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C. F. D. Moule

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Jesus in Early Christian Interpretation

1

Fulfilment-words in the New Testament: Use and Abuse*

'Promise and fulfilment', 'Verheissung und Erfüllung', is a familiar phrase in New Testament theology. It has furnished the title for at least one notable book,¹ and occupies considerable sections of other works in the New Testament field. It is a well-known fact, too, that, in some senses at least, it belongs also to the Old Testament scene. It is possible, as an article by W. Zimmerli illustrates,² to tell the Old Testament story under the same title.

But its very merits as an epitome of biblical eschatology have made it such a cliché that it is easy to accept it as a matter of course, without examining either its distinctiveness or its exact incidence. The purpose of this paper, accordingly, is to bring the implications of the correlatives, promise and fulfilment, into sharper focus, to ask what, more precisely, it is that gives them their special appropriateness in the area of the New Testament, and to initiate (it cannot attempt to do more) an inquiry into their incidence in ancient literature generally.

Among the causes of imprecision in the use of the phrase is the fact that both words, 'promise' and 'fulfilment', and the equivalents in Hebrew and Greek of at least fulfilment (מִלֵּא and πληροῦν), are often used inexactly – not least by the biblical writers themselves – where precision would require some defining phrase, or even where some different word would be more appropriate. Thus, it is possible at once, without

* Presidential Address to S.N.T.S. delivered at the General Meeting in Gwat, Switzerland, 28 August 1967.

1 By W. G. Kümmel (Zürich,³ 1956; E.T., London, 1957), though here it is used in a different and special sense, of the anticipatory fulfilment, in Jesus, of the final, eschatological promise.

2 Originally published in *Evangelische Theologie* 12, 1/2 (1952), 6 ff.; reprinted in *Probleme alttestamentlicher Hermeneutik*, ed. C. Westermann (München, 1960), E.T. *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation* (London, 1963), pp. 89 ff. A *Festschrift* for S. H. Hooke bears the same title, *Promise and Fulfilment*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Edinburgh, 1963).

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going into more elaborate detail, to name at least three sets of correlatives which, carefully defined, are distinguishable, but which could all be included, and sometimes are, both in the Bible and outside it, under the single umbrella of a loosely-defined 'promise and fulfilment'. The sets of correlatives which I have in mind are these. First, there is simply a prediction over against verification. Today this stands, for a thoughtful person, at the bottom of the scale of religious values, though the ancient world thought otherwise.³ Secondly, one may group together words such as beginning or project, undertaking or obligation, promise (but not with the content I shall define in a moment) or threat, and set these over against words denoting termination, completion or achievement, discharge, confirmation or realization. That is a second set of correlatives. And only then, thirdly, comes what I suggest should be called covenant-promise over against fulfilment proper or consummation in its strictest sense. It is for the apodosis in that final pair of correlatives that I suggest we would do well, when we are aiming at a measure of precision in our use of the phrase in New Testament theology, to reserve the term fulfilment, Erfüllung, **אִמְלָא**, *πληροῦν*, because only in such a context does its content of finality and insurpassability come into its own. The protasis in this pair as I am defining it is no mere prediction, nor a mere beginning, nor even a promise or threat in general, but God's covenant-promise in particular; and by this is meant not any single, limited promise, but all the promise and hope attaching to all that is epitomized in the Bible by God's covenant with his people. It means his plan for achieving a truly personal relationship between himself and his people – all that we associate with his kingship and his fatherhood – and his design for accomplishing it. As soon as 'promise' is filled out with such a content, it is clear that its correlative cannot be mere verification – no mere 'coming to pass' or 'coming true' is sufficient; nor yet the mere completion or termination of a project; nor even the mere discharge of some obligation as such. All these may contribute to the realization of a relationship, but are not as comprehensive as the fully achieved relationship itself. The proper correlative to covenant-promise is the perfecting and realization of the entire relationship which is its goal; and there is a special appropriateness in the application of the terms **אִמְלָא**, *πληροῦν*, which properly denote filling to capacity, to any symbol of such a relationship. It is worthy of note, at

³ 'Weissagung und Erfüllung', as the title of a well-known article by Bultmann (*Z.T.K.* 47 (1950), 360 ff.), was chosen with a special purpose. In the English version in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation* (as n. 2 p. 3), it appears as 'Prophecy and Fulfilment'.

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this point, that just as the neutral and undefined 'promise' in my second pair of correlatives has been augmented to 'covenant-promise' in the third, so an alternative protasis in the second, namely, 'obligation', can be filled out into 'covenant-obligation' and thus find a place in the protasis of the third set. And to speak of 'fulfilling' Torah (covenant-obligation) is, thus, a parallel way of expressing the total realization of a right relationship, comparable to the phrase 'to fulfil covenant-promise': the moral and volitional is obviously a very important factor in relationship. The combination under the single, comprehensive apodosis, 'fulfilment', of a protasis consisting of both 'covenant-promise' and 'covenant-law' is characteristic of *Heilsgeschichte* precisely because it is characteristic of incarnation.⁴

In thus attempting some preliminary clarification of the meaning of 'promise and fulfilment' as the phrase is commonly used by biblical theologians, I realize, of course, that I have done what the Bible does not do explicitly, and that I have had recourse to some non-biblical terms such as 'personal relationship'. But it is not only usual but legitimate to use such convenient epitomes of what the Bible - more concretely but also more diffusely - does present. For that matter, the actual combination, 'promise and fulfilment', as we shall remind ourselves shortly, is extremely rare in the Bible.

So much, then, for the setting of the stage. What I offer by way of reflexion on the subject will fall into three sections. First, an attempt to locate that in the faith of the New Testament which gives unique and distinctive appropriateness to the use of promise and fulfilment to describe the 'Christ-event' in its relation to the entire design of God. Secondly, some consideration of correlatives in which מלא/πληροῦν is not used, and some indication of their incidence in ancient literature. And thirdly, a closer examination of the incidence and use of מלא and πληροῦν, with some reflexions on the phenomena.

I

The article I have just referred to, by W. Zimmerli, expressly calls attention to ways in which the New Testament transcends the Old in respect

⁴ It is noteworthy, if not immediately relevant, that Isa. xl. 3 is used in 1QS viii. 13-16 as an injunction or authorization, whereas in the Gospels it is treated as a prediction. (But see a rather different formulation by J. A. Fitzmyer, 'The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament', *N.T.S.* 7 (1961), 297 ff. (318), F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1959; London, 1960), p. 28.)

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of fulfilment. Similarly (if I may make a passing allusion to one other recent example of the same insight) R. N. Longenecker couches his estimate of the newness of Paul's Christian experience in contrast to his former Judaism in terms of promise and fulfilment.⁵ Talking of the dual message of judgement and mercy, death and life, in the Old Testament,⁶ Zimmerli observes: 'The Yahweh-event, which would unite the elements of death and life proclaimed by the prophet in a conclusive fulfilment, has not yet [i.e. in the Old Testament] come to pass' (E.T. p. 105). And again, commenting (p. 112) on the **כָּפַל הַבָּרָא** of Joshua xxi. 45, he says that, although here the movement from promise to fulfilment might appear to have reached its goal and come to a standstill, it transpires that, in fact, there is more - much more - yet to come. And when Zimmerli comes to the New Testament (p. 113) he says that its message of fulfilment stands over against the situation in the Old Testament. 'In Jesus Christ the Apostles attest the Word of God which has become wholly event, and the event that is the Word of God, wholly and completely.' This formulation, you will observe, while connecting the New Testament closely with the Old, acknowledges a difference in the New Testament, and describes that difference in terms of wholeness and completeness. This is the Christian claim that has now to be in some measure spelt out; and, for a start, a foil is provided by the much more jejune conception of mere prediction and verification (the first and, to us, the least religiously important of my pairs of correlatives).

It serves the better as a foil precisely because, in the ancient world, it was highly valued. I suppose it would be true to say that most, if not all, ancient religions regarded prediction and verification as of high importance. To them it meant that God was wise and was in control of things. He was as good as his word: 'Hath he said, and shall he not do it?' Things happen as God has devised them, not by chance nor according to any other pattern than the one he lays down. A god who can see the end from the beginning is obviously a competent god and a living god, unlike the dumb idols (cf. Deutero-Isaiah, e.g. Isa. xli. 21 ff., and Wisd. vii. 18). And his true prophet enjoys a correspondingly high esteem. One of the deuteronomic tests of a true prophet is the verification of his predictions (Deut. xviii. 22). Of Samuel it was said (I Sam. ix. 6): '... he is a man that is held in honour; all that he says comes true.' Daniel enjoys high prestige as one who knows 'a God in heaven

⁵ *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (New York, etc., 1964); see p. 84.

⁶ Cf. C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London, 1952), pp. 108 ff.

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who reveals mysteries' (Dan. ii. 28 f.).⁷ And then, again, for the ancient world, the central figure concerned with the verification was also marked out as in some way important, even if not necessarily good or heroic. If Oedipus is unconsciously instrumental in verifying a terrible prediction, he may be the most miserable – even the most execrable – of men on earth, but he is significant, he is a figure of importance. If Judas is the one who was to lift up his heel against his familiar friend, he is marked as the archetypal traitor – but, as such, he is a figure of sinister importance in the working out of the divine will.⁸ But more often the central figure of a prediction which has come to pass is good as well as important.

A convenient illustration of many of the features of the ancient attitude to prediction-verification is afforded by the nightmare story in I Kings xiii, with its sequel in II Kings xxiii. 15–18, about the prophet from Judah who predicted the destruction of Jeroboam's altar at Bethel by Josiah. The prophet inveighs against the altar and predicts its fate circumstantially, including the actual name of Josiah (v. 2); according to the text as it now stands, he also gives interim, authenticating signs⁹ – the altar is, there and then, miraculously split and the ashes poured out (vv. 3 and 5 – though this may well originally have been a reference to the subsequent events under Josiah), and Jeroboam's hand, stretched out against the prophet, is paralysed. The prophet's prediction comes true in Josiah's reform, as explicitly recorded in II Kings xxiii. 15–18. But meanwhile, in I Kings xiii itself, there is a further example of prediction and verification, when another prophet, living at Bethel, sends a lying message to recall the Judaeen prophet who is returning home in obedience to Yahweh's instructions; and then, having recalled him by telling an arrant lie, he predicts that, because of the disobedience into which he has himself enticed him, his body will not come to the tomb of his fathers. And, sure enough, on his return journey the Judaeen prophet is killed by a lion – a discriminating animal, who demonstrates his own obedience to the very letter of his commission by sparing the poor prophet's donkey. *Cadavera* (it must have said to itself) *non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*. The wicked old liar of a prophet then makes what reparation he can by giving the Judaeen prophet

7 Cf. Isa. xlv. 26a: 'who confirms the word of his servant, and performs the counsel of his messengers.'

8 Cf. Gen. i. 20; Acts iii. 17 f.; xiii. 27; and Justin, *Dial.* xcvi. 1.

9 Cf. I Sam. ii. 34 (Hophni and Phinehas); x. 1 ff. (signs for Saul); II Kings xx. 8 ff. (sign for Hezekiah).

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honourable burial, and asking to be buried, when he dies, in the same grave, and confirming that his prediction against the Bethel altar will come true. So, here is prediction in detail by men who know because God has told them; and the hero or victim of the prediction, as the case may be, is given prominence as an important person.

If one once accepts this view, that the competence and truthfulness of God himself is exhibited in foreseeing the future – or, to put it otherwise, in the ability to carry through his predetermined plan – then prediction-verification does acquire a religious importance, even if only derivatively and in the context of this outlook. It is taken as confirmation that things do not happen by chance: there is a God who is in charge;¹⁰ and that there are important people who are let into God's counsels; and that there are others, again, who, whether they like it or not, have to play leading roles in God's drama. And, on this showing, it is not only not necessary that predictions should have any intrinsic ethical importance: it is a positive advantage when they concern such arbitrary and peripheral details that their realization presents evidence which is the more convincing in proportion as it is the less likely to be coincidental. Best and most cunning of all is when God sets a sort of conundrum or crossword puzzle – a רז, which has to be subtly decoded by someone with the gift of פֶּשֶׁר.¹¹ For the early Christians with this outlook, the climax of all previous demonstrations of God's control was reached when it could be proved that Jesus was Messiah by his performance of some obscure detail deemed to be a prediction about the Messiah.¹² This is the mentality behind most of the Matthaean 'formula-quotations' (*Reflexionszitate*);¹³ and it comes to a riot of proliferation

10 So G. Delling, *s.v.* πληρόω, *T.W.N.T.* vi, 295, 5 f. Cf. 'The prophecies prove that the historical events happened according to the will of God', N. A. Dahl, 'The Story of Abraham in Luke-Acts', *Studies in Luke-Acts* (Festschrift for Paul Schubert, edd. Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn, Nashville and New York, 1966), pp. 139 ff. (p. 153).

11 So Rom. xvi. 25 f. Cf. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis*, p. 8. 1QpHab vii. 5 speaks of כּוֹל רִזִּי דְבָרֵי עֲבָדָיו הַנְּבִאִים (E. Lohse, *Die Texte aus Qumran* (München, 1964), p. 234); and ii. 8 seems to refer to the gift of פֶּשֶׁר as given to a Priest (who is the Right Teacher). I wish I had lived in the age of פֶּשֶׁר. I would have shown how II Kings vi. 5 f. is an account of St Paul's conversion in code: the lost axe-head was שְׂאוֹר; what rescued it was עֵץ!

12 Acts xvii. 3, xviii. 28 are references to this occupation in the course of the early Church's evangelism. See Paul S. Minear, 'Luke's Use of the Birth-Stories', in Keck and Martyn, *Luke-Acts*, pp. 118 ff.; and Dahl, 'Story of Abraham', p. 152.

13 Cf. R. Hummel, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum im Mattäusevangelium* (München, 1963), p. 130 and n. 12 (following Goppelt). A. Suhl, *Die Funktion der alttestamentlichen Zitate und Anspiel-*

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in Justin's *Dialogue*. It is a conspicuous motif also in Jewish-Christian apocalyptic.

Now, if this mere prediction-fulfilment leaves the modern religious consciousness stone cold, that is largely because, in spite of the high value set upon it by the biblical writers (not least the writer of St Matthew's Gospel, who uses *πληροῦν* to describe it, in the way I am inviting you to avoid), they bear witness, despite themselves, to a principle which, for religion, has proved to be incomparably more important. These writers do not themselves say so; they do not seem consciously to rank this principle above prediction-verification; and yet, if we, in our day, have learnt to despise mere prediction-verification as a phenomenon which (even if and when established) is religiously neutral, it is from these very writers, and the experience they mediate, that we have learnt our lesson. That incomparably more important principle to which, only half-consciously, they bear witness exercises a decisive influence on the whole shape of their gospel, and, as I shall suggest, may even have left traces of itself in the frequency of their use or abuse of *πληροῦν*. The principle to which I refer is, in essence, what is summed up in the term *Heilsgeschichte*. I know that this is a controverted term; but, in the present context, I take it as a symbol for the recognition that God's personal relations with man assume, for those who are sensitive to personal values,¹⁴ a recognizable pattern. Those who are sensitive can recognize God's pattern of relationship as it shapes itself out of the different materials of successive generations, particularly in God's covenant-relation with Israel, and they can see that the pattern has a purpose and is developing 'teleologically' towards a goal.

And so, if Christians found in the pattern shown in the story of Jesus of Nazareth a unique finality or 'fulness', this was not really because a uniquely large number of predictions seemed to be verified in it, but because they found uniquely reflected in Jesus a perfect filial

ungen im Markusevangelium (Gütersloh, 1965), denies this mentality to Mark. But see the critical review by E. Grässer, *T.L.Z.* 91 (1966), 668^a, b, 669^a. See, further, a brief discussion of this matter by Ellen Flessemann-van Leer, 'Die Interpretation der Passionsgeschichte von Alten Testament aus' in *Zur Bedeutung des Todes Jesu: exegetische Beiträge*, H. Conzelmann, E. Flessemann-van Leer, E. Haenchen, E. Käsemann, E. Lohse (Gütersloh, 1967), pp. 79 ff.

¹⁴ I use this qualifying phrase advisedly. We are not to assume that Old Testament history, without some such interpreting agency, of itself presents a clear pattern. There have, for instance, been warnings enough in the past against the assumption that there is a clearly defined 'doctrine of the remnant' in the Old Testament. See, e.g. E. W. Heaton 'The Root אֲרָם and the Doctrine of the Remnant', *J.T.S.* n.s. 3 (1952), 27 ff.

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relationship with God.¹⁵ They had come to estimate Jesus, in his ministry, his crucifixion, and his resurrection to life, as the climax, the coping-stone, of an entire edifice of relationship. He was the inaugurator of a new and decisive covenant. The word *τελειωτής*, applied to Jesus in Heb. xii. 2, is found only in Christian literature,¹⁶ and it epitomizes this estimate – an estimate of Jesus as the climax of an eschatological and teleological process. Even more important, among single words in this connexion, is *τύπος*, which L. Goppelt has examined so exhaustively.¹⁷ There is a distinctively Christian conception of typology which bears witness to the recognition of covenant-promise and fulfilment in its stricter sense. Harnack credited Paul with being the originator of typological exegesis.¹⁸ and, although this judgement has been modified by E. E. Ellis,¹⁹ there is, at any rate in the New Testament as a whole, a distinctive attitude to what may be called the pattern of God's dealings.²⁰

Now, out of a large number of symptoms which give evidence of this estimate of Jesus as the climax and fulfilment, not of mere prediction, but of a pattern of personal relationship, I choose for the present occasion what is perhaps the most impressive and the most inclusive. I mean the fact that upon the single figure of Jesus there have converged, in Christian thought, an unprecedented and unsurpassed number of dif-

15 So G. Delling, *s.v.* *πληρόω* in *T.W.N.T.* vi, 295, 15: 'Der nt.liche Gedanke der Erfüllung ist zusammengefasst in der Person Jesu'; and L. Goppelt, *s.v.* *τύπος* in *T.W.N.T.* viii, 251, 24 f.: 'Dabei ist die Entsprechung nicht nur in äusseren Ähnlichkeiten der Vorgänge, sondern vor allem in der Wesensgleichheit von Gottes Handeln zu suchen'; and Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis*, p. 77; and J. Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (London, 1966), p. 138.

16 *T.W.N.T.* viii, 87, 10. Cf. Heb. vii. 11, 19, denying *τελειώσις* to the Levitical System; and note the theme of *τελειωθῆναι* throughout the Epistle. See further below, p. 29.

17 *Tupos: Die typologische Deutung des Alten Testament im Neuen* (Gütersloh, 1938; reprinted 1966); and *T.W.N.T.* viii, 246 ff.

18 See Fitzmyer, *N.T.S.* 7 (1961), 297 ff. (332); and cf. Goppelt, *T.W.N.T.* viii, 252, claiming that in I Cor. x. 6, 11 the words *τύπος* and *τυπικῶς* are used for the first time in the technical sense in which they are often used in early Christian literature subsequently. See also G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woollcombe, *Essays on Typology* (London, 1957).

19 *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh, 1957), pp. 129 and 90 ff., cited by Fitzmyer, *N.T.S.* 7 (1961).

20 See further L. Goppelt, 'Paulus und die Heilsgeschichte: Schlussfolgerungen aus Röm. iv und 1. Kor. x. 1-13', and G. Klein, 'Heil und Geschichte nach Römer iv', *N.T.S.* 13 (1966), 31 ff. and 43 ff.

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ferent images and titles from pre-Christian Judaism.²¹ That many of them are Israel-terms, that is, terms for a collective relationship, is itself a Christological phenomenon of importance.

The convergence of an exceptional number of images on the single figure of Jesus is illustrated with almost ludicrous volubility in Justin's *Dial.* cxxvi. 1: *τίς δ' ἐστὶν οὗτος, ὃς καὶ ἄγγελος μεγάλης βουλήs ποτέ, καὶ ἀνὴρ διὰ Ἰεζεκιήλ, καὶ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου διὰ Δανιήλ, καὶ παιδίον διὰ Ἡσαίου, καὶ Χριστὸς καὶ Θεὸς προσκυνητὸς διὰ Δαβίδ, καὶ Χριστὸς καὶ λίθος διὰ πολλῶν, καὶ σοφία διὰ Σολομῶνος, καὶ Ἰωσήφ καὶ Ἰούδας καὶ ἄστρον διὰ Μωσέως, καὶ ἀνατολή διὰ Ζαχαρίου, καὶ παθητὸς καὶ Ἰακώβ καὶ Ἰσραὴλ πάλιν διὰ Ἡσαίου καὶ ῥάβδος καὶ ἄνθος καὶ λίθος ἀκρογωνιαῖος κέκληται καὶ υἱὸς θεοῦ . . .* ; (cf. lxxxvii). But even so sweeping a claim as this is already implied when Paul says (II Cor. i. 20) that Christ is the confirmation (*τὸ Naί* and *τὸ Ἀμήν*) of all the promises (*ἐπαγγελίαι*) of God; for by God's promises, in this kind of context, is meant what I am calling God's covenant-promise – his promise of a developing personal relationship between himself and his people, rooted in his own character and in their ethical response, and symbolized by such Israel-figures as appear in a list like Justin's. And within the New Testament itself, as we know well, there converges on Jesus a very remarkable number of images and titles, which, in Hebrew-Jewish writings, had been unrelated and scattered. That a Jewish leader should win the titles of divinely appointed royalty is not particularly surprising: Messiah, Chosen, Only, Beloved, Son of God in a messianic sense – such titles would not be too difficult to account for in any outstanding leader in Israel. Non-Christian explanations have been offered also for the application to Jesus of such quasi-divine titles as *κύριος* and *σωτήρ* (though the latter is, as a matter of fact, rare in the New Testament). But it is when, in addition to reverential and adorative individual titles such as these, there occurs a great convergence of Israel-titles and other collectives (and even God-titles) that the phenomenon assumes unique proportions. Servant of Yahweh, Son of Man, Zechariah martyr, rejected-but-vindicated stone, cornerstone, foundation stone, stumbling-stone, temple, Melchizedek-priest, Emmanuel, Adam, Word, Wisdom, bridegroom, even *θεός* – here is a convergence which, together with the titles of reverence and adoration, constitutes, taking the New Testament as a whole, a symptom of an estimate of Jesus as incomparably more than the mere verifier of predictions. This marks him as,

21 Cf. Zimmerli, in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, p. 121; Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis*, p. 77.