Godliness and Good Learning: Cranfield's Romans

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The great work is finished at last. Four years after the first volume, Cranfield's commentary on Romans (the first in the new series of the *International Critical Commentary*, of which he is joint editor) has now been completed by the arrival of the second.[1] And a great work it truly is. It represents the best part of a lifetime of patient and careful exegetical study, an easy grasp of the classical languages, a thorough familiarity with the work of commentators from the earliest times to the present day, and, by no means least, a godly, wise and

[1] *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, by C. E. B. Cranfield, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark: vol. 1 (Rom. 1–8) 1975, vol. 2 (Rom. 9–16) 1979. The first volume has now gone into a further edition, in which mention is made (p. 44) of commentaries which have appeared since 1975, and in which the many misprints in the first edition have been corrected. Of these, warning should be given to possessors of the first edition that on p. 66 the phrase 'the faith which consists in obedience' has replaced 'the obedience which consists in faith' (due, no doubt, to Pelagian gremlins at the printers') as option (vii) on the phrase *hypakoē pisteōs*.

sensitive approach to the subtle and delicate theological and practical issues with which Romans deals. The author richly deserves the chair in Durham to which he has recently been elevated. To think his thoughts after him is to be given a lesson in theological scholarship at its very best—that is, in the peculiarly delightful combination of godliness and good learning.

Any treatment of Romans in this detail is bound to make considerable demands on the reader, and Cranfield is no exception. Though most Hebrew words are transliterated, they are usually left untranslated, as are quotations from (e.g.) Chrysostom, Pelagius, Bengel and the modern French and German commentators. At the same time, it should quickly be said that almost all non-English material occurs in the footnotes, so that readers with only English and Greek will have no trouble with the text: and that it is of course in the interests of exact scholarship that authors should speak for themselves (Cranfield is quick to point out weaknesses in some translations).[2] Otherwise the commentary is easy to use. It follows the Nestle text (though Cranfield disagrees with it at certain points, and discusses a good many of the variants with commendable clarity[3]), and the use of heavy type ensures that one can see at a glance (in contrast, for instance, with Käsemann) exactly where one is. The pagination runs on from the first to the second volume (like Kuss, unlike Murray), so that cross-references are simplified. The indices are very full and helpful, with the odd exception that sub-apostolic literature is not listed in the usual way, but instead occurs, by author's name only, in the general list of secondary writers. This means (e.g.) that, though the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is cited (e.g. p. 809), one cannot tell at a glance whether use is made elsewhere of this or other early Christian writings. The bibliographies, though occasionally needing supplementation from Käsemann, are extremely helpful. In particular, the list of commentaries at the start compares well with Käsemann (109 in the 1973 edition, against Käsemann's 40): and Cranfield has made careful use of almost every one he lists. This use of, and debate with, his predecessors, is an important feature of the work: unlike many writers, he has cast the net wide and culled the best of Christian scholarship of the last two thousand years. The index reveals that his favourites are Barrett, Barth, Bengel, Calvin, Chrysostom, Gaugler, Käsemann, Lagrange, Michel, and of course Sanday and Headlam. Others who crop up regularly are Huby, Origen, Pelagius (who emerges with more credit than one might have thought) and Zahn.[4] This underlines Cranfield's stated intention of making exegesis prior to the wider theological issues:[5] and it is no doubt because of this that other names well known in recent Pauline research—Davies, Schoeps, Stendahl, Wrede, Schweitzer—are hardly mentioned at all. Ridderbos is one of the most striking absentees, in view of the fact that his commentary takes a theological stance fairly close to Cranfield's own. But in general the coverage is extremely full: and Cranfield is always scrupulously fair to his opponents.[6]

In one respect Cranfield stands out from most writers on Romans, namely, the full coverage he gives to every single part of the epistle. After 44 pages of introduction (authenticity, structure, purpose, the church in Rome, etc.: and a good brief history of exegesis), chs. 1-8 occupy 400 pages, with 9-11 taking 150 and 12-16 requiring 200. What Cranfield says of Michel[7] is just as true of himself: it is very difficult to find him unaware of questions which need to be asked. The section on chs. 12-13 reproduces almost exactly the earlier *Commentary* on those chapters,[8] except that one or two of the detailed practical applications in the earlier volume are missing, and one or two others, including a rare peep into the author's background,[9] are added. The only significant modification of stance is that, though Cranfield still thinks it is wrong simply to dismiss the idea of a double reference for *exousiais* in 13.1 (i.e. to heavenly powers as well as to earthly ones), he has 'now come to regard it as less probable than the interpretation according to which Paul in using *exousiais* here had in mind simply the civil authorities as such'.[10]

The commentary is then concluded with two essays. The first[11] deals with Paul's purposes in writing the letter, and the second[12] is entitled 'Concluding remarks on some aspects of the theology of Romans'. Of this, about one-third is taken up with a revised form of Cranfield's deservedly famous article 'St Paul and the Law',[13] the

[2] E.g. p. 43 n. 3 re Barth's shorter commentary.
[3] E.g. p. 784 n. 2, re 16: 3–5.
[4] Käsemann, Black and Schlier appeared too late to be used in vol. 1: the third volume of Kuss, and the first of Wilckens, came too late for either volume.
[5] Cf. pp. 1, 823f.
[6] Cf. e.g. p. 778 re Michel.
[7] P. 43.
[8] *A Commentary on Romans 12–13* (*SJT* Occasional Papers no. 12), Edinburgh and London, 1965.
[9] P. 688. Note too the addition of the phrase 'and quite often even in others' in the last sentence on 13: 10 (p. 679).
[10] P. 659.
[11] Pp. 814-23.
[12] Pp. 823-70.
[13] *SJT* 17, March 1964, pp. 43-68, reprinted with slight alterations in R. Batey (ed.) *New Testament Issues*, New York and London, 1970, pp. 148-72.

revisions consisting mainly of the deletion of material now covered in the body of the commentary. For the rest, the reader is offered a useful summary of Cranfield's understanding of Paul, particularly of his Christology, soteriology, pneumatology and use of the OT (in the last, he holds that Paul has been given, as the servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, the 'legitimate freedom . . . from time to time to take a certain liberty with a particular passage, in order thereby to bring out the more faithfully and clearly the overall sense of the OT's witness', as opposed to the idea that Paul shows 'a readiness to force [the text] to render service to the interpreter's own purpose, in other words, a freedom of arbitrariness').[14] I suspect that Cranfield had to curtail these essays—some sections of which are very brief—in the interests of the publisher's plans: were he to enlarge some of them (perhaps particularly his welcome rejection of the common assumption that Paul wrongly believed that the Parousia would certainly occur in the very near future) he would win considerable further gratitude.

Three features of this commentary, hinted at in the title of this review, call for particular comment. First, Cranfield's extraordinary analytic skill. To one who has waded through many discussions of difficult points in Romans, reading Cranfield is always refreshing, because of the painstaking clarity and honesty with which he sets out the alternative options which the text suggests or permits, and the ruthless logic with which he examines their strengths and weaknesses and reaches his conclusion—which is sometimes that the matter must be left undecided between two or more possibilities. Even where one disagrees with the results, one can always see more clearly just where the issues lie.[15] I think particularly of his discussion of 8: 28[16] (in which he understands 'all things' as the subject of 'work together'): his arguments for treating 5: 1, not 6: 1, as the start of the new section of the epistle:[17] and his masterly analysis of 11: 30f,[18] 14: 16,[19] and 15: 4, 7 and 9.[20]

Second, the sensitivity to the finer points of grammar, and their theological significance. It is good to have pointed out the significance of the presence of *te* in 1: 16,[21] of *to* in 9: 5,[22] and of the absence of *ho* in the same verse.[23] There is also a nice distinction between *gar* in its explanatory and confirmatory senses[24] (Cranfield never tires of pointing out the importance of Paul's connecting words, and the significance of the occasional sentence that is *not* connected to its predecessor): an interesting suggestion, on the basis of the aorist indicative active in 16: 12, that Persis may have already completed a significant amount of Christian work:[25] and countless other similar points. I particularly liked the footnote warning English and German readers not to assume that, just because 'so' in both languages could translate *hōste* in the sense of 'therefore', *hōste* could also carry the meaning of 'so' in the 'as . . . so . . .' sequence—all this by way of pointing out that 7: 1–3 is not an allegory but an argument.[26] With this kind of thing always present though never obtrusive, one feels one has learnt more from the commentary than just theology, though everything in the book is tied in to the central theological themes.

Third, godliness (I can think of no better word. 'Piety' sounds a bit wet, and 'devotion' suggests that the book is 'devotional' which, though heart-warming to the understanding reader, it is not). It is always apparent, though again never obtrusive, that Cranfield takes very seriously indeed the responsibility of the theological exegete towards the text he handles and towards the church he serves, as well as the responsibility to set before himself, as a member of that church, the many challenges and exhortations the text provides. His practical comments are always worth pondering[27] and his various remarks on prayer, though brief, are excellent.[28] Above all, his sense of awe and reverence before the wise, gracious and loving God of whom Paul speaks is reflected in his writings

[14] P. 869.

[15] Occasionally the method becomes too heavy: e.g. pp. 613-6, dealing with 12: 3, where we are invited to compare 'the combination of (i)(b)(β), (ii)(c) and (iii)(a)' with 'the combination of (i)(b)(β), (ii)(b) and (iii)(a)', and both against 'the combination of (i)(a)(β), (ii)(b) and (iii)(b). And Cranfield's clear and logical mind sometimes draws him into sentences where only the brave will follow without a tremor: e.g. (p. 239): 'Paul's meaning may then be understood to be, not that it was not through the instrumentality of the law but through that of the righteousness of faith that the promise was given, but that it was not through the instrumentality of the law but through that of the righteousness of faith that the promise was to be appropriated, or—to put it differently—that the promise was not given on the condition of its being merited by fulfilment of the law but simply on the basis of the righteousness of faith.'

[16] P. 425ff.

[17] P. 252ff.

[18] Pp. 582-6.

[19] Pp. 715ff.

[20] Pp. 735, 739f., 742: an example, this, of Cranfield's patient exegesis even at the stage when most commentators, with the end in sight, are skating quickly over complex issues.

[21] P. 91 (though it is odd to criticize RV here and not AV which is identical).

[22] P. 464.

[23] P. 469 n. 3.

[24] P. 582: though it seems very forced to take *gar* in 12: 3 (p. 611) as drawing out the implications of, rather than explaining the reason for, 12: 1–2.

[25] P. 793 n. 2.

[26] P. 335 n. 3.

[27] E.g. p. 610-11, re the last phrases of 12: 2.

[28] E.g. pp. 399f., 422, 777 n. 1.

throughout. It is hard to think that anyone could work humbly and attentively through this commentary and not be a better Christian for it: and it is not every work of massive NT scholarship of which that could be said.

Cranfield rightly refuses to treat his commentary as a theological treatise in which to argue a point of view. Nevertheless, a definite theological stance emerges: and it is so distinctive, and so important, that we must describe it a little and direct some questions towards it. The position can be illustrated in two typically Cranfieldian sentences, from p. 867:

> Because he kept his eyes so steadily fixed on Jesus, the author of Romans was able to hear and to comprehend the message proclaimed by the OT; and, because in his total commitment to Jesus as Saviour and Lord he never ceased to be seriously engaged with the OT scriptures, he perceived with amazing clarity of vision vast and splendid reaches of the truth of Christ which lie beyond the ken of all Marcionites and semi-, crypto-, and unwitting, Marcionites. Because he saw Christ steadily in the light of the OT—not abandoning the real Christ, who is the Christ of Israel, for any imaginary Christ more flattering to human self-importance—he did not refuse to grapple with the mystery of God's gracious election or fail to hold firmly to the truth of God's faithfulness—His faithfulness (which does not exclude, but includes, severity) to the Jewish people, all human unbelief and disobedience notwithstanding, His faithfulness to all mankind (Paul saw the Gentile mission foretold in the OT) and His faithfulness as the Creator of heaven and earth to His whole creation.

From these two sentences there emerges Cranfield's main theological contention. Against all suggestions that God has had two plans of salvation, that Jews were to obey the law but that, when they failed to do so, God made an easier way of justification (i.e. faith), or that Israel was to be got rid of to make way for the true people of God—against such suggestions, standard though many of them have been in NT scholarship (not to mention evangelicalism), Cranfield reasserts the Reformed position which often goes by default in these debates. The law is not abolished, but fulfilled: faith is not a work, but the surrender of man to the gospel in which all the 'work' is done for him:[29] Jesus Christ, by his obedience culminating in but not to be reduced to his death, has earned that righteousness which he now shares with his people. In the same way, Israel is not abolished: God still has purposes for the Jews (Romans 9–11 is no mere apocalyptic dream), purposes whose all-embracing end is mercy.[30] It is good to see Marcion, and his many modern followers, thus put in their place, though one could wish that Cranfield had attached names to the tantalizing descriptions in the quotation above! They have for too long had the field of Pauline studies all to themselves, with the only debate being whether Paul was a Lutheran or a Rabbi. And at virtually no point can Cranfield be accused of reaching his conclusions by special pleading. He has outgunned his opponents by good old-fashioned exegesis.

Yet there remain questions. Without any desire at all to return to Marcionism in any of its forms, it may be suggested that the stress on the continuity of the purposes of God (it is important to see the argument against Marcionism and that against anti-Semitism, the arguments that the law is not abolished and that Israel is not 'replaced by the church', as essentially the same point), right and proper though we believe it to be not least as a correction of current imbalance, needs in turn to be balanced by the emphasis on the *dis*continuity between BC and AD, for which Cranfield scarcely allows at all. This discontinuity is not a Marcionite invention, nor need it be understood in a Marcionite fashion. It is there in Paul, particularly in Galatians, at which Cranfield is clearly uncomfortable:[31] we surely should not play Romans and Galatians off against each other, but look for a larger theological framework within which both will be at home. The Lutherans have traditionally started from Galatians and ignored (e.g.) Romans 3: 31: Cranfield begins from Romans and makes heavy weather of Gal. 3, where Paul explicitly says that the law (while no doubt retaining a permanent validity in the sense of Gal. 5: 14: this is most important) held nevertheless a *temporary* function in the over-arching purposes of God, which function ceases when the Messiah comes. Bound up with this is of course the exegesis of Romans 10: 4, particularly the meaning of *telos*. Here it may be asked whether the meanings of 'goal, fulfilment' (which Cranfield supports) and 'termination' (which he rejects) are necessarily mutually exclusive. If I travel by train from Edinburgh to King's Cross, the latter station is surely the goal, fulfilment *and* termination of the journey. Until a solution is found in which the temporary purpose of the law, and its abolition in

[29] NB. p. 89f., where this is set out very clearly.

[30] The obvious Barthian overtones of this—to which we will return—are symptomatic of Cranfield's deep indebtedness to Barth. This is almost always a great gain (e.g. p. 371ff., re 8: 1–11), but very occasionally leads the exegesis into unusual conclusions, e.g. p. 754f. on 15: 15f.

[31] E.g. pp. 522 n. 2, 858 point (2).

that sense by Christ, can be explained in a non-Marcionite sense (i.e. within a wider view of the single and unchanging purpose of God), one of the most pressing of all Pauline problems remains on the agenda.

This problem can also be expressed as follows. Granted that Marcionism presents an odd picture of God, setting out on an impossible plan and changing his mind half way, is it not equally odd to think of God promulgating a law with the intention of one man, the Messiah, eventually coming to keep it and to earn righteousness for himself[32] and for his people, but equally with the intention that his people should in the meantime understand the law quite differently, namely, as something to provoke not works but faith? In other words, does not Cranfield's theology[33] *either* make Christ himself a legalist (i.e. one who misunderstood the law's purpose, wrongly imagining it to be a means of acquiring merit or 'righteousness' by works), *or* imply that, when the Jews treated the law as a legalist's charter (assuming for the moment that they did) they were not misunderstanding it at all, but merely doing with it what God intended the Messiah to do? I suspect that this view, like the one it opposes, has not quite shaken itself free from an ethical meaning of 'righteousness' and fully grasped the forensic nature of the word: though to take up that question would require several more articles at least as long as this one.[34] (To avoid misunderstanding, I hasten to add that Paul would have dismissed any suggestion that Jesus Christ *dis*obeyed the law—though some, in their eagerness to save the Messiah from legalism, have suggested this.)[35]

Another aspect of the same problem is the use made by Cranfield of the *theologia crucis*. Granted his splendid treatment of the doctrine of the atonement, in which he does not shrink from the always unpopular conclusion that God 'purposed to direct against his own very Self in the person of His Son the full weight of that righteous wrath which [sinful men] deserved',[36] it is not clear that he has seen (as the Germans, particularly Käsemann, see so clearly) the implications of the cross for the place of Israel and the law in the purposes of God.

[32] This is odd in itself: why should the Messiah, if (as Cranfield believes) he is fully divine, need to *earn* anything for himself? Is he not already God's beloved Son? Yet Cranfield seems to assert that his works do earn something for himself as well as for others: see the references in the next note.

[33] See e.g., pp. 240, 290f., 505 (though see n. 1 there), 522.

[34] For similar hints towards a solution, see G. B. Caird's review of E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, in *JTS* n.s. 29, 1978, pp. 540ff.

[35] Cf., e.g., A. T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology*, London, 1974, p. 50f.

[36] P. 217: cf. pp. 647f., 827ff.

(A further consequence is that he is unable to attack the Lutherans here with the corresponding, and equally Pauline, *theologia resurrectionis*, which does not reverse the verdict of the cross so much as break out into newness of life beyond it. This, I believe, points the way to the resolution of some of the issues mentioned above.) As we need to state the abolition of the law without Marcionism, so we need to state the *theologia crucis*, and its implications for Israel, without anti-Semitism. In other words, Cranfield's perfectly valid points need to be set in a framework which will include the strengths of the opposing case as well.

The law is also central in the issue which many will regard as the most controversial in the whole commentary, namely, Cranfield's powerful support for the 'minority' position that sees in Rom. 7: 13–25 a description of (one aspect at least of) normal Christian experience. As usual, Cranfield has unerringly put his finger on important weaknesses in the opposing majority view (which, contrary to usual suppositions, is not so much that the passage describes how Paul remembers feeling before his conversion, but rather that it is how Paul, the Christian, analyses what in fact had been the case, theologically, about his pre-Christian life). In particular, he exposes the shallow view of the Christian life, and of sin and ethics, that presumes to have left behind a state in which the believer says 'the evil I would not, that I do'.[37] He is right to see, behind the normal (existentialist) view, the same incipient Marcionism which he attacks elsewhere. But I am not quite convinced. It seems to me that Cranfield has not fully allowed for the fact that the passage is not first and foremost describing anyone's experience (though no doubt, in some sense at least, it does that even if incidentally): the passage is basically about the law, and its conclusion is that the law is God's law, holy and just and good, but at the same time impotent to rescue man from the plight described. This does not settle the burning issue, since it could still be the Christian who realizes that the law by itself could not save him, but only (8: 1–11) the law fulfilled by the Spirit. It is possible, however, to maintain on the one hand that Paul would have agreed with Cranfield's view of the Christian life as a struggle for obedience in which one is always conscious of indwelling sin, while asserting on the other hand that this does not happen to be what he is talking about here. While, therefore, I prefer Cranfield's interpretation to any others I have read—and particularly to the standard Kümmel-Bultmann-

[37] Cf. pp. 342ff., 365ff.

Käsemann line—I cannot help feeling that the last word has not been said on the subject.

Finally, the vexed question of Romans 9–11. One cannot but applaud Cranfield's determination to wrestle seriously throughout with this notorious passage, and there are several discussions to which I shall often return for illumination. But I do not feel he has done full justice either to the section itself, or to its integration within the whole epistle (though his exposition of the latter point is better than most). It seems to me that 9–11 is not merely a discussion that Paul cannot omit without loss of integrity,[38] but a vital part of the *same* argument that has occupied him in the first eight chapters. Though Cranfield suggests that this may be so,[39] he does not develop the point: and, when it comes to the connection between 9–11 and 12ff., he notices the link of 'mercies of God' in 12: 1 with 9–11 rather than with 1–8 specifically and yet seems to play it down.[40] For the detail, he appears to regard the questions of election and predestination, rather than the issue of God's purposes for the Jews, as the main problem in these chapters: and this, I believe, starts off a false (though well-trodden) trail which results in distortion at several points. Thus, despite the clear soteriological language used in connection with predestination in ch. 9 (cf. 'sonship' and 'glory', coming so soon after ch. 8), he takes the old line that predestination is not here to salvation but to a place in God's purposes. Again, despite Paul's emphasis on the unity of Jew and Gentile in 10: 9ff., he seems to regard this as incidental to the real point of the passage, which he takes to be the proof of the Jews' responsibility. This in turn leads to the idea that 10: 14ff. is all about the Jews', not the Gentiles', hearing and obeying (or not) of the gospel. Despite p. 533, it is surely more natural to identify the subject of 'call' in v. 14 with that of the same verb in the previous verse—i.e. to see it as the worldwide company of (potential) believers, not merely Jews. To maintain that in vv. 18–19 Paul was proving that the Jews must have heard the gospel by saying that the Gentiles had heard it[41] is surely much more awkward than making Paul's basic point, as in 9: 30ff. where this section begins, the inclusion of Gentiles within the people of God. Cranfield's very proper concern to counter any suggestion that Paul had fallen into anti-Semitism has, I believe, led him astray in a good cause, a cause moreover which Paul himself champions fully in ch. 11. By that stage, though, Cranfield is on course for a Barthian solution, which is duly propounded: though universalism is not required by ch. 11 (since Paul 'may actually in this context only have meant that God has shut in the various groups he has mentioned as wholes'),[42] it is preferable, he thinks, to refrain *both* from seeking to establish the doctrine on the basis of this or other possible texts *and* 'to refrain from treating the solemn and urgent warnings, of which the NT assuredly contains an abundance, as clear warrant for confidently proclaiming the certainty of the final exclusion of some from the embrace of God's mercy'. This is a typically cautious solution (even non-universalists would hardly want to make 'confident proclamations' about Hell), but the whole discussion leaves one with the impression that Cranfield would like to be a universalist even though he realizes that the text of scripture not only does not support the doctrine but actually tends on occasion, at least *prima facie*, to oppose it. Though I do not enjoy this debate at all, I have argued against such a position elsewhere.[43]

My underlying impression throughout the discussion of chs. 9–11 is that, though there are undoubtedly nettles to be grasped, the issues are clarified by the recognition that Paul has indeed *in some senses* transferred the privileges of Israel to the Christian (Jew-plus-Gentile) church: that this is precisely the point which raises the question of God's righteousness not only in ch. 9 but also in 1: 16 f. and 3: 21 ff.: that Paul's answer to the problem is given in terms of the OT prophecies which warned Israel that God would (righteously) both punish her and call Gentiles to join a remnant of Jews as his true people, the family of Abraham:[44] and that, though 11: 1 ff. shows Paul's awareness of a potential anti-Semitism at this point, justified not least by the history of exegesis, a deeper understanding of God's purposes for his people makes such an attitude impossible. In short, as with the law, I believe that within the scheme of the continuity of the people of God, which Cranfield is absolutely right to stress against all Marcionism and anti-Semitism, there must be included a proper element of discontinuity, though this must be formulated in a very different way than has usually been imagined.

I would like to emphasize in conclusion that these comments are in no way intended to detract

[38] See pp. 446ff.
[39] On p. 445f.
[40] P. 595f.
[41] Pp. 537f., 539.
[42] P. 588.
[43] Cf. *Themelios* 4.2, January 1979, pp. 54-8, and other references in the first footnote of that article.
[44] Cf., e.g., the way in which the OT background to Rom. 9: 21 (the potter and the clay) is set in the context of God's strange ways (not with men in general but) with *Israel*.

from the deliberately high praise given above. Cranfield's theological judgments are a breath of fresh air and an incentive to hard work and further debate, and it is towards that task, not to destroy but to fulfil his true intentions, that my questions are directed. This is a superb commentary, a masterpiece of Christian scholarship: to presume even to criticize it makes me feel uncomfortably like the thistle challenging the cedar. Before I am trampled down for my impudence, let me conclude with a bold assertion and prediction: this book is the finest work on Romans to appear in English this century, and has a good chance of remaining at the top of the list for several decades to come.