



CHARLES CRANFIELD

# Charles Ernest Burland Cranfield 1915–2015

CHARLES CRANFIELD WILL BE FOREVER ASSOCIATED with the Department of Theology in the University of Durham, where he taught for thirty years (1950–80), first as Lecturer (1950–62) joining a group of excellent academics appointed by Arthur Michael Ramsey, who were crucial to the revival of theological studies in the post-war period. He was promoted to Senior Lecturer (1962–6), Reader (1966–78) and Professor (1978–80). Since the fashion was then to have only one ‘Professor’ in each subject (in this case Kingsley Barrett) Charles’s was a ‘personal chair’.<sup>1</sup> Although their personal relationship was not the warmest, the individual contributions of Cranfield and Barrett, particularly in research and publications, gave the Durham Department its reputation as one of the European leaders in New Testament study and research.

## I

Charles was born in North London on 13 September 1915. His father, Charles Ernest Cranfield, was, between 1929 and 1945, Town Clerk of the County Borough of West Ham, where he served during a very busy period, including a great deal of all-night work during air raids. He was duly awarded an OBE for his services. He was a devout Methodist and a local preacher for many years. Charles’s mother, Beatrice Mary Tubbs, had

<sup>1</sup>On Barrett see J. D. G. Dunn, ‘Charles Kingsley Barrett 1917–2011’, *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, XII (1913), 3–21.

studied at the Slade School of Art. She had a coveted life ticket to admit her to the National Gallery to copy pictures, and she used to take Charles as a small boy on her sessions there. His only sister was ten years older than him, and they had little in common. His childhood, then, was somewhat solitary and from quite a young age he developed one of his life-long recreations of walking—uphill whenever possible.

Charles's horizons widened when he went as a day boy to Mill Hill School (Congregational), where he had an outstanding master in the Sixth Form—Alan D. Whitehorn—to whom he owed an enormous debt, as he himself gladly affirmed. From there he went with a scholarship to Jesus College, Cambridge, where he was awarded a First in Classics (1933–6), and then to Wesley House where he attained a First in Theology (1936–9). It was at Cambridge that he made the acquaintance of Franz Hildebrandt, who was formerly Martin Niemöller's assistant at Berlin-Dahlem. He was active in the Student Christian Movement and was well aware of the importance of the World Student Christian Federation in such difficult times. He joined the Cambridge University Socialist Club and the Labour Party, which he continued to support for most of his life, though not uncritically. Throughout his life he remained both remarkably well informed and acutely sensitive to political issues, as his Durham students were to learn.<sup>2</sup> There was no Prime Minister nor a government in office but received either warm support, a pertinent enquiry, or constructive criticism of policy and action from 1938 onwards. Charles's first recorded political letter was addressed to Churchill (13 September 1938) when the latter was MP for the constituency in which Charles's parents then lived.

In 1939 he went to Basel, where he planned to study under Karl Barth, with whom he had some preliminary meetings; but the outbreak of war in September 1939 obliged him to return home after only three months and before his studies had formally started. Charles remained a steady though not entirely uncritical Barthian thereafter, sometimes sending his own research students to study with 'the old man of Basel' as part of their course.<sup>3</sup> One talent he certainly had in common with Barth was the ability to move from producing the weightiest scholarship, for which he was so

<sup>2</sup> His 'A Christian's political responsibility according to the New Testament' was first published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 15 (1962), 176–92, reprinted in C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Service of God* (London, 1965), pp. 49–66, and in C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Bible and the Christian Life* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 48–68.

<sup>3</sup> The three books Charles recommended to those who needed an introduction to Barth were *Church and State* (London, 1939); *Against the Stream* (London, 1954); and *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God* (London, 1938).

formidably equipped, to writing and delivering sermons informed indeed by that scholarship, but in all their clarity making demands on the attention and consequent action of those who heard him.<sup>4</sup> Charles's ability to preach as he did was honed both in the congregations in which he served and in the harrowing circumstances of war service.

Back in England, he carried out pastoral duties as a Probationer in the Methodist Church into which he was ordained in 1941, in Leeds, followed by a further spell of pastoral work as minister in Shoeburyness, Essex. Believing that he would be better able to communicate with his congregations if he too experienced the war as a member of the forces, he volunteered as an army chaplain in 1942. Never a pacifist, despite his experience of the war, he served to the limits in his support of resistance to the political evils of Europe at this time, yet was generally concerned about the misuse of force, not least by successive British governments. It was consistent that he was also opposed to capital punishment, and to cruelty and degradation of all kinds, of human and non-human creation alike.<sup>5</sup>

## II

Attached initially to the 33rd Guards Brigade, Charles was posted to North Africa, being torpedoed and rescued by a destroyer on the way. There he was attached to the 99th General Hospital and, during his spare time, he took charge of a correspondence course in Theology for candidates for the Methodist Ministry in the British North Africa Force (BNAF). He asked for, and was granted, permission (in his spare time, but with the support of the Assistant Chaplain General) to preach and to carry out pastoral work with Germans in Prisoner of War (POW) camps around Algiers, including one German Field Hospital for severely wounded men. Many of the prisoners were from the armies which had been defeated in the desert war, a war regarded as undertaken honourably so far as that was possible. All were treated with courtesy. He thus furthered his study of German which he had begun in Basel, and held

<sup>4</sup>An example here is 'Divine and human action: the biblical concept of worship', first published in *Interpretation*, 12 (1958), 387-98; then in Cranfield, *The Service of God*, pp. 9-33, and Cranfield, *The Bible and Christian Life: a Collection of Essays*, pp. 127-43—itself a very rare instance of a theologian writing about a concept so fundamental as 'worship'.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, C. E. B. Cranfield, 'Some observations on Romans 8.9-11', in R. J. Banks (ed.), *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L. L. Morris on his 60th Birthday* (Exeter, 1974), pp. 224-30.

services in German in various camps and compounds (over thirty during the rest of 1943). Among other activities, he was able to take walks in the hills with the captured German General, Johann Cramer, who gave Charles considerable understanding of the culture of at least one senior Wehrmacht officer. In the summer of 1944 he was posted to Italy, where he was able at last to get into an operational unit, the 51st Battalion Royal Tank Regiment, and was in action at Viterbo during the last weeks of the fighting. He was remembered for praying before battle for the British soldiers and for the men against whom they would be fighting. Some relief was provided by his participation in two refresher courses for Methodist Chaplains at Assisi.

When the war ended, the Deputy Chaplain-General—who was aware of his work in North Africa—gave him a general responsibility to work with the Protestant German POWs. He was sent to Naples to consult with Martin Niemöller, who had just been released from a concentration camp and with whom he had a number of meetings. He felt that the most pressing need was to organise Protestant Chaplaincy services among the German POWs, and worked for the repatriation of some chaplains (a similar appointment was made for the organisation of like services for the Roman Catholics). It was necessary in the first place to identify the chaplains, many of whom had been enlisted and served as combatants. There was also the task of distinguishing between the pro-Nazi German Church pastors, who could not be trusted, and those who were part of the Confessing Church. He then arranged, as far as he could, for some of the Confessing Church pastors to be distributed so far as possible among the very numerous camps of Surrendered Enemy Personnel, and for some to be sent to Germany, where their services were greatly needed. Some of these pastors became life-long friends.

In an area north of Rimini, Charles was responsible to the British HQ. He was attached to the 21st Tank Brigade, coping with Surrendered Enemy Personnel, so called because of the shortage of resources to treat them as POWs. Liaison with the US 3rd Army and visits to Munich also made possible contact with Bishop Wurm (Württemberg Landeskirche and President of the Protestant Church in Germany), and Bishop Meiser of the Bavarian Landeskirche.

From December 1945, when he was posted back to England, until his demobilisation in September 1946 he did similar work among German POWs in England, for the latter part of this time being (the first) Staff Chaplain to the Directorate of Prisoners of War, working from the War Office. He was responsible for organising the distribution of pastors

through English and Welsh POW camps, in cooperation with YMCA Prisoners' Aid led by Swedish Pastor Birger Forell and Dr Hirschwald (a German refugee ordained as a Congregational minister), and the British Council of Churches. He also organised a circulating library of theological and pastoral books for the pastors, and made it possible for them to take part in week-long visits with the five theological colleges in Cambridge. When he was demobilised, he was asked by George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, to continue his work with POWs for another year (paid by the Church of England), but he was weary of administration and felt that the task of organising care for the POWs had been largely completed. Longing to engage in the pastoral work for which he had been ordained, he declined the invitation.

### III

Charles was then appointed as Methodist Minister to Cleethorpes in Lincolnshire, with charge of two smaller churches (1946–50), with whom he established life-long friendships. As well as the pastoral work he was able to do some study, and began to write a small commentary on 1 Peter for the SCM Press (which was later reprinted with the inclusion of 2 Peter and James). This was a time of relative tranquility and he enjoyed the pastoral work, though there were, perhaps inevitably, tensions. Such was the case of the unrationed eggs! Early in his ministry, a housekeeper had put a supply of eggs (apart from his ration) in his larder. He refused to accept them: 'I have always hitherto lived, and intend to continue to live, strictly within the limits of my rations in respect of rationed goods,' he wrote. The housekeeper left of her own volition, much to Charles's relief, and thereafter he looked after himself, except when his parents lived with him.

His pastoral work was enriched and supported by a continuing awareness of, and interest in, the post-war world at large. He encouraged his congregations to write letters and send food parcels to the hungry countries of Europe, particularly Germany, where poverty and shortage of food were acute. He loved work which involved young people, including a Bible Study Group, and was still in touch with a few of the members of these churches when he died. In his spare time, he completed the work on 1 Peter. He welcomed the invitation to apply for a Lectureship at Durham University, was appointed, and moved there in September 1950.

He was now in an ideal situation: he loved the teaching and the chance to study, while there was also space for preaching in the Methodist (and other) churches on Sundays, and also for the political activity which he came to believe was part of every Christian's responsibility.

In 1953 Charles married Ruth Bole, an Irish Girtonian, then working in Durham University Library, and they moved into a house on which he had set his heart in spite of its being earmarked for compulsory purchase for development by the council. When the forecast fate of demolition to make way for the new road was at last realised, after nine happy years there, Charles and Ruth moved to Western Hill (Albert Street), where they lived for more than sixty years. Charles was pleased to be at the top of the hill; always, when he saw a hill, he wanted to climb it! With his first-hand experience of the miseries of prisoners, Charles encouraged Ruth to become involved with work in the local prison (visible from that first house). She became a prison visitor, then, as a member of the Durham Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society (later NEPACS—North Eastern Prison After Care Society),<sup>6</sup> she became involved in establishing a Visitors' Centre for the comfort of families and friends visiting inmates of Durham prison who until then had to wait outside the prison, whatever the weather, before their visits. Charles himself could be found on the morning of a prisoner's release offering him a cup of tea and practical assistance.<sup>7</sup>

This centre proved its worth and later moved into prison-owned premises. Similar centres, facilitated by NEPACS, are now provided at seven prisons in Durham and Northumberland. Charles also encouraged his wife to accept an invitation to become a magistrate, which led to more challenging but immensely fulfilling work. In the same way, when the chance to teach a little sixth form history at the girls' high school was offered to Ruth (by someone who 'couldn't stand it a minute longer'), Charles was very positive and encouraged her in the gradual growth of the job to about thirty hours. Ruth cites this as an example of a very generous husband, who wanted to encourage his wife to find satisfaction in the use of her own gifts in constructive activity, even if it meant that sometimes he had to get his own meals. Twin daughters, Mary Monica and Elisabeth Faith, had now arrived (born in 1962), and Charles became a proud and loving father.

<sup>6</sup>R. Cranfield, *The Story of NEPACS: Care for Prisoners and their Families in the North East 1882–2007* (NEPACS, 2010).

<sup>7</sup>On care for discharged prisoners, see 'Diakonia', in Cranfield, *The Service of God*, pp. 23–33, reprinted in C. E. B. Cranfield, *If God be for Us* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 97–111.

In 1954 Charles resolved a question which had long haunted him. Since his undergraduate days he had been drawn towards the theology of Karl Barth and the Reformed tradition, notably the work of John Calvin. He had grown more critical of the implicit Arminianism of Methodism and its teaching on 'Christian perfection'. While still a student at Wesley House, Cambridge, he had indicated to the Principal, Dr R. Newton Flew, that he was uncomfortable with these features of Methodist doctrine, and that he was more and more drawn towards Reformed theology, influenced by Calvin, Barth and others. Understandably, however, he had been reluctant to break with the church of his family and the denomination which had nurtured him and supported his ministry as a chaplain during the war and its aftermath, and to which he confessed to be greatly indebted. And the war, of course, had taken priority over the discomfort of his situation, though it was never far from his mind. So it was only in 1954 that he finally realised he was not being as honest as he ought to be and that he owed it to the Methodist Church, and to the students he was teaching, as also to his own integrity, to make a decision at last, a painful decision for him, to move to the Presbyterian Church of England (P. C. of E.).

It was unfortunate that, unknown to him, the P. C. of E. was just about to make an important change to its Statement of Faith, and Charles found himself almost at once joining in a protest movement in the North-East. This unfortunate timing troubled him and he greatly regretted the impression that he had joined the P. C. of E. as a trouble-maker. The group met in Charles and Ruth's house and produced two pamphlets, *On the Statement of the Christian Faith*, which were sent to all P. C. of E. Ministers and Presbytery Elders. Some years later, in 1972, the P. C. of E. and the Churches of Christ joined in union with the Congregational Church to make the United Reformed Church. Some, including Charles, would have favoured an alliance or a union with the Church of Scotland, but they were reassured by the context within the Reformed Churches in Europe.

#### IV

Before turning specifically to Charles's academic achievements, it is important to set these in the context of his strong social and political commitments, not least because Charles himself would have seen them as a unity, his interpretation of Scripture helping to generate these self-same commitments. Thus his acumen as a theologian of the Reformed tradition came to be invaluable in drawing attention to what was happening

worldwide in international affairs, not least in the troubled areas of Africa. For instance, in a letter to the *British Weekly* (8 November 1956) he rightly deplored the British contribution to the Suez Crisis, ‘a morally unjustified war of aggression’, in which indeed human lives were likely to be sacrificed irresponsibly by ‘a morally blinded government’. His MP, Charles Grey, the Prime Minister, *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* newspapers all received, at the initiative of Charles, a letter from the academic staff of Durham and three other universities deploring government policy towards Egypt, and as a Presbyterian minister he was one of those who demanded immediate compliance with the UN General Assembly’s request for an immediate ceasefire.

Another major and long-standing concern was the state of affairs in South Africa. He was deeply involved in a protest against South Africa’s treatment of the Bantu population and was a founder member of the Durham Africa Council (of which Ruth was a long-time secretary) which brought speakers such as the Revd Michael Scott and Trevor Huddleston CR to Durham to speak about events in South Africa. Many of them stayed with the Cranfields. Charles himself organised a noteworthy meeting of Durham University’s academic staff to raise the issue of the university’s banking with Barclays Bank, which had major investments in South Africa’s economy. The Bantu Education Acts which transferred education to the Department of Native Affairs were clearly an instrument of apartheid, and spelt death to Mission Schools and to Teacher Education. On 6 May 1960, Charles and the Revd A. David Lewis made an outstanding attempt at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England to pass a resolution requiring the members of all related churches to openly oppose ‘the evil policy of apartheid together with all its attendant injustices and brutalities’. The Assembly passed a watered-down resolution, and it was to be a long haul indeed before things changed.<sup>8</sup>

During the war, Charles resisted nationalism, treating those whom he encountered as POWs with courtesy. In action, when he was praying with soldiers as they went into battle, he always included a prayer for the men

<sup>8</sup> See the Minutes of the Assembly for 6 May 1960, on Inter-Church Relations (314–15), following resolutions on the Christian approach to the Jews. While the first to admit shame for terrible wrongs done by Christians to Jews, it was for him (as for many others) a tragedy that Jewish-Palestinian relations developed as they did. He summoned Jews to be ‘perceptive, penetrating critics of the Church and of individual Christians’, while each should recall the other to the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. See his ‘Light from St Paul on Christian-Jewish relations’, in Cranfield, *The Bible and the Christian Life*, pp. 14–47.

against whom they would be fighting, and there were no complaints. Some of those whom he met as German Chaplains in captivity became personal friends after the war, and many years later one of his students in Durham University married the daughter of one of them. In the post-war years, Charles worked for reconciliation in this country: he helped to foster relations between POWs and people in the English churches; and, as already mentioned, when he went as minister to Cleethorpes he encouraged the members of his congregations to send food parcels to Germany and other stricken European countries.

Many other examples could be cited, but not least of Charles's problems came to be that of gaining insight into what was happening, given changing standards of newspaper reporting and of the media as time went on. His tactic changed. Thus on 15 July 2003 he sent a letter to ten correspondents in the USA on the subject of 'the holding of fellow human beings in Guantanamo Bay (and perhaps some other places?) outside the protection of the Geneva Convention, international law and also U.S. law'. He wrote with all his experience as a Chaplain in the Second World War, and of the extreme difficulty of dealing with those who had been indoctrinated in the Nazi youth movement. He wrote acknowledging that of course there were great differences between most German POWs and those held at Guantanamo Bay, but was convinced that there was a very great deal of great importance which the US authorities could learn from the experience of the 1940s, 'which might save them from making terrible mistakes with long-lasting bad effects'. It was perhaps fortunate that he may not have been fully acquainted with the horrors of 'enhanced interrogation techniques' in his last frail years, but there is no question of how he would have evaluated what had been done in the name precisely of those who had fought so bravely against the worst excesses of governments in European mid-century and beyond.

## V

What was in many ways a tranquil academic and domestic life was undoubtedly also one not merely alert to the world as it was beyond university, church and home,<sup>9</sup> but also one in which Charles' academic work

<sup>9</sup>See his two essays 'Diakonia in the New Testament' and, as a criterion for the ecumenical movement, 'New church constitutions and Diakonia' (Cranfield, *The Bible and Christian Life*, pp. 69–87 and 88–93).

fired the sermons which he delivered in all the austerity of a Geneva gown, marking him as a servant of God, one of whose tasks was to help congregations to pray intelligently, and an analogous demand was being made of his students, though they may not have been conscious of it at the time. Most of them lacked the preparation for theological study of those who either had schooling like his at Mill Hill, or who had a prior degree such as Classics in a discipline which would give them the exacting standards by which to engage with the complexities of a collection of texts such as the New Testament. While a specialist in Hebrew Scripture might well have a first degree in Oriental Studies, Charles was able to draw on the Greek writers from Homer to Thucydides, as well as Patristic writers, and the work of theologians across the centuries—whatever the language—up to the present day, and including significant figures such as Barth and also Congregationalism's greatest theologian, P. T. Forsyth. Such a range was less and less true of subsequent generations of New Testament specialists, as resources for long periods of preparation, such as Charles had gratefully enjoyed, declined, as also periods of vacation with opportunities for writing up sustained research. In his case it had made wide reading across a huge spectrum possible, including deep engagement with commentaries on Paul's letter to the Romans from Chrysostom to Barth. In addition, increasing class sizes and administration were all to have an effect on what could (and can) be achieved in the generations since he began in Durham, though it would be years before this became apparent. In any event, in Charles's day, whether in a lecture group or in the privileged personal tutorial group, students could be in no doubt that their teacher was deeply engaged with the text, its meaning and significance. His patience as a teacher, and the hospitality which he and Ruth extended to students from as far away as Sierra Leone (Fourah Bay College then being affiliated to Durham University), gave them long and much-valued friendships, with Charles's letters carefully kept life-long. Some of Charles's former students, including one of the very first group, were at his funeral: among their number was one of his godsons, the son of an early student from Sierra Leone.

The thirty years in the university were rewarding. Charles loved the academic work. The academic term was devoted to teaching, university activities and entertaining students, and the vacations to reading related to his own studies, writing and sometimes entertaining visitors from overseas. In writing, he was punctilious, liable to spend a whole day on one sentence. He acknowledged the need for holidays, but quite often did not come on the longer ones, coveting the time for his writing. Then, just

before the start of term, he would go off on his own, usually pony-trekking in the Borders. He loved animals, especially cats and horses. The Cranfields never owned a cat, because of his fear that it would run out into the road and be killed.

Charles was known in Durham as a patient and thorough—if not always scintillating—lecturer. His deep concern to probe to the very heart of the text, and his careful attention to all relevant details, could try the patience of the less studious. But there was never any doubt that one was in the presence of a man who cared deeply about the actual content and personal meaning of the text and about the importance of exact, clear-thinking scholarship upon it. These are qualities which shine out of his published work. He was not worried about rank and distinction, but was quietly encouraged by the recognition embodied in the promotions through Senior Lectureship and Readership to a personal chair, by the award of a DD by Aberdeen University (1980), by the invitation to become a Fellow of the British Academy (FBA, 1982) and by the award of the Academy's Burkitt Medal (1989). The citation referred to his teaching as 'unequalled in its rigour, perceptiveness and profundity'.

His first book, on *I Peter* (London, 1950), was followed by a short commentary on *I and II Peter* (London, 1960). He is best known, however, for two masterpiece commentaries: on *The Gospel According to St Mark*, in the Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary series (1959 and many subsequent impressions); and his two-volume International Critical Commentary (ICC), *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh, 1975, 1978 and many subsequent impressions). Cranfield was subsequently appointed as the New Testament editor for what was a new series of the famous ICC, then published by the Scottish house of T. & T. Clark in Edinburgh. One surmises both that his embrace of a moderate Reformed stance had endeared him to their board, and the fact that he had already accepted the commitment to write on Paul's Epistle to the Romans for the series, provided strong motivation for him to take on the onerous task of editing such a distinguished series. He only relinquished the editorship in 2005, his ninetieth year, though he had for some time shared the duties with others.

On Mark and in the editing of the ICC on Matthew (written by W. D. Davies and Dale Allison),<sup>10</sup> Cranfield regularly took what would now be seen as a 'conservative' line: though clearly not a fundamentalist

<sup>10</sup>W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St Matthew in Three Volumes* (London, 2004).

or ‘inerrantist’, he did not usually like to rule out the possibility that Jesus really did say and do more or less what the Gospels indicated. Indeed, it seemed to him ‘to require quite extraordinary resources of credulity to believe that the disciples did not remember as long as they lived with some measure of accuracy the most stirring events of their lives’.<sup>11</sup> There are a few endnotes in Davies and Allison which say, perhaps through clenched teeth, that ‘the editor has asked us to say’ something which the authors had not wanted to say, offering a different, and usually more conservative, point of view. But for many starting Gospel study, ‘Cranfield St Mark’ (which sounded like a parish church in some idyllic rural setting) was the sigh-of-relief alternative to the arid scepticism of D. E. Nineham’s Pelican commentary.<sup>12</sup> Gospel scholarship, and for that matter Historical Jesus scholarship, has moved on a long way since the 1950s. But Cranfield’s patient scholarship was solid, and, though now somewhat of a period piece, the book retains his characteristic combination of reverence for the gospel and its subject matter and his determination to look patiently and carefully at every syllable of the text.

The magisterial two-volume commentary on Romans bears all the marks of thorough and indeed prayerful study. In the ‘Laureation’ address for his Aberdeen DD, Professor Howard Marshall described the work as ‘a masterly exposition which concentrates on examining in detail what Paul said rather than discussing *ad nauseam* what modern scholars have said about him’. It does its job so well that as a lecturer on Romans it left him wondering what else to say, and he finds himself ‘concurring with the commentator’s wise judgment on point after point’.<sup>13</sup> As one fellow commentator (N. T. Wright, a former Bishop of Durham) notes, ‘The remarkable thing about this commentary is that, even though I now disagree with Cranfield on several of the major interpretative issues, his steady and persistent laying out and weighing of all the exegetical options remains a model of “how to do it”. You always know, with Cranfield, that if you are going to take a different line you will need to get up very early in the morning and hold your nerve through some highly complex discussions of texts and theological issues.’<sup>14</sup> A *Vorarbeit* of the commentary on

<sup>11</sup> See the note in Cranfield, *The Bible and Christian Life*, p. 122.

<sup>12</sup> D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (Harmondsworth, 1969).

<sup>13</sup> Professor Howard Marshall, Laureation address for Charles Cranfield, *Aberdeen University Review*, 49 (1981–2), 44–5.

<sup>14</sup> N. T. Wright, ‘The Reverend Professor Charles E. B. Cranfield (1915–2015)’, *Fulcrum*, 5 March 2015. Available at <<https://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/articles/the-reverend-professor-charles-e-b-cranfield-1915-2015/>> (accessed 31 March 2016).

chapters 12 and 13 had appeared in 1965 as a *Scottish Journal of Theology* occasional paper, and *Romans: a Shorter Commentary* followed his retirement, in 1985 (Edinburgh). Translations into Portuguese, Spanish and Korean ensued.

Cranfield had the misfortune, if that is the appropriate term, to be completing his *Romans* just when what some call the ‘Sanders revolution’ was sweeping through Pauline studies, with E. P. Sanders’s *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London, 1977) drawing together many earlier protests against a basically Lutheran reading of Paul, and generating the so-called ‘new perspective on Paul’ which, and debating which, captivated many of the generation following Cranfield. The ‘new perspective’ (or better, ‘new perspectives’) was at one level, basically, a retrieval of a Reformed emphasis on the goodness and God-giveness of Israel and the Torah, as opposed to what Cranfield himself saw as the semi-Marcionite understanding of many Germans (as also of his colleague Barrett). There are thus convergences between him and the ‘new perspective’ which transcend any easy opposition. Nevertheless, to take two obvious examples, Cranfield argued stoutly for the Reformation reading of *dikaio syne theou*, not as ‘God’s (own) righteousness’, but as the ‘righteousness (which comes as a gift) from God’ through the gospel. He also argued that Romans 7.7–25 should be taken as a description of ‘the normal Christian life’, a view which he recalled had played a part in his switching from Methodism to Presbyterianism. Both of these views are now minority positions in New Testament scholarship. Some indeed have regarded his proposal of an understanding of Romans 9–11, which he himself saw as leaning heavily on Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, 1961), as a substantial distortion of what Paul was actually saying.

After his retirement, life was not so very different. He continued to write, notably the shorter commentary on *Romans*. 1985 also saw published a collection of his essays, *The Bible and Christian Life*, and a collection of his sermons, *If God Be For Us*. More widely influential was his study of *The Apostles’ Creed: a Faith to Live By* (Edinburgh, 1993), in which he drew heavily on Scripture to explain the Creed and stressed the importance of faith being both individual and collective. His final volume, published when he was already eighty-three, *On Romans and Other New Testament Essays* (Edinburgh, 1998), was one which expressed his character and range of interests most fully, as he engaged in vigorous debate on the then currently controversial issues, ‘works of the law’ in the Epistle to the Romans, and the meaning of the Greek phrase *pistis Christou* (whether ‘the faith of Christ’ or ‘faith in Christ’), as well as with particular fellow

scholars on such issues. His essay on 'Preaching on Romans' explicitly attends to the position of women in the Church,<sup>15</sup> not the least contentious issue either then or now.

## VI

Committed to academic theology though he was, Charles was convinced that Christians had a political duty to follow the news and to fight against injustice. Charles's political awareness developed during his time at Cambridge. Through Chinese friends among the students he had become keenly interested in the Far East, and condemned Japan's aggression in China. He grieved over Mussolini's aggression in Abyssinia, and sympathised strongly with the Republicans and the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. He worried about the rise of Hitler and condemned the appeasement of Neville Chamberlain in 1939. As already noted, he wrote in protest to Winston Churchill, at that time MP for his parents' constituency.

Charles continued also to speak to meetings and conferences, to write letters and to take his walks. But everything naturally became less and less. A student recalls his comments on other commentaries on Romans: 'He noted particularly the commentaries of John Chrysostom and Aquinas as excellent but often overlooked, and that Pelagius' commentary is quite helpful at times.' Of recent commentaries, he thought Käsemann's came off the highest. He asked Charles what books a theologian should read in order not to be 'uneducated'. He offered these: (1) Barth's original commentary on Romans, because of its historical importance; (2) Shakespeare and John Milton; (3) Greek writers—Homer, Sophocles, Thucydides, Aeschylus and Euripides; and (4) the commentaries of Calvin and Luther.

To the end, he was considerate and thoughtful. He liked children, and enjoyed their company. His own children loved to be with him, and always hurried to the study to say hello and report on their doings when they came home. He was always willing to listen, unfailingly supportive and careful to recognise the differences between them. They knew that, though his work was very important to him, they too were very important to him. His daughter Mary adds that he clearly loved them deeply and showed his respect for them by asking their opinions: 'He would refuse to make final

<sup>15</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *On Romans and Other New Testament Essays* (Edinburgh 1998), pp. 79–80.

decisions (such as the donations of ongoing royalties) without their agreement. Part of his respect for us was that such discussions were usually held separately from Elisabeth and me since he knew that it was important to value and understand his twin daughters as individuals.' She notes that when she and her sister were young, he was always keen to explain things rather than just giving instructions.

There was a consistency between the man in the pulpit and the father at home. As Dad respected us so we grew to see and understand how passionate he was about respect for everyone, and how much he tried to live by this principle which was so much part of his faith. . . . In his own life he tried to live by his principles, never doing something simply to please others or to satisfy an expectation, but rather doing what he believed to be right. . . . This is how he encouraged us to live.

Elisabeth also speaks warmly of her father's unconditional love:

. . . always very supportive and a wonderful listener. . . . He was very good at understanding how I felt about things and so was often able to say exactly the right thing to help me cope with situations or experiences I was finding difficult.

He was a great source of wisdom and good advice. I really appreciated being able to discuss theology and all sorts of issues with my dad and enjoyed having lively discussions with him. I could always trust his advice since he wouldn't just say what you wanted to hear and only gave advice after careful thought.

Although it was (almost) always my mum who took us out on day trips my dad would always come down from his study to say hello to our friends and to wish us a great day. When we arrived home he was always eager to hear how the day had gone.

As they grew up and went through university, Mary in Aberdeen (Theology) and St Andrews (General Studies) and Elisabeth in St Andrews (Medieval History) and Aberdeen (Theology), Charles and Ruth did not know that they were thinking of ordination. They were pleased, then, when both Mary and Elisabeth decided to follow their father into the ministry; in their case in the Church of Scotland. Charles, who had always been keenly interested in the Church of Scotland, now felt closer than ever, and was deeply interested by their news of it. He enjoyed his visits to them, so long as his health allowed him to travel, and they often spoke on the phone. The bonds between them became even closer. Although he was decidedly a member of the Reformed Church, he recognised the importance of, and respected, other churches. He greatly valued the friendship of people from other denominations. A Roman Catholic priest and an Anglican vicar were among his closest friends.

Charles was always focused and always logical. He was patient and sympathetic with those who were failing or struggling: it was important that they should be making an effort. He found it difficult to suffer fools gladly, or to be patient with the preacher who did not feel nervous on going into the pulpit. He liked the Geneva gown, because it masked the personality of the preacher and marked him or her simply as the servant of God. He was not a worldly man. Rather austere, perhaps, in his personal life, he did not spend much on clothes and had little interest in the luxuries of the flesh. He followed his children into vegetarianism enthusiastically, and did not require elaborate cooking. He never learned to drive, and wanted to live within walking distance of his workplace. In his early days in the ministry, he had ridden his bike, a relic of Cambridge days, and continued to ride in Durham until the roads became too dangerous for him. Although Charles loved maps and studied them whenever a new place was mentioned, and he had friends and acquaintances all over the world, he did not travel a great deal. But he loved Switzerland and, once their daughters were old enough, they had several holidays in Mürren, the highest village in the Bernese Oberland. Thereafter, he encouraged the family to go to Italy, Scandinavia and France, though he felt the need to use the time to write. Once Mary and Elisabeth had left home, they went for several holidays to Dalwhinnie, which has a disputed claim to be the highest village in the Scottish Highlands. Literature he loved, and during his later years he reread the works of Shakespeare (often while he ate his lunch in the department). He also found comfort in the works of Dante, Milton and in the classical writers. He was always generous: one of his files, labelled *diakonia*, was devoted to charitable giving, and his bank statements largely consisted of covenanted donations. He 'adopted' two Palestinian orphans as a thanksgiving for his two daughters and had other such commitments. Always, as warmly attested by his family, he was the kindest of men.

Distinctive among my own memories is a meal together at a conference in Newcastle in which he vigorously maintained the value of the Revised Version of the Bible, as being much closer to the original Greek than more 'modern' translations. A few years before my own appointment to Durham University's Department of Theology I had given a paper to the Durham Lightfoot Society, after which Charles had walked home with his colleague Kingsley Barrett (a fairly rare event even though they lived quite close to each other) vigorously critiquing what they had heard. In my own latter years at Durham (I lived slightly over the hill from him) I

would see his somewhat bowed figure taking his daily walk. And it was a particular delight, on our first return visit after my wife's and my own departure from Durham, when we called in on Charles and Ruth, only to discover that we had come on his 94th birthday.

At Charles's funeral service (he died on 27 February 2015), the Revd Brian Hunt preached on the text 'Remember Jesus Christ . . .' (2 Timothy 2, 8). The Revd Peter Kashouris, Priest in Charge, St Oswald's Church, Durham, commented to Ruth: "'Remember Jesus Christ" was exactly the needful message; I'm sure this is what Charles would have wanted. I could just about hear his quiet, but imploring voice saying these words. We indeed thank God for his witness to the Lord.' At the service the Revd Steven Orange recalled his meeting with Charles in Charles and Ruth's home in 2008, as their minister: 'He quizzed me, gently, and was delighted to hear of my reading of works of and about John Calvin, my books by Karl Barth, and also by the greatest Congregational theologian, P. T. Forsyth. I must have won Charles' approval, because as he showed me out he said excitedly to Ruth, "Ruth, Steven has read—books!"' He recalls also that Charles had a simple lifestyle, but that he did not live in an ivory tower: 'Yes, he never owned a TV set, but he kept up to date with current affairs through Radio 4. He felt passionately that a theologian must never be too busy to take up "social and political issues in which justice and mercy and truth are at stake".'

Many recollections of Charles were passed to me. One of the carers in his last days spoke of 'this kind and intelligent man'. An early student, now a vicar in the south of England, wrote to him not long before his death: 'One of God's great gifts to me was your being my tutor those many years ago.' A colleague for many years in Durham University's Department of Theology speaks of 'his loyalty and generosity to his colleagues . . . (he) referred to his students as his *Sorgenkinder*'. A former German student writes: 'I have a Greek New Testament, which Charles gave my father, when they were soldiers in North Africa and my father was a prisoner of war of the British.' Another former pupil, now a Bishop in Australia, attests: 'No one has had such an influence on my life as Charles had . . . I have kept every letter Charles wrote to me . . . careful exegesis with great humility. I have reason to thank God for this good and faithful service.' One of the university librarians attests: 'The quiet depth of exposition and insight of his preaching . . . he was never afraid of "speaking the truth to power" . . . he always spoke as he thought, but also thought carefully before speaking.' And a colleague in Aberdeen

sums up: 'He will be remembered by many for his meticulous scholarship, his wisdom and deep understanding of the Bible, and especially his concern and courtesy to younger scholars . . . But most of all as a kind and courteous person.'

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*Note.* The basic information for this Memoir was provided by Ruth Cranfield, and their daughters Mary and Elisabeth, supplemented by some extensive personal memories of Professor N. T. Wright.