

disputes between Yale and Chicago theologians in the 'post-liberal' era (chapter 12)—but you certainly have to know what you are looking for! In fact these essays visibly owe far less to Irenaeus and company than they do to Nicholas Lash, Gareth Evans, Sabina Lovibond, Walter Benjamin and above all Frederic Jameson. While certainly 'ecclesiology-minded' (page 202), Surin's theological writing is interwoven by a wide range of literary-critical and socio-political theory. It is appropriate, and surely not surprising, that the founder-editor of the highly successful quarterly *Modern Theology*, now resident in North Carolina, should be writing theology in the same universe of discourse as readers of Adorno (as well as Aquinas), Roland Barthes (as well as Karl Barth), Cornelius Castoriadis (as well as Cornelius Ernst), Julia Kristeva (as well as Donald MacKinnon), Richard Rorty (as well as Karl Rahner), and other such exotic couplings.

An unreviewable book, then. Every other page inspires and requires an essay-length response. It may sound eclectic, modish, inaccessible and even terrifying. But the names are not being capriciously dropped—the extensive footnotes show how solid and illuminating the connections are. This is one of the rare books in which theology shows signs of having joined the modern world.

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MEDITATING UPON GOD'S WORD: PRELUDE TO PRAYER AND ACTION by Peter Toon. *Darton, Longman and Todd, London. 1988.* Pp. viii + 103. £3.95.

In a brief Introduction, a sketch of traditional Christian meditation, Peter Toon proposes a definition of meditation: 'The mental activity—the mental prayer if you like—of attempting to see ourselves in the light of God's revealed will and truth, as that is recorded in the sacred Scriptures and summed up and contained in the "Word made Flesh", the exalted Lord Jesus Christ' (p. 3). He asserts that if we are to engage in true contemplation of God, 'our souls need to be stimulated, fed and directed by the content and dynamism of God's revelation, written in Scripture' (p. 10). As sentiment, unexceptionable. The pity is: this book conveys little of that 'dynamic'.

The opening chapter seeks to establish the difference between study of and meditation upon the Scriptures. It is claimed that while God does not require all his children to study (in an academic sense) the Bible, he does expect all to meditate upon his revelation. Fair enough. By way of illustration is a study of Psalm 1 followed by a meditation on it. The study tells us that the psalm contrasts righteous and wicked. The righteous is happy now and looks forward to greater happiness in paradise. The consequent meditation is correspondingly bland. The study ought to have shown that the perspective of the psalmist is this-worldly: retribution (theoretically) happens in this life. But, of course, it does not work so in practice. The psalm challenges us to question that theology of retribution and yet to accept the justice of God, enigmatic though it be. A meditation which had respected this real 'dynamic' would be anything but bland.

The rest of Part One (chs 1-4) follows a staidly traditional line, pointing out that meditation on Scripture leads to union with Jesus (as Risen Lord)

and that meditation itself involves mind, heart and will. Practical methods are proposed, including four model six-day cycles of meditation on Scripture. Part Two (chs 5–7) looks at the theory and rationale of meditation. Pondering on Scripture should lead us to Jesus as Receiver and Revealer of Revelation. Unhappily (it is claimed) modern critical study of Scripture has led to a distrust of Scripture. The answer, for one seeking to meditate faithfully on Scripture, is ‘to make a gallant effort’ to ignore ‘the modern problem’ (p. 77). In fairness, there is a mild qualification: ‘we must suspend (not abandon) our scientific and critical approach’ (p. 78). While the book has helpful pages, one feels a nagging dissatisfaction. The model meditations scattered throughout left this reviewer mildly embarrassed. Typical of a pervading shortcoming is a four-page description of the Jesus Prayer: meditation on the text, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner’. There is no reference at all to the startling parable of Lk. 18:9–14 — clearly the inspiration of the prayer. Surely a remarkable oversight in a book devoted to meditation on *Scripture*.

Just here is one’s unhappiness with the book. It proposes a method of meditation on Scripture which, in effect, blunts the challenge of the Word. I have noted some instances. To underline the point it will be helpful to indicate ways in which an awareness of the biblical challenge might lead to robust prayer—prayer with some of the verve of biblical prayer itself. One looks to Old Testament lament. Here is a forceful form of prayer, present in prayers of Moses, Jeremiah, Job, in many psalms and elsewhere. It is prayer that takes its stand on covenant. The faithfulness of our covenant-God gives us a right to complain to him, to demand a hearing. My problem can become God’s problem. He is not a God who regards our woes as trivial but as the stuff which should favour our growth. We know that suppressed grief is hurtful; in biblical prayer we find uninhibited outpouring of grief. Suppressed anger is harmful. In biblical prayer we find candid anger—often enough aimed at God. Biblically inspired prayer will not permit us to wallow in past benefactions; it should empower us to work for the present liberation of fellow humans.

Biblically inspired prayer will point us to a God who needs us. It should come as no surprise that a Jewish writer had put his finger on it: ‘God is imprisoned. Man must free him. That is the best-guarded secret since the Creation’ (E. Wiesel, *The Town Beyond the Walls*, p. 15). God asks us to let him be God in his way. This is precisely what Paul had grasped (2 Cor 11:30–12:10). Acknowledgement of our weakness gives God scope to act. But, awareness of frailty must be made in full appreciation of our human dignity. The Israelite at prayer does not grovel. He is conscious of God’s unflinching respect for humankind.

It is this refreshing biblical forthrightness, this readiness to grapple with God, that is missing in the approach and models presented by Peter Toon. Another thing. Meditation centred exclusively on the heavenly Lord (a heavy emphasis of the book) is in danger of missing the challenge of the prophet Jesus. In our day—witness all recent christological writing—emphasis is on the human Jesus. Liberation theology and the vibrant prayer-life of basic communities testify to the powerful inspiration of this Jesus. One wonders if traditional meditation can any longer meet our need.

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