

REVIEWS

EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX by John Bowden, *SCM*, 1983, £4.95

PILGRIMAGE TO PRIESTHOOD by Elizabeth Canham, *SPCK*, 1983, £2.95

There is a photograph of Edward Schillebeecx on the front of this book and he looks sweet. He has a benign, bespectacled face, a sad mouth and a tweed jacket. The overall effect is cuddly. I began reading in the hope that I would find out what kind of man lies behind this face and behind the immense volumes of what to me is impenetrable theology he churns out.

But the book is misleadingly subtitled "Portrait of a Theologian". It is a portrait of his work, translated into ordinary language and boiled down into manageable summaries for the amateur reader. There is just one chapter on Schillebeecx's life and much of that is about his philosophical life. The man and his theology are one, it seems. One learns about his studies at Louvain and Paris, his professorship of theology at Nijmegen, his lecturing and writing, and his involvement with Vatican II's thinking on religion in the world.

The little one learns about his personal life makes one want to learn more. Schillebeecx is Belgian, not Dutch, as I had thought. He was one of fourteen children in a pious family strongly influenced by his father, who sounds like a fine man. When Schillebeecx went to Ghent to enter the Dominican novitiate there, at the age of nineteen, he wrote home to his father how much he liked the Dominican night office, sung from 3 to 4 a.m. while everyone else was asleep. His father wrote back: "My boy, your mother and I have to get up three or four times a night to calm a crying baby, and that is less romantic than your night office. Think about it: religion is not an emotional state but an attitude of service."

That understanding of religion runs through all Schillebeecx's work, particularly his political theology, which con-

demns western society and religion for its obsession with self fulfilment. He writes his theology from a critical starting point, re-examining traditional Christian views and going on to re-interpret the truths that they are based on. Or at least that is what I gather from this book, which explains his theology and his methods with admirable clarity.

I was absorbed by the account of Schillebeecx's view of the sacraments as personal encounters with God, and his ultimate extension of that to Jesus as the supreme sacrament. Everything he says about the need to evolve new interpretations of the priesthood, Church authority and community, and the role of women in the Church sounds right. So much so that I began to wonder whether John Bowden might not have selected his evidence too pointedly, in his concern to vindicate Schillebeecx in his *contretemps* with the Vatican.

I know the Vatican is usually wrong when it comes to geniuses, and usually takes at least a century to admit it, but can Schillebeecx be so obviously a genius and the Vatican so obviously foolish as this book makes out? Could easily be. In any case, the book made me like Schillebeecx and interested in his theology, as long as someone else writes it for him. He is a theologian of hope, and please God he will stay in the Church to give it more of that priceless virtue, which it needs badly.

Elizabeth Canham is better at anger than hope, though her achievement in becoming an Anglican priest has renewed her hope in the future of the Anglican Church, despite all the prejudice, narrow mindedness, bigotry, chauvinism and general beastliness she reports meeting on the way to her goal.

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