

Isaac Watts' beliefs concerning immortality

Isaac Watts (1674–1748), English hymnwriter and theologian. A prolific and popular hymnwriter, he was recognised as the "Father of English Hymnody", credited with some 750 hymns. Many of his hymns remain in use today, and have been translated into many languages. He was also evidently a believer in conditional immortality as the following article from Wikipedia suggests.

In 1644 he published a notorious tract, 'Mans Mortalitie', wherein he sought to prove 'both theologically and philosophically, that whole man (as a rational creature) is a compound wholly mortal, contrary to that common distinction of soul and body: and that the present going of the soul into heaven or hell is a mere fiction: and that at the resurrection is the beginning of our immortality, and then actual condemnation, and salvation, and not before.'

Overton's treatise provided the heresy hunters of the 1640s with further evidence of the need to restrain liberty of speculation in matters of religion, but it is wrong to regard his work, as some writers have done, as presaging modern materialism.

Here are a couple of his hymns which show he did not believe in the immortal soul!

Think, mighty God, on feeble man;
How few his hours! how short his span!
Short from the cradle to the grave
Who can secure his vital breath
Against the bold demands of death,
With skill to fly, or power to save?

Lord, shall it be for ever said,
"The race of man was only made
For sickness, sorrow, and the dust?"
Are not thy servants day by day
Sent to their graves, and turned to clay?
Lord, where's thy kindness to the just?

Hast thou not promised to thy Son
And all his seed a heav'nly crown?
But flesh and sense indulge despair:
For ever blessed be the Lord,
That faith can read his holy word,
And find a resurrection there.

For ever blessed be the Lord,
Who gives his saints a long reward
For all their toil, reproach, and pain:
Let all below and all above
Join to proclaim thy wondrous love,
And each repeat their loud Amen.

No, I'll repine at death no more,
But with a cheerful gasp resign
To the cold dungeon of the grave
These dying, with'ring limbs of mine.

Let worms devour my wasting flesh,
And crumble all my bones to dust,
My God shall raise my frame anew
At the revival of the just.

Break, sacred morning, through the skies,
Bring that delightful, dreadful day;
Cut short the hours, dear Lord, and come;
Thy ling'ring wheels, how long they stay!

[Our weary spirits faint to see
The light of thy returning face,
And hear the language of those lips,
Where God has shed his richest grace.]

[Haste, then, upon the wings of love,
Rouse all the pious sleeping clay,
That we may join in heav'nly joys,
And sing the triumph of the day.]