

THE GOOD NEWS ACCORDING TO MARK, by Eduard Schweizer. Translated by Donald H. Madvig. S.P.C.K., London, 1971. 396 pp. £3.

In recent years, the evangelists have come into their own. Mark, in particular, neglected for centuries as the mere abbreviator of Matthew, and later used as a primary source in the quest for the historical Jesus, is no longer seen as a simple transmitter of tradition, whether at first- or second-hand. It is now recognized that the evangelists were writing what they claimed to be writing—Gospel, or Good News—and that the documents which they produced were primarily theological.

The latest method of Gospel study—redaction criticism—is seen in action in Eduard Schweizer's *The Good News according to Mark*. This is a translation of a commentary originally written for the German series, *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*. Professor Schweizer approaches Mark's Gospel with the understanding that the evangelist has arranged his material (consisting of individual stories and stories and sayings) in his own order, and has constructed his own editorial framework: *the particular message which Mark is endeavouring to express will be found, for the most part, in this very framework and in the special arrangement of his Gospel* (p. 13). He accordingly pays great attention to this framework and to the ordering of the material in trying to understand Mark's message. His primary question of the evangelist is not 'What happened?' but 'What meaning does this narrative have for Mark and for his reader?' Professor Schweizer sets out clearly the fundamental difference between theological truth and historical truth. The real significance in the story of the Baptism, for example, is not affected by whether the details of the narrative happened exactly as described: 'That God has actually spoken here can be declared only by the believer, and this is exactly what the Church does in telling the story. Every detail makes this assertion, whether it is based upon a report about Jesus or has been included to make the event represent the fulfilment of the Old Testament' (p. 37).

Professor Schweizer does not deny the importance of history—indeed, he points to the significance of the fact that Mark chose to use stories about Jesus rather than theological statements to present his 'good news'. But we might perhaps be certain of all the details of an historical event, without it necessarily having meaning for us: for Mark, the events which he records have meaning because they involve us, the readers—his book is written

from faith to faith, and it is this which Professor Schweizer brings out. What he writes about Mark's account of Jesus' action in the temple is for him true of the whole Gospel: 'If we ask whether or not the story really happened in this way, it is obvious that we have not reached a proper understanding of it. We will understand the story correctly only if we ask what Mark wants to tell us about Jesus in it. However, the story of the cleansing of the temple must be based upon some historical act of Jesus' (p. 231). We see here Professor Schweizer's cautious approach to the question of the historicity of the material. Unlike many redaction critics, he does not think it necessary to abandon all hold on history, and to assume that the narratives are simply expressions of theological truth, without any basis in history; but he rightly regards the task of a commentator as being to concentrate on the evangelist's understanding of the material, and the theological truth he wishes to convey, rather than on historical problems.

At times, however, one wonders whether too much theological interpretation is not being read into the narratives. Professor Schweizer rightly sees the Cross as the dominating theme of the Gospel, and linked to it the question of discipleship, the attitude of faith or disbelief which one adopts towards Jesus. But did Mark really see the boat as a symbol of discipleship, and those left on the shore as 'bereft of God's presence?' (pp. 159f.). Does the leper who approaches Jesus break through the barrier of the Law, and so demonstrate the faith which consists in complete dependence upon Jesus—the faith which (as Paul so clearly saw) stands in contrast to the attitude which depends on merit based upon the Law? (p. 57). Some of Mark's narratives, certainly, have this deeper significance: the opening of blind eyes is undoubtedly meant to symbolize the beginning of understanding on the part of the disciples, just as the withering of the fig-tree is clearly a symbolic act. The difficulty is in determining the extent to which this 'hidden meaning' is to be looked for in all Mark's material.

This commentary is meant for the non-specialist. Footnotes are almost entirely absent, Greek is transliterated on the rare occasions where it is needed, and though the views of other scholars are represented, they are not referred to by name. Yet this simplicity of presentation clothes a profound understanding

of the evangelist from which no reader, however familiar with the Gospel, can fail to learn. Professor Schweizer possesses the gifts of lucidity and felicitous illustration, and the result is not only a stimulating book, but an extremely readable one.

The text used for the English edition is *Today's English Version—Good News for Modern Man*, a translation which has gained considerable popularity. The translation of the commentary into English has been generally well done, though there are occasional odd expressions, and a few places where references to the text of Mark apply only to the German

translation made by Professor Schweizer. The fact that the English edition was prepared for an American public causes an occasional surprise, such as the attempt to illustrate the strange route attributed to Jesus, which took him from Tyre and Sidon to Galilee via Decapolis; we are offered 'an example from closer to home, e.g. going from New York to Washington by way of Boston down the Mohawk valley'. English readers will probably feel more at home with the original Palestinian geography!

MORNA D. HOOKER

HOPE AND PLANNING, by Jurgen Moltmann. *S.C.M. Press*, London, 1971. 223 pp. £2.75.

These eight essays are described in the Introduction as 'the preparatory work for and the sequel to' Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, which was published in German in 1964 and in English in 1967.

Three of them (nearly half the book) are indeed preparatory material. The others were by and large written fairly soon after *Theology of Hope*: they do not specially represent either an advance in its thought or a detailed working out of its implications. In fact most of the material in this book can be found more or less explicitly in *Theology of Hope*.

But being less condensed these essays do have a certain clarity and systematic quality not found in the other book—and here and there they expand points made in it. For they consist of a number of topics each considered separately within the eschatological perspective that has come to be known as the theology of hope. (The German collection, published in 1968, from which these essays were selected was in fact called 'Theological Perspectives: Collected Articles'.)

That is, God has revealed himself as the God of promise who calls men into the future: the present is to be understood in terms of this hoped-for future—it is 'opened up' by the promises of God. This hope in the new, which contradicts the world as it is (the suffering world characterized by the cross of Jesus), is given by the resurrection of Jesus.

The working out of this perspective can be seen for instance in the essay on 'Hope and Planning'. We are increasingly able to plan towards the future and, in our dissatisfaction with the present, do so. But the real impetus for this is that we are drawn to the new possibilities for men in the future that we can hardly anticipate from our present experience.

It is this difference between the hoped-for future and the planned future that is the mainspring of history. Christian faith shares this dissatisfaction with the present, this hope, and this impetus to plan. But the future of Christian faith to which we are summoned is not just new, it is God's future: a horizon that is in which even freedom from death is hoped for. It is this tension between the 'new' as promised by God and the 'old' that Christian hope is kindled and cuts into history as an active—but critical—partner in planning the future.

In summary form, then: what these essays do is set up this perspective of hope and discuss how within it we are to understand God, the cross, the resurrection, history—and since it is a perspective rightly inseparable from history, the problems it raises as to the interpretation of history are fairly complex. They also discuss its application to ethics, science, planning the future—though here the discussion basically amounts to the insistence that these things must be considered within the perspective of hope.

Those who consider Moltmann's version of the theology of hope throws too much emphasis on the future—losing hold as it were on the God of the past, on the goodness of creation—will not find their criticisms directly dealt with here. But they will find his intense concern for the suffering and oppression of the present from which Christian hope must issue and to the elimination of which Christian hope is driven.

Hope and Planning costs £2.75. *Theology of Hope*—which it must be admitted contains somewhat more, though with considerable density—has just been brought out as a paperback by SCM at £1.75. ANTONY ARCHER, O.P.