

*Studies in the hymnody of Isaac Watts.* By David W. Music. (Studies in Religion and the Arts, 18.) Pp. x + 290 incl. 10 figs and 7 tables. Leiden: Brill, 2022. €119. 978 90 04 51994 7; 1877 3192

*A soul prepared for heaven. The theological foundation of Isaac Watts' spirituality.* By W. Britt Stokes. (Reformed Historical Theology, 72.) Pp. 238. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022. €140. 978 3 525 56069 3; 2198 8226  
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Isabel River's *Vanity Fair and the celestial city* (2018) has demonstrated that Isaac Watts, the London dissenting minister, was one of the most widely-read and influential authors in the British Atlantic world. Through his hymns, sermons and prose, Watts was not only one of London's most prominent preachers, but made significant contributions to the zealous and affective piety of the Evangelical revivals. Compared to his contemporaries, such as Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys, Watts has received far less scholarly attention, despite his significance within his own lifetime and beyond. Recent years have seen a small number of scholarly volumes which fill this *lacuna*. Graham Beynon's treatment of the place of reason and logic in Watts's system of thought has contributed to our understandings of his intellectual approach, and David Music's *Repeat the sounding joy* gives a detailed examination of twenty-five of Watts's most widely published hymns and psalms.

Two newer works now build upon these foundations. Stokes's *A soul prepared for heaven* and Music's *Studies in the hymnody of Isaac Watts* both make new contributions to the existing *corpus* of treatments on Watts.

Stoke's *A soul prepared for heaven* is a study of Watts's spirituality. The purpose of the book is to address the relationship between Watts's theology and his piety, locating him within the Puritan tradition. The work is the first extended study of Watts's theology to date, examining the relationship between happiness and holiness in the life of the Christian. As such, Stokes's work is driven by pastoral application. This means that he tends to assume that the reader is familiar with or sympathetic to Watts's tradition, and brings with it an assumption that Watts ought to be appropriated for a specific, contemporary Evangelical culture. To that end, Stokes mines Watts's body of work; to my knowledge, no other study on Watts cites him as frequently, nor draws together the *corpus* of his writings in such a specific manner. In my own research, *A soul prepared* has proved to be a useful reference point, as so many aspects of Watts's theology are included herein. However, it is hard to ascertain whether Stokes is articulating Watts's theology, or is using Watts to voice his own. This is where the implicit and explicit intentions of the book appear conflicted.

The desire to use historical figures to communicate contemporary piety is commonplace. Publishing houses such as Crossway have series such as 'on the Christian Life', which typically demonstrate the ways that white, male, Anglophone Christians continue to be applicable to twenty-first century Evangelical sensibilities. This appears to be Stokes's implicit intention; however, the explicit intention is to write a work of intellectual theological history. The introduction outlines the historical context of Watts, and determines the methodology of chosen sources (in this instance, the works of Watts published in 1810–11). The implicit intention is apparent from the first page of the introduction, where Alister McGrath and

Bradley Holt are cited for definitions of Christian spirituality (p. 15). While both are highly respected theologians, they are not considered to be experts in early modern religion. D. A. Carson is also cited (p. 122) in a discussion on Watts's belief on hell; not to provide illumination into Watts's position, but to offer a (presumably) normative definition of Christian belief. At the start of chapter ii, the support for Watts's view of the relationship between holiness and the 'knowledge of God's truth' is drawn from *Scripture and truth*, which is a volume intended to convince late twentieth-century Evangelicals of a particular interpretation of the doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy (p. 39). On the same page, we encounter Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the Welsh pastor who ministered in London during the middle of the twentieth century ('Martyn Lloyd Jones' is also inadvertently listed under 'M' in the index). Lloyd-Jones is used to provide a definition of mysticism; while Lloyd-Jones may have insights into the general nature of Christian mysticism, he is not considered to be a source of expertise in an academic monograph. Examples like these can leave the reader confused as to Stokes's intentions.

This is further seen in the passage on Watts's Christology. Following the events at Salters' Hall in 1719, when Dissenters voted against subscription to credal formulations of Trinitarian orthodoxy, Watts wrote a series of works intended to unify the warring factions by articulating a Christology which espoused the eternal divinity of Christ united to his pre-existent human soul. Watts's view provoked controversy on both sides; the orthodox accused him of Arianism, and later Unitarianism, while the anti-Trinitarians accused him of seeking to smuggle orthodoxy in through the back door. Stokes analyses Watts's Trinitarian writings in great detail, with the same meticulous attention he shows throughout the book. However, rather than being willing to simply leave the inner tensions of Watts's atypical Christology hanging in the air, he moves swiftly on to the spiritual applications of Watts's Trinitarianism (p. 164). While there are many areas within Watts, especially his hymns, which align to the Athanasian and Chalcedonian creeds, there are also areas which – especially within a work of theology – warrant more sustained critique.

In many ways, this is typical of Stokes's book, encapsulating its strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are that he provides a close reading of Watts, and weaves together a broadly convincing narrative of the relationship in Watts's thought between Christian happiness and holiness. However, the question remains as to whether Stokes is expressing Watts's view, or using Watts to express his own.

David Music, author of *Studies in the hymnody of Isaac Watts*, is one of the world's leading hymnologists, and his expertise is evident throughout this volume. Given that he has published two works on Watts in close succession, it is apparent to the reader that Music has pored over Watts's hymns and psalms in considerable detail for a sustained period of time. It is hugely surprising that, to date, only one book has been written on Watts's psalms and hymns given that they are the landmark texts in the history of the English hymn. Escott's 1962 *Hymnographer* provides much analytical detail of Watts's psalms, but totally neglects his 1707 *Hymns and spiritual songs*. As such, it is at best incomplete and insufficient. Music's study, by contrast, is a relief to all students of hymns; his book provides a simultaneously broad and detailed analysis of Watts's hymns and psalms, and in doing so demonstrates why they became such a significant part of Evangelical piety.

Music consciously builds upon Gray's 2015 *Hermeneutics of hymnody*, utilising this framework to examine the hymns in their relation to the Bible, theology, liturgy, literature and music. A glance through the index shows that Music has drawn from a wide range of examples to support this analysis; many hymns will be unfamiliar to almost all readers, and as such the scope of Watts's hymnodic *corpus* is presented to a new audience. The introduction draws the reader's attention to the key details of Watts's life, as well as providing the history and purpose of Watts's relevant publications. The subsequent chapters demonstrate that Watts's hymns can and should be considered through several lenses; in doing so, Music allows these facets of Watts's hymns (and by extension, all hymns) to be assessed on their own merits. A hymn may be a beautiful piece of literature and a poor work of theology, and Music's work (building upon Gray) provides a basis for hymnologists to adopt and apply. Music has provided a clear model for others to follow. One can hear echoes of J. R. Watson's argument in *The English hymn* (1997) that hymns are neglected areas of research, and that theologians, musicologists, liturgists and literary scholars would all benefit from giving them further consideration.

The book serves as an engaging introduction to Watts's hymns, and as such, each chapter could become a springboard for further studies. For example, research into the ways Watts's scriptural hermeneutics influence and are expressed in his hymns would build upon this foundation. Literary scholars could further appraise the strengths or weaknesses of Watts the devotional poet, which Music has begun here.

In conclusion, both of the works under review demonstrate the ongoing significance of Watts; he made a unique contribution to eighteenth-century religion, and his legacy continues to this day. Stokes and Music have both shown that Watts requires further study; his *corpus* is an influential but contested body of work, and these two volumes go some way to showing the breadth of his mind and thought. Both works present a domesticated Watts; his theology and hymnody both drew impassioned criticisms, and questions over his orthodoxy endured long after his death. However, both volumes also demonstrate why Watts was so influential; he was able to articulate an affective piety, through his hymns and prose, which deeply resonated with Dissenting sensibilities and fuelled the revival fires of Evangelical zeal. For readers wishing to understand an author whose significance has not been sufficiently reflected in the scholarly literature, both these two works will provide stimulating and rewarding insights.

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*Johann Wilhelm and Johanna Eleonora Petersen's eschatology in context.* By Elisa Bellucci. (Beiträge zur Europäischen Religionsgeschichte, 9.) Pp. 298. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022. €90. 978 3 525 54088 6

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With Philipp Jakob Spener officiating, Johann Wilhelm and Johanna Eleonora Petersen were married in 1680. Over the following decades they shared life together as influential Lutheran Pietists, even after their spiritual commitments cost Johann Wilhelm his position as superintendent in Lüneburg. Finding a