and acceptable because, by definition, they harmed not a single ratiocination. Insights, like those from a mystical experience, not verifiable in the public court of reason, were thrown out."[20]

Harvard followed Chauncy's lead. Jonathan Mayhew (1720–66), minister of the Old West Church in Boston, another prominent voice in the liberal Harvard community, exalted the role of natural theology at the expense of special revelation in a series of sermons published in 1749. Shrinking the gap between knowledge revealed by the Bible and that available through reason, Mayhew asserted that the Christian's most important duties were universally recognized simply by means of the "light of nature." For Mayhew, the Bible remained useful largely for its explanations of the proper motives for virtue, Jesus's role as mediator, and the assurance of forgiveness for the repentant.[21]

Though the liberals claimed the mantle of rationality, their opponents, the Old Calvinists and the New Divinity party, were far from irrational. Jonathan Edwards, Jonathan Dickinson, and their heirs, despite their support for revivals, were models of reason, moderation, and learning. They discussed empirical evidence that substantiated the validity of biblical revelation and denounced the excesses of the Awakening. Even though Edwards believed that God worked through the affections, he did not dispute the importance of intellect. However much they argued with one another, then, all three factions were united by their faith in and use of evidence and reason.[22]

The growing prominence of naturalistic evidence and reason was not unique to New England in the mid- to late eighteenth century. The Presbyterians of the College of New Jersey were moving in similar directions.[23] Under President John Witherspoon, conservative Princeton embraced Scottish Common Sense philosophy, a cause taken up by Witherspoon's successor, Samuel Stanhope Smith. Using natural means to defend revelation while simultaneously arguing that individuals could cultivate a moral sense independent of revelation, the Princetonians struggled to fashion a common morality for an increasingly theologically diverse America—a morality, based on the Bible and common sense, that would hold the emerging nation's fragile society together.[24]

At least one prominent eighteenth-century academic came to question the wisdom of an alliance between reason and revelation. Samuel Johnson (1696–1772), an Anglican and president of King's College in New York, was, like his peers at Harvard, generally liberal. He, too, drank deeply from the well of Locke and Newton. For most of his life, he believed that nature revealed spiritual truths and that morality and virtue could be studied and understood independently of revelation. Toward the end of his life, however, Johnson concluded, as biographer Joseph Ellis states, that "a rational analysis of nature had shown a tendency to produce skeptical deists rather than God-fearing Christians." The "scientific approach

to nature was not wrong in it self," he maintained, "but it had demonstrated a tendency to woo men away from the mysteries of a supernatural God."[25] In his later years, Johnson devoted himself to the study of Scripture. Under the spell of John Hutchinson's *Moses' Principia* (1724), which asserted that Moses had embedded in the Old Testament a long-lost message describing the physical universe, Johnson now attempted to uncover the mysteries of nature through a close attention to the Bible, thus reversing the methodology he had pursued earlier in his career.[26]

The quixotic nature of Johnson's latter-day quest is one especially telling indication that he was bucking a trend, even though his fundamental point could not be denied: defending supernatural knowledge with the tools of reason and evidence was diminishing the independence and authority of revealed truth. Throughout the northeast, mid-eighteenth-century communities of faith were welcoming a more rational approach to religion. Still, as Gaustad notes, "reason found its happiest home and some of its ablest exponents" at Harvard.[27] Norman Fiering and John Corrigan have traced this development back to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when Harvard and the church leaders it trained embraced the moderation, reason, and evidential nature of latitudinarian theology. Educators such as William Brattle and John Leverett encouraged students to read latitudinarians' writings, especially those of John Tillotson (1630–94). According to Fiering, two of Tillotson's ideas had a particularly significant impact on the Harvard community: (1) nature can be trusted as an independent source of divine truth and (2) religion should be subjected to the free inquiry of autonomous reason. Given his high regard for the powers of human understanding, Tillotson was confident that Christian morality and ethics were accessible by the light of nature.[28] He and other latitudinarians, Gerard Reedy notes, also devoted a good deal of intellectual labor to gathering historical evidence to affirm the validity of the Bible.[29] As the Dudleian Lectures got under way in 1755, these cultural, religious, and intellectual forces made themselves felt.

The Lectures on Revealed Religion

Edward Wigglesworth (1693–1765), the first professor of divinity in the American colonies and holder of the Hollis Chair at Harvard College, delivered a lecture in 1755, the same year the Dudleian Lectures were inaugurated. In his address, he sought to affirm that the books of the Old Testament "were all given by Inspiration of GOD."[30] Although he does not specifically single them out, in defending the authenticity of the Old Testament, Wigglesworth was responding to critiques by the

likes of Spinoza, Toland, and Hobbes. Mustering textual and historical evidence that suggested a much later composition, those skeptics had infamously challenged Mosaic authorship. Wigglesworth, like the latitudinarians, attempted to best them at their own game by turning historical evidence to the service of validating the authority of the Old Testament. Anglican latitudinarian divines such as Tillotson, John Wilkins, William Lowth, and Edward Stillingfleet had developed a series of arguments that had hardened into what became a standardized defense. It was patterned more or less as follows: (1) Jesus and the Apostles quoted the Old Testament. (2) Because New Testament writers were undoubtedly inspired, by referring to the Old Testament, they validated its authenticity. (3) Both Christian and pagan witnesses acknowledged that Moses had written the laws. (4) Because the Jews frequently looked upon the law as a burden, if they could have invalidated it by denying Mosaic authorship, they would have done so. (5) Finally, the miracles, recorded by reliable witnesses, affirmed that Moses had been granted divine authority.[31]

In the spirit of the latitudinarians, Wigglesworth contended that the Bible should be subjected to and understood by means of the same rules of empirical investigation as were typically applied in the study of history or other ancient texts, and so he set about examining and reconstructing the historical circumstances in which various texts were accepted or rejected for inclusion in the Bible. Because the ancient Jews revered their canon, they took an "exact and religious Care . . . not to admit any Thing into the Number of inspired Writings, but what was unquestionably of Divine Original." Moreover, cultural and historical circumstances made it highly unlikely that the Old Testament had undergone any material corruption since the time of Jesus. Jesus's first followers were Jews, and they, along with their unconverted brethren, would have wanted to preserve their holy writings. In fact, during the Church's early years, unchristianized and christianized Jews alike cited Scripture in their refutations of one another: "It became (through the Providence of God, who often brings Good out of Evil) an effectual security against any future material Corruption, or alteration of the Books then called the Holy Scriptures, rendering it in the very nature of the thing impossible." Wigglesworth reasoned that if either group had attempted to alter the canon, its rival would have noticed the adulteration. And, of course, it was all but impossible that Jews and Christians would have conspired to corrupt the text.[32]

Through a series of plausible historical inferences, Wigglesworth attempted to contradict the skeptics and establish the Bible's textual validity, but to confirm its special status, he relied on "the Testimony of our Savior JESUS CHRIST that all the Scriptures from the Old Testament

were given by the Inspiration of GOD." Jesus, whose divine authority was indisputable for Wigglesworth, proved that the Hebrew Scriptures were divinely inspired simply because he quoted from them. Furthermore, unlike Spinoza, for example, he believed that the miracles the Bible related were genuine because they had been witnessed by the Jews or had fulfilled earlier prophecies. Returning to the canon, Wigglesworth asserted that there was a categorical difference between inspired texts and ordinary writings. The apocryphal books were barred from the Old Testament because they were not "from above *by immediate Inspiration*" but were of mere "human Composition," rife with historical and doctrinal errors that were contrary to the "infallible spirit of God." The Bible, in its extant pure form, had been written with the "immediate Direction and Assistance" and "the infallible Guidance of the Spirit of GOD."[33]

The early Dudleian Lectures that considered the topic of revealed religion generally employed two lines of reasoning. First, a careful, empirical scrutiny of the Bible would affirm its accuracy and supernatural origins. Second, to achieve the Bible's spiritual benefits, the reader must intuit—as in Edwards's "new sense"—that the Bible was indeed the word of God and not a human invention. To be convincing, the empirical proof must be accessible to all rational, reasonable, and impartial people, whereas the intuitive understanding was granted by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, available only to Christians.

To assert the historical reliability of the Gospels, John Barnard (1681–1770), a moderate Calvinist pastor from Marblehead, Massachusetts, observed in 1756 that ancient historians, who had no sympathy for Christians, did not dispute the accuracy of the events related by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Therefore, Barnard deduced, the "Bible . . . may, at least, be put upon an equal foot with all other authentick Histories of Persons, and Facts, which made their Appearance in former Ages."[34] Twelve years later, John's son, Thomas (1716–76), pastor of the First Church in Salem, insisted that the supernatural quality of Jesus's and the Apostles' miracles—historically reliable because performed in the presence of many witnesses—confirmed that their message, as embodied in the Gospels, was divinely inspired.[35] According to Timothy Hilliard, another Dudleian lecturer, the evidence of the miracles should carry "a great weight with every unprejudiced mind," and the Resurrection should provide "incontestable proofs."[36] For these early lecturers, the spiritual and empirical interpretations of the Scriptures were interdependent, mutually reinforcing, and self-evident.

Why, then, did some not believe? "Surely this is not from any Defect in the Evidence of the Truth of it," John Barnard had claimed; "for it is

certain they [skeptics] credit ancient Histories, and many other Things, upon much less Evidence." The evidence for the Bible, he declared, was as reliable as for any historical document and therefore "ungainsayable." Since the evidence was unassailable, Barnard concluded that the skeptic must suffer from a spiritual defect. Ultimately, belief depended on God's intervention, and so, Barnard exhorted, "should we not make it our daily Prayer for them that the Scales may be taken off their eyes."[37] The biblical reference would have been well known to Barnard's audience. In the book of Acts, Paul of Tarsus persecuted first-generation Christians until God blinded him on the road to Damascus. When God subsequently restored Paul's vision, he became a believer and went on to proselytize Christianity throughout the southern Roman Empire. Paul's conversion thus became a textual justification for why intellectual apprehension and assent is an insufficient pathway to or proof of religious belief.

Until the spiritual condition was addressed, Barnard believed that the tools of reason and evidence would be ineffective against unbelief. To be sure, sinful skeptics press "philosophy into their service . . . to undermine Christianity, and strengthen themselves in the Disbelief of it." Human reason had shown itself to be so corruptible and unreliable in the hands of the skeptics that Barnard warned pastoral candidates to "be careful never to resign up your understanding to the Government of any merely humane writings, be they ever so plausible, and artfully contrived, and appear with the face of the strictest philosophy, in anything wherein they differ from Divine Revelation." Barnard did not discourage the students he addressed from reading humane literature; to the contrary, they would enlarge their minds by doing so. Still, if at any point reason and evidence appeared to contradict Scripture, students must understand that such aberrations proceeded from their sin, not biblical error. In Barnard's final analysis, despite his appeals to reason and evidence, scriptural authority was unequivocal and indivisible.[38]

In 1768, when the trustees of the Dudleian Lectures called upon the younger Barnard to address students on the topic of revealed religion, he centered his discussion on one question: "How shall men arrive to this persuasion, which is in our text termed faith?" Thomas previewed the thrust of his argument. He would explain how one came to know about the world and about God. Logic, empirical observation, reason, and philosophy, he would then demonstrate, could reveal much about the nature of the world, but they were incapable of discovering matters divine. He went on, "I lay it down as clear, that the person who will assent to nothing but what he is intuitively certain of, or convinced of by abstract reasoning, must remain ignorant of many and very interesting

truths. That therefore in this state of imperfection and sin, men need to have much religious knowledge conveyed to them in some other way." By the "other way," Barnard meant divine intervention. He acknowledged the remarkable advances that had been made in the realms of philosophy, natural history, technology, and knowledge in general. But, he cautioned, despite "the best improvements of the power of the mind," there were heights man could not ascend. Taking a swipe at the deists, he intoned, "We are beings . . . of limited capacities; there are bounds we cannot pass."[39] Deists wanted to exclude all religious claims except those supported by natural reason and the evidence of nature. Given such stringent standards, claimed Barnard, people would be reduced to believing almost nothing.

Thomas Barnard declared that there were three avenues leading toward knowledge of God: intuition, reasoning, and testimony.[40] Apparently, he had been reading Locke. Intuition he defined as self-evident truths that do not require empirical demonstration.[41] But few things in life are self-evident. To deepen one's knowledge, one must appeal to reason, which Barnard seemed to characterize as the process of drawing inferences from that which was already apprehended by means of intuition. Reason, however, had its shortcomings. Its conclusions "come by an indefinite number of steps, in proportion as truth lies near or more remote from intuition, to low probability or moral certainty."[42] Deductive reasoning was problematic, in other words, in proportion to its distance from axiomatic truth.

"Both these sources of knowledge, reflection on ourselves [intuition], and the experience of mankind in general [reason]," Barnard concluded, "compel us to own their deficiency in respects most deeply concerning our best welfare"—our best welfare being our knowledge of God. The most effective—indeed, the only—path to knowledge of God was via the testimony of those who preach. The proselyte would be most readily convinced not by heeding empirical or logical argumentation but by submitting to "an inward influence upon the mind" delivered directly from God through the pastor: "It may please God to reveal his truths or will immediately. For cannot the Father of Spirits, ever present with us, enlighten imperfect minds by his inward energy; and direct those he so converse with, how to distinguish between divine communications, and the heights of an enthusiastic fancy, or the illusions of depraved spirits?" If unbelievers were to open their hearts to the preacher's words, Barnard averred, they would be persuaded of the veracity of "the pure sentiments of inspiration."[43] Ultimately, it appears, conviction was a matter of grace.

"Innumerable doubts are resolved, and difficulties removed, by the authority of a 'thus saith the Lord,' which might otherwise perplex the soul," Barnard decreed; "especially will the case be so with those who cannot abstract, nor enter into the reason of things. And how many are they?" One could not think one's way to God, Barnard affirmed. Indeed, thought was by and large irrelevant to faith, for intellectual apprehension could either proceed from or precede assent: "In this view it is far from being true, that in order to one's receiving any benefit from holy scripture, he must be first convinced of its divine authority, for they may be a means themselves of proving their original, and opening the mind to a thorough conviction thereof." Christianity was not intended to be a religion for pedants. It dealt little with "metaphysics or any abstruse science. It is designed for the high benefit of those of common understanding, of babes . . . The blessed Trinity is not therein described by the doctrine of triangles, or of the emanation of light from the sun; but [revelation] teaches us the personal properties of the Sacred Three, whom we adore and on whom we depend. Beyond these we ought not, nor can we proceed in our speculations."[44]

Although he proclaimed a Christianity for the masses, Barnard did not neglect to tout his own intellectual bona fides. With the "doctrine of triangles," he made reference to geometric logic, which for Locke was the basis of intuitive and axiomatic truths. With the phrase "emanation of light from the sun," he invoked Newtonian cosmology. As his father, John, had encouraged Harvardians to do, Thomas had stretched his mind in the study of humane literature. But also like John, Thomas Barnard understood that God's knowledge, unlike man's, was revealed, not learned, and he sought to share his experience, as well as his scholarship, with his audience of future ministers.

Barnard closed his lecture with a warning: "Beware of relying on the wisdom of men, or the researches of human sagacity, where revelation ought to be their only guide . . . We shall act as wrongly, and hazard as much, if we put in their place the Dogmas of philosophy." There was only one place to turn to discover God's truth, Barnard confidently declared: the Bible. "Fix therefore in your minds the design and extent of revelation," he advised, "and receive its truth from the mouth of its divine author."[45]

Its tone was neither harsh nor polemical, but Thomas Barnard's 1768 lecture was a stern repudiation of the value of unaided human reason in matters spiritual. It would prove to be the last gasp of a generation committed to a dying hermeneutic.

In 1772, the trustees called upon Benjamin Stevens (1721–91), pastor of the First Church in Kittery, Maine, to deliver the Dudleian Lecture on revealed religion. As with the previous four lectures on the topic, his proofs were unoriginal. Still, his words betrayed a shift in the Bible's status at Harvard, albeit one so subtle that it undoubtedly went unnoticed by most and therefore alarmed few.

The earlier Dudleian Lectures on revealed religion had confidently asserted the necessity of divine illumination. The various empirical proofs that had been offered were, according to earlier apologists, helpful but ultimately insufficient. Stevens took a slightly different tack. He quoted at length from the notorious skeptic David Hume, who had challenged the credibility of New Testament miracles. Even if miracles had occurred, Hume contended, at the historic distance of the eighteenth century fraud must be assumed because witnesses, even those near to hand, were notoriously unreliable.[46] Shifting the grounds of Hume's objection, Stevens argued that the number of witnesses and the public nature of the miracles made the likelihood of a fabrication or delusion more unlikely than the fact of the miracles themselves. In applying empirical principles, Stevens privileged observation over revelation, perception over reality, thus demonstrating that biblical testimony was adequate even according to Hume's standards.[47] In a striking concession to the enemy, Stevens implied that Hume's historical and empirical methodology was correct but that he had misapplied it, thus leading to his erroneous, skeptical conclusions. It is also noteworthy that Stevens, whatever his views may have been, does insist on the final recourse to divine revelation.

In 1788, Dudleian Lecturer Timothy Hilliard (1767–90), pastor of the First Church in Cambridge, resorted to historical evidence, specifically pagan records, to establish the authority of the New Testament. This was all ground covered by his predecessors and, in a different setting, by the latitudinarians. However, the manner in which Hilliard approached his proofs was noticeably different from that of lecturers before Stevens. Describing the process of logical deduction, Hilliard confidently asserted, "Where the whole process is understood, there is no possibility of doubt. In this case, the premises are of such a nature as to render us infallibly certain of the conclusion."[48] Recall that twenty years earlier, Thomas Barnard had also discussed logical inferences, but he had emphatically concluded that such manmade contrivances were unreliable when compared with the knowledge that God alone could reveal. According to Hilliard, historical evidence that prophecies had been fulfilled and that the Resurrection had transpired afforded "a strong and undeniable argument of the

truth of revelation" and "incontestable proofs" to any who would observe with an impartial mind.[49]

In the face of such overwhelming evidence, Hilliard asked, why then do some, such as the deist, refuse to believe? Previous Dudleian defenders of revealed religion declared that such skeptics were spiritually deficient; Hilliard argued that they were intellectually so. Although deists claimed that Christianity lacked an adequate evidentiary base, Hilliard countered that it enjoyed as much support as other matters commonly held to be true: "If these persons [deists] are resolved to believe nothing which they cannot fully comprehend, the being of God and his providence, together with their own existence must be called in question and all the phenomena of nature whose cause have not been investigated, must be properly denied." He was convinced that "if [deists] would with honest, *impartial* minds consider the nature and design of the Christian institution, and the evidence and facts recorded in the New Testament, they would perfectly be satisfied with its truth." In 1788, Hilliard appealed to the "eternal and immutable rule of reason and religion" to draw people toward a knowledge of God.[50] He issued no calls for divine intervention, nor did he pray that scales might fall from the deists' eyes. An objective and impartial examination of Christianity would reveal its fundamental truth. The tide had turned. Throughout the rest of the century, those lecturing on revealed religion would base their defense on natural, not supernatural, logic.[51]

The Lectures on Natural Religion

Decades before the Dudleian Lectures established a forum for regularly and formally examining natural religion, a few prominent American ministers were engaged in the exercise. Both Increase and Cotton Mather tackled the topic, as did Benjamin Colman. Although they were enthusiastic about the natural world as a source of theological truth, they were careful to remain within the bounds of traditional Calvinist orthodoxy. Nature could affirm the glory of God, they believed, but would never lead one to the savings truths of revealed religion found only in the Bible. John Bulkley (1679–1731) a minister in Colchester, Connecticut, pushed the claims of natural religion further.[52] In *The Usefulness of Reveal'd Religion, to Preserve and Improve That Which is Natural* (1730), Bulkley argued that Christianity was simply "no other than Natural Religion reinforced, and improved by Divine Revelation." Unlike the deists, he insisted that natural and revealed religion did not contradict but instead complemented each other.[53] Although Christians generally allowed that man, by virtue

of unassisted reason, could partially apprehend God, Bulkley elevated its role beyond the limits of traditional orthodoxy.

One can trace the progress of Bulkley's thought from an earlier work, his preface to Roger Wolcott's *Poetical Meditations* (1725).[54] The majority of the preface comprises a justification for colonists' possession of Mohegan lands, based on Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* and his theory of natural law, but Bulkley also speculated on *prisca theologia*, ancient history, and natural religion.[55] Since the earliest ages, the human race had possessed knowledge of God, he claimed. Because the descendants of the first thinkers had initially transmitted the sacred information they had inherited by means of "hieroglyphics" and "oral tradition," it had become "liable to corruption and misinterpretation." But "the traditions still contained fragments" of the "Ancient & True Traditions of the First Ages of the World." Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in particular, preserved remnants of God's original revelation, as was clear from the fact that its account of the "most *Ancient Things*" exhibited a "great Harmony or Agreement" with "that of the *Sacred History*." Bulkley dismissed as "unlikely" the commonly held theory that the ancient pagan writers had conversed with Moses or with Jewish prophets. He found it more plausible "that the general tradition" was "Preserv'd in the World," although "in many Places it was grossly disguis'd and corrupted, yet in others retain'd much of its Primitive Purity."[56]

Admittedly, the ancients expressed these preserved yet corrupted memories of divine truth in fantastic and poetic forms. Ovid wrote "in the Strain and Manner of others of his Tribe, who are wont generally to mingle a great deal of Mythology with the Truth." Their intent, however, was not to distort; they simply conceived of reality differently: "It is observed by some Learned Men, that was the most Ancient way of Writing, and that prose is only an imitating of Poetry, and that the Grecians in particular at their first delivery from barbarism had all their Philosophy and instructions from the Poets such as Orpheus . . . that in old time poets were the lights and instructors of the World and gave laws to men for their conduct in several relations and affairs of Life."[57] The same year in which Bulkley was formulating his views, Giambattista Vico issued the *New Science*, which conceptualized ancient peoples as primitive. Decades later, German scholars such as Johann Gottfried Eichhorn would radically reorient that idea to argue that the writers of the Bible conceived of reality in a primitive way. German biblical scholars would argue that that in determining the meaning of a text, the influence of the author's culture and historical setting played a larger role than his conscious intentions. Thus Eichhorn and others challenged the historical reliability of

the Bible by arguing that the biblical writers wrote out of their primitive worldview and therefore interpreted natural phenomena as supernatural events. Because testimonies of miraculous events were merely the expressions of primitive modes of thought, then, miracles as recorded should not be interpreted literally. But in 1725, in America, these ideas remained dormant in the obscure work of an isolated country pastor in New England, who certainly would not have considered himself breaking with New England orthodoxy in any significant way.

By 1730, however, Bulkley was most certainly exhibiting liberal tendencies. In the course of an ordination sermon titled *The Usefulness of Reveal'd Religion*, he found himself praising natural religion. He was, he acknowledged, venturing on "an untrodden path" and employing a method most would perceive as "improper and very aliene from what might be expected" for such an occasion. Nonetheless, he pressed on. He argued that the key elements of the Christian revelation already existed in all natural religions. Long before Christ entered the world, Bulkley declared, natural religions in all their many manifestations taught men to love God, treat one's neighbor with love and charity, hope for immortality, and expect divine rewards and punishments in the afterlife. These motive forces were, of course, identical with the Bible's core ethical teachings. Therefore, "a considerable part (yea, may I not say, the main part) of Faith and Obedience of Reveal'd Religion (largely taken) is primarily and Really no other than the Faith and Obedience of Natural Religion." And, by extension, Christianity was "no other than Natural Religion." Elsewhere Bulkley wrote, "There is no Opposition or Inconsistency in any, either of the Doctrines or Precepts of the Word of GOD with those which Nature Teaches." Revelation merely reaffirmed and elaborated old truths that pagan natural religions had discovered by means of reason, "without the help of supernatural revelation."[58] Bulkley was no deist. But some of his ideas bore a provocative affinity with deist notions: the Bible was merely one among many expressions of religious truth, and it conveyed a common, universal religion of nature.

Nothing in revealed religion could "Hurt, Prejudice, or Hinder that which is Natural," Bulkley maintained; in fact, God intended that the Bible "preserve, cultivate, and improve" natural religion. "Reveal'd Religion has Illustrated and Improved these Discoveries of the Pagan Theology, bro't these things out of their obscurity, and set them in a clearer light," he argued. The Scriptures do "not make void that Law that is the sum of Natural Religion, but on the other hand Establish it." Consequently, he reflected, "how strange it is that the Deists of our age should seek to weaken [the Bible's] Authority, and procure its Banishment out of

the world," for the Bible did not contravene but "aided natural religion." As Perry Miller commented about the sermon, "revelation is ritualistically exalted above nature and then all the heartfelt encomia are heaped upon the natural."[59]

To understand the context in which Bulkley was expressing his views, consider Thomas Walter, a pastor in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and nephew of Cotton Mather, who in 1723 set himself the task of propounding upon classical and pagan virtues: "UPON the whole, we may conclude the Pagan Ethics to be miserably Defective and false; and in Truth it has been rightly thought by some great Men, that the revival of them has done one of the greatest Disservices & Mischiefs to the Christian Religion, which has ever befell it . . . [W]hen these [Classical] moral Duties are separated from their Evangelical Relation to GOD in CHRIST, and are not animated by the Spirit of Grace, they are a lifeless & breathless carcase, which GOD will not accept nor regard."[60] Walter was on the conservative end of the theological spectrum, to be sure. Still, for his time, Bulkley's charge that Christian pastors were unjustifiably shunning natural religion in their ministries and his claim that the Bible was not the *only* guide to life were shocking, especially when coupled with such bold proclamations as a person who relied exclusively on supernatural revelation was a person of "a very depraved Conscience indeed."[61]

Even when he used it to defend the Bible, Bulkley elevated natural above revealed religion. As was common, he argued that the Qur'an, unlike the Bible, could not have come from God: "Nor need we any further Evidence of the Falseness of any pretense the Alcoran or that grand Impostor (Mahomet) makes to this than its teaching things Repugnant to the sincere & pure dictates of Nature: Hereby it assures us it never came from Heaven. No Institution of this sort can do so; for GOD is the Father of Natural Light, as well as that which is Supernatural, and he cannot contradict himself."[62] Although others had sought to affirm the authority of the Bible and discredit the Qur'an, Bulkley's argument was unusual insofar as it assumed and depended upon an external and independent source of authority, natural religion, the gauge by which all Scripture must be measured.[63] The Bible alone, it is not surprising, met the test.

In the 25 years between Bulkley's sermon and the inception of the Dudleian Lectures, which would formalize the study of natural religion at Harvard, almost no printed material defending natural religion surfaced in New England.[64] Edward Holyoke (1689–1769), Harvard's ninth president, delivered the series's inaugural lecture, and he spoke on natural religion. Holyoke defined natural religion as "that regard to a Divine

Being or God which Men arrive at, by mere Principles of natural Reason, as it is improveable, by tho't, consideration & Experience, without the help of Revelation," but he insisted that revelation was essential for true spiritual understanding.[65] In 1759, as the Dudleian cycle brought natural religion to the fore again, lecturer Ebenezer Gay (1696–1787) stated, "Religion is divided into natural and revealed:—Revealed Religion, is that which God hath made known to Men by the immediate Inspiration of his Spirit, the Declarations of his Mouth, and Instructions of his Prophets: Natural, that which bare Reason discovers and dictates."[66] Four years later, Peter Clark (1694–1768)—who defined natural religion much like Holyoke as the "laws or rules or moral conduct as are founded on deductions from principles of mere natural reason relative to divinity and morality, without the aids of supernatural revelation"—noted that the "powers of this rational and intelligent mind of man are of vast extent in the knowledge of nature." By "ransacking the creation, and surveying the works of God in the heavens, earth and seas," man could trace "the footsteps and impressions of a Deity." Clark concluded that "God has put this principle of intellectual light into the nature of man to discover his duty to him, and direct him in his whole moral behavior, and also given it the force of a law to oblige him to the practice of it; the same which is commonly called the light and law of nature, or the light and dictates of conscience."[67] Holyoke, Gay, and Clark were typical of those Dudleian Lecturers who, in the second half of the eighteenth century, addressed the matter of natural religion: they believed that it complemented revelation.

Gay asserted that natural and revealed religion "subsist harmoniously together, and mutually strengthen and confirm each other . . . Nothing therefore could be vainer and more preposterous, than the attempt to raise the credit on one, upon the discredit of the other." Revelation could not be ignored, for it "gives us the same (tho' clearer) Ideas of the Attributes of God, which we have from Nature and Reason."[68] Andrew Eliot (1718–78) pursued the point in 1771: "The gospel makes certain, which, without it, is but a dark conjecture."[69] And in 1775, Samuel Langdon (1723–97), the thirteenth president of Harvard College, opined, "Where the light of nature fails the Gospel offers itself as an infallible guide, discovering the things of God which could not be discovered by the naked eye or the human intellect and correcting errors of misguided reason . . . [R]evelation teaches the same things with natural religion, but it teaches more."[70] By denying the all-sufficiency of autonomous reason, the natural religionists scrupulously distinguished themselves from the deists.[71]

Like Bulkley, both Langdon, in 1775, and Gad Hitchcock (1748–1803), in 1779, drew upon the tradition of *prisca theologia* to trace the

mutually reinforcing properties of natural and revealed religion. In the beginning, God had revealed himself to Adam supernaturally. From this initial special revelation, Adam and his descendants had, with their natural powers of reason, subsequently enhanced their storehouse of knowledge. Over the centuries, as the human population expanded and dispersed, the original deposit of revelation degraded, but it always persisted in some form. Hitchcock reasoned, "There were but two generations from Adam to Noah. So we cannot well imagine that the knowledge and true worship of God, during that time, could be lost in any part of the world." God had never abandoned humanity; rather, he periodically "saw fit to interpose" and reveal himself to correct their "darkened understanding." Similarly, Langdon wrote, "When the world was peopled after the Flood, all mankind were acquainted with the one true God, and that rational and spiritual worship which he requires; but as vice increased, they grew more averse to the purity of religion, though natural reason would not suffer them absolutely to renounce the form." Thus, he concluded, "there never was a time when mankind was absolutely left without revelation, though some nations have approached very near such a state."[72]

And because revelation is always in some sense present in the world, Langdon reasoned, a purely natural religion is not possible. Deists have fallen into the trap of believing so, however, because revelation "imperceptibly mixes with natural notions of mankind, so that it is *difficult to distinguish between one and the other*." All civilizations, Langdon insisted, build their ideas on the remnant knowledge derived from God's original revelation to Adam. Even the "heathen sages," such as Plato, Socrates, and Cicero, did not gather their ideas from nature alone; they too benefited from divine grace: "The Jewish scriptures were spread throughout the entire world . . . [D]oubtless the philosophers had the curiosity to read them, and did not neglect to take some advantage of the knowledge they gained for the further improvement of their own schemes."[73] Human reason, Hitchcock and Langdon concluded, never existed in a form entirely independent of God's revelation.

In contending that revealed and natural religion could not be isolated one from the other, Hitchcock and Langdon distanced themselves from the deists. Hitchcock noted that "modern Deists know more . . . than . . . the ancient philosophers. But," he averred, "this is chiefly to be attributed to the advantages of the Christian revelation, which has been a rich blessing, even to those who do not believe in it."[74] Though deists claimed that their insights were derived purely from the unassisted and natural powers of human reason and observation, their ideas, as well as all knowledge

of God, were in fact derived from an original deposit of revelation and God's periodic gifts of grace.

In 1795, Thomas Barnard Jr. (1748–1814), whose father had addressed Harvard's students on the topic of revealed religion in 1768, delivered the Dudleian Lecture on natural religion. Barnard, speaking at the height of the deist panic, began his lecture boldly yet defensively. "A Discourse upon Natural religion in an University professedly under Christian instruction, and by a minister of Christ, appears to some, if not criminal, yet highly improper," he announced. He then recapitulated the familiar argument about the complementary relationship between revealed and natural religion: "They are to be conceived rather as different rays of light from the Great Source of Understanding." When discussing the role of reason and the relationship between Christianity and deism, however, Barnard undoubtedly surprised his coreligionists. "Where is the Christian who will refuse to own his mind has been instructed, and faith strengthened by [deists'] labors?" he asked. "Christians are assisted by the work of deists!" Hitchcock and Langdon had asserted that deist and pagan thinkers were aided by revelation; Barnard countered that Christian revelation was aided by the progress of natural religion. "The firmest believer in Christianity seeks to render his faith more firm, than the evidence of testimony can alone render it, by rational illustration and argument," Barnard asserted. The modern Christian benefited from "analogies, facts, and inferences from allowed premises" that could "explain and corroborate the doctrines or precepts of his religion." Intellectual advances in natural philosophy and philosophy, spurred on in many cases by the deists, had advanced the Christians' understanding of revelation.[75] Though Thomas Barnard Jr. was no deist, he valued the contribution that natural means of knowing could make to divine matters.

Barnard Jr. grounded his contention about the progressive advancement of humanity's intellect, and thus its spiritual understanding, in historical reasoning. In a telling passage, he maintained that Cicero had a better notion of the deity than the average Roman; Dr. Samuel Clarke had a more advanced understanding of religion than a "Hottenton [*sic*]"; and, by analogy, the Apostles possessed more "enlarged sentiments and well-informed notions of God" than the priests of Jupiter. Clarke, Cicero, and the Apostles—in all three cases, Barnard declared, as he looked out on his audience of Harvard students, men had improved their knowledge of God by virtue of the "blessings of education," "instructive books," "conversation," and sufficient leisure for "application and study." Taking for granted that all nations had at least some limited access to divine revelation, he identified three factors that promoted an individual's, or

a culture's, ability to enhance religious understanding: "natural strength of mind," the "industry with which they improve them," and "the favorableness of their situation for such investigations." With such comments, Barnard Jr. showed himself to be an intellectual elitist, a committed teacher, and a liberal minister, one who presaged the shift that Harvard would experience in the coming century.[76]

Barnard's more sophisticated understanding of history set him apart from previous lecturers. Whereas they had resorted to history merely as an objective and universally accessible tool with which to judge and verify the validity of the biblical accounts, he had employed it (as Bulkley had done briefly as well) to argue for a progressive view of both humanity and of religion. Although Barnard still maintained that God spoke to man through revelation, his concept of revelation had become so broad that it was universally available to all Adam's children, not just orthodox Congregationalists. And if revelation was present as remnant knowledge throughout history, there was little about it that was "special." Moreover, the proposition that religious understanding increased over time had the effect of casting the writers of the Bible as "primitive" in comparison to modern people, who had a more enlightened apprehension of revelation—a notion that would become a hallmark of modern liberal Protestantism.[77]

When viewed in a transatlantic context, the Dudleian Lectures seem relatively unsophisticated. To be sure, they tend to flatten important distinctions across time periods, cultures, and genres. Contemporary German scholars such as Johann David Michaelis and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn argued that in determining the meaning of a text, the influence of the author's culture and historical setting played a larger role than his conscious intentions. Their treatises, which would radically undermine the traditional authority of the Bible, were largely unknown to the American speakers. However, the works of English biblical scholar Robert Lowth, who maintained that the interpreter must appreciate the alien historical context of the Bible's writing properly to interpret it, were available to Americans by the middle of the eighteenth century. Most of the Dudleian lecturers seemed unwilling, or unable, to incorporate such historical reasoning in their defenses of religion. Barnard, perhaps, had a glimpse of the future in which radical historicist critiques of the Bible would come to dominate New England's religious discourse.

The Death of Deism and the Rise of Unitarianism

In 1796, Nathan Fiske delivered the lecture on revealed religion. With complete confidence, he discussed the historical credibility of testimonies

by those who had witnessed the miracles of Christ, incredulous that any "unprejudiced mind" could examine the evidence and conclude that the Gospels were composed by the "unassisted powers of man." Though the Bible's authors had been inspired by God, their writings should nonetheless be interpreted and understood by natural means. As the century drew to a close, Dudleian speakers had more recourse to words such as "objectively," "unprejudiced," and "rationally" and less to manifestations of the Holy Spirit. However, these ministers naturalized revelation not to undermine it but to make it more credible against skeptical deistic assaults. According to Fiske, the Dudleian Lectures "serve as a laboratory, or armoury, where those weapons may be formed and burnished, by which to defend the religion of Jesus, and the rights of Christians. These weapons have hitherto been proof against every assailant in every attack, in whatever new mode the opponents might use their own armour, or bring on the assault."[78]

Fiske and his predecessors were convinced that they were arming their students to combat the deists. In the process of rendering their defense of the Bible increasingly rational and empirical, however, they were unwittingly adopting a metaphysical naturalism. In doing so, they were collapsing the distinction between their position and the deists' position and encouraging their students to minimize the role of a supernatural God in the reading of divine revelation. Some, in fact, would (perhaps only temporarily) join the deist craze that swept college campuses in the late eighteenth century.

No radical revolution of ideas occurred between Edward Holyoke's first Dudleian lecture in 1755 and Thomas Barnard Jr.'s in 1795, and Barnard's speech would not prompt the outrage that greeted Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Divinity School Address" in 1838. But, although the Dudleian Lectures marked no rupture with the past, they did display a significant, albeit gradual, evolution of ideas. In the course of four decades, the series shifted its locus of authority and knowledge, as is clear in the addresses of the two Thomas Barnards. When Thomas Barnard Sr. grew too feeble to continue ministering to his flock, his son became a candidate for his pulpit at the First Church in Salem. Thomas Jr. shared his father's name but not his father's views on revelation. Apparently sensing as much, the majority of the divided congregation rejected him in 1771. On July 19, 1772, Thomas Barnard Jr., along with the First Church minority that had steadfastly supported him, formed the North Church and Society in Salem. A century later, at a service commemorating the church's centennial, the individual delivering the memorial sermon commented,

> During the ministry of Dr. Barnard this pulpit and this society stood also for religious liberty. Not negatively only, by preaching practical religion and leaving dogmatic divinity aside, did the minister of this church discountenance bigotry and the over-valuation of theological schemes . . . It is very evident that the society at the time of his death in 1814 had had such teaching and was, in its whole organic life, so penetrated and moved by the spirit of religious freedom, that it was ready to take, as it did take without a consciousness of change, its place among those churches which about that time were beginning to be known and to know themselves, as Unitarian.[79]

In retrospect, the Dudleian Lectures quietly heralded an evolution that would spark a noisy revolution. Deism had been conquered, but Unitarianism had arisen in its stead.

Part II

The Early Nineteenth Century

German Biblical Critics and the Betrayal of History

Chapter 4

Blindsided by Germany

Buckminster, Textual Criticism, and the End of the *Textus Receptus* in America in the Nineteenth Century

By the early years of the nineteenth century, the threat of deism was eroding in the United States.[1] During the eighteenth century, the Bible's apologists used historical and empirical evidence to place Holy Writ firmly on safe and high ground, far out of reach of the arrows of the skeptics. However, at the beginning of the next century, the conservative defenders of the Bible were blindsided by a new threat. This threat was driven not from hostile skeptics but from European Christian scholars who meticulously examined the biblical text with increasingly rigorous historical scrutiny, often based on a naturalistic epistemology.

In 1809, Joseph Stevens Buckminster (1784–1812), a Boston Unitarian pastor and scholar,[2] convinced the trustees of Harvard College to publish Johann Jakob Griesbach's (1745–1812) edition of the New Testament, which was first published in Germany in 1777.[3] The publication caught American biblical scholars off guard. Griesbach examined numerous ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament and found that they differed from each other. He made the troubling assertion that the version of the word of God that Protestants had commonly accepted for centuries as the *Textus Receptus* (or Received Text) was corrupted. It in fact was not an exact copy of the autographs written by the inspired authors. In other words, revelation was vulnerable to the same corruptions and degradations as any ancient text copied repeatedly by successive generations of scribes of varying talent, care, and integrity. In short, the infallible word of God contained copy errors.[4] Griesbach's discussion of the inadequacies of the *Textus Receptus* was hardly news to European scholars. They had dismissed the notion of a pristine text long ago. But only a very

few sophisticated Americans who followed European scholarship knew about these advances. When Buckminster published Griesbach's text, he brought the problem to American soil and radically challenged traditional English-speaking Protestant certainties of a flawless text.[5]

The notion that the original autographs had been altered threatened the authenticity and authority of the Bible in the minds of more conservative Protestants. Errors in the Received Text did not necessarily refute the special status of the Bible, but understandably, many were alarmed by the profoundly disconcerting implications. Traditionally, when Protestants conceptualized how the Spirit of God inspired the writers of the Bible, they generally minimized the human element. Most believed that God inspired every word of the Scriptures and the writers were practically taking dictation. Some believed that the authors became passive writers guided by the Spirit. The Westminster Confession of Faith of 1658 declared that the biblical authors received their words directly from God. God then miraculously guided the scribes to copy the text perfectly. This guaranteed the truth of the text in the minds of most Christians. The Bible never explicitly stated such a doctrine, but Christians, especially Protestants, tended to feel the need to believe in such a divinely guided mechanism of transmission.[6]

Though the belief in a pristine text and miraculous error-free transmission had been gradually eroding for centuries in Europe, most Americans were largely unaware that European scholars had been investigating the corruption of the *Textus Receptus* until Buckminster introduced Griesbach to the United States in the early nineteenth century. He was one of the first Americans to examine thoroughly these European developments, and not surprisingly, the liberal Unitarians appreciated his efforts. Orthodox Calvinists were initially threatened by the implications of textual criticism, but they eventually accepted the basic premise of the textual critics and conceded that the Bible had been adulterated and accrued errors over time. Though they resisted the more radical claims, they, in what is by now a predictable pattern, defended their orthodox conclusions by appropriating and using the weapons of their enemies.

The Development of Textual Criticism in Europe

Griesbach did not invent the revolutionary idea that the Bible had been corrupted in the process of transmission over the centuries. He was the heir of a long tradition of investigation that had been developing in Europe for centuries. Scholars had been examining the biblical text and ferreting out errors. However, previous scholars cautiously left their "suggestions" for corrections to the *Textus Receptus* respectfully at the bottom

of the pages in the notes. The actual Received Text remained intact. (The *Textus Receptus*, though generally trusted, itself originated in controversy. The text was based on Desiderius Erasmus's revision of the Vulgate.) Griesbach was one of the first to alter publicly and blatantly the *Textus Receptus*. What follows is a brief summary of the development of textual criticism in Europe leading up to Griesbach.[7]

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, printed copies of the Greek New Testament proliferated. However, these Greek texts were all largely based on Erasmus's faulty edition of the Greek New Testament.[8] Erasmus haphazardly edited a handful of inferior manuscripts and inserted an occasional correction when he found discrepancies. He published his edition in 1516. Despite these shortcomings, observes Bruce Metzger, Erasmus's Greek text became the basis of several influential editions of the Bible. The Elezevir edition, in the preface to the second edition, claimed that the readers held in their hands the "text now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted." Intended as nothing more than an advertisement, the claim became popularized as a stamp of accuracy and authenticity. In England, the Stephanus edition was revered as the *Textus Receptus*. Both were based on Erasmus's text. According to Metzger, people "slavishly held onto this text" as the *Textus Receptus*—a copy of the words written by the inspired authors without error—and its authority became an object of superstition.[9]

Some biblical scholars noticed and more carefully examined the troubling discrepancies among the Greek manuscripts and consulted a broader range of sources.[10] Hugo Grotius noted in his *De Veritate* (1622) and *Annotationes*, or commentaries, on the Old and New Testament (1641–50) that discrepancies between various manuscripts indicated errors in transmission and he believed some sections of the Bible were added at a later date. He believed that corruptions entered the text "through carelessness or perverseness in the transcribers." Over time "some letters, syllables, or words may be changed, omitted, or added." Grotius was not disturbed because he thought the errors were minor, the Bible was essentially sound, and the original text could be restored if one carefully studied the manuscripts. He believed that the "most ancient copies . . . should be preferred before the rest."[11] Therefore the oldest copies needed to be found and evaluated in order to restore the true text. His biographer wrote of him, "As a critic, he is so bold as to treat the Scriptures as if they were no more than a mere literary work. He approaches them as he would any work of classical antiquity."[12]

In England, during the seventeenth century, Brian Walton, John Fell, and John Mill each published Greek texts in which they noted variants

among the ancient texts. The increased attention to the biblical text was prompted in part by the arrival of the Codex Alexandrinus in England in 1628. Cyril Lucar, the patriarch of Constantinople gave the manuscript as a gift to the king of England. The manuscript was copied in the fifth century, five hundred to one thousand years earlier than the manuscripts used for Erasmus's Received Text. The Alexandrian text differed from the *Textus Receptus* in a number of places. This prompted others to scour European libraries for older manuscripts.[13] Taking advantage of the newly rediscovered manuscripts that were unavailable to previous generations of scholars, in 1657, Walton published the last of six folio volumes of the London Polyglot Bible, which noted manuscript discrepancies.[14] In 1675, John Fell published a Greek Bible in which he also noted inconsistencies among at least one hundred different manuscripts. John Mill spent the last thirty years of his life collecting, collating, and analyzing manuscripts and patristic sources. In 1707, the small trickle of errors turned into a flood when Mill published his Greek New Testament, in which he noted an embarrassing and troubling thirty thousand variants.[15] Mill printed the Received Text (Stephanus's 1550 edition) but attached notes of the variant readings. The thirty thousand variants were only the beginning as successors made more extensive collations. Mill only cited the variants he considered to be significant. He ignored minor issues such as variations in word order or articles. When subsequent scholars examined more manuscripts with greater rigor, Mill's thirty thousand variants multiplied by a factor of five within a century. Walton, Fell, and Mill made notes of the variants. However, they did not actually tamper with the Received Text. Doing so would be too disturbing to the many Christians who practically venerated the Received Text.

Mill's younger friend and famed classicist Richard Bentley (1662–1742) was also interested in examining the text of the Bible.[16] He applied to the New Testament the same philological tools he so effectively used to examine classical texts. In doing so, he treated the Bible just like any other profane ancient text. Bentley concluded that the original autographs of the New Testament books lay beyond recovery. The best that one could realistically hope for was to reproduce the text as it existed in the fourth century. The task entailed comparing the most ancient and venerable manuscripts and testing for agreement among Greek and Latin versions, then checking the readings against patristic citations and ancient Syriac, Coptic, Gothic, and Ethiopian translations. His philological principles guided subsequent scholars, and German textual critics abandoned the goal of restoring the original autographs.[17]

In Germany, Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752) was understandably disturbed when he encountered the Fell edition of the New Testament. However, he concluded that corruptions were inevitable over centuries of successive transmissions. A Bible free of textual errors, he believed, could only be a result of a "miracle so great that belief in it could no longer be called belief." Despite the errors, he believed that careful investigation, collection, and collation of manuscripts could restore faith in the sacred text. In 1734, Bengel published a Greek New Testament in which he catalogued variant texts and rated them according to five levels of reliability. He also tried to bring order to the growing number of newly discovered manuscripts by classifying them into families of geography and origins.[18]

Historian Jonathan Sheehan notes that Bengel was one of the first biblical scholars to attempt to examine the text of the Bible independent of theological constraints. Rather than choosing a variant based on theological principles, Bengel attempted to establish sound, consistent, and objective principles of evaluation for determining the probable original form. For example, he posited that number of manuscripts was not as important as their antiquity. An erroneous manuscript could have been recopied many times. Bengel also made central to his method of textual criticism the Erasmian principle that "proclivi scriptioni praestat ardua [the harder reading is preferable to the easier]." Erasmus had imagined that scribes would naturally tend to err in the direction of more obvious phrasing rather than more puzzling terms.[19]

About two decades later, Johann Jakob Wettstein (1693–1754) continued the task of correcting the ancient manuscripts. In 1751 and 1752, he published a critical Greek New Testament in two volumes, for which he utilized 225 manuscripts, 100 of which he personally examined. Wettstein included in his New Testament a prolegomena in which he discussed 19 principles for evaluating textual variants. Wettstein, like Bengel, also believed, in theory, that the evaluation and the interpretation of the text should be wholly independent of theological or doctrinal loyalties. Evidence should guide the evaluation of texts. Though he wanted to publish a text of the New Testament that departed from the Received Text, sensibly fearing repercussions, he took a conservative route. He did not tamper with the Received Text but noted the variants safely in the notes.[20]

Reactions to Textual Criticism

These biblical scholars were not trying to undermine faith. Rather, they believed they were getting to the earliest possible text. However, skeptics took advantage of their discoveries for their own ends, and many more

cautious Christians also feared that these biblical scholars were undermining the credibility of revelation. As early as 1670, the arch-heretic Spinoza attempted to dismantle the Bible's special status by arguing that it should be treated like any other book. He presciently asserted in his infamous *Theological-Political Treatise* that the *Textus Receptus* had been corrupted and altered from the original manuscripts, which were now hopelessly lost. Over the ages, the text, he asserted, had been degraded either by malicious intent or by the natural degradations of time. He attempted to assure his readers that only details of history or the nuances of theology were contaminated and altered. The heart of the word of God, those parts that encouraged love for God and mankind, were still intact. The rest was unimportant.[21]

In the eighteenth century, the deists Anthony Collins, John Toland, and Matthew Tindal attempted to undermine the authority of Christianity by arguing that its foundation was a corrupted text. Taking advantage of Mill's thirty thousand textual variants, they argued that the numerous errors proved that the Bible was not a reliable document and could not be divinely inspired.[22] Both deists and many Christians realized that scholars such as Mill, Grotius, and Wettstein made the status of revelation vulnerable. In this rare case, many Christians actually agreed with the skeptics.

In response, some Christians tenaciously held onto the belief that God would not have allowed errors to creep into his revelation. For example, soon after the London Polyglot was published, John Owen launched a vicious defense. He wrote, "Every tittle and iota in the word of God must come under our care and consideration, as being . . . from God." He acknowledged that the original manuscripts of "Moses and the prophets . . . the apostles and the evangelists" were gone, but every detail "hath been by his special care and providence preserved entire and uncorrupt unto us." He asserted that all the words of the Bible were "*immediately and entirely given out by God himself*, his mind being in them represented unto us without the least interveniency of such mediums and ways as were capable of giving change or alteration *to the least iota or syllable*." Furthermore, the copies were "*preserved unto us entire* in the original languages."[23] Other Christians also believed that God's providence extended to the copyist by preserving manuscripts from error. John Edwards of England, in 1691 wrote, "We have reason . . . to be thorowly perswaded that the Books are entirely transmitted to us without any Corruption, and are the same that ever they were, without . . . Diminution or Addition."[24] Responding to Mill's discovery and documentation of the thirty thousand errors, Daniel Whitby wrote, "I GRIEVE therefore, and am vexed that I have found so much in Mill's Prolegomena which seems

quite plainly to render the standard of faith insecure, or at best to give others too good a handle for doubting."[25] He, like Owen, also argued that God miraculously preserved the Bible in transmission. "Who can imagine that God, who sent his Son . . . to declare this doctrine, and his apostles, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit to . . . preach it, and by so many miracles confirmed it to the world, should suffer any wicked persons to corrupt it and alter any of those terms on which the happiness of mankind depended?"[26] Most Christians believed the idea of errors in the holy text was a scandalous one.

In 1777, Griesbach made the first significant alteration of the Received Text using the texts produced by Mill and Wettstein. In the prolegomena, he discussed the origin of the Received Text and questioned its reliability. He made cautious changes when Greek manuscripts, ancient translations, and the witness of church fathers supported them. Like Bengel and Wettstein, Griesbach divided the main texts into families (Alexandrine, Western, and Byzantine), and, in his prolegomena, he discussed 15 canons for evaluating the reliability of textual variants. Based on his principles, he removed from the Received Text a few passages that he believed to be inauthentic. For example, he concluded that 1 John 5:7–8 was added later. Though he included John 5:7–8:11, he noted that the passage in all likelihood was not original.[27]

Griesbach believed that God revealed Himself in the Bible. However, his views stood in stark contrast to earlier understandings of the authority of the Bible. For example, Griesbach concluded that only Matthew and John were inspired Gospel accounts. Mark and Luke were useful, but their accuracy was contingent on their reliance on Matthew.[28] John Owen believed that the Bible was entirely from God and the writers were "passive instruments for the reception and representation of words." God expected Christians, Owen argued, not to examine the Bible skeptically as they would other books but to receive it in faith.[29] In contrast, nearly a century later, Griesbach wrote, "Those who argue that Mark wrote under the influence of divine inspiration must surely regard it as being a pretty meager one!"[30]

Early Encounters with Textual Criticism in Eighteenth-Century America

When Buckminster convinced the trustees of Harvard to publish an American version of Griesbach's New Testament in 1809, only a few learned Americans knew that their European cousins were investigating the integrity of the biblical text. Examining the texts of the Bible required examining rare manuscripts scattered across various locations throughout

Europe. This was an extremely difficult task for someone living in Europe and impossible for someone living across the Atlantic. But Americans were not entirely blissfully ignorant of the problems of the textual corruptions of their Holy Writ.

Americans also faced some of these challenges. In 1735, Robert Breck sought to be settled as the pastor of a congregation in Springfield, Massachusetts. Thomas Clap, the future president of Yale College, led a group of conservative clergy to block Breck's appointment. Among other complaints, Clap charged that Breck denied that several passages of the New Testament were of divine inspiration. After reading Jeremiah Jones's *Canonical Authority of the New Testament*, Breck agreed with Jones's conclusion that two passages of the New Testament were later "interpolations and not of Divine Inspiration."[31] Jones believed that John 8 and 1 John 5:7 were not written by the inspired authors because they did not appear in the Syriac version of the New Testament. Jones believed that the first- or second-generation Jewish Christians, living in Syria, translated manuscripts of the New Testament into their own language. The Syriac manuscripts were translated early and in the lifetime of the Apostles and therefore they were likely a highly accurate translation of the original manuscripts. Since they did not contain the passages in question, Jones concluded that they must have been added at a later time and not in the original.[32]

When Clap confronted Breck regarding his heterodox views, Breck showed Clap the pages of Jones's book that discussed the evidence. Predictably, the conservative Clap recorded that he did not think that Jones successfully proved that the passages were not originally written by the inspired authors or that it was even Jones's intention to do so. Clap clearly misunderstood Jones, for Jones argued in no uncertain terms that he believed the vast majority of the most ancient manuscripts did not contain the verses in question, which therefore were later interpolations.[33] Not only did Clap misunderstand Jones's argument, but Clap did not address Jones's textual and historical evidence. One would imagine that Clap could have attempted to persuade Breck that he was wrong by offering counter historical and textual evidence. Instead, Clap simply rejected Jones's conclusions without engaging in any sort of substantive debate regarding the evidence.

Perhaps Clap did not read Jones very carefully. This is a reasonable conjecture because Clap grossly misinterpreted Jones's point. However, he may not have cared. Clap, by his own admission, based his belief in the authenticity of the present version of Scriptures on grounds that transcended the evidence based on ancient copies, history, or the examination

of languages. Rather, Clap believed that the texts were not corrupted on the basis of a theological, rather than a historically naturalistic argument: "I *relied much* on this Argument which all might rely upon, whether they were skilled in the ancient Copies or no? viz. That as GOD had a gracious Intention and Design in revealing the Scripture at first, so *we* might depend upon it, that in pursuance to that good Intention, his Providence *would be engaged to preserve the Scriptures Pure and Uncorrupted*."[34] Clap, like many Christians of his age, believed God protected and preserved his revelation for His people. To put it another way, Clap believed God would not go through all the trouble of inspiring various authors, only to have the inspired word corrupted. The providence of God superseded the corruptions and degradations of history that affected other writings.

In response, Breck asked Clap, "Do you suppose, that when ever any Man undertakes to write, or print, a Copy of the Bible, that the Providence of GOD would be engaged to secure him from making any mistake in it?"[35] A copyist, Clap argued, could make an error; however, if or when such corruptions occur, "GOD in his Providence gives the World sufficient Light and Evidence" to discover the mistake with the aid of "the multitude of true and ancient Copies extant in the World."[36] Breck countered that "God in his Providence [has] given the World sufficient Reason to think that these Places are interpolations and not of divine Inspiration."[37] To what extent Clap believed the claim that the Bible could contain errors is questionable. He never attempted to address the historical or textual evidences. Rather, he persisted in condemning Breck on the principle that he believed that the Bible had been altered. Under pressure, Breck eventually recanted.[38]

Many early American Protestants were understandably highly resistant to the notion that the inspired texts had changed. The Breck affair illustrates that in the mid-eighteenth century, some of the most educated Protestant leaders were unwilling or unable to engage seriously with the developing textual criticism of the Bible. More important, they did not see a need to do so. In the coming decades, Protestants who sought to protect the pristine nature of revelation would not be able to dismiss textual evidence as easily as Clap. However, in mid-eighteenth-century America, fideistic arguments were sufficiently effective. Few Americans confronted the issue of textual criticism in any significant way until Buckminster published Griesbach in 1809.[39]

BUCKMINSTER AND EUROPEAN TEXTUAL SCHOLARSHIP

Though Americans were behind their European counterparts in the historical study of the Bible, some desired greater rigor in this area. In 1799,

the scholarly Boston merchant Samuel Dexter bequeathed his considerable fortune to establish a lectureship at Harvard to examine the Bible rigorously, in part because he was concerned about skepticism.[40] As he stated the matter in his will, "revelation is rejected because some of the historical, doctrinal, or perceptive parts of the holy scriptures . . . are misapprehended by unbelievers; the reading of whose writings tends to shake the faith of such as are unable to detect their mistakes." The problem, according to Dexter, was not a matter of faith but proper knowledge and education. He confidently believed "if the Christian religion be but well understood, it cannot fail of convincing every sincere inquirer of its divine authority." Dexter was certain that "difficulties would vanish, were the passages objected to critically and judiciously rendered and explained." He endowed his fund for the purpose of "promoting a critical knowledge of the holy scriptures." Unlike the Dudleian Lectures, endowed in the previous century, which were designed for a general audience, Dexter specified that his lectures be of a more erudite and specialized nature and go beyond the ordinary discussion appropriate for the lay in church meetings.[41] Though Dexter was willing to allow the trustees some latitude in the handling of the endowment after his death, on some principles he was unyielding. He demanded that "the usefulness of explaining idioms, phrases, and figures of speech, which abound in the scriptures; and the usages and customs therein referred to; and of clearing up the difficulties in sacred chronology and geography, should not be adverted to by the managers of the legacy."[42] In 1811, the trustees of the Dexter Endowment chose Rev. Joseph Stevens Buckminster as the first lecturer. Buckminster was a most appropriate choice, for his intellectual pursuits embodied the spirit of Dexter's lectureship.

Buckminster's interest in European biblical studies in part arose from conflicts with his father, which were a microcosm of the bitter theological war in Massachusetts between traditional Calvinists and liberals (later called Unitarians) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[43] Buckminster was raised by a stern and conservative Calvinist father, also named Joseph Buckminster. At age 19, the younger Buckminster abandoned his father's faith and embraced a liberal Arianism. The younger Buckminster concluded that Christ secured man's salvation, but he could not accept Jesus's divinity.[44]

In line with Unitarian tendencies, Joseph Stevens Buckminster, the younger, believed that traditional Calvinists elevated tradition and primitive errors of the past into indisputable religious dogma. Skeptics, believed Buckminster, found such erroneous propositions absurd. He characterized Calvinist adherence to doctrine as the "mummery of unmeaning

ceremonies, the superstition of an enslaved people."[45] Therefore, Christians needed to restore true religion, purified of all the errors that had accrued over the centuries. Thus it would be safe from skeptical attacks. Most importantly, Buckminster, like most Unitarians, believed that religious truth should be based on an objective, rational, and empirical examination of the source of faith: the Bible. He stated in a sermon, "My friends, if we would all first satisfy ourselves of the historical evidence of the gospel facts, and then each for himself carefully study the New Testament, and find his religion there, we should not see so many" sects or errors.[46] Traditional Calvinists, believed Buckminster, instead assumed their theology was correct and conformed (or distorted) their interpretation of the Bible to fit their theology.

Not only must alien tradition be purged from one's interpretation of the Bible, but Buckminster believed that the text itself needed to be restored to its original form. At odds with most European scholars, including Griesbach, Buckminster suggested in his various descriptions of textual criticism that he believed it was possible to restore the original manuscript of the Scriptures. However, Bentley convinced European critics that the original manuscripts lay beyond reach. Buckminster's claim put him eighty years behind European erudition. One can speculate that he may have made this claim to soften the blow and ease the reception of Griesbach's text.[47] But Buckminster was prepared to put forward the claim that the Received Text had been seriously corrupted. In the American context, this was a radical claim. The Calvinists, he believed, refused to consider evidence objectively. Rather, they stubbornly held on to their conclusion. Buckminster was probably not as objective as he claimed. The liberals were opposed to Calvinist doctrines such as depravity and the Trinity. However, their arguments were based on their temperament and their general philosophical outlook. Conveniently for Buckminster and eager Unitarians, European textual criticism called into question the authenticity of some of the verses that traditionally had been used to support the Trinity. The textual criticism defended what the Unitarians were already inclined to believe, and Buckminster was only too pleased to provide the ammunition.

The younger Buckminster began to grow weary of Calvinism as early as his teen years at Harvard College. In 1799, his father feared that his son was demanding too much evidence for revelation, which could lead, the elder Buckminster feared, to skepticism. In a letter, the elder Buckminster reminded his son that Christian revelation was indeed "supported by evidence that has proved satisfactory to some of the greatest and the wisest of our race, who were accustomed not to believe without evidence."

Nonetheless, the elder Buckminster cautioned that such proofs and evidences had limits. He warned against "the fashionable folly of placing reason before revelation." Instead, he advised his son to "let a thus saith the Lord, or a plain Scripture declaration, silence your objections and satisfy the craving of your mind,—and 'Where you can't unriddle, learn to trust.' "[48] The younger Buckminster would not agree with his father.

If the younger Buckminster's primary image of Calvinism was based on his father, as his sister Eliza Buckminster Lee suggested, the budding textual scholar may have had some grounds to be frustrated. Nathan Parker, in his funeral sermon for the elder Buckminster, described the deceased's mind as poetical rather than scientific or systematic. Parker remembered of the deceased Buckminster, "His mind was not accustomed to the regular management of argumentative discourse. It was impatient of the forms of close investigation and systematic reasoning."[49] Similarly, Eliza described her father as a devoted pastor but certainly no scholar. She wrote of him, "He certainly did not pursue any critical or biblical studies, except in the common version of the English Bible." She went on to write that he "could not be called a student, in any sense of the word, except so far as writing sermons requires study." His considerable pastoral duties precluded any opportunity "for critical researches or learned investigation." In a letter to Eliza, the elder Buckminster deprecated "the pride of science and the wrangling of scholars," and he avowed that the English Bible was "sufficient for all purposes of the knowledge of God."[50] As the younger Buckminster was coming of age, he found his father's beliefs increasingly unsatisfying.[51]

After the younger Buckminster graduated from Harvard at the age of 16 in 1800, he set about a rigorous plan of theological reading. The bulk of his reading was made up of latitudinarian authors, and many of the works concerned biblical interpretation. His reading list included Priestley's *Harmonies of the Gospels* and *Corruptions of Christianity*, Grotius's *Veritate*, Butler's *Analogy*, Newton's work on the prophets, Locke's *Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of Paul*, David Hartley, and the *Monthly Review*.[52]

A letter written in March 1801 to the Rev. Joshua Bates, friend and later president of Middlebury College, suggests part of his motivation for his wide and intense reading during this period. Buckminster described an unsent letter that was more of a treatise than a personal correspondence. In the unsent "*ingens opus*" (or massive work) Buckminster summarized arguments used to confute Hume's assertion of the impossibility of proving miracles by testimony. Buckminster added, "I had begun it as much for my own satisfaction as for your perusal."[53] Dissatisfied with

the general level of intellectual sophistication he found among most pastors in New England, he tried to educate himself: "The age calls loudly for able defenders of Christianity. The wild boar threatens to tear down the hedges of our vineyard, and the laborers are ignorant and inactive; they know not how to use their tools for the culture of the vine or the defence of the vineyard."[54] The "ignorant and inactive" laborers referred to the orthodox Calvinists. When he said, "There is a diffusion of information widely and thinly spread . . . Our scholars are often employed in loose and undirected studies. They . . . lose their time in superficial and unconnected inquiries," he possibly had his father, or conservative Calvinists like him, in mind.[55] He believed the Calvinists were ignorant of or refused to take seriously the latest theological advances. Not only were they in error, but their beliefs made the church vulnerable to the attacks of skeptics or "the wild boars." According to the young Buckminster, pastors neglected scholarly theological pursuits. He continued,

> I hope, my friend, when the husbandman cometh and asketh for the fruit, we may all be able to produce some of the richest clusters. When I think of the duties and opportunities of a minister of the Gospel, the mark to which they should press forward seems much more elevated than the attainments of many of our clergymen would lead one to expect. Let us endeavor, my friend, to magnify our office, that it may, by the blessing of Heaven, prove at least a barrier to that inundation of infidelity on one side and enthusiasm on the other, which seems to be sweeping away all that we hold valuable.[56]

Years later, he repeated these sentiments in an address to the Phi Beta Kappa Society. The ultimate purpose of scholarship was the service of the church by defending it against skepticism, fanaticism, and error.[57]

Typical of Unitarians, Buckminster claimed he rejected Calvinism because he wanted a faith built on evidence and reason. He believed that Calvinists had allowed their inherited theological traditions to cloud their reason.[58] Furthermore, he rejected internal or intuitive evidences. Calvinist pastors, he argued, used their piety as an excuse for their lack of erudition. Empirical evidence, not spiritual experience, must be the foundation of belief. He cautioned that spiritual intuitions were "beyond the reach of ordinary minds; but as you offer no external testimony in support of your imagined consciousness, you must not expect to impart your confidence, however just it may be, to those who have not been favoured with like illumination, and perhaps you will not avoid the imputation of enthusiasm."[59] Buckminster claimed that he had "the peculiar advantage . . . of not being bound by a previous system of established dogma."[60]

Like most Unitarians, he believed that Calvinists had imported creeds, traditions, and dogmatic systems into their interpretation of Scriptures that were alien to the intentions of the biblical writers. Buckminster, instead, was determined to forge a faith built on evidence and reason. He wrote, "The catalogue of American divines is not crowded with philologers and criticks, with scholars versed in the sacred idiom, and provided with the furniture of sacred science; but we discover in the village and hamlets of New-England scholastic theologues, hair splitting metaphysians, longbreath controversialists, pamphleteers, and publishers of single sermons."[61] The historical examination of the text of the Scripture, Buckminster believed, free from all theological presuppositions, would establish true Christianity.

With this purpose in mind, the younger Buckminster set out to elevate the intellectual development of Boston's clergy. He immersed himself in European biblical scholarship, which was unknown to most Americans. In 1804, he became the pastor of the cosmopolitan and influential Brattle Street church in Boston, and he wove his learning into his sermons. The Anthology Society invited him to join their ranks. As a member, he conversed and dined with the most educated and cosmopolitan men in the Boston area and wrote for the *Monthly Anthology*, a literary publication for liberal highbrow intellectuals.[62]

Hoping to cure himself from the epilepsy from which he suffered, Buckminster toured Europe from 1806 to 1807 and amassed a three-thousand-volume theological library that became one of the greatest in America. His library was often frequented by other intellectuals of New England. The Rev. Dr. John Pierce of Brookline wrote of Buckminster's new library, "His study became the resort of the first scholars among us; and his company was equally sought by people of fashion, of literature, and of religion."[63] The trip did not cure his illness, but it enabled him to continue his quest to examine the Bible, free from what he considered to be narrow doctrinal constraints.

Buckminster's Review of Thomson's Septuagint

Buckminster was not the only American trying to advance biblical study in America, but he was uncommonly erudite and au courant with the advances in European scholarship. In 1808, Charles Thomson (1729–1824), former secretary of the Continental Congress, also attempted to advance the study of the Bible in America by publishing the first English translation of the Septuagint.[64] However, his efforts were by Buckminster's evaluation a spectacular scholarly flop. Thomson was an unlikely biblical translator, for he was neither a pastor nor a college professor. As

such, he was ill-prepared for his scholarly venture. An ambitious statesman for most of his adult life, he was devastated when he lost his position and was forced into retirement. He sought to memorialize his name by defending biblical revelation against skepticism. In 1789, at the age of sixty, he devoted himself to translating the Bible from the "original" Greek into English. Thomson believed a translation of the Septuagint (or LXX) could strengthen arguments for the Bible's authenticity and reliability and would help defend the authenticity of Jesus's claims. Because it was older than many of the Hebrew manuscripts used to translate the Old Testament and it was the text the Apostles used when quoting from the Old Testament, Thomson believed it was less likely to have historical errors and corruptions.[65] He conceded that sacred texts could become corrupted over time and ancient manuscripts were preferable.[66]

Buckminster reviewed Thomson's translation in the *Monthly Anthology* and used the opportunity to express his disdain for orthodoxy's uncritical and superstitious devotion to the Bible. Calvinists, Buckminster asserted, naively accepted the present version of the Bible as a flawless copy of the manuscript written by the inspired writers. Furthermore, they were generally uninterested in the critical biblical scholarship that examined the accuracy of the transmission of the text. According to Buckminster, most Christians believed that God had miraculously preserved and semi-inspired the process of transmission and copying. In ignorance, wrote Buckminster, they even extended this notion to the Septuagint.[67]

In his review of the Septuagint, Buckminster explained the history of the document. The Septuagint was the most ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. He sought to debunk the commonly believed "fable" that in the third century BC, Ptolemy Philadelphus, the Hellenistic king of Egypt, wanting a Greek version of the laws of Moses, procured 70 or 72 Jewish elders to come to Egypt and translate the Hebrew Scriptures. Although the translators worked alone in isolated cells, they produced identical manuscripts. Buckminster dismissed this as myth with an anti-Jewish wave of his hand that was typical of his day: "The Christians, who have *always been the dupes* of Rabbinical fables, believed this Jewish fiction, and for many ages considered the version thus made as inspired, and not less authentick than the Hebrew original." Buckminster believed that many Christians "absurdly retained" this account of a miracle because it helped them maintain their belief that God not only inspired the original writers of the Scriptures but also supernaturally preserved the transmission of Holy Writ.[68]

As a corrective, Buckminster related the long and convoluted history of the Septuagint in order to demolish any notion that the Septuagint

was a semi-inspired document. The text itself evidenced that the Septuagint in all likelihood was translated over the course of several centuries by different writers. He wrote, "This is incontestably evident from the great diversity of style, different degrees of accuracy, and various modes of translating the same words, which are discoverable in the different books."[69] Furthermore, passages found in the Hebrew text were often missing in the Greek due possibly to skipped pages. Origen attempted to examine the various copies and restore the document in the original form in what has become called the Hexapla. Unfortunately, his work was lost. No one had yet performed a careful and critical study of the variant manuscripts or families of the present editions. Incidentally, modern scholars agree with Buckminster's assessment.[70]

Anyone who compares the various editions of the LXX will see "how unsettled is the text of the Septuagint," wrote Buckminster. He went on to say, "No one but a consummate critick would be able to form a just text, and make many passages of it intelligible in English, without better aids than those we have at present."[71] Clearly, Buckminster believed that Thomson was not a "consummate critick." He criticized Thomson for neglecting to provide an introduction as the great European biblical critics had done in their critical editions of the Bible. The introductions to the critical editions of the Bible from the Europeans scholars were often extremely learned, dense, and more interesting than the text themselves. There they discussed the methods of weighing the relative merits of variant texts, the history of the families of manuscript copies, and their methods of interpretation. Thomson simply printed the translation without any introduction or explanation, as if to suggest that the Septuagint simply presented itself to the reader without any need for interpretation or any suggestion that it was one version among several.

Because Thomson provided no critical apparatus, or as Buckminster colorfully put it, sent "his work abroad in a state of such absolute nudity," the task of evaluating the quality of the work for any scholarly contribution was difficult. Buckminster complained, "He has not given us even a hint, that he was aware of the differences of editions." Unlike European textual critics such as Wettstein or Griesbach, Thomson made no effort to classify or compare the various differing manuscripts to arrive at the most accurate version. Buckminster discovered to his "mortification" that Thomson exclusively consulted only one version of the LXX. To make matters worse, he relied on the London edition of 1653, an edition that had been well known in the learned community to be "a very incorrect copy of the Roman exemplar, and . . . grossly spurious and interpolated." Its Greek was "at best, barbarous." His uncritical adherence to this single

inferior version resulted in translations Buckminster considered to be "sufficiently absurd."[72]

As if to suggest which sources Thomson should have consulted and illustrate how far the critical study of the Septuagint had already advanced, Buckminster briefly reviewed the works of several European scholars. He noted that in England, Robert Holmes, professor of poetry at Oxford, canon of Christ Church, and dean of Winchester, had been in the process of collecting various texts of the Septuagint in order to untangle the discrepancies and produce a critical edition. He unfortunately died before he could complete his labors.[73] Buckminster also cited John Ernest Grabe, who argued that the Jews may have willfully corrupted the Septuagint because Christians were using it as a source to prove the prophetic predictions of Christ.[74] Buckminster also mentioned Herbert Marsh, who suspected that Christians altered the Septuagint over the centuries to more closely resemble the New Testament. Thomas Randolph, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, compared the New Testament quotations of the Old and noted that the Septuagint that the New Testament writers did use was different from the present text.[75] Henry Owen, who had a wider array of variant manuscripts of the Septuagint than Randolph, made extensive comparisons and concluded the vast majority of quotations came from some version of the Septuagint.[76] This is all to say, the Septuagint was not a flawless text. Buckminster showed that it had a long and convoluted history and European scholars were hard at work critically examining the text. Buckminster demonstrated in his review the complexity of the problem and showed readers the work with which Thomson would have to engage if he wanted to make a serious contribution to scholarly discussion. Buckminster concluded, "These remarks tend to show the shortsightedness of those who deprecate the attention paid to sacred criticism; and the imprudence of maintaining the absolute *verbal integrity of the Hebrew, Greek, or English bibles as they now stand*. Nothing but the so much calumniated labours of collators, editors, translators and criticks, can place the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in a proper light."[77] Buckminster concluded that Thomson's diligence and good intentions were not sufficient to overcome the deficits.

Ignorance of better texts and tools was the least of Thomson's problems. Theology was a far more serious matter. For Buckminster, Thomson's translation served as a prime example of the barriers that traditional faith created for the progress of scholarship and search for truth. Buckminster believed dogmatic adherence to theology shackled the mind. Rather than allowing history, the text, and evidence to lead to their natural conclusions, Thomson contorted and deformed the evidence to

fit into theologically predetermined conclusions, believed Buckminster. Because Thomson believed the Septuagint was flawless and all of it was the inspired word of God, Buckminster noted that he even attempted to harmonize typographical errors in the text of the London edition by making some painfully contorted translations. Such efforts could have been easily avoided had Thomson simply consulted a better text or been aware that he was dealing with a printing error. There was little excuse for such sloppy scholarship, believed Buckminster, because better versions of the Septuagint were easily available in America.[78]

Buckminster also noted that Thomson "unjustifiably disguised the evident sense of the Greek." At times, he rendered distorted translations to preserve theological orthodoxy. For example, 2 Samuel 24:1 stated that God moved David to take a census and David sinned in doing so. This verse disturbingly implied that God moved David to sin. Thomson rendered a bizarre translation that ascribed the influence not to God but to a wholly invented anonymous individual: "This arose from a mistaken notion of the impropriety of directly ascribing this act to the suggestion of God, which in another place (1 Chron. 21.) is ascribed to Satan or an adversary." Buckminster concluded with his axiomatic principle, "These theological difficulties should have no weight in the mind of a translator."[79] Such ignorance or blatant disregard of the scholarly conventions and European advances surely irritatingly reminded Buckminster of an older and naïve understanding of the Bible that he associated with his father and other Calvinists. In the younger Buckminster's mind, his father believed the Bible was a pristine, infallible text that was delivered by God directly to the modern reader. Therefore, it did not require any rigorous historical and critical examination.

Buckminster did not want merely to discuss narrow and purely academic issues of translation and scholarship. He used his review to address broader issues that concerned all Christians. He asserted that textual criticism was important to all Christians. The "unlearned Christian must be persuaded that this subject is not unworthy of the attention of any man who would know the foundations of his faith." Most uninformed Christians, Buckminster regretted, believed that the Received Text of the Scriptures was a flawless representation of the original, inspired writings. Furthermore, most Christians were unnecessarily narrowly dogmatic. Rather than being guided by the text or scholarly examination, they allowed their beliefs to determine their interpretation. Regarding what he considered to be this superstitious view, Buckminster wrote, "Nothing can more satisfactorily illustrate the extreme folly of a bigotted adherence to the Received text and version of the Scriptures, and of that horrour of

alteration which has been of late so industriously propagated among us, than the study of the Septuagint."[80]

An examination of the English translation of the Septuagint could erode the notion that the present Bible was a pristine text. He pointed out to his readers that often, when the New Testament quotes from the Old, the respective Old Testament passages cannot be found in the Bibles most people use. However, the complete quoted passages can generally be found in the Septuagint. The scholarly community widely accepted that the Old Testament Scriptures that the New Testament authors used were a version of the Septuagint. After examining the Septuagint, the Christian "will now suspect perhaps for the first time that our Saviour and the apostles, whom he will allow to have had a due reverence for the word of God, did not use King James's Bible."[81] If there were discrepancies between various versions of the Bible, the Christians would be obliged to conclude that "if our Saviour's bible was the true one, his own cannot be so scrupulously correct." If that were the case, reasoned Buckminster, Christians should not condemn textual scholars who questioned the accuracy of transmissions. The essentials of the faith were not affected by the questionable and doubtful readings. However, Buckminster added, "perhaps he will be compelled to make much fewer essentials than he has heretofore done." Buckminster suggested that since the biblical text was at places less than entirely certain, perhaps Christians should be more humble and less narrowly dogmatic. The "grand facts" of faith were unaffected by the discrepancies. Therefore, suggested Buckminster, Christians should focus on these broad "essential doctrines." Of course Buckminster determined what was "essential" based on his own theological leanings.

Though Buckminster attempted to write with a polite tone, he made it quite clear that Thomson's translation typified the amateurish and uninformed understanding of the Bible that he was trying to move Americans beyond. Working in relative isolation, and detached from European biblical scholarship, Thomson's efforts were characterized by naïve piety rather than scholarly rigor. Buckminster lamented that Thomson did not benefit from the century of scholarship that could have advanced his work. Despite Thomson's twenty years of labor, his translation was so out of touch with recent discoveries, it would make no contribution to the continuing work of textual criticism in Europe. He concluded, "In considering the state of the version which Mr. Thomson has translated, we have almost lost sight of his labours. Indeed we have been continually dispirited by the thought, that in the present state of the Septuagint he has taken great pains to little purpose."[82] But Buckminster was not satisfied merely to point out Americans' inferiority in comparison to their

European cousins. He wanted to make a contribution and encourage his countrymen to enter the mature world of learning.

AN AMERICAN GRIESBACH

Around the same time that he was reviewing Thomson's work, Buckminster was also preparing the American edition of Griesbach's New Testament. He made clear in his review of Thomson that texts changed and were corrupted over time. Though Christians might have had a great deal of respect for the Septuagint, ultimately, there was only one Bible, and it and only it was inspired. However, he did not actually take a shot at the *Textus Receptus*, though he was coming awfully close. When Buckminster and the Harvard Corporation published Griesbach's Greek New Testament in 1809, he made it clear that he believed that the Bible as it stood was altered from the original. He brought the massive weight of the most advanced and radical European textual scholarship to demonstrate that the Received Text was based on manuscripts that had been adulterated over the centuries.

The publication of the American edition was a remarkable event. It was the first critical edition of the Greek New Testament ever published in America. Its American publication also signaled the growing maturity of American scholarship. Buckminster brimmed with pride as he noted that Harvard published an American edition before scholars in England could do so. Buckminster contributed and advanced the scholarly venture by carefully editing and correcting errors that marred the German edition. The publication was, according to Buckminster, an "event not only important to the theological learning of the country, but infinitely honourable" to Harvard.[83]

Only by studying the text objectively, free from dogma, could one begin to restore the original autographs. Given Buckminster's aversion to theological loyalties guiding the analysis and interpretation of the text, it is not hard to imagine why Buckminster would become so enamored of Griesbach. Describing his scholarly methods Griesbach wrote, "First the philologian and exegete must speak; after the completion of his work, then the theologian and philosopher comes."[84] Griesbach elevated philology over theology. In him, Buckminster found a kindred spirit.

Buckminster anticipated that Calvinists would be deeply resistant to any claim that the *Textus Receptus* had been corrupted over time. In his review of Griesbach's New Testament, he tried to goad them and point out their own inconsistencies in resisting textual criticism. He wrote, "It has always struck us with astonishment that many of those who may maintain the most rigid notions of inspiration, and exclaim

most vehemently against the glosses, evasions, and forced interpretations of hereticks, should have discovered so little solicitude to ascertain the true text even of the New Testament, and have felt no more dread than they seem to have done of adding to the word of God."[85] In an attempt to disarm and persuade resistant Christians to be open to the changes to the Received Text by Griesbach, Buckminster argued that readers of classical literature would prefer a critical edition of Homer or Virgil over an inferior copy. Buckminster asked, "Is it of less importance that the word of God should be studied in its most correct state?" Just as he had done with the mythical history of the Septuagint, Buckminster pulled the curtain and exposed the long and often haphazard history of the venerated Received Text. He discussed, for example, Erasmus's use of inferior manuscripts. He wrote that if pious people only knew the history of their Bible, they would discover that "they are defending as the precise language of inspiration, a text, which was given us by two printers of Leyden [Elzevirs], in the infancy of sacred criticism."[86] One should honor God by utilizing the best made text available by the most recent and advanced science, not one raised on an altar by the accidents of history.

Attacking the Received Text was troubling enough. However, Buckminster proceeded to use Griesbach to undermine biblical support for the Trinity. Buckminster assured his readers that though the Bible had indeed been altered over the centuries, the "essentials" of the Christian faith remained "intact." The specific "details" and minutiae of some theology might be questionable because of textual corruptions, but these were not important. In fact, argued Buckminster, Christians should be less dogmatic about such "narrow" points now that they could clearly see that the biblical support for some issues was questionable. Buckminster in particular pointed to three verses that were commonly used as proof of the divinity of Christ. He brought attention to the evidence, marshaled by Griesbach, that the authenticity of these particular verses was questionable. He called ignorant any Christian who would use 1 John 5:7, Acts 20:28, and 1 Timothy 3:16 as a proof of the Trinity when Griesbach had shown that the authenticity of these verses was highly dubious. Griesbach concluded that readings that supported the Trinity were found only in later manuscripts. These verses "ought to be no more quoted in their present form as proof passages, by any honest and well instructed theologian."[87] As a Unitarian, Buckminster was not at all troubled by these conclusions. In fact, he was pleased and gratified by such conclusions for they affirmed his theological convictions. (Buckminster would claim that he had no theological loyalties and that he was only led by the evidence.)

Of course conservative Trinitarians were not going to take lightly such an attack on the foundations of their faith. *The Panoplist*, a conservative Trinitarian Congregationalist publication, took up the banner in the fight against Griesbach and Buckminster in a series of articles.[88] Jedidiah Morse, a fiercely conservative and combative Trinitarian Calvinist, began *The Panoplist* in 1805 with the explicit purpose of combating liberal Unitarian influences. In the inaugural issue, the editors made clear that *The Panoplist* was created specifically to be an "antidote" to the heretical "poison" spewed by the liberal and Unitarian *Monthly Anthology*, which began publication the previous year. In the first issue, the conservative magazine clearly stated its adherence to Reformed theology. It would not publish anything that would not support evangelical "truth." The editors declared open war against liberal Unitarians who were out to "overthrow . . . the Christian religion."[89] Buckminster's claims could not go unanswered.

The Panoplist and orthodox Christians in general were unprepared for the challenge of the mountain of erudition coming from Griesbach. From the inaugural issue in 1806 to the first response to Buckminster in 1811, the periodical did not address textual criticism.[90] The *Panoplist* editors of course never hesitated to criticize Unitarians for their lack of piety and heterodoxy, but never did they feel the need to defend the integrity of the Received Text against the textual critics. There were a few minor exceptions. *The Panoplist* printed a historical survey of religious controversies in which the writer of the article made an oblique and passing reference to German scholars who used historical, cultural, and linguistic distance to explain away important passages of the Bible. This learned article, however, was reprinted from the *Religious Monitor*, published in Edinburgh, Scotland.[91]

However, one cannot assume that the editors and writers of *The Panoplist* and scholarly Americans were wholly ignorant of European advances in textual criticism. Buckminster was certainly rare, but not unique. William Bentley (1759–1819), the remarkably learned pastor of Salem, Massachusetts, was one of the most erudite men living in the United States. He mastered 21 languages (including German, French, Dutch, Spanish, Slovenian, Latin, Greek, Arabic, and Persian) and amassed a personal library of approximately 4,000 books. Only Thomas Jefferson had a larger library. Through his correspondence with the German scholar Christopher Ebeling, Bentley became steeped in European scholarship.

Though Bentley was interested in a wide variety of subjects such as history and the natural sciences, he spent considerable time studying biblical criticism and went so far as to begin his own translation of the Bible in an interleaved copy of the Standard Version, making emendations in

accordance with his own knowledge of Hebrew and of recent biblical studies. His library was well equipped for the task. It included books such as the Leipzig 1769 edition of the remains of Origen's *Hexapla*, Walton's Polyglot, Alexander Geddes's critical translation of the Bible, and works by Johann Gottfried Eichhorn and Benjamin Kennicott.[92] He also owned Grotius's *Annotationes*. Given his wide reading in European learning, in all probability, he would have had at least some secondhand knowledge of Griesbach.[93]

Bentley was not a leader in this matter, but he was a well-established pastor and it would seem impossible that he did not share his insights and knowledge with learned friends and acquaintances.[94] Surely in the small and tight-knit community of New England intellectual elites, ideas would have been exchanged. Through men like Bentley, intellectuals would have been aware of the rumblings in Europe.

But Bentley and his library were exceptional. There were other avenues to such ideas as well in America. For example, in 1773, Harvard College published a select catalogue of books that were frequently used by the undergraduates. This list included works by John David Michaelis, Robert Lowth, and Benjamin Kennicott. (The significance of Michaelis and Lowth are discussed in the following chapter.) Kennicott's *State of the Printed Hebrew Text of the Old Testament* (1753 and 1759), which Harvard possessed, attempted to combat the popular conception of the "absolute integrity" of the received Hebrew text. Kennicott argued, as did Richard Bentley with the New Testament, that original manuscripts had been edited in antiquity and were beyond recovery.[95] Thus, even by 1773, Americans *could* have been familiar with textual criticism. The average Harvard student, if he read such works at all, probably did not fully absorb these ideas. But presumably some of the best, brightest, and most curious minds in America could have studied these issues.

It is difficult to ascertain to what extent Americans were familiar with textual criticism at the turn of the century. However, there are some intriguing hints. For example, in the *City Gazette* of Charleston, South Carolina, a pseudonymous letter to the editor, dated September 22, 1797, praised the publication of Griesbach's New Testament in Europe. The author correctly contextualizes his work with Mill, Wettstein, Michaelis, and Marsh. At least one soul reading a South Carolina newspaper kept up with European textual criticism. Remarkably, he wrote his letter over a decade before Buckminster published the American version.[96]

When *The Panoplist* responded to Buckminster, the magazine provided a surprisingly informed article. The anonymous *Panoplist* writer attacked Buckminster with the opening statement: "If there be, in our

country, any who oppose every effort to ascertain and establish, by sound criticism, the genuine text of the Old or New Testament, we do not wish, nor intend, to be ranked with them."[97] The author went on at length to support the general mission of textual criticism and expressed his hopes that Americans would continue to delve into the field. Furthermore, he emphasized that *The Panoplist* in no way sought to hinder the progress of biblical criticism.

The writer also expressed sympathy for the "many honest and pious men" who were "opposed to any changes in the commonly Received Text of our Bible." He assured his readers that if only those sensitive souls understood "sound and genuine criticism" their fears would be relieved. However, the writer was opposed to those individuals, motivated by malicious intent, who wanted to destroy the faith of the orthodox by overturning established doctrines:

> It appears to us, that the disingenuousness of some, who pretend to a knowledge of criticism . . . are ever dabbling with it . . . to support a favorite scheme of theology, or to display their own extensive erudition . . . Some text of Scripture, which many well meaning persons had, without sufficient examination, made the symbol and the support of their faith, respecting some important doctrine of their religion, has, on examination, been found to be of doubtful or of insufficient authority. This text has been seized by those who are ready and very desirous to find something which may annoy orthodoxy, and has been held up to public contempt or execration, as a gross interpolation, and perversion of the sacred oracles; while the doctrine, which it seemed to support, has been also represented as vanishing with it, at the magic touch of modern manuscript-mongers and biblical critics.[98]

The *Panoplist* writer was measured in his evaluation. He conceded that the careful examination of manuscripts had demonstrated that the Received Text required correction and that many Christians had come to trust in particular verses of the Bible for assurance of certain doctrines and some of these verses were possibly of dubious origins. However, it was inappropriate to conclude that these verses needed to be thrown out. The matter was still debatable. Furthermore, other verses still supported these key doctrines. Therefore, argued the *Panoplist* writer, Buckminster was overreaching the claims of criticism when he wrote that the doctrine of the Trinity was indefensible.

The writer then proceeded to take issue with the anti-Trinitarian aspect of Buckminster's summary of Griesbach. The *Panoplist* writer acknowledged that there was evidence against the authenticity of 1 John 5:7,

Acts 20:28, and 1 Timothy 3:16, but there was not enough evidence to make a certain judgment or to eliminate the belief in the Trinity. For support, the writer noted that Griesbach himself was an ardent Trinitarian and Griesbach himself insisted that based on the textual evidence, the divinity of Christ "can not be called into question" and that "it can never be overturned by the daring attacks of critics and interpreters."[99] The rest of the essay attempted to counter the anti-Trinitarian reading of the three verses by citing various ancient manuscripts, church fathers, and other learned European biblical critics who supported Trinitarian readings of the text. The author complained, "We wish access, and to satisfy us at all, we must have access to the authorities by which Griesbach himself professes to regulate his opinions," thus affirming the venture of textual criticism if not Buckminster's particular conclusions.[100] The *Panoplist* article accepted the basic premise of Griesbach's method and attempted to dispute some of the conclusions based on the principles of textual criticism. More important, the journal did not attempt to defend its interpretation on theological grounds. At least rhetorically, the writer did not presuppose a conclusion granted by spiritual insights. Rather, he appeared to be guided by evidence and method. *The Panoplist*, in essence, asserted that Buckminster allowed his Unitarian theology to guide his interpretation of Griesbach.

Buckminster countered by arguing that the author of *The Panoplist* article was driven, not by an objective examination of the evidence as he claimed, but by his own theological agenda. He posited that the *Panoplist* author's claims that he had to reserve judgment until he could examine the text himself were simply a ruse. Though *The Panoplist* could accumulate a list of evidences supporting the Trinitarian readings, they were of an inferior value. Buckminster wrote, "If such few, dubious, suspicious, and recent testimonies, and arguments so light, may suffice to demonstrate the genuineness of any reading, there would be no criterion at all remaining of true and false in criticism, and the whole text of the New Testament would be altogether doubtful and uncertain."[101] Buckminster also argued that because Griesbach was a devout Trinitarian, his lack of questioning of the particular verses granted greater weight to his dedication to evidence.

More damningly, Buckminster pointed out that the writer of *The Panoplist* article was in no way qualified to critique or examine the work of Griesbach, as he claims to want to do. Buckminster admitted that he was initially surprised and impressed by the apparent level of erudition of the *Panoplist* writer. Though Buckminster disputed his conclusions, he certainly had a command of a vast array of European sources.

Buckminster later discovered that the vast majority of the *Panoplist* article was in large part copied, without attribution, from the English periodical *The Christian Observer*. To make matters worse, Buckminster pointed out that the *Panoplist* writer, in copying, did his own share of interpolation and corruption. Where *The Christian Observer* was far more cautious and measured in its pronouncements, *The Panoplist* altered some of the words of *The Christian Observer* to make decided and certain claims. To prove his point, Buckminster printed sections of *The Panoplist* and *The Christian Observer* in parallel columns, like a polyglot Bible, to show how *The Panoplist* strategically altered the sense of the text of *The Christian Observer* for its own ends.[102] Buckminster was right in pointing out that the conservative Calvinist writers of *The Panoplist* were not deeply erudite on the subject. However, they immediately knew which European journal articles to copy. This suggests that they were at least reading accounts of European scholarship.

The publishing skirmishes over Griesbach continued as each side launched a series of attacks and counterattacks. In 1808, English Unitarian Thomas Belsham published an "Improved Version" of the New Testament. It was a translation heavily dependent on Griesbach's work. An American edition was published in 1809.[103] A writer for *The Panoplist* accused the editors of the "Improved Version" of the Bible of intentionally declaring Trinitarian passages as later interpolations. In 1813, *The General Repository and Review* predictably shot back and defended the publication. (*The General Repository* was in some sense a successor to *The Monthly Anthology*. They both spoke for the liberal Congregationalists. However, *The General Repository* was more theologically technical and at times more polemical than *The Monthly Anthology*.) *The Panoplist*, in its critique of both Buckminster and the "Improved Version," did not condemn Griesbach or textual criticism. The vast majority of the articles acknowledged textual corruptions and accepted most of Griesbach's corrections. They repeatedly emphasized that the errors had almost no effect on established belief. Importantly, the conservative *Panoplist* accepted the principle that the text had been corrupted and textual criticism was a necessary corrective.[104] Clearly, over the years, the writers of the *Panoplist* acquired an acquaintance with European biblical scholarship, albeit a superficial one. It was enough to make them open to Greisbach's methods but not to his theological conclusions.

Conclusion

In 1810, in an article in the *Monthly Anthology*, Samuel Thacher accused the Calvinists of being driven by theological loyalties rather than a

devotion to the Bible and the objective principles of textual examination. Calvinists, he argued, insisted on following a clearly flawed text. They had no interest in investigating "whether our present text is uncorrupt . . . and [if] our versions [are] a faithful representation of the original."[105] This accusation was not entirely true. Some, like the writer for *The Panoplist*, were interested, though they were clearly far behind the European scholarship. However, the *Panoplist* writer was honest when he wrote in 1811 that most conservative Christians were "unacquainted with the true nature of critical labors, [and] are, from feelings which it is impossible not to respect, strongly opposed to any changes in the commonly Received Text of our Bible."[106]

Thomas Clap, seven decades earlier, rejected the suggestion that the Received Text had been corrupted. Clap's views were slightly more advanced than those of John Owen, who asserted that God had preserved the transmission of the texts over the centuries. Clap was at least willing to accept the possibility that the text had been corrupted, though he quickly followed that admission with the assertion that he saw no such evidence. That he would ever admit the plausibility of any amount of evidence is doubtful.

By the early nineteenth century, some conservative Calvinists could no longer maintain such dogmatic views. The writers of the articles attacking Griesbach, Buckminster, and the "Improved Version" conceded the principles of textual criticism and that the text had been corrupted. Rather than defending a pristine Received Text, they were arguing over which text and words had been corrupted. The Calvinist *Panoplist* and Unitarian *Monthly Anthology* and *General Repository* in arguing their points both claimed to be guided by the objective principles of textual criticism rather than by theological loyalties. Furthermore, by 1811, *The Panoplist*, like the Unitarian publications, did not make explicit claims of God's providence to defend the integrity of the text. Historical evidence, *The Panoplist* trusted, would affirm that the essentials of their doctrine were not corrupted. Buckminster once argued that a pristine Received Text would "require a perpetual miracle to preserve . . . the text from corruption, or the pen of every translator from mistakes."[107] The writers of the conservative *Panoplist* could no longer, at least not explicitly, resort to miracles to establish its points. They too needed to bring their claims to the bar of history.

Decades later, in 1834, the conservative Calvinist Edward Robinson looked back at the controversy regarding the textual corruption of the manuscripts of the New Testament. In retrospect, he thought that those who believed that God preserved the transcribers from error appeared

"amusing" and "absurd." He concluded, "Time and the power of indisputable facts have, at length settled many of these questions; and no one any longer feels alarm at the thousands of various readings in the Bible."[108] As Robinson noted, there was no dramatic moment when this radical shift occurred among the conservatives. Rather, the orthodox seemed to have gradually accepted textual criticism. Repeated exposure blunted the radical edge of claims that were once considered heretical. Eventually, the orthodox adapted and domesticated such tools for their own purposes. They were forced to alter their conception of the Bible to preserve a plausible faith. In the early nineteenth century, conservative Christians were making concessions regarding the status of Holy Writ that their parents could never have imagined.

Although the notion that the inspired text itself had a history and could be corrupted in the process of transmission was profoundly troubling, the conservative writers of *The Panoplist* could accept aspects of textual criticism. The historical evidence and argumentation were too persuasive to be denied. The increasingly sophisticated historical examinations of the text of the Scriptures undermined the traditional understanding of the book as flawless and transcendent revelation, immune from the corruptions of history that affected ordinary ancient books. Conservative Christians could still maintain that the Bible was a transcendent book, unlike ordinary ancient texts, but by the nineteenth century, it seemed a bit more vulnerable.

One reason the orthodox conceded the argument was that for decades, history had been one of the strongest weapons in the arsenal of the Christians against the deists and skeptics. In eighteenth-century America, liberals, Calvinists, and skeptics all grew to trust history as an independent arbiter of truth. All sides often turned to the evidence of history to assert their points. Skeptics believed that history could reveal the contradictions and flaws of the Bible. Christians, in turn, defended revelation using history. Calvinist thinkers generally believed a full and genuine understanding of the Scriptures ultimately depended on some form of divine illumination. Some Christian apologists believed that the facts of history could testify to the authenticity of Scripture, though the lack of divine illumination limited the full spiritual comprehension of the Bible. So great was their trust in history and its confirmatory powers that some Christian apologists argued that the Gospels were in all probability true because the writers fit the qualifications of credible historical witnesses. Buckminster told his congregation, "Faith that is not founded on testimony is no longer faith." Christian faith did not require a special faculty.

Rather, believing in the Gospels is analogous to trusting in the testimony of history and natural science.[109]

The eighteenth-century Christian apologists' trust in history would come back to haunt them in the nineteenth century. In the next century, historical criticism would arrive in America but in a new, different, and far more corrosive form. The orthodox eventually accepted that historical evidence demonstrated that the text of the Bible had been altered. However, European scholars such as Johann Gottfried Eichhorn went far beyond challenging the accuracy of the transmission of the texts. He questioned the historical factuality of the biblical writers. Eichhorn and others argued that the testimonies of miracles were merely the expressions of primitive modes of thought, turning revelation into myth. For decades, American apologists used history to argue that the Apostles were men of integrity and would not deceive. Eichhorn did not challenge the honesty of the biblical writers. Rather, he made the novel and historical argument that as men of a radically distant alien time and culture, they were being honest, but in their own primitive mode. These claims were far more devastating.

CHAPTER 5

THE HISTORICAL BIBLE

THE UNITARIANS GRAPPLE WITH THE BIBLE'S PAST

AMERICAN PROTESTANTS HAD RECONCILED THEMSELVES TO THE reality that the original autographs of the Bible were lost and the process of transmission had corrupted some of the text. Although this was initially unsettling and disturbing to some of those of a more conservative bent, textual criticism did not lead to the destruction of their Christian faith as some feared. However, the scholarly examination of the history of the texts and transmission of the Bible developed in conjunction with a related and second line of inquiry that had the potential to be far more destructive to traditional American Protestant conception of the authority and uniqueness of the Scriptures. As textual scholars discovered that the Bible had a history, subject to change and corruption, some scholars also examined more closely the historical contexts in which parts of the Bible were composed. They pondered the effect of the culture and environment on the biblical text. European biblical scholars believed that knowledge of the historical context shed light on the original meaning of passages. However, the examination of the circumstances in which the Bible was written led some scholars to a more disturbing and radical conclusion. Some argued that much of the Bible was an expression of a primitive mind and culture and therefore should not be read literally. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the "mythical school of interpretation," principally composed of J. G. Eichhorn, J. P. Gabler, and G. L. Bauer, argued that the biblical texts were an amalgam of history and myth, and they questioned the supernatural elements of the Bible.[1] Textual criticism challenged the integrity of the transmission of the Bible, but Christians could still believe that God supernaturally preserved the essential points of divine revelation. However, the so-called higher criticism treated the substantive content of the Bible as a product of history and challenged

the factual reality of key events. The historical examination of Scripture, which had defended the integrity of the Bible throughout most of the eighteenth century in America, by the early nineteenth century threatened to devastate it.[2]

Just as Joseph Stevens Buckminster introduced Americans to advances in textual criticism, he also attempted to open a window for Americans to see how European scholars were examining the historical context in which the Bible was written. Buckminster was excited and encouraged by these developments for the new light they shed on the biblical authors' intended meaning. He, however, did not accept the more radical conclusions of higher or historical criticism that dismissed the biblical miracles as myth. Andrews Norton (1786–1853), another Boston Unitarian and Buckminster's successor in the Dexter Lectureship, continued to explore European biblical scholarship after Buckminster's death. Like Buckminster, he found much he liked about historical criticism, particularly the ways it could be used as a weapon against Calvinism. Norton lived long enough to see the radical (and in his mind heretical) conclusions of the historical examination of the Bible. Alarmed, Norton attempted to defend what he believed to be the essentials of the Christian faith. Believing history could vindicate the Scriptures, he was not willing to relinquish the tools of history to the hands of the enemy.

Historical Examination of the Bible in Europe

The historical examination of the Scriptures developed alongside the study of classical texts. Scholars developed similar tools and techniques to examine classical Greek and Roman works and the Bible. For example, Bentley studied both classical and biblical philology. Robert Wood, in *An Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer*, painted an image of Homer and classical Greece that was drastically different from the traditional conception. He placed ancient Greeks in their primitive historical context, arguing that Homer was an illiterate primitive living in a crude world.

Wood sent a copy of his book to the Göttingen philologist Johann David Michaelis. Michaelis loaned it to the classical scholar Christian Gottlob Heyne, who praised it in a 1770 review. Heyne also believed that people of the past conceived of the world differently. In their inability to understand the universe, primitive people assigned natural forces to personalities. Lacking science, primitive people created myths to explain their world.[3]

Just as textual scholars took the tools of textual analysis of classical texts and applied them to the Bible, scholars eventually historicized the

Bible as the productions of primitive minds and cultures. Reimagining Homer as a semicivilized primitive was radical and disconcerting. However, applying the same tools of the historical analysis to the sacred Scripture was an entirely different matter. Doing so would imply that the Bible could be treated like any other book, a heresy that made Spinoza anathema. Recall that Spinoza argued that the Bible must be interpreted as the writings of people thinking within the limitations of their cultural circumstances. For example, the miracles recorded in the Pentateuch should not be interpreted as supernatural. Rather, they were natural events, and Jewish custom and idiom tended to ascribe all good things to the agency of God.[4]

Nearly a century later, European biblical scholars gradually eroded the barrier that separated secular and biblical writings. Heyne's student and colleague, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, applied newly developed conceptions of history to his interpretation of the Bible. In 1779, he argued that the first three chapters of Genesis should be understood as a philosophical myth—an expression of a primitive people that was neither inspired nor historical. He also applied the same mythological interpretation to the New Testament. For example, he argued that the appearance of angels at Peter's escape from prison as recorded in Acts 12:3–13 should not be interpreted literally. Peter did not know, according to Eichhorn, how he had been set free. He assumed that God had freed him and that angels were the agents of God's design. This was his natural conclusion, as this was consistent with his Jewish mental world. Thus Eichhorn concluded that his escape was no miracle.[5]

Eichhorn and others were beginning to interpret the Bible with "historicist" tendencies. The terms *historicist* and *historicism* have been used in a variety of ways and there has been little scholarly consensus on their meaning. For the purposes of this book, *historicism* refers to the belief that an ancient text was written in an alien culture and the interpreter must take into account the historical context of the writer. Contemporary dogmatic theologies or philosophies should not be imposed on the interpretation of an ancient text. As was the case with Eichhorn, historicism, when applied to the Bible, did not necessarily but often tended to challenge traditional conceptions of the Christian faith, particularly accounts of the miraculous. For example, Ernst Troeltsch, writing in the early twentieth century, believed that historicism devastated the Christian faith by denying the validity of miracles recorded in the Bible, annihilating conceptions of providence in history, and reducing all religious truth to a state of relativity. The Bible, he believed, did not stand outside the normal course of history. Of course, simply being sensitive to the historical

and cultural context of the biblical writers did not necessarily lead to such radical conclusions. Some, like Norton, contextualized the Bible and still believed it was a supernatural revelation. One could say that there were degrees of historicism.[6]

European Historical Criticism

Buckminster read as much European historical criticism as he could from his side of the Atlantic. Of the numerous writers he read on the matter, he noted that Hugo Grotius, Jean Le Clerc, John Locke, Johann David Michaelis, and Robert Lowth were particularly influential.[7] He incorporated their ideas into his own views on Scripture and disseminated them to the literarily inclined in New England. Just as he spread the knowledge of the textual criticism of the *Textus Receptus* in New England learned circles, he also introduced his countrymen to the historical examination of the Scriptures.

After reading Jean Le Clerc's *Ars Critica* and *Five Letters on Inspiration*, Buckminster wrote, "What a wonderful man was Le Clerc! Learned, to an extent almost unequalled by any who have succeeded him; liberal, perhaps to a fault."[8] The *Ars Critica* was a massive introduction to philology and history in which Le Clerc argued that ancient historical documents must be read skeptically as many were full of anachronism. For example, classical historians often inserted speeches that were inconsistent with the character and culture of the supposed speakers. Furthermore, he proposed that ancient texts must be understood within the historical and cultural context of their writers.[9] Le Clerc's *Ars Critica* dealt with classical histories, but he also believed that the Bible must be interpreted in its historical context as he proposed in his *Letters on Inspiration*. He was profoundly influenced by Spinoza's historical hermeneutic. He wrote that Spinoza's "critical-historical methods are not only in a great part justified," but they are "necessary for the proper interpretation of many scriptural passages." Of course Spinoza was a skeptic and a heretic, but Le Clerc attempted to use the historical method to defend what he considered to be the "fundamental articles" of the faith. Le Clerc argued that only the passages where God was speaking were divinely inspired. Therefore, the biblical authors were fallible witnesses to divine revelation.

Le Clerc argued the interpreter needed to understand the culture and limitations of the writers. Large portions of the Old Testament were obscure because God accommodated his revelation to the limited intellectual abilities of the Hebrews. The older parts of the Bible were full of errors, not because God was fallible, but because of the crude level of understanding of the ancient Hebrew people. Due to the primitive state

of the Jewish people, God "prescribed for Israel a cult proportionate to their weakness and similar to that which they had seen in Egypt, a worship full of ceremonies and physical figures."[10] Furthermore, God may have given laws to Moses by revelation, but these laws were neither necessarily perfect nor eternally relevant for all people. Many of the sins and prohibitions were those that were common in the Egyptian way of life to which the Hebrew people had grown accustomed. Therefore, Le Clerc argued that the Bible had to be interpreted within its authors' primitive and alien cultural context.

Buckminster noted that he read John Locke's *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (1707).[11] It is highly likely that he would have also read Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) and *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690). In line with his general epistemology and understanding of language, Locke argued that Scripture can only convey ideas derived from ideas people already have. The Bible must communicate by way of propositions that make sense in the same way that ordinary books do. In other words, Locke submitted that the interpretation of the Bible must conform to the common rules for the meaningful use of language. The Holy Spirit did not supernaturally convey ideas that are beyond the plain meaning of the words of the Bible. Even if it did, Locke found such meaning impossible to verify.[12] Instead, in order to ascertain the authentic meaning of a biblical text, the interpreter must read the Bible within its historical context.

Locke found it perplexing that Paul, who was clearly learned and inspired by God, wrote epistles that were difficult to understand. Locke concluded that the modern interpreter lost a sense of Paul's intentions and his historical context. Locke believed that Paul had never intended for his letters to be divided into verses and read in isolation. Rather, the original text was intended to be a coherent whole. Locke argued that the modern reader lost the "thread and coherence" of the discourse by reading verses isolated from their context. Instead, one should read an entire epistle in one sitting in order to "understand the Mind of him that writ it. Only in this way could one" find the main tendency and aim or the "genuine Sense of the Author."[13] Individual verses and sections needed to be interpreted as contributing to the purpose of the main point of the entire epistle.

Locke also noted that the Epistles were obscure because they were written for a particular situation. However, the modern reader did not read with an awareness of the specific circumstances that shaped Paul's letters. Locke attempted to reconstruct the situations by examining the contents of the Epistles.[14] Locke of course did not invent this idea of

historical contextualization or the notion that the Bible should not be studied dogmatically. Erasmus attempted to interpret the Bible within its historical context in the sixteenth century. However, Locke was writing for a broad Protestant audience rather than for scholars.[15]

Paul, Locke pointed out, shaped his discourse to fit the needs of the specific audience he was addressing. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul used the term *adoption* because it was a "Custom well known amongst those in Rome." In contrast, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul used "Allusions and Arguments, from the Records of the Old Testament." Thus the biblical interpreter needed to know "the state, and exigencies, and some peculiarities of those times"; the mind of the writer; and the mental world of the intended recipients. In other words, biblical interpretation needed to be disciplined by history.[16]

Too often, noted Locke, interpreters representing a particular sect of the church interpreted parts of the Bible to support their particular theology. People inserted their own "systems, confessions, or articles of any church or society of Christians" into the Bible. Locke noted that "we may see still how at this day everyone's Philosophy regulates everyone's Interpretation of the Word of God." Rather, one needed to read without presuppositions and avoid imposing an alien interpretation. Locke was adamant that philosophical and theological constructions that were developed after the apostolic age should not be imposed upon an interpretation of Paul: "He that would understand St. Paul right, must understand his Terms in the Sense he uses them, and not as they are appropriated by each man's philosophy, to Conceptions that never enter'd the Mind of the Apostle." The historical context of the biblical writer should regulate interpretation. However, historical contextualization had its limits. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Locke asserted that Paul's writings were based exclusively on divine and immediate revelation. The Apostle's writings were "all a pure revelation from God and not in the least the product of humane discovery parts or learning." Though Paul clearly expressed himself in the cultural style and language of the era, revelation was transcendent and therefore not reducible to contemporary philosophy, pagan religions, or culture.[17] Despite claims to objectivity, Locke of course imposed his own views on the Bible.

Buckminster also noted that Johann David Michaelis's *Introduction to the New Testament* (1750) informed his thinking.[18] Lacking a knowledge of German, Buckminster read Michaelis in Herbert Marsh's translation. Marsh's edition included notes, which acquainted Buckminster with a good deal of more recent German biblical criticism. In his *Introduction*, Michaelis sought to establish the authenticity of the New Testament

by investigating the historical evidence and scrutinizing it in the same manner one would examine a classical text. Though he still believed that much of the Bible was inspired, he read it as essentially a product of particular times and cultures. Therefore, Holy Writ had the same flaws as any ordinary document. Flaws in fact affirmed its authenticity. For example, he noted that the Greek used by the New Testament writers was full of Hebraisms and far inferior to "pure" Attic Greek. He wrote, "Several harsh idioms of this nature, especially in the translated Gospel of St. Matthew, have occasioned obscurity, and sometimes mistakes." He also noted that "the Hebraisms in general were blemishes in the New Testament." Michaelis held that many Christians believed that the inspired texts could not be marred by grammatical errors or written in a corrupted Greek.[19]

For example, a century earlier, Cotton Mather defended the Greek prose of the New Testament as "noble," "sublime," and "pure." He believed that the claim of bad prose eroded God's dignity. Regarding Erasmus and Grotius, who called the style of the Greek of the New Testament barbarous, Mather wrote, "The gentlemen are mistaken in every one of their pretended Instances; All the Unquestionable Classicks may be brought in to convince them of their Mistakes. Those Glorious Oracles are as pure Greek as ever Was written in the World; and so Correct, so noble, so sublime is the Style, that never anything under the Cope of Heaven, but the Old Testament, was equaled it."[20]

Michaelis countered such views by arguing that the peculiar Hebraic nature of the Greek of the New Testament testified to its authenticity: "Would it not have been ridiculous in St. Paul, who was probably well acquainted with the classic Greek, to have used, in writing to such persons, the same language as he would have spoken before an Athenian audience?" He went on to argue that if the New Testament had been written with pure Attic Greek, the Jewish Greeks would not have been able to understand it. By taking into consideration the nature of the writers and the intended audience, Michaelis argued that the corrupted Greek affirmed its authenticity. Only by divine intervention could the Apostles have written in pure Attic Greek. And even if God caused such a miracle, Buckminster argued, that classical pure prose would arouse suspicions of forgery and its authenticity would defy plausibility.[21]

Michaelis's devotion to the principles of historical interpretation led him to deny the divine inspiration of parts of the Bible. He rejected the parts of the New Testament that he believed misinterpreted the Old. For example, Matthew 1:22–23 interprets Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah writes that God will give a sign to his people: a virgin giving birth to a son. Matthew interprets this as a prophecy predicting Jesus. Michaelis believed that Isaiah

referred to a child born in his own time rather than Jesus.[22] He noted that some explained away the discrepancy by arguing that God inserted a hidden meaning into the text.[23] Michaelis rejected such a method of interpretation. People must concede that "Christian revelation is capable of being tried by rules as severe as those which are universally applied to other writings." The author must "understand his own writings," and passages must be interpreted accordingly.[24]

Buckminster also recorded that he read Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*.[25] As discussed earlier, Lowth, a Hebrew scholar at Oxford University, made remarkable innovations in the study of the Old Testament. He argued that people had failed to recognize that much of the Hebrew Scriptures were composed in a poetic form. Biblical writing had of course been studied as a source of theological truth but not as art. He suggested that people felt they were at liberty to analyze classical poetry because it was a product of human invention. However, the Bible was a revelation from God and therefore most believed that it was "not as conformable to the principles of science, nor to be circumscribed by any rules of art." Lowth did not dispute the Scripture's heavenly origin, but he believed the artistic quality of its human authorship warranted examination. As poetry, the words "of Moses, of David and Isaiah" should be analyzed and studied for their artistic style just as scholars studied classical writers such as Homer, Pindar, and Horace.[26]

When reading any foreign and ancient poetry, one needed to know the intentions of the writer and his purpose in writing as well as the conventions of the culture. However, the world of the ancient Jews was even more alien and strange to the modern reader than was the classical world.[27] Lowth argued that the writings of "the Orientals above all foreigners" were the hardest to understand because of this cultural distance. They were "the farthest removed from [English] customs and manners." Furthermore, "of all the Orientals" the writings of the ancient Hebrews were the most difficult to interpret because their writings were the oldest. In order properly to interpret the Old Testament, the reader needed to enter the mental world of the biblical author and become accustomed to the "habits of life totally different" from his own. Lowth warned the reader to avoid "rashly estimating all things by [his] own standard." Otherwise, he would "form an erroneous judgment." By leaving behind modern European cultural standards and expectations and instead becoming inhabitants of the alien world, the reader would "feel [the Bible] as a Hebrew, hearing or delivering the same words, at the same time, and in the same country." Lowth instructed his readers that if they desired to "perceive and feel the peculiar and interior elegancies of the Hebrew

poetry," they "must imagine" themselves "exactly situated as the persons for whom it was written, or even as the writers themselves." In doing so, many passages that struck "the superficial reader as coarse, mean, or deformed" would "appear graceful, elegant, and sublime."[28]

Furthermore, one also needed to understand the world of the surrounding ancient cultures. Though the Bible's ultimate author was God, the inspired writers did not compose in a vacuum. They followed the cultural conventions that had been established in the most ancient of times and followed by a wide variety of cultures. Lowth noted that Persians, Arabs, and the people of most other eastern nations in the ancient world commonly preserved their history, laws, morals, and religion in poetry. He wrote that poetry was the "only mode of instruction, indeed, adapted to human nature in an uncivilized state, when the knowledge of letters was very little." Poetry was well suited to preserve words in the "minds and hearts" of a preliterate people. Therefore, Lowth tried to understand Moses and the ancient Hebrews by seeing them as analogous to other surrounding nations of the time. He believed that poetry, though inspired by God, was an adaptation for a primitive, illiterate, and rude people.[29]

Lowth also concluded that some parts of the Pentateuch were not originally written by Moses. Rather, Moses incorporated oral histories into his writings. For example, when Moses recorded the benedictions of the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob in Genesis 27:27–40, the poetic form of the verses led Lowth to conclude that it was "highly probable that they were extant in this form before the time of Moses; and that they were afterwards committed to writing by the inspired historian, exactly as he had received them from his ancestors, without presuming to bestow on these sacred oracles any adventitious ornaments or poetical colouring."

Furthermore, Lowth speculated that some historical sections of the Pentateuch were not originally composed by Moses or even Hebrews but by neighboring nations. Moses merely incorporated history that had been preserved in oral tradition.[30] Thus a proper interpretation of the Hebrew Bible also required knowledge of the surrounding cultures.

Though these scholars believed that the Bible was inspired by God, they increasingly emphasized its human authorship. As such, they viewed the books of the Bible as products of distinct cultures and individuals. The Bible possessed the peculiar idiosyncrasies and even limitations of its authors and their world. In their views, the Bible was becoming an increasingly human book, and they were beginning to examine it, as Spinoza had suggested a century earlier, almost like any other book. These critics assumed a zero-sum game. In their minds, the human quality of the book came at the expense of the divine.

Buckminster and Norton were particularly interested in incorporating these ideas into their own understanding of revelation. Of course examining the Bible in a historical context was not new to Anglo-America. Men like Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, and Jonathan Dickinson certainly read or were aware of writers such as Hugo Grotius and turned to history to defend the credibility of the Bible. Mather and Edwards believed that the history and literature of the nations surrounding ancient Israel validated the Old Testament. However, these men still presumed that the Bible was a book unlike any other. It was a message from God, recorded by inspired writers. Though it was written by a person in a particular historical context, it was not purely a product of a culture. Traditionally, many believed that the Scriptures were transcendent revelation, written by God but using the pen of his chosen inspired author.[31]

Buckminster and Norton were certainly not the first Americans to discover these historicist ideas. As noted in the last chapter, William Bentley owned some of the works of Eichhorn and Lowth and would likely have loaned out the books or discussed them with the intellectually curious. Bentley also acquired John Spencer's *De Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus* (1685), which argued that the ancient Jews were primitive people and their religion was heavily influenced by the Egyptians. Also, Lowth sent Jonathan Mayhew a signed copy of his English grammar, suggesting that they were at least indirectly acquainted. Presumably, Mayhew also knew about Lowth's work on the Old Testament.[32] When Lowth was rumored to have died in 1774, the *Boston Post Boy* called him "the finest scholar in Europe." Even ordinary presses in the United States found the English biblical scholar worthy of note. This suggests that Americans were at least aware of European learning.[33]

By no later than 1773, Harvard College's library owned works by Michaelis and Lowth.[34] A few may have read these books, but it does not appear that they integrated such ideas into their thinking in any substantial way. If the Dudleian Lectures delivered in the late eighteenth century are any indication, most did not drink deeply (or even sip) at the well of historical consciousness.[35] Harvard's best and brightest used history to gather evidence that "proved" that the biblical writers had neither the inclination nor the opportunity to fabricate their accounts. Showing little sensitivity to the historical and cultural context of the ancient writers, they assumed that the New Testament writers were men very much like themselves. By contrast, Buckminster and Norton integrated historicist ideas into their theology. They did so because they found these ideas genuinely intriguing, and they claimed that they were trying to find an independent arbiter of the theological battles in New England. However,

they were also using history to fight for their liberal Unitarian interpretation of the Bible.[36]

Buckminster, Historical Contextualization, and Paul

Though Buckminster was physically cut off from the European institutions that advanced the historical study of the Bible, he did his best to engage with the world of ideas across the ocean. His journals demonstrate a ravenous appetite for European critical studies of the Bible, and he attempted to convey this new learning to a broader audience. As a member of the Anthology Club, he presumably discussed these ideas with his contemporaries. His immense library was also a center of conversation. One can only imagine the discussions Buckminster would have held with other pastors and men of learning in Boston. However, one can see the influence of the historical contextualization of the Bible in some of his preserved sermons.

In his sermon "The History and Character of Paul and the Causes of Obscurity in his Writings," delivered to the Brattle Street Church, Buckminster imported European biblical scholarship and the study of historical context of the Pauline epistles to advance a Unitarian theological position in New England. He began his sermon by observing that Paul was difficult to understand: "In order to understand the unconnected writings of any person, written at a remote period, and in a foreign language, the character of the writer, the opinions that prevailed in his time, his object in writing, and every circumstance peculiar to his situation, must be taken into consideration, before we can be sure of having reached the whole of his meaning." Buckminster's stated aim was to give "the history and character of this apostle, and then to consider the causes of that obscurity in his writings." Paul wrote in a distant time and culture. Though the Epistles were the timeless and universal word of God, they were written in a particular historical moment that shaped their form.[37]

Like Locke, Buckminster noted that the Epistles were written as "private letters, addressed to particular societies, or individuals, upon particular occasions." Therefore, it was impossible to understand the full meaning of the correspondence without knowing the historical circumstances such as "the occasion, on which it was written, the peculiar circumstances of the writer, and of those to whom it was addressed; and still further, without being acquainted with a thousand little incidents well known to the parties." He laid down as a "maxim," "The epistles of Paul cannot be thoroughly understood, without knowing something of the history of the times, the character of the writer, the prevailing prejudices

of the age, and the particular purpose, which the writer meant to effect."[38] To that end, he also examined the character and life of Paul. He noted that Paul was educated in the literature and philosophy of the Greeks as well as the Jewish religion. Paul used words in both a Jewish and a Greek context. Therefore, Buckminster noted, Paul used "many words in a signification, which it is now extremely difficult to settle" for the modern reader. Some key terms such as *justification*, *law*, *faith*, and *death* were difficult to understand because there was a multiplicity of possible meanings. For example, Buckminster observed that *law* could signify either the Jewish ceremonial law or the moral law to which all rational creation are accountable. Paul's words were "used in various acceptations, more or less modified by the peculiar notions of the age, and therefore more or less different from the meaning we assign to them in modern times." Only by careful examination of the historical use and the particular context of the words could their particular meaning be derived.[39]

Like Locke, Buckminster believed that Paul wrote most of his Epistles in the context of the Judaizers: "There was one controversy, however, in the apostolical age, in which Paul was especially interested, which we must keep in mind during the perusal of his writings, or we shall never attain to a just understanding of his epistles." For several pages, he attempted to reconstruct the climate of theological controversy. To read the Epistles without this background knowledge would be akin to listening to only half a conversation, Buckminster believed. He wrote, "It is only by keeping in mind this controversy, and the state of the churches to which Paul wrote, made up of Jews and Gentiles, that we can understand the reasonings of the apostle."[40]

In the last section of his sermon, Buckminster took direct aim at his conservative Calvinist opponents and used his historical hermeneutic to attack their position. He opposed the widespread habit of believing that everything written in the Bible must apply to the modern church. Because Paul's letters were composed to address a particular occasion, every word and instruction should not be interpreted to apply universally, argued Buckminster. Some phrases, propositions, and arguments applied "solely to the situation of Christianity, at its first institution." Buckminster argued, "It would have been one of the strangest things in the world, if the writings of the New Testament had not, like all other books, been composed for the apprehension, and consequently adapted to the circumstances, of persons they were addressed to."[41] Times and circumstances changed, and therefore not all verses applied universally.

Buckminster believed Calvinists constructed a distorted theology by interpreting words from the Bible out of their historical context. Paul

used the terms *elect*, *called*, and *saints* to refer to the few Christians living in a predominantly pagan world. However, the vast majority of the European and American world was now Christian. The context in which Paul used the terms was drastically different. Calvinists believing "these expressions to have a perpetual meaning" and "forgetting the original use of them" applied words to their modern context in a manner "extremely foreign from the design of their author." Rather than using terms to distinguish pagan from Christian, in the absence of pagans Calvinists appropriated the terms to distinguish various kinds of Christians, according to Buckminster. Paul also wrote that God chose the Gentiles to become his new chosen people and he knew this beforehand. Buckminster argued that Paul "originally conceived" of the idea as an antidote to the "narrow and excluding claims of Jewish Prejudice." Losing sight "of the proper occasion of these expressions," Calvinists misinterpreted Paul's writings and constructed their doctrine of predestination.[42] In another sermon, Buckminster, like Locke, cautioned that the biblical authors were not, "on every occasion, delivering a system of dogmas, for the instruction of all succeeding time." To ascertain the true meaning, one needed to examine the circumstances of the writing and consider that the writer accommodated his words to the "assumptions," "suppositions," and "habits of interpretation" of the intended audience.[43]

The historical interpretation of the Bible was not a trivial matter for Buckminster. He believed the Calvinists had drastically misunderstood the original intent and meaning of the Epistles of Paul precisely because they did not pay attention to the historical circumstances that Paul was addressing. Though some parts of the Bible were applicable for all times and all Christians, he concluded, some were limited to the particular circumstances of the first-century church. Only the examination of the Scriptures in their historical context could allow the interpreter to make the proper distinction.

Andrews Norton

Buckminster died at the age of 27 in 1812. Illness cut short a promising scholarly career. Had he lived longer, presumably, he would have continued to study European biblical scholars and spread their ideas in the United States. However, his efforts lived on in part through the sale of his massive theological library.[44] Others also took up the role of disseminating historicist criticism. The Dexter Lectureship, to which Buckminster was appointed but never able to take up because of his premature death, soon went to Andrews Norton. Norton was a most appropriate successor. He admired and wrote glowingly of Buckminster as the very model of the

intelligent and broadly educated liberal Christian who pursued the Bible with scholarly rigor.[45]

The two had much in common. Norton read European biblical scholarship and became deeply interested in biblical hermeneutics. He too came to believe that the Bible must be examined historically. Norton, like Buckminster, was also a Unitarian who opposed conservative Trinitarian Calvinism. However, unlike Buckminster, Norton was not raised in a world of strict Calvinism. His father, Samuel Norton, was a liberal Congregationalist. Nonetheless, Norton had little sympathy for Calvinism. Exposing the faults of Calvinism and attempting to destroy it by logic and evidence was one of the driving causes of his life.[46]

Though he has largely been forgotten, Andrews Norton was one of the most erudite and formidable American intellects of his day. He graduated from Harvard in 1804 and afterward remained to study for the ministry with Henry Ware, a leader of the Congregationalist liberals. His ambitions to settle in an elegant and cultured pulpit in Boston were frustrated. Though studious and learned, he was not a good preacher. In 1809, he reluctantly became a pastor in remote Augusta, Maine, which he quickly left to accept a tutorship at Bowdoin College. Yearning for cosmopolitan conversation, he returned jobless to Cambridge in 1810.

In 1811, he accepted an appointment at Harvard as a mathematics tutor. After only a year, he quit the tutorship to edit the new liberal Unitarian publication the *General Repository and Monthly Review*. Unlike its predecessor, the *Monthly Anthology*, the *Repository* reflected Norton's highly polemical tone. Whereas the Trinitarian *Panoplist* sought to engage the liberals in direct combat, the *Anthology* tended to avoid harsh argument. Norton was irritated by liberal passivity. He wanted completely to annihilate and defeat his Trinitarian enemies. Most liberals did not appreciate Norton's degree of rancor, and they tried to muzzle his vitriol.[47] Less erudite readers, which in Norton's mind included almost everyone, could not keep up with the intellectual sophistication of the publication. The *Repository* collapsed after one year.

In 1813, Harvard appointed Norton to the Dexter Lectureship and promoted him to the Dexter Professorship of Sacred Literature in 1819. In 1829, he resigned from his position due to poor health and disillusionment with the Harvard administration. However, retirement did not dampen his fighting spirit. He continued to write polemical articles against Calvinists, and he completed his magnum opus, *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels* (3 vols., 1837–44), in which he sought to establish an intellectual foundation for liberal beliefs and attack radical German scholars who questioned the historical reliability of the Gospels.

As Norton looked across the theological landscape in both Europe and America and as he surveyed the history of biblical interpretation, he grew concerned with the lack of theological consensus. Calvinists and Unitarians in his own city could not agree on the meaning of the Bible. Historically, believers had splintered into factions, fought bloody wars, and accused each other of heresy. Yet all these Christian sects maintained some common beliefs, which they held onto as fiercely as they despised one another: the Bible was the word of God; their theological truth claims were based on their reading of Holy Writ; and anyone who disagreed with them clearly misinterpreted the Bible. There was one solution to this theological chaos, believed Norton. Before Christians could come to a common consensus regarding the meaning of the Bible, they would have to establish a universally acceptable and infallible hermeneutic, or what he called a "scientific interpretation of the Bible." His method of interpretation was shaped by the same European scholars that influenced Buckminster.[48]

Norton devoted a great deal of energy to attacking the Calvinists. He believed that traditional Trinitarians maintained retrograde superstitions and held onto outdated dogmatic formulations that were no longer plausible in light of advances in hermeneutics. They harmed the progress of faith for modern people who were increasingly unwilling to accept what he considered to be antiquated dogmatic assertions such as the Trinity and man's depravity. Norton could not understand how rational people could assent to the belief in a God who would create people who were constitutionally incapable of being good, condemn them for all eternity, and then claim that this was a matter of justice that was beyond human comprehension. Intelligent men, he asserted, either rejected or merely gave lip service to this horrifically cruel and intellectually untenable theology.[49]

Because the Calvinists believed that a transcendent and timeless God inspired the Scriptures to be read and understood by all believers at all future times, they hermetically sealed the Bible from historical criticism and examination. Consequently, Norton believed that the orthodox paid too little attention to the human factors regarding the writing of the Bible.[50] Nor did they seriously consider, argued Norton, that their own interpretation of the Bible was influenced by historical circumstances and ideas alien to the biblical authors.

Norton argued that any interpreter ignorant of the historical circumstances of the biblical writers was bound to contaminate the purity of God's revelation with ideas from his own culture. Christians read their own ideas into the text, which were often alien to the intention of the

author.[51] The history of interpretation demonstrated that the Bible had been misinterpreted since its earliest days due to the intellectual and cultural chasm between the world of the primitive biblical writers and the modern readers. Due to the "moral and intellectual condition of the world at the time of the introduction of Christianity," Norton concluded that revelation was "very imperfectly understood by a large proportion of believers and that many erroneous opinions were connected with it."[52] Gentile converts accustomed to the unrefined barbarisms of paganism "were not free from the influence of their former associations and habits and they were not at once transformed from ignorant heathens into enlightened Christians."[53] Short of "direct miraculous illumination" the first-century convert could not have fully or correctly comprehended the message of Jesus, argued Norton. Only the Apostles were the beneficiaries of a direct illumination, he believed.[54]

The crude and ignorant were not the only ones responsible for distorting the message of Christ. "Learned and philosophizing converts" imported ideas from pagan philosophy. Norton reasoned that philosophers were unlikely to "at once wholly relinquish their old belief," for it was the source of their pride and distinction. Inevitably, the minds of the early Christians were "conformed to the intellectual character of the age." Therefore, their theology was "alloyed and debased by Platonism."[55] The philosophers may have become Christians, but they did not leave behind their former opinions and habits of mind: "With what they now learnt they mingled much of what they had before been accustomed to teach."[56]

In Norton's recounting of church history, the misinterpretation of the Bible only grew worse over the course of the centuries as Western culture drifted farther away from the cultural world in which the New Testament was composed. Some of the early church fathers could read classical Greek, but the Greek Scriptures were written in a form with Hebrew idioms that the scholars must have found alien. Furthermore, the writers of Scripture presumed cultural knowledge that their immediate audience would have known but of which later Christians would have been ignorant. Norton believed that various groups elevated error to the level of divine truth: "As soon as Christians begin to divide into sects, and to attach an extravagant importance to the holdings of their peculiar opinions, and to engage in controversies, the tendencies of persecution begin to operate." To defend their beliefs, they claimed that their particular beliefs were based on the Bible and their interpretations were granted by God. Sects tended to "regard themselves as being, like the ancient Jews, the chosen depositories of the religious truths communicated by God to men; and have in consequence claimed like them to be

the sole favorites of Heaven."[57] As a general historical pattern, Christian sects made sacred their errors. All assumed God had communicated their particular interpretation.

This history of error and dispute suggested that all readers of the Bible seemed hopelessly trapped by the limitations of their own cultural context. However, Norton reassured that "there is now no reason for our being discouraged in the hope of attaining a correct and satisfactory knowledge of our religion." There was a path out of the hermeneutical mess. The "science of biblical interpretation . . . is the only guide on which we can rely."[58] Only recently had learning advanced to a point that the original meaning of the Bible could be recovered. Historical biblical interpretation could scrape away the barnacles of centuries of misunderstanding and reveal the treasure chest that had lain covered for years. Hermeneutical advances liberated the interpreter from his own historical moment.

Christians of the past lacked the ability to recognize the errors of the doctrine of their day. His age, the refined Anglo-American nineteenth century, had finally reached a state of intellectual maturity. The ancients lacked enlightened thinkers such as Bacon, Locke, and Butler who could "release" one from the "thralldom" of one's limited perspective.[59] Norton believed that armed with fully matured reason and scholarly tools, he and his fellow liberal scholars were now finally able to rediscover the truth because the world had at last come of age: "We know that reason so far from having exhausted itself on the subject of Christianity, has almost from the first ages to our own time scarcely come to its examination except in fetters . . . Reason has rarely freely examined scriptures till now."[60]

Using history, Norton attempted to thrust a lethal blow at the Calvinists. Norton found it absurd that Calvinists insisted on deferring to the opinions of men of an era long past. The state of textual scholarship available to the reformers also limited their interpretation. The reformers "lived when true philosophy and the principles and art of correct reasoning were almost unknown. They lived when the science of biblical interpretation had but just appeared."[61] Because the biblical criticism at the time was still in its state of infancy, their theological conclusions were less accurate than Norton believed the nineteenth-century man could achieve.[62] No other field of learning would rely on opinions from the Middle Ages, yet many Christians placed centuries-old conclusions above those informed by the latest modern research.

He argued that the sixteenth-century reformers themselves were shaped and limited by their historical circumstances. He granted that the

reformers were right to revolt against the accumulated errors and corruptions of the Catholic Church. However, the Reformation "was far from being a restoration of uncorrupted Christianity."[63] The reformers, educated under a Catholic system, could not completely break free of their historical context. The Reformation freed Christianity from "many of the errors with which it had been surrounded; but they left many unassailed, and they substituted error of their own instead of those which they removed." For instance, in reaction to certain aspects of Catholic practices, some reformers constructed the doctrine of the impotence of man and irresistible grace and forced the entirety of Scripture into their theological system.[64] Due to the environment of theological warfare and the threat of death, the reformers "were in a state of mind very little favorable to the best exercise of the judgment upon matters of study and speculation."[65] The Westminster Assembly wrote its confession during "one of the most tumultuous, fanatical and disgraceful periods of English history." Surely, reasoned Norton, the circumstances made their writings narrow and defensive.[66] Calvinists, argued Norton, did not acknowledge that the theological convictions of the reformers were rooted in issues particular to sixteenth-century history, politics, and philosophies. Contemporary Calvinists acted as if they were timeless.

The Calvinists did not let Norton's contentions go unanswered. Nathaniel William Taylor carried on a lengthy debate with Norton, between 1822 and 1824 in the pages of the *Spectator*.[67] Oddly enough, in defending Calvinism, Taylor conceded to some of Norton's historicist logic. Taylor charged that Norton had been criticizing modern Calvinism by looking to older writings such as Calvin's writings or the Westminster Confession. Taylor argued that Norton was absurd to expect a sixteenth-century reformer to reason with the light of the nineteenth century. Taylor implied that theology had developed since then. No one in America, argued Taylor, adhered to the "exact creeds of Calvin" anymore: "Such a Calvinist is not to be found in this country." Taylor certainly did not say, as did Norton, that because Calvin could only reason within his context, his thinking was inferior.[68] However, the implication was inevitable. Remarkably, even a Calvinist like Taylor was adopting a historicist mode of thinking.

"A Science of Interpretation"

In his lectures for the Dexter Lectureship, Norton did not discuss the content of the Bible, nor did he elucidate the meaning of particular verses. He neglected these matters for two reasons. First, he stated that he did not intend that the lectures would settle the "meaning of a few obscure

passages, the misapprehension of which affects no important truth," or would define "the shades of signification of some doubtful word for the gratification of the critical scholar." Rather, he instead believed hermeneutic was "of far higher importance." The primary purposes of his lectures were to "establish correct opinions respecting the true character, and original purpose of the sacred writings; and to settle and to apply principles of criticism which may guide us throughout in determining their meaning." Criticism would discover the "original meaning from the mass of erroneous, absurd, and contradictory explanations."[69] There was little point in talking about the particular texts of the Bible unless one could first establish the proper method of interpretation. Until then, various factions would simply talk past each other. Norton naïvely believed that only the "science of biblical interpretation" could allow one to transcend one's own subjective limitations and silence the endless debates. The second reason he kept to himself. At this point, Norton did not know enough to interpret any given passage with philological expertise. He essentially had little background in biblical scholarship when he was appointed Dexter Lecturer.

Trinitarians certainly read their Bibles, but because their hermeneutics were so hopelessly flawed almost all their interpretations were inevitably warped, believed Norton. In a lecture on biblical interpretation, Norton compared the "science of interpretation" to the "science of optics." Some images he noted "appear[ed] at first sight only a confusion and shapeless mass of colors." However, when the image was refracted through the properly calibrated lens, the picture became clear.[70] To extend his metaphor, once the interpreter was fitted with the corrective lenses of scientific interpretation, all he saw would be clear. Without them, no matter how hard he looked, everything would be distorted. Only the proper hermeneutic would allow one to see the Bible accurately.[71]

Norton believed the vast majority of people, especially Calvinists, unfortunately did not sufficiently reflect on the ways they interpreted any text. Rather, they believed reading was reflexive instead of involving a myriad of choices and rational processes. They assumed, according to Norton, that self-evident words of the Bible left the page and entered directly into their minds with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, most held that "certain words are the definite expression of one certain idea, or series of ideas, and of this alone." Reading, they believed, required "no more exercise of reason or judgment to determine its meaning than is necessary when we see the picture of a man, to determine what it is intended to represent."[72] They did not believe that they needed to use their rational abilities when they saw a simple picture. The colors and

shapes seemed spontaneously and automatically to enter their eyes and minds. Reading, they assumed, was analogous to seeing.

Norton tried to challenge those who rested on their easy confidence in their reading of Scripture by pointing out that even seeing and visually recognizing objects did in fact involve a complicated process of cognition. Norton was clearly making an allusion to Locke's theory of primary and secondary qualities. Locke believed that physical objects possessed primary qualities such as solidity, extension, figure, and motion that really existed in the bodies themselves. Secondary qualities such as color, smells, taste, and sound were not actually inherent in the objects. Rather, objects had the power to cause the mind of the perceiver to produce sensations such as color. Though the secondary qualities were not inherent in the object but the production of the mind, Locke still believed the secondary qualities were objective as the sensations were prompted by the nature of the object.

Most people were not aware of the complicated process involved in seeing, but their mind was interpreting and processing nonetheless. Likewise, Norton pointed out that when reading, the mind constantly and actively worked at the process of interpreting.[73] When individuals encountered a seemingly familiar and simple text such as the Bible, they erroneously assumed that the plain and obvious meaning of the text simply entered their mind. However, the same reader was self-aware that he was making interpretive choices when dealing with an extremely difficult text from an alien culture. The experience was slow enough that one could be conscious of the rational process involved in trying to decipher the meaning of the words. For example, one carefully chose from a variety of possible meanings of words and considered the context of the sentence. One weighed the various merits of a figurative or literal interpretation in order to reconstruct the author's intended meaning. The same process was involved in reading both seemingly simple texts and obviously challenging texts. If Norton could establish that all reading involved a process of interpretation, then he could argue that some methods of interpretation were better than others. The reader who examined his own interpretive choices was more likely to have a correct hermeneutic.

Further complicating the problems of interpretation, Norton also pointed out that just as ideas and cultures changed over time, the meaning of words changed as well. Moreover, words rarely carried their full meaning when translated from one language to another, especially when the cultures were particularly distant from one another. He wrote, "The intellectual character and furniture of men's minds undergo changes quite as great as do their habits of life and external accommodations.

Under the influence of different circumstances and associations . . . the composition and character of abstract ideas are continually varying with changes, which it would be in vain for language to attempt to follow and to mark, by a corresponding change of names." Norton cautioned that if the interpreter was not sensitive to the ways in which words changed over time, the careless interpreter could easily impose a "modern instead of ancient" idea on the language of an ancient author. One could misinterpret an ancient writer as holding views and opinions that did "not exist till long after his time."[74]

Words that expressed abstract ideas, such as theological concepts, were particularly fragile. Norton noted that the Greek term "*dikaiosune* (righteousness)" could signify several different meanings, even in the same book. Context and reason needed to determine its use in a particular circumstance. Norton believed that words and their meaning are never permanent. Rather, their relationship is determined by the collective use of a particular community at a particular moment in history. Thus meaning was always in a state of flux. Therefore, people were liable to make drastic errors in interpretation when they assumed that a word used in an ancient text from a foreign culture had the equivalent meaning as the contemporary use. This principle of course applied to the Bible.

Most uninformed Christians, according to Norton, did not appreciate that language was a "very imperfect instrument for expressing our thoughts." Words potentially could signify a wide variety of meanings or shades of meaning. He wrote, "There can be nothing in mere words alone to decide our choice." Yet Norton was not a fan of ambiguity. The clear solution to finding the original meaning of the author was to examine the context of the writing. Like Locke, Norton argued that one needed to look at the surrounding words and sentences, the circumstances in which the words were written, the tendencies and characteristics of the writer, and the modes of expression that were common in the culture of the writer.[75]

Following Buckminster and the European biblical critics, Norton concluded that only by understanding the world of the biblical writer could the interpreter attempt to recapture the original intended meaning of the author. Only by studying the historical context could the modern interpreter fathom the cultural and intellectual distance between his own world and that of the first-century Near East. Most importantly, historical knowledge prevented the modern scholar from reading his own contemporary sensibilities into the text.

Like Locke and Lowth, Norton was sensitive to the cultural distance between the modern world and the first-century Near East:[76] "In order

to know, in any particular instance, what is the true meaning of words, it is often necessary to know under what circumstances and relations they were used in that particular instance." Therefore "the biblical interpreter must immerse himself in the world that yielded the text by acquainting himself with the style of the writer and his period, the outlook of the people to whom he directed his message and the circumstances under which he wrote." To rediscover the meaning of Scripture, the interpreter needed to become fully acquainted with the historical context.[77] One also had to reconstruct the character, feelings, and opinions of the author: "In order to understand the words of another, we assimilate as far as possible our minds to his, and enter into his situation, and we then understand his language in that sense in which his character, in his circumstances, and using language with the same license or the same restriction which he does, should ourselves employ his words."[78] Anyone who presumed to interpret the Bible, Norton wrote, "must be, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, a philologist." Otherwise, texts were bound to convey as false an impression as "an historical picture might give to one wholly ignorant of the story which forms its subject."[79] According to Norton, Calvinists did not fully appreciate the cultural chasm that lay between the biblical writers and the nineteenth-century American. Following the European critics, Norton asserted that in the Old Testament, God accommodated his message to "an almost barbaric people of low moral standards." Thus God "adapted" his revelation "to minds very differently modified from our own."[80] In the New Testament, Jesus, contended Norton, adapted his message to the nature of his "comparatively rude and uncivilized" audience, using images, words, and hyperbole to move the passions of the people. Norton wrote, "In many parts of the New Testament there is a boldness and license and sententiousness of expression, which sometimes obviously and sometimes not, leaves much to be limited and defined by reason and good sense." The audience, he wrote, was accustomed to "oriental modes of expression." Jesus's words would "have been very different, if he had been addressing a body of men of calm, enlightened, unprejudiced minds, from what they were when he spoke to the Jewish multitude." Because of the intellectual limitations of his first-century audience, "the style of the New Testament is not that of logical accuracy and precision, it is the style of sentiment, of passion, of feeling, and of imagination."[81]

Norton warned that many Calvinists erroneously read the Bible as if every pronouncement was written for a modern audience and it were to be interpreted as a philosophically precise treatise, because they believed that Scripture was "designed for the use of the whole Christian community

throughout all ages, composed under the superintendence and direction of God Himself." God "interpose[d] in a miraculous manner" so that the Bible would transmit history and doctrine to a future age totally unknown to the biblical writer. "If this were true," wrote Norton, "then the writings were in no way affected by local or temporal circumstances."[82] Calvinists, according to Norton, believed that God had written the Bible with the intent that, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, "all Christians in all countries and in all ages" would be able to understand His message.

Norton conceded that God could have supernaturally dictated the Scriptures to be applied universally. However, there was no reason this should necessarily or even probably be true. Norton proposed that the interpretation of the nature of the Bible should not be made on theological grounds or on any "*a priori* arguments." Rather, the "question is to be decided on by an examination of the writings themselves" and based exclusively on historical evidence. Once again, history, for Norton, was the final referee. Norton observed that the Gospels showed no evidence that the writers self-consciously wrote for posterity. They did not write "in the style of a classic historian." The writings lacked prefatory material, explanations, or dates. Many parts seemed incomplete because the writers assumed the readers already knew the history. If the writers knew they were writing for posterity, they would have included information about which "men in a future time would have a very reasonable curiosity." Norton observed that Paul's Epistles explicitly addressed specific communities, and the unique issues did not apply to modern European or American Christians.[83]

Norton in his zeal exaggerated the ahistorical tendencies of Calvinism. Even John Calvin acknowledged that God accommodated his revelations to the capacities of primitive Israelites. Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge, professors at the Presbyterian Princeton Theological Seminary, were also aware that conditions and ideas changed throughout history. Though they believed that the inspired writers taught no error of a religious nature, the biblical writers shared the views of their day. Regarding the inspired writers, Hodge wrote, "As to matters of science, philosophy, and history, they stood on the same level with their contemporaries." Therefore, some of their incidental comments on science or history were liable to error. Hodge also acknowledged that the Bible must be interpreted in its "plain historical sense" or "the sense attached to them in the age and by the people to whom they were addressed."[84] However, Hodge did not go as far as Norton in his belief in the effects of history.

Perhaps what Norton found most offensive about prevailing conservative interpretations of the Bible was what he perceived to be their

potentially arbitrary nature. Norton concluded that most people followed two main principles. First, they insisted that the Bible should be interpreted according to the "analogy of faith." Norton believed people used this principle to bend the meaning of various passages of the Bible to affirm a "system of theological opinions which the interpreter may have chanced to adopt." Second, most Christians believed that the Bible should be interpreted literally. However, Norton pointed out various instances when Calvinists did not interpret the Bible literally. They resorted to figurative readings when the literal interpretation defied reason or common sense, or contradicted their established theological system. As a result, most interpreters allowed theological loyalties to dictate the rules of interpretation. The Bible would always affirm their theology.[85]

Norton noted that many notable and learned European biblical critics such as Robert Lowth, William Warburton, and Johann Jakob Wettstein argued that the verses of the Bible must be interpreted in their historical context. However, he observed that these same scholars also acknowledged that ahistorical and theological considerations should guide interpretive choices because God intended the Scriptures to be understood by the church. Norton noted that the choice between the two interpretive modes was too arbitrary. Readers, believed Norton, tended to vacillate between the temporal and universal modes and chose according to their needs. The vagaries of ahistorical interpretive principles permitted readers to impose theologically driven interpretations on the text that the biblical writer might not have intended.[86]

Predictably, Norton found Calvinists particularly guilty of this crime. Yet the Calvinists did not believe they were being subjective or arbitrary. Norton asserted that for the Calvinists, the "main evidence of truth" was based on "something placed beyond the uncertainty of reasoning." Their confidence in their interpretation of the Bible was grounded on "a higher source than any human reasoning, or opinions or conjectures; it is derived from the secret witness of the Spirit."[87]

Calvinists, according to Norton, thought they could bypass a scientific and historical hermeneutic. He argued that their Spirit-aided interpretation made his historical hermeneutic superfluous and did not acknowledge the degree of subjectivity that was involved in their own reading. Furthermore, they did not acknowledge their own theological biases that affected their interpretation. Norton wrote of Calvin, "His interpretation of the New Testament as far as I am acquainted with his commentaries, or the manner in which he has applied passages in his theological reasonings, are of such a kind as might be expected from his views on the character of the scriptures. He imposes that meaning upon words in which

he was accustomed to use them, without any investigation to discover whether it were their true one."[88] Norton argued that the Calvinists relied on their hermeneutic because they sought certainty. However, he pointed out that Calvin argued that belief based on "arguments or probabilities" could only lead to fear or doubt.[89] Norton based his interpretation on historical knowledge, which was by its nature probabilistic. He wrote, "I know of no absolute certainty, beyond the limit of momentary consciousness, a certainty that vanishes the instant it exists, and is lost in the region of metaphysical doubt." He asserted that the Calvinist certainty was an illusion, for no knowledge, with the exception of mathematical propositions, could achieve absolute certainty.[90]

Norton's combative, polemical nature tended to lead to exaggeration. Historian W. Andrew Hoffecker has argued that Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge forged a *via media* between an objective and rational doctrine and the importance of inner experience and the witness of the Spirit.[91] However, Norton claimed he believed that all interpretation must be based exclusively on historical evidence.

"The Modern School of German Infidelity"

Norton was not the only man in the nineteenth century who believed that history would open the way to religious truth. German theologians were also discarding the alleged errors of the past using historical tools of investigation. However, they were moving in a direction far more radical than Norton would have ever desired. Some were questioning the authenticity of the Gospels and the historical reality of miracles. While Norton wanted the Calvinists to shed an unnecessary adherence to certain dogmas of the past, the Germans were challenging what Norton considered to be essential beliefs. Norton wanted to harness the corrosive effects of history to eliminate the false beliefs of the Calvinists. The Germans were also using history to challenge what they considered to be outdated superstitions that Norton held close to his heart.

By Norton's day, German scholars were turning their critical attention to the Gospels. G. E. Lessing had dared to suggest that the reported miracles were merely exaggerations of natural events by credulous followers of Jesus. W. M. L. DeWette and F. C. Baur argued that religious beliefs evolved historically and that the biblical texts were an amalgam of history and myth. They, along with like-minded German scholars such as Eichhorn, Gabler, and Bauer, defined as mythical those parts of the Bible that could not stand up to the rational scrutiny of Enlightenment epistemological presuppositions and relegated to mythical status events such as Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt or God's appearance to Moses

in a burning bush. Through careful scholarship they felt that the mythical chaff could be separated from the historical wheat and a truly accurate history of Israel could be established.[92] The composition of the Bible reflected the worldview of what Eichhorn referred to as the "primitive mind." The contribution of their criticism, so these scholars reasoned, was to the newly championed ability to make appropriate epistemological distinctions and supply a natural cause where a biblical author had given a mythical one. Norton had little interest in the critical study of the Old Testament. He believed that the Jews were guided by the providence of God and that their conception of religion was far superior to that of other ancient nations but that their canon contained much irrelevant and contradictory material, which had nothing to do with revelation from God.[93]

When Eichhorn turned his critical eye toward the New Testament in his *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Norton grew concerned. Eichhorn examined the historical evidence in the first two centuries and argued that the four Gospels, according to this theory, were second-century recensions and therefore could not have been written by the Apostles or their contemporaries. Consequently they could not be relied on as accurate historical accounts of the life of Jesus.[94] For example, "Justin Martyr," wrote Eichhorn, "nowhere quotes the life and sayings of Jesus according to our present four Gospels, which he was not acquainted with." He also examined discrepancies between different Gospels describing the same event and concluded that scribes embellished the texts. Eichhorn believed that if one put aside "idle tales and unsupported tradition" the historical evidence forced one to conclude that "before our present Gospels, other decidedly different gospels were in circulation, and were used during the first two centuries in the instruction of Christians."[95]

Proving the Authenticity of the Bible

Norton had little regard for what he believed to be the collection of superstitions in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, he believed that Jesus was the messenger of God and the Gospels were the reliable account of his life and teachings and therefore the basis of true religion. In order to combat the destructive effects of Eichhorn's biblical criticism, Norton fought back with history. For 18 years, he devoted himself to composing an adequate response to the German threat. In 1837, he published the first two volumes of his magnum opus, *The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*.

In order to establish the authenticity of the Gospels, Norton attempted to reconstruct the world of the second-century Christian to demonstrate that corruption and fabrication would have been highly unlikely. For example, Norton referred to Dionysius, who was Bishop of Corinth

about the year 170. Dionysius condemned in unqualified terms anyone who altered the Scriptures. Norton reasoned, based on the "prevailing sentiment," that "Christians did not generally practice or permit what was esteemed a work of 'the apostles of the devil,' and one 'against which a woe was denounced.'"[96] Norton attempted to imagine the intellectual milieu of the time and culture in which the early Christians were duplicating and distributing the Gospels to assert that, given the environment, gross fabrication and distortion of the Gospels would have been unlikely.

Interestingly, Norton did not assemble a series of authoritative pronouncements by saints and bishops and attempt to overwhelm his opponents with the declarations of men whom Christians believed had been entrusted with divine knowledge. Rather, to illustrate the intellectual tenor of the times, he gathered an array of voices writing on the sacredness and importance of the Gospels. He quoted from Clement of Alexandria as well as from a lowly anonymous writer. The opinion of the church father carried evidentiary weight, not because Norton deferred to authority but because the church father represented the opinions of his community and influenced the minds of his church. He sought to reconstruct the ideas of the time. He noted that Origen believed that the Scriptures were dictated by the Holy Spirit. Though Norton thought this notion was absurd, he used it to establish the "existence of sentiments" that would make the intentional alteration of Scriptures improbable during the first two centuries.[97] The context proved, believed Norton, that the Gospels were authentic.

Norton's proofs were not necessarily original. For example, he pointed his readers to the latent antagonism between the Jews and Gentiles. He observed that the Gospels were evidently the works of Jewish authors. By the second century, Gentile Christians far outnumbered their Jewish brothers and regarded them with suspicion. Therefore, he reasoned that Gentile Christians would have examined four histories of Christ, from Jewish Christians, with the greatest scrutiny. If Jewish authors had attempted to fabricate the history, the Gentile community would never have accepted the accounts. Americans had been using similar proofs against the deists as early as the mid-eighteenth century in the Dudleian Lectures.[98]

Norton also pointed out that the Gospels were "evidently the work, not merely of Jewish authors, but of *unlearned* Jewish authors, men unskilled in the use of language generally, and of the Greek language in particular." He referred to Origen, who wrote that "the style of the scriptures was regarded by the Greeks as poor and contemptible." He also looked to Lactantius, who observed, "Literary men when they give

their attention to the religion of God . . . do not become believers . . . [T]hey despise as sordid the simple and common language of the divine writings." Norton therefore concluded that if the Gospels had not been genuine, "their style and idiom alone would have formed no small obstacle to their reception."[99] He argued that if the Gospels were forgeries, then the forger would have utilized a better form of Greek. A century earlier, Locke had made a similar point. The great classicist Bentley demonstrated that anachronistic language disproved the authenticity of the letters of Phalaris.[100] Le Clerc, in his *Ars Critica*, argued that the ancient historians did not accurately record the past if the language of the actors was uncharacteristically eloquent.[101]

Norton's disagreements with the Germans were not merely academic. He believed that the radical German scholars were adversely affecting religion in the United States. If the foundation of faith was not a scientifically grounded interpretation of revelation, then the door was open to a religion based on the subjective intuitions and feelings of the Transcendentalist. Since Norton's battle against the Transcendentalists is well known and has been examined at length by historians, one need not rehash the details.[102] In 1836, George Ripley defended an intuitionalist doctrine of religious knowledge in the *Christian Examiner*. He and other Transcendentalists borrowed their ideas from German Idealism through Samuel Coleridge and Victor Cousin. They attacked the use of external evidence to support Christianity. Norton could not stand for such absurdities. Not only did such views nullify the purpose of Norton's great work, *The Genuineness of the Gospels*, but Norton argued that evidence was the ultimate foundation upon which faith could rest. The issue of evidence erupted again in 1838 when Emerson delivered his famous Divinity School Address. Norton responded with *A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity*, in which he argued that the Christian faith must be grounded on historical evidence. Most importantly, the external evidence of miracles authenticated Jesus's divine mission. In his *Remarks on the Modern German School of Infidelity*, he linked Transcendentalism with Schleiermacher, Strauss, de Wette, Neander, and Paulus.[103]

The heart of the problem, according to Norton, was that the Transcendentalists and Germans relied on intuitions as a source of knowledge. Intuitions were vague and subjective. Only the rigorous and exacting work of historical and linguistic scholarship could ground religious truth on precise and concrete biblical meaning. Interestingly, Norton opposed Transcendentalists and Calvinists for similar reasons. Norton believed both distorted the meaning of the Bible by detaching words from their socially conditioned contexts. Furthermore, both sought certainty through

intuition and believed they could bypass the work of historical research. Calvin certainly had very little in common with Emerson. However, from Norton's perspective, neither group's wildly subjective hermeneutic was restrained by history.[104]

The Limits of History

Norton had historicist tendencies—ideas and words must be understood within their historical context. But there were limits to his adherence to historicism. He was not a metaphysical naturalist. He still believed that God used miracles to confirm the divine authority of revelation. Therefore, the very ahistorical nature of the Gospels proved their divine origin. They did not appear to emerge from their historical context or resemble other literature produced in the historical and cultural milieu: "It was indeed a most marvelous event, and *wholly out of the sphere of natural causes*, that one who had never entered the schools of human wisdom, who had lived all his life in the midst of the gross ignorance, the inveterate prejudices, and the habitual and degrading vices of Galilean Jews, surrounded by a people not more cultivated nor intellectual than those who now occupy the same land, that such an one should make known to mankind a universal religion, the most pure, the most holy, and the most powerful in its operation." When he examined the state of morals and the philosophy available to the Apostles, Norton found it impossible that such uneducated and primitive men could ever have created the religion on their own.[105] Because such an advance had never occurred in the history of mankind, divine intervention was the only explanation.

Furthermore, Norton accepted that the people of the past thought differently, but he still believed that common principles transcended history. Some people, in all times and cultures, could still be reasonable. When he lectured on the interpretation of ancient writings, he advised the interpreter to ask if the writer was reasonable or irrational.[106] Likewise, he believed that the first-century Christians would have inquired about the authenticity of the Gospels: "But Christians at that period, *equally with Christians at the present day*, must have considered the question of the genuineness of the Gospels as one of the greatest importance." Any man, modern or ancient, would test them to see if they were true.[107] Norton assumed that the Gospels must have been authentic because Christians of the second century would have examined the Gospels just as he would have. He went on to write, "[Second-century Christians] must have felt, at least as strongly as *we* do, the fundamental importance of the subject of [evidence]."[108] Who exactly were the "*we*" to whom Norton referred?

Apparently, the second-century Christians shared the values of not only a person of the nineteenth century but in particular a Boston Unitarian.

This point reveals tensions in Norton's view of history. At several points in his lectures on interpretation, Norton argued that the first-century Christians were ignorant primitives who could not possibly fully comprehend the meaning of the Gospels. However, these first-century primitives were still capable of searching for proof just as someone like Norton would. Eichhorn also believed that the people of the past were different, but he was willing to go much further. Primitives interpreted the world as myth. The modern man erroneously interpreted the myth as real miracles.

Norton may have assumed that all reasonable people throughout history relied on evidence, but the German theologians took the tools of historical analysis and challenged this assumption. David Friedrich Strauss took historical interpretation to a new level when he argued that to the writers of the first century, myths and legends were common modes of expression, and in using myth they were neither creating falsehoods nor describing events in a scientific manner.[109] By Strauss's paradigm, erroneous accounts of Jesus's life would not have been considered deceptions or fabrications by the standards of the first century. They were true in a mythological sense. According to Strauss, the scholar of the nineteenth century did not share common conceptual modes with the authors of the Gospels.

Norton addressed the heresy of Strauss in his *Internal Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, which he composed in 1847 and 1848. He did not directly engage with the most radical aspect of Strauss's theory, that the people of the past conceptualized truth mythically. Instead, he reasserted his thesis from *The Genuineness of the Gospels*. Norton believed that he had already proven that the Apostles wrote the Gospels. Therefore, he argued that the Apostles and other Christians were either intentionally deceptive or honest but certainly not both.[110] People, even those living in the first century, would not look at a falsehood and believe it was the truth, he insisted. Norton assumed that the early Christians shared his nineteenth-century epistemology.

One could also look at the conflict between Norton and Strauss as a difference of degree. Like Strauss, Norton believed that ideas changed throughout history. However, Norton did not think that ideas changed as radically as Strauss posited. Even before he read Strauss, Norton said in 1819 that the biblical interpreter must understand the "previous condition, opinions, and character of mankind." He went on to write, "He must make himself familiar with forms of error, *and modes of exhibiting*

truth, very different from those to which he has been accustomed. He must become, as it were, an inquisitive traveler in a strange country, among men who use a new language; and he will see around him much, of which he cannot at once comprehend."[111] Norton and Strauss were utilizing a similar historicist principle to understand the Bible. The very foundation of Norton's dispute with the Calvinists was that they had not taken history seriously enough. Strauss could have made the same accusation of Norton.

Norton maintained that some aspects of human nature were essential and did not vary through the ages. He simply could not accept Strauss's thesis that people of the past could look upon a myth as reality. Strauss had taken the explanatory powers and relativistic implications of history into regions where Norton would never venture. For example, Norton took issue with Strauss's view on miracles. Norton was a historicist, but he still believed that miracles were possible. Strauss, like Spinoza, worked on the *a priori* assumption that the laws of nature could not be broken and therefore any record of a miracle could have been the result of a primitive mythological mind interpreting the life of Jesus. Norton charged that Strauss had gone too far. Norton needed to preserve the reality of the miracles from the corrosive effects of history. He shifted the debate from historical to theological grounds and argued that God's nature allowed for the miraculous.[112]

The Calvinists, according to Norton, adhered to an older epistemology in which the ultimate cause and meaning of historical events on earth were understood to lie in the supernatural world. They believed that God interrupted the natural flow of worldly events and therefore historical criticism could not completely apply to miraculous events, the Bible, or perhaps the writing of theology. For the Calvinist, these immutable and eternal truths floated above the world of natural causes. Strauss, on the other hand, asserted that earthly causes and prior circumstances could explain all the events and ideas of the world. He banished God from the earth and relegated him to the realm of ideas. Strauss knew that history would eventually eliminate the supernatural. He wrote that "the pure historic idea was never developed among the Hebrews . . . Indeed, no just notion of the true nature of history is possible, without a perception of the inviolability of the chain of finite causes, and of the impossibility of miracles."[113] Timeless propositional truths and miracles had no place in a world where natural causes and historically different modes of conception could explain everything.

Norton sought to straddle both worlds. While he attempted to pull the Calvinists into a historical awareness of some of their own myths, he

tried at the same time to keep the historical criticism of the Germans at bay. He wanted to historicize the Reformed conception of Christianity, yet he still wanted to preserve his own sacred cows: the Gospels and the miracles of Christ. He thought he could place them on a pedestal above the relativizing ravages of German historical criticism.

Conclusion

Joseph Stevens Buckminster and Andrews Norton believed they lived in a time of hermeneutical chaos. Though the Bible was still the revelation and truth of God in the minds of most, there was little control over its interpretation. They were essentially dealing with the same problems that plagued the American Puritans earlier. Puritans thought that the Holy Spirit would bring interpretive consensus. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Dickinson, and Jonathan Edwards thought that a combination of the Spirit and science and history could resolve interpretive disputes. Buckminster and Norton naïvely believed that they relied exclusively on a historicist hermeneutic to resolve interpretive conflicts. Both believed that the Calvinists in particular were mired in the past, clinging to a dated hermeneutic. According to the two Unitarians, these Calvinists relied on a hermeneutic that affirmed their own conclusions. Discussion was fruitless. The liberals were continually struck by barbs from orthodox publications such as *The Panoplist*. Both Buckminster and Norton, drawing upon European resources, believed that a historical hermeneutic could place the discussion on objective and empirical grounds. The interpretation of the Bible required discipline. Otherwise, people could make the Bible support their own notions. Buckminster and Norton believed history provided the only viable grounding. Needless to say, they were partial to European criticism, for it happened to affirm their own conclusions. However, the tools of history that they thought would affirm their interpretation of the Bible threatened to attack the very foundations of their beliefs.

Epilogue

The Orthodox Reconcile with the Past

Buckminster and Norton certainly stood near the liberal end of the theological spectrum in early-nineteenth-century America. It is not surprising that Unitarians departed from traditional conceptions and interpretations of the Bible. What is interesting is how elements of this evidentiary and historicist tendency pervaded the theological landscape beyond the liberal Unitarians. The belief that the Bible must be studied objectively, historically, and free from theological presuppositions can be found in conservative Moses Stuart (1780–1852) as well.

It is impossible to do full justice to Stuart's life and work in this short space. Others have written about his life and work.[1] I would like to point out the extent to which this orthodox Calvinist absorbed the historicist hermeneutic. Stuart, one of the most able biblical scholars in the early nineteenth century, taught at Andover Seminary as a professor of biblical literature from 1810 to 1848. The seminary was founded in 1808 with the express purpose of safeguarding Calvinist orthodoxy from Harvard Unitarianism. Unlike the Unitarian Norton, Stuart believed that the Bible in its entirety was inspired by God.

Nonetheless Stuart, along with Norton, was one of the first Americans to recognize the importance of German biblical criticism.[2] He wrote, "There is more scientific knowledge of biblical criticism comprised in the German . . . than in all the other languages of the world taken together."[3] Stuart was deeply impressed by the scholarship of Eichhorn, though he was troubled by his conclusions regarding the historicity of the Bible. Stuart wanted to introduce the German methods, not to undermine the orthodox, but to strengthen them. He attempted to extract the best German scholarship on biblical subjects and then refute the radical German criticism through an informed reading of these sources. Like Norton, Stuart believed that the interpreter must examine what the text actually

said by a thorough knowledge of the grammar and the historical background of the subject of the passage.[4]

Also like Norton, Stuart was concerned with the problems of arbitrary interpretation and subjectivity. All Christians (by which he meant Protestants), he noted, appealed to the Bible, but many arrived at different conclusions, undermining the Bible's credibility. Christians, Stuart noted, regrettably imported their own theological convictions into their interpretation of the Bible. Thus people, perhaps unintentionally, read the Bible to justify their particular theological convictions. Only scientifically determined and universally accessible laws of interpretation, free from theological or spiritual bias, could adjudicate between partisan bickering: "Our ultimate appeal then is to the laws of Exegesis."[5]

The interpreter should not read his own modern culture into the past. Doing so "would be doing violence to the laws of interpretation."[6] Theological convictions and presuppositions must always yield to the conclusions of historical criticism and philology. Stuart argued that the interpreter needed to enter the cultural world of the biblical writer: "Whether [the biblical author] agrees or disagrees with our present notions, yea, whether he inculcates truth or error, is nothing to him as interpreter. With this he may be deeply concerned as a man and a theologian; he is so; but as an interpreter, his work is done, when the true meaning of his author is unfolded."[7] Stuart, like Norton, was overconfident in his ability to transcend his particular prejudices. Stuart fervently asserted that a proper interpreter must lay aside all theological or personal opinions. He claimed that he would take leave of all theology and "aim to act merely the part of a historical inquirer, who applies to the appropriate sources of information, and endeavors in this way to find out what he ought to believe."[8] He boasted that the "simple sling and stone of historical criticism are all that I assay to use."[9] He was from a modern perspective naïve. He believed that hermeneutics could eliminate all elements of subjectivity and eventually sort out almost all vagaries. He predicted that in a few decades, "hermeneutics will be a science as definite and as well bounded and discriminated, as most other sciences which have long been taught as complete." He even cautiously though cryptically challenged John Calvin. He noted that Calvin's knowledge of biblical languages was "admirable for his times" but the state of knowledge has far exceeded him. Calvin, Stuart suggested, imposed his theology on all his interpretations. Stuart carefully added the contorted critique that though Calvin's methods were not reliable his conclusions were correct. Then Stuart noted that only readings based on the proper methods were trustworthy.[10]

So great was Stuart's confidence in the methods of interpretation that he argued that the Bible must be interpreted like any ordinary ancient book. He certainly believed that the Scriptures were divine revelation and the miracles it recorded were real. But he explicitly denied the notion that one must be "enlightened in a spiritual sense" before one could understand the Scriptures. "That illumination and guidance are promised to humble inquirers after heavenly wisdom, is a most delightful truth, by no means to be obscured or surrendered." But the Bible, he insisted, could be understood with common "reason and understanding." A spiritual person would naturally have more sympathy for the Scriptures than someone who did not believe. But this was no different from saying "poetic feeling" was necessary to understand Milton more properly, or that "mathematical feeling" aided the comprehension of Laplace or Newton. "I must then relinquish the idea of a miraculous interposition, in every instance where the Bible is read and understood," Stuart wrote.[11] He believed the Bible was a supernatural revelation from God. However, the true meaning of the Bible could only be adjudicated by completely naturalistic methods and scholarly labor. Interpretation not founded on "clear and certain laws" led to the "subjective caprice of interpreters." Stuart rejected the views of Mather, Dickinson, and Edwards. However, Stuart believed he could maintain traditional convictions but with more certain, reliable, and universally accessible methods. Like his predecessors, he believed that putting the meaning of the Bible in the open light of examination could more effectively convince the skeptic.[12]

The issue of slavery and the Bible reveals how deeply the historical hermeneutic pervaded Stuart's thinking and pushed his interpretations to conclusions at odds with more conservative views. Many scholars have noted that in the decades before the Civil War, the biblical interpreters were deeply divided over the biblical view of slavery.[13] Proslavery apologists pointed out that the Old Testament clearly permitted slavery and the New Testament never explicitly condemned it. Moses wrote laws regulating the practice of slavery. Jesus interacted with slaves and slave owners, and he never condemned the practice as a sin. The Apostle Paul urged the escaped slave Onesimus to return to his master Philemon. The Bible appeared tacitly to tolerate and even approve of the practice.[14] Thus antislavery Christians faced a problem. How could one oppose slavery when the Bible appeared to support it?

Some abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Gerrit Smith simply rejected the moral authority of the Bible over the matter of slavery. Similarly, the Transcendentalist Theodore Parker wrote that "if the Bible defends slavery, it is not so much better for slavery, but so much worse

for the Bible."[15] Such views were too radical for most Christians. William Ellery Channing, a leading Unitarian, argued that conscience and reason should determine the general tenor and spirit of the Scriptures and determine which parts of the Bible should be privileged over others. The spirit of Christianity, he determined, was opposed to slavery and therefore it overruled any passage that sanctioned slavery.[16] Furthermore, Channing and other Unitarians believed that the world had been progressing morally since the Bible was written and therefore God intended that the complex social evil would be gradually eradicated over time. The New Testament writers did not overtly call for the abolition of slavery because the world was not morally mature enough for such a radical move. Furthermore, if Jesus overtly called for the immediate abolition of slavery, the Roman Empire would have surely crushed the young religion, not allowing the church the opportunity to grow. Instead, in their wisdom, argued the Unitarians, the New Testament writers wrote about love in such a way that implicitly made slavery untenable. Channing argued that God intended gradually to abolish slavery.[17]

Such solutions were of course unacceptable to more conservative Christians who believed that the entire Bible was inspired. It seemed unsettling to them that reason and conscience could adjudicate which parts of the Bible were more correct or that the timeless and transcendent word of God could be morally inconsistent. Did not God establish a single unified revelation for all times and places?[18] Some abolitionists who maintained their commitment to Scripture attempted to maintain a literal interpretation of the Bible and escape the embarrassing suggestion that the Bible supported slavery. For example, Theodore Weld and George Cheever, despite all historical evidence to the contrary, denied that the Old Testament and first-century Jews ever owned slaves.[19] Thus Jesus's silence on the matter should not be interpreted as approval. Most preferred to argue that since the pious and learned translators of the King James Bible never translated the Greek word *doulus* as slave but only as servant, Jesus, they concluded, never encountered slavery.[20] As historian Molly Oshatz observes, "the hermeneutical lengths to which Christian abolitionists were willing to go to avoid the conclusion that the Hebrews practiced slavery under God's watch demonstrated the depth of their commitment to the universality and unchangeability of moral law as reflected in the Bible."[21]

Though Stuart was opposed to slavery, he was also devoted to his principles of biblical interpretation. He found the conservative assertion that there were no slaves in the New Testament world untenable. He could never support a "strained or unnatural interpretation" in order to

reconcile the Bible to the moral needs of the modern reader or resolve an apparent inconsistency.[22] Although he agreed with the Unitarian Channing that the writers of the New Testament hoped to abolish slavery through principle rather than explicit precept, he did not believe that reason and conscience could adjudicate which parts of the Bible were truer than others because he held that all parts of the Bible were inspired. How then could Stuart argue that the Bible opposed slavery when the inspired biblical writers did not condemn the practice in their midst? Stuart argued that the Bible must be read in a manner that took into account the understanding of morality in the culture of the writers.[23]

For example, the biblical account states that Moses instituted rules to regulate the practice of slavery. Stuart argued that Moses intended to ameliorate the brutality of slavery gradually. When Moses came out of Egypt and gave laws to the Hebrews, he declared that male slaves would be free after six years. No such provisions were given to female slaves. However, forty years later, on the borders of the promised land, he declared that female slaves would also be free after six years. Why did Moses wait forty years to make this declaration? Stuart argued that this was a matter of culture and development. The "universal degradation [of women] in the East, rendered [the equal treatment of male and female slaves] revolting to the Jews, and quite impractical." However, Moses had been "moulding [*sic*] the manners and customs of the Hebrew nation for forty years" to prepare them for the improved treatment of female slaves.[24]

Just as the Hebrews' understanding of women improved over the course of forty years, humanity had been progressing morally over the centuries, argued Stuart. Moses allowed slavery as a concession to the moral immaturity of the age. His people were not prepared for the emancipation of all slaves. Stuart argued that despite being the recipients of God's grace and revelation, they were still people of their time. To expect the Jews to accept immediate emancipation given their cultural context was simply unreasonable. Slavery and brutality prevailed in the Ancient Near East. The Mosaic legislation was, by comparison, quite humane: "Compare all this now with the laws of Moses. Does it now not lie on the very face of his legislation, that he far outstripped all the legislation and sages of antiquity? How came he, issuing from Egypt, the very hot-bed of polytheism and slavery, to know so much about the right of men, and to do so much for the interests of humanity? There is but one satisfactory answer to these questions; and this is, that he had light from above."[25] Moses's slavery laws were quite progressive given the historical and cultural context. The very fact that the laws of Moses were inconsistent with the historical context demonstrated its divine origin. Stuart argued that "the

Mosaic dispensation was a *preparatory* one, and not a complete, perfect, or permanent one." It was intended for a morally primitive era. Therefore Moses's permission for slavery simply did not apply to the modern age.[26]

The same logic applied to the toleration of slavery in the New Testament. Stuart argued, like Channing, that Christ and his Apostles chose to abolish slavery through principles instead of explicit precepts. Christ "doubtless felt, that slavery might be made a very tolerable condition, nay, even a blessing to such as were shiftless and helpless, in case of kind and gentle mastership." Christ decided that slavery should be tolerated for the time being but "took care to utter truths and establish principles, which in their gradual influence and operation would banish slavery from the face of the earth." The writers of the New Testament adapted their message to the cultural and moral state of the age. Also, Stuart argued, Christ and the writers of the New Testament did not abolish slavery immediately for pragmatic reasons. Like Channing, Stuart believed that the New Testament writers tolerated slavery as a pragmatic concession to contemporary needs. If Christ and the Apostles declared that all slaves must be freed, then the "whole power of the Roman government would have been brought down upon it, to crush it in the bud, and never to suffer it again to rise up. Paul, Peter, and other disciples, thought it best to wait with patience for the greater prevalence of Christianity and its more matured state, before they urged obligations on masters to free their servants."[27] Some more conservative voices took issue with Stuart's belief in moral progress. Charles Hodge, a conservative Presbyterian, opposed the contention that Christ avoided the immediate abolition of slavery to avoid strife and bloodshed in the first century. He also disputed the notion that human nature and the moral maturity of people were different from one age to another: "Is human nature so much altered, that a course, which would have produced universal bloodshed, and led to the very destruction of the Christian religion, in one age, is wise and Christian in another?"[28] Stuart was not a full-fledged historicist, but, more than Hodge, he believed that people shaped by distant times and cultures perceived moral issues in profoundly different ways. Clearly, Stuart had been more open to and influenced by the ideas of German scholars such as Eichhorn.

Stuart believed that the immediate audience of the biblical writers did not conceive of the world in the same manner as the modern reader. They were morally immature. Therefore, without the aid of a properly trained historical scholar, some of revelation's meaning was inaccessible to the average reader. The biblical scholar's exacting and scientific historical reconstruction demonstrated how culturally remote and distant

the world of the biblical writer was from the modern reader. In previous generations, theology or the light of the Holy Spirit closed any perceived historical gap. The reader enjoyed a sense of intimacy and immediacy with the Bible.

Stuart threaded a difficult needle. On the one hand, he believed that the whole of the Bible was inspired. The Christian, Stuart believed, was not permitted to believe that he had greater wisdom than the inspired writers. For Stuart, historical context provided the solution. Stuart argued that Christ and his Apostles fully understood that slavery should be abolished. The inspired writers were, by the grace of God, ahistorical. They transcended the primitive morality of their age. However, they accommodated their revelation to the pragmatic considerations of their times and the moral condition of their audience. Stuart's historical hermeneutic should be distinguished from that of the late-eighteenth-century German critics such as Semler, Eichhorn, and Gabler. They argued that the writers were unaware of their own limitations. They themselves were blinded by their culture. Stuart never went that far. He believed that the inspired writers transcended their culture. Nonetheless, Stuart believed that the human race was in a state of continual moral progress. The primitive culture limited and constrained the writing of the inspired writers. Of course Stuart still believed that the Bible was a transcendent revelation, but his hermeneutic increasingly made it a product of its historical moment.

Stuart's hermeneutic illustrates the gradually increasing domination of philology and history in the interpretation of the Bible over the course of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. Although Stuart represents the more conservative end of the spectrum of theological views in the early nineteenth century, he rejected the views typified by Jonathan Edwards when he denied that the Holy Spirit's illumination was a prerequisite for properly interpreting and understanding the Bible and claimed that theological considerations must be put aside. The meaning of the Bible became accessible through dispassionate empirical examination, not grace. The Bible was composed by supernatural means, Stuart believed, but its interpretation was natural. Both Norton and Stuart believed that in an increasingly theologically diverse age, history and philology were two of the few common languages people could speak about the Bible. Consequently, the Bible might have been the final authority, but the empirical tools of interpretation increasingly became the arbiter over the Bible's meaning.

Stuart was of course not fully historicist in his hermeneutic. He attempted to utilize historicist methods for orthodox ends. But historicism would prove to be an unreliable ally. Historian Grant Wacker

contends that interpreting the Bible increasingly through lens of historicism lay at the heart of the twentieth-century division between fundamentalist and liberals. Historicist critics continued to undermine the Bible's traditional conception as transcendent and timeless revelation and portray the Bible as marred by errors, prejudices, ignorance, and limitations of its human authors and their primitive cultures. During the next hundred years after Stuart, American biblical scholars such as William Rainey Harper, Charles Augustus Briggs, and Shirley Jackson Case would push historicism in far more radical directions that would have shocked Stuart. Furthermore, the theory of moral progress became fundamental to the development of late-nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism developed by theologians such as Newman Smyth, Lyman Abbott, and Theodore Munger.[29]

Conclusion

From the early-eighteenth-century Puritan Cotton Mather to the early-nineteenth-century Unitarian Andrews Norton, scholarly Americans increasingly subjected their sacred revelation to rational, empirical, and universally accessible examination. They did so in part to answer the challenges that skeptics launched against the Bible. Skeptics, deists, and German critics, in various ways, questioned the factual accuracy, historicity, and authority of their Scriptures. The American apologists all defended the conception of the Bible as sacred revelation. However, in light of the ever-increasing attacks and the changing standards that constituted legitimate knowledge, they felt pressured to do so on evidentiary grounds. They believed that they could no longer take for granted that everyone assumed that the Bible's truth and status were self-authenticating and self-evident. The Holy Spirit's testimony in the heart of the believer no longer functioned as convincing evidence. The pious apologists, like their skeptical enemies, subjected the Bible to examination by a variety of disciplines. Both sides believed that evidence of the Scripture's authenticity needed to be accessible to any intelligent and unprejudiced mind. However, these apologists tacitly conceded some of the argument to their enemies: the authenticity and authority of the Bible could no longer be based primarily on dogmatic authority, tradition, or spiritual intuition.

Increasingly, the status and meaning of the text became subject to a growing body of disciplines such as history, philology, and natural science, and the Bible needed to meet new standards of evidence. Initially, this choice appeared to be both pragmatic and wise. Defenders marshaled empirical evidence to support traditional theological views, but rarely did evidence seriously challenge older certainties. When necessary, they bent external evidence to confirm traditional interpretations of the Bible. However, gradually, the prestige and influence of history, science, and philology grew. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, where there were apparent conflicts, the Bible had to be interpreted in such a way as to be consistent with new findings. The intellectual resources that the defenders of the Bible had confidently utilized for so long began to erode the traditional understanding of revelation. Cotton Mather confidently declared in 1712, "How gloriously do we pursue our Victory

over Infidelity! We have seized the Enemy's Cannon, & we now turn it all upon themselves."[1] These cannons were effective indeed. However, by the nineteenth century, the weapons of empirical examination were turned back upon the Bible's apologists.

The impulse to rationally scrutinize the Bible was not only an attempt to shield Holy Writ from the arrows of skeptics. Theological leaders turned to history to create order and consensus. Due in part to the cultural upheaval of the First Great Awakening, the Revolutionary War, and the formation of a new nation, most Americans became less deferential and more independent. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Americans generally rejected the authority of tradition, of mediating elites, and of organizations that were perpetual rather than volitional. Furthermore, because of its peculiar nature, America was far more religiously pluralistic than most European nations. By the end of the eighteenth century, as Nathan Hatch argues, the varieties of Christianity grew exponentially due to the Second Great Awakening. A proliferation of new leaders felt free to interpret the Bible as they wished. Some claimed new revelations and unique spiritual insights. Many of the freelance religious entrepreneurs felt little accountability to the authority of history, formal theology, or the collective will of churches. Biblical interpretation was following the same egalitarian trends driving American culture. Consequently, during the late eighteenth century, "a revolution had taken place that made private judgment the ultimate tribunal for the exposition of Scripture."[2] Americans felt entitled to choose from a wide and diverse Christian menu.

Without an established state religion and unable to coerce belief, many leaders turned to Scottish Common Sense philosophy to establish a common minimal consensus about the Bible as authoritative revelation. As Christopher Grasso writes, "public champions of Christianity realized that . . . making the United States a Christian nation would require more than the simple perpetuation of a religious heritage. To maintain Christianity as the foundation of a nation that rejected traditional authority by appealing to self-evident truths, many American Protestants felt compelled to defend scripture by invoking common sense, insisting that the Bible's divine origin was obvious to any sensible person."[3] The Bible's defenders argued that the truth of the Scriptures was available to all people of common sense and reason and not merely the elect or those blessed with privileged spiritual senses. A diverse society necessitated broadly accessible means of being convinced of the Bible's divine authority.

Similarly, scholars such as Buckminster, Norton, and Stuart turned to the language of evidence and history to curb the interpretive independence and chaos of their world. In the Second Great Awakening,

unbridled interpretations were spinning out of control. In this context of ever-expanding hermeneutical possibilities, one can understand the impulse to despiritualize the interpretations of the Bible. Multiple interpretations, based on individual insights, ultimately undermined the Bible's claims to authority. Thus, in their attempt to protect the plausibility of the claim that the Bible was a supernatural revelation, they sought to discipline its interpretation, making the text subject to universally accessible and rational criteria. Doing so yielded mixed results.

The naturalistic and historicist hermeneutic practiced by both the liberal Norton and the conservative Stuart was never intended to negate the Bible's status as supernatural revelation, but it certainly strained it. Through this hermeneutic, they unintentionally laid the groundwork for radical critiques of revelation that would arrive in the coming decades. Historians have argued that the second half of the nineteenth century was an era of secularization in Europe and America. When rounding up the usual suspects, scholars look to the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), the Anglican collection of *Essays and Reviews* (1860), and Renan's *Life of Jesus* (1863). These works, published in rapid succession, are commonly credited for undermining traditional views of biblical authority in the English-speaking world. However, by the time they showed up, the ground had already been prepared.

Those who defended the Bible on empirical grounds made a fateful mistake. However, one should not conclude that they were foolish and wrongheaded. Skeptics were attacking the very foundation of Protestant faith by exposing apparent defects and inconsistencies. Given the situation, their choices seem reasonable and sensible. Confident that the Bible was literally and factually true, they defended the historical and factual veracity of the Scriptures using universally accepted empirical tools. And for decades, this strategy was effective. They could have never foreseen the looming threat of historicism and naturalism. Ultimately, their choice was tragic.

The Bible's defenders had every reason to feel confident in the eighteenth century. They believed they had succeeded in demonstrating the historical accuracy of the Bible. However, in the process of "proving" the historical truth of the biblical events, they subtly and perhaps imperceptibly altered the nature of revelation. In hindsight, they erred in trying to reduce a supernatural revelation into something comprehensible by the natural tools of investigation. Alternatively, they could have utilized the resources of their own traditions. In the past, virtually all Christians believed in a transcendent God and to fully understand his revelation required divine intervention; erudition was helpful and necessary, but

not sufficient. Luther and Calvin had a high view of Scripture, but they certainly did not expect the Bible to be a depository of historical facts. A few minor historical inconsistencies did not undermine its status as revelation in their minds. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century apologists certainly could not return to a precritical world, but they could have chastened their faith in the power of history. Perhaps the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century apologists were too enamored with the utility and power of the empirical tools of analysis. The battles with the skeptics certainly demanded a response. But in their zeal to defend their Bible, they painted themselves into a corner. The confidence and clarity that empirical investigations provided may have been more appealing than dependence on the grace of God to reveal the mysteries of Revelation.[4]

Notes

Introduction

1. For the European Enlightenment and skepticism, see Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Norton, 1995 [1966]); Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000); Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Roy S. Porter and Mikulás Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); and Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*; Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002 [1995]); and Paul Hazard, *The European Mind* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1967 [1935]).
2. Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), xvi. See also Frei, *Eclipse*, 1–16, 49–50.
3. The Society of Biblical Literature published several biographies of American biblical scholars. All deal with nineteenth- and twentieth-century figures. Mark Noll's *Between Faith and Criticism* also focuses on the era after the Civil War. Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986).
4. There are a few exceptions. In *The Bible in America*, a collection of essays, Harry Stout deals with the use of the Bible in the eighteenth century. In the same book, Noll discusses the uses of the Bible in the period between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. In *Opening Scripture* literary scholar Lisa Gordis examines American Puritan hermeneutics. These works do not deal with the challenges of skepticism. Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969); Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism;* Harry Stout, "The Word and Order in

Colonial New England," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 19–38; Noll, "The Image of the United States as a Biblical Nation, 1776–1865," ibid., 41; and Lisa M. Gordis, *Opening Scripture: Bible Reading and Interpretive Authority in Puritan New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 3.

5. For example, see Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety versus Moralism: The Passing of New England Theology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1932); Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953); Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1976); James Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis: New England Puritanism before the Great Awakening* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973); and Mark Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768–1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
6. Similar to Winship, Robert Middlekauff observes that Cotton Mather placed greater emphasis on an understanding of the Newtonian natural world than his father and grandfather. Doing so challenged some of his traditional Puritan certainties. Michael P. Winship, *The Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596–1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). See also Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Bozeman, "Biblical Primitivism: An Approach to New England Puritanism," in *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, ed. Richard T. Hughes (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 19–32; and David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).
7. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*.
8. Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).
9. Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 6–7.
10. Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 300. For Common Sense philosophy, see Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 93–113. See also Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History* 24, no. 3 (1955): 257–72.
11. Christopher Grasso, "Deist Monster: On Religious Common Sense in the Wake of the American Revolution," *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 1 (2008): 67–68.

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1. For accounts of skepticism, see for example Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Harbinger Books, 1962 [1876]); Paul Hazard, *The European Mind* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1967 [1935]); Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
2. Diego Lucci, *Scripture and Deism: The Biblical Criticism of the Eighteenth-Century British Deists* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 13, 44–52. See also Robert E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); and E. Graham Waring, *Deism and Natural Religion* (New York: Fredrick Ungar Publishing Company, 1967).
3. John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion, and Responsibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xix, 148, 432. See also Alan P. F. Sell, *John Locke and the Eighteenth-Century Divines* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997); and Lucci, *Scripture and Deism*, 44–48.
4. Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); John Locke, "The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures," in *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, ed. Victor Nuovo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 85–210; Locke, "The Preface: An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles by Consulting St. Paul Himself," in *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, 51–66; Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, ed. John W. Yolton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603–1714* (New York: Norton, 1961), 252.
5. See Lucci, *Scripture and Deism*, 44–48.
6. For a discussion of the mutual intellectual influence between Locke and Newton, see James L. Axtell, "Locke, Newton, and the Elements of Natural Philosophy," *Paedagogica Europaea* 1 (1965): 235–45; Axtell, "Locke's Review of the 'Principia,'" *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 20, no. 2 (1965): 152–61; Margaret J. Osler, "John Locke and the Changing Ideal of Scientific Knowledge," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31, no. 1 (1970): 3–16; G. A. J. Rogers, "Locke, Newton, and the Cambridge Platonists on Innate Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 2 (1979): 191–205; and Rogers, "Locke's Essay and Newton's Principia," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39, no. 2 (1978): 217–32.
7. Winton U. Solberg, "Science and Religion in Early America: Cotton Mather's 'Christian Philosopher,'" *Church History* 56, no. 1 (1987), 77; Solberg, introduction to *The Christian Philosopher* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press,

1994), xliv, lv, xxxvi. For the related issue of Natural Theology, see Charles E. Raven, *Organic Design: A Study of Scientific Thought from Ray to Paley* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 9–15. For the Christian examination of nature in this period, see also James L. Bono, *The Word of God and the Languages of Man: Interpreting Nature in Early Modern Science and Medicine* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 83, 193, 198; Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 168–69, 264; and David S. Katz, *God's Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 100.

8. Hans Frei argues that the historical credibility of the miracle accounts became particularly important in the eighteenth century. This move rose in response to the critiques by deists. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 54, 56. For attacks on miracles, see Hazard, *European Mind*, 155–79; and Stephen, *English Thought*, 192–97.
9. For Anglican attempts to defend the Bible by reason and evidence, see Robert E. Brown, "Edwards, Locke, and the Bible," *The Journal of Religion* 79, no. 3 (1999): 361–84; Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 56–80; Reedy, "Interpreting Tillotson," *Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 1 (1993), 81–103; and Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
10. Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 15; Reedy, *Bible and Reason*; and Frei, *Eclipse*, 18, 80.
11. The sixteenth-century Protestant reformers believed in the inspiration of the Bible. Luther believed that "God is in every syllable." Calvin believed that the biblical writers were "secretaries of the Holy Ghost." However, inspiration did not ensure inerrancy in all details. Calvin and Luther accepted that there were minor historical errors and inconsistencies, and this did not trouble them. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Protestant views of the Bible hardened into literalism. By 1800, evangelicals read the Bible with what James Turner calls "a flat-footed literalness unparalleled in the annals of Christianity." James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 144. Barbara E. Bowe, "Inspiration," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 641; Geoffrey Bromley, "Inspiration, History of the Doctrine of," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: E–J*, ed. Geoffrey Bromley, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 849–54; Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 5; Frei, *Eclipse*, 18–41, 55–56; Roland Bainton, "The

Bible in the Reformation," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 12–13.

12. Isaac La Peyrère, *Men before Adam* (London: [n.p.], 1656).
13. Ibid.
14. Richard H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676): His Life, Work and Influence* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 1987); Anthony Grafton, "Isaac La Peyrère and the Old Testament," in *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 204–13; Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997 [1982]), 77; and David N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
15. David Rice McKee, "Isaac La Peyrère: A Precursor of Eighteenth-Century Critical Deists," *Publication of the Modern Language Association* 59, no. 2 (1944): 466.
16. The emerging history of pagan nations threatened the unique status of the Bible. Anthony T. Grafton, "Joseph Scaliger and Historical Chronology: The Rise and Fall of a Discipline," *History and Theory* 14, no. 2 (1975): 156–85; Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: Textual Criticism and Exegesis*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: Historical Chronology*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 271–72; and Arthur McCalla, *The Creationist Debate: The Encounter between the Bible and the Historical Mind* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 36–39.
17. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors*, 28; Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère*, 11.
18. Robert Morden, *Geography Rectified* (London: Robert Morden and Thomas Cockerill, 1688).
19. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère*, 47–48; McKee, "Isaac La Peyrère," 461–70. See also Grafton, "Scaliger's Chronology: Philology, Astronomy and World History," in *Defenders of the Text*, 104–44; Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
20. Bowe, "Inspiration," 64; Bromley, "Inspiration, History of the Doctrine of," 849–54.
21. Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium: Directions for a Candidate of the Ministry* (Boston: Thomas Hancock, 1726), 83; Thomas Walter, *The Scriptures the Only Rule of Faith & Practice* (Boston: B. Green, 1723), 31.
22. Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16; Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère*, 1; Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts*, 237; Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors*, 48; and McKee, "Isaac La Peyrère," 458.
23. Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 410–13; Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in*

Leviathan (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996); and Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 265.

24. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 261–63, 268.
25. Ibid., 266–68.
26. Seymour Feldman, "Introduction," in *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Seymour Feldman (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), vii. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 230–85; Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*; Stuart Brown, " 'Theological Politics' and the Reception of Spinoza in the Early English Enlightenment," *Studia Spinozana* 9 (1993): 181–200; Roslie L. Colie, "Spinoza and the Early English Deists," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20, no. 1 (1959): 23–46; Colie, "Spinoza in England, 1665–1730," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107, no. 3 (1963): 183–219; Richard Popkin, "Spinoza and Bible Scholarship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 383–407.
27. Stephen, *English Thought*, vol. 1, 33.
28. Benedictus de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2001 [1670]), 86.
29. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 448; Feldman, "Introduction," xxix; Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority*, 8.
30. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 87.
31. Ibid., 5.
32. For metaphysical naturalism, see Brad Gregory, "The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion," *History of and Theory, Theme Issue* 45, no. 4 (2006): 132–49; and Gregory, "No Room for God? History, Science, Metaphysics, and the Study of Religion," *History and Theory* 47 no. 4 (2008): 495–519.
33. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 66
34. Ibid., 88.
35. Ibid., 10.
36. Ibid., 82–83.
37. Ibid., 16.
38. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 27. See also Feldman, "Introduction," xxvii.
39. Ibid., 90, 97.
40. Martin I. Klauber, "Between Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism: Fundamental Articles in the Early Career of Jean LeClerc," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54, no. 4 (1993): 614. John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: Towards an Evaluation of the Rogers and McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 94–95. Regarding the debate between Simon and Le Clerc, see Woodbridge, "German Responses to the Biblical Critic Richard Simon: From Leibniz to J. S. Semler," in *Historische Kritik und Biblischer Kanon in der Deutschen*

Aufklärung, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988). For Simon and the Bible, see also Hazard, *European Mind*, 180–97.

41. Richard Simon, *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Chez Reinier Leers, 1678), 20–41. Klauber, "Between Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism," 624–25; John D. Woodbridge, "Richard Simon's Reaction to Spinoza's 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,'" in *Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner Religiösen Wirkung*, ed. Karlfried Gründer and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1984), 201–26; J. A. I. Champion, "Père Richard Simon and English Biblical Criticism, 1680–1700," in *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin: Essays in His Honor*, ed. James E. Force and David S. Katz, Brill Studies in Intellectual History (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 37–61.
42. Jean Le Clerc, *Five Letters Concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (London: [n.p.], 1690), 187.
43. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, 97.
44. Klauber, "Between Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism," 623–24; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 466–67. Israel also includes Locke in this claim.
45. Sullivan, *Toland*, 232.
46. Lucci, *Scripture and Deism*; Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority*; Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*; Stephen, *English Thought*, 78–136, 170–83; J. A. Redwood, "Charles Blount (1654–93), Deism, and English Free Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 3 (1974): 490–98; Roger L. Emerson, "Deism," in *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener, 5 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973–74),: 647–52; Popkin, *History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*; Roger L. Emerson, "Latitudinarianism and the English Deists," in *Deism, Masonry, and the Enlightenment: Essays Honoring Alfred Owen Aldridge*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 19–48.
47. Lucci, *Scripture and Deism*, 51; Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 77; Frei, *Eclipse*, 66–85.
48. Frei, *Eclipse*, 52–53. Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 17–33.
49. Herbert of Cherbury, *De Religion Laici*, trans. Harold R. Hutchinson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944 [1645]), 95.
50. Lucci, *Scripture and Deism*; A. Owen Aldridge, "Natural Religion and Deism in America before Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 54, no. 4 (1997): 836; and Hazard, *European Mind*, 252–65.
51. Charles Blount, *The Oracles of Reason* (London: [n.p.], 1693); John Toland, *John Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious: Texts, Associated Works, and Critical Essays* (Dublin, Ireland: The Lilliput Press, 1997 [1696]); Toland, *Nazarenus*, ed. Justin Champion (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999 [1718]); Anthony Collins, *Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (London:

[n.p.], 1724); Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation* (Newburgh, NY: David Denniston, 1798 [1730]); Lucci, *Scripture and Deism*, 14, 32–38; and Sullivan, *Toland*.

CHAPTER 1

1. A. Owen Aldridge, "Natural Religion and Deism in America before Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 54, no. 4 (1997): 836; Kerry S. Walters, *The American Deists: Voices of Reason and Dissent in the Early Republic* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992); and Walters, *Rational Infidels: The American Deists* (Durango, CO: Longwood Academic, 1992).
2. Cotton Mather began taking notes daily on the Bible for a future project after he was ordained in 1685. In 1693, he began formally to work on the "Biblia." Though he claimed to be done in 1706, he continued to add to it for much of the remainder of his life. Winton U. Solberg, introduction to *The Christian Philosopher*, ed. Winton U. Solberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), xxxvi.
3. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America*: *Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 5. Winton U. Solberg, "Science and Religion in Early America: Cotton Mather's 'Christian Philosopher,' " *Church History* 56, no. 1 (1987): 74; Frederick Ferré, "Design Argument," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener, 5 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973–74), 670–77; Thomas McPherson, *The Argument from Design* (London: Macmillan, 1972); Clement C. J. Webb, *Studies in the History of Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915).
4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960 [1560]), 1: vii, 1, 4. Citations to the *Institutes* are to book, chapter, and section.
5. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 55; Hans-Joachim Kraus, "Calvin's Exegetical Principles," *Interpretation* 31, no. 1 (1977): 8–18.
6. Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 30–33; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 422; Theodore Hornberger, "Benjamin Colman and the Enlightenment," *The New England Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1939): 417; and John Corrigan, *Prism of Piety: Catholick Congregational Clergy at the Beginning of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
7. Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002 [1995]), 23.
8. The literature on Reformed and Puritan biblical hermeneutics is too vast to list here, but one could begin with Donald K. McKim, ed., *Calvin and the*

Bible (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1947]); Lisa Gordis, *Opening Scripture: Bible Reading and Interpretive Authority in Puritan New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Michael P. Winship, *The Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

9. Quoted from Harry Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 34–35.
10. Nuttall, *Holy Spirit*, 1–61; Gordis, *Opening Scripture*; and Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636–1641* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
11. Gordis, *Opening Scripture*, 114–15. See also Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 56–65; John K. Louma, "Restitution or Reformation? Cartwright and Hooker on the Elizabethan Church," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 46 (1977): 85–106; and Louma, "Who Owns the Fathers? Hooker and Cartwright on the Authority of the Primitive Church," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 8, no. 3 (1977): 45–60. For Puritan uses of reason, see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), 181–206 and John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 41–78.
12. See the prologue for Hobbes, Spinoza, La Peyrère, Simon, and the deists.
13. Diego Lucci, *Scripture and Deism: The Biblical Criticism of the Eighteenth-Century British Deists* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), 10.
14. Cotton Mather, *Reasonable Religion or, The Truth of the Christian Religion, Demonstrated. The Wisdom of Its Precepts Justified: and the Folly of Sinning against Those Precepts, Reprehended. With Incontestable Proofs, That Men, Who Would Act Reasonably, Must Live Religiously* (Boston: T. Green, 1700); Cotton Mather, *A Man of Reason* (Boston: John Edwards, 1718); and Cotton Mather, *Reason Satisfied: and Faith Established* (Boston: J. Allen, 1712). According to Perry Miller, Cotton Mather composed *A Man of Reason* in 1709. However, it was lost on its way to France. It was not recovered and published until 1718. Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, 426.
15. For example, see Raymond F. Stearns, *Science in the British Colonies of America* (Urbana: University of Illinois,1970); Michael P. Winship, "Prodigies, Puritanism, and the Perils of Natural Philosophy: The Example of Cotton Mather," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 51, no. 1 (1994): 92–105; Jeffery Jeske, "Cotton Mather: Physico-Theologian," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47, no. 4 (1986): 583–94; Otho T. Beall Jr., "Cotton Mather's Early 'Curiosa Americana' and the Boston Philosophical Society of 1683," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 18, no. 3 (1961): 372; and Dagobert De

Levie, "Cotton Mather, Theologian and Scientist," *American Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (1951): 362–65.

16. Mason I. Lowance, "Typology and the New England Way: Cotton Mather and the Exegesis of Biblical Types," *Early American Literature* 4, no. 1 (1970): 15–37; Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 72–135.
17. Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596–1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Winship, *The Seers of God*, 77–79; Jeske, "Cotton Mather: Physico-Theologian."
18. Solomon Stoddard, *The Efficacy of Fear of Hell to Restrain Men from Sin* (Boston: Thomas Fleet, 1713).
19. Mather, *Reasonable Religion*, 40.
20. Mather, *Reasonable Religion*, 12–15. Winship, *The Seers of God*, 79. Gerard Reedy offers an excellent discussion on latitudinarian arguments for the Bible. Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).
21. Christians practiced some form of natural theology beginning in the second century. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 5–6; Lucci, *Scripture and Deism*; Herbert M. Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 61–62; Aldridge, "Natural Religion and Deism in America," 836; Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 4.
22. Mather, *Reasonable Religion*, 40, 41.
23. Ibid., 12, 20.
24. Increase Mather, *A Discourse Proving That the Christian Religion Is the Only True Religion: Wherein the Necessity of Divine Revelation Is Evinced, in Several Sermons* (Boston: T. Green, 1702). Holifield notes that this work was one of the earliest American treatises directed solely against deists. Holifield, *Theology in America*, 70.
25. Cotton Mather, *The Everlasting Gospel. The Gospel of Justification by the Righteousness of God* (Boston: B. Green, and J. Allen, 1700), 17.
26. Miller observes that Increase Mather pushed the boundaries of the Puritan use of reason. However, Cotton Mather was even more at ease relying on reason than his father. Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, 421.
27. Mather, *Reasonable Religion*, 3, 4, 6, 7.
28. Miller notes that *Reasonable Religion* shows Cotton Mather using reason in "a new tone—not that he deviates from the founders, but that in his determination to prove" that if "'men Act Reasonably, they would live Righteously,'" Mather gives reason "a fresh stress." Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, 420.
29. Ibid., 426.
30. When he wrote, "It is an Irrational, as well as Unscriptural Opinion, that we have no Ideas in our minds, but what are introduced from abroad, by Observation," he was clearly refuting Locke. He was taking a swipe at Blount when

he wrote, "Perhaps their brazen heads will publish pretended *Oracles of Reason*." He also referred to deists as "Wicked Sons of the *Leviathan*," an unmistakable reference to Hobbes. Mather, *Man of Reason* (Boston: John Edwards, 1718) 3, 5.

31. Mather, *Reason Satisfied*, 7.
32. Mather, *Man of Reason*, 3, 7, 9, 26, 30–34.
33. Fiering argues that seventeenth-century Harvard ethics texts taught that pagan ethics could be appropriate and useful for regulating external behavior. However, this was a matter of debate in New England. Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 16.
34. Mather, *Man of Reason*, 4.
35. See Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 23–30.
36. Mather, *Man of Reason*, 16, 17. One could reasonably conclude that Mather got the idea that certain theological principles could be mathematically proved from reading Samuel Clarke's Boyle Lectures (1704–5). Samuel Clarke, "A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God," in *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, ed. Ezio Vailati (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1705]), 1–92.
37. Mather, *Man of Reason*, 5, 6.
38. Ibid., 7.
39. Cotton Mather, *Reason Satisfied*, iii, iv, vi.
40. Mather, *Reason Satisfied*, 9. This type of historical apologetic was standard latitudinarian fare. Reedy, *Bible and Reason*.
41. Mather, *Reason Satisfied*, 9.
42. Ibid., 11.
43. Ibid., 15.
44. Ibid., 27.
45. Mather also commended the works of Mornay, Baxter, and Bates. For Grotius, see William Lane Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus during the Deist Controversy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 672.
46. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*. The issue of historical evidence is taken up in greater detail in Chapter 2.
47. Middlekauff compares *Reasonable Religion* with *Reason Satisfied* and argues that after reading skeptical and deistic authors, Mather backed away from his advocacy of reason in his 1712 piece. Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 299.
48. Mather, *Reason Satisfied*, 29.
49. Ibid., 30.
50. Ibid.
51. Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 305–19.
52. Ibid., 16.
53. Cotton Mather, *Icono-Clastes* (Boston: John Allen, 1717), 19.
54. Ibid., *15–20;* Mather, *Reason Satisfied*, 15.

55. Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 41–78, quote on 51.
56. Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, 418.
57. For Ramus's logic and its relationship to Puritan thought, see Miller, *New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*; W. S. Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500–1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956); Walter J. Ong, *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Howard H. Martin, "Ramus, Ames, Perkins and Colonial Rhetoric," *Western Speech* 23, no. 1 (1959): 74–82; Keith L. Sprunger, "Ames, Ramus, and the Method of Puritan Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 59, no. 2 (1966): 133–51; Sprunger, "Technometria: A Prologue to Puritan Theology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29, no. 1 (1968): 115–22; Donald K. McKim, "The Functions of Ramism in William Perkins' Theology," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16, no. 4 (1985): 503–17; Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard*, 22–42, 239–301; and Hugh Kearney, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Universities and Society in Pre-Industrial Britain, 1500–1700* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 52.
58. Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, 128; Gordis, *Opening Scripture*, 19–24, 113–19; Edward H. Davidson, "John Cotton's Biblical Exegesis: Method and Purpose," *Early American Literature* 17, no. 2 (1982): 128; Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*; Davidson, "John Cotton's Biblical Exegesis," 119–38.
59. Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium. Directions for a Candidate of the Ministry* (Boston: Thomas Hancock, 1726), 35.
60. Mather, *Manuductio*, 36, 37; Jeske, "Cotton Mather: Physico-Theologian," 593; and *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, 419.
61. Mather, *Manuductio*, 35, 36.
62. Davidson, "John Cotton's Biblical Exegesis."
63. Gustaaf Van Cromphout, "*Manuductio ad Ministerium*: Cotton Mather as Neoclassicist," *American Literature* 53, no. 3 (1981): 361–79.
64. Ibid., 366. Rick Kennedy, "The Alliance between Puritanism and Cartesian Logic at Harvard, 1687–1735," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51, no. 4 (1990): 565–66.
65. Mather, *Manuductio*, 1–2; Van Cromphout, "Mather as Neoclassicist," 367; and Middlekauff, *Mathers*, 284.
66. Van Cromphout, "Mather as a Neoclassicist," 370.
67. Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard*, 241.
68. Jeske, "Cotton Mather: Physico-Theologian," 592.
69. Kennedy, "Puritanism and Cartesian Logic," 549–72.
70. John Milton, "A Fuller Course in the Art of Logic Conformed to the Method of Peter Ramus, 1672," ed. and trans. Walter J. Ong and Charles J. Ermatinger, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols., vol. 8 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 161, 214.
71. Kennedy, "Puritanism and Cartesian Logic," 563–64.
72. Mather, *Manuductio*, 50; Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, 435–36.

73. Mather, *Manuductio*, 51. Jeske argues that Mather was following the model of John Ray's *Wisdom of God*. However, unlike Ray, who eliminated the providence of God, Mather still referred to God's occasional intervention. Jeske, "Cotton Mather: Physico-Theologian."
74. Jeske, "Cotton Mather: Physico-Theologian," 585–86, 592.
75. Mather's shift from a Cartesian to a Newtonian or evidentialist mode of thought was consistent with similar trends occurring in England. Leslie Stephen notes that in the early decades of the eighteenth century, the terms of the debate between the deists and Christian apologists changed from "internal" to "external" evidence. Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 1 (London: Harbinger Books, 1962 [1876]), 143.
76. Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See also George Marsden, "The Bible, Science, and Authority," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 80.
77. Stearns, *Science in the British Colonies of America*, 405; Winship, "Prodigies, Puritanism, and the Perils of Natural Philosophy"; Jeske, "Cotton Mather: Physico-Theologian"; Beall, "Cotton Mather's Early 'Curiosa Americana,'" 372; and Dagobert De Levie, "Cotton Mather, Theologian and Scientist," *American Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (1951): 362–65.
78. Pershing Vartanian, "Cotton Mather and the Puritan Transition into the Enlightenment," *Early American Literature* 7, no. 3 (1973): 217; Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, 440; Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 279–304; Jeske, "Cotton Mather: Physico-Theologian"; John E. Van De Wetering, "God, Science, and the Puritan Dilemma," *The New England Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1965): 494–507; Winship, "Prodigies, Puritanism, and the Perils of Natural Philosophy"; Van Cromphout, "Mather as Neoclassicist."
79. Solberg, "Introduction," xxi, xxxvi.
80. Winton U. Solberg, ed., Cotton Mather, *The Christian Philosopher* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994 [1721]), 7, 17.
81. Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, 441; Otho T. Beall Jr. and Richard Shryock, *Cotton Mather: First Significant Figure in American Medicine* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1954), 50. Solberg, "Introduction," xxxvi. George Lyman Kittredge, "Cotton Mather's Scientific Communications to the Royal Society," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 26 (1916): 18–57. See also David Levin, "Giants in the Earth: Science and the Occult in Cotton Mather's Letters to the Royal Society," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 45, no. 4 (1988): 751–70; Theodore Hornberger, "The Date, the Source, the Significance of Cotton Mather's Interest in Science," *American Literature* 6, no. 4 (1935): 413–20.
82. Cotton Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather 1681–1708* (Boston: The Society, 1911), 169–70.
83. Mather promoted his "Biblia" in his *Magnalia Christi Americana*, *Bonifacius*, and *A New Offer to the Lovers of Religion and Learning.* Cotton Mather,

Magnalia Christi Americana: or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England, From Its First Planting, in the Year 1620, unto the Year of Our Lord, 1698 (London, England: T. Parkhurst, 1702); Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius, An Essay upon the Good* (Boston: B. Green, 1710); and Cotton Mather, *A New Offer to the Lovers of Religion and Learning* (Boston: Thomas Fleet, 1714).

84. Solberg, "Introduction," xxxix.
85. Samuel Mather, *The Life of the Very Reverend and Learned Cotton Mather, D.D. & F.R.S. Late Pastor of the North Church in Boston. Who Died, Feb. 13. 1727* (Boston: Samuel Gerrish, 1729), 74. See Solberg, "Introduction," xxxvii. For a history of the manuscript, see Reiner Smolinski, "How to Go to Heaven, or How Heaven Goes? Natural Science and Interpretation in Cotton Mather's 'Biblia Americana' (1693–1728)," *New England Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2008): 278–84. I am indebted to Reiner Smolinski's scholarship on the "Biblia" in the following section.
86. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Joshua*, trans. H. Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 152–55. Smolinski, "How to Go to Heaven," 325–26.
87. See the introduction.
88. Cotton Mather, "Biblia Americana," MS, The Cotton Mather Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Reel 10, vol. 2, 283. For recent scholarship on the "Biblia," see Reiner Smolinski and Jan Stievermann, ed., *Cotton Mather and* Biblia Americana*—America's First Bible Commentary, Essays in Reappraisals* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).
89. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, 280. Robert Jenkins, *The Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: Richard Sare, 1708), 211–12. See Smolinski, "How to Go to Heaven," 327.
90. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, Reel 10, vol. 2, 283.
91. For example, William Whiston, the successor to Newton in the Lucasian Chair, in his *New Theory of the Earth* attempted to reconcile the biblical account of creation with natural philosophy. He did so by departing from a more literal interpretation. William Whiston, *A New Theory of the Earth* (London, England: J. Whiston and B. White, 1755 [1696]).
92. Ibid., 284.
93. R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 114–19, 132, 137, 143.
94. Mather, *Man of Reason*, 34.
95. On *prisca theologia*, see Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 93–109; Daniel Pickering Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972).
96. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, Reel 10, vol. 1, 97. Regarding *prisca theologia* in America, see Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard*, 14–15.

97. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, Reel 10, vol. 1, 97. See also Cotton Mather, *Biblia Americana, America's First Bible Commentary, A Synoptic Commentary on the Old and New Testaments: Genesis*, ed. Reiner Smolinski 10 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2010), 414–15
98. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, Reel 10, vol. 1, 786. Anthony Grafton, "Protestant versus Prophet: Isaac Casaubon on Hermes Trismegistus," in *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 145–61.
99. A century later, F. C. Baur (1792–1860) of the Tübingen school would compare Israel with its neighbors and come to more radical conclusions. See also Paula Findlen, *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
100. Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 91–92.
101. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, Reel 10, vol. 1, 644. For Witsius's debates with Spencer, see William Henry Green, *The Hebrew Feasts in Their Relation to Recent Critical Hypotheses Concerning the Pentateuch* (New York: Robert Carter,1885), 57–58; Brevard S. Childs, *Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 494; Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13, no. 3 (1950): 309; and Guy G. Stroumsa, "John Spencer and the Roots of Idolatry," *History of Religions* 41, no. 1 (2001): 1–23. Witsius, *Aegyptiaca* (Basle, Switzerland: Herbornæ Nassaviorum, Sumptibus Joannis Nicolai Andreæ 1717, [1683]), l8, 47, 87, 145.
102. Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17.
103. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, Reel 10, vol. 1, 47. Mather, *Biblia*, 277. William Whiston, *A Short View of the Chronology of the Old Testament, and of the Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (Cambridge: University Press, 1702).
104. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, Reel 10, vol. 1, 47; Mather, *Biblia*, 278. See John Marsham, *Chronicus Canon Ægyptiacus Ebraicus Græcus* 8 vols., vol. 4. (London, England: Thomas Roycroft, 1672), 473–76; Anthony Grafton, "Joseph Scaliger and Historical Chronology: The Rise and Fall of a Discipline," *History and Theory* 14, no. 2 (1975): 156–85.
105. Arthur McCalla, *The Creationist Debate: The Encounter between the Bible and the Historical Mind* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 36–39.
106. D. E. Mungello, "European Philosophical Responses to Non-European Culture: China," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 87–102; Edwin J. Van Kley, "Europe's 'Discovery' of China and the Writing of World History," *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 2 (1971): 358–85.

107. In the late seventeenth century, John Webb advanced the thesis that Noah landed in China. Umberto Eco, *Serendipities: Language and Lunacy*, trans. William Weaver (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), 64; Mather, "Biblia Americana," Reel 10, vol. 1, 48. Mather, *Biblia*, 279, 281; Maureen Farrell, *William Whiston* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 296. See Van Kley, "Europe's 'Discovery' of China."
108. Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 271–72.
109. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, Reel 10, vol. 1, 50; Mather, *Biblia*, 285; Whiston, *Short View*, 73–74. The Latin citation translates "without any particular reference of time," and it is taken from James Ussher, *Chronologia Sacra* (Oxford, England: W. Hall, impensis Joh: Forrest, 1660), 160–62, 186.
110. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, Reel 10, vol. 1, 52. Mather, *Biblia*, 296. Mather paraphrased the section about Ahaz from Whiston, *Short View*, 92–93.
111. Mather drew upon a long history of environmental explanations for physical and cultural differences among various groups of people. Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 61, 62.
112. Reiner Smolinski, "Authority and Interpretation: Cotton Mather's Response to the European Spinozists," in *Shaping the Stuart World, 1603–1714: The Atlantic Connection*, ed. Arthur Williamson and Allan MacInnes (Leyden, Netherlands: Brill, 2006), 182–83.
113. See the prologue. Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 116; Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: Towards an Evaluation of the Rogers and McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982); Woodbridge, "German Responses to the Biblical Critic Richard Simon: From Leibniz to J. S. Semler," in *Historische Kritik und biblischer Kanon in der deutschen Aufklärung*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1988), 65–88.
114. Mather, "Biblia Americana," The Cotton Mather Papers, Reel 10, vol. 1, 60.
115. Quoted from Smolinsiki, "Authority and Interpretation," 185–86, 189, 190.
116. Quoted from Smolinski, "Authority and Interpretation," 191.
117. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1: vii, 1; Frei, *Eclipse*, 80.
118. Mather, *Icono-Clastes*, 18.
119. Gordon Stein, *Free Thought in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 4.
120. Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000), 104; Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*.
121. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996 [1791]), 43.

CHAPTER 2

1. Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth Century England: A Study of the Relationship between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 4, 17, 271; Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England 1550–1720* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). See also Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 17–18, 31, 24–29, 52; and Henry G. Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought: 1630–1690* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970).
2. George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 480.
3. Quoted from Edwin F. Hatfield, *History of Elizabeth, New Jersey* (New York: Carlton and Lanahan, 1868), 352, and Bryan F. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson and the Formative Years of American Presbyterianism* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), 1. For more on Dickinson, see David C. Harlan, "The Travails of Religious Moderation: Jonathan Dickinson and the Great Awakening," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 61, no. 4 (1983): 411–26; Leigh Eric Schmidt, "Jonathan Dickinson and the Making of the Moderate Awakening," *American Presbyterians* 63, no. 4 (1985): 341–53; and Leslie W. Sloat, "Jonathan Dickinson and the Problem of Synodical Authority," *Westminster Theological Journal* 8, no. 2 (1946): 149–65.
4. Jonathan Dickinson, *The Reasonableness of Christianity in Four Sermons* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, Cornhill, 1732), 83.
5. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson*, 85–103.
6. Jonathan Dickinson, *Familiar Letters to a Gentleman, upon a Variety of Seasonable and Important Subjects in Religion* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1745).
7. Dickinson's understanding of the categories of certainty and probability differed from the commonly held beliefs of his Anglican counterparts described by Shapiro. They held that all evidence, except for self-evident principles, was probabilistic rather than certain.
8. Grotius, quoted from William Lane Craig, *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus during the Deist Controversy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 672; Jan Paul Heering, "De Veritate Religionis Christianae," in *Hugo Grotius, Theologian: Essays in Honour of G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes*, edited by Edwin Rabbie and Henk J. M. Nellen (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1994), 46–48. See also Hugo Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, trans. Simon Patrick (London: Rich. Royston, 1680 [1632]).
9. William Chillingworth: *Religion of Protestants* (London: E. Coates, 1664 [1638]), 31–32, 33–34, 38; Robert R. Orr, *Reason and Authority: The Thought of William Chillingworth* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); see also Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought*, 15–32; Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 81; Reedy, *The Bible and Reason*, 31.

10. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975 [1689]), 525–38.
11. Locke, *Essay*, 655–56.
12. See Locke, *Essay*, 525, 530–34, 536–39, 654–55, 667–68, 690–91, 694; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Locke's Philosophy of Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. Vere Chapell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 175–77, 190–91; Paul Helm, "Locke on Faith and Knowledge," *Philosophical Quarterly* 23, no. 90 (1973), 52–57; S. G. Hefelbower, *The Relation of John Locke to English Deism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918), 71–73; David Laurence, "Jonathan Edwards, John Locke, and the Canon of Experience," *Early American Literature* 15, no. 2 (1980): 109–10.
13. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson*, 87.
14. Robert E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); John Toland, *John Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious: Texts, Associated Works, and Critical Essays* (Dublin, Ireland: The Lilliput Press, 1997 [1696]); Anthony Collins, *Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (London: [n.p.], 1724); Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation* (Newburgh, NY: David Denniston, 1798 [1730]). See Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harbinger Books, 1962), 1: 78–136, 170–83.
15. John Corrigan includes Thomas Foxcroft, pastor of Boston's First Church, in what he identifies as the liberal or "Catholick" Congregationalists of the early eighteenth century. See John Corrigan, "Catholick Congregational Clergy and Public Piety," *Church History* 60, no. 2 (1991): 210–22; Corrigan, *The Prism of Piety: Catholick Congregational Clergy at the Beginning of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
16. Dickinson, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 1, 41, 42. My emphasis.
17. Jonathan Dickinson, *Witness of the Spirit* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1740), 5.
18. Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 219; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George M. Giger (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1997). See vol. 1, Topic 2, Question 6, 89–91, and Topic 2, Question 4, 195–96.
19. Christians attempted to find evidences to defend the uniqueness of the Scriptures as early as the second century, but the use of external evidence rose to unprecedented heights by the eighteenth century. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 5, 6, 32, 70; Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (New York: Corpus, 1971), 99–101, 113–30.
20. Charles Leslie, *The Truth of Christianity Demonstrated: With a Dissertation Concerning Private Judgment and Authority: To Which Is Prefixed a Vindication of a Short Method with the Deists*, in *The Theological Works of the Reverend Mr. Charles Leslie: In Two Volumes*, vol. 1(London: W. Bowyer, 1721), 227. See also Stephen, *English Thought*, vol. 1, 166.

21. John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation* (London: R. Harbin, 1717 [1691]); John Locke, "The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures," in *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, ed. Victor Nuovo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 85–210; Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 92; Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 101–2, 305–6.
22. Dickinson's writing indicates that he was familiar with at least some of the work of Samuel Clarke, Henry Dodwell, and Anthony Collins.
23. Dickinson, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 3.
24. Ibid., 17, 27, 29.
25. Ibid., 3, 5, 13; *Familiar Letters*, 26. My emphasis.
26. Ibid.
27. Dickinson, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 31. Dickinson did not quite grasp the epistemological categories of latitudinarian thought, or he appropriated them selectively. Dickinson granted "infallible certainty" to a broad range of religious propositions. In contrast, latitudinarians typically believed that all knowledge, with the exception of special categories such as mathematical axioms or intuitions, were at best high probabilities.
28. Ibid., 40. My emphasis.
29. Ibid., 57.
30. Ibid., 54, 57, 64.
31. Ibid., 72.
32. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Gibbon's Contributions to Historical Method," in *Studies in Historiography* (New York: Garland Pubs., 1985 [1966]), 40–55.
33. Momigliano, "Gibbon's Contributions," 40–55; Joseph M. Levine, *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Levine, *The Autonomy of History: Truth and Method from Erasmus to Gibbon* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 171–72.
34. For philosophic history, see Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 217–49. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," in *Studies in Historiography* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1985), 6; George H. Nadel, "Philosophy of History before Historicism," *History and Theory* 3, no. 3 (1964): 291–315; Anthony Grafton, *What Was History?: The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–20; James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming 2014), chapter 4.
35. Seth Ward, *A Philosophical Essay on the Being and Attributes of God, Immorality, and Scripture*, 4th ed., 8 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: Lichfield, 1667 [1652]), 84–85, 87–88, 90, 99–102; Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 156–57.
36. Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, 21, 55–56; Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 94.
37. On the quality of historical reports and witnesses, see John Locke, *Essay*, 660–68. Giovanni Gentile, "Eighteenth-Century Historical Methodology: De Soria's *Institutiones*," *History and Theory* 4, no. 3 (1965): 315–27; and Shapiro,

Probability and Certainty, 119–62; Jean Bodin, *A Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945 [1566]); Nicolas Lenglet du Fresnoy, *A New Method of Studying History* (London: W. Burton, 1728); Benjamin Bennet, *The Truth, Inspiration, and Usefulness of the Scripture Ascertained and Proved* (London: J. Grey, 1730); Jean Le Clerc, *Parrhasiana or Thoughts upon Several Subjects as Criticism History, Morality, and Politics* (London: A. and J. Churchil, 1700); Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *Historical Writings*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972);

38. Dickinson, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 139, 140, 146.
39. Ibid., 147, 155.
40. Ibid., 141, 148–49.
41. Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, 202–3; Gerald R. McDermott, "The Deist Connection: Jonathan Edwards and Islam," in *Jonathan Edwards's Writings: Text, Context, Interpretation*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 39–51.
42. Dickinson, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 60. Dickinson possibly read Prideaux's "Letters to a Deist," which was appended to a *Life of Mahoment*, or works that made similar claims. Humphrey Prideaux, *A Letter to the Deists* (London: Whitehall, 1696), 8.
43. Dickinson, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, 160.
44. Jonathan Mayhew made a similar point. Since many religions claimed to be based on divine revelation, reason alone, employing "probable evidence," could determine which was genuine and determine its meaning. Jonathan Mayhew, *Seven Sermons* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1749), 36, 47, 72; Holifield, *Theology in America*, 132–33.
45. Leslie was responding to Charles Blount, who implied that the miracles of Jesus were no more credible than were the miracles of Apollonius of Tyana. Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," 13; Charles Leslie, *The Truth of Christianity Demonstrated: With a Dissertation Concerning Private Judgment and Authority: To Which Is Prefixed a Vindication of a Short Method with the Deists*, in *The Theological Works of the Reverend Mr. Charles Leslie: In Two Volumes*, vol. 1(London: W. Bowyer, 1721), 12, 31
46. When Dickinson used historical evidences, he often used the language of "certainty" as well as high "probability." It is curious that Dickinson would use history as a source of "certain" proof for the authority and accuracy of Scripture. The major English trends he was undoubtedly familiar with and drew upon clearly viewed history as probabilistic. However, Dickinson did not necessarily depart from his English counterparts. Men like Locke believed the historicity of the Bible was as probable as propositions could be given its nature. Though not certain, history could be "extremely probable." On the matter of the certainty of history, Locke and Dickinson did not necessarily disagree with each other substantially. Rather, Locke was more precise in his language. Locke, *Essay*, 662.
47. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson*, 96.

48. Dickinson, *Familiar Letters*, 1.
49. Dickinson, as leader of the New Lights, supported the revivals in general, but he wanted to curb the excesses. See Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson*; Harlan, "Religious Moderation"; Schmidt, "Moderate Awakening."
50. Dickinson, *Familiar Letters*, 12.
51. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson*, 96.
52. Dickinson, *Familiar Letters*, i.
53. Ibid., xi.
54. See the prologue. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 262–68.
55. Dickinson, *Familiar Letters*, 20, 28.
56. Ibid., 46, 47, 59.
57. Ibid., 60.
58. Ibid., 61.
59. Ibid., 62.
60. Ibid., 69–70.
61. Ibid., 69; For Dickinson on rebirth, see Jonathan Dickinson, *Nature and Necessity of Regeneration* (New York: James Parker, 1743).
62. Dickinson also briefly noted that the "light of nature" and "common sense" could distinguish Christians from heretics. Jonathan Dickinson, *A Sermon, Preached at the Opening of the Synod at Philadelphia, September 19, 1722. Wherein Is Considered the Character of the Man of God, and His Furniture for the Exercise Both of Doctrine and Discipline, with the True Boundaries of the Churches Power* (Boston: T. Fleet, 1723), 13, 18–21. See also Jonathan Dickinson, *Remarks upon a Discourse Intitled an Overture Presented to the Reverend Synod of Dissenting Ministers Sitting in Philadelphia, in the Month of September 1728* (New York: J. Peter Zenger, 1729). On the subscription controversy, see Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson*, 27–44, and Michael Bauman, "Jonathan Dickinson and the Subscription Controversy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, no. 2 (1998): 455–67.
63. Quoted in Reedy, *The Bible and Reason*, 52–55.
64. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 281.
65. Solomon Stoddard, *The Efficacy of Fear of Hell to Restrain Men from Sin* (Boston: Thomas Fleet, 1713), 5.
66. Solomon Stoddard, *The Defects of Preachers Reproved: In a Sermon Preached at Northampton, May 19th 1723* (New-London, CT: T. Green, 1724), 18–19.
67. Solomon Stoddard, *The Safety of Appearing at the Day of Judgment, in the Righteousness of Christ: Opened and Applied* (Boston: Samuel Green, 1687), 126, 115–16.
68. Solomon Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ or, the Way of Directing Souls That Are under the Work of Conversion: Compiled for the Help of Young Ministers and May Be Serviceable to Private Christians, Who Are Enquiring the Way to Zion* (Boston: J. Draper, 1735), 48–49; and Stoddard, *Fear of Hell*, 5.

69. Gerald R. McDermott, Michael J. McClymond, and Robert E. Brown argue that scholarship has not sufficiently appreciated the degree to which Edwards's apologetics engaged the modern critics of the Bible on their empirical and rational terms. Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Michael J. McClymond, *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1998), 7, 80–106; and Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*.
70. Quoted from McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 93–94.
71. Conrad Cherry, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990 [1966]), 12–43.
72. A full treatment of Jonathan Edwards's views on and interpretation of the Bible would entail the work of several books. This discussion is limited primarily to how Edwards responded to deist challenges and his attempts to defend the Bible, particularly on his use of reason, evidence, and especially history. Edwards's response to the challenges of deism is of course only a fragment of Edwards's biblical interpretation.
73. Stephen Stein, "The Quest for the Spiritual Sense: The Biblical Hermeneutics of Jonathan Edwards," *Harvard Theological Review* 70, no. 1/2 (1977): 99–113; Stein, "The Spirit and the Word: Jonathan Edwards and Scriptural Exegesis," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 118–30; and Stein, "Jonathan Edwards and the Rainbow: Biblical Exegesis and Poetic Imagination," *New England Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1974): 440–56.
74. The exact nature of Edwards's "new sense" has been a matter of some debate. See Michael J. McClymond, "Spiritual Perception in Jonathan Edwards," *Journal of Religion* 77, no. 2 (1997): 195–216; Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart," *Harvard Theological Review* 41, no. 2 (1948):123–45; Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*; Paul Helm, "John Locke and Jonathan Edwards: A Reconsideration," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (1969): 51–61; James Hoopes, "Jonathan Edwards's Religious Psychology," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 4 (1983): 849–65; and William J. Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Sense of the Heart," *Faith and Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (1990): 43–92.
75. Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 45, 42.
76. Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *Selected Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Harold P. Simonson (New York: Ungar, 1970), 72, 77.
77. Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellany" (no. 248), *The "Miscellanies,"* ed. Thomas A. Schafer, vol. 13, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 361; Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 480–81; Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 38–39, 44.
78. Stein, "Quest for the Spiritual Sense," 102–3; McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 95; Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 43, 50; Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 44–55.
79. Quoted from Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 50.

80. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 474; Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 51.
81. Ibid., 55. Brown argues that the deist criticism of the Bible forced Edwards to reconceptualize traditional biblical hermeneutics. Edwards believed that the truth of the Bible could no longer be taken for granted. The deist challenges compelled Edwards to marshal evidence to defend the historical veracity of the biblical account. See also Brown, "The Bible," in *Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, edited by Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 87–102.
82. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, vol. 2, *Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 305–7.
83. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 481.
84. Quoted from Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 476.
85. Edwards addressed the problems raised by Tindal in his "Miscellanies," (no. 583), (no. 1340), and in an entry in his "Book of Controversies" titled "The Importance of Doctrines and of Mysteries in Religion." See Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 65, 66.
86. Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 72; Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 477.
87. Edwards writes this in "Miscellanies," (no. 1340). Quoted from Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 67. Locke made a similar point about trusting witnesses. Locke, *Essay*, 662.
88. Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 70.
89. See Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 116. For a survey of the debates regarding Mosaic authorship, see John D. Woodbridge, "German Responses to the Biblical Critic Richard Simon: From Leibniz to J. S. Semler," in *Historische Kritik und biblischer Kanon in der deutschen Aufklärung*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988), 65–87.
90. Locke, *Essay*, 663–64.
91. Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 115; Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason* (Boston: Thomas Hall, 1794), 114.
92. Jonathan Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* (no. 416), ed. Stephen Stein, vol. 15, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 423–69.
93. Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 118; Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 480; Stein, introduction to *Notes on Scripture*, 14–15; and Stein, "Edwards as a Biblical Exegete," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen Stein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 186–87.
94. Edwards, *Notes on Scripture*, (no. 416), 440.
95. Ibid., 416, 425, 432. My emphasis. Edwards likely drew on latitudinarian sources. Reedy, *Bible and Reason*, 48–52.
96. Edwards, *Notes on Scripture*, (no. 416), 441.
97. For Astruc, see Emil Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation* (New York: Harper, 1955), 55.
98. For wisdom of the Egyptians, see Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), and Anthony Grafton, "Protestant Versus Prophet: Isaac Casaubon on Hermes

Trismegistus," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46 (1983): 78–93.

99. Edwards discusses Moses's qualifications as a historian in his commentary on Acts 7:22 in *The "Blank Bible,"* ed. Stephen Stein, vol. 24, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 771; Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 245.
100. Edwards, *Notes on Scripture*, (no. 416), 426.
101. Ibid., 442.
102. Ibid., 456.
103. Ibid., 427.
104. Ibid., 457–58; Brown, *Edwards and the Bible*, 121.
105. Edwards, *Notes on Scripture*, (no. 416), 464.
106. Ibid., 456. Edwards references Bedford, *Scripture Chronology*, 92–100, 512–13, as the source.
107. Edwards, *Notes on Scripture,* (no. 401), 400–5; (no. 408), 415–16. Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 206. Edwards also discusses pagan confirmations of Moses in his "Miscellanies," (no. 983), 302–3 and (no. 1015), 347–48 in Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. 833– 1152),* ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw, vol. 20, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).
108. *Notes on Scripture*, (no. 432), 511–14.
109. Ibid. Edwards cited Humphrey Prideaux's *The Old and New Testament Connected in the History of the Jews and Neighboring Nations*. For Edwards on Zoroaster, see "Whether the PENTATEUCH Was Written by Moses," (no. 416), 464; Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* in entry (no. 416) and (no. 464); (no. 432); and Edwards, "Miscellanies," (no. 969), 251–52.
110. Edwards's references to pagan confirmation of the biblical account are numerous throughout the *Notes on Scripture*. For example, see also (no. 409), (no. 410), (no. 417), (no. 424), (no. 429), and (no. 431). Edwards, *Notes on Scripture*.
111. McDermott, "The Deist Connection," 44.
112. Kenneth P. Minkema, "The Other Unfinished 'Great Work,'" in *Jonathan Edwards's Writings: Text, Context, Interpretation*, ed. Stephen Stein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 52–65.
113. Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 487.
114. Minkema, "The Other Unfinished 'Great Work,'" 53.
115. Minkema "The Other Unfinished 'Great Work,'" 58–59.
116. Quoted from Minkema, "The Other Unfinished 'Great Work,'" 59. See Edwards, *Works*, vol. 11, 202. Edwards's most sustained reflections on typology appeared in the "Miscellanies" in an essay titled "Types of Messiah." This essay fills more than seventy manuscript pages, written in the mid- to late 1740s. His *Notes on Scripture* also functions as a collection point for his interpretation of biblical types. The essay "Types of Messiah" appears in the "Miscellanies,"

(no. 1069) *Works*, vol. 11, 187–382. Stein, introduction to *Notes on Scripture*, 10–11.

117. Stein, introduction to *Notes on Scripture*, 11; (no. 6), 50, (no. 503), 601–5. Edwards, *The "Blank Bible*," 206.
118. Minkema, "The Other Unfinished 'Great Work,'" 62.
119. Quoted from Minkema, "The Other Unfinished 'Great Work,'" 55.
120. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 480.
121. For Edwards's view of history, see Peter Gay, *A Loss of Mastery: Puritan Historians in Colonial America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 104–17; John Wilson, "Jonathan Edwards as Historian," *Church History* 46, no. 1 (1977): 10, 12; Wilson, "History," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 210–25; Avihu Zakai, "The Age of Enlightenment," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen Stein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 88–91; Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History*; and McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 65–79
122. See Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*, 55–90.
123. See Chapter 5 for Michaelis.
124. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 303–4; quoted from Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 481;
125. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 480; Stein, introduction to *Notes on Scripture*, 15.
126. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 303.
127. McDermott, "The Deist Connection," 45.
128. Thomas Pender, *The Divinity of the Scriptures, from Reason and External Circumstances* (New York: William Bradford, 1728), 5.

CHAPTER 3

1. Benjamin Foster, "On the Formal Study of Near Eastern Languages in America, 1770–1930," in *U.S.-Middle East Historical Encounters: A Critical Survey*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Bernhard Magnusson (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007). Historian John H. Giltner notes that in the second half of the eighteenth century, serious training in biblical languages had been in decline in America. John H. Giltner, *Moses Stuart: The Father of Biblical Science* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 6. See also Mary Latimer Gambrell, *Ministerial Training in Eighteenth Century New England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 81.
2. The colonies were certainly not devoid of biblical scholarship at this time. In the mid-eighteenth century, Judah Monis taught Hebrew at Harvard and printed the first Hebrew grammar in America (1735). Stephen Sewall succeeded him and became the Hancock Professor of Oriental Languages (1764). However, Benjamin Foster notes that by most accounts, American students and pastors learned very little about ancient languages. Foster, "Near Eastern Languages."
3. Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 5.

4. John Barnard, *A Proof of Jesus Christ His Being the Ancient Promised Messiah* (Boston: J. Draper, 1756). 5.
5. Christopher Grasso argues that in the last decades of the century, many Americans feared that deism threatened not only Christianity but the integrity and existence of the new nation. Grasso, "Deist Monster: On Religious Common Sense in the Wake of the American Revolution," *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 1 (2008): 43–68. Conrad Wright states that the countless pamphlets defending revealed religion and attacking Thomas Paine proliferated and were "uncorrupted by the slightest taint of originality." Wright, *Beginnings of Unitarianism*, 246. A perusal of the polemical antideist literature easily confirms this point. A. Owen Aldridge, "Natural Religion and Deism before Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 54, no. 4 (1997): 835–48.
6. Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955), 243. Deists, who pursued political as well as theological agendas, resented the imposition of civil authority based on appeals to history and particular interpretations of the Bible.
7. For the rise of deism in America, see Walters, *American Deists*, 26; Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 16–22; Gary B. Nash, "The American Clergy and the French Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 22, no. 3 (1965): 391–412; Bryan Waterman, "The Bavarian Illuminati, the Early American Novel, and Histories of the Public Sphere," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 62, no. 1 (2005): 9–30; Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati* (New York: Columbia University, 1918), 66–102; Wright, *Beginnings of Unitarianism*, 244; Peter S. Field, *The Crisis of the Standing Order: Clerical Intellectuals and Cultural Authority in Massachusetts, 1780–1833* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 148; and I. Woodbridge Riley, "The Rise of Deism in Yale College," *American Journal of Theology* 9, no. 3 (1905): 474–83.
8. Wright, *Beginnings of Unitarianism*, 241–51; Richard Watson, *An Apology for the Bible in a Series of Letters, Addressed to Thomas Paine* ([1796] Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown, 1828).
9. Kerry S. Walters, *The American Deists: Voices of Reason and Dissent in the Early Republic* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 39–43; Adolph Koch, *Religion of the American Enlightenment* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), 239–89.
10. Walters makes a similar point. Kerry S. Walters, *Rational Infidels* (Durango, CO: Longwood Academic, 1992), xiv; Walters, *American Deists*, 34, 36.
11. Cotton Mather, *Reason Satisfied: and Faith Established* (Boston: J. Allen, 1712), 31.
12. Quoted in E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 170.

13. John Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* ([1822] Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1912), 2; my emphasis. The lectures were not published until years after his death in 1794.
14. See John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* ([1947] New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Michael P. Winship, *The Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
15. Thomas Barnard Jr., *A Discourse on Natural Religion, Delivered in the Chapel of the University in Cambridge* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1795), 9.
16. See John Barnard, appendix to *A Proof of Jesus Chris*, which reprints Dudley's prescription for the lectures. For more information, see Dudleian Lectures at Harvard University, Minutes of Trustees, 1830–1984, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Edward Holyoke, president of the college, delivered the first lecture in 1755.
17. For more on the Great Awakening, see Edwin Scott Gaustad, *The Great Awakening* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957); Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); and Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 185–202.
18. Although Edwards by and large agreed with Chauncy that some of the preachers of the Awakening were theologically ignorant and the revivals disorderly, Edwards nonetheless maintained that the revivals were a work of God. The two carried on their debate in a series of publications. Among these, from Edwards, were *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1741), and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New-England* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1742). From Chauncy were *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1743), and *Enthusiasm Defended and Caution'd Against* (Boston: J. Draper, 1742).
19. Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*, 5.
20. Gaustad, *The Great Awakening*, 83.
21. Jonathan Mayhew, *Seven Sermons* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1749), 36, 47, 72. See also Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 138–40, and Holifield, *Theology in America*, 132.
22. Holifield, *Theology in America,* 128. Stout concurs, arguing that that the differences between rationalist and evangelical preaching during the period of the Great Awakening have been exaggerated (*New England Soul*, 212–32).
23. Presbyterian churches divided along similar fault lines between 1741 and 1758, with the New Side generally supporting the Awakening and the Old Side

opposing it. See Gaustad, *The Great Awakening*, 83; Mark Noll, "The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 2 (1985): 149–76; and Noll, "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought," *American Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1985): 216–38.

24. Noll finds it ironic, and tragic, that the Princetonians relied so heavily on a naturalistic epistemology to defend a system of belief ultimately based on supernatural revelation. See Mark Noll, *Princeton and the Republic,1768–1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 292–300.
25. Joseph Ellis, *The New England Mind in Transition: Samuel Johnson of Connecticut, 1696–1772* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 234.
26. See Ellis, *New England Mind in Transition*, 228, and John C. English, "John Hutchinson's Critique of Newtonian Heterodoxy," *Church History* 68, no. 3 (1999): 581–91.
27. Edwin Scott Gaustad, "Theological Effects of the Great Awakening in New England," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40, no. 4 (1954): 681–706.
28. Norman Fiering, "The First American Enlightenment: Tillotson, Leverett, and Philosophical Anglicanism," *New England Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (1981): 310; John Corrigan, *The Prism of Piety: Catholic Congregational Clergy at the Beginning of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9–31; Corrigan, "Catholick Congregationalist Clergy and Public Piety," *Church History* 60, no. 2 (1991): 210–22.
29. Gerard Reedy, "Interpreting Tillotson," *Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 1 (1993): 81–103; Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 40–45.
30. Edward Wigglesworth, *Some Evidences of the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, from the Testimony of Jesus Christ and His Apostles in the New: Briefly Considered at the Publick Lecture in Harvard-College, June 24th. 1755* (Boston: D. Fowle, 1755): 5, 6.
31. Reedy, *Bible and Reason*, 46–62.
32. Wigglesworth, *Some Evidences of Divine Inspiration*, 8, 9, 17, 18.
33. Ibid., 5, 8, 9, 17, 18, 19, 21.
34. J. Barnard, *A Proof of Jesus Christ*, 8. Barnard was rehearsing a typical latitudinarian proof (see Reedy, *Bible and Reason*, 56–57, 46–56). A brief biography of Barnard appears in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans: A Source Book of Their Writings* ([1963] Mineola, NY: Courier Dover Publications, 2001), 270.
35. Thomas Barnard, *The Power of God and the Proof of Christianity* (Salem, MA: Samuel Hall, 1768). A brief biography of Thomas Barnard appears in Samuel Atkins Eliot, *Heralds of a Liberal Faith: The Prophets*, 4 vols., vol. 1, (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1910), 131–32.

36. Timothy Hilliard, *A Sermon Delivered September 3, 1788 at the Dudleian Lecture in the Chapel of Harvard College in Cambridge* (Boston: Edmund Freeman, 1788), 4.
37. J. Barnard, *A Proof of Jesus Christ*, 54.
38. Ibid., 8, 9, 50, 52, 53, 54.
39. T. Barnard, *The Power of God*, 6, 7, 8.
40. Ibid., 8, 9.
41. Barnard wrote, "Intuition is the direct view the soul has of the truth and reality of any one, or the relation of any two or more ideas, that are so immediate as neither to need nor admit of any reasoning to discover it." He explained, "The proposition 'I am' is intuitively certain; and to argue 'I think therefore I am,' is trifling logick. And where one conceives justly of God and man, it lies equally clear in the mind, that men are the subjects of moral government of God. Perhaps the idea of cause and effect, is among all created things, as clear and unperplexed: The mind sees without a course of argument that nothing which begins to exist, can be without some agency to produce it. There must therefore be some fixt and necessary existing cause . . . So with regard to morality, right and wrong appear in many instances most obvious; and he who labours by a course of ethical arguments to prove the obliquity of ingratitude, profaneness, and the like, might be more usefully employed." *Power of God*, 8, 9.
42. T. Barnard, *The Power of God*, 9. See Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 3–14, 74–118.
43. T. Barnard, *The Power of God*, 9, 13, 14, 28.
44. Ibid., 15, 7, 14, 24, 25.
45. Ibid., 25.
46. David Hume, "Of Miracles," in *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* ([1748] Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 117–41.
47. Benjamin Stevens, "Mr. Stevens's Sermon at the Annual Dudleian Lecture, May 13, 1772," MS, Harvard University Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.
48. Hilliard, *A Sermon Delivered September 3, 1788*, 6–8. A brief biography of Hilliard appears in William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit: Or, Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of Various Denominations*, 9 vols., vol. 1 (New York: R. Carter and Brothers, 1857), 660–62.
49. T. Barnard, *The Power of God*, 9; Hilliard, *A Sermon Delivered September 3, 1788*, 4.
50. Hilliard, *A Sermon Delivered September 3, 1788*, 28, 29, 30; my emphasis.
51. See, for example, Nathan Fiske, *A Sermon Preached at the Dudleian Lecture in the Chapel of Harvard College September 7, 1796* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1796).
52. On the Mathers, see Holifield, *Theology in America*, 30–33. Benjamin Colman, *The Glory of God in the Firmament of His Power* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1743), 2–3, 10, 17; Colman, *The Credibility of the Christian Doctrine*

of the Resurrection (Boston: Thomas Hancock, 1729), 14. Bulkley attended Harvard and was a minister in the small frontier town of Colchester, Connecticut, from 1703 to 1731. For a brief biography, see Miller and Johnson, *Puritans: A Source Book*, 680, and Clifford K. Shipton, ed., *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, *18 vols.,* vol. 4, 1690–1700 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 450–54. Miller and Holifield see Bulkley as representing a growing rationalism in eighteenth-century New England. Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 430–32; Holifield, *Theology in America*, 82.

53. John Bulkley, *The Usefulness of Reveal'd Religion, to Preserve and Improve That Which Is Natural* (New London, CT: T. Green, 1730), a sermon delivered in 1729.
54. John Bulkley, preface to *Poetical Meditations Being the Improvement of Some Vacant Hours*, by Roger Wolcott (New London, CT: T. Green, 1725). With the exception of philosopher James Tully, scholars have neglected Bulkley's preface. See James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 166–67, and Tully, "Rediscovering America: *The Two Treatises* and Aboriginal Rights," in *Locke's Philosophy: Content and Context*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 165–96. The preface was reprinted in part as "An Inquiry into the Rights of the Aboriginal Natives to the Lands in America," in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 1st ser., 4 (Boston: 1795), 159–81.
55. For *prisca theologia* see Chapter 1.
56. Bulkley, preface to *Poetical Meditations*, ii–iii, iv, v.
57. Ibid., vii.
58. Bulkley, *Usefulness of Reveal'd Religion*, 6, 7, 9, 13, 34.
59. Ibid., 4, 12, 13, 14, 21; Miller, *New England Mind: From Colony to Province*, 432.
60. Thomas Walter, *The Scriptures the Only Rule of Faith & Practice* (Boston: B. Green, 1723), 28. Fiering discusses at considerable length the varying degrees to which seventeenth-century scholars at Harvard accepted or rejected the ethics of classical thinkers in the *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard*, 11–62.
61. Bulkley, *Usefulness of Reveal'd Religion*, 27–28.
62. Ibid., 16.
63. See Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1–18.
64. One possible exception is Lemuel Briant's critique of Calvinism's doctrine of depravity (*The Absurdity and Blasphemy of Deprecating Moral Virtue* [Boston: J. Green, 1749]), which incited a minor pamphlet war. He argued that revelation merely reiterates the dictates of nature, but this was a small point in a larger argument.
65. Edward Holyoke, "The First Sermon for the Dudleian Lecture, 1755," MS, Harvard University Archives, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 3.

Holyoke's biography is covered briefly in John Langdon Sibley, *Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University, 18 vols.,* vol. 5, 1701–12 (Cambridge: Charles William Server, 1873), 270.

66. Ebenezer Gay, *Natural Religion as Distinguish'd from Revealed* (Boston: John Draper, 1759), 6, 7. On Gay's biography, see Robert J. Wilson, *The Benevolent Deity: Ebenezer Gay and the Rise of Rational Religion in New England, 1696–1787* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).
67. Peter Clark, *Man's Dignity and Duty as a Reasonable Creature; and His Insufficiency as a Fallen Creature* (Boston: Richard and Samuel Draper, 1763), 3, 9, 10.
68. Gay, *Natural Religion as Distinguish'd from Revealed*, 19, 23.
69. Andrew Eliot, *A Discourse on Natural Religion* (Boston: Daniel Kneeland, 1771), xxxvi.
70. Samuel Langdon, *The Co-Incidence of Natural with Revealed Religion. A Sermon at the Annual Lecture Instituted in Harvard College by the Last Will and Testament of the Honorable Paul Dudley, Esq; Delivered November 1, 1775* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1776), 22. For Langdon's biography, see Mark A. Peterson, "Langdon, Samuel," *American National Biography Online* at http://www.anb.org.ezp1.harvard.edu/articles/ 01/01-00492 html.
71. Wilson, *Benevolent Deity*, 67.
72. Gad Hitchcock, *Natural Religion Aided by Revelation, and Perfected in Christianity* (Boston: T. and J. Fleet, 1779), 23, 24; Langdon, *The Co-Incidence of Natural with Revealed Religion*, 12, 14. For Hitchcock's biography, see Sprague, *Annals of the American Unitarian Pulpit*, 29–31.
73. Langdon, *The Co-Incidence of Natural with Revealed Religion*, 12, 13.
74. Hitchcock, *Natural Religion Aided by Revelation*, 30.
75. T. Barnard, *Discourse on Natural Religion*, 5, 21. For a brief biography of Barnard Jr., see Eliot, *Heralds of a Liberal Faith*, vol. 1, 131–40.
76. Barnard, *Discourse on Natural Religion*, 12. Barnard engaged in a bit of anachronistic fancy in his interpretation of the past. He imagined historical figures, who knew something of divine matters, to be of the intellectual elite, as were he and his Harvard peers. Samuel Clarke, and possibly Cicero, certainly occupied the class of intellectual professionals he imagined, but to say that the Apostles did so as well defied the historical knowledge of his own time.
77. Molly Oshatz, "The Problem of Moral Progress: The Slavery Debate and the Development of Liberal Protestantism in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History* 5, no. 2 (2008): 225–50.
78. Fiske, *A Sermon Preached at the Dudleian Lecture*, 7, 19.
79. Eliot, *Heralds of a Liberal Faith*, vol. 1, 131–33; "Memorial Sermon," in *The First Centenary of the North Church and Society in Salem, Massachusetts* (Salem, MA: Printed by the Salem Press for the Society, 1873), 38–39. For the date of gathering and adoption of the covenant, see the introduction, 1.

CHAPTER 4

1. Herbert M. Morais, G. Adolf Koch, and Kerry S. Walters all note that deism was no longer a prominent threat by the early nineteenth century. Herbert M. Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 24; G. Adolf Koch, *Religion of the American Enlightenment* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), 239–84. Kerry S. Walters, *Rational Infidels* (Durango, CO: Longwood Academic, 1992), xiv; Walters, *The American Deists: Voices of Reason and Dissent in the Early Republic* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 34, 36.
2. It should be noted that at this point, Unitarians were theologically still close to their Congregationalist Trinitarian counterparts. Though they denied the Trinity, they still believed that Jesus was the "son of God" and the means of salvation. They also held the Bible in high regard as the revelation of God, but they challenged a particular and narrow view of inspiration. Early nineteenth-century Unitarians should not be confused with modern Unitarians.
3. C. Berger, "Griesbach, Johann Jakob (1745–1812)," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 468–69.
4. On the life and work of J. J. Griesbach see John McClintock and James Strong, "Johann Jakob Griesbach," in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 10 vols., vol. 3 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871), 1008–10. For an examination of his methods, see G. D. Kilpatrick, "Griesbach and the Development of Textual Criticism," in *J. J. Griesbach: Synoptic and Text-Critical Studies 1776–1976*, ed. Bernard Orchard and Thomas R. W. Longstaff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 136–53.
5. Historians have generally neglected Buckminster. Lewis P. Simpson describes Buckminster as an exemplary figure who transitioned Boston intellectuals from a focus on theology to literary and artistic culture. Literary historian Lawrence Buell explains Buckminster's phenomenal popularity as a preacher. Buell argues that Buckminster met the spiritual needs of an increasingly prosperous, educated, and cosmopolitan population. Jerry Wayne Brown describes Buckminster's contributions to biblical criticism. Lewis P. Simpson, "Joseph Stevens Buckminster: The Rise of the New England Clerisy," in *The Man of Letters in New England and the South: Essays on the History of the Literary Vocation in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 3–31; Lawrence Buell, "Joseph Stevens Buckminster: The Making of a New England Saint," *The Canadian Review of American Studies* 10, no. 1 (1979): 2–29; Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969).
6. See P. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York, 1999), 17–40; B. Bowe, "Inspiration," in D. Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 641; and G. Bromley, "Inspiration, History of the Doctrine of,"

in G. Bromley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,1995), 849–54.

7. This chapter makes no attempt to offer a thorough history of textual criticism. Rather this section briefly illustrates radical changes in the understanding of the transmission and accuracy of the Bible manuscripts. Also, this chapter focuses on American reactions to New Testament criticism. This is not to say that the Old Testament was neglected by textual critics. For example, Spinoza, Hobbes, Simon, and Le Clerc challenged Mosaic authorship. See the prologue. Also, in 1753, Jean Astruc in his *Conjectures sur les Mémories Originauz* argued that Genesis was compiled by two different authors. See Chapter 2. Years later, Benjamin Kennicott attempted to edit the Old Testament. In 1776 and 1780, he published *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum cum variis lectionibus* [Hebrew Old Testament with Variant Readings].
8. Erasmus's Bible was the first Greek text published. The first printed Greek text was part of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible published in 1514 but not circulated until 1522. Because Erasmus's text was disseminated first and was more affordable, it was vastly more popular than the Complutensian, although the Complutensian was far superior according to Metzger and Ehrman. Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005 [1964]), 139; Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 70–111.
9. From the mid-sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, Robert Estienne (Latinized as Stephanus), Theodore Beza, and the brothers Bonaventure and Abraham Elezevir all published Greek New Testaments based largely on Erasmus's text. Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 149–52. See also Lyle O. Bristol, "New Testament Textual Criticism in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69, no. 2 (1950): 101.
10. It is difficult to determine a beginning point for the process of examination and correction of the biblical text. In the fourth century, Jerome discovered as many different texts as manuscripts of the New Testament as he prepared the Vulgate. Detailed work with ancient biblical manuscripts ceased until Renaissance humanists began to examine seriously the problems of textual variants and corruptions. Lorenzo Valla attempted to correct the Latin Vulgate. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, 32–39; Dean Freiday, *The Bible: Its Criticism, Interpretation, and Use in 16th and 17th Century England* (Pittsburgh, PA: Catholic and Quaker Studies Series, 1979), 9.
11. W. S. M. Knight, *The Life and Works of Hugo Grotius* (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1925), 266; J. H. Hayes, "Grotius, Hugo (1583–1645)," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 470–71.
12. Knight, *Grotius*, 250.
13. John H. P. Reumann, *The Romance of Bible Scripts and Scholars: Chapters in the History of Bible Transmission and Translation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 113; A. W. Wainwright, "Mill, John (1645?–1707)" in *Dictionary*

of Biblical Interpretation, 158; Wainwright, "Fell, John (1625–1686)" in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 388.

14. The London Polyglot was the last of the great polyglots to be published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The other notable polyglots of the era were the Complutensian (1514–17), Antwerp (1569–72), and Paris (1629–45). Erroll F. Rhodes, "Polyglot Bibles," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 601–3. See also Peter N. Miller, "The 'Antiquarianization' of Biblical Scholarship and the London Polyglot Bible (1653–57)," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 3 (2001): 463–82; Adam Fox, *John Mill and Richard Bentley: A Study of the Textual Criticism of the New Testament, 1675–1729* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), 47–49; Henry John Todd, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Right Rev. Brian Walton*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: Rivington, 1821), 119; Freiday, *The Bible*, 10; Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 7, 8.
15. Mill's conclusions were based on 103 Greek manuscripts, Latin translations of early versions found in Walton's Polyglot, and uncritical editions of the early church fathers. Bart D. Ehrman, "Methodological Developments in the Analysis and Classification of New Testament Documentary Evidence," *Novum Testamentum* 29, no. 1 (1987): 24. For Mill's contributions, see Bristol, "New Testament Criticism." Bristol also offers a good summary of developments from Mill to Griesbach.
16. Ehrman, "Methodological Developments," 24; Richard Laurence, *Remarks on the Systematic Classification of Manuscripts Adopted by Griesbach in His Edition of the New Testament* (Oxford: University Press, 1814), excerpts reprinted in the United States in the *Biblical Repository* 2 (1826): 33–95. G. E. Schwerdtfeyer, "Bentley, Richard (1662–1742)," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 121.
17. Kristine Haugen, *Richard Bentley: Poetry and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). For his critical method, see Richard Bentley, *Dr. Bentley's Proposals for Printing a New Edition of the Greek Testament, and St. Hierom's Latin Version, with a Full Answer to All the Remarks of a Late Pamphleteer*, 2nd ed. (London: J. Knapton, 1721), 16–27.
18. Quoted from Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 97; W. R. Baird, "Bengel, Johann Albrecht (1687–1752)" in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 120.
19. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 95; Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, trans. M. Ernest Bengel, 5 vols., vol. 1 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1873), 12–20. William Baird, *History of New Testament Research: From Deism to Tübingen,* 3 vols., vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 72–83. For a deeper history of this principle, see Jerry H. Bentley, "Erasmus, Jean Le Clerc, and the Principle of the Harder Reading," *Renaissance Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1978): 309–21.

20. Reumann, *The Romance of Bible*, 119–20; W. R. Baird, "Wettstein, Johann Jacob (1693–1754)" in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 642; and Baird, *New Testament Research*, 101–7.
21. Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2001), 90, 145–52.
22. Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (Newburgh, NY: David Denniston, 1798 [1730]), 288, 250–90; Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of Freethinking, Occasioned by the Rise and Growth of a Sect Called Freethinkers* (London: [n.p.], 1713); John Toland, *Nazarenus; or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity* (London: J. Brown, J. Roberts, and J. Brot, 1718), 11; Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Harbinger Books, 1962 [1876]), 180–82.
23. John Owen, *Of the Divine Originall, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Povver of the Scriptures* (Oxford: Henry Hall, 1659), 154; Freiday, *The Bible*, 10.
24. John Edwards, *A Discourse Concerning the Authority, Stile, and Perfection of the Books of the Old and New Testament,* 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: Richard Wilkin, 1693), 65–66; Reedy, *Bible and Reason*, 111–12; and Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 100.
25. Fox, *Mill and Bentley*, 106; Daniel Whitby, *Examen Variantium Lectionum Johannis Milli* (London: Bettesworth, W. Mears, W. and J. Innys, 1709); Richard Bentley in *Remarks on a Late Discourse of Freethinking* (Cambridge: C. Crownfield, 1725, [1713]).
26. Daniel Whitby, *A Commentary on the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament*, quoted from Baird, *New Testament Research*, 32.
27. For a history of this passage, see Joseph M. Levine, "Erasmus and the Problem of the Johannine Comma," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 4 (1997): 573–96, and Bentley, "Erasmus, Jean Le Clerc, and the Principle of the Harder Reading," 309–21.
28. Baird, *New Testament Research*, 138–43.
29. Quoted in Freiday, *The Bible*, 11.
30. Quoted in Baird, *New Testament Research*, 145.
31. *Narrative of the Proceedings of Those Ministers of the County of Hampshire* (Boston: [n.p.], 1736), 4, 5. For Jeremiah Jones, see David L. Wykes, "Jones, Jeremiah (1693/4–1724)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15021 (accessed December 10, 2007).
32. For the Breck affair, see Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, 20–23; Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates: Biographical Sketeches of Those Who Attended Harvard College in the Classes 1726–1730*, 18 vols., vol. 8 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1951), 663–73; Richard Warch, *School of the Prophets: Yale College, 1701–1740* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 180–81; Louis L. Tucker, *Puritan Protagonist: President Thomas Clap of Yale* (Williamsburg, VA: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1962), 47–59; Charles E. Jones, "The Impolitic Mr. Edwards: The Personal

Dimensions of the Robert Breck Affair," *New England Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1978): 64–79; Ezra Hoyt Byington, "The Case of Rev. Robert Breck," *Andover Review* 13 (1890): 517–33. Most accounts of the life of Jonathan Edwards relate that in the Breck affair Edwards was involved and sided with Clap. For two recent examples, see George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 176–82, and Philip F. Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America's Theologian* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 63–65.

33. Jones addressed the matter of textual corruption and interpolation from the original text in chapter 18 of his book, titled *The Syriack Translation Is of the Greatest Antiquity, because There Is a Most Remarkable Agreement between It and Our Most Ancient Greek Manuscripts of the New Testament*. Regarding the disputed verses, Jones wrote, "I need not cite more; it is plain, it was formerly wanting in many copies, which, with what has been said above, seems to be a good argument of the antiquity of the Syriack Version." He also wrote that the verses in question were "wanting in almost all the ancient manuscripts." Jeremiah Jones, *A New and Full Method of Settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1798 [1726–27]), 110–13.
34. *Narrative of the Proceedings*, 57, 58.
35. Ibid., 57.
36. Ibid., 58.
37. Ibid., 23. Clap's hasty dismissal of Jones and Breck was consistent with his general approach to the challenges of skepticism and deism. He chose to combat it by rejecting it. His successor to the Yale presidency, Ezra Stiles, in contrast believed one needed to confront deism head on in the realm of ideas. Edmund Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan: A Life of Ezra Stiles, 1727–1795* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962).
38. Fifteen years later, Jonathan Edwards defended the canon of Scripture in his notebooks. His essay "Concerning the Canon of the New Testament" ("Misc" 1060) was essentially an excerpt from Jones's *Canonical Authority of the New Testament*. In the essay, Edwards repeated Jones's argument that the Syriac version of the New Testament demonstrated that the Canon was formed early and was therefore accurate. Edwards was marginally involved in the Breck affair, and he knew that Breck and Jones used the Syriac manuscripts to question the authenticity of some passages of the New Testament. Edwards did not mention the textual issues of variant manuscripts or corruptions. Edwards copied extensive sections of Jones's work on the Syriac Bible into his notebook. However, he seems to have consciously avoided copying or summarizing the section that argued for a corrupted text. This is rather conspicuous because he extensively copied large sections of the preceding and following parts. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*. 20–23; Jonathan Edwards, (Misc. 1060) "Miscellanies," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 20, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 396–427; Byington, "The Case of Rev. Robert Breck," 529.
39. Bruce Metzger points out two obscure exceptions. William Boyer, an English printer, published a Greek text of the New Testament in 1763. Boyer, using

Wettstein, departed from the *Textus Receptus* when the textual evidence warranted change. He sent a copy of his edited Greek New Testament to Harvard, and in 1767 the President and fellows of Harvard sent him a letter, thanking him for his "very curious edition." In 1800, Isaiah Thomas Jr. published the first Greek text of the New Testament printed in America. Though the title page claimed that the text was based on John Mill's Greek Bible, Thomas eclectically chose from various Greek texts. Almost no one in late-eighteenth- or early-nineteenth-century America mentioned either Boyer's or Thomas's texts. Bruce M. Metzger, "Three Learned Printers and Their Contribution to Biblical Scholarship," *The Journal of Religion* 32, no. 4 (1952): 257–58.

40. For a brief biography of Dexter, see "Biographical Notice of the Late Hon. Samuel Dexter," *Monthly Anthology* 9 (1810): 3–7.
41. Portions of Dexter's will were printed in the *General Repository*. See "Intelligence," *General Repository and Boston Review* 1 (1812): 204, 205, 208.
42. Ibid., 208.
43. Peter S. Field, *Crisis of the Standing Order: Clerical Intellectuals and Cultural Authority in Massachusetts, 1780–1833* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy 1805–1861* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988).
44. Eliza Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs of Rev. Joseph Buckminster, D.D., and of His Son, Rev. Joseph Stevens Buckminster* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1851), 331. The Buckminsters' letters and journals are preserved in a volume edited by George Ticknor with commentary and biography filled in by Eliza Buckminster Lee, sister of the younger Buckminster.
45. Joseph S. Buckminster, "Sources of Infidelity," in *Sermons by the Late Rev. Joseph S. Buckminster with a Memoir of His Life and Character*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1815 [1814]), 146.
46. Buckminster, "The Reasonableness of Faith," in *Sermons*, 148.
47. For example, see Joseph S. Buckminster, "Defence of the Accuracy and Fidelity of Griesbach," *General Repository* 1 (1812): 89–101.
48. Letter from Buckminster Sr. to Buckminster Jr. May, 1799. Quoted from Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 98, 99, 100.
49. Parker compared Buckminster with the Apostle Paul in their steadfastness. Both were convicted by a "miraculous interposition" of the mind. Nathan A. Parker, *Discourse Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Joseph Buckminster, D. D. Pastor of the North Church in Portsmouth, Delivered June 19, 1812* (Portsmouth, NH: S. Whidden, 1812), 6, 10, 14.
50. Letter from Buckminster Sr. to Eliza Buckminster Lee. Quoted from Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 436–37.
51. Eliza Buckminster Lee gave the impression that the elder Buckminster had been a strong if not oppressive and nagging presence in the young Buckminster's life. The elder Buckminster comes across as a cold, stingy, humorless ogre who made unreasonable demands on a young, sweet boy. Buckminster Lee made the curious conclusion that the elder Buckminster's Calvinism was rooted in his sour personality. In contrast, the younger Buckminster's happy

and sunny disposition made Calvinism an impossible option. Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 331, 364.

52. These works helped move him in Unitarian directions. For example, Priestley's *Corruptions* argued for the corruption of original Unitarian Christianity by Greek philosophy. Locke's *Paraphrase* similarly argued that Christian belief was originally a simple belief in Jesus as Messiah. At one point, while he was investigating the idea of the Trinity, his notes filled ten pages of a commonplace book. Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 122, 248.
53. Buckminster claimed that his notes on Hume and skepticism did not survive, for they were accidentally destroyed. In an early American version of "the dog ate my homework," he wrote, "When this *ingens opus* was nearly completed, as it lay loose upon my table, it was by some mischance torn and mutilated, and rendered wholly useless." Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 128.
54. Letter dated March 1801. Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 129.
55. Buckminster, "Lecture to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard, Delivered on Thursday, August 31, 1809," in *Sermons*, lx, lxi.
56. Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 130.
57. Buckminster, "On the Dangers and Duties of Men of Letters," in *Sermons*, lxxvii, lxxviii.
58. Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 191.
59. Buckminster, "The Reasonableness of Faith," *Sermons*, 145.
60. Quoted from Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 25.
61. Buckminster, "Review of *A Theoretick Explanation of the Science of Sanctity*," *Monthly Anthology*, 2 (1805): 418; Brown, *Biblical Criticism*, 18.
62. For a history of The Anthology Society and the *Monthly Anthology*, see Lewis P. Simpson, "A Literary Adventure of the Early Republic: The Anthology Society and the *Monthly Anthology*," *The New England Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1954): 168–90.
63. From the diary of Rev. Dr. John Pierce, DD (1773–1849). June 1812, quoted in Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 378; Brown, *Biblical Criticism*, 23.
64. For Thomson and his translation, see Boyd Stanley Schlenther, *Charles Thomson: A Patriot's Pursuit* (Newark: University of Delaware, 1990), 206–11; Edwin Hendricks, *Charles Thomson and the Making of a New Nation, 1729–1824* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1979), 168–83; and Lewis R. Harley, *The Life of Charles Thomson* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs, 1900).
65. Hendricks, *Charles Thomson*, 170; Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777–1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 93–95.
66. Charles Thomson, *The Old Covenant, Commonly Called the Old Testament; Translated from the Septuagint* (Philadelphia: Jane Aikin, 1808). For a twentieth-century appraisal of Thomson's translation efforts, see Kendrick Grobel, "Charles Thomson, First American N.T. Translator—An Appraisal,"

Journal of Bible and Religion 11, no. 3 (1943): 145–51. Thomson was also the first American to translate and publish the Greek New Testament.

67. Joseph S. Buckminster, "Thomson's Septuagint," *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* 7 (1809): 396–97.
68. Ibid. My emphasis.
69. Buckminster cites Humphrey Hody (1659–1707) and Prideaux as authorities on this matter. Hody, in 1684, published *Contra historiam Aristeae de LXX. interpretibus dissertatio*, in which he argued that the so-called letter of Aristeas, containing an account of the production of the Septuagint, was the late forgery of a Hellenistic Jew. Buckminster, "Thomson's Septuagint," 397.
70. Buckminster, "Thomson's Septuagint," 398. For a modern assessment of the LXX, see S. K. Soderlund, "Septuagint," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Q–Z*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 4 vols., vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 400–409.
71. Buckminster, "Thomson's Septuagint," 399.
72. Thomson did not use the 1653 London Septuagint. He had in fact used the four-volume 1665 Cambridge edition of the Septuagint printed in England by John Field, which he stumbled across by accident at a Philadelphia bookseller. It was from this Cambridge edition that Thomson made his translation. Buckminster was wrong, but his guess was not far from the truth. The editors of the 1653 London Septuagint altered and interpolated the text to bring it nearer to the Hebrew text and modern versions. These errors were retained in the 1665 Cambridge edition. See Schlenther, *Charles Thomson*, 206; Albert J. Edmunds, "Charles Thomson's New Testament," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 15 (1891): 334; Thomas Hartwell Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York: Robert and Carter and Brothers, 1852 [1818]), 23; Buckminster, "Thomson's Septuagint," 399–400.
73. Holmes's work was completed by James Parsons (1762–1847). They produced the first attempt to restore the original LXX by examining the variant texts and provided a critical apparatus. Their type of critical scholarship was the sort that Buckminster hoped Americans could soon appreciate, but the work of Thomson depressingly reminded him that his countrymen had a long way to go. For information on Holmes and Parsons, see Henry Barclay Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 185. See Buckminster, "Thomson's Septuagint," 398, and Robert Holmes and John Parsons, *Vetus Testamentum Graecum cum variis lectionibus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1798–1827).
74. John Ernest Grabe, *Septuagint* (Oxford: Jacob Wright, 1859 [1707–20]).
75. Thomas Randolph, *The Prophecies and Other Texts Cited in the New Testament Compared with the Hebrew and the Septuagint Version* (Oxford: J. and J. Fletcher, 1782).
76. Henry Owen, *An Enquiry into the Present State of the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament* (London: B. White, J. Fletcher, T. Payne, 1769).
77. Buckminster, "Thomson's Septuagint," 197.

78. Ibid., 399–400.
79. Buckminster incorrectly cites the verse as 2 Kings 24:1 rather than 2 Samuel 24:1. Buckminster, "Thomson's Septuagint," 198.
80. Buckminster, "Thomson's Septuagint," 193.
81. Ibid., 194.
82. Ibid., 197.
83. Joseph Buckminster, "Review of Griesbach's New Testament," *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, 10 (1811): 107.
84. Quoted from Baird, *New Testament Research*, 138.
85. Buckminster, "Review of Griesbach," 110.
86. Buckminster, "Notices of Griesbach's Greek Testament," *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* 5 (1808): 20.
87. Buckminster, "Review of Griesbach," 110.
88. *The Panoplist* was begun by Jedidiah Morse in 1805 and edited by Jeremiah F. Evarts from 1810 to 1821. See John A. Andrew III, *From Revivals to Removal: Jeremiah Evarts, the Cherokee Nation, and the Search for the Soul of America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), and Field, *Crisis of the Standing Order*, 151–67. For their staunchly conservative editorial policy, see "Editorial Remarks," *Panoplist and Missionary Magazine* 9 (1813): 175–81. Decades later, Andrews Norton, a Unitarian, remembered the *Panoplist* as a publication that deliberately provoked controversy and antagonized Unitarians. Andrews Norton, introductory note to "Defence of Liberal Christianity," in *Tracts Concerning Christianity* (Cambridge: John Bartlett, 1852), 6.
89. *Panoplist* 1, (1806): i–iii.
90. *Panoplist* printed an announcement for the publication of Griesbach's New Testament. They knew that the text was coming, but they may not have been aware of its significance. "Griesbach's Greek Testament," *Panoplist* 3 (1808): 422–24.
91. "A Brief Review of the Principal Controversies amongst Protestants," *Panoplist* 3 (1808): 164–71.
92. Benjamin Kennicott, a Hebrew scholar, published *Vetus Testamentum hebraicum cum variis lectionibus* (1776–1780) and *The State of the Printed Hebrew Text of the Old Testament Considered* (1753, 1759). He sought to combat the then current ideas as to the "absolute integrity" of the received Hebrew text. Eichhorn in discussed in Chapter 5.
93. For Bentley, see J. Rixey Ruffin, *A Paradise of Reason: William Bentley and Enlightenment Christianity in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Henry A. Pochmann, *German Culture in America, Philosophical and Literary Influences, 1600–1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 51–57; and Harold S. Jantz, "German Thought and Literature in New England, 1620–1820," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 41, no. 1 (1942): 35–45. In his will, dated May 8, 1819, Bentley left "all my classical and theological books, dictionaries, lexicons, and Bibles" to Allegheny College. The rest went to the American Antiquarian Society. The 1823 Allegheny College catalogue lists 740 books from Bentley. Griesbach was not listed in the

collection. Timothy Alden, *Catalogus Bibliothecæ Collegii Alleghaniensis* (Meadville, PA: Thomas Atkinson & Society, 1823), 66–88. In 1962, Edwin Wolf, then librarian of the Library Company of Philadelphia, was commissioned by Allegheny College to make a survey of library collection of 1823. His observations are recorded in Edwin Wolf, "Observations on the Winthrop, Bentley, Thomas and 'Ex Dono' Collections of the Original Library of Allegheny College, 1819–1823," 1962, Special Collections, Pelletier Library, Allegheny College, Meadville, PA.

94. For example, he knew Moses Stuart, Edward Everett, and George Ticknor.
95. [James Winthrop], *Catalogus Librorum in Bibliotheca Cantabrigiensi Selectus, Frequentiorem in Usum Harvardinatum, [A Select Catalogue of Books in the College Library of Cambridge for the More Frequent Use of the Undergraduates]* (Boston: Typis Edes & Gill, 1773). Other relevant authors included in the select catalogue are Jeremiah Jones, Hugo Grotius, Nathaniel Lardner, and Moses Lowman.
96. Sylvester, "Griesbach's Greek Testament," *City Gazette*, September 22, 1797, 2.
97. "Review of Griesbach's New Testament, with Select Various Readings," *Panoplist* 3 (1811): 503.
98. Ibid., 503.
99. Ibid., 507.
100. Ibid., 506.
101. Buckminster, "Defence of the Accuracy and Fidelity of Griesbach," 99.
102. Buckminster, "Defence of the Accuracy and Fidelity of Griesbach."
103. Thomas Belsham, *The New Testament, an Improved Version upon the Basis of Archbishop Newcome's New Translation with a Corrected Text and Notes* (London: Richard Taylor & Co., 1808); P. Marion Simms, *The Bible in America: Versions That Have Played Their Part in the Making of the Republic* (New York: Wilson-Erickson, 1936), 255–58; Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism in Transylvania, England, and America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 338, 339.
104. Philalethes, "Plain Scripture Reading," *Panoplist* 9, (1813): 15–18, 58–62, 121–26, 164–74; Philalethes, "Notice of Publication in the *Panoplist*," *General Repository* 4 (1813): 194–223; "Editorial Remarks," *Panoplist* 9 (1813): 175–81.
105. Samuel Cooper Thacher, "Review of Dr. Porter's Sermon," *Monthly Anthology* 9 (1810): 279–80.
106. "Review of Griesbach," *Panoplist* 3 (1811): 503.
107. Brown, *Biblical Criticism*, 24; Buckminster, "Sources of Infidelity," 145.
108. Edward Robinson, "Philology and Lexicography of the New Testament," *The Biblical Repository* 4, no. 13 (1834): 160.
109. Buckminster, "Sermon Eighth" in *Sermons*, 106–16.

Chapter 5

1. Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W. M. L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37; J. W. Rogerson, "Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried (1752–1827)," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 324; H. Boers, "Gabler, Johann Philipp (1753–1826)," in ibid., 425–26; O. Merk, "Bauer, Georg Lorenz (1755–1806)" in ibid., 109–10.
2. Both the deists and the German scholars threatened the American understanding of the Bible, which placed a heavy emphasis on historical accuracy. Hans Frei notes the Germans took the Bible to be a rich embodiment of religious truth even though they questioned its historical accuracy. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974). The difference between textual criticism and higher criticism was first articulated by Eichhorn in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1780–83).
3. Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1952), 11–19, 21; William Baird, *History of New Testament Research: From Deism to Tübingen*, 3 vols., vol. 1(Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 149.
4. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 2001[1670]), 81–82.
5. Eichhorn interpreted Genesis 1–3 as myth in 1779 in an anonymous essay, "Urgemeinde: Ein Versuch," *Repertorium für Biblische und Morgenländische Litteratur*, 4 (1779): 129–256, and discussed Peter's jailbreak in "Versuch über die Engels-Erscheinungen in der Apostelgeschichete," *Allgemeine Bibliothek der Biblischen Litteratur* 3 (1790): 381–408. See Baird, *New Testament Research*, 149.
6. Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, "Ernst Troeltsch: The Power of Historical Consciousness," in *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002 [1995]), 146–68; Eva Schaper, "Troeltsch, Ernst (1865–1923)," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, 8 vols., vol. 8 (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 162–63; Jean Loup Seban, "Troeltsch, Ernst Peter Wilhelm (1865–1923)," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig, 10 vols., vol. 9 (New York: Routledge, 1998), 461–64. For the varieties of "historicism," see Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck, "The Meaning of 'Historicism,'" *The American Historical Review* 59, no. 3 (1954): 568–77; Georg G. Iggers, "Historicism: The History and the Meaning of the Term," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, no. 1 (1995): 129–52; and Donald Kelley "Historicism," *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Maryanne Horowitz, 6 vols., vol. 3 (Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2005), 1000–2. For an account of the interactions of theology and historicism in Germany, see Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*.

7. In addition, Buckminster noted the influence of Bishop Beilby Porteus, Nathaniel Lardner, and Herbert Marsh. Marsh translated Michaelis into English and published his lectures. Buckminster also read Marsh's *Dissertation*, in which he proposed that the first three Gospels were based on a common Hebrew source that was lost and Matthew's Gospel was originally written in Hebrew and later translated into Greek. Buckminster wrote in a letter to Marsh that he hoped the English scholar would soon translate Eichhorn as he longed to read him in translation. Eliza Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs of Rev. Joseph Buckminster, D.D., and of His Son, Rev. Joseph Stevens Buckminster* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1851), 243–53; Andrews Norton, "Marsh's Lectures," *General Repository and Review* 1 (1812): 216; Herbert Marsh, *A Dissertation on the Origin and Composition of Our First Three Canonical Gospels* (London: Rivington, 1801). For a review of the controversy regarding Marsh's proposal, see "Marsh on the First Three Gospels," *Monthly Review* 51 (1806): 247–55. For Michaelis and Lowth, see Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
8. Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 252–53.
9. For a summary of the *Ars Critica* and its significance, see Anthony Grafton, *What Was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2–20.
10. Quoted from Martin I. Klauber, "Between Protestants, Orthodoxy, and Rationalism: Fundamental Articles in the Early Career of Jean Le Clerc," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54, no. 4 (1993): 623, 631–32; J. H. Hayes, "Le Clerc (1657–1736)," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 51–52. For accommodation, see Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 184–209, and R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 118–37. See also Stephen D. Benin, *The Footprints of God: Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 177–98.
11. Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 122.
12. Hans Frei, *Eclipse*, 83.
13. John Locke, "An Essay for the Understanding of St Paul's Epistles by Consulting St Paul Himself," in *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, ed. Victor Nuovo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53–54, 59.
14. Nuovo, introduction to *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, xxxvix.
15. Harrisville and Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, 30. For Erasmus's methods of interpretation, see Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 173–93, and J. B. Payne, "Erasmus, Desiderius," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 184–90. Arthur W. Wainwright, "Introduction," in Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul to the Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians*, ed. Arthur W. Wainwright, 2 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 21.

16. Locke, "Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures," in *John Locke: Writings on Religion*, ed. Victor Nuovo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 207.
17. Locke, "Understanding of St. Paul," 64, 65, 32.
18. Buckminster began to read Michaelis in January 1804. Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 248–62. B. Seidel, "Michaelis, Johann David (1717–91)," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 153–54.
19. John David Michaelis, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Herbert Marsh, 4th ed., 4 vols., vol. 1 (London: F. C. & J. Rivington, 1823), 124–25.
20. Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (Boston: Thomas Hancock, 1726), 46–47.
21. Michaelis, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 1: 119, 120. It should be noted that modern scholars now know that the writers of the New Testament wrote in Koine Greek, which was the lingua franca of the Hellenistic world. This fact was not understood until the late nineteenth century.
22. Ibid., 120.
23. Early church fathers used the principle of ceconomia or logical finesse and the Jews sought a hidden meaning according to the interpretive principles of the Midrash. Ibid., 204.
24. Ibid., 205, 210.
25. Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs*, 252. Lowth was elected professor of poetry at Oxford in 1741. He served for a total of ten years. In that time, he delivered a series of lectures on Hebrew poetry. His lectures were published in 1753, in Latin. Michaelis, who introduced the work of Lowth to Germany, added his own notes. In 1787 the English translations of his lectures were published. Scott Mandelbrote, "Lowth, Robert (1710–1787)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004, online ed., Jan 2008; and R. R. Mars, "Lowth, Robert (1710–1787)," *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 89–90.
26. Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of Hebrews* (Boston: Joseph T. Buckman, 1815), 31.
27. Turner, *Philology,* chapter 4. Maurice Olender notes Lowth's emphasis on the cultural distance of the ancient Hebrews in *Les langues du Paradis: Aryens et Sémites: un couple providentiel* (Paris: Gallimard/Le Seuil, 1989), 49–50.
28. Lowth, *Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 71, 72–73.
29. Ibid., 33, 57.
30. Ibid., 60–61, 62.
31. For this traditional view of inspiration, see the introduction. See also Barbara E. Bowe, "Inspiration," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 641; Geoffrey Bromley "Inspiration, History of the Doctrine of," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: E-J*, Geoffrey Bromley ed., 4 vols., vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 849–54.
32. Bentley's copy of Spencer was previously owned by Andrew Eliot and his father John Eliot before him. It was originally owned by Joshua Gee, the Harvard

librarian. Thus several generations had access to this book. Edwin Wolf, "Observations on the Winthrop, Bentley, Thomas and 'Ex Dono' Collections of the Original Library of Allegheny College, 1819–1823," 1962, Special Collections, Pelletier Library, Allegheny College, Meadville, PA.

33. "Extract from Sunday News-Papers, and Also of Letters from London, Dated July 6," *Boston Post-Boy*, August 29, 1774, 1.
34. [James Winthrop], *Catalogus Librorum in Bibliotheca Cantabrigiensi Selectus, Frequentiorem in Usum Harvardinatum, [A Select Catalogue of Books in the Library of Cambridge More Frequently Used by Harvard Students]* (Boston: Typis Edes & Gill, 1773).
35. See Chapter 3.
36. The American deists Thomas Paine and Ethan Allen briefly addressed the problems that the distance of history raises for the interpretation of the Bible. They asked how the meaning of revelation given in one language could be preserved over centuries of linguistic evolution. Most antideist writers did not respond to this point. Andrew Broaddeus, a self-taught Baptist in rural Virginia, countered that if language was truly mutable as Paine and Allen asserted, then the rational interpretation of any historical text would be impossible. He asserted that "the substance" of what was conveyed in one time or language could be "faithfully conveyed" in another. Andrews Norton would later address the problem of the mutability of language. Ethan Allen, *Reason the Only Oracle of Man* (Bennington, VT: Haswell & Russell, 1784), 426–28; Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason* (Boston: Thomas Hall, 1794), 63–68; and Andrew Broaddeus, *Age of Reason and Revelation* (Richmond, VA: Dixon, 1795), 24.
37. Buckminster, "Sermon XI: The History and Character of Paul and the Causes of Obscurity in His Writings," in *Sermons by the Late Rev. Joseph S. Buckminster with A Memoir of His Life and Character*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1815 [1814]), 135–36.
38. Ibid., 147.
39. Ibid., 141, 148, 149, 150.
40. Ibid., 150–52.
41. Ibid., 153.
42. Ibid.
43. Buckminster, "Philemon," *Sermons*, 103–5; Brown, *Biblical Criticism*, 20.
44. "Sale of the Library of the Late Rev. Mr. Buckminster," *The General Repository and Review* 2 (1812): 392–94; *Catalogue of the Library of the Late Rev, J. S. Buckminster* (Boston: John Eliot, 1812).
45. Andrews Norton, Introductory note to "The Defence of Liberal Christianity," in *Tracts Concerning Christianity* (Cambridge: John Bartlett, 1852), 3–14; Norton, "Character of Rev. Joseph Stevens Buckminster," *The General Repository and Review* 2 (1812): 306–14.
46. Norton has generally been a neglected figure. Historians usually look at him as the conservative opponent of Emerson and the Transcendentalists. There are some exceptions. See Lilian Handlin, "Babylon Est Delenda—the Young Andrews Norton," in *American Unitarianism: 1805–1865*, edited by Conrad

Edick Wright (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989), 53–86; Robert D. Habich, “Emerson’s Reluctant Foe: Andrews Norton and the Transcendentalist Controversy,” *The New England Quarterly*, 65 no. 2 (1992): 208–37; Brown, *Biblical Criticism*, 10–26; and James Turner, “Language, Religion, and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century America: The Curious Case of Andrews Norton” in *Language, Religion, Knowledge: Past and Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 11–30.

47. For the polite tone of the *Anthology* and Unitarians in general, see Peter S. Fields, *Crisis of the Standing Order: Clerical Intellectuals and Cultural Authority in Massachusetts, 1780–1833* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), and Fields, “The Birth of Secular High Culture: *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* and Its Critics,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 4 (1997): 575–609.
48. The English biblical scholar Herbert Marsh was a particularly strong influence. He was one of the first English-language conduits of German biblical scholarship. Fortunately, his *Lectures* arrived in America just as Norton was about to begin his teaching career. Norton praised Marsh’s lectures as soon as they appeared in the United States. Norton, “Marsh’s Lectures,” 216. Norton’s works particularly illustrate the influence of Marsh’s Lectures II and III. See Herbert Marsh, *A Course of Lectures, Containing a Description and Systematic Arrangement of the Several Branches of Divinity: Accompanied with an Account, Both of the Principal Authors, and of the Progress, Which Has Been Made at Different Periods in Theological Learning* (Boston: Cummings and Hilliard, 1812–19); Marsh, *Lectures on the Criticism and Interpretation of the Bible* (London: Rivington, 1838), 283–320.
49. Norton, “Views of Calvinism,” in *Tracts Concerning Christianity* (Cambridge: John Bartlett, 1852), 163, 206.
50. Norton’s characterization of Calvinist theology was perhaps extreme. Charles Hodge, one of the most learned representatives of the Presbyterians in the nineteenth century, asserted that God inspired every passage of the Bible. He acknowledged historical factors in the composition of the Bible but not to Norton’s extent. See Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 3 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995 [1871–73]), 15, 182–88. For Hodge’s neglect of historicism, see Turner, “Charles Hodge in the Intellectual Weather of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Language, Religion, Knowledge*, 31–49.
51. Norton, “Defence of Liberal Christianity,” 56.
52. Norton, “Lectures, 1,” Andrews Norton Papers [hereafter ANP], Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge.
53. Norton, “Defence of Liberal Christianity,” 44.
54. Norton, “Lectures, 1,” ANP.
55. Ibid.
56. Norton, “Defence of Liberal Christianity,” 45.
57. Norton, “Lectures, 2,” ANP.
58. Norton, “Lectures, 1,” ANP.

59. Norton, "Lectures, 1," ANP; see also Norton, "Defence of Liberal Christianity," 50.
60. Norton, "Lectures, 4," ANP.
61. Norton, "Lectures, 3," ANP.
62. Norton, "Defence of Liberal Christianity," 54.
63. Norton, "Lectures, 3," ANP.
64. Norton, "Defence of Liberal Christianity," 51, 52, 40.
65. Norton, "Lectures, 3," ANP.
66. Norton, "Contrast between Calvinism and Hopkinsianism," *General Repository and Review* 3 (1813): 368.
67. Nathaniel William Taylor and Norton engaged in a lengthy debate regarding varieties of Calvinism. Taylor replied to Norton's "Views of Calvinism," in his "Review of Norton's Views of Calvinism," *Christian Spectator* 5 (1823): 196–224. An anonymous author, possibly Norton, responded with "The State of the Calvinistic Controversy," *Christian Disciple* 5 (1823): 212–35. Sidney E. Mead reviews the debate between Norton and Taylor in *Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786–1858: A Connecticut Liberal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 185–99.
68. Nathaniel William Taylor, "Review of Pamphlets on the Unitarian Controversy," *Christian Spectator* 3 (1821): 129–30; Taylor, "Review of Norton's Views of Calvinism," ibid. 5 (1823): 200, 210, 219; Taylor, "Review Reviewed," ibid. (1824): 313; Handlin, "Babylon Est Delenda," 77; and Mead, *Nathaniel William Taylor*, 171–99.
69. Ibid.
70. Norton, "Lectures, 5," ANP.
71. Norton, "Defence of Liberal Christianity," 48.
72. Norton, "Lectures, 10," ANP.
73. In addition to Locke, Norton pointed to Dugald Stewart's philosophy and Le Clerc's *Ars Critica* as sources of influence for his theory of language. However, Norton noted that it had never been so "explicitly stated." Norton, Lectures, 10, ANP; Turner, "Curious Case," 23. Incidentally, Samuel Miller, a Presbyterian professor at Princeton, was also influenced by Scottish views of language around the same time. Miller devoted a chapter to the origin and nature of human language based on the ideas of Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart in Samuel Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (New York: T and J Swords, 1803). See John Stewart, *Mediating the Center: Charles Hodge on American Science, Language, Literature, and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1995), 51–53.
74. Norton, "Lectures, 5," ANP.
75. Norton, Lectures, 10, ANP.
76. Andrews Norton, *Internal Evidences of the Genuineness of Gospels* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1856), 118, 114, 106.
77. Norton, "Extent and Relations of Theology," 73, 62.
78. Norton, "Lectures, 10," ANP.
79. Norton, "Extent and Relations of Theology," 71, 68.

80. Norton, *A Discourse on Religious Education: Delivered at Hingham, May 20, 1818. Before the Trustees of the Derby Academy; Being the Annual Derby Lecture* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1818), 22.
81. Norton, "Lectures, 5," ANP. As did Buckminster in his sermon "The History and Character of Paul," Norton cited and summarized Paley, who recommended caution "in the use and application of Scripture language" when he discussed how Scripture was distorted when passages applying to specific circumstances were applied universally. Norton, Lectures, 7, ANP. Predictably, Charles Hodge rejected Norton's views on the interpretation of the Bible. He believed that Norton's desire to culturally contextualize would lead to distortion. He wrote, "I should feel that I reject [the New Testament's] authority if I allowed myself to regard as mere Jewish modes of thought, those ideas, and to inquire what were the essential truths which they embodied . . . [I]t indicates the point, where lies the source of the differences of our views of what Christianity really is." Charles Hodge to Andrews Norton, 27 February 1840, ANP.
82. Norton, "Lectures, 6," ANP.
83. Ibid.
84. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 397; Hodge, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology*, 165, 186.
85. Norton, "Lectures, 11," ANP.
86. Norton, "Lectures, 7," ANP. Once again, Norton simplified and distorted Calvinism. Interestingly, Charles Hodge agreed with Norton on the dangers of the vagaries of figurative and literal modes of interpretation. Edwards A. Park advanced the theory that biblical language could be both figurative and literal. Hodge pointed out that Park's hermeneutic allowed the interpreter subjectively and arbitrarily to determine various parts of the Bible to be figurative or literal. Charles Hodge, "The Theology of the Intellect and That of Feelings," in *Essays and Reviews: Selected from the Princeton Review* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 539–683, especially 548–49; D. G. Hart, "Poems, Propositions, and Dogma: The Controversy over Religious Language and the Demise of Theology in American Learning," *Church History* 57, no. 3 (1988): 317.
87. Norton, "Lectures, 7," ANP. Norton quoted from Calvin's *Institutes*, 1: vii, 4.
88. Norton, "Lectures, 7," ANP.
89. Norton, "Lectures, 7," ANP. Norton quoted from Calvin's *Institutes* 1: vii, 4.
90. Norton, "Latest Form of Infidelity," in *Tracts*, 31; Norton wrote some thoughts on the difference between probabilistic knowledge and mathematical or philosophical certainty on a loose sheet of paper that is folded up inside a notebook. Norton, "Lecture on Biblical Criticism," ANP.
91. Alexander wrote about the importance of the Holy Spirit in reading the Bible in *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1841). He also wrote two books defending the Bible on empirical grounds that grew out of his antideistic lectures—*Brief Outline of the Christian Religion* (1825) and *Evidences of the Authority, Inspiration, and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures* (1826). Hodge summed up his beliefs on the

matter in "The Theology of the Intellect and That of the Feelings," (1850). Hodge, "Intellect and Feelings," 539–69. See Mark Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983), 186. For the role of experience at Princeton, see W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1981). Donald K. McKim and Jack B. Rogers argue that Hodge moved away from Alexander's emphasis on experience in *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 270–73. Noll also observes that N. W. Taylor, in his 1828 sermon *Concio ad Clerum*, reinterpreted Calvinism. Taylor proposed that consciousness adjudicated Scripture and tradition. Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 298.

92. Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, 37.
93. Andrews Norton, *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, 3 vols., vol. 2. (London: John Chapman, 1843), xlviii. For Eichhorn, see J. Sandys-Wunsch, "Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, 312–16; Baird, *New Testament Research*, 138–53.
94. Brown, *Biblical Criticism*, 82.
95. Norton, *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: John Chapman, 1837), 5.
96. Norton, *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, vol. 1, 39.
97. Ibid., 40, 41.
98. See Chapter 3.
99. Ibid., 122.
100. Richard Claverhouse Jebb, *Richard Bentley* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1899), 62–83.
101. Grafton, *What Was History?*, 2–20.
102. Robert D. Habich argues that Norton's dispute with the Transcendentalists was based on his desire for authority. Miller argues they differed over the nature of man. Turner argues that Norton differed with the Transcendentalists over epistemology and the nature of language. Habich, "Emerson's Reluctant Foe"; Turner, "Curious Case." For an account of the miracle debate, see William R. Hutchison, *The Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 52–97. Perry Miller collected the articles of the debate in *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 157–246. See his commentary on 157–60.
103. See Norton, "A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity," in *Tracts*, 229–68; Norton, "Remarks on the Modern German School of Infidelity" in *Tracts*, 269–368.
104. Turner points out that Norton believed that neither the Calvinists nor the Transcendentalists rooted their hermeneutics in history. Turner, "Curious Case." For a similar argument, see also W. P. Trent, et al., *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, 18 vols., vol. 16 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons,

1907–21), 31–32. Norton more explicitly argues against those who would base faith on intuitions rather than rigorous historical evidence in "On the Objection to Faith in Christianity as Resting on Historical Facts and Critical Learning" in *Tracts*, 369–92.

105. Norton, *Inaugural Discourse, Delivered before the University in Cambridge, August 10, 1819* (Cambridge: Hillard and Metcalf, 1819), 15. My emphasis.
106. Norton, "Lectures, 1."
107. Norton, *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, vol. 1, 100. My emphasis.
108. Ibid., 100, 101–2.
109. Brown, *Biblical Criticism*, 144.
110. Norton, *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, 25.
111. Norton, *Inaugural Discourse*, 23. My emphasis.
112. Norton, *Internal Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, 66.
113. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972 [1835]), 64–65; D. Lange, "Strauss, David Friedrich (1808–74)" in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 507–8.

EPILOGUE

1. See John Giltner, *Moses Stuart: The Father of Biblical Science* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); Giltner, "Moses Stuart and the Slavery Controversy: A Study in the Failure of Moderation," *Journal of Religious Thought* 18, no. 1 (1961): 27–40; R. W. Yarbrough, "Moses Stuart," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 368–72; Mark Granquist, "The Role of 'Common Sense' in the Hermeneutics of Moses Stuart," *Harvard Theological Review* 83, no. 3 (1990): 305–19; and Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969).
2. Stuart wrote that the "sale of the Rev. J. S. Buckminster's library in Boston threw a considerable number of German critical works" for his consumption. Among the first Germans who influenced him, he notes "Seller, Storr, Flatt, [and] J. D. Michaelis." Later, "Eichhorn, Gabler, Paulus, Staüdlin, Haenlein, Jahn, Rosenmüller (father and son), Gesenius, Planck, and others of like rank and character" influenced him. He also wrote, "I have, for the last twenty years, read much more in German authors (comprising their Latin as well as German productions), than I have in my own vernacular language; a matter not of choice, i.e. not out of any special partiality for the German, but one to me of necessity." *Christian Review* 6, no. 23 (1841): 449–50.
3. Moses Stuart "Letters to the Editor, on the Study of the German Language," *Christian Review* 6, no. 23 (1841): 450.
4. Stuart articulates his principles of biblical interpretation in a variety of places. For example, see Stuart, "Study of the German Language"; Stuart, "Are the Same Principles of Interpretation to Be Applied to the Scriptures as to Other Books?" *Biblical Repository* 2, no. 5 (1832): 124–37; and Stuart, "Remarks on Hahn's Definition of Interpretation and Some Topics Connected with It,"

Biblical Repository 1, no. 1 (1831): 139–60. See also his unpublished lectures on Biblical interpretation at the Andover Newton Theological School.

5. Moses Stuart, "Lectures on Hermeneutics, 1 and 2," Moses Stuart Papers, Andover Newton Theological School Library, Andover Newton Theological School, Newton.
6. Stuart, "Hahn's Definition of Interpretation," 158.
7. Ibid.
8. Moses Stuart, *Critical History and Defence of the Old Testament Canon* (New York: Mark H. Newman, 1845), 23.
9. R. W. Yarbrough writes that Stuart naively believed that philological methods could discover the genuine meaning of the text with absolute certainty. He was guilty of "philological positivism." Yarbrough, "Moses Stuart," 370. Stuart, "Hahn's Definition of Interpretation," 139; Stuart, *Critical History and Defence of the Old Testament Canon*, 3.
10. Stuart, "Hints Respecting Commentaries upon the Scriptures," *Biblical Repository* 3, no. 9 (1833): 148.
11. Stuart, "Principles of Interpretation," 134–35.
12. Stuart, "Lectures on Hermeneutics 2 and 3," Moses Stuart Papers; Stuart, "Principles of Interpretation," 124–37; and Stuart, "Study of the German Language," 449.
13. For recent scholarship on the Bible and slavery, see Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Noll, "The Bible and Slavery," in *Religion and the Civil War*, ed. Harry Stout, Randall Miller, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 43–73; J. Albert Harrill, "The Use of the New Testament in the American Slave Controversy: A Case History in the Hermeneutical Tension between Biblical Criticism and Christian Moral Debate," *Religion and American Culture* 10, no. 2 (2000): 149–86.
14. For proslavery arguments based on a literal and plain interpretation of the Bible, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Geneovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' World View* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
15. Theodore Parker, *The Slave Power* (New York: Arno Press, 1969 [1910]), 272; Noll, "Bible and Slavery," 51; George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993 [1965]); Anne C. Rose, *Victorian America and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
16. Other abolitionists including Jonathan Blanchard, Albert Barnes, and Henry Ward Beecher also moved from the Bible's letter to its spirit. Many associated this move with the liberal theology of the Unitarians. Thus this approach was not popular among many conservative Americans. Noll, "The Bible and Slavery," 51.
17. On this issue of moral progress and biblical interpretation, see Molly Oshatz, "The Problem of Moral Progress: The Slavery Debate and the Development of

Liberal Protestantism in the United States," *Modern Intellectual History* 5, no. 2 (2008): 225–50.

18. Noll, "Bible and Slavery," 44–45, 51–52.
19. Theodore Weld, *The Bible against Slavery, or, An Inquiry into the Genesis of the Mosaic System, and the Teachings of the Old Testament on the Subject of Human Rights* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1837); George Cheever, *God against Slavery, and the Freedom and Duty of the Pulpit to Rebuke It, as a Sin against God* (New York: J. H. Ladd, 1857). See also Albert Barnes, *The Church and Slavery* (Philadelphia: Parry & McMillan, 1857).
20. Harrill, "New Testament in the American Slave Controversy," 151.
21. Oshatz, "The Problem of Moral Progress," 230.
22. Stuart, *Conscience and the Constitution* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1850), and Stuart, "Hints Respecting Commentaries upon the Scriptures," 140.
23. Molly Oshatz, J. Albert Harrill, and John H. Giltner discuss Stuart's interpretation of the Bible on the matter of slavery. Oshatz, "The Problem of Moral Progress"; Harrill, "New Testament in the American Slave Controversy"; Giltner, "Moses Stuart and the Slavery Controversy." Charles Hodge and Robert Breckenridge also adhered to a conservative notion of the authority of the Bible and opposed slavery. Both admitted that the Bible sanctioned slavery. However, Breckenridge believed that the slavery practiced in the South was not biblical slavery. Hodge argued that the Bible hedged the practice of slavery with so many ameliorations that slavery would end when biblical principles were pursued to their logical conclusions. Noll, "Bible and Slavery," 60.
24. Stuart, *Conscience and Constitution*, 29.
25. Ibid., 37.
26. Ibid., 36–37. My emphasis.
27. Ibid., 46, 56.
28. Charles Hodge, "Review of 'Slavery' by William Ellery Channing," *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 8, no. 2: 283.
29. Grant Wacker, "The Demise of Biblical Civilization" in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 127. See also Wacker, *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985). For the ways moral progress undermined traditional certainties, see Oshatz, "The Problem of Moral Progress."

CONCLUSION

1. Cotton Mather, *Reason Satisfied: and Faith Established* (Boston: J. Allen, 1712), 31.
2. Nathan Hatch, "Sola Scriptura and Novus Ordo Seclorum," in *The Bible in America*, ed. Mark A. Noll Nathan O. Hatch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 70–71; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

3. Christopher Grasso, "Deist Monster: On Religious Common Sense in the Wake of the American Revolution," *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 1 (2008): 67. See also Mark A. Noll, "The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 2 (1985): 149–75, and Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768–1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
4. James Turner makes an analogous claim about the rise of unbelief in the nineteenth century. I am indebted to him and his work. James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1986).

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