THE NEW HERMENEUTIC

by A. C. Thiselton

I. *Aims and Concerns: How may the text speak anew?*

(1) The approach to the New Testament which has come to be known as the new hermeneutic is associated most closely with the work of Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling.[1] Both of these writers insist on its practical relevance to the world of today. How does language, especially the language of the Bible, strike home (*treffen*) to the modern hearer?[2] How may its words so reach through into his own understanding that when he repeats them they will be *his* words? How may the word of God become a living word which is heard anew?

This emphasis on present application rather than simply antiquarian biblical research stems partly from connexions between the new hermeneutic and the thought of Rudolf Bultmann,[3] but also from a pastor's deep and consistent concern on the part of Fuchs and Ebeling, both of whom served as pastors for some years, about the relevance and effectiveness of Christian preaching. Central to Fuchs's work is the question "What do we have to do at our desks, if we want later to set the text in front of us in the pulpit?"[5]

It would be a mistake to conclude that this interest in preaching, however, is narrowly ecclesiastical or merely homiletical. Both writers share an intense concern about the position of the unbeliever. If the word of God is capable of *creating* faith, its intelligibility cannot be said to *presuppose* faith. Thus Fuchs warns us, "The proclamation loses its character when it anticipates (i.e. presupposes) confession."[6] Whilst Ebeling boldly asserts, "The criterion of the understandability of our preaching is not the believer but the non-believer. For the proclaimed word seeks to effect faith, but does not presuppose faith as a necessary preliminary."[7]

Nevertheless the problem goes even deeper than this. The modern hearer, or interpreter, stands at the end of a long tradition of biblical interpretation; a tradition which, in turn, moulds his own understanding of the biblical text and his own attitude towards it. His attitude may be either positive or negative, and his controlling assumptions may well be unconscious ones.[8] The New Testament is thus interpreted today within a particular frame of reference which may differ radically from that within which the text first

addressed its hearers. Hence simply to *repeat* the actual words of the New Testament today may well be, in effect, to say something different from what the text itself originally said. Even if it does not positively alter what was once said, it may be to utter "nothing more than just a tradition, a mere form of speech, a dead relic of the language of the past." [9] For never before, Ebeling believes, was there so great a gulf between the linguistic tradition of the Bible and language that is actually spoken today. [10]

Two undue criticisms must be forestalled at this point. Firstly, some may believe that this problem is solved simply by an appeal to the work of the Holy Spirit. Fuchs and Ebeling are fully aware of the role of the Holy Spirit in communicating the word of God; but they rightly see that problems of understanding and intelligibility cannot be short-circuited by a premature appeal of this kind. [11] The New Testament requires hermeneutical translation no less than it obviously requires linguistic translation. This point will become clearer as we proceed.

Secondly, Fuchs and Ebeling do not in any way underestimate the power of the New Testament to interpret itself, and to create room for its understanding. Ebeling insists that hermeneutics "only consist in removing hindrances in order to let the word perform its own hermeneutic function." [12] "Holy Scripture, as Luther puts it, is *sui ipsius interpres*." [13] The "one bridge" to the present is "the Word alone". [14] Similarly Fuchs stresses the importance of Heb. 4:12–13 ("The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword") even in the present moment. [15] Indeed it is crucial to Fuch's position, as we shall see, that the New Testament itself effects changes in situations, and changes in men's pre-conscious standpoints. The language of Jesus "singles out the individual and grasps him deep down." [16] "The text is itself meant to live." [17]

The key question in the new hermeneutic, then, is how the New Testament may speak to us *anew*. A literalistic repetition of the text cannot *guarantee* that it will "speak" to the modern hearer. He may understand all of its individual words, and yet fail to understand what is being said. In Wolfhart Pannenberg's words, "In a changed situation the traditional phrases, even when recited literally, do not mean what they did at the time of their original formulation." [18] Thus Ebeling asserts, "The *same word* can be said to another time only by being said differently." [19]

In assessing the validity of this point, we may well wish to make some proviso about the uniquely normative significance of the original formulation in *theology*. The problem is recognized by Fuchs and Ebeling perhaps more clearly than by Bultmann when parallel questions arise in his programme of demythologizing. [20] It is partly in connexion with this problem that both writers insist on the necessity of historical-critical research on the New Testament. [21] At the same time, at least two considerations re-enforce their contentions about the inadequacy of mere repetition of the text from the standpoint of *hermeneutics*. Firstly, we already recognize the fact that in translation from one language to another, literalism can be the enemy of faithful communication. "To put it into

another language means to think it through afresh." [22] Secondly, we already have given tacit recognition to this principle whenever we stress the importance of preaching. The preacher "translates" the text, by placing it at the point of encounter with the hearer, from which it speaks anew into his own world in his own language. [23] But this hermeneutical procedure is demanded in *all* interpretation which is faithful to the New Testament. For "God's revelation consisted simply in God's letting men state God's own problems *in their language,* in grace and judgment." [24]

(2) How, then, may the text of the New Testament speak anew? Four sets of considerations are relevant to a positive answer, each of which turns on a given point of contrast.

(a) Firstly, Fuchs and Ebeling draw *a contrast between problems about words (plural) and the problem of the word (singular).* Ebeling laments the fact that too often preaching today sounds like a foreign language. [25] But he adds, "We need not emphasize that the problem lies too deep to be tackled by cheap borrowing of transient modern jargon for the preacher's stock of words. It is not a matter of understanding single words, but of understanding the word itself; not a matter of new means of speech, but of a new coming to speech." [26] Mere modern paraphrase of the New Testament does not answer the problem. The concern is, rather, that the word of God itself should "come to speech" (*das Zur-Sprache-kommen der Sache selbst*), in the technical sense which this phrase has come to bear in the philosophical writings of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. [27]

(b) Secondly, hermeneutics in the writings of Fuchs and Ebeling concerns "the theory of understanding", and *must not be reduced "to a collection of rules."* [28] Indeed, because it concerns the whole question of how a man comes to *understand,* Ebeling asserts, "Hermeneutics now takes the place of the classical epistemological theory." [29] This is why hermeneutics cannot be separated from philosophy. Because it concerns "a general theory of understanding", hermeneutics is "becoming the place of meeting with philosophy."[30] Similarly for Fuchs the central question of hermeneutics is: "how do I come to understand?" [31] Yet both writers are concerned not simply with the theory, but with the *practice* of setting understanding in motion. Fuchs suggests an analogy. It is possible, on the one hand, to theorize about an understanding of "cat" by cognitive reflection. On the other hand, a practical and pre-conceptual understanding of "cat" emerges when we actually place a mouse in front of a particular cat. The mouse is the "hermeneutical principle" that causes the cat to show itself for what it is. [32] In this sense biblical criticism and even the traditional hermeneutical "rules" do "not *produce* understanding, but only the preconditions for it." [33]

Admittedly it would not be wholly incorrect to argue that this distinction goes back in principle to Schleiermacher. An illuminating comment comes from the philosopher Heinz Kimmerle, whose research on the earlier writings of Schleiermacher is so important for the new hermeneutic. He writes, "The work of Schleiermacher constitutes a turning point in the history of hermeneutics. Till then hermeneutics was supposed to support,

secure, and clarify an *already accepted* understanding (of the Bible as theological hermeneutics; of classical antiquity as philological hermeneutics). In the thinking of Schleiermacher, hermeneutics achieves the qualitatively different function of first of all *making understanding possible,* and deliberately *initiating understanding* in each individual case." [34] This touches on yet another central and cardinal feature of the new hermeneutic. The concern is not simply to support and corroborate an *existing* understanding of the New Testament text, but to lead the hearer or the interpreter onwards *beyond* his own existing horizons, so that the text addresses and judges him *anew*. This fundamental principle will emerge most clearly in connexion with Hans-Georg Gadamer and the wider philosophical background.

(c) The problem of initiating understanding brings us to another concept which is also central in the thinking of Fuchs, namely that of *das Einverständnis*. [35] This is often translated as "common understanding", "mutual understanding" or "agreement", and in one essay as "empathy". Fuchs illustrates this category with reference to the language of the home. Members of a close-knit family who live together in one home share a common world of assumptions, attitudes, and experiences, and therefore share a common language. A single word or gesture may set in motion a train of events because communication functions on the basis of a common understanding. Fuchs explains, "At home one does not speak so that people may understand, but because people understand." [36] The problem of understanding a language, in the sense of "appropriating" its subject matter, "does not consist in learning new words – languages are learned from mothers." [37] So important is this category of *Einverständnis* for Fuchs that in the preface to the fourth edition of *Hermeneutik* he stresses that "all understanding is grounded in *Einverständnis*," and in a later essay he sums up the thrust of his *Hermeneutik* with the comment, "Ernst Fuchs, *Hermeneutik* (is) an attempt to bring the hermeneutical problem back into the dimension of language with the aid of the phenomenon of 'empathy' (*des Phänomens des Einverständnisses*) as the foundation of all understanding." [38]

Jesus, Fuchs maintains, established a common understanding with his hearers, especially in the language of the parables. Or more accurately, the parables communicated reality effectively because they operated on the basis of this common understanding, which they then extended and reshaped. [39] The hermeneutical task today is to re-create that common world of understanding which is the necessary basis of effective communication of language and appropriation of its truth. Such a task, however, stands in sharp contrast to a merely cognitive and conscious exchange of language. Like Heidegger's category of "world", it is pre-conceptual. "It is neither a subjective nor an objective phenomenon but both together, for world is prior to and encompasses both." [40] It is therefore, for Fuchs as for Gadamer, primarily a "linguistic" phenomenon, reflecting ways in which men have come to terms with themselves and with their world. [41]

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(d) Both Fuchs and Ebeling view language as much more than being only a means of information. Ebeling writes "We do not get at the nature of words by asking what they contain, but by asking what they effect, what they set going . . ." [42] In the terminology of J. L. Austin, Fuchs and Ebeling are most interested in the *performative* functions of language, in which "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action." [43] The word of God, Ebeling believes, enacts "an event in which God himself is communicated . . . With God word and deed are one: his speaking is the way of his acting."[44] Thus the word of Jesus in the New Testament does not simply provide information about states of affairs. His language constitutes a call or a pledge.[45] He promises, demands or gives.[46] Actually to *make* a promise, or to *convey* a gift is very different from talking *about* promises or gifts. The one is action; the other is mere talk.

In the terminology used by Fuchs, language which actually conveys reality constitutes a "language-event" (*Sprachereignis*), whilst Ebeling uses the term "word-event" (*Wortgeschehen*) in much the same way.[47] Fuchs comments, "The true language-event, for example an offer, shows that, though it sets our thoughts in motion, it is not itself thought. The immediate harmony between what is said and what is grasped is not the result of a process of thought; it takes place at an earlier stage, as event . . . The word 'gets home'." [48] For example, to name a man "brother" performatively is thereby to admit him into a brotherly relationship within the community. [49] In this sense, when the word of God addresses the hearers anew, it is no longer merely an object of investigation at the hands of the interpreter. Fuchs concludes "The text is therefore not just the servant that transmits kerygmatic formulations, but rather a master that directs us into the language-context of our existence." [50] It has become a language-event.

II. *Subject and Object: Understanding as experience*

Two further principles now emerge from all that has been said. The first concerns the interpreter's experience of life, or subjectivity. Ebeling writes, "Words produce understanding only by appealing to experience and leading to experience. Only where word has already taken place can word take place. Only where there is already previous understanding can understanding take place. Only a man who is already concerned with the matter in question can be claimed for it." [51] This is certainly true of a text which concerns history: "It is impossible to understand history without a standpoint and a perspective." [52] Thus there are connexions between the new hermeneutic and Bultmann's discussion about *pre-understanding*.

The second principle concerns the direction of the relation between the interpreter and the text. In traditional hermeneutics, the interpreter, as knowing subject, scrutinizes and investigates the text as the object of his knowledge. The interpreter is active subject; the text is passive object. This kind of approach is encouraged by a notion of theology as "queen of the sciences". But it rests upon, or presupposes, a particular model in

epistemology; a model which is exemplified in the philosophy of Descartes. If understanding is viewed in terms of experience rather than knowledge, a different perspective may also be suggested. James Robinson offers an illuminating comment. In the new hermeneutic, he explains, "the flow of the traditional relation between subject and object, in which the subject interrogates the object ... has been significantly reversed. For it is now the object – which should henceforth be called the subject-matter – that puts the subject in question." [53] Thus Fuchs asserts, "*The truth has us ourselves as its object.*" [54] Or even more strikingly, "The texts must translate us before we can translate them." [55]

1. LANGUAGE AND PRE-UNDERSTANDING

It is well known that Rudolf Bultmann, among others, has repudiated the idea that an interpreter can "understand" the New Testament independently of his own prior questions. One cannot, for example, understand a text about economic history unless one already has some concept of what a society and an economy is. [56] In this sense Bultmann rightly insists, "*There cannot be any such thing as presuppositionless exegesis* ... Historical understanding always presupposes a relation of the interpreter to the subject-matter that is ... expressed in the texts." [57] "The demand that the interpreter must silence his subjectivity ... in order to attain an objective knowledge is therefore the most absurd one that can be imagined." [58] "Preunderstanding", or a prior life-relation to the subject-matter of the text, implies "not a prejudice, but a way of raising questions." [59]

This principle must not be rejected merely because it has particular connexions with other assumptions made by Bultmann in his programme of demythologizing. Other more moderate scholars including, for example, Bernard Lonergan and James D. Smart, have made similar points. [60] Lonergan rightly asserts, "The principle of the empty head rests on a naive intuitionism ... The principle ... bids the interpreter forget his own views, look at what is out there, and let the author interpret himself. In fact, what is out there? There is just a series of signs. Anything over and above a re-issue of the same signs in the same order will be mediated by the experience, intelligence, and judgment of the interpreter. The less that experience, the less cultivated that intelligence, the less formed that judgment, the greater will be the likelihood that the interpreter will impute to the author an opinion that the author never entertained." [61]

In this connexion both Bultmann and the new hermeneutic look back to Wilhelm Dilthey, and even beyond to Friedrich Schleiermacher. [62] Both the later thinking of Schleiermacher after 1819 and also the earlier thinking as rediscovered by Heinz Kimmerle are relevant in different ways to the new hermeneutic. At first sight, Fuchs's central concept of *Einverständnis* seems to relate to the later Schleiermacher's insistence that the modern interpreter must make himself contemporary with the author of a text by attempting imaginatively to re-live his experiences. Especially if we follow the translator

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who rendered *Einverständnis* as "empathy", this looks like Schleiermacher's procedure of entering into the hopes and fears, desires and aims of the author through artistic imagination and rapport.

We have seen, however, that "mutual understanding" in Fuchs operates at a pre-conscious level. It is not primarily, if at all, a matter of psychology, as it was in the later thought of Schleiermacher. With Manfred Mezger, Fuchs believes that this psychological approach founders on the existential individuality of the "I" who is each particular interpreter. [63] Thus Mezger asserts that we must find "the new place at which this text, without detriment to its historical individuality, meets us. The short cut by which I picture myself as listener in the skin of Moses or of Paul is certainly popular, but it is not satisfactory, for I am neither the one nor the other" (i.e. neither Moses nor Paul). [64] Mezger adds that the way to overcome this problem is "not by treating the particular details with indifference, thus effacing the personal profile of the text, but by becoming aware of the involvement (*Betroffenheit*) which is the same for them as for me, but which is described in a particular way in each instance." [65] He then quotes Fuchs's redoubled warning that the modern listeners "are not the same men to whom the gospel was first proclaimed"; although their concrete situation can nevertheless be "appropriated" today, when the text is accurately translated. [66]

In the earlier writings of Schleiermacher, however, as Kimmerle has shown, hermeneutics are more language-centred, and less orientated towards psychology. Understanding is an *art,* for the particular utterance of a particular author must be understood "in the light of the larger, more universal, linguistic community in which the individual ... finds himself." [67] "Rules" perform only the negative function of preventing false interpretation. Even on a purely linguistic level the subjectivity of the interpreter has a positive role to play. What we understand forms itself into unities made up of parts. In understanding a stretch of language, we need to understand words in order to understand the sentence; nevertheless our understanding of the force of individual words depends on our understanding of the whole sentence. But this principle must be extended. Our understanding of the sentence contributes to our understanding of the paragraph, of the chapter, of the author as a whole; but this understanding of the whole work in turn qualifies and modifies our understanding of the sentence.

This principle prepares the way for hermeneutics in Heidegger and Gadamer, as well as in Fuchs and Ebeling, and is in fact tantamount to a preliminary formulation of the theory of the hermeneutical circle. [68] It shatters the illusion, as Dilthey later stressed, that understanding a text could be purely "scientific". As Richard Palmer puts it, "Somehow a kind of 'leap' into the hermeneutical circle occurs and we understand the whole and the parts together. Schleiermacher left room for such a factor when he saw understanding as partly a comparative and partly an intuitive and divinatory matter ..." [69] Still commenting on Schleiermacher but with obvious relevance to Fuchs's notion of *Einverständnis,* Palmer adds, "The

hermeneutical circle suggests an area of shared understanding. Since communication is a dialogical relation, there is assumed at the outset a community of meaning shared by the speaker and the hearer. This seems to involve another contradiction: what is to be understood must already be known. But is this not the case? Is it not vain to speak of love to one who has not known love . . .?"[70] Thus we return to Ebeling's comment, "Words produce understanding by appealing to experience and leading to experience. Only where word has already taken place can word take place. Only where there is already previous understanding can understanding take place."[71]

This helps to explain why the new hermeneutic inevitably involves problems of philosophy.[72] But it also raises theological questions. In one direction, the New Testament cannot be understood without reference to the interpreter's own experiences of life. Thus Fuchs insists, *"In the interaction of the text with daily life we experience the truth of the New Testament."* [73] In another direction, it raises questions about the relation between exegesis and systematic theology. For the *total* context of any theological utterance is hardly less than Scripture and the history of its interpretation through tradition. In Heinrich Ott's words on the subject, Scripture as a whole constitutes "the 'linguistic room', the universe of discourse, the linguistic net of co-ordinates in which the church has always resided . . . Heidegger says, 'Every poet composed from only a single poem . . . None of the individual poems, not even the total of them, says it all. Nevertheless each poem speaks from the whole of the one poem and each time speaks it'." [74]

2. THE INTERPRETER AND THE TEXT

All that has been said about the subjectivity of the interpreter, however, must now be radically qualified by the second of the two major principles at present under discussion. We have already noted Fuchs's assertions that the texts must translate us, before we can translate them, and that the truth has "ourselves" as its object. It is not simply the case that the interpreter, as active subject, scrutinizes the text as passive object. It is not simply that the present experience throws light on the text, but that the text illuminates present experience. Ebeling insists, *"The text . . . becomes a hermeneutic aid in the understanding of present experience."* [75] In an important and often-quoted sentence in the same essay he declares (his italics) *"The primary phenomenon in the realm of understanding is not understanding OF language, but understanding THROUGH language."* [76]

Both Ebeling and especially Gadamer call attention to the parallel between theological and juridical hermeneutics in this respect.[77] The interpretation of legal texts, Gadamer insists, is not simply a "special case" of general hermeneutics, but, rather, reveals the full dimensions of the general hermeneutical problem. In law the interpreter does not examine the text purely as an "object" of antiquarian investigation. The text "speaks" to the present situation in the courtroom, and the interpreter adjusts his own

thinking to that of the text. Each of our two principles, in fact, remains equally relevant. On the one hand, the interpreter's own understanding of law and of life guides him in his understanding of the ancient legal texts; on the other hand, that preliminary understanding is modified and moulded, in turn, as the texts themselves deliver their verdicts on the present situation. Even outside the courtroom itself, Ebeling believes that "the man who has no interest in giving legal decisions will be a poor legal historian." [78] Similarly Gadamer asserts, "Understanding the text is always already applying it." [79]

These two principles operate together in Gadamer's version of the hermeneutical circle. We have already noted the idea in Schleiermacher and in Heidegger that we can understand a whole only in the light of its parts, but also that we can understand the parts only in the light of the whole. But Heidegger and especially Gadamer take us a step further. [80] The "circle" of the hermeneutical process begins when the interpreter takes his own preliminary questions to the text. But because his questions may not be the best or most appropriate ones, his understanding of the subject-matter of the text may at first remain limited, provisional, and even liable to distortion. Nevertheless the text, in turn, speaks back to the hearer: it begins to interpret him; it sheds light on his own situation and on his own questions. His initial questions now undergo revision in the light of the text itself, and in response to more adequate questioning, the text itself now speaks more clearly and intelligibly. The process continues, whilst the interpreter achieves a progressively deeper understanding of the text.

In his recently published book the American scholar Walter Wink develops his own particular version of this kind of approach. [81] He criticizes New Testament scholars for failing to interpret the New Testament in accordance with its own purpose, namely "so to interpret the scriptures that the past becomes alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation." [82] Because of a deliberate suspension of participational involvement, "the outcome of biblical studies in the academy is a trained incapacity to deal with the real problems of actual living persons in their daily lives." [83] The kind of *questions* asked by the New Testament scholar are not those raised by the text, but those most likely to win a hearing from the professional guild of academics. [84] Scholars seek to silence their own subjectivity, striving for the kind of objective neutrality which is not only an illusion, but which also requires "a sacrifice of the very questions the Bible seeks to answer". [85]

Nevertheless, Wink is not advocating, any more than Fuchs, a suspension of critical studies. In order to hear the New Testament *speak for itself*, and not merely reflect back the interpreter's own ideas or the theology of the modern church, the interpreter must allow critical enquiry first to *distance* him from the way in which the text has become embedded in the church's tradition. The text must be heard as "that which stands over against us". [86] Only after this "distance" has first been achieved can there then occur "a communion of horizons" between the interpreter and the text. [87] Thus whilst

Wink acknowledges the necessity for "rigorous use of biblical criticism", his primary concern, like that of Fuchs, is "for the rights of the text". [88]

Hans-Georg Gadamer makes some parallel points. Descartes' theory of knowledge, in which man as active subject looks out on the world as passive object, provides only *one* possible model for the apprehension of truth. This model is more appropriate to the "method" of the sciences than to the art of understanding in hermeneutics. There has always been a tradition in philosophy which stressed the connexion between understanding and *experience*. For example, Vico, with his sensitivity for history, rejected the narrow intellectualism of Descartes' notion of truth, even in the latter's own lifetime. In ancient times the Greek idea of "wisdom" included practical understanding of life as well as intellectual theory. [89] Later, Shaftesbury stressed the rôle of wit, Reid stressed the rôle of common sense, and Bergson stressed the rôle of intuitive insight, as valid ways through which truth could be revealed. [90] It is not simply a matter of discovering theoretical "methods" by which man can arrive at truth. In true understanding, man is grasped *by* truth through modes of experience. [91] A more adequate model than that provided by Descartes is the experience of truth in a work of art, in which something real and *creative* takes place. We shall refer to Gadamer's comments on this in our third section.

One reason why hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, must take account of something more than cognitive "knowledge" (*Erkenntnis*) is that every interpreter already stands within a historical tradition, which provides him with certain presuppositions or pre-judgements (*Vorurteile*). [92] Gadamer insists, "An individual's pre-judgements, much more than his judgements, are the reality of his being (*die geschichtliche Wirklichkeit seines Seins*)". [93] To bring these pre-judgements to conscious awareness is a major goal of hermeneutics, and corresponds to what Walter Wink describes as "distancing". For Gadamer believes that the very existence of a temporal and cultural *distance* between the interpreter and the text can be used to jog him into an awareness of the differences between their respective horizons. The interpreter must cultivate a "hermeneutically trained" awareness, in which he allows the distinctive message of the text to reshape his own questions and concepts. [94]

Once this has been done, the interpreter is free to move beyond his own original horizons, or better, to *enlarge* his own horizons until they come to *merge* or *fuse* with those of the text. His goal is to reach the place at which a merging of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*), or fusion of "worlds", occurs. [95] This comes about only through sustained dialogue with the text, in which the interpreter allows his own subjectivity to be challenged and involved. Only in the to-and-fro of question and answer on both sides can the text come to speech (*zur-Sprache-kommen*). [96] Thus in Gadamer's notion of the merging of horizons we find a parallel to Wink's ideas about "fusion" and "communion", and to Fuchs's central category of *Einverständnis*. But this is achieved, as we have seen, only when, firstly, the interpreter's subjectivity is fully engaged at a more-than-cognitive level; and when, secondly,

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the text, and the truth of the text, *actively* grasps *him* as its object.

III. *The Establishing of New "Worlds" in Language: Heidegger and the Parables*

To achieve a merging of horizons, or an area of shared understanding amounting to *Einverständnis,* involves, in effect, the creation of a new "world". In common with Heidegger's philosophy in both the earlier and later periods, Fuchs believes that man stands within a linguistic world which is decisively shaped by his own place in history, i.e. by his "historicality". But together with the later Heidegger, Fuchs also looks for a *new* coming-to-speech in which the confines and conventions of the old everyday "world" will be set aside and broken through. The language-event, especially the language-event of the parables of Jesus, corresponds to the establishment of a new world through language.

It is difficult to summarize Heidegger's view in a few paragraphs, but we may note the following major themes.

(1) One consequence of man's historicality (his being radically conditioned by his place within history) is that he views objects from the man-centred perspective of his own world. He sees things from the point of view of this relation to his own purposes, seeing them through a kind of grid of egocentric functionalism. A hammer, for example, is not merely a neutral "object" of wood and metal; but a tool which can be used for certain jobs. Thus a hammer is something very different from a broken hammer; although in "neutral" terms of their physical properties the difference would not be very great.[97] Man's language both reveals, creates, and sustains this perspective. Thus in everyday language "time", for example, "has ceased to be anything other than velocity, instantaneousness ... Time as history has vanished from the lives of all peoples." [98]

(2) Man has lost touch with genuine reality still further by accepting in his intellectual orientation the legacy of Plato's dualism. In Heidegger's words, Western philosophy since Plato has "fallen out of Being".[99] It embodies a split perspective, in which subject becomes separated from object. "Appearance was declared to be mere appearance and thus degraded. At the same time, Being as *idea* was exalted to a suprasensory realm. A chasm ... was created." [100] Man thus looks out, in the fashion of Plato and Descartes, onto a merely *conceptualized* world, a reality of his own making. He himself, by seeing "reality" through the grid of his own split perspective, becomes the measure of his own knowledge.[101] An example of the evil consequences of this can be seen in the realm of art. Art is divided off into one of the two realms, so that it is *either* a merely "material" thing, in which case it cannot reveal truth; *or* it is conceptualized into "aesthetics" in which case it becomes tamed and emasculated and, once again, unable to reveal truth. By contrast "on the strength of a recaptured, pristine, relation to Being, we must provide the word 'art' with a new content." [102]

(3) The combined effect of these two factors is to lead to circularity and

fragmentation in the use of *language*. The truth of language now depends on an artificial correspondence between man's concepts and what he supposes to be "reality", but which is in fact another set of his own concepts. [103] For everything which he thinks and sees, he thinks and sees through the medium of his own "linguisticality" or language-conditionedness. Thus, Heidegger concludes, "He is always thrown back on the paths that he himself has laid out; he becomes mired in his paths, caught in the beaten track ... He turns round and round in his own circle." [104]

Fuchs and Ebeling accept the linguistic and hermeneutical problems which Heidegger's diagnosis lays down. Ebeling believes that language has become loosed from its anchorage in reality, to disintegrate into "atoms of speech ... Everything seemed to me to fall into fragments." [105] This has precipitated "a profound crisis of language ... a complete collapse of language". [106] Today "we threaten to die of language poisoning." "With the dawn of the modern age ... the path was clear for an unrestricted development of the mere sign-function of language ... Words are reduced to ciphers ... and syntax to a question of calculus." [107] Language has wrongly become a mere "technical instrument". [108] Yet, Fuchs argues, language and reality are bound so closely together that there can be no "reality" *for us* outside this language. [109]

The solution, if it is a solution, offered by Heidegger, and indirectly by Fuchs, is to put oneself in the place at which language may, once again, give voice not to a fragmented set of human concepts, but to undivided "Being". Firstly, this "Being" is not the substantial "beingness" (*Seiendheit*) of human thought; but the verbal, eventful, temporal Being-which-happens (*Sein* or better, *Anwesen*). Echoing Heidegger, Fuchs declares, "Language ... makes Being into an event." [110] Secondly, when language is once again pure and creative, Heidegger believes, "the essence of language is found in the act of gathering." [111] Before the advent of Plato's dualism, the word (*logos*) was "the primal gathering principle". [112] Where modern Western culture and its idle talk merely divides and fragments, the pure language of Being integrates and brings together. Thus Fuchs writes, "The proclamation gathers (i.e. into a community) ... and this community has its being, its 'togetherness', in the possibility of its being able to speak the kind of language in which the event of its community is fulfilled ... *The language of faith brings into language the gathering of faith*." [113]

Once again this notion of "gathering" approaches the idea of sharing a common "world", or achieving *Einverständnis*. But Heidegger, followed by Fuchs, insists that language can achieve this "gathering" only when man accepts the rôle of *listener,* rather than that of subject scrutinizing "object". For Heidegger, this means a silent, receptive waiting upon Being. Language is the "house" or "custodian" of Being (*das Haus des Seins ... des Anwesens).* [114] Man's task is to find the "place" (*Ort*) at which Being may come to speech. [115] As listeners, whose task is to cultivate a wakeful and receptive openness to Being, Heidegger urges that "we should *do* nothing, but rather wait." [116] The listener must not impose his own concepts of

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reality onto Being, but should "know how to wait, even for a whole life-time".[117]

Although in principle he is concerned with the word of God rather than the voice of Being, Fuchs does at times seem to identify the two. The word of God relates to "the meaning of Being" (*der "Sinn" des Seins*) and comes as the "call of Being" (*der Ruf zum Sein*).[118] But above all man "listens" in receptive silence and openness to the text of the New Testament. To be sure, critical analysis, as in Wink's and Gadamer's "distancing", is first necessary as a preliminary. In this way, by active critical scrutiny, the interpreter "must in the *first instance* strike the text dead".[119] But *after* this he must wait for God, or Being, to speak "In the tranquillity of faith, where noise is reduced to silence, a *voice* is heard . . . It sings out in Phil. 2.6–11 . . ." [120]

All these principles about language and "world" apply in particular to Fuchs's handling of the parables of Jesus. By means of the image part or picture-half (*Bildhälfte*) of the parable, Jesus creates and enters a "world" which, in the first place, is shared by the hearer. He stands within the hearer's horizons. But everyday conventions and everyday assumptions are then challenged and shattered by the actual message or content-half (*Sachhälfte*). The hearer is challenged at a deep and pre-conceptual level. It is not simply a matter of his assessing certain "ideas" presented to him by Jesus. Rather, "he is drawn over on to God's side and learns to see everything with God's eyes." [121] The parable is both a creative work of *art*, and also a *calling* of love, in contrast to flat cognitive discourse. Thus "Jesus draws the hearer over to his side by means of the artistic medium, so that the hearer may think together with Jesus. Is this not the way of true love? Love does not just blurt out. Instead, it provides in advance the sphere in which meeting takes place." [122]

The difference between entering a "world" and merely assessing ideas is further clarified by Gadamer in his comments on the nature of games and the nature of art. A game creates a special "world" of experience. The player participates in this world, rather than simply observing it, by accepting its rules, its values, and its presuppositions. He yields himself to them, and *acts* on them. It is not a matter of his consciously carrying them in his mind. Hence the *reality* of a game is something shared by the players in the play itself.[123] Such "real-life" experience (*Wirklichkeitserfahrung*) is also involved when one is grasped by a true work of art.[124] It is not a mere set of concepts to be manipulated by a spectator, but a "world" which takes hold of a man as someone who *enters into it*. It is not something presented as a mere object of scrutiny, or source of theoretical concepts. [125]

In his treatment of specific parables, therefore, Fuchs insists that the main point is not simply to convey a conscious "idea". In this sense, he steps away from Jülicher's "one-point" approach. For the "point" or verdict of a parable may come differently to different people. Thus in his work on the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, Fuchs declares, firstly, that "the parable is not intended to exemplify general ethics." [126] Secondly, the verdict for Israel is "God is harder than you are"; whilst the verdict for the Church is

"God insists upon his indulgence." [127] If these verdicts, however, are turned into merely conceptual generalizations, the result is only a self-contradiction: God is hard and indulgent.

Three principles are especially important for understanding Fuchs's approach to the parables.

(1) The image-part or picture-half of the parable is not merely an illustrative or homiletical device to make a lesson more vivid or memorable. It is a means of creating a common world in which Jesus and the hearer stand together. When Jesus speaks "of provincial and family life as it takes place in normal times", of the farmer, of the housewife, of the rich and poor or the happy and sad, he is not simply establishing a "point of contact" but standing with the hearer in *his* "world". [128] "We find *existentialia* wherever an understanding between men is disclosed through their having a common world." [129]

(2) Conventional everyday presuppositions about life and "reality" may then be challenged and shattered. This is where Fuchs's approach relates closely to Heidegger's verdict about the circularity and "fallenness" of man's everyday concepts and everyday talk. Something new and creative must break in to rescue him; in this case, the creative word and person of Jesus. Thus in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt. 20: 1–16) at first "we too share the inevitable reaction of the first. The first see that the last receive a whole day's wage, and naturally they hope for a higher rate for themselves." [130] But then comes the shock: "in fact they receive the same ... It seems to them that the lord's action is unjust." Finally comes the verdict on the assumption which has been brought to light: "Is your eye evil because I am kind?" The word of Jesus thus "singles out the individual and grasps him deep down." For the hearer, by entering the world of the parable, has been drawn into an *engagement* with the verdict of Jesus. "The parable effects and demands our decision." It is *not* simply "the pallid requirement that sinful man should believe in God's kindness. Instead it contains, in a concrete way ... Jesus' *pledge*." Jesus pledges himself to "those who, in face of a cry of 'guilty', nevertheless found their hope on an act of God's kindness." [131]

The creative language event, therefore, shatters the mould imposed by man's "linguisticality". Even ordinary life, Fuchs suggests, can provide a model of this occurrence: "A new observation can throw all our previous mental images into confusion ... What has already been observed and preserved in mental images comes into conflict with what is newly observed." [132] This conflict, this clash, demands a decision and re-orientation. Robert Funk illustrates this principle with reference to the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32). The "righteous" find themselves in the "world" of the elder brother, endorsing his conventional ideas of justice and obligation. "Sinners" participate in the "world" experienced by the prodigal son. Funk writes, "The word of grace and the deed of grace divide the audience into younger sons and elder sons – into sinners and Pharisees. This is what Ernst Fuchs means when he says that one does not interpret the

parables; the parables interpret him. *The Pharisees are those who insist on interpreting the word of grace, rather than letting themselves be interpreted by it.*" [133] The judges find themselves judged. Sinners find themselves welcomed. "It is man and not God who is on trial." [134] The same principle operates in the parable of the Great Supper (Matt. 22:2–10; cf. Luke 14:16–24). One group is excluded; the other, embraced. "Each hearer is drawn into the tale as he wills." [135]

Walter Wink applies this approach to the interpretation of the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18.9–14). Most of Jesus' own hearers would at first identify themselves with the Pharisee as the hearer of religious and social status; but "then suffer shock and consternation at the wholly unexpected justification of the publican". [136] This of course raises a major hermeneutical problem, to which both Fuchs and Wink are eager to call attention. The *modern* reader already knows that it is the *Pharisee* who will be condemned. Hence nowadays "a simple descriptive approach wrecks the parable." [137] It must come to speech anew, and not merely be "repeated". For the ending of the parable has now in turn become embedded in the conventional judgements of "religious" man, from which the language-event is meant to free us!

(3) There is not sufficient space to comment adequately on the importance of Christology for Fuchs's understanding of the parables. We must note, however, that he stresses this aspect with special reference to the oneness of word and deed in the ministry of Jesus, and also to the status and rôle of Jesus as one who pronounces God's word in God's stead. God is present in the word of Jesus. Moreover, since Jesus enters the common world of understanding experienced by the hearer, the hearer makes his response to God's word "together with" Jesus. Thus in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard "Jesus acted in a very real way as God's representative" especially in "his conduct ... and proclamation". Jesus gives us "to understand his conduct as God's conduct". "Jesus' proclamation ... went along with his conduct." Finally, if I respond in faith," I am not only near to Jesus; in faith I await the occurrence of God's kindness together with Jesus." [138] Similarly, in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, "God accepted the conduct of Jesus as a valid expression of his will." The hearer "lets Jesus guide him to the mercy of God". "Jesus does not give a new law, but substitutes himself for the law." [139]

This means that as Jesus stands "together with" the hearer, he becomes in some sense, a model for faith. For as the hearer, through the language-event, enters the "world" of Jesus, he finds a new vision of God and of the world which he shares with Jesus. For Fuchs this means especially the abandonment of self-assertion, even to the point of death; which is the repetition of Jesus' own decision to go the way of the cross and way of love. [140] "To have faith in Jesus now means essentially to repeat Jesus' decision." [141] This is why the new hermeneutic has definite connexions with the new quest of the historical Jesus. Fuchs writes, "In the proclamation of the resurrection the historical Jesus himself *has* come to us. The so-called Christ of faith is none

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other than the historical Jesus . . . God himself, *wants to be encountered* by us in the historical Jesus." [142] For the message of Jesus to come-to-speech creatively and liberatingly as language-event presupposes some kind of continuity between his words and his life. Thus Ebeling also concludes, "The kerygma . . . is not merely speech about man's existence. It is also a testimony to that which has happened." [143]

IV. *Some Conclusions*

(1) Whilst the new hermeneutic rightly faces the problem of how the interpreter may understand the text of the New Testament more *deeply* and more *creatively,* Fuchs and Ebeling are *less concerned about how he may understand it correctly.* Admittedly they insist on the need for historical-critical study, but rightly or wrongly we receive the impression that this is mainly a preliminary to the real task of hermeneutics. Fuchs and Ebeling are looking at *one* side, albeit a neglected and yet important side, of a two-sided problem. Rather than simply "first" using critical methods, is it not possible *both* to "listen" to the text as subject, and also *alongside this* critically to test one's understanding of it? May not both attitudes be called into play successively and repeatedly as if in dialogue?

It will be suggested, by way of reply, that this is necessarily to surrender a vision of wholeness in exchange for a split conceptualizing perspective in which the text becomes once again, a mere "object" of scrutiny. But whilst we may accept the warning of· Heidegger and Gadamer that the subject-object "method" of Descartes is not always adequate, nevertheless conceptualizing thinking must be given *some* place in hermeneutics. Commenting on Heidegger's notion of openness to the call of Being, Hans Jonas points out that thinking "is precisely an effort not to be at the mercy of fate". [144] To surrender one's own initiative in thinking in exchange for a mere "listening" is precisely *not* to escape from one's own conditionedness by history and language, but is to make everything "a matter of the chance factor of the historical generation I was born into". [145] Theologians, Jonas concludes, have been too easily seduced by the pseudo-humility of Heidegger's orientation. The Christian has been delivered from the power of fate, and must use his mind to distinguish the true from the false.

We have already seen that Heidegger, and presumably Fuchs, would regard this as a misunderstanding and short-circuiting of the whole problem of man's "linguisticality". Subject-object thinking, they believe, as well as distancing man from reality also sets in motion a vicious circularity by evaluating one set of human concepts in terms of another. But the New Testament itself, especially Paul, seems to be less pessimistic than Heidegger about the use of reason or "mind" (*nous*). In this respect Heidegger stands nearer to the sheer irrationality of Zen Buddhism. For it is noteworthy that after reading a work of Suzuki's, Heidegger declared "This is what I have been trying to say in all my writings." [146] Moreover the actual practical difficulties of trying to distinguish between the true and the false in "non-

objectifying" language are insuperable. They have been exposed, for example, by Paul van Buren in his discussion of Heinrich Ott.[147] Thus, in spite of its emphatic character, there is some justice in the verdict of J. C. Weber, when he insists that in Fuchs's thought "there can be no basis for distinguishing the language of the word of God and the language of Being . . . In what way can we know that language does not bring to expression illusion, falsehood, or even chaos? If the criterion of truth is only in the language-event itself, how can the language-event be safeguarded against delusion, mockery, or utter triviality? Why cannot the language-event be a disguised event of nothingness? . . . Fuchs's ontology is in danger of dissolving into a psychological illusionism." [148]

(2) *The new hermeneutic is also one-sided in its use of the New Testament and in its relation to the New Testament message.* To begin with, there are large areas of the New Testament which are explicitly concerned with rational argumentation and with the elucidation of theological concepts. Bornkamm, among others, has drawn attention to the rôle of reasoned argument in Paul, and Hebrews also invites consideration in this respect.[149] However, the approach of Fuchs and Ebeling better fits such language — categories as hymns, poems, metaphors, and parables. It is no accident that Fuchs tends to concentrate his attention on the parables, and also on such passages as 1 Cor. 13 and Phil. 2:5–11. This seems to confirm our claim that the new hermeneutic is one-sided. It is tempting to wonder whether if Fuchs were still pastor to a congregation, they would find themselves confronted regularly by the same kinds of passages. This is partly, too, because Fuchs tends to see the "translated" message of the New Testament itself in narrowly selective terms. In the end, almost everything in the New Testament can be translated into a call to love; into a call to abandon self-assertion.

The problem for the new hermeneutic, however, is not only that certain parts of the New Testament take the form of cognitive discourse; it is also that it is frequently addressed to those who *already believe,* and often spoken out of an already existing theological *tradition* in the context of the historical community of the church. But tradition, even *within* the New Testament, is for Fuchs a factor that tends to obscure, rather than clarify, the original proclamation of Jesus, which was to *un*believers. Just as Heidegger wishes to step back "behind" the conceptualizing tradition of Western philosophy, so Fuchs wishes to step back "behind" the tradition of the primitive church.

The consequences of such a move can be seen most clearly in Fuchs's handling of the resurrection of Christ. This may never be seen as a past historical event known on the basis of apostolic testimony. Like Bultmann, Fuchs sees it simply as expressing the positive value of the cross; as expressing, exhaustively and without historical remainder, Jesus's abandonment of self-assertion in the death of the cross. In his attempt to support such a view, Fuchs even claims that Paul made a mistake in 1 Cor. 15:5–8, being driven to ground the resurrection in history only by the exigency of a polemic

against the Corinthians. [150] Fuchs can find no room in his hermeneutic for tradition, the church, or history after the event of the cross. The issue is put sharply by P. J. Achtemeier: "The church itself could, and did, become a historical 'security' for faith, thus robbing faith of its announcement of the danger of all such security . . . In this way . . . the new hermeneutic attempts to defend a view of faith based on some portions of the New Testament from a view of faith based on other portions." [151]

Once again, however, these difficulties should not blind us to the positive insights of the new hermeneutic where they occur. Fuchs does make some valid comments on the hermeneutics of the epistles; and from this kind of viewpoint Robert Funk offers some very valuable insights on 1 Cor. 2:2–16 and especially on "Second Corinthians as Hermeneutic". He sees this epistle as "a re-presentation of the kerygma in language that speaks to the controversy in which (Paul) is engaged". [152] The main contribution of the new hermeneutic, however, concerns the parables of Jesus, and here, although many criticisms about exegetical details could be made, the suggestiveness and value of the general approach is clear.

(3) Just as it represents a one-sided approach to the hermeneutical task and also a one-sided use of the New Testament, *the new hermeneutic further embodies a one-sided view of the nature of language.* This shows itself in two ways.

Firstly, like Heidegger whom they follow here, Fuchs and Ebeling fail to grasp that language functions on the basis of convention, and is not in fact "reality" or Being itself. Whilst language admittedly determines, or at least shapes, the way in which reality is perceived and organized in relation to a language-community, effective language-activity presupposes "rules" or conventions accepted by that community. It is an established principle not only of Korzybski's "general semantics", but also of general linguistics since Saussure, that the word is not the thing. Saussure himself described "*l'arbitraire du signe*" as the first principle of language study, and the point is discussed in the chapter on semantics. [153] Opaqueness in vocabulary, polysemy or multiple meaning, change in language, and the use of different words for the same object in different languages, all underline the conventionality of language. But the attitude of Fuchs and Ebeling, by contrast, is close to that which has been described as the belief in "word-magic". Their view is sometimes found especially among primitive peoples. Malinowski comments, "The word . . . has a power of its own; it is a means of bringing things about; it is a handle to acts and objects, not a definition of them . . . The word gives power." [154] Heidegger, of course, would not be embarrassed that such an outlook is primitive; he is concerned with "primal" language. [155] But this does not avoid the problem when Ebeling writes that a language-event is not "mere speech" but "an event in which *God himself is communicated.*" [156]

This is *not* to say that we should reject Ebeling's contrast between a word which speaks *about* reconciliation and a word which actually *reconciles*; between speaking *about* a call and actually *calling*. But in two articles I have

tried to show that the sense in which "saying makes it so" is best explained in terms of performative language, and not in terms of word-magic. [157] Furthermore, it should be stressed that, in spite of any appearances to the contrary, Fuchs and Ebeling base their approach on a particular view of language, not on some affirmation of faith about the "power" of God's word.

Secondly, the new hermeneutic has a one-sided concern with imperatival, conative, directive language as over against the language of description or information. Ebeling writes, "We do not get at the nature of words by asking what they contain, but by asking what they effect, what they set going." [158] "The basic structure of word is therefore not statement ... but appraisal, certainly not in the colourless sense of information, but in the pregnant sense of participation and communication." [159] Here it is important to see exactly what we are criticizing. We are *not* criticizing his concern with function, with communication, with self-involvement. We welcome this. But it is false to make two exclusive *alternatives* out of this, as if description somehow undermined other functions of language. Indeed in my article on the parables as language-event, I have argued in detail, firstly, that not all descriptive propositions function in the same way (some may be open-ended); and secondly that, in Austin's words, "for a certain performative utterance to be happy, certain statements have to be *true.*" [160] Amos Wilder presses this kind of point in a different way. He writes, "Fuchs refuses to define the content of faith ... He is afraid of the word as convention or as a means of conveying information ... Fuchs carries this so far that revelation, as it were, reveals nothing ... Jesus calls, indeed, for decision ... But surely his words, deeds, presence, person, and message rested ... upon dogma, eschatological and theocratic." [161]

(4) There is some force in the criticism that the new hermeneutic lets "what is true *for me*" become the criterion of "what is true", and that *its orientation towards the interpreter's subjectivity transposes theology too often into a doctrine of man.* We have noted Fuchs's comment that he proposes "a more radical existential interpretation" than even Bultmann. The hermeneutical task, he writes, is "the interpretation of *our own existence* ... We should accept as *true* only that which we acknowledge *as valid for our own person.*" [162] At the same time, we should also note that there is another qualifying emphasis in Fuchs. He insists, "Christian faith means to speak of God's act, not of ... acts of man." [163]

Some conservative theologians believe that we are drawn into a man-centred relativism if we accept either the notion of the hermeneutical circle, or Fuchs's idea of "self-understanding" (*Selbstverständnis*). Thus J. W. Montgomery calls for "the rejection of contemporary theology's so-called hermeneutical circle." [164] He writes "The preacher must not make the appalling mistake of thinking, as do followers of Bultmann and post-Bultmann new hermeneutic, that the text and one's own experience enter into a relationship of mutuality ... To bind text and exegete into a circle is not only to put all theology and preaching into the orbit of anthropocentric sin-

fulness, but also to remove the very possibility of a 'more sure word of prophecy' than the vagueness of men." [165]

The problem formulated by Montgomery, however, turns on epistemology, or the theory of understanding, and not upon theological considerations alone. To begin with, there are some areas of discussion in which it is possible to distinguish between "Scripture" and "interpretation of Scripture", and others in which it is not. We can and must distinguish between the two, for example, when we are discussing questions about theological method *in principle* and at a formal level. As Ebeling points out, this was important in the Reformation and for Luther. But as soon as we begin to consider a *particular text,* every way of understanding it constitutes an act of interpretation which is related to the experience of the interpreter. This is clear, for example, when we look back on Luther's handling of specific texts. On this level, it is simply philosophically naive to imply that some interpreters can have access to a self-evidently "true" meaning as over against their interpretation of it. Moreover, the interpreter's understanding, as Gadamer rightly insists, is a *progressive* one. In the words of Heinrich Ott, "There is no final black-and-white distinction between 'having understood' and 'not having understood' ... Understanding by its very nature takes place at different levels." [166] Thus the interpreter is in the position of a student confronted with a new text-book on a new subject. At first his preliminary understanding of the subject-matter is disjointed and fragmentary, not least because he does not yet know how to question the text appropriately. Gradually, however, the text itself suggests appropriate questions, and his more mature approach to it brings greater understanding. At the same time, the parts and the whole begin to illuminate one another. But in all this the interpreter is not merely active subject scrutinizing passive object. The text "speaks" to him as its object, moulding his own questions. The notion of the hermeneutical circle is not, then, a sell-out to man-centred relativism, but a way of describing the *process of understanding* in the interpretation of a text.

The problem of "self-understanding" is often misunderstood. It does not simply mean man's conscious understanding of himself, but his grasp of the possibilities of being, in the context of his "world". It concerns, therefore, his *way of reacting* to life or to reality or to God and not merely his opinions about himself. [167] In one sense, therefore, it is less man-centred than is often supposed. In Ebeling's words, "When God speaks, *the whole of reality as it concerns us* enters language anew." [168] In another sense, however, it is true that a pre-occupation with self-understanding may narrow and restrict the attention of the interpreter away from a wider theological and cosmic perspective. Indeed this underlines precisely the problem of one-sidedness which we have noted in connexion with the task of hermeneutics, with the scope of the New Testament, and with language. We saw, for example, that Fuchs fails to do full justice to the resurrection of Christ.

(5) *The new hermeneutic is concerned above all with the "rights" of the text,* as over against concepts which the interpreter himself may try to bring

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with him and impose on it. A "subject-object" scrutiny of the text which takes no account of man's linguisticality tends to tame and to domesticate the word of God, so that it merely echoes back the interpreter's own perspectives. By contrast, the text should challenge him, judge him and "speak" to him in its otherness. But in order that this word may be understood and "strike home", there must also be a common "world", an *Einverständnis*, in which the horizons of the text become fused with those of the interpreter.

Some further strengths and weaknesses of this rejection of mere "knowledge" and "analysis" can be seen when the new hermeneutic is set in the wider context of literary interpretation, of art, and even of educational theory. In the world of literature for example, Susan Sontag argues that interpretation impoverishes, tames, and distorts, a literary creation. "Interpretation makes it manageable, comfortable". Instead of interpreting literature we ought simply "to show *how* it is what it is". [169] Similarly R. E. Palmer sees a further attempt "to transcend the subject-object schema" in the French phenomenological literary criticism of Blanchot, Richard or Bachelard, and in the phenomenological philsophy of Ricoeur or Merleau-Ponty." [170] In the realm of art one could cite the work of Adolph Gottlieb. In education theory it is possible to see both gains and losses in the move away from concerns about "knowledge" and "information", in exchange for an emphasis on participation, engagement and "experience". The pupil will gain from attempts to help him to understand in terms of his own life-experiences; but he may well lose as less stress is laid on the "content" part of instruction.

It is our claim that *both* aspects are important for New Testament interpretation, but that at present there is more danger of neglecting the new hermeneutic than of pressing its claims too far. Although it would be wrong to reduce its lessons simply to a few maxims for preachers, nevertheless it does have something to say about preaching and basic Bible study. For example, it calls attention to the difference between talking about the *concept* of reconciliation or the *concept* of joy, and on the other hand so proclaiming the word of Christ that a man *experiences* joy or reconciliation, even if these concepts are never mentioned. The preacher must concern himself with what his words effect and bring about, rather than simply with what concepts they convey. The gospel must not merely be spoken and repeated; it must also be *communicated*. Similarly in Bible study the student is not only concerned with "facts" and information, but with verdicts on himself. Moreover as he "listens" to the text he will not be content only to use stereotyped sets of questions composed by others, but will engage in a *continuous* dialogue of question and answer, until his own original horizons are creatively enlarged.

The otherness of the New Testament must not be tamed and domesticated in such a way that its message becomes merely a set of predictable religious "truths". Through the text of the New Testament, the word of God is to be encountered as an attack, a judgement, on any way of seeing

the world which, in Fuchs's phrase, is not "seeing with God's eyes". The hermeneutical task is a genuine and valid one. Two sets of horizons must be brought together, those of the text and those of the modern interpreter; and this must be done at a more than merely conceptual level. Few questions can be more important than that asked by Fuchs, namely how the text of the New Testament, written in the ancient world, can come alive in such a way as to *strike home* in the present.

NOTES

1. For objections to the customary use of the term, see C. E. Braaten, "How New is the New Hermeneutic?" in *Theology Today* 22 (1965), pp. 218–35, and J. D. Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church* (London, 1970), pp. 37–8; as against James M. Robinson, "Braaten's Polemic. A Reply", in *Theology Today*, loc. cit., pp. 277–82.

2. E. Fuchs, "Zur Frage nach dem historischen Jesus" (*Gesammelte Aufsätze* II; Tübingen 1960), pp. 411–14 and 418; cf. *Studies of the Historical Jesus* (London 1964), pp. 196–8 and 202.

3. E. Fuchs, *Hermeneutik* (Tübingen 1970⁴), p. 281; cf. R. Bultmann, *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (London 1955), p. 14. Cf. further, E. Fuchs, *Hermeneutik*, p. 182, and R. Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (London 1969), pp. 286–312.

5. E. Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, p. 8.

6. E. Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, p. 30; cf. Zum hermeneutischen Problem in der Theologie (*Gesammelte Aufsätze* I, Tübingen 1959), pp. 9–10.

7. G. Ebeling, "Non-religious Interpretation of Biblical Concepts" in *Word and Faith*, p. 125.

8. G. Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition* (E.T. London 1968), pp. 11–31, especially 26, 28.

9. G. Ebeling, *God and Word* (Philadelphia 1967), p. 3; cf. pp. 8–9.

10. Ibid., p. 4.

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12. G. Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, pp. 318–19.

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16. E. Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, p. 35.

17. Ibid., p. 193.

18. W. Pannenburg, *Basic Questions in Theology* I (E.T. London 1970) p. 9.

19. G. Ebeling, "Time and Word", in J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Future of our Religious Past: Essays in Honour of Rudolf Bultmann* (London (1971), p. 265 (translated from *Zeit und Geschichte,* 1964) (my italics). Cf. further, W. G. Doty, *Contemporary New Testament Interpretation* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1972), pp. 34–7.

20. In addition to the previous chapter, see Ian Henderson, *Myth in the New Testament* (London 1952), p. 31, and A. C. Thiselton, "Myth, Mythology". in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids 1975), vol. 4, pp. 333–343.

21. G. Ebeling, "The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism" in, *Word and Faith*, pp. 17–61; and E. Fuchs, *Hermeneutik*, pp. 159–66, and especially *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 95–108.

22. G. Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith* (E.T. London 1961), p. 188.

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24. E. Fuchs, "The New Testament and the Hermeneutical Problem", loc. cit., pp. 135–6. (Fuchs writes almost the whole sentence in italics.)

25. G. Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith*, p. 15, cf. *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language* (London 1973), pp. 15–80.

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27. H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen 1965²) p. 360 (E.T. *Truth and Method* (London 1975), p. 350).

28. G. Ebeling, "Word of God and Hermeneutics", in *Word and Faith*, p. 313.

29. Ibid., p. 317.

30. Ibid.; cf. *The Word of God and Tradition*, p. 9.

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33. G. Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition*, p. 17.

34. H. Kimmerle, "Hermeneutical Theory or Ontological Hermeneutics" in R. W. Funk (ed.), J Th. Ch. 4, *History and Hermeneutic*, p. 107 (my italics); cf. pp. 107–121.

35. See E. Fuchs, *Marburger Hermeneutik*, pp. 171–81 and 239–43.

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37. E. Fuchs, "The Hermeneutical Problem" in J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Future of Our Religious Past* pp. 267–8 (translated from E. Dinkler (ed.) *Zeit und Geschichte*, p. 357).

38. Ibid., p. 270; German from *Zeit und Geschichte*, p. 360. Cf. *Hermeneutik*, p. 136.

39. E. Fuchs, "The New Testament and the Hermeneutical Problem," loc. cit., p. 126; "Proclamation and Speech-Event", loc. cit., pp. 347–51; *Hermeneutik*, pp. 219–30; *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 97–9 and 130–66; and *Marburger Hermeneutik*, pp. 231–2. The parables are discussed further below.

40. Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics. Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston 1969), p. 139.

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44. G. Ebeling, *The Nature of Faith*, pp. 87 and 90.

45. E. Fuchs, *Zur Frage nach dem historischen Jesus*, pp. 291 and 293 (cf. *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 94 and 95).

46. E. Fuchs, loc. cit. (German) pp. 288 and 291 (English, 91 and 93); 224 and 226 (English 36 and 38); and 347 (English 141).

47. Cf. E. Fuchs, *Zum hermeneutischen Problem in der Theologie*, pp. 281–305; *Marburger Hermeneutik*, pp. 243–5; and *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 196–212; and G. Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, pp. 325–32, and *Theology and Proclamation* pp. 28–31. On the different terminology in Fuchs and Ebeling, James Robinson explains, "*Sprachereignis* and *Wortgeschehen* are synonyms ... The choice depends on which Bultmannian term serves as the point of departure, *Heilsereignis* or *Heilsgeschehen*" (*New Frontiers in Theology, 2: The New Herrneneutic*, p. 57).

48. E. Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, p. 196 (German, p. 411).

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 211.
51. G. Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, p. 320.
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57. R. Bultmann, *Existence and Faith*, pp. 343–4 (his italics) and 347.
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73. E. Fuchs, "The New Testament and the Hermeneutical Problem", p. 142 (his italics).
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