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## Coming home to St Paul? Reading Romans a hundred years after Charles Gore\*

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### Abstract

Charles Gore's two-volume commentary on Romans (1899, 1900) showed his heartfelt delight in the grace and love of God. Gore questions whether Luther had really understood Paul, thus in certain respects anticipating the so-called 'new perspective' of E. P. Sanders and others. He manages, in a way that Sanders does not, to hold together 'justification' and 'being in Christ', though he does not integrate these with Romans 9–11. When we today explore Paul more fully, we see that Romans was yet more integrated than Gore had realised, and that two of Gore's principal emphases, the vital importance of holiness and the social and political dimensions of the gospel, have a more solid exegetical basis than he realised.

### 1. Introduction

My title reflects a famous conversation between Charles Gore and William Temple. Temple himself describes it like this: 'Bishop Gore once said to me that he paid visits to St. John as to a fascinating foreign country, but he came home to St. Paul. With me the precise opposite is true.'<sup>1</sup> But which Paul was it to whom Charles Gore came home?

A hundred years ago Gore was a canon of Westminster, living with his small community at 4 Little Cloister. In addition to his many other interests, he gave himself energetically during his eight years as a canon to the public exposition of scripture. He published the results in books on the Sermon on the Mount, on the Epistle to the Ephesians, and then, in 1899 and 1900, his two volumes on Romans. He was in his middle forties, a seasoned scholar, a passionate preacher, a controversial figure in church and theology, with a Christian social conscience of unusual intensity. We don't have to hunt far in his commentary on Romans to discover the principles from which such a life sprang.

Gore himself would urge us not to focus on his writings for their own

\* The Charles Gore Lecture 2000. Westminster Abbey, 14 November 2000.

<sup>1</sup> William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel (First and Second Series)* (London: Macmillan, 1945 [1939]), p. vi. He tells the same story in slightly different words in his 'Epilogue' to A. Mansbridge, *Edward Stuart Talbot and Charles Gore* (London: Dent, 1935), p. 90. A different version again is reported in F. A. Iremonger, *William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury: His Life and Letters* (London: OUP, 1948), p. 176.

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sake, but to learn afresh from Paul. This is a task many Anglicans find daunting, and many downright distasteful. As Gore says on the first page of the commentary, Romans 'is still . . . viewed with discomfort and neglected by those who most value the name of Catholic' – and, we would have to add, a good many others as well.<sup>2</sup> I wish this was because, like Temple, they visited Paul with a sense of strange beauty but came home to St John; I fear it is rather because today people visit both Paul and John with a sense of reluctant duty and come home to the television.

In this lecture I shall describe the main points of Gore's commentary on Romans, calling attention to three features of his interpretation where, I shall argue, he had rightly guessed at Paul's deeper meaning without yet seeing how the text of the letter could actually get him there. I shall then suggest, with a very broad brush, that advances in Pauline scholarship since Gore's day help us to do with more exegetical thoroughness what he was wanting to do. When we in turn 'come home' to St Paul a century after Charles Gore, we find in the apostle more, not less, than the canon had seen. We may, perhaps, in the words of a poet 12 years old when Gore wrote his commentary, arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time.

### 2. Gore's *Romans*: issues and questions

Gore's commentary is written at a popular level. It is lively, occasionally sermonic, and peppered with illustration and application. The underlying scholarship peeps out in the notes: he knows the fathers, and has read Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort, and of course the then recently published Sanday and Headlam. He refers to Ritschl and other Germans from time to time. He makes use of intertestamental Jewish texts. But none of this troubles the general reader. The line of exposition is clear and forthright.

Gore had been grasped by one of the main thrusts of Romans, and was determined that his readers be grasped by it as well. Whenever he comes near the subject of the grace of God freely given to sinners in Jesus Christ and him crucified; whenever he can say something about God being not a hard taskmaster but a loving father; whenever Paul suggests to him the question of whether we save ourselves by our moral efforts or whether all our moral effort is but a feeble response to God's sovereign love – then the staunch Anglo-Catholic catches fire, his prose becomes elevated, and he preaches the gospel of God's love and grace as well as any Protestant or evangelical. He names, shames and demolishes the characteristically English

<sup>2</sup> Charles Gore, *St Paul's Epistle to the Romans: A Practical Exposition*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1899, 1900), 1.v. Subsequent non-annotated references are to this work.

Pelagianism,<sup>3</sup> along with all attempts to rely on past traditions, including evangelical and Catholic, instead of scripture. He is aware of much nominal Christianity, and knows that Paul will have none of it. His own personal devotion to Jesus Christ, and single-minded determination to serve him, shines through page after page.

Early in the commentary, and repeatedly throughout it, he raises the question: is the Paul of Martin Luther the real Paul? Last week a learned Italian theologian accused Martin Luther of being the patron saint of the fast-food hamburger;<sup>4</sup> we should be wary of attributing all our *bêtes noires* to the German reformer. We must distinguish Luther himself from Lutheran tradition, and later low-grade caricatures. But was Paul, Gore asks, really advocating a standard Protestant individualism?<sup>5</sup> He is anxious to be fair to Luther, and to explain why his protest was necessary in its day. But he is still more anxious to wean his hearers off any assumption that what they know as Protestantism will do justice to the depth of Paul's thought. 'St. Paul', he writes, 'has for us undercut and antiquated the theological standing-grounds of the sixteenth century, and substituted for them something both truer, completer, and freer.'<sup>6</sup>

Gore's question anticipated by nearly 80 years one of the greatest shifts in Pauline studies to have occurred since critical scholarship began. In 1977 Ed P. Sanders published his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, whose aim was to rebut what had become a 400-year-long tradition, especially associated with Lutheran theology and exegesis, of how to understand the Judaism to which Paul was reacting and hence of how to expound Paul himself.<sup>7</sup> Despite some weaknesses, I regard Sanders's central thesis as secure: the Judaism of Paul's day was not a kind of primitive version of Pelagianism, of a self-help morality which seeks to justify itself by the unaided performance of moral good works. Judaism bases itself upon the grace of God which established the covenant with Abraham and brought Israel out of Egypt. Observance of Torah flows from gratitude. Sanders did not succeed in working out a new way of reading Paul to match this insight; that task remains unfinished among scholars today. But the old Protestant picture of Paul opposing self-help moralism or ritualism, the doing of good works to

<sup>3</sup> E.g. 1.8f.

<sup>4</sup> Professor Massimo Salari declared that the hamburger 'reflects the individualistic relationship between man and God established by Luther', according to *The Independent* (Friday 10 Nov 2000), p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. esp. 1.32–41.

<sup>6</sup> 1.40f.

<sup>7</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977).

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earn God's favour, with the gospel of grace and faith simply will not stand up historically. To this we shall return. Gore had on his side the very structure of Romans itself, and some of its inner logic.

It has become notorious in the century since he wrote that one of the hardest things to do with Romans is to explain the relationship between its different sections. How do chapters 9–11 relate to the rest? And how do chapters 1–4 belong with 5–8? What is the connection between justification in chapters 3 and 4 and baptism in chapter 6? When, 12 years after Gore's commentary, Albert Schweitzer published his book *Paul and His Interpreters*, he elevated the difference between these two sections of Romans into his central organising principle, making them represent two different types of theology which Paul had brought together, only one of which represented the heart of his thought. Schweitzer called these two types the 'juridical', represented by the law-court language in chapters 3 and 4, and the 'mystical', represented by the 'being-in-Christ' thought of chapters 6–8.<sup>8</sup> But for Gore no such split was necessary. One does not have to play off justification against incorporation into Christ; theologically one can, and Gore does, hold them together – as indeed of course Paul himself does elsewhere, for instance in Gal 3:21–4:7.

Gore answers his own question by insisting that though one is justified by faith alone, the faith that justifies is never in fact alone. It goes with a lively incorporation into the body of Christ, and with all that is meant by baptism, through which one comes to live the communal and sacramental life. Gore emphasises that each Christian must make this real for him- or herself; there are no passengers on this boat; but individualism is out of the question. Justification is, says Gore, all about 'membership in the sacred people, the Israel of God'.<sup>9</sup>

Gore's exposition of what we may call the ecclesiological dimension of Paul's thinking issues in a robust exposition of Rom 12–15. Rom 12, he points out, is not simply a set of individual ethics but the description of what it takes to live together as a community – something which Gore had himself been endeavouring to do, in Pusey House, in Radley, then in Westminster, and which was to bear remarkable fruit in the newly formed Community of the Resurrection. His treatment of chapters 13, 14 and 15 bears the same stamp. Precisely because he holds together justification and the life of the church, these chapters do not fall off the back of the

<sup>8</sup> A. Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters: A Critical History* (London: Black, 1912 [1st German edn also 1912]). Schweitzer's later study, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (London: Black, 1931) expounds this fully.

<sup>9</sup> 1.35.

commentary as they do so often. However, in my view he fails to follow through his own insights about the roots of Paul's ecclesiology within the Jewish covenant theology of the OT and of the first century.<sup>10</sup>

In particular, he falls back – as, given his theology, he scarcely needed to do – on the view that chapters 9–11 are an 'episode', a discussion without which the letter would still flow perfectly well. Explaining that he had originally been put off these chapters because of their Calvinist misuse, he offers a careful though not very deep exposition of what they are actually about, namely, the plight of unbelieving Israel. What he never sees – but would have been helpful to his whole theme – is the organic connection of chapters 9–11 to all that had gone before, especially chapters 3 and 4. He sees that the church needs warning against anti-semitism – he is aware of writing immediately after the *affaire Dreyfus* – but he can still declare that the twin climaxes of the letter are chapters 3 and 8, not, as it would seem to most today, chapters 8 and 11.<sup>11</sup>

Thus Gore, though he uses the idea of the church as the community of the renewed covenant as a principal means of tying together individual faith and the life of the church, points beyond what he achieves exegetically. The same is true in the other emphasis which his followers would not be surprised to see: a strong note of social protest against oppressive systems and structures. As with the warmth of his personal devotion, one senses that he had only to get a whiff of social justice in a text before he was on to it, calling (for instance) for a new sense not just of sin but of social sin.<sup>12</sup> And, though he does not develop the connection very far, this belongs closely with his splendid exposition of the groaning of creation and its promised renewal (8:18–25). He not only sees the Jewish roots of Paul's thought at this point, and his close awareness of the pain at the heart of creation itself; he sees that here Paul stands over against all false and one-sided spiritualism and materialism. 'The religion of the Incarnation,' he writes, 'as represented by St. Paul, recognizes [the material world] as God's creation and the temple of His presence.'<sup>13</sup> For Gore that phrase, 'the religion of the Incarnation', said it all. That was, for him, the heart of Christology and

<sup>10</sup> Thus, for instance, he goes back to a standard exposition of the place of Abraham in Rom 4, and the treatment of the Jewish Law in ch. 7 – though he sees, for instance, that *nomos* in 7:21 must mean 'the Jewish Law', not some abstract 'principle' (1.269f.), a point most commentators still miss.

<sup>11</sup> On the present situation of the Jews in France and England: 2.92; on the climaxes of the letter: 1.271.

<sup>12</sup> 1.257f., with a note lamenting how little notice had been taken of a Lambeth resolution on industrial problems.

<sup>13</sup> 1.307f.

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hence the heart of the revelation of God, and it inspired alike his Pauline vision of the eventual renewal, as opposed to the abandonment, of all creation, and his lifelong passion for social justice, at a time when such a theme was far less common than it is today.

But once again, at least in his commentary, he did not tie the two together. Here too I believe we can point beyond where he got to, and offer a reading of Romans which, from an unexpected angle, gives fuller grounding to the his concerns.

The Paul, then, to whom Charles Gore came home was a man of passionate devotional allegiance, theological conviction, ecclesial commitment, sacrificial holiness, and social concern. What I now wish to propose is that exactly this Paul was in fact more present in the very text Gore was expounding than he himself had seen, and that when we offer a more tightly knit and historically grounded exegesis we find that these themes, far from being left behind, are more securely based and suggestively worked out. I turn, then, first to Paul's exposition of the new covenant in Christ, and second to his exposition of the challenge to paganism in general and, perhaps to our surprise, to Caesar in particular.

### 3. Paul and the new covenant

When we come home to Paul, the man we discover is a first-century Jew. For the last half-century most scholars have seen Paul as a Jewish thinker, rather than one who swapped Jewish categories for Gentile or Hellenistic ones. We stand on the shoulders of W. D. Davies's 1948 book *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*,<sup>14</sup> which took the elements of Paul that had been used in the Hellenistic hypothesis and showed that they were better explained by seeing Paul as a rabbi who believed the Messiah had come. Significantly, this was just when theologians were becoming aware, after the Holocaust, of the dangers of treating Judaism as the wrong sort of religion. Since then most of the 'Pauls' offered by scholarship have been Jewish, though, as with Jesus, the further question, what sort of Jew, remains controversial.

The so-called 'new perspective on Paul', launched by Ed Sanders in the mid-1970s, has developed this further. But neither Davies, nor Sanders, nor their followers, have advanced a satisfactory new picture of Paul as a whole – religion, theology, exegesis, and contemporary application. I want to suggest a reading of Paul and Romans, building on the work of Davies and Sanders while modifying some of their proposals, through which we can do more fully what Gore was trying to do, namely, hold together the warm

<sup>14</sup> W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 4th edn (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980 [1948]).

personal faith by which one is justified and membership in the church, the covenant people promised by God to Abraham. This will lead on to the two other concerns, the moral and the social.<sup>15</sup>

Four interlocking points form the foundation. The first is Paul's understanding of the purpose of God's covenant. In line with much Jewish thinking, he believed that God's covenant with Israel was itself designed to put the world to rights, to bring justice to the entire cosmos. Israel is the light of the world, carrying God's commission to bring that light to the pagans. Part of Paul's critique of Israel is precisely that they have turned this commission into a mere privilege. In Gore's stringent language about Christian leaders, they wanted to shine rather than to serve.<sup>16</sup>

The second is that when Paul says 'Christ' he regularly intends us to hear, not a proper name merely, but the title 'Messiah', meaning by that not least 'the one in whom Israel's identity is bound up'. The Messiah represents Israel, so that what is true of him is true of them, and vice versa. The Messiah's death and resurrection are therefore the means whereby, and the sign that, Israel according to the flesh has passed under judgment, and the new covenant has been constituted whereby all who belong to the Messiah – Jew and Gentile alike – are part of God's people. Jesus' messianic death and resurrection are his faithful obedience to the covenant purposes of God; through him, God has now accomplished what he always purposed. Put together the first two points: because of the meaning of the covenant, God's achievement in Christ cannot be restricted to the salvation of individual souls, but must reach out to the bringing of God's eventual justice to the cosmos.

The third point is the meaning of 'the righteousness of God' – one of the key phrases in Romans. This righteousness, in line with the Jewish background, is not the status that God gives, imputes or imparts to faithful humans; nor is it a moral principle or energy which God places within us. It is God's own faithfulness to the covenant. Jews of Paul's day wrestled with the question, how can God be faithful to the covenant, granted all that has happened? What will this covenant faithfulness look like when it is finally unveiled?<sup>17</sup> Paul's answer, decisive for the shaping and theology of Romans, is that God's righteousness, his covenant faithfulness, has been unveiled once for all in Jesus the Messiah, and in the gospel announcement of his death and resurrection.

<sup>15</sup> On all that follows, see now my commentary on Romans in *New Interpreter's Bible* vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> 2.112.

<sup>17</sup> See particularly 4 Ezra.



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The fourth point is that the exodus story forms the narrative substructure of much of Paul's writing. The exodus was the great redeeming action, accomplished in fulfilment of God's covenant promises to Abraham. Paul now uses exodus language to explain the significance of the Messiah's death and resurrection. He shapes the whole of Rom 4–8 around a long retelling of the story: the promise to Abraham in chapter 4, the passage through the baptismal water by which freedom is attained in chapter 6, the giving of the Spirit to do what the law could not in chapters 7 and 8, finally reaching the inheritance, the whole redeemed creation, at the climax of chapter 8.

The Paul of Romans is thus a deeply Jewish thinker, rethinking his Jewish categories around his belief that the crucified and risen Jesus is Israel's representative Messiah. Within this scheme of thought, the key focal points stand out. Jesus' obedient death is the central covenant action, revealing God's love and grace in decisive and climactic action, dealing with sin by condemning it in his flesh (8:3). Justification by faith is the juridical declaration in the present time which anticipates the verdict of the last day: faith that Jesus is Lord, and that God raised him from the dead,<sup>18</sup> is the result of the Spirit's work through the gospel – and what God has thus begun, he will certainly complete.<sup>19</sup> Justification is not merely law court language, however; if it were, it would be isolated from the life of the church and from Christian morality. Justification is also *covenant* language, as in Rom 4 (a sustained exposition of Gen 15, where God establishes his covenant with Abraham), and has to do precisely with God's setting up of the single family, consisting of Jews and Gentiles together, characterised by faith rather than by possession or keeping of Torah. It is a measure of Gore's insight that he glimpsed some of this at least, even though he did not follow it through.<sup>20</sup>

Rom 9–11 is not, then, an extraneous aside, but a necessary and intrinsic part of the letter. It addresses questions Paul cannot avoid, which he has indeed noted earlier.<sup>21</sup> It is also, arguably, the first point of immediate relevance he wants to get across to the predominantly Gentile Christians in Rome. He wants them to see how God's righteousness, God's covenant faithfulness, works out in practice; he tells the entire covenant story in Rom 9 and 10, from Abraham right through to the Messiah and, beyond, to the Gentile mission whereby they themselves have come to faith. But that same covenant faithfulness means that unbelieving Jews will always remain

<sup>18</sup> A primitive 'creed' in 10:9, as Gore rightly saw (2.55).

<sup>19</sup> Phil 1:6.

<sup>20</sup> 1.20: 'Justification by faith is opposed to justification by works of the law, as the universal or catholic to the merely Jewish or national.'

<sup>21</sup> In 3:1–9.

within the scope of God's love. God has not cut them off for ever, and if Gentile Christians suppose he has, they are making the same mistake of ethnic superiority that Paul had made in his pre-Christian days and now saw in many of his fellow Jews.

In the same way, chapters 12–15 focus on the question of how Christians from different cultural backgrounds should live together in a single community – a question of particular relevance to Rome, where groups from different backgrounds often lived separately, as in some modern cities. This reaches its climax in an often-ignored passage, 15:1–13, the final theological and practical paragraph before the lengthy closing material. The main purpose of the letter is not, after all, simply to tell Rome that all have sinned and can be justified by faith through the death of the Messiah; it expounds those truths, as the centre of the unveiling of God's righteousness, in order to build on them these great arguments about the mission and unity of the church.

When, therefore, we come home to Paul as a first-century Jewish covenant theologian, expounding his belief that in Jesus Christ the faithfulness of God has burst unexpectedly upon Israel and the world, we discover a way of doing more securely what Gore was determined to do in holding together justification by faith and membership in the church. The larger story of Israel within which Paul lives, which I have labelled with the word 'covenant', enables both of these to be held with equal force and appropriate correlation. As Gore himself exemplified, warm personal faith and strong membership in Christ's body belong together.

#### 4. Paul, paganism and Caesar

This brings us to the other two areas in which Charles Gore was eager to explore Paul's thought, but was not able to substantiate his hunches. First, how does Paul integrate justification by faith with his strong moral teaching? Second, what does Paul have to say on what we loosely call 'social justice'?

At the heart of Paul we find his opposition, not to Judaism, but to paganism. Precisely because he remains a deeply Jewish thinker, believing that the God of Abraham is the one true God, now revealed in Jesus the Messiah, he stands firmly and Jewishly opposed to paganism of every sort. On the cross, the true God has defeated the false gods, and this victory must now be worked out in Christian lives and Christian communities.

Paul, then, did not *derive* his ideas from paganism. There are parallels, cross-over points of theme and language. But Paul intends to *confront* the world of paganism – with the news that the God of Abraham is its rightful God, the Jewish Messiah its rightful Lord, and that those who give

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allegiance to this God and Lord are the true heirs of the world, the truly human people. As in the Areopagus speech, Paul declares to the pagan world that what it has been groping after all along is now revealed by the true God in the gospel of Jesus.

The basic challenge of Paul's gospel is not, therefore, against self-help moralism – though if Paul had ever met proto-Pelagians, which is unlikely, he would have put them straight. There were pagan moralists, and Paul has words for them too, but his main challenge is against idolatry and the dehumanisation that results from it. Humans are made in God's image, to reflect his glory; those who worship that which is not God find that their image-bearing capability, their glorious humanness, begins to unravel. Those, however, who worship the true God (this is what Paul means by 'the obedience of faith') will rediscover their genuine humanness. All sinned, and lost God's glory; those whom God justified, them he also glorified. If Rom 3 and 4 are about justification, Rom 5–8 are not so much about sanctification as glorification, with sanctification as a sub-category.<sup>22</sup> Christian holiness, for Paul, means becoming more truly human. And the faith that justifies, itself the gift of God by the Spirit and the response to God's grace in the gospel, is also the core of that worship in which humanity is renewed.

Watch how this works in the four main sections of Romans. In the first four chapters, Paul demonstrates that, through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, God has established the community he promised to Abraham, the single family of Jews and Gentiles together, characterised by faith in the gospel. At the close of chapter 4 he describes Abraham's faith: it was his belief in God's promise to give him and Sarah a son in their old age. Paul here deliberately contrasts this faith with the faithlessness described in Rom 1:18–32, where idolatry in the pagan world results in the fracturing of the glory, the image-bearing, that was humanity's vocation.<sup>23</sup> This naturally leads on to Rom 5, in which Christ is seen as the true Adam, the source of genuine humanity, generating by the Spirit a renewed human life of holiness and hope. In the climax of Rom 8, Paul sees the whole creation, not as itself divine – that's the mistake of paganism – but as God's good creation which is designed to be flooded with God, renewed by the Spirit, to experience its own exodus when the children of God are themselves raised from the dead. That which paganism has wrongly worshipped will one day share the freedom of the glory of God's children. Paganism is, after

<sup>22</sup> Cf. 3:23; 8:29–30, with e.g. 6:19, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Cp. esp. 4:18–25 with 1:18–25.

all, a parody of the truth, wanting to steal the beautiful empty chalice instead of waiting for it to be filled with the wine of God's love.<sup>24</sup>

Then, in 9–11 and 12–16, Paul challenges the Roman church not to behave as pagan society around is behaving. Roman anti-Judaism is well known in classical literature. The church had been largely Gentile after the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in the late 40s, and now had to face the question of its attitude to the large number of recently returned non-Christian Jews, and also its attitude to Jewish Christians. His appeal in both cases is that the church should learn to live as God's true humanity, in accordance with his covenant faithfulness and the call to unity in Christ. The main thrusts of the letter, therefore, can be seen all through to flow from Paul's essentially Jewish understanding, rethought in Christ, and to tell against paganism in general, and any attempt on the part of Christians to go with its flow. All of this continues to tie together the emphasis on justification by faith with that on Christian holiness, without confusion or muddle. If faith is genuine, the attachment to God in Christ that it expresses cannot but issue in a searching and serious holiness of life. Gore's exposition of Rom 6:1–11 and 12:1–2 makes it clear both that the huge moral demands made by the gospel are simply a response to grace, being in no way an attempt to place God in human debt, and that the demands are indeed total.<sup>25</sup>

Within this, however, one particular emphasis is emerging in very recent study, and it provides the other missing link which joins Pauline theology closely with the vocation to social critique and to work for God's justice in the world – the very thing Charles Gore was eager to do. Romans, I suggest, indicates that Paul intended his gospel to subvert not merely paganism in general but the imperial cult in particular.

The imperial cult – worship of the emperor, and of Rome – was the fastest-growing religion in Paul's world. The early emperors drew back from claiming actual divine honours for themselves in Rome and Italy during their lifetime. But there was no such restraint further east. In any case, being styled 'son of god', following the apotheosis of the previous emperor, was almost as good – especially when, from Augustus onwards, emperors were able to claim that their dynasty had brought peace and justice to the warring world. New temples to Caesar and Rome were springing up; some city centres were redesigned to give them maximum prominence. Paul could not have missed it. Nor could he have dismissed

<sup>24</sup> On this, see e.g. my *The Crown and the Fire* (London: SPCK, 1992), ch. 10.

<sup>25</sup> 1.204–25; 2.97–102.

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it as of merely political rather than religious importance; he would not have made that distinction. Whereas almost all works on Paul assume that Rom 13:1–7 is his only comment on Caesar, this is far from the truth.

Recent studies of Philippians have shown that Paul was capable of addressing this issue sharply and subversively. The Christ-poem in Phil 2:5–11, though its sources and theology are Jewish, parodies some aspects of the Caesar-cult; when Paul says Jesus is Lord, he means that Caesar is not. The end of Phil 3, likewise, refers to Jesus as Saviour, Lord and King in a way which certainly intends a contrast with Caesar. Similar hints are found in 1 Thessalonians and elsewhere.

But it is in Romans itself, written to Christians right under Caesar's nose, that the subversive theme emerges most strikingly. Caesar claimed to be 'son of god'; his accession day, or birthday, was hailed as 'good news', *euaggelion*; he was regarded as the Lord of the world, the one to whom all nations owed allegiance. Through his powerful rule justice and salvation had come to the world: Roman 'justice', *Iustitia*, first became a goddess under Augustus. With all that in mind, think through the famous first paragraph of Romans (1:1–17), which by common consent introduces the themes of the whole letter, and watch it come up in three dimensions. Paul introduces himself as the apostle of God, commissioned to announce the gospel of God's son, who was now the rightful lord of the whole world and who claimed obedience and loyalty from all. Through this gospel, God was powerfully at work to produce salvation, because in the gospel God's righteousness, his justice, had been unveiled. That is why, says Paul, he is not ashamed to be coming to preach in Rome. The gospel of Christ, by strong implication, upstages the gospel of Caesar.

The same point is stressed at the end. In the final climax, urging Christians of different backgrounds to unite in worship of the one true Lord, Paul quotes from the royal prophecy of Isa 11. The root of Jesse shall appear, the one who rises to rule the nations; in him shall the nations hope. Paul's hearers knew that there was already a king who ruled the nations. The opening and theological closing of Romans declare that Caesar is a parody of the true lordship of Jesus.

Once we understand how the theme of God's justice unveiled in the gospel actually works, the rest of the letter will fall into place. The renewal of all creation in Rom 8 can be seen as the climax it really is, instead of being sidelined as in so many individualised readings of Romans. Caesar's attempt to bring the world into new peace and harmony are to be upstaged by God's great act of liberation. Caesar, of course, ruled the world by sheer force, with crucifixion both as his primary weapon and as a regular symbol of his authority. Paul's theology of the cross, as the secret means whereby

God has defeated the powers of the world,<sup>26</sup> comes into its own in a new way, standing on its head this symbol of imperial arrogance and making it instead the symbol of all-powerful divine love.<sup>27</sup> Romans as a whole, by expounding God's creation of the single family of faith in which Jew and Gentile come together in one body, provides the charter for what we must call a counter-empire: a worldwide, multi-ethnic family owing allegiance to Jesus as Lord rather than Caesar, and looking forward to inheriting the renewed creation.

Within this framework, Rom 13:1–7 can be seen for what it is. It is a Jewish-style statement that rulers are not divine, but owe allegiance to the one God. When this is realised, the rulers are to be obeyed, because God desires that evil should be checked, that anarchy should be resisted, that laws should be enacted through which societies can live in order and peace. Paul inherited the tradition of, among other things, Jeremiah, in which the Israelites are instructed to pray for the welfare of Babylon as long as they are living there, and of Daniel, in which, though the rulers of the world are regularly warned, judged, condemned and demoted, Daniel and his companions are promoted to high ranks of service within the imperial household. God desires order, it seems, not chaos; when rulers discover they are not divine, they can once more be God's agents, whether knowingly or not, to promote good order in the world.

Paul did not suggest to the Romans, a tiny and fragmented church in a huge pagan capital, that they should begin to campaign for better laws and more effective justice. He might as well have told them what sort of aeroplanes they should be building for the next stage of his mission. But, just as elsewhere he laid the foundation for revolutions yet to come, so in his subversive, almost cheeky, upstaging of Caesar's claims with those of Jesus, I believe he laid the foundations for a fully integrated and theologically coherent Christian social agenda which we today ignore at our peril. Just as justification by faith and the life of the church are held together with Paul's wider covenant theology, and just as grace, faith and moral effort belong together, so the whole theology of salvation and the responsibility to promote God's justice in the world are held together, within that same covenant theology, by Paul's high Christology and by his grand vision of the eventual renewal of all creation, the bringing of God's healing justice to bear on the cosmos as a whole. Once again, in learning to see in Paul things that Charles Gore never dreamed of, we are nevertheless meeting a figure to whom he would have been happy to come home.

<sup>26</sup> See 1 Cor 2:6–8; Col. 2:13–15.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Rom 8:31–39.

### 5. The end of our exploring

Time permits only the briefest of conclusions. I allow myself three points only, corresponding to the three main points I have made.

First, when we locate Paul's theology of justification within his larger covenant theology, we see that it is not simply a controversial doctrine that we might now be able to agree on, but is the doctrine which itself commits us to ecclesial membership and hence ecumenical endeavour. Justification means not simply that God accepts us by grace through faith; it means that all who believe in Jesus Christ belong together in one worshipping family, sharing at the same table. When we integrate Rom 3 and 4 with the incorporative theology of Rom 5–8 and the practical instructions of Rom 14 and 15, we discover that this ecumenical work is never a matter of one side giving the orders to the others, but of all working together, preferring the way of tolerance of things indifferent to an insistence on solving all problems before we can unite in shared worship. Paul has so often been a sign of division, but when we come home to him he offers us ways to grown into real union.

Second, the integration of Paul's ethics with his theology, such as Gore glimpsed in Romans and we have developed further, suggests that mainstream Western churches need to look hard at some of today's familiar assumptions. Justification means, at one level, that God accepts us as we are. But God's acceptance is always the transforming acceptance of holy love, demanding from us not a slack acquiescence in whatever state we happen to be in, but serious and Spirit-helped moral effort in becoming what God intends for us. Without this, we slip back into the worst of both worlds, holding the form of a bare and caricatured Protestant justification-theology but without any of the lively devotion that has traditionally accompanied it. An integrated Pauline ethic never says, 'Because God has accepted me, I can stay as I am'. It always says that the mercy of God invites me to present my body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. It never asks, 'What am I allowed to do? Can I get away with this?' It always asks, 'How can I live according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh? How can I be transformed by the renewing of my mind, rather than being conformed to the present age?'

Third, the social and political implications of reading Romans against the background of the Caesar-cult need to be teased out in more detail. As with many aspects of post-Enlightenment thought, we have tended to assume that there are really only two possible positions, the quiescent and the revolutionary. Most have assumed that Rom 13 means that Paul was politically quiescent; you might suppose that my new proposed reading means he was straightforwardly revolutionary. As with the Enlightenment

splits between sacred and secular, and between individual and community, this is far too simplistic. Paul stands in the tradition of apocalyptic and covenantal Judaism that includes Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel: earthly powers must learn that they are not divine, but once that lesson is learned they have a positive place and purpose in God's will for the world.

The church has found it difficult to maintain this balance. From the second-century apologists, who both appealed to rulers and suffered martyrdom, through the Constantinian settlement, through the many different models of church/state relationship essayed in the Middle Ages, the Reformation and thereafter, in this country and elsewhere, the church has struggled to hold together its double responsibility: to live by the gospel of Jesus which proclaims him as the world's true Lord, and to live as good citizens of a state which may or may not acknowledge that Lordship. Here at Westminster that balance is symbolically maintained by our crowning of monarchs right in front of the text from Revelation, written in gold above the high altar: 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.'<sup>28</sup> Confrontation and collaboration are both appropriate expressions of this responsibility; it may result in martyrdom, as with Bonhoeffer, or it may result in partnership, as with (to think of our roots) Aidan and Oswald. Here again this abbey symbolises both, with its royal tombs and its martyrs' memorials.

What this responsibility rules out, I think, are Erastianism at one end and dualist disengagement at the other. Few today want the former; but the clamour for disengagement is loud, particularly in the press. Some argue for disengagement on Christian grounds; but what is really driving the agenda is the secularist desire that the church should mind its spiritual business and leave the state to look after society and politics – in other words, that the church should not even think of saying that Jesus is Lord and Caesar isn't. But Pauline Christianity is not about discovering a way of being religious or spiritual, or a private route to salvation. It is about announcing, and living by, the message that Jesus is Lord of all. To retreat into the private world of our own religious life is not a way of keeping ourselves pure from the non-Christian world; it is, ironically, a way of compromising with the world, giving in to its sacred/secular split.

We must of course look hard at how our present Establishment correlates with our ecumenical collaboration, and indeed our relation to quite different worldviews. But to disengage because such questions exist is to scrap the car because the steering needs adjusting. If Daniel had not been at Belshazzar's court, no-one would have been able to read the writing on the

<sup>28</sup> Rev 11:15 ('kingdom' is singular in the original).



## Coming home to St Paul? Reading Romans a hundred years after Charles Gore

wall. Precisely at this time of massive worldview confusion in the country and the wider world, we need all the engagement we can get if we are to play the same prophetic role, announcing the gospel of Jesus and living by it within Caesar's world.

Who then is Caesar in a modern liberal democracy, a tradition which is itself profoundly though ambiguously influenced by Christianity? That is a harder question. Caesar does not live in either Buckingham Palace or Downing Street, nor yet in the Stock Exchange or Fleet Street – though each possesses some Caesar-like attributes. But there are powers in our world that want to become Caesar, and the church of Jesus Christ is one of the main obstacles in their way. As readers of Paul we will be unwilling to stand aside and give them a free run: not because we seek political power for ourselves, but because we believe that if, in the old pietist phrase, Jesus Christ is not Lord of all he is not Lord at all.

The call to social justice in the present, in the light of God's promised recreation of the whole cosmos, stands in parallel to the call to Christian holiness. Christians are called to live in the present in the light of God's future; it won't do to say God will make us holy hereafter, we must make it real right now. Similarly, it won't do to say that God will one day solve the problems and there's nothing we can do in the meantime. Precisely because God will one day put the whole world to rights by the Spirit, we Christians, indwelt by that same Spirit, should go to work today, as Charles Gore did, to inaugurate as far as possible that world-renewing justice which will do what Caesar's justice claims to do but cannot.

A fresh reading of Romans, then, grateful to Charles Gore but determined to press on beyond, can invigorate Christian discipleship and mission like little else. The end of our exploring is to come home to the Paul from whom we started, and know him for the first time. As we do so, we may find fresh ways towards an integrated and challenging Christian worldview: to fold again the tongues of flame into the crowned knot of fire, so that the fire and the rose may be one.