

## Blank Bible

Precisely when Edwards came into possession of his book table is unrecorded, yet its invention may have had something to do with another acquisition, his great interleaved Bible (called the "Blank Bible"). Around 1730 Edwards inherited a thick quarto volume of originally blank leaves interleaving a small octavo King James Bible.<sup>1</sup> The blank pages were each divided into two columns by a red line so that the page offered a space corresponding to the double-columned Bible page facing it. It is a beautiful workbook for one who loves to study the Bible and develop his reflections with the pen, verse by verse, as Edwards was wont to do. The Bible had always been the center of Edwards's meditations, and he had notebooks of speculations on the scriptures, but this new tool enabled him to anchor all his strands of thought directly to a biblical text. Every sermon was identified by biblical text, each miscellaneous theological reflection in his notebooks was implicitly or explicitly derived from the Bible, and Edwards believed that the key to understanding the "language and lessons of nature" also lay in the mysterious typological language of the scriptures.<sup>2</sup> Inevitably, this new workbook became the logistical center of the expanding web of Edwards's recorded speculations and of his mental life, and as such it became the center of his cross-references, an index of indexes in his study. Once his process of thought was embodied concretely in his working papers, it was but a step for Edwards's lively imagination to conceive of such a material embodiment of the process as his revolving book table, a tool he probably acquired by at least 1733. With its aid, he could enter parallel or closely related entries in the interleaved Bible, his notebook on types, a "Miscellanies" volume, or whatever half-dozen sources and repositories he needed, with a slight pull of his hand; conversely, he could study and cross-reference previous writings in much the same way.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that Edwards received the "Blank Bible" from his brother-in-law, Benjamin Pierpont, a failed ministerial candidate. Sarah Pierpont Edwards may have had a role in passing this valuable item from her brother to her husband. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 24, *The "Blank Bible," Part 1 and Part 2*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven, Conn., 2006), 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 11, *Typological Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, Mason I. Lowance Jr., with David H. Watters (New Haven, Conn., 1993), 50 (quotation). For an example of Edwards's belief in the connection between the "languages and lessons of nature" and the scriptures, see "Images of Divine Things," in *ibid.*, 11: 49–142. Although the published work was titled *Images of Divine Things*, Edwards toyed with other titles, including "Shadows of Divine Things" and "The Language and Lessons of Nature," and he wrote "Images of Divine Things" on the notebook cover. See *ibid.*, 11: 51 ("Shadows") and 50 ("Language"). This work and its titles illustrate Edwards's quest to unite the realms of theology, natural science, and semiotics, and his faith that the Bible provided the key.

<sup>3</sup> The process of reference cycles is analyzed and illustrated in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 10, *Sermons and Discourses, 1720–1723*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 74–90.