Sweeney’s Booknotes: God-Haunted World: The Elemental Theology of Jonathan Edwards
by Doug Sweeney | October 12th, 2015


Despite the frightening connotations of its title—catching but nonetheless misleading—this self-published monograph requires careful attention with a primer on what others have described as Edwards’ quest to rechant the natural world in the age of the Enlightenment.

Its author started the project as a doctoral dissertation under the guidance of Robert Caldwell at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (in Fort Worth, Texas). In its current, published form, it appears on paper in an easy-to-read format, with insightful, summative side bars and 142 well-placed illuminations.

As Boss describes the book, it “is a visual exploration of the nexus between Scripture and Nature” in Edwards’ private manuscripts (p. 1). “In his personal notebooks and throughout his preaching and writing, Edwards reveals a God-haunted world,” the author explains, “in which we are surrounded by signs, symbols, and emblems that serve as windows to spiritual reality” (p. 35).

He focuses most closely on Edwards’ “Images of Divine Things,” a notebook on divine types found throughout the natural world. He categorizes this manuscript as an early edition sermon book that follows in the train of those by Bishop Joseph Hall, Ralph Aurens, John Bunyan, Benjamin Keach, and the young Cotton Mather—all of whom read the physical world as a poetic composition symbolizing the truth and beauty of God, an effort in what Boss calls reenchantment.

Why reenchantment instead of the usual reformation? Because, Boss contends, Edwards labored “to recover the spiritual and distinctly biblical dimension of creation,” an effort often sidelined in discussions of reenchantment. In fact, as Boss makes his case, Edwards’ reenchantment of the natural world around him “is key to understanding the distinctively biblical and emblematic worldview evident within his emblem book Image of Divine Things” (p. 123). It is a key, in other words, to Edwards’ natural theology.

Boss is right about this. I recommend his book to everyone who is interested in typology and/or Edwards’ radically theological vision of the cosmos.

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