

Barth, and antinomy of Bulgakov, is supplemented in Balthasar by ‘analogy’ (ever a concept to conjure with). There is an analogy between the intra-trinitarian dialectic of freedom and necessity, and the dialectic of freedom and necessity operant between God and the world. An eternal intra-trinitarian drama grounds the economy of salvation and creation, but the two are not (*pace* Hegel) collapsed. Going beyond Balthasar, and drawing implicitly upon Barth as well, Gallaher pictures a double election: there is a primordial intra-hypostatic election that grounds the immanent Trinity’s life, and a temporal economic election by God for creation in the incarnation by the Spirit. The latter, although it could have been otherwise, through participation (another word to conjure with) in the former, gains the gift of necessity. But there is still a sense for Gallaher in which that second election poses an element of risk and novelty for the first.

The audacity, and occasional opacity, of this work is evident in the above summary. Gallaher is self-evidently a theologian in the process of becoming formidable. Yet, there is a tendency in this unapologetically dense work for the argument to become subterranean beneath its details. The reader will, for instance, learn much about the internecine wars within Barth scholarship. Nor is much care given to orient a reader not already familiar with, say, German idealism, Eastern Orthodox theology (Gallaher’s own tradition) and patristic thought. Thus, the usefulness of this potentially important work will be limited to those with the requisite knowledge, or the patience to obtain it. It is also self-consciously ‘systematic’ in the sense that there is only a minimal attempt to situate its thinkers historically and in relation to one another – rather the discussion is more interested in a purely formal shared problematic with which these three thinkers grappled. One cannot help but feel there is something lost in this, admittedly understandable, methodological approach.

Brett Gray

Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge CB2 3HU

bcg24@sid.cam.ac.uk

doi:[10.1017/S0036930617000436](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930617000436)

Ola Sigurdson, *Heavenly Bodies: Incarnation, the Gaze and Embodiment in Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), pp. 683. \$60.00.

This is an ambitious book: it offers a slice through the terrain of Christian systematic theology that takes account, albeit briefly, of the history of the Judaeo-Christian tradition from biblical times to the present day and the philosophical turn towards embodiment, and what it has taught us, from the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty to the poststructural investigations of ... well, everyone from Levinas to Nancy, from Foucault to Irigaray.

Furthermore, the theological study situates itself in the matrix of a number of American, European and Scandinavian theologians who have taken aspects of the phenomenological tradition or the poststructural investigations into their own theologies of desire, embodiment and sexuality. What emerges is a bold project then in vision, scope and length, and of an entirely different magnitude to Professor Sigurdson's earlier work on Terry Eagleton and Slavoj Žižek. The synthesis of so many perspectives and their theological implications is remarkable, and accessible.

As the Introduction informs us, this is a volume aimed at the general reader and so there is a need (very well executed) for exposition prior to critical analysis and theological appropriation. Familiarity with the tradition is not assumed and some lightning sketches of highly complex material (like Chalcedon with respect to the incarnation, for example, and the history of the icon with respect to the gaze) are inevitable.

The book proceeds through an examination of its three interlaced themes: incarnation, the gaze and embodiment – with large sections devoted to historical changes, new philosophical understandings and contemporary theological treatments. So in Part II: The Gaze, for example, we move from historical and more recently phenomenological examinations of seeing to biblical accounts of Jesus' seeing, to the philosophical, theological and historical account of icons and idolatry, and into a theology of embodied faith. This is executed in less than 150 pages. The epic scale of this approach to a theology of embodiment is evident, and its details are impossible to summarise in a review. For the 'general reader' (though I'm unsure what general reader would dare to venture into such weighty tome) perhaps this is less problematic than for a theologian working in this field. The exegesis of other people's ideas can feel cumbersome, at least for those already acquainted with these ideas. The argument can get lost, along with the urgency of the prophetic voice. Where the theology pushes through the synopsis it is strong, resonant, critical and constructive; a theology that delights in the incarnate and incarnational body as graced materiality. It is an ascetic theology, but the *ascesis* is not one of repression and denial, but rather an ascetic that enjoys the cultivation of a sensual and an erotic ethic that is both necessary (because of sin) and forgiven (because of mercy).

As 'a study of the Christian problem of incarnation' (p. 577), then, the book can take a respectful place (with much erudition) as a landmark survey, but I think Sigurdson wishes to do more than that. He wants to make an original theological contribution to present Christian debates. And there lies the problem: for any originality in the theological argument can get lost in the contextualising information. A number of recent theologians have made the turn to embodiment and sought connections with christology,

incarnation and creation. Sigurdson cites many of these scholars. So when Sigurdson examines the gaze, appropriating Merleau-Ponty (as many other theologians have also done), the theology is thin and taken up too quickly into the third part of the book that explores and advocates transcorporeality (that is, how physical bodies are mapped onto, continually morphing into, and reconceived as the 'philosophical body', the 'liturgical body', the 'erotic body', the 'grotesque body', the 'heavenly bodies' and their 'divine cities'). When the 'gaze' returns, in the penultimate chapter treating resurrection, in which the discipline of being able to see aright comes from 'beholding' Jesus, what follows is a synopsis of Marianne Sawicki's work. The synopsis is critical, and he uses the work of Rowan Williams and N. T. Wright to leverage some theological correctives. But this is fairly typical of his handling of theological themes: the account of malleability of the body is excellent, but it is also considerably indebted to other theologians who have also been working this cultural seam and the theological ore extracted is much less than the work that has gone into the extraction process.

Where theological originality does emerge – with Sigurdson's account of the 'grotesque body' – there is a profound reflection on pain and suffering that is associated with a *theologia crucis* balanced by a meditation on the resurrection. But the profundity rests upon our understanding 'grotesque' in Bakhtin's sense of the word (exposition pp. 388–90), where it stands opposed to the 'classical body'. It will be interesting to see if something further can be made of the 'grotesque body' christologically, and the original contribution of working Bakhtin's concept into an account of incarnation and embodiment. But this would require rethinking the doctrine of creation – Sigurdson doesn't tackle that in this book. I can also see possibilities for developing this model ecclesialogically. But this would require much more thorough accounts of sin, salvation and the sociology of institutions, to my mind, that this book doesn't offer. More fundamentally, given Sigurdson's commitment to historical change (and the historical analyses that are important to his method and argument), change that has refigured incarnation, the gaze and embodiment – questions arise concerning his understanding of revelation, the relation of the Faith to faith, soteriology to history, providence and the economic operations of triune grace. If these questions are given no answer, then the relation of truth and orthodoxy to historical contingency and even cultural 'fashion' is an open one. What is the theologian's role with respect to thinking through the Faith today? Is it to provide some culturally relative understanding or be involved in the unfolding of a truth and a soteriology human beings are striving realise? If we are working towards some 'eschatological horizon' (a prominent theme throughout the study), then will tomorrow's world

and the new cultural trends it will bring in simply invalidate today's theological enquiries, or are we making progress towards some more complete theological understanding? Where is the operation of God in all of this? I don't believe we can start with a doctrine of God, and I take it that Sigurdson doesn't either. That would be 'theological hubris' (something Sigurdson adamantly wants to avoid). But we do have to work with and towards, and give some articulation of, a doctrine of God; otherwise the anthropological and cultural *read* the christological and theological, and we are not being taught by the gaze of Christ as God incarnate how to see.

So for the 'general reader' this book will prove highly informative and insightful. Its advocacy of the relationship between contemporary understandings of incarnation, the gaze and embodiment is an important reminder of where Christian theology is now: somewhere beyond the narratives that have constructed 'modernity' for us. But as an original contribution to contemporary theology, too much is trying to be done on too many fronts too quickly: biblical and patristic exegesis, the history of Western Christianity, contemporary continental philosophy, literary, feminist, queer and cultural theory, and Christian dogmatics. For the 'general' reader what is achieved – and the weaving of different disciplines into a theological synthesis focused upon incarnation is indeed an achievement – is a sketch of a large and complex field in contemporary theological enquiry that doesn't shun but enters more deeply into the material. What this seems to call for now is a more systematic approach to the theological *loci* themselves: how they are reconstellated and reconceived in the light of new appraisals of the sensual and corporeal. The book lays out the ground for (and offers the vision of) a rich and imaginative theological analysis. Many of the voices, past and present, have been consumed, and consumed with discernment. What we need now is Sigurdson's own dogmatics. So what is important about this book is the preparation it accomplishes for what might follow.

Graham Ward

Christ Church, Oxford OX1 1DP

graham.ward@theology.ox.ac.uk

doi:[10.1017/S0036930617000199](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930617000199)

Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), ppviii + 220.

In this worthwhile study of Isaac Watts, Graham Beynon tries to move beyond the existing scholarship in a number of ways. In the first place, he aims to give Watts' theological, pastoral and educational works as much attention as his hymns, an attention which they have not received before. He also