## Cotton Mather

## Biblia Americana

America's First Bible Commentary. A Synoptic Commentary on the Old and New Testaments. Volume 1: Genesis Ed., with an Introduction and Annotations, by Reiner Smolinski

[Biblia Americana. Der älteste amerikanische Bibelkommentar. Band 1: Genesis.]



BIBLIA AMERICANA
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Volume 1: GENESIS

Edited, with an Introduction and Amendation, by Reliew Smallinki

2010. XIX, 1337 pages.

ISBN 978-3-16-150190-6 cloth 254,00 € ISBN 978-3-16-163498-7 eBook PDF 254,00 € Published in English.

Scheduled to appear in 10 volumes, this scholarly edition of Cotton Mather's *Biblia Americana* (1693–1728) makes available for the first time the oldest comprehensive commentary on the Bible composed in British North America. Combining encyclopaedic discussions of biblical scholarship with scientific speculations and pietistic concerns, *Biblia* represents one of the most significant untapped sources in American religious and intellectual history. Mather's commentary not only reflects the growing influence of Enlightenment thought (Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Newton) and the rise of the transatlantic evangelical awakening; it also marks the beginnings of historical criticism of the Bible as text in New England.

Volume 1 (Genesis) of Cotton Mather's *Biblia Americana* is particularly valuable because Mather addresses some of the most hotly debated questions of his age: Are the six days of God's creation to be taken literally? Can the geological record of the earth's age be reconciled with biblical chronology? Were there men before Adam? How many animals fit into Noah's Ark? Was Noah's Flood a local or global event? Why are the religions of the ancient Canaanites, Egyptians, and Greeks so similar to the revealed religion of Moses? Did God dictate the Bible to his prophets, and how many (if any) of the books of the Pentateuch did Moses write? Such questions were as relevant during the early Enlightenment as, indeed, they are to many believers today. Edited, introduced, annotated, and indexed by Reiner Smolinski, Mather's commentary on Genesis is as rich in its critical texture as it is surprisingly modern in its answers to many central concerns of the Christian faith.

Cotton Mather (1663–1728) The leading New England theologian of his period, Mather was both a defender of Reformed orthodoxy and an intellectual innovator, who propagated the Pietist renewal of Protestantism and embraced ideas of the Early Enlightenment. Best known for his Magnalia Christi Americana (1702), he published more than 400 works in various fields including church history, natural theology, and medicine.

Reiner Smolinski Born 1954; 1987 PhD in English and American Studies from The Pennsylvania State University; Professor of Early American Literature and Culture at Georgia State University (Atlanta).

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