

In *Pilgrimage to Priesthood*, she tells her story. She tells it in Church terms, concentrating on her experiences in the Church of England between 1979, when the Synod rejected the possibility of women priests, and 1981, when she emigrated to America and was ordained by one of the bishops there who accepts women priests. It is a simple, standard statement of women's complaints about male domination. Its basic argument is "they can so why can't we?" It is unpretentious, unsurprising and, to me, unexciting. There is no

writing in it about personality, and a cause is seldom as engaging as a hero or heroine as a person. I think Ms Canham must have undergone psychoanalysis at some stage; she often talks in psychological language, about issues like "the self-realisation of consciousness", which is doubtless important but does not make a good read. There is a picture of Ms Cranham on the cover but I will not give away what she looks like.

TERESA McLEAN

HISTORY AND CRITICISM OF THE MARCAN HYPOTHESIS by Hans-Herbert Stoldt: Translated from the German by D L Niewyk, T & T Clark, 1980, pp xviii + 302 £7.95.

The aim of this book is to discredit the widely-held belief in the priority of St Mark's Gospel by tracing the rise of it in nineteenth-century German scholarship and exposing what the author takes to be the fallacies, hidden motives, and uncritical acceptance of ill-established hypotheses, on which it rests. In particular the works of Wilke, Weisse, Holtzmann, Bernhard Weiss and Wernle are subjected to close critical scrutiny. English scholarship is only lightly touched on; French and American scholarship not at all.

Dr Stoldt, a retired administrator, has thoroughly mastered the material he treats, and he has no difficulty in scoring a number of palpable hits. As he rehearses the argument from Petrine origin, the argument from language, the argument from freshness and vividness, and the rest, he is often able to show inconsistencies and serious weaknesses in the way the case was developed. As a result, he may be said to have shown, as indeed Dr W R Farmer had already shown, that if nineteenth-century scholars were right in holding to Marcan priority, it was not, in many cases, for the reasons they alleged.

Dr Stoldt, however, goes much further than that, and it is at this point that his argument needs careful watching. According to his submission, the Marcan hypothesis is so completely without plausibility that no impartial or fair-minded scholar

can possibly subscribe to it, or can ever have subscribed to it in the past. The fair-mindedness of anyone who has subscribed to it is thus put in doubt. About that a number of things need to be said.

What Dr Stoldt seems to have done is to leap from the fact that *some* of the arguments in favour of the hypothesis, advanced by one group of scholars in the nineteenth century, are untenable to the conclusion that *all* arguments advanced in support of it, then or since, are equally untenable. This last is a strange claim to make with regard to a hypothesis which still commands the support of the overwhelming majority of those competent to judge, and it could be substantiated, if at all, only by means of a close analytic investigation into the texts of the Gospels themselves such as is not attempted in this book (see the remarks of H Conzelmann in *Theol. Rund.* 1978, pp 321 ff). Nevertheless it appears to be the only basis for Dr Stoldt's frequent attribution of stupidity (e.g. p 179), intellectual inadequacy (e.g. p 151) or bad faith (e.g. pp 229, 231, 252), to supporters of Marcan priority; sometimes he even seems to suggest that arguing in favour of this view actually involves sin! (pp 122, 154, 203). Even in the English version, in which it has been somewhat toned down, this unsupported, and often highly sarcastic, imputing of bad motives to devoted and distinguished

scholars is a disagreeable feature of the book, the more ironic because of the author's repeated insistence that such poisoning of the wells of argument is to be avoided (e.g. pp 109, 164, 234); "irony, satire and caricature", as he says, "prove less than nothing". The extent of the *parti pris* involved becomes clear when we reach p 233 and the positively hagiographic picture of J J Griesbach, a supporter of the Matthean hypothesis, who is contrasted with his opponents as having "excelled in noble impartiality and pure objectivity of scholarship"; cp. however p 203.

In large part the defects of this book seem to spring from a fundamental misconception, namely that the synoptic problem is capable of a solution which completely "comes out". "And that means that it must be able to explain completely all the phenomena of the synoptic problem and that no questions remain unanswered" (p 222; and cp e.g. pp 129 and 204). With that goes a determination to rule out, as "mere psychologizing", all attempts to suggest reasons why one Evangelist might have decided to deviate from another. In fact different sorts of problems admit of different sorts of solutions, and the synoptic problem is not one where the evidence at present available – or for that matter ever likely to be available – makes possible the kind of solution without remainder Dr Stoldt desiderates. Recognising that, supporters of the Marcan hypothesis are willing to admit that it *is* only a hypothesis, and moreover one which leaves a number of things unexplained (cp. e.g. the quotations on pp 204 and 223-4). So far from being "admissions that the Marcan hypothesis does not hold water" (p 224) such statements are in fact evidence of realism. Their authors recognise that at present the most to be looked for in this area is a balance of probabilities; and,

despite the weaknesses in the case, so carefully probed by Dr Stoldt, they feel, often for reasons not touched on in this book, that the theory of Marcan priority is more probable than any of its rivals – so much more probable as to be a sensible working hypothesis. Not surprisingly, given the standards of objective proof he demands (e.g. pp 90 and 86), Dr Stoldt himself feels certain of nothing in this connexion except the falsity of the Marcan hypothesis; "we cannot offer a positive answer", he writes; "it [sc. the synoptic problem] is still an unsolved mystery" (p 260). Since few New Testament scholars are likely to share his one certainty, the most he can be said to have achieved is a slight shortening of the odds in favour of the Marcan hypothesis.

It is sad to have to write in such a relatively dismissive way about a book which, despite a number of unfair criticisms and some surprising instances of error and ignorance, betrays both erudition and some shrewd insight. It will, for example, set many readers straight about the exact bearing of Lachmann's contribution in 1835, and it certainly strengthens, though it does not prove, the suggestion that a strong motive behind much of the moderate Protestant support for the Marcan hypothesis in the nineteenth century was the desire to refute the mythopaedic understanding of the Gospels put forward by F D Strauss in reliance on Griesbach's hypothesis. Embedded in this book are some useful contributions to the understanding of the synoptic problem, and indeed to the history of ideas. If Dr Stoldt had confined himself to points he has validly made, and legitimate deductions from them, his book could have been commended unreservedly as a useful, if modest, contribution to the subject; as it is, he has signally over-played his hand,

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THE COMING OF GOD by Maria Boulding, *SPCK*, London, 1982. pp 208. £4.95.

Dame Maria Boulding of Stanbrook Abbey has given us a book which successfully combines modern biblical scholarship with deep spiritual insight. The reader

is not left with a cold presentation of the results of exegesis but, instead, is led through a reflection of the Scripture texts. It is not a hurried journey but an explora-