

Everyday Glory

THE REVELATION OF GOD IN ALL OF REALITY

Gerald R. McDermott



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This book is dedicated to our three wonderful daughters-in-law,
Darrah, Whitney, and Julie.

They have helped make our sons the splendid men they are,
and they have given us eleven precious grandchildren,
Augustine, Anastasia, Magdalen, Catherine, Piers,
Margaret Rose, Florence, BIP, Phinehas,
Simeon, and Thaddeus Bede.

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Preface

Many years ago I happened upon a notebook that Jonathan Edwards (1703–58) had kept throughout his life. He titled the notebook “Images of Divine Things.”¹ In this notebook, now about eighty-five pages, Edwards jotted notes on the resemblances to the Triune God and his ways that he saw in the world around him. By “world,” I mean not only nature but also what we call human relations. I was immediately enthralled.

This notebook opened a whole new world to me. I began to see beauty and riches in the stars above and the world beneath and pointers to gospel truths in multiple dimensions of reality. Later when I started to explore the history of Christian thought, I discovered that this Edwardsean way of seeing the world was not uncommon in previous Christian theology. In fact, it was the norm.

But in the twentieth century this way of seeing was lost in many sectors of the Christian church for reasons that I will explain. The reasons are now understandable, but the effect was a terrible loss to the faith of millions.

This book is an attempt to retrieve a profoundly Christian way of seeing reality. My prayer is that it adds depth and beauty to the faith of believers in this new century. I hope it also speaks to seekers who have caught a glimpse of the wonder and beauty of life and wonder where those glimpses have come from.

1. *WJE* 11:51–135.

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As always, my wife, Jean, was a daily inspiration as I wrote this book on sabbatical. We were living with our oldest son and his wife and their six kids at the time. My gratitude goes to them for putting up with Grandpa as he wrote and wrote, day after day, while enjoying their laughter, questions, and long conversations.

I am deeply indebted to my editor Dave Nelson, who is becoming one of this country's premier theological book editors. He has smoothed the way all along and made excellent suggestions throughout.

I am also grateful for the invitations of Dallas Theological Seminary to deliver their Griffith-Thomas lectures for 2017 and St. John Lutheran Church in Roanoke, Virginia, to be the speaker at their annual theological weekend. Both series helped me think through and then revise some of the chapters that follow.

Thanks are also due to the following readers who gave input: Michael McClymond, Mark Harris, Matt Franck, Robert Benne, Paul Hinlicky, Brian Bolt, Hans Boersma, Josh Reeves, Ralph Wood, Alan Pieratt, Sean McDermott, Ryan McDermott, and Mark Graham. I am sure I did not use their suggestions in the ways most of them thought I should, and whatever distortions remain should not be attributed to any of them.

Special thanks are due to Paula Gibson for what I think is a superb cover. Thanks are also due to my excellent student Justin Hendrix for his copy-editing work.

Abbreviations

- AE *Luther's Works: American Edition*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955.
- AH Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1885. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- CD Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. 14 vols. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010.
- CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Edited by Jean Baptiste Chabot et al. Paris, 1903.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke*. Weimarer Ausgabe. 121 vols. Weimar: H. Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1883–2009.
- WJE Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Vol. 2, *Religious Affections*, edited by John E. Smith (2009). Vol. 8, *Ethical Writings*, edited by Paul Ramsey (1989). Vol. 9, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, edited by John F. Wilson (1989). Vol. 10, *Sermons and Discourses, 1720–1723*, edited by Wilson H. Kinnach (1992). Vol. 11, *Typological Writings*, edited by Wallace E. Anderson and Mason I. Lowance Jr. (1993). Vol. 13, *The "Miscellanies," a–500*, edited by Thomas A. Schafer (1994). Vol. 14, *Sermons and Discourses, 1723–1729*, edited by Kenneth P. Minkema (1997). Vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, edited by George S. Claghorn (1998). Vol. 18, *The "Miscellanies," 501–832*, edited by Ava Chamberlain (2000). Vol. 20, *The "Miscellanies," 833–1152*, edited by Amy Plantinga Pauw. Vol. 23, *The "Miscellanies," 1153–1360*, edited by Douglas A. Sweeney.



1

Recovering a Lost Vision

Most people in the world wander through life without seeing its full meaning. Christians know its meaning but often miss the embedded meaning in the *world* all around them. They know that God created the world and that he will bring the world to an end. Some know that the end will not take his people to a heaven in the sky but to a renewed world right here. But most Christians have been trained not to see the meaning of the innumerable *parts* of this world, or the meaning of the world itself. They have been conditioned to see *beyond* the earth and its heavens to a realm fundamentally removed from what they can see. They miss the glory of the Lord that is all around them—in *this* world and *these* heavens—which the seraphim extolled to Isaiah (Isa. 6:3) and the great liturgies proclaim: “Heaven and earth are full of your glory!”

Let me try to illustrate how we can see and not see at the same time. Try staring at the four dots in the picture on the previous page for 30–60 seconds.¹ Next close your eyes, and then look at a bright wall. You will see an image of “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6 ESV). Of course this is only an image and not the refulgent glory. Yet it demonstrates my point: the glory of the Lord is right in front of us, but we usually don’t see it.

1. Taken from <http://www.eyetricks.com/jesus.htm>.

Disenchantment

This gap between perception and reality was not always so large. For millennia the cosmos had seemed to most men and women to be a source of wonder, an infinitely complex mystery with unsearchable beauties and intriguing harmonies. They believed the universe was a sign with meaning, but that the meaning was often missed. As the twelfth-century theologian Hugh of St. Victor wrote,

The whole sensible world is like a kind of book written by the finger of God—that is, created by divine power—and each particular creature is somewhat like a figure, not invented by human decision, but instituted by the divine will to manifest the invisible things of God’s wisdom. But in the same way that some illiterate, if he saw an open book, would notice the figures, but would not comprehend the letters, so also the stupid and “animal man” who “does not perceive the things of God” may see the outward appearance of these visible creatures, but does not understand the reason within.²

By the “animal man,” Hugh probably meant a person who sees nothing of God’s glory, or else has a sense of a Creator but does not let it affect him or her. But in the beginning of this quote Hugh spoke for millions in the church who have seen God’s glory through “the things that have been made,” as Paul put it (Rom. 1:20). They not only sensed something beautiful in the glories of the world around and above and in them but also sensed something of what Hugh called “God’s wisdom” in and through the creatures he made. They resonated with Jesus’s saying that the lilies of the field and the birds of the air showed that God would provide for his people, since God provided for the lilies and the birds and yet loved his people even more (Matt. 6:26–30). And if God was speaking through lilies and sparrows, they surmised, then he was probably also speaking through wine and bread and vines and lights, as his connections to those things suggested.

But in the modern age fewer Christians have been able to see messages like this in the creation. They have been affected by two things: growing secularism, which refuses to acknowledge that we and the world are the creation of God, and certain theologies that discount even believers’ abilities to discern meaning in the creation.

2. Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus* 4; quoted in Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

We've all heard about the first cause of Christians being less able to understand the meaning of creation—secularism and its gradual disenchantment of the world. We have heard from historians and sociologists that as more and more people became convinced that the world's origin could be explained by science, the cosmos came to be regarded as a predictable machine made by God. Then, when faith in God dissolved, it was seen as a cold universe arising from randomness and therefore inimical to lasting personhood and love.³

Most of us learned in college history classes that this disenchantment of the world started with “the Copernican revolution,” which made humanity the center and measure, replacing the infinite God with finite man, broken in his relationships and partial in his vision. It made sense to us that moderns started to turn their focus from what was beyond limit (God) to what they could know within their limits (human beings and their nearby world). If we took a bit of philosophy in college, we learned that the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) limited knowledge even further by arguing that we could never know things as they really are, either God or things closer to us, but only our own thoughts about God and things. We might have also read about the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) and his so-called leap of faith (a term he probably never actually used). But there is little doubt that he persuaded generations of readers that they must leap *over* reason and this world to get to ultimate truth. (It is unfortunate if this is all they gained from Kierkegaard, for he rightly stressed the flip side of reason's inability to know the Triune God—namely, the *soul's* capacity for communion with the Triune God in its “subjective,” or personal, knowledge.) University students in the last few decades often felt reinforced by Kierkegaard in what they already had intuited, both from their own experience and the atmosphere at most universities, that reason cannot prove God or say *anything* certain about God other than that his existence is doubtful.

There is also what could be called a denominational difference. The sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers argued that late medieval Catholic theology had too much confidence in reason. Luther and Calvin insisted that Roman theologians of their day failed to recognize sufficiently that reason, like every other part of the human person, was tainted by the fall and therefore could not be relied upon to see in the creation anything truthful about God. Since reason was a gift of nature and not grace, Protestants tended to conclude that the world of nature is fundamentally different from the sphere

3. On the universe as a machine, see such works as Richard S. Westfall, *The Construction of Modern Science: Mechanism and Mechanics* (1971; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), and Margaret C. Jacob, *The Cultural Meaning of the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1988).

of grace, so that the beauties of the world have no fundamental or primary relation to the beauty of God. Even if they do, sin has so damaged our eyesight that we cannot see that relation rightly. In fact, our sin-damaged eyes are not capable of seeing anything about the true God from reason and nature alone. But more important for Protestants, God has shown us everything we need to know in the Bible, and the main story there is about salvation and especially justification. According to the Protestant Reformers,⁴ too many Catholics had misused the creation to argue for what Luther called a “theology of glory,” which assumed that they could know what was important to know about God through reason and nature alone. Luther proposed that the only way to know the true God was through the cross of Jesus Christ. Protestants generally agreed with Luther’s approach to God and the cross, as did many Catholic theologians in the next centuries. But while Catholics continued to sustain a robust theology of creation, Protestants tended to let their understanding of creation become eclipsed by their overwhelming emphasis on redemption. Some even went so far as to claim that there is no such thing as revelation through the creation.

It didn’t help matters that the formidable trinity of the long nineteenth century—Darwin, Marx, and Freud—seemed to confirm Western culture’s growing disenchantment of the world. However much some Christians labored to reconcile macroevolution with God’s creative work, Charles Darwin (1809–82) persuaded millions that God was not needed to begin or sustain the world. Karl Marx (1818–83) told moderns that God talk is merely a drug (“the opiate of the masses”) enabling the weak to cope with their economic and social hardships. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) pointed not at society as Marx did but at inner desire, claiming that religion is wish fulfillment. Like Marx, Freud insisted it was only the weak who need religion. For all three of these modern “prophets,” the world was no longer a beautiful mystery created by a glorious God but an arena for the survival of the fittest (Darwin) or for the exploitation of the proletariat (Marx) or for conflict between the superego and the id (Freud).

While Christians rejected the atheism of these three thinkers, many agreed with parts of their projects. Some Christians accepted the new creation story of natural selection but said God initiated and perpetuated that process. Most Christians sympathized with Marx’s concern for the downtrodden and recognized the evil of economic exploitation, especially by one class against another. Many Christians also saw Freud as opening up the ways that sin

4. There were also Catholic Reformers who used the Council of Trent to refashion doctrine in response to Luther’s critique. See John O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

works in child-parent relations and in the depths of the unconscious. Yet by training Christian attention on how nature might have originated species, on the manner in which history and human nature colluded to produce economic oppression, and on the ways that inner human nature was conflicted, these thinkers made it more difficult for Christians to see the glory of God in nature. Besides, Darwin faulted the church's literal interpretation of creation, Marx protested the church's acceptance of class differences, and Freud decried the church's teaching about sexual sin. Christians couldn't help wondering whether the church might be wrong about creation too. Perhaps the medieval church's assumption that nature speaks in a variety of ways was just another illusion that secular prophets were dispelling.

More recently, the New Atheists have claimed to lend the authority of science to the world's disenchantment. Richard Dawkins is probably the most famous of this new tribe. In his book *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986) he tried to refute the argument for God from the apparent design of the universe. In 2006 he published *The God Delusion*, which claimed that the more one uses reason to understand science, the more one sees that there is no God. When reason looks at the stars above, the earth beneath, and the soul within, one finds not God, he claimed, but final randomness and meaninglessness. The world does not care, and love is something we imagine but that is finally ephemeral. This conclusion should not surprise us, Dawkins said in a BBC documentary: "Why should it be anything other than bleak? I mean, there is no caring about the universe. Why should there be? Why should the universe care about what happens to us?"⁵

Most Christians do not pay great attention to Dawkins and his ilk. As Alister McGrath and David Bentley Hart showed, these new skeptics are astonishingly ignorant of basic philosophy and theology.⁶ For example, they typically treat the Christian God as one more being in a world of beings; such a conception is radically alien to the God and metaphysics of the Bible. Scripture's God is Being itself and in fact beyond being, so that all beings and all the world are *in* him. As Paul put it to the Athenian philosophers on Mars Hill, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28 ESV). The New Atheists tend to conceive of God as the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century

5. This quote is from "Richard Dawkins Documentary," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLtOffrpsHQ> (site unavailable because of copyright restrictions). See also https://www.edge.org/conversation/richard_dawkins-why-there-almost-certainly-is-no-god.

6. Alister McGrath, *Why God Won't Go Away: Engaging with the New Atheism* (London: SPCK, 2011); David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

deists did, as a finite being who created the world with its laws of nature and then sat back to observe it and occasionally intervene.⁷

Yet there is a way in which the New Atheists affect Christians. They concentrate on moral evil, which they think disproves a good God, for he does not stop the greatest human evils such as the German Holocaust, the Soviet Gulag, and the Cambodian Killing Fields. They delight in exposing the vicious killing of nonhuman nature, “red in tooth and claw,”⁸ where life seems to require death on a regular basis. What appear to be innocent animals are routinely attacked and killed with savagery by bigger animals. Then they ask how a good and loving God could have invented such a vicious system of nature.

Christians know there are good replies to these objections. They know that sin started a chain of life and death, so that nature both outside and inside of us is fallen. It groans with us for its redemption one day (Rom. 8:22). So while nature contains immense beauty and grandeur, it is also wracked by what could be called tragedy.

Many Christians also find it ironic that many of these same skeptics (both readers who cheer the New Atheist rejection of traditional monotheistic religion and some of the New Atheists themselves) treat the natural world as divine. It is a growing belief in the West that the physical cosmos is animated by an impersonal spirit called “Gaia” or “the goddess”—although this spirit is not regarded as a person in the way that monotheists think of God. In other words, while the cosmos is regarded by these devotees as more than physical, with some sort of supernatural (i.e., “above or beyond” nature) power driving it forward, the power is an “it” or a “thing,” not a “he” or a “she”—something like the Hindu Brahman or the Daoist Dao. Neither of the latter two is a person or god; rather, they are but the impersonal spirit or essence of all that is, what we might call a directed energy. The ironic element is that while the New Atheists and their readers mock Christians for believing that a good God created a good world, they treat that same world with a similar reverence for the spirit that lies in and behind it. Even Dawkins, who disdained the Gaia hypothesis for its suggestion that the cosmos works to optimize life, wrote glowingly of the cosmos’s “appearance of design,” which contains such “complexity and beauty” that William Paley “hardly even began to state the case.”⁹

7. On God’s intervening occasionally, see Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19–33.

8. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, section 56, stanza 4.

9. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (London: Penguin, 1986), 21. Paley (1743–1805) was the English apologist who famously argued that the universe showed evidence of being designed, just as a watch’s complexity reveals a watchmaker behind it.

So today's skeptics are not very convincing. But they have received an inordinate amount of attention in the media and blogosphere. Their voices at times have been so noisy that the atmosphere seems to keep sounding their echoes. Some Christians as a result have lost confidence. They are less prone to celebrate the creation as "full of the glory of God" and more prone to wonder what if anything nature tells us of the divine.

Biblical Joy

Consider the irony: moderns are proud that they now know that the world is not enchanted. Yet these same moderns—indoctrinated by Darwin, Marx, and Freud—have run to psychiatrists and counselors because of more per capita depression than perhaps in any period of history. The biblical authors, in telling contrast, write of joy to be found amid suffering. At the heart of that joy is a vision of the world as full of the glory of God. As John Calvin put it, the world is a theater of God's glory.¹⁰

Calvin wasn't saying anything new. The Great Tradition—from Origen and Augustine through John of Damascus to Thomas and Bonaventure—saw the world as a thing of wonder studded with beautiful and mysterious signs pointing beyond themselves. They all agreed with what the fourth-century theologian Ephrem of Syria (306–73) wrote: "In every place, if you look, his [Christ's] symbol is there, and wherever you read, you will find his types. For in him all creatures were created, and he traced his symbols on his property."¹¹ Ephrem was articulating what most Christians believed for most of the church's first seventeen centuries—that the universe is an immense trinitarian symbol, with every corner of the cosmos bursting with divinely given meaning. All the Christian thinkers drew on what the biblical authors thought obvious to any reasonable person: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1). Only "the fool" who looks at the heavens above or the moral law within can say, "There is no God" (14:1 ESV). It seemed absolutely obvious to anyone not prejudiced that, as Paul put it, "What can be known about God is plain to [human beings] because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made [in the

10. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.5.8; 1.14.20; 2.6.1.

11. Ephrem of Syria, *Hymn on Virginity* 20.12; quoted in Seely Joseph Beggiani, "The Typological Approach of Syriac Sacramental Theology," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 544–45.

heavens above and the world below]. So they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:19–20). Paul went on to suggest that those who are intellectually honest will look into their own hearts and realize that “what is written on their hearts” is what *God’s* “law requires, to which the conscience bears witness” (2:15).

Two modern Christian theologians teased out the implications of this biblical vision. They accepted the biblical suggestions that all the world is full of types and proceeded to lay out this vision with a clarity and fullness that have not been duplicated. The first was Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), and the second was John Henry Newman (1801–90). Let me outline the vision of each, for with these two we can get a robust conception of what the historic church has meant by its typological vision of reality.

Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards believed that every last bit of the cosmos is a sign that speaks and shows. The message is as near-infinite as the universe itself because the universe was made by the infinite God. But the message has a code that must be cracked—word by word, sentence by sentence—to tell the story inscribed within. The story is of the infinite-personal Being who decided to create a cosmos with a little speck called Earth populated by creatures called human beings. These little creatures were somehow made to be like God himself, at least like him insofar as they had a capacity to think and to love and to enjoy. But they abused those spectacular privileges and rejected him. Yet he won them back by becoming one of them, subjecting his infinite self to their, by comparison, infinitely tiny capacities and permitting them to disrespect him, abuse him, and then torture and kill him. But then he was lifted from the dead and in the same body came back to life. It was through that shocking series of events—the life and death and resurrection of the God-man—that God won those magnificent but perverse creatures back to himself.

According to Edwards, this counterintuitive story is told by every square inch of the cosmos. To be more precise, a tiny part of the story is told by each tiny part of the cosmos. But if a person does not have what Edwards called the “sense of the heart,” which is given by the Holy Spirit, then that person will never crack the code. He or she will not get that little bit of the story, and probably not the whole story at all. In other words, that person will not be able to read the signs, for they will be in a foreign language. Edwards used exactly those sorts of words for this story. He said it is a language one has

to learn, just like learning a language of this world. But you have to go to the other world, as it were, to learn the language of the message because the message comes from the other world about this world, even though every bit of this world is inscribed with a part of the story.

Here is Edwards on the extent of God’s messaging: “I am not ashamed to own that I believe that the whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas . . . be full of images of divine things . . . [so much so] that there is room for persons to be learning more and more of this language and seeing more of that which is declared in it to the end of the world without discovering [it] all” (*WJE* 11:152).¹² God has a reason for his method, said Edwards—namely, that he is “a communicating God” who is ever speaking, ever imprinting his creation with messages, and ever revealing more and more of his beauty. But that characteristic—of being an ever-communicating Being—is only penultimate, not ultimate. It is an end or purpose of his works, but not his final end. The last end of all he said and did, in creating and then redeeming, is to bring glory to himself. Eighteenth-century skeptics said that idea sounded selfish. Edwards replied that it was selfish only if bringing joy and beauty and love to his creatures is selfish (see *WJE* 8:450–53).

So the purpose of imprinting the entire creation is for the sake of God’s glorifying himself, but that happens only when his creatures find their greatest joy in seeing his beauty. And that beauty is, in a word, love. And all the beauties of this world—from the beauty of the intricate design of a simple cell in a simple leaf from a simple tree, to the phantasmagoria of a distant galaxy seen from the top of a mountain on a cloudless night, to the splendor of Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*, to the beauty of the most beautiful woman in recent history, Mother Teresa (!)—all of these earthly beauties are but refractions of the beauty of the self-denying, servant love of the three persons of the Trinity.¹³ In Edwards’s language, all of these beauties are types or images for which the antitype (the referent, or thing to which the type points) is the eternal beauty of the mutual love among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now Edwards had plenty of critics in his day, even on typology. Liberals of his day—and eighteenth-century liberals denied the Trinity and the blood atonement and an eternal hell, just as liberals do today—denied types. Others

12. See the abbreviations list for full information on the various volumes cited throughout of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*.

13. To those who would object that the Father cannot be self-denying and a servant, I (not Edwards) would reply that, in giving his son over to a humiliating incarnation and horrible death, the Father was denying himself for the service of his sinful human creatures. And the Spirit denied his own glory by pointing to the Son.

criticized him for going too far, finding a type under every bush, as it were. Edwards's response was, in effect, No, there are really two under every bush—both the insects under the bush and the roots that feed the bush.

Edwards defended himself by going to the Bible. He argued the usual case that the Old Testament is full of types that point to New Testament antitypes, but then he went further. Not only is the exodus a type of salvation, and not only are Kings David and Solomon types of Messiah Jesus as King, but every stroke of the pen in the Old Testament is typical. How do we know that? Because Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:11, after recounting certain events when the Israelites were wandering in the Sinai wilderness, that “*all* these things were written for our instruction.”

Thus almost everything that was said or done that we have recorded in Scripture from Adam to Christ, was typical of Gospel things: persons were typical persons, their actions were typical actions, the cities were typical cities, the nation of the Jews and other nations were typical nations, the land was a typical land, God's providences towards them were typical providences, their worship was typical worship, their houses were typical houses, their magistrates typical magistrates, their clothes typical clothes, and indeed the world was a typical world.¹⁴

Like much of the church for most of its last two thousand years, Edwards believed that “Mount Zion and Jerusalem are types of the church of saints” (*WJE* 11:153). But unlike much of the church, he was not a supersessionist who believed that the church entirely replaced Israel. Unlike many evangelicals who insist, in Enlightenment fashion, that every text has only one meaning, and unlike many Christians who think, like Occamite nominalists, that the simplest explanation is always the best, Edwards followed the Great Tradition's fourfold sense of Scripture and was able to see multiple layers of meaning in the same text.¹⁵ He was also able to do ontology (i.e., talk about being and existence) in the way the Bible does it. In other words, he employed the christological principle of coinherence and the trinitarian principle of *perichōrēsis*, both of which mean that *God's* reality, and therefore creaturely realities, are able to have two or more things going on at the same time. Christ is both God *and* man. The Father is in the Son, *and* the Son is in the Father,

14. *WJE* 9:289; 13:435; see also *WJE* 13:325, 363–64, 431–33, 434–35; 18:335; 23:500–501.

15. By Occamite I mean those who think like philosopher-theologian William of Occam (ca. 1287–1347), whose “Occam's razor” is famous for suggesting that the explanation with the fewest assumptions is always best. The fourfold sense of Scripture was the oft-used medieval and early modern method of interpreting Scripture that saw four levels of meaning in most biblical texts—the literal (what the text asserts), the allegorical (or doctrinal, especially about Christ), the topological (or moral), and the anagogical (or eschatological).

and the Two by the Spirit are in the believer, at the same time that the whole church is in Christ, and the whole world is in God in some mysterious sense—in him we live and move and have our being. Therefore a Scripture text about Jerusalem or Mount Zion can refer as a type to the future gentile church at the same time that it speaks in quite literal fashion about the future of Jewish Israel.

Edwards went further than most of the tradition on typology, insisting that the New Testament is full of types too. The dove on Jesus's head at his baptism was a type of the Holy Spirit; so were the tongues of fire on the heads of the 120 and the rushing of wind at Pentecost (*WJE* 11:151).

Furthermore, the New Testament itself teaches us to look outside the Bible for types. When Jesus proclaimed that he was the true light and true vine and true bread, he implied that all lights and vines and breads in this world are pointers to, or types of, their antitypes in Jesus. Paul did the same for seed and sowing in springtime when he used them in 1 Corinthians 15 to argue for the resurrection of bodies. Unless God intended seed and planting to be types of spiritual realities, Paul's argument would not have made sense: "If the sowing of seed and its springing were not designedly ordered to have an agreeableness to the resurrection, there could be no sort of argument in that which the Apostle alleges; either to argue the resurrection itself or the manner of it, either its certainty, or probability or possibility" (*WJE* 11:62–63).

If types are in nature, they can also be found in nonbiblical history. Edwards wrote in his enormous "Types of the Messiah" notebook (*WJE* 11:191–324) that "many things in the state of the ancient Greeks and Romans" were typical of gospel things. For example, his "Images" notebook contains a long entry comparing the celebration of a military triumph in the Roman Empire to Christ's ascension. Just as the Roman emperor's triumphal chariot was followed by senators and ransomed citizens, so Christ was accompanied on his return to glory by principalities and powers and ransomed citizens of heaven. The Roman procession was closed by the sacrifice of a great white ox; so too Christ at the ascension entered the holy of holies with his own blood. The Roman emperor treated the people in the capital with gifts, and Christ did the same for his church (*WJE* 11:191, 82–84).

Edwards went further still—to the history of religions. He proposed that God has planted types of true religion even in religious systems that are finally false. This idea is hard for most Christians today to fathom, but Edwards was nothing if not a daring thinker, yet always within the bounds of the Great Tradition of orthodoxy. His adventurous step was to say that the near-universal practice of *sacrifice* in world religions was planted by God as a

type of the perfect sacrifice of God's Son. Even the ghastly practice of human sacrifice, inspired by the devil, was permitted by God to prepare peoples for the sacrifice made by the God-man. Edwards also taught that pagan *idolatry*, in which deities were believed to inhabit material forms, was a type of the true incarnation. Furthermore, he believed pagan sacrifices showed the heathen that sin "must be suffered for" and that they therefore needed God's mercy (WJE 13:405–6).

Yet Edwards warned that typology can go off the rails. It is not a problem to see types everywhere, because they *are* everywhere. But it *is* a problem to interpret them wrongly, as sometimes happens. Origenist speculation, as it has been called because of the tendency of Origen (ca. 184–253) to take the material things of Scripture as types of spiritual things, can flee from history (the proper domain of orthodox typology) to allegorical generalizations about human existence. Edwards said the guardrails on orthodox typology are twofold. First, it must stay within the orthodox story of redemption, which is rooted in historical events. They compose the great antitype. The story is a huge story with a near-infinite number of types, but it is a different story from the myriads of heretical stories and the varieties of human speculations that are not heretical but merely imaginary.

Second, typological interpretation takes practice, just as it takes practice to learn any language, to learn to read this story. Here are Edwards's words, worth quoting at length:

Types are a certain sort of language, as it were, in which God is wont to speak to us. And there is, as it were, a certain idiom in that language which is to be learnt the same that the idiom of any language is, viz. by good acquaintance with the language, either by being naturally trained up in it, learning it by education (but that is not the way in which corrupt mankind learned divine language), or by much use and acquaintance together with a good taste or judgment, by comparing one thing with another and having our senses as it were exercised to discern it (which is the way that adult persons must come to speak any language, and in its true idiom, that is not their native tongue).

Great care should be used, and we should endeavor to be well and thoroughly acquainted, or we shall never understand [or] have a right notion of the idiom of the language. If we go to interpret divine types without this, we shall be just like one that pretends to speak any language that ha[s]n't thoroughly learnt it. We shall use many barbarous expressions that fail entirely of the proper beauty of the language, that are very harsh in the ears of those that are well versed in the language. God ha[s]n't expressly explained *all* the types of Scriptures, but has done so much as is sufficient to *teach* us the language. (WJE 11:150–51)

John Henry Newman

Like Edwards, John Henry Newman (1801–90) believed the Old Testament is chock-full of types pointing to New Testament realities. Eve is a type of Mary, Rahab of Mary Magdalene, Moses of Christ, Pharaoh of the devil, just as Israel in the wilderness is a type of the church in the world. But for Newman, the Anglo-Catholic theologian who shocked all England by “swimming the Tiber” in 1845, the Old Testament’s types pointed especially to high church and sacramental realities. The tree of life in the creation story, Melchizedek’s bread and wine, and the milk and honey in the wilderness all were types of Christian Eucharist inaugurated by Jesus. As if to rebut what he thought to be evangelical antinomianism (the idea that in Christ we are free of law), Newman taught that Joshua’s work was a type of the works that faith must produce if it is saving faith: Joshua showed that, once given an inheritance by God, we must seize it and fight the battles necessary to hold it. Newman said that the three Jewish orders of ministry—high priest, priest, and Levite—were types of the Christian orders of ministry: bishop, priest, and deacon.¹⁶

Similarly to Edwards, Newman saw a continuity of substance between type and antitype, but substance raised to a higher order. Church buildings continue to show that God maintains a special presence in a building consecrated to his worship, just as in Jerusalem’s temple. The New Testament tells us in Colossians 2 that baptism is the new covenant antitype to the Old Testament type of circumcision; each sacrament brings the child into God’s covenant with Abraham’s family. The Jewish Passover is raised to its completion in Jesus’s passion as the sacrificial lamb, and then in the church in the daily and weekly Eucharists. In each transition from type to antitype, there is a kind of correction but then restoration. For example, the Passover enables a special annual communion with the God of Israel, but the Eucharist enables it every day. Yet Passover’s essential elements—atonement and communion—are restored.¹⁷

Newman wrote less about the world of nature “out there” than Edwards did. For example, he said that the blessings of rain and fruitful seasons and regular food and ordinary gladness in life are all types that show every human being that God is good, but he did not write in profuse Edwardsean detail about the hundreds of other ways in the natural world that we learn about

16. Jaak Seynaeve, *Cardinal Newman’s Doctrine on Holy Scripture: According to His Published Works and Previously Unedited Manuscripts* (Leuven: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1953), 258–62; John Henry Newman, “Joshua a Type of Christ and His Followers,” in *Sermons Bearing on the Subjects of the Day* (London: Longmans, Green, 1918), 159, 161, 165, 209–10.

17. Newman, “Joshua a Type,” 204–5, 206, 207–11.

God. Yet he did surpass Edwards in his commentary on the types in *human* nature. In particular, Newman wrote often about conscience. He said that we humans hear God speak to us the most in our conscience. What we learn there, more than anything else, is that God is our Judge and that justice is an eternal principle. Sinners must be punished for their sins.¹⁸

There is another type in the world “out there” that teaches Christians and non-Christians alike, according to Newman. He called it the “government of the world” by God, which is close to what Edwards called “moral government.” By these phrases they both meant things that happen in the world that teach observers that there is genuine moral retribution in the cosmos. For Newman, among the things taught by the “government of the world” was that evil is punished eventually, even if after a long time. Good is returned for good, not always but often, and sometimes after a long time. Newman saw this pattern happening through earthquakes and plagues, the rise and fall of states, the migrations of peoples, scientific and technological inventions and discoveries, and even the progress of philosophy and other realms of knowledge (313).

Again, like Edwards, Newman believed that the world religions contain types of truth, even though these religions are finally false. They teach lessons such as the following: “that punishment is sure, though slow, that murder will out, that treason never prospers, that pride will have a fall, that honesty is the best policy, and that curses fall on the heads of those who utter them” (313). But it is not only moral truth they teach; there are also truthful religious lessons. The most important is the “vicarious principle,” which is the idea that “we appropriate to ourselves what others do for us.” For example, parents work and endure pain so that their children may prosper, and children in turn suffer because of the sins of their parents. The punishment earned by the husband often falls on the wife, and benefits come to all from the dangerous or unhealthy toil of the few. Soldiers endure wounds or death for the sake of those who sit at home (315). This is a truth that other religions recognize in varying degrees but that Christian faith sees most clearly in Christ’s vicarious satisfaction for our sins.

Two corollaries are the notions (1) that sacrifices for sin must offer something that is ours and unblemished, and (2) that there is meritorious intercession, whereby it is of the greatest merit for saintly people to intercede for sinners. There are strains of these two themes in many world religions, said Newman, and both are types fulfilled perfectly in Christ’s unique mediation by the offering of his unblemished self for undeserving sinners (315–17).

18. John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1955), 312, 304–5. In the next few paragraphs, page numbers in parentheses refer to *Grammar of Assent*.

Newman paid more attention to the fine arts than did Edwards. When we hear sublime and beautiful sounds emanating from so little—a mere “seven notes in the scale”—we cannot but conclude that the mysterious stirrings of heart that we feel have actually “escaped from some higher sphere.” These earthly harmonies suggest to our inner religious ear that there must be an eternal harmony shared by saints and angels in another world. They even whisper to us that just as good music obeys mathematical and harmonic laws, so too there must be divine law for us to obey in the moral and religious realms. Music has a peculiar ability to pierce the veil that separates the visible from the invisible worlds.¹⁹

Newman talked about two levels or kinds of types. There are natural types for this world, visible in nature and history, that operate by what he called the “mystical principle.” They are principally for unbelievers and show to them that there is another world beyond their sight. Then there are types of grace that operate by the “sacramental principle,” which are for the church. They show *not* that there is a God who governs the world according to justice over the long haul (lessons from mystical principle) but that God redeems the world through the meritorious and vicarious intercession of his Son (lessons from the sacramental principle). Both kinds of types operate by analogy, which principle seen in its fullness shows that everything is connected to everything else. Even the two kinds of types—the mystical for the world of nature and the sacramental for the world of grace—are connected. Hence grace does not oppose nature but perfects it.²⁰

Is It Legitimate?

For both Edwards and Newman, as for most of the Christian tradition until the twentieth century, this typological view of reality was a great blessing to believers and unbelievers alike. For believers it helped make sense of all of reality, showing that nature and grace are not opposed but complementary, one pointing to the other. It was also enjoyable, providing great satisfaction and fulfillment, both intellectually and aesthetically. Furthermore, it provided a kind of ethical enjoyment, adding conviction and strength to moral lessons that otherwise were harder to accept. For unbelievers, it offered an intellectual

19. *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain (London: Nelson, 1969), 19:415.

20. John Henry Newman, “Milman’s View of Christianity,” in *Essays Critical and Historical* (London, 1871), 2:190, 192, 229; John Henry Newman, *Sermons 1824–1843*, vol. 2, ed. Vincent Ferres Blehl, SJ (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 382.

coherence to reality that reinforced Christian theological proposals that God is the author of not just redemption but also creation and that the two are concordant not disjunctive. For many, this perspective was helpful apologetically—assisting them in their own understanding of faith and explaining its coherence to others. This typological vision of reality served the church in these ways for more than nineteen hundred years.

In the twentieth century, however, many Christians, especially Protestants, lost sight of this vision. Part of the reason was the rise of Nazism and its “theology” of blood and soil. This was taken to be an example of “natural theology” (the name for Christian theologies that find meaning in this world) and therefore proof that claims for types in the world outside the Bible lead only to idolatry. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) was particularly effective in persuading his fellow theologians that all natural theology is a betrayal of the biblical vision. For more on Barth’s objections to natural theology and my analysis of those objections, see the appendix.

Barth is best known for his judgment that liberal theology rejected biblical revelation and replaced it with a system of thinking from outside the Bible. He called on Christians to recover “the strange, new world of the Bible” as a framework for viewing reality.²¹ In the next chapter we will look at the Bible and its use of typology. Readers might find that the ways that Jesus and the apostles read the Old Testament typologically are strange and new. But even if they seem strange and new, I trust that readers will also find that the Bible’s use of types is the key to discerning types outside the Bible.

21. Karl Barth, “The Strange, New World within the Bible,” in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978), 28–50.