

REALITY AS LANGUAGE: ERNST FUCHS'S THEOLOGY OF REVELATION

GERALD G. O'COLLINS, S.J.

Pembroke College, Cambridge

IT COULD seem paradoxical to write on Prof. Ernst Fuchs's theology of revelation, seeing that, so far as I can discover, he has published nothing *ex professo* on this subject. Revelation is, nevertheless, an important theme in his writings. It is a category with which he works rather than one about which he has written fully and explicitly, as his teacher Rudolf Bultmann did.¹ This very lack of a formal statement can be an advantage, as it means that Fuchs's thought on revelation emerges naturally from his writings. On this point he is not too concerned to recommend his views or to defend them against critics. On the contemporary German scene there are such critics, one of the most notable among younger Lutheran theologians being Prof. Wolfhart Pannenberg of Mainz. It is precisely as an alternative to the Bultmannians' "theology of the word"² that the work of Pannenberg and his circle, *Offenbarung als Geschichte*, is offered.³ At present it seems unlikely that Pannenberg's theology of God's indirect self-revelation⁴ through His deeds in history will provide German theology with a new direction in this field. This may be done by Prof. Jürgen Moltmann's thesis that God's self-revelation "must be understood in

¹ See, above all, "The Concept of Revelation in the New Testament," in *Existence and Faith*, tr. Schubert M. Ogden (London, 1961) pp. 58-91.

² *Kerygma und Dogma, Beiheft 1: Offenbarung als Geschichte* (hereafter *O.a.G.*; 2nd ed., Göttingen, 1963) p. 132. Pannenberg's coauthors, R. Rendtorff, U. Wilckens, and T. Rendtorff, each contribute a chapter to this work.

³ Fuchs replied by labeling the Pannenbergian account of revelation an "ideology"; see his article "Theologie oder Ideologie? Bemerkungen zu einem heilsgeschichtlichen Programm," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 88 (1963) 257-60. On Pannenberg's theology of revelation, cf. D. P. Fuller, "A New German Theological Movement," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 19 (1966) 160-75, and my "Revelation as History," *Heythrop Journal* 7 (1966) 394-406.

⁴ Fuchs objects to talk of God's self-revelation on the grounds that (1) it asserts that "the content" of God's word to us is "only God Himself" and (2) implies "the erroneous presupposition that God must first of all make Himself accessible before (sinful) man can speak of God" ("Über die Möglichkeit, Gott zu erfahren," *Gesammelte Aufsätze 3: Glaube und Erfahrung* [hereafter *G.A.* 3; Tübingen, 1965] p. 187) The term "self-revelation" could carry such overtones, especially (1), but does not necessarily do so.

the horizon of promise and expectation."⁵ In any case, it is important to define precisely the kind of "theology of the word" against which Pannenberg and Moltmann are reacting. As a leading post-Bultmannian, Fuchs exemplifies that position well.

To understand Fuchs's theology of revelation, we must recall that, like Heidegger, he understands reality as linguistic. Only that which can become present as language is real.⁶ For "where meaning is, there also is language. And where language is, there is reality. Language belongs so closely to reality that it sets reality free for the first time: language *ex*-presses reality."⁷ If we talk of language setting reality free, we can also speak of meaning making a language-event. Fuchs recognizes the event of a cow licking her calf as meaningful and hence as a language-event.⁸ He sees too the possibilities of meaningfulness which could make us understand a sunrise as a language-event.⁹

Man himself is what he is through language; he "is born out of language."¹⁰ It is not merely that "our being . . . expresses itself only in the event of language," but the "language-event is our being." Hence "as men we must 'come to language,' actively and passively,"¹¹ i.e., in our being addressed and in our decision to respond.¹² In short, "the content of human historicity" is "linguisticity."¹³ Or, in James Robinson's words, "man's nature is defined as linguistic, in that his role is to re-speak, to re-pond, to an-swer, the call of being."¹⁴

Given this account of man as needing (both actively and passively) to come to language—rather than to seeing or to thinking¹⁵—Fuchs

⁵ *Theologie der Hoffnung* (Munich, 1964) p. 37.

⁶ *Hermeneutik* (3rd ed.; Bad Cannstatt, 1963) p. 130.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 131. "Language lets being 'be' temporally, makes it event." Language is called "admission" in that it admits something into its real being ("Was ist ein Spracherignis?" *Gesammelte Aufsätze 2: Zur Frage nach dem historischen Jesus* [hereafter *G.A. 2*; Tübingen, 1960] p. 425).

⁸ *New Frontiers in Theology 2: The New Hermeneutic*, ed. J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb (New York, 1964) p. 49, n. 3.

⁹ *Hermeneutik*, p. 131.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹¹ "Alte und neue Hermeneutik," *G.A. 3*, 229.

¹² "Was ist existentielle Interpretation? B," *Gesammelte Aufsätze 1: Zum hermeneutischen Problem in der Theologie* (hereafter *G.A. 1*; 2nd ed., Tübingen, 1965) p. 100. Man is "not only a doer but always also a hearer . . . related to language" ("Was ist existentielle Interpretation? C," *ibid.*, p. 113).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁴ *The New Hermeneutic*, p. 47, n. 6.

¹⁵ "The customary view, that reality is 'based on' seeing or apprehending, proves to be

can argue that in "the event of the *complete* revelation in Christ"¹⁶ "the word is the only possibility of the revelation."¹⁷ What the word revealed was "Jesus' own secret, his *personal* secret,"¹⁸ viz., "God's presence in the presence of Jesus' person,"¹⁹ or, to put it another way, Jesus' consciousness of God's presence in his time.²⁰ This was Jesus' understanding of his own existence; his "faith consisted in that he believed in God as present in faith and that he therefore insisted on God's presence there where he himself was."²¹ "God's presence in *Jesus' time*" was to become "God's presence in our time."²² We are to believe as Jesus believed. We are called to "believe in *the secret of God's presence*"²³ and to make our own the very presence of God, "which Jesus identified with his own presence."²⁴ This is possible because in "Jesus Christ God proclaims Himself as present."²⁵ Jesus "brought to *language* what God in his—Jesus'—presence not merely wished, but also did," and "*with* his preaching as event he made known also that God Himself wished *in the word of man* to come definitively to language and did come to language."²⁶ It is in this sense, then, that Fuchs understands the revelation in Christ as word, as a coming to language.

In this divine coming to language "the word not merely conveys the concrete situation but creates it,"²⁷ inasmuch as it demands a decision. For the revelation-event is not merely the revelation of "the' presence as the secret of our existence in God," but it is also a call to love, a call to "faith in the *word* of love which in Jesus became event."²⁸ Jesus' "secret" consists not merely in his consciousness of

a half-truth. There is no seeing or apprehending without understanding. But there is no understanding without the active possibility of language" (*Hermeneutik*, p. 131). "The existential interpretation discloses that man as responsible is a man *who is addressed* and *to be addressed*, and that, therefore, our existence is related primarily not to seeing but to hearing" (*ibid.*, p. 57). "Thinking is an abbreviation of language" ("Was ist ein Sprachereignis?" *G.A.* 2, 428).

¹⁶ "Die Grenze der Kirche," *G.A.* 3, 113.

¹⁷ "Alte und neue Hermeneutik," *ibid.*, p. 226.

¹⁸ "Jesus Christus," *ibid.*, p. 450. ¹⁹ *Introd.*, *ibid.*, p. 23. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

²¹ "Was hat die christliche Verkündigung zu sagen?" *ibid.*, p. 428.

²² *Introd.*, *ibid.*, p. 15. ²³ "Glaube und Wirklichkeit," *G.A.* 1, 12.

²⁴ *Introd.*, *G.A.* 3, 15.

²⁵ "Was hat die christliche Verkündigung zu sagen?" *ibid.*, p. 427.

²⁶ *Introd.*, *ibid.*, p. 23; cf. p. 29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4, n. 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24. "Christian existence is . . . always *called* existence. It is Christologically

God's presence in his (and hence our) time, but in the fact that "he spoke, suffered, and died *for us*." "This man . . . had decided to suffer and, if need be, to die for his proclamation. This was his secret. And so faith understood him most clearly, in that it understood Jesus' love and accordingly Jesus himself as God's word, as our call to love."²⁹

This "manifest speaking of God" which is revelation "leads" to love, which is also the "joy of faith" and the "joy in faith." "With its joy, which was Jesus' joy" (Mt 11:19 and par.), love "*promised* itself to man as *God's* presence." God can thus be said to "speak with His creatures, in that He calls them to His joy."³⁰ This understanding of revelation as a call to joy links up with Fuchs's proposal that joy (*Freude*) has as much right to be considered a structure of human existence as have concern (*Sorge*) and anxiety (*Angst*). It is insufficient to dwell on the concern and anxiety which man experiences from the fact that "the world offers him the possibility of gaining or losing space and time for his own existence."³¹ God's revelation comes to man who also experiences the world in joy.

On the social level God's revealing word in Christ carries out an assembling function, viz., by forming the community and linking its members to Jesus.³² God's "definitive speaking" is thus "the medium which linked Jesus . . . with the community."³³ It does this by calling forth the "speech of faith" which brings "the assembly of faith."³⁴ Faith itself implies for Fuchs new self-understanding;³⁵ in this point he pays homage to Heidegger's insistence on understanding as the

based, because he who calls us into love has become the word to us in the historical person of Jesus" (*Hermeneutik*, p. 248).

²⁹ "Jesus Christus," *G.A.* 3, 450-51. "Jesus had to come and die in order that the *time* of love as time for love could be proclaimed in 'the word from the Cross' (1 Cor 1:18)" ("Die Wirklichkeit Jesus Christi," *ibid.*, p. 465). In the New Testament we are asked "whether we believe in the time and place of man's encounter with God as the time of love and the place of the suffering of this love, while we receive both from Jesus as God's gift and demand" ("Glaube und Wirklichkeit," *G.A.* 1, 21).

³⁰ *Intro.*, *G.A.* 3, 24.

³¹ "Was ist existentielle Interpretation? C," *G.A.* 1, 112; cf. p. 113.

³² "Alte und neue Hermeneutik," *G.A.* 3, 229. ³³ *Intro.*, *ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁴ "Was ist ein Sprachereignis?" *G.A.* 2, 426.

³⁵ "Faith is indeed, as Bultmann has shown, in itself a way of self-understanding, and brings to *consciousness* that self-understanding which makes possible a relation to God" (*Intro.*, *G.A.* 3, 13). Cf. "Warum fordert der Glaube an Jesus Christus von uns ein Selbstverständnis?" *G.A.* 1, 237-60.

basic existential.³⁶ But Fuchs clearly thinks of faith as something more than a new form of self-understanding. It means a "knowledge of God, which becomes active";³⁷ it means receiving "Jesus' secret" in the experience that in the proclamation of Jesus "God's presence is here and now expressing itself."³⁸ Faith involves "believing in Jesus" in the sense of sharing the faith of Jesus, i.e., "being involved with our time and our space as the time for faith and the place for faith."³⁹ This means "a *desire* to be directed to God's presence,"⁴⁰ as Jesus was.

Further, "this making oneself dependent upon God's presence is claimed always for the benefit of the neighbor. . . . In that the believer disposes of himself for the benefit of the neighbor, he remains directed to God's presence."⁴¹ Thus faith is understanding and answering the call to love. "According to its *structure*, faith in Jesus Christ" is "love."⁴² Man is the one capable of love (*der lieben Könnende*) to whom the risen Lord brings the courage to love and for whom faith means "believing in the *power* and the *victory* of love."⁴³ Besides leading to love, God's revealing word is, as we have seen, a summons to joy. "This emotional factor," Fuchs rightly observes, "can *not* be eliminated."⁴⁴ By way of contrast, one misses this stress on the call to love and joy in, e.g., Pannenberg's account of revelation, where the emphasis lies on *seeing* the *truth* of the revelation in the Christ-event.⁴⁵ As Fuchs appreciates, God's revealing word is directed towards man with all his possibilities, and so includes the function of calling to love and joy.

³⁶ Cf. *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (London, 1962) pp. 195 ff.

³⁷ "Die Spannung im neutestamentlichen Christusglauben," *G.A.* 3, 290.

³⁸ Introd., *ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁹ "Muss man an Jesus glauben?" *G.A.* 3, 273. To believe in Jesus is "to call on God" as Jesus did ("Sprachgeschehen und Christologie," *ibid.*, p. 240), "to believe *like* Jesus that God hears" ("Jesus und der Glaube," *G.A.* 2, 256), "to receive the word as Jesus received the word" ("Die Sprache im Neuen Testament," *G.A.* 2, 278), to "believe like Jesus in the 'omnipotence' of love" (Introd., *G.A.* 3, 24), and "to repeat Jesus' decision" ("Die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus," *G.A.* 2, 164). In this way the gospel brings us "into the relation between God and Jesus" ("Was ist existentielle Interpretation? B," *G.A.* 1, 100) and makes us share in "the relationship to God disclosed in Jesus" ("Die Frage nach dem historischen Jesus," *G.A.* 2, 166). There is "only one genuine relation to God, *Jesus' certainty of God*" ("Die Theologie und Jesus," *ibid.*, p. 404).

⁴⁰ "Alte und neue Hermeneutik," *G.A.* 3, p. 211. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁴² "Der Ursprung des christlichen Glaubens," *G.A.* 1, 62. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴⁴ Introd., *G.A.* 3, 26.

⁴⁵ "The revelation in history is open to everyone who has eyes to see" (*O.a.G.*, p. 98).

In Fuchs's synthesis, revelation and faith constitute a dialogue. Faith is "obedient *answer*"⁴⁶ and as such presupposes an address. There is truly a revealing word of God, an *extra nos*, even if it does not appear as such when there is no response of faith: "Certainly the word of God is not made the word of God through the hearer. But the word of God does not reveal itself as the word of God, it does not appear so, if it is not believed as the word of God."⁴⁷ Faith does not create revelation,⁴⁸ but it is the means of knowing that it is present. "It is precisely our answer" which is "the *ratio cognoscendi* that God *encounters* us in the language of life."⁴⁹ Fuchs does not try to describe the origin of faith, the way faith is "called forth through revelation."⁵⁰ "The question how faith *arises* remains hidden. That it arises through public preaching is no satisfactory answer, but pushes the question only further back. One would have to say: *when* faith is *there* is essential."⁵¹ We have to start with the phenomenon of faith, i.e., with faith when it shows itself as faith. For the ultimate reason "why one believes and another doesn't" remains "a secret."⁵² Here Fuchs reminds us, along the lines of the Augustinian *tantum cognoscitur quantum diligitur*, that the "knowledge of God" who addresses us is found only in the movement to love.⁵³ We "recognize faith by the capacity for love." For "he who believes loves; he who cannot love does not believe."⁵⁴ This attitude contrasts favorably with Pannenberg's account, in which the role of love in man's coming to a knowledge of revelation and faith remains neglected.

In its central thrust, does Fuchs's theology of revelation succeed? An emphatic negative verdict is found in Prof. Amos Wilder's contribution to *The New Hermeneutic*.⁵⁵ Wilder fears that the work of Fuchs (and other members of "the Bultmann group") leaves us with "confession as faith without confession as doctrine" and "the word

⁴⁶ *Hermeneutik*, p. 93.

⁴⁷ "Das Wesen des Sprachgeschehens und die Christologie," *G.A.* 3, 233.

⁴⁸ "The direction of God's revelation" is "not from the being of man" but "into the being of man" ("Muss man an Jesus glauben?" *ibid.*, p. 265).

⁴⁹ "Über die Möglichkeit, Gott zu erfahren," *ibid.*, pp. 185-86.

⁵⁰ "Prolegomena zu einer Vorlesung über Anthropologie des Neuen Testaments," *G.A.* 1, 158.

⁵¹ *Introd.*, *G.A.* 3, 29.

⁵² "Was ist existentielle Interpretation? A," *G.A.* 1, 88.

⁵³ "Alte und neue Hermeneutik," *G.A.* 3, 210.

⁵⁴ "Muss man an Jesus glauben?" *ibid.*, p. 264. ⁵⁵ Pp. 198-218.

as address but not as meaning."⁵⁶ In Wilder's view, God's word to us is set forth as a mere call which fails to express or describe any reality.

The content of the kerygma as an object of faith is obscured and the New Testament teaching on belief is slighted. Man is asked to respond as a matter of the will alone; all that we associate with man's reason and imagination is neglected. The word of God has no structure . . . man hearing is isolated from man seeing, knowing, symbol-making and feeling. Ernst Fuchs's language revelation is indeed located in daily life, but the cognitive, persuasive, semantically meaningful terms of the divine address and self-impartment are sterilized away.⁵⁷

In a word, for Fuchs, "revelation, as it were, reveals nothing." His emphasis on obedience and love "apart from meaning and structure" means too that Fuchs "exposes himself to a charge of voluntarism."⁵⁸ The trouble arises, Wilder suggests, because he

deals with language phenomenologically; at a level where language is elemental gesture, where it is a question of language versus silence, of sheer address and response. . . . But after all language also involves meaning and we cannot neglect the matter of semantics. The aspect of idea and even of ideology, the noetic element of the word and even of mythos, these must be given their rights. Faith involves consent to truth as well as obedience to an invitation or a call.⁵⁹

This nonnoetic understanding of language links up with Fuchs's existentialist anthropology.

The word as understood by existentialists seems opaque. It involves mainly obedience or consent rather than understanding; and this view beautifully corresponds to the view of man in question. Existentialist man is mainly conative and the word for him is mainly imperative.⁶⁰

Wilder's criticism, however, does not seem persuasive. For Fuchs, God's address (*Anrede*) to man includes a noetic dimension; it is not an empty cry but a meaningful word (*An-rede*) which produces understanding. Jesus' parables, for example, brought understanding and thus existence "in a new context," viz., "being before God."⁶¹ In believing

⁵⁶ *The New Hermeneutic*, p. 214. ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 213. Two remarks in Fuchs's essay on Bultmann's *Jesus* might suggest the point Wilder is concerned to criticize: the word of Jesus' preaching "does not convey new items of knowledge," but "it is address, which is obeyed" ("Theologische Exegese und philosophisches Seinsverständnis," *G.A.* 3, 41).

⁵⁹ *The New Hermeneutic*, pp. 211-12. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁶¹ "Sprachgeschehen und Christologie," *G.A.* 3, 240.

in God's call to love, "we learn to *understand* Jesus' joy as God's word in Jesus' person."⁶² Fuchs could in fact be defended even on the basis of the account which Wilder himself gives. Wilder complains, for example, that for Fuchs

Faith . . . is consent and obedience to the fact that God is operating here in ordinary life. The Beatitudes and the parables do not set forth a doctrine; they celebrate this reality, this astounding coincidence of God's work with ours . . . love is set in action in our time and place, and this is of God and is irreversible.⁶³

This "consent" to "the fact that God is operating here in ordinary life" and to the "reality" of the "coincidence of God's work with ours" is something more than a transaction of "sheer address and response" devoid of "cognitive," "semantically meaningful terms." It is a consent to something which has structure and concerns our knowing; it is a confession of truth.

If Fuchs in fact understood revelation as "sheer address," a call to love and obedience lacking structure and meaning, this would make it difficult for him to insist on the definitiveness of God's coming to language in Jesus. There would be no "content" to mark off, e.g., this coming to language from any other coming by God to language. Jesus would be merely "the first Christian,"⁶⁴ the exemplar of those who hear God's word of address—in that (reduced) sense "the first new man."⁶⁵ With the decision Jesus himself made finding its parallel in the call to decision which confronts us in the proclamation, Jesus would serve simply as an example who could—at least in theory—be superseded. In that case it would appear illogical for Fuchs to insist on the absoluteness of God's revealing word in Jesus. And yet this is what he does. For he writes: "fundamentally faith—also in the New Testament—is not simply obedience towards a command, but a necessity which—and this is the decisive point—is wholly connected with the person of Jesus."⁶⁶ If revelation were "sheer address," there would be no room left for a talk of a "definitive speaking" and "the complete revelation" in Christ, nor could Fuchs claim that the responsible decision of faith which is ever to be renewed is "always"

⁶² *Intro.*, *ibid.*, p. 25. ⁶³ *The New Hermeneutic*, p. 212.

⁶⁴ "Was hat die christliche Verkündigung zu sagen?" *G.A.* 3, 428.

⁶⁵ "Die biblische Auffassung vom Menschen," *G.A.* 1, 271.

⁶⁶ "Jesus Christus," *G.A.* 3, 448.

faith "in the same matter," viz., "the historical Jesus, in whom God has uttered the word which alone can awaken faith."⁶⁷

Fuchs, however, does indicate grounds for his position. Even if he dismisses discourse about "the being of Jesus as the God-man" as "Gnostic theory,"⁶⁸ he nevertheless recognizes the "secret of Jesus' person," viz., "God's presence in the presence of Jesus' person."⁶⁹ It was not merely that Jesus "identified" God's presence with "his own presence,"⁷⁰ but in Jesus "God proclaimed Himself at that time as a matter of fact as present in faith."⁷¹ Jesus "brings the 'Yes' of God to man"; and with him "the hour for the revelation of this 'Yes' " came.⁷² In the words "I and the Father are one" (Jn 10:30) Fuchs sees "the revelation of a 'together,' a 'where' into which sinful man is being taken."⁷³ Jesus becomes then the "ground of our faith, as soon as we understand and accept him as God's word."⁷⁴ Far from being merely an exemplar of those who hear the revealing word of God and respond in love, Jesus is the one in whom God's call to love comes to us.

Christian existence is . . . always *called* existence. It is Christologically based, because He who calls us to love became in the historical person of Jesus the word to us in which He declared Himself for us—all His glory and divinity—as the *truth* of our existence. . . . Christian existence is Christologically based, because it understands and believes itself as called through Jesus into the present.⁷⁵

This account of what is meant by "the complete revelation" in Christ could allay Wilder's fear that Fuchs sees revelation as "sheer address" devoid of structure or meaning. So too could Fuchs's description of revelation as "truth" to be "understood."

As Jesus interpreted *understanding* the Father as the proper gift of hearing (cf. Lk 15:11 ff.; also Mt 20:1 ff., etc.), so the understanding which faith gains from

⁶⁷ Introd., *ibid.*, p. 28. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷¹ "Was hat die christliche Verkündigung zu sagen?" *ibid.*, p. 428.

⁷² "Das Christusverständnis bei Paulus und im Johannesevangelium," *ibid.*, p. 311. To believe in Jesus is to believe that "with Jesus the *time*" of "revelation" is come and that "no one can withdraw himself from the time of this revelation." "*Faith in Jesus*" is thus "*faith in God's revelation in our time and in the locus of our life*" ("Muss man an Jesus glauben?" *ibid.*, p. 262).

⁷³ "Das Christusverständnis bei Paulus und im Johannesevangelium," *ibid.*, p. 309.

⁷⁴ "Was hat die christliche Verkündigung zu sagen?" *ibid.*, p. 428.

⁷⁵ *Hermeneutik*, p. 248.

the Father's love is decisive for Paul also. *For both, Jesus as well as Paul, revelation occurs in the first place as truth.*⁷⁶

One could further defend Fuchs from the fact that his writings are sprinkled with such statements as "God wishes to be present in faith";⁷⁷ God "wishes to have Himself proclaimed" as the one who "best understands us";⁷⁸ "in His revelation God . . . wishes to gather for Himself a single people."⁷⁹ The final basis for such assertions can only be God's revealing word itself. In that case each statement in which some predicate is attached to "God" helps us to fill out the noetic content of the revelation Fuchs envisages. This holds also for such statements about faith as that "the believer sees himself condemned and set free through Jesus' death";⁸⁰ for here Fuchs surely implies an *extra nos*, something more than a groundless, private certainty.

Even after being satisfied that the word of revelation in Fuchs's view is "meaningful," one could still remain in radical disagreement with him—as Pannenberg does—precisely because it is a *word*-theology that he offers. Is not the revelatory function of the deed or the fact suppressed? Is Fuchs saying that God reveals Himself to us by speaking and not by acting? "To believe," he writes, "means now very simply to listen to something which can only be *said* to us."⁸¹ With those who wish to describe words as a form of deeds he argues: "If we must say that Jesus' word was a deed, the accent lies nevertheless not on the deed, but on the word. . . . What Jesus *said* is precisely the 'kernel' of his procedure."⁸² We see Fuchs himself operating in the reverse direction, bringing deeds under the category of word. Thus, he writes of the Crucifixion: "The Crucified is not an image of our action, but of the divine action! Where everything seemed to be over, it was precisely then that God was not silent. He made Himself heard out

⁷⁶ "Das Problem der theologischen Exegese des Neuen Testaments," *G.A.* 1, 145. Those who are puzzled that Fuchs can support his argument by referring to the parable of the prodigal son might consult some of his writings on this parable: e.g., "Das Fest der Verlorenen," (*G.A.* 3, 402-15) or "Das Zeitverständnis Jesu" (*G.A.* 2, 369-71). Even after reading his "existential" exegesis of the parable, they may feel that it would have been preferable, or at least simpler, to cite such a passage as Mk 4:12 and parallels.

⁷⁷ "Was hat die christliche Verkündigung zu sagen?" *G.A.* 3, 431.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 432. ⁷⁹ "Alte und neue Hermeneutik," *ibid.*, p. 202.

⁸⁰ "Glaube und Wirklichkeit," *G.A.* 1, 38.

⁸¹ "Glaube und Geschichte," *G.A.* 2, 183.

⁸² *Introd.*, *G.A.* 3, 19.

of the mouth of the Crucified.’⁸³ Behind Fuchs’s position lies the view that we should not distinguish between doing and speaking. Man experiences the world in a context of understanding and language; for being cannot be understood apart from language. Actions “express” reality and deeds “speak.” What has meaning and is real for us must become present as language.

Hence, what God *did* in and through Jesus’ presence came to language, in particular through the preaching of the parables. Towards Jesus’ miraculous deeds Fuchs remains sceptical.

Our own thinking, which is more or less oriented towards the sciences, differs from New Testament thought above all in that we are sceptical towards the miracles as they are ascribed in the Gospels to Jesus and in the Acts to Peter, Paul, etc., especially when such narratives are recognized as being written in the style typically used in ancient times to glorify, e.g., the “divine man.”⁸⁴

There is a philosophical reason for this attitude. Like Bultmann, Fuchs emphasizes that history is a closed causal continuum;⁸⁵ thus miracles are excluded a priori. To discuss this whole question is not possible here. But in principle there seems no reason why one cannot differ from Fuchs over the historical factuality of Jesus’ miraculous activity and yet at the same time understand these deeds as speaking to us, as part of God’s coming to language in Jesus.

The difference between Fuchs’s understanding and that of Pannenberg comes sharply to focus in their attitudes towards the situation in which man’s hold on God’s revelation is threatened. In such a contingency Pannenberg argues that “the only thing” which can prevent the believer “from falling into unbelief” when his faith is under attack is “the truth”⁸⁶ of God’s revelation in Christ, which can be established as an objective “fact” and an “indubitable truth.”⁸⁷ Fuchs, on the other hand, insists on an unbending, obedient faith which knows God in the present and is loyal to the word of love.

The self-limitation of faith to the obedience of love in patience and comfort

⁸³ “Hermeneutik,” *ibid.*, p. 134.

⁸⁴ “Über die Möglichkeit, Gott zu erfahren,” *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁸⁵ “Die der Theologie auferlegte Besinnung,” *G.A.* 2, 227 ff.; cf. “Glaube und Geschichte,” *ibid.*, pp. 176 and 182 f.

⁸⁶ “Einsichte und Glaube,” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 88 (1963) 88, n. 11.

⁸⁷ *O.a.G.*, p. 101; cf. p. 99, n. 12, and p. 145.

(Rom 15:5) sets the knowledge about God completely in the present experience of God's activity. And the present experience of God's activity supports itself continually by the fact that a personal faith in God's grace is sufficient to beat down all the objections against the Gospel of Christ which arise in human helplessness (Rom 14:7-9). The whole point is precisely that faith does not yield when what has taken place threatens to become effective against it, as Paul experiences in Corinth.⁸⁸

In Pannenberg's case it is clear that the importance of the truth-question is overrated when he makes acceptance of an objective, past revelation in Christ the sole condition of saving belief that is under attack. On his side, Fuchs might seem to be overplaying the role of present experience. We could point, e.g., to Paul's efforts to help the Galatian and Corinthian Christians in the face of problems that were threatening their faith. The Apostle appeals not merely to their own present experience, but also to his own past experience (1 Cor 15:8; Gal 1:11 ff.), to the record of Scripture (1 Cor 10:1 ff.), to the tradition about Jesus (1 Cor 11:23-26), and to their own past experience (1 Cor 2:1-5; Gal 1:6-9; 3:1-4). However, it could be argued that the past is effective only as present in language-event. The past qua past has no meaning for our faith and can lay no claim on us. It is faith, which has its own understanding of time, that makes the past a present event.

Where the opposition of Fuchs's theology of the revealing word to that of the revealing facts comes out in a striking fashion is in his attitude towards Christ's resurrection. In Pannenberg's view, this resurrection from the dead is an objective, historical event which brings the definitive self-revelation of God to all mankind.⁸⁹ Fuchs, however, even when he writes of the appearances of the risen Christ, puts his emphasis on the confessing language which follows these experiences rather than on the appearances and still less on the resurrection itself.

When the Crucified appeared to his followers, first to Peter, then to others also, finally to Paul, it all depended on whether they were moved through their experiences to that definitive language which had already been reached with the historical Jesus—to that language which spoke in the mouth of men definitively

⁸⁸ "Alte und neue Hermeneutik," *G.A.* 3, 210.

⁸⁹ *O.a.G.*, pp. 103-6; cf. *Grundsätze der Christologie* (Gütersloh, 1964) pp. 47-112.

of God's presence. In actual fact, there were obviously no such experiences without confession and witness.⁹⁰

Thus Jesus' death and resurrection have their reality for revelation and faith in so far as "they contain the ever-new event-character of the *proclamation*."⁹¹

It is worth exploring in greater detail Fuchs's attitude towards the resurrection of Christ and its revelatory value; for his views on this most important case in point provide perhaps the best insight into his theology of revelation and the themes that shape it. We could begin with his discussion of the prolegomena to the interpretation of 1 Cor 15:1-11.⁹² After dealing with the ecstatic phenomena of 1 Cor 14:20 ff., 2 Cor 12:1-5, and Acts 2:3 f., he comments that "Paul did not leave the revealing happening as it was in the ecstatic sphere of a miraculous seeing or appearing. On the basis of the appearances the primitive Christian tradition could have led him astray in this direction." Paul, however, did the same as "this historical Jesus, who—above all in his parables—raised ordinary life to be 'stuff' of the revelatory event. . . . Jesus' transformation of the ecstatic-apocalyptic sphere into the commonplace could have been endangered through the Easter visions." "The ecstasies" of the "Christian Gnostics"⁹³ led to "religious self-assertion," and—as "the Galatian example shows"⁹⁴—"in practice made necessary a reestablishment of the law." However,

⁹⁰ Introd., *G.A.* 3, 23.

⁹¹ "Muss man an Jesus glauben?" *ibid.*, p. 270. ⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 249-79.

⁹³ In *Hermeneutik* (p. 182) Fuchs again describes Paul's opponents in 1 Corinthians as "Gnostic enthusiasts." This is to side with W. Lütgert (*Freiheitspredigt und Schwarmgeister in Korinth* [Gütersloh, 1908] esp. pp. 41-101) and others (e.g., K. Lake, Windisch, Munck, Allo), who understand the factions of 1 Corinthians—at least those of Christ and Peter—as Gnostic libertines or "spirituals." To show that Paul's "opponents" in 1 Corinthians were Gnostics who accepted a resurrection, Fuchs elsewhere uses 2 Corinthians and 2 Timothy and supposes that Paul has misunderstood these opponents ("Die Auferstehungsgewissheit nach I Korinther 15," *G.A.* 1, 200-201). There are other views: H-J. Schoeps, e.g., holds that they were extreme Judaizers (*Paulus* [Tübingen, 1959] p. 71).

⁹⁴ Fuchs is thus in agreement with Schmithals' identification of Paul's Galatian opponents with Gnostic Jewish Christians (cf. W. Schmithals, "Die Häretiker in Galatien," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 47 [1956] 25-67). H-J. Schoeps identifies them with extreme Jewish Christians (*Urgemeinde, Judenchristentum, Gnosis* [Tübingen, 1956] pp. 7 and 72-73). Bo Reicke connects them with Jewish zealots (*Diakonie, Festfreude und Zelos* [Uppsala, 1951]). But, as H. Schlier points out, "it does not help much" to label Paul's opponents "with this or that collective name" (*Der Brief an die Galater* [12th ed.; Göttingen, 1962] p. 19).

the threat was averted, as we can see from Paul. "He followed the tendency which came from Jesus himself and linked together faith and thought *in the sphere of daily life*."⁹⁵ One reaction to Fuchs's account could be to query whether the tradition of the risen Christ's appearances can be connected so readily with the phenomena of 1 Cor 14:20 ff. and the "ecstatic sphere" of Gnostic Judaizers. After all, the Corinthians who were so pleased with their ecstatic phenomena were precisely those who needed to be reminded by Paul of the appearances of the risen Christ (1 Cor 15:1-11). Yet at the same time we should not pass over Fuchs's valuable point. It would have been at very least deplorable if Paul had understood God's revelation simply in terms of (past) Easter appearances granted to a privileged few. This kind of understanding of revelation might well have been a danger in the early Church.

When writing of the Easter appearances, Fuchs could sometimes give the impression that there is no true *extra nos* involved. If we accept the historical objectivity of Jesus' resurrection, how—asks Fuchs—can we avoid accepting such mythical wonders as his virgin birth, descent into hell, and ascension?

We don't want to believe in a ghost. It seems that in the face of this danger the historical objectivity of the resurrection of Jesus must be asserted. Once we embark on that course, we come, nevertheless, as regards the New Testament, into difficulties. The most notable is that not only the resurrection of Jesus comes into consideration as an "objective" fact of salvation, but also his birth from the Virgin, his descent into hell, and his ascension, as well as his return, to say nothing of his miracles on earth.⁹⁶

Yet Fuchs is ready to say that "the resurrection" is "a historical event," if "more than that." For we "cannot establish the resurrection of Jesus from a neutral, from a spectator's, point of view; even the people named in 1 Cor 15:5-8 were in no way spectators";⁹⁷ for "they were moved through their experience . . . to that language which spoke in the mouth of men definitively of God's presence."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ "Muss man an Jesus glauben?" *G.A.* 3, 259-60.

⁹⁶ *Hermeneutik*, p. 76.

⁹⁷ "Das entmythologisierte Glaubensärgernis," *G.A.* 1, 225 f.; cf. *Introd.*, *G.A.* 3, 23, and "Glaube und Wirklichkeit," *G.A.* 1, 16.

⁹⁸ *Introd.*, *G.A.* 3, 23.

It is the coming to language of the resurrection through the word of proclamation that is paramount for Fuchs.

When in this way language points to or describes past facts, it brings them into understanding, makes them present, and lets being be. It is through language that being expresses itself. "When language says what 'is,' it does not merely state, but rather it brings existence for the first time to its being. What would the nameless be? Language creates—as soon as I listen to it—more than does some business or other which brings things about." In opposition to a Cartesianism which demands "facts," Fuchs asks: "Does being consist in facts or does being correspond to language?"⁹⁹

Fuchs is clearly right in holding that if God's revelation in Christ were to remain unknown, "nameless," this would be an unintelligible situation. "The horizon of action"¹⁰⁰ is not enough. The resurrection must be proclaimed. But to what extent is the proclamation constitutive? What is Fuchs's meaning when he writes: "To a lost world we speak of God's power as the power of love. . . . Christ is risen if this confession is an expression of love?"¹⁰¹ Fuchs seems to be saying that the power of love shows to me the reality of the risen Christ, not that the proclamation brings it about that Christ is risen. Here, as elsewhere, language is based on being, not vice versa. "Being *appears* as the *truth* of language" and "is indeed the basis of language. . . . The man who has a basis for speaking speaks truly." Hence, even though "without language being also is nothing," it is true that "without being, language is without a basis, absurd, chimerical, glossolalia."¹⁰² In these terms it would hold that without the actuality of the risen Christ the proclamation of the resurrection would be chimerical and groundless. It is not, of course, that we should take the "salvation event as *two different things* . . . as if Christ were risen without us." There is "*one unique* salvation event, which does not identify the resurrection of Jesus Christ with the witness of faith in the Spirit but makes it coincide with that." We should not then "separate a fact, viz., the resurrection of Jesus Christ, from the fact of the Spirit

⁹⁹ "Was ist existentielle Interpretation? C," *G.A.* 1, 114. ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁰¹ "Die Spannung im neutestamentlichen Christusglauben," *G.A.* 3, 295.

¹⁰² "Das Problem der theologischen Hermeneutik," *G.A.* 1, 128. "Language brings existence into its truth, and discloses it. . . . Where an intelligible word is, there being takes place; and what is shows itself" (*ibid.*, p. 129).

in the existence of faith."¹⁰⁸ Christ is known to have risen because of this "witness of faith" in the Spirit. In that sense "the resurrection-event is at the same time the event which appears as faith in the world."¹⁰⁴

In grasping Fuchs's position on Jesus' resurrection as the revelation of God's love, we must never lose sight of his understanding of time. The past is presented existentially, to be understood now in faith and love through the present proclamation, the locus of God's revelation to men. God is not to be looked for anywhere but in His word, i.e., His present word of proclamation. It is not merely that revelation "discloses itself to us *only*" through preaching,¹⁰⁵ but also in this proclamation "the present, not the past, is constitutive."¹⁰⁶ "God's revelation comes to encounter precisely *as* presence, insofar as God is present in a word."¹⁰⁷ In this way "the truth of revelation annuls history. There is only a 'now' of revelation."¹⁰⁸ Christ with the revelation he brings is in this sense the end of history,¹⁰⁹ i.e., not chronologically but existentially.

Behind Fuchs's attitude lies too a deep concern with faith as a free, personal encounter. Insistence on the fact of the resurrection could make the faith that responds to this revealing event into an empty recitation without self-committal. Thus, Fuchs objects to those who stress credal formulations as pointing to "a 'fact of salvation' which is preached to us in Christ's Cross and resurrection. It is just such a 'theology' which would rightly be characterized as magic."¹¹⁰ In this way the *fides qua* would be destroyed by the *fides quae*. Fuchs detects a threat to the *fides qua* in any command that "we have to believe in Jesus, because there were men who proclaimed Jesus as eyewitnesses of his heavenly glory."¹¹¹ Paul himself is criticized for suggesting in 1

¹⁰⁸ "Die Spannung im neutestamentlichen Christusglauben," *G.A.* 3, 293.

¹⁰⁴ "Warum fordert der Glaube ein Selbstverständnis?" *G.A.* 1, 255.

¹⁰⁵ *Hermeneutik*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁶ "Was hat die christliche Verkündigung zu sagen?" *G.A.* 3, 422.

¹⁰⁷ "Das Fest der Verlorenen," *ibid.*, p. 411.

¹⁰⁸ "Das Problem der theologischen Exegese des Neuen Testaments," *G.A.* 1, 148.

¹⁰⁹ "Christus das Ende der Geschichte," *G.A.* 2, 79-99.

¹¹⁰ "Hermeneutik," *G.A.* 3, 124. "The love which Jesus wanted does not tolerate our pushing off its truth into a Credo instead of venturing faith in its power" ("Glaube und Geschichte," *G.A.* 2, 216).

¹¹¹ "Jesus Christus," *G.A.* 3, 448.

Corinthians that faith is dependent on the fact of the resurrection as indicated by the Scriptures. (Fuchs is thinking of the "according to the Scriptures" of 1 Cor 15:3 f.) Such an approach would place faith under compulsion, even though clearly this "according to the Scriptures" could hardly be thought to constitute anything like a peremptorily compulsive argument.

Paul says in 1 Cor 15:11: "so we proclaim and so you received the faith." A few sentences later he likewise makes all dependent on the *fact* of the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:17): otherwise "your faith" is "in vain." If these *sentences* are true, is not faith then a new compulsion, even though it should mean freedom from the old compulsion of a faith directed to ourselves? And if we regard, e.g., the Easter fact proved according to the Scriptures . . . as a fact which is to be shown or has been shown from the Scriptures, does not our faith depend then basically on the same compulsion from which it was supposed to free us—from a faith in our exegetical insight or from that of the so-called apostolic council in Jerusalem, to which the text in 1 Cor 15:3 ff. seems to look back?¹¹³

Fuchs feels that Paul is being inconsistent. "The purity" of his faith does not "necessarily coincide with the purity of the reflection in subsequent statements about faith."¹¹³

To place this comment on Paul, we should recall that the Apostle has in fact diverse formulations of faith which are not to be artificially harmonized. Some statements will be preferable to others. It is doubtful that Paul's formulation in 1 Corinthians implies that an insight drawn from Scripture places us under a compulsion to believe. That is a question of exegesis.¹¹⁴ At any rate, Fuchs is right in refusing to allow that faith could be compelled through human insight or proof.

Fuchs fears, too, that a human certainty brought about by seeing could be in competition with faith. Thus, those to whom the risen Christ appeared "had to believe not because of but in spite of their having seen."¹¹⁵ The "witnesses of a particular, repeated happening

¹¹³ "Muss man an Jesus glauben?" *ibid.*, p. 268. ¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹¹⁴ Elsewhere Fuchs has varying explanations of Paul's "according to the Scriptures." In "Das Problem der theologischen Exegese des Neuen Testaments" he speaks of "the Scripture proof of 1 Cor 15:3 f." as concerning "above all the 'new' fact, the *historicity* of the resurrection of Jesus" (*G.A.* 1, 143). Yet in "Muss man an Jesus glauben?" he decides that "the meaning of the Scripture proof in 1 Cor 15:3 f." is that "now the time for faith is definitively come" (*G.A.* 3, 278). In the *New Hermeneutic* (p. 114) he writes: "Faith in Jesus Christ believes about itself that such faith is not man's work but God's act so that faith appeals for its truth to God's Holy Spirit and not to man (1 Cor 2:4 f.). This is the point in the apostolic appeal to the 'Scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3-5)."

¹¹⁵ "Das Sprachereignis," *G.A.* 1, 304.

are in competition with the faith, and what they have seen is in competition with the gospel, which is to be believed."¹¹⁶ But one could well ask here whether—given the person seen and the occasion—the problem of a merely human “seeing” in competition with faith is real.

In general, we can only agree with Fuchs's insistence on faith as a free, personal encounter in love. No appeals to facts, e.g., to the “happenedness” of the resurrection, can act as a magic path to faith in the God of revelation. Faith does not consist in a mere recognition of a “kerygma-dogma” enshrining a list of past “objective facts of salvation”;¹¹⁷ for faith is given to “a person or his word with which he ‘promises’ himself to someone,” not to “matters of fact.”¹¹⁸ Nor is God's word to the individual now to be identified with “a historical event” from the past, instead of “with a word to be heard which offers God's gift.”¹¹⁹ We should agree, too, with Fuchs that revelation and faith, involving as they do personal relationship, evade final scientific treatment. “If we suppose that faith is something which is called forth through revelation, faith itself is as little liable to become the object of a scientific discussion as the revelation of God.”¹²⁰ To that extent Fuchs can claim that “God's revelation” is “no object of learning, but in any case an event of life.”¹²¹ It is not to be reduced to the full intelligibility of facts open to ordinary analysis.

At the best of times Fuchs can be hard to understand. To set out his theology of revelation is made even harder because he has published no formal statement on revelation that could provide the framework for a discussion. At all events, I hope this article has done reasonable justice to an important theologian, who so often has been the object of “extreme mistrust and great misunderstanding.”¹²²

¹¹⁶ “Muss man an Jesus glauben?” *G.A.* 3, 276. ¹¹⁷ *Hermeneutik*, p. 190.

¹¹⁸ *Introd.*, *G.A.* 3, 15 (citing Fr. Gogarten).

¹¹⁹ “Glaube und Wirklichkeit,” *G.A.* 1, 39.

¹²⁰ “Prolegomena zu einer Vorlesung über Anthropologie des Neuen Testaments,” *ibid.*, p. 158. We could compare Newman's account of “real assent,” which “as the experience which it presupposes, is an act of the individual, as such, and thwarts rather than promotes the intercourse of man with man. It shuts itself up, as it were, in its own home, or at least it is its own witness and its own standard; and . . . it cannot be reckoned on, anticipated, accounted for, inasmuch as it is the accident of the individual” (*An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* [London, 1870] pp. 81–82).

¹²¹ “Prolegomena zu einer Vorlesung über Anthropologie des Neuen Testaments,” *G.A.* 1, 156.

¹²² Jürgen Fangmeier, *Ernst Fuchs Versuch einer Orientierung* (Zurich, 1964) p. 7.