

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.

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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

seeks to find coherent patterns in Watts' thought, where most other scholars have discerned, instead, a degree of inconsistency. Beynon broadly follows Isabel Rivers' lead, by identifying Watts as a writer who aspired to hold both the rational and the evangelical dimensions of eighteenth-century Dissent together, and thereby to express the spiritual heritage of Puritanism in a way that respected the intellectual preoccupations of the eighteenth century.

He focuses the first part of his study on what he convincingly argues are central topics in Watts' writing, namely reason and passion. In the second part, he tries to show how Watts' understanding of the interplay between reason and passion informed his practical agenda. Beynon underlines the influence of both Descartes and Locke on Watts' intellectual formation, and suggests that this places him within the mainstream of English Enlightenment thought. As he points out, Watts' emphasis on reason was by no means unusual within the world of English Dissent. Anxious not to be labelled as 'Enthusiasts', many Nonconformists embraced the contemporary emphasis on clear, rational discourse. Beynon contends, however, that despite his avowed admiration for Locke, Watts consistently subordinated reason to revelation. He also stressed that the deleterious effect of the sinful human passions on the functioning of reason rendered it insufficient for the purposes of salvation. At the same time, Watts insisted that 'God requires that a creature of reason should be a rational worshipper' (p. 38). He also believed that revealed religion was perfectly consistent with reason, even though its mysteries were above it. Even the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, Watts argued, needs the endorsement of reason, if it is not to degenerate into enthusiasm.

Beynon locates Watts' reflection on the passions against the background of contemporary philosophical discourse on this issue, as exemplified by the writings of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Mandeville. For Watts, the passions provided the motivation for human actions; but since they could not determine whether a given action is good or evil, they should always be subjected to the guidance of reason. Since the passions provide the motivation for action, Watts argued that Christians should indeed aspire to excite their passions in an appropriate manner, and under the direction of the Holy Spirit. This idea, Beynon suggests, distinguished Watts even from the other Christian writers who offered a positive assessment of the passions in the Christian life (p. 108). Having set out Watts' approach to reason and passion, Beynon then tries to show how his understanding of the proper relationship between the two was reflected in his writings on preaching, worship and prayer, and shaped his attitudes to all these activities, including Watts' somewhat eccentric attempt to render the Psalms less Jewish, in order that they might be more edifying to the believer (p. 156). Beynon concludes that Watts' writings exemplify the ways in which the Puritan religious tradition was

able to adapt to, and embrace, the intellectual concerns of the eighteenth century.

Beynon's work is undoubtedly a worthwhile study. It offers a thoughtful discussion of one of the most influential dissenting theologians of the Eighteenth Century, drawing on his less well known prose works, and arguing, persuasively, that Watts' thought has an inner coherence that has been overlooked in the existing scholarship. It is perhaps regrettable that Beynon only engages fleetingly with Watts' contemporaries, rather than offering any extended comparison. Beynon's thesis also assumes that the Puritan theological tradition can be spoken of as a monolithic whole, to which Watts might be faithful, which is a questionable assumption, given the theological diversity among those who might legitimately be called 'Puritans'. Even so, Beynon's work represents a helpful advance on the existing scholarship, and will be of significant interest to anyone studying the evolution of Reformed theology within the world of the eighteenth-century Dissent.

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