

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-

tion which takes account of the events and the people that are encountered on the way. In the end it is the destination that comes to the traveller. The journey to God through prayer and reflection is fulfilled by the God who comes to us.

The long meandering journey is given its initial impetus by 'our desire and longing for God' which are already 'his gift', a gift which was created in us. The God who came, and comes, in creation is the same God who came to Abraham. He is the God who came in the Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt and who was longed for by the prophets. He is the God who came in Jesus Christ. But that is not the end of it, of course. Christ will come again at the end of time, and in the meantime he comes into the lives of those who wait for him. That is the other side of the coin. Advent people are people who wait for the coming of God, and one virtue of this book is that it encourages us to wait and listen.

Like the people of Israel, especially the poor, we wait for the Messiah who was foretold by the prophets. Like Jesus himself we learn to grow up by listening to God. Like Jesus this will lead us to a life of service, suffering and self-sharing love because that is the way we share in his glory. Jesus interpreted all things in the scriptures concerning himself to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, so that they recognised him in the breaking of bread. We too must reflect on these things beginning with Moses and all the prophets. That is the way Jesus comes into our lives today.

We are thus led to the final coming of Jesus and the way that the many comings of Jesus are celebrated in the Advent season. Maria Boulding then shows how Advent can be perceived as a kind of sacrament. The season of the Church's year is not simply commemorative of the waiting for the incarnation of Jesus Christ, nor is it simply a sign of the future coming of Christ. By meditation on the Advent theme and living it out in the liturgy of the Church a new future is made present. This future is not the pre-Christian one of 'doubt, confusions, ambiguities, failures and desires', but a future which comes in God who is 'coming in the consummation of our

desire'.

The sources which Maria Boulding uses to guide the reader along the path towards the God who comes are diverse and imaginative. Among these are selections from many poets: the religious standards like Francis Thompson and T S Eliot, but also her fellow Benedictines Ralph Wright and Philip Jebb. The Fathers of the Church are used: Augustine, Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen, who provide a good balance to the mystics like John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich.

Of course, Maria Boulding's principal source is scripture and this she expounds with an extremely delicate touch. There is none of the brashness of modern biblical criticism where the results of exegetical research are presented with challenging effrontery. Her method is more instinctive than this, but equally learned. This is made very clear in Chapter 6, *The First-born of All Creation*. In this chapter the wisdom literature of the Old Testament is explored to deepen our understanding of Jesus Christ. This exploration reaches its climax in the Christological hymn of St Paul's letter to the Colossians. It is though it were almost by accident that the reader is given the fruits of recent scholarship, as might be found in J D G Dunn's *Christology in the Making*. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of the comment on Mark 10: 42-45 (p 114) where it is said that Jesus makes 'an explicit claim to the Servant role as sketched in Isaiah 53.' After the work of Morna Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 1959, and other scholars, we are not entitled to infer that Jesus understood himself to be the Suffering Servant of Isaiah; although this interpretation did come into the Palestinian Church very early and that is why it is legitimate to use it as a liturgical motif to understand the self-emptying of God in the incarnation of his son.

*The Coming of God* is to be recommended as a book for all seasons. Though it specifically works on the theme of Advent, this is only a means to an end. That end is that we are the Easter People and we will know this for sure when God comes.

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