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# Romans 7 Once Again: Intertextual Setting, Structure, and Rhetorical Strategy

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## Romans as Story<sup>1</sup>

It is becoming increasingly clear that though Paul's letters are occasional pieces they are not devoid of theological content. This content, however minimal it may be, carries with it a strong narrative feature, which serves as the very foundation of the theological framework. As a result, Paul's letters are not to be read as 'only independent snippets of "truth" or isolated gems of logic' but as 'discursive exercises that explicate a narrative about God's saving involvement in the world' (B. Longenecker 2002, 4). If this observation is correct, then one should expect to find in Paul's longest discursive exercise evidence of a narrative substratum. Both J.M.G. Barclay and N. T. Wright have recently set themselves the task of laying bare Paul's narrative strategy in his letter to the Romans.

Wright's proposal in this regard is that chapters 3-8 contain the basic story line of Israel's redemption from Africa northeast. This narrative substructure, drawn from the Exodus, also holds the key to our understanding of how the two allegedly disparate 'juristic' (1-4) and 'participationist' (5-8) sections of the letter cohere. Wright begins his exploration of the 'New Exodus' motif in Romans by suggesting that Paul's exposition of baptism has in mind the Red Sea crossing—a connection Paul makes in 1 Cor 10:2. The connection in Romans is seen particularly in 6:17-18, where the metaphor of slavery and its radical reversal thereof (New Exodus liberation) is invoked. Wright then poses the question, 'what effect does this reading of chapter 6 have on 6-8 as a whole?' His own answer follows immediately: 'If 6 tells the story of the Exodus, or at least the crossing of the Red Sea, the next thing we should expect is the arrival at Sinai and the giving of the Torah. This, of course, is exactly the topic of Romans 7:1-8:11 (Wright 1999, 24). The narrative sequence, therefore, moves from 'Egyptian' slavery to sin (that was exacerbated by the law) by way of the 'Red Sea event of baptism' to a new leading through the 'wilderness' (Rom 8:12-17). The new journey will eventually see the eschatological people of God entering into their inheritance.

J.M.G. Barclay, recognizing that Paul may be viewed as a storyteller in his own right, explores 'the theological uses to which Paul puts his first-person narrative' (2002, 147 n. 34). Barclay makes the observation that Romans offers 'a striking "I" text in 7:7-25 which begins with some quasinarrative elements (7:7-13).' However, he expresses serious doubts concerning the pericope's autobiographical value 'except in the most attenuated sense' (147). What Paul's rhetorical 'I' does is to dramatize the discourse of the 'paradoxical relationship of law and sin' by probing its personal dimensions. Barclay is more interested in 1:7-15 and 15:14-33 as revealers of Paul's personal story. Moreover, Paul also 'presents himself as an example of the "remnant saved by grace" (11:1-6)' and finds even in his apostleship to the Gentiles, some positive role in Israel's future (11:13-16). Thus Paul's story is presented in Romans as *entangled* with the story of the church and the story of Israel. Foundational to all of this, in Barclay's view, is the molding of Paul's story in the form of a 'christomorphic historiography'. I believe that the desire to find narrative features in the Pauline corpus is essentially correct, and both Barclay's and Wright's contributions have the potential of advancing our understanding of Romans through their respective proposals.

<sup>1</sup>Petersen 1985, 43: 'Letters have stories, and it is from stories that we construct the narrative worlds of both letters and their stories.'

One suggestion however that I think is a bit far-fetched is Wright's linking of the Red Sea crossing with baptism in Romans 6. Paul undoubtedly makes a similar connection in 1 Cor 10:2, as Wright pointed out, but in Romans 6 the writer is probably drawing upon traditional material. Maybe a better connection between the books of Exodus and Romans is the phrase 'signs and wonders' (Rom 15: 18-19a; cf. Ex. 7:3), which sets 'the miraculous demonstrations of the power of the Spirit in the preaching of the gospel and the founding of the Christian communities in the context of the Exodus tradition' (Grieb 2002, 138).

Barclay's proposal is not fundamentally different from Wright's in its insistence to draw inter-textual links with the OT. He is correct in drawing our attention to how Paul positions himself implicitly in the stories he tells, or preferable (so Barclay), how the testimonies he gives press home his point. More important than Paul's self-presentations in Romans is his manifest desire to root his understanding of the gospel in Scriptures (Hays 1989, 34). This is done in several ways: as explicit 'authoritative warrants', and as indirect markers of thematic and theological concerns which provide significant clues to his lines of argumentation (Hays 1989, 34-35). In this regards Hays finds within Paul's programmatic statement in Rom 1:16-17 several Septuagintal echoes. For example, Hay's observes that the Pauline declaration 'I am not ashamed' has been badly handled by expositors, on account of their failure to identify its intertextual links with certain lament Psalms, such as 43:10 and 24:2, as well as Isa 50:7-8 (cf. Eissfeldt 1965, 115). I would add to Hay's list of 'shame' texts Genesis 2:24, where we find the first man standing in God's presence unashamed. Paul's point then is this: it is the gospel that powerfully removes the shame of humankind, allowing women and men once again to stand in the divine presence with confidence. Elsewhere Paul refers to the work of the gospel in people's lives as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Both the old creation (Gen 2:24) and the new stand unashamed as a result of divine mercy. Interestingly, both 'shame' texts seem quite out of place in their respective context. As we have seen above, Wright traces Paul's central section (3-8) in Romans to the pentateuchal account of the Exodus. If my proposal is on target, the Pauline allusions to the Pentateuch go beyond that.<sup>2</sup> We also see possible echoes of Gen 3 in Romans 7, for example, the first appearance of *egM'I* in the LXX is a picture of wretchedness and weakness. There is no hint in the passage that Cain the character is aware of any wickedness or wretchedness, but it does seem that the narrator wants his auditors to see Cain as such. There is then an echo of Cain in Romans 7 (cf. Wright 1993, 226-230).<sup>3</sup>

A comparison of Gen 3-4 and Romans 1-3 is highly suggestive. Both Genesis chapters 3 and 4 appear to be couched in the form of a courtroom drama with their incisive questions (3:9, 11, 13; 4:9-10; Sailhamer 1992, 106). In Romans 1-3 as well, one senses a certain kind of forensic setting that depicts nothing but guilt, shame and weakness (cf. Rom 5:6) on the part of the defenseless defendants (Rom 1:20c). What is interesting is that only the alienated experience forensic embarrassment. Those who are found in God's will stand unashamed (Gen 2:25; cf. Rom 1:1, 16; 5:1; 8:1).<sup>4</sup> Hays (1989, 39) has already shown that what was for Isaiah (50:7-8) a hope of future vindication was for Paul a present realization. 'Thus, Isaiah's future rebounds through Paul's voice into a new temporal framework defined by God's already efficacious act of eschatological deliverance in Christ.' If then Gen 2:25 is admitted as one of the faint but compelling echoes of the LXX in Paul, we have yet another testimony of how the law and the prophets prefigure the gospel, for the good news Paul proclaims, at the very least, restores wo/man to paradise where s/he stands in God's presence with confidence (Rom. 5:1-2). For Paul, this astounding reversal of fortunes should never qualify as the world's best-kept secret. Accordingly, in Romans 'I am not ashamed' becomes the ground of 'I am a debtor' (v.14; cf. Rom 10:11), which is later embellished by Isaiah's i Ἀτῷα τὸ πόδες μου ἔσται ἡμέρα ἡμῶν (How beautiful are the feet of those heralding good things; Rom 10:15; citing Isa 52:7 LXX). Earlier reference was made to the forensic flavour of Rom 1-3. This is in agreement with Hays' proposal. However, for him these crucial

<sup>2</sup>Stowers (1994, 159ff.) is adamant that nothing of the sort is found in Rom 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. also 'T' on the lips of Cain, presented as the first user of the 'T' of weakness (Gen 4:9); cf. this with his Mother's exuberant language at his birth, 'now I, a woman, have in turn produced a man'. 'Man' is the only occurrence of *ων* to refer 'to a newborn babe' (Lieber 2004, 24).

<sup>4</sup>The 'shame' words in the LXX and the NT passages belong to the same semantic domain. See Hays (1989) for another echo in Rom 1:16.

chapters are a recapitulation of the narrative structure of 2 Samuel 11-12 (Hays 1989, 49). In fact, the route to 2 Samuel is an indirect one via a penitential piece (Psalm 50: 3-6 LXX), with its manifest language of weakness:

*Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight --That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.*

Undoubtedly, as slender as this connection is, it provides a stronger case for a Septuagintal echo than Gen 3-4. What Hays however would concede, I believe, is that some echoes in Paul in particular, and the NT more generally, are louder than others. One section of Romans that could be likened to the so-called silent years between Malachi and Matthew, as far as direct quotations are concerned, is 5:1-8:39. This is in contrast to 1:16-4:25; 9:1-11:36 and the paraenetic sections of 12:1-15:13. In these passages we have ‘extensive use of Scripture in Paul’s argumentation’ (R. Longenecker 1999, xviii). But the very presence and plethora (over half of the explicit foundation is the Pauline Corpus) of these citations underscore in no uncertain terms how much the writer of Romans was immersed in his sacred literature and how its essential story and worldview shaped his literary activity. It is not surprising, then, that one can trace in Paul’s letters an almost equal amount of OT allusions whose echo (the overall story line) or echoes (sub-plots) cry out for attention. For example, very few would doubt that Paul has in mind Gen 3 in Romans 5 (cf. Enoch 14:22). And we will hear other echoes in chapters 7 that contribute to the portrait of Paul as a skilful storyteller, who utilized the literary and rhetorical conventions of his day to make his case for ‘His-story’.

Perhaps a prime example of Paul’s narrative sophistry is the way in which he handles Hab 2:4b as the bedrock on which his introductory thematic statement is erected. This prompts Watts (1999, 18) to suggest that one can analyze the distribution of language of 1:6-17 (already coloured by the Habakkuk text) throughout the major sections of 1:1-3:20, 3:21-5:21, 6:1-8:39, 9:1-11:36 and 12:1-15:1. In these portions forming the backbone of the epistle, one also finds key terms such as ‘salvation’, ‘power’, ‘gospel’, ‘believe’, ‘righteousness’, ‘Jew’, ‘Greek’, ‘life’ and their cognates (Watts 1999, 18 n.74), tying them closely to the introductory paragraph. So pervasive is the influence of Habakkuk on Romans, according to Watt (1999, 24), that he also finds a plausible explanation for the unique presence of a doxology at 16:25-27, which, in his view, echoes Hab 3:2-17. Although Watts does not mention 15:14ff as one of the passages influenced by Habakkuk, it can be argued, I believe, that this missionary paragraph is linked to Rom 1, forming an epistolary frame along with it. And within this context some see a clear prophetic consciousness reflected in Paul’s language. Evans (1999, 115-118), for example, uses 1 Cor 14:37 (‘If any thinks, he is a prophet’) as his point of departure to discuss propheticism in Romans (cf. Baaij 1993). Evan’s case is mainly built on Paul’s citation of Isaiah 52:7 and its probable allusion to Isaiah 61:1. Crucial to Evan’s proposal is the key word *evangelize* that appears in the two Isaiah verses. Evans also points out the recognition of recent research that the concept of *apostellM* (‘send’, and its OT equivalent) is quite close.

When one adds to this the observation that ‘the very nature of Paul’s conversion invites comparison with the prophets (cf. Isa 1:1, 6:1-13; Jer 1:5; Ezek 1:1; 8:4; Obadiah 1; Nah 1: 1; Hab. 2:2)’, and that visionary or revelatory communication (cf. 1 Cor 15:8; Gal 1:15-16; 1 Cor 12: 4-7) with the above references (Evans 1999, 118) is common to both the prophetic and apostolic traditions, the case for seeing a nexus between the two traditions appears stronger. Add to this the fact that the only quotation in 15:14-33, with its strong missionary thrust, is Isaiah 52:15 (cf. Isa 52:5, 7 and in Rom 11:15), the prophetic echo in Romans becomes even more distinct. Although our main focus is verses 14-25, we will first consider verses 1-13 contextually. Our purpose is to investigate the relation of ‘I’ to the law.

### Romans as a Structured Story

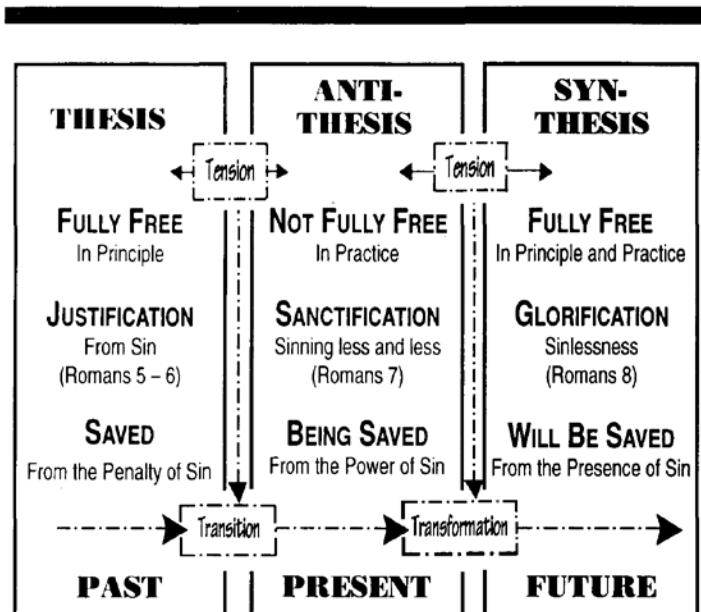


Fig. 1. Wo/Man in Transition –& Tension: *Dialectic of Christian Experience*

The structure of the entire letter may be delineated as follows:<sup>5</sup>

#### *Introduction 1:1-17*

##### **A. Justification: Gospel for Sinful Humanity (1:18-5:21)**

##### **B. Sanctification: Gospel for Saints in Principle (6:1-8:1-17)**

##### **C. Glorification: Gospel for a Suffering<sup>6</sup> Entity (8:18-39)**

##### **A<sup>1</sup>. Justification: Gospel for a Sinful Nationality (9:1-11:36)**

##### **B<sup>1</sup>. Sanctification: Gospel for Saved Humanity in Praxis (12:1-16:1-23)**

#### *Conclusion 16:24-27*

<sup>5</sup>Adapted from Noelliste (2015, 93-94). The focus (C) of the structure is anticipated by the frustrated and wretched cry of 7:24. The cosmic character of the emancipation from wretchedness is seen especially in Rom 8:18-23 and from a comparison between the old and the new creation: in the former, the Creator-turned-Liberator started with the material universe before the creation of humanity (Gen 1); in the latter, humanity takes precedence. The comparison further reveals the following chiastic macro-structure: A-Material Universe (Gen 1:1-25), B-Image-bearers (Gen 1:26-31), Bt- Image-bearers (2 Cor 5:17), At-Material Universe (Rev 21:22; cf. 2 Pet 3).

<sup>6</sup> On this theme, see especially Wu (2015).

There is a sense in which chapters 6, 7, and 8 go together theologically (putting to rest the rumour that six was afraid of seven, because seven ate nine.), since the author's discourse on 'law', a crucial term in this section, begins to take centre stage in chapter 6 (see fig. 1 above). In the first four chapters the topic of justification is high on the agenda. There the apostle worked out the relation between that issue and 'law.' Another important aspect of righteousness, sanctification, is the burden of 6, 7 and 8. If justification is righteousness imputed, sanctification is the process whereby the believer increasingly experiences and grows into that righteousness. At the heart of chapters 6-8 is how this righteousness relates to *nomos* (law).

Paul's use of *nomos* has been the centre of controversy over the last twenty years or so. E. P. Sanders (1985), for example, posited contradictions in Paul's view of the law. Earlier Sanders (1977, 518-524) expressed the view that Paul was indeed coherent in his expression concerning the concepts of *nomos*. Sanders thinks that Romans 1:18-29; 5:12-21 and 7:7-25 are internally inconsistent and contradictory. Martin (1989, 39), however, disputes this claim by pointing out that what is considered a contradiction in Paul (and the rest of the NT) may turn out to be something else on closer examination. To better appreciate the usage of *nomos* in Romans it may be useful to see how it was employed in previous epistles. The term may be found thirty three times in Galatians. The Galatian believers were under siege from nomistic interests who were responsible for 'disturbing' (1:7), 'bewitching' (3:1) and 'unsettling' (5:12) them.<sup>7</sup>

All of this was in an attempt to get the Galatian Christians to bow to the Mosaic Law. In response, Paul points to the freedom (5:1) and law of Christ (6:2) that should govern their lives. But what is this law of Christ to which the apostle alludes? In the context of the entire letter it has to be something different from the Mosaic Law against which he appears to skillfully inveigh. But though we can say what it is not with some measure of certainty, its positive identification is not to be found in this epistle. When we come to 1 Corinthians we do not fare much better. But it becomes much clearer that the 'law of Christ' is not the same thing as the Mosaic Law. I have in mind particularly chapter 9:19-21 that distinguishes 'those under the law' (v. 20), that is, the Jews, from the apostle himself who is 'not under the law.' So where does that leave the apostle? If he is not under the Mosaic Law in any real sense (though he finds himself under it conveniently, 'that he might gain those under the law'), is he now lawless or antinomian? 'Not so!' says the apostle Paul; he is not lawless, but under Messianic government (v.21). Out of this discourse, then, in which we learn something of Paul's philosophy of mission, we also gain some knowledge of his ethical posturing. From the foregoing we learn that Paul's framework in terms of a moral code was not essentially Mosaic but Messianic in orientation.<sup>8</sup> Romans 2 adds another interesting dimension to the Pauline concept of 'law'. Whereas 1 Corinthians manifests nomistic distinctions in terms of Mosaic and Messianic codifications, Romans 2:13-14 seems to reveal the presence of another 'law'—one that is universal in scope. This law evidently predates both the foregoing varieties (contra Jewett 2007).<sup>9</sup>

Apart from these significant theological uses, *nomos* also appears to carry the following senses in Romans: (1) principle (3:24); (2) precept; and (3) all or part of the Tanak (3:31). What is in dispute is whether or not it is used to designate Roman law, law in general, (Bultmann, 259-60), or Mosaic law (Fitzmyer 1993, 456) in Romans 7:1. The immediate context does seem to favour the Mosaic Law, since part of the language of verse three which continues Paul's illustrative argument, is Hebraic (Black 1989, 93). The point of the illustration is that the Roman Christians had 'died' to the law. This is made plain in verse 4, though from Paul's 'what appears to be awkwardly constructed analogy' (Yorke 1991, 66), we expect to see a corresponding 'husband' dying instead of a 'bride'. Despite the difficulty that some (e.g., Black 1989, 93) have seen in the illustration

<sup>7</sup>See Palmer and Dennis, *Galatians* (2016). A. J. Hultgren (2011, 294–309) labels 8:1–11 "Liberation from Sin and Life in the Spirit," verses 12–13 should probably have been included here, especially v. 13. R. Longenecker (2011, 347) proposes that chapters 5–8 set "out the essence of what [Paul] proclaims in his Gentile mission . . ." This can hardly be doubted, but we do not have any letter from him to a purely Jewish church to fully support this contention.

<sup>8</sup>That is, it was more marked by discontinuity with the OT law than continuity.

<sup>9</sup>This universal variety may be dubbed 'mesographic' (Palmer and Dennis, 38-56), i.e., written inside (Rom 2:14; cf. Epictetus 1926, 312).

and its subsequent application, what seems clear is that Paul believed that a radical shift has taken place: believers are no longer under the Mosaic code, thanks to *corpus Christi* (v. 4) through which they were put to death (•, ±½ Ä, · Ä—a divine passive?). A new marriage is now contracted (Holland 2011). The results of all this are far reaching—believers are now able to become ‘faithful and fruitful’ to the glory of God (v. 4b; Yorke 1991, 67). What a stark contrast to the negative sentiments of 6:21<sup>10</sup> and 7:5. Verse 6 reiterates the point of verse 4: Christians are severed from the law.

Having written so ‘harshly’ about the law, the apostle now seeks to demonstrate that there is nothing wrong per se with the law. The real problem lies elsewhere, with the failure of the ‘I’ to submit to God and the expression of his will within the law. The law played an important role in the experience of the ‘I’ in revealing sin, though the law itself is in no way sinful. The age old question is whether or not Paul is strictly referring to himself. The consensus before the twentieth century was that ‘I’, whether expressed by *egMor* not, should be taken at face value. A sampling of older authorities demonstrates the point (Baaij 1993, 21-46; Bray 1998). To illustrate the beneficial nature of the law the ‘I’ testifies: *But I did not come to recognize sin except through the law; for example, the matter of lust would have been difficult to grasp but for the prohibition that says, You must not entertain any evil desire* (v.7b; personal translation). What does the ‘I’ mean by ‘sin’ at this point? And why was this particular prohibition singled out? The context definitely favours defining sin as an infraction of divine command, since the prohibition of Exod 20:17/Deut 5:21 is cited. This quotation also supports the idea that the Mosaic Law is really in view (cf. Chrysostom 1862, col. 502).

The answer to the question as to why the tenth commandment was singled out is somewhat bound up with the quest to identify the ‘I’ in this chapter, so both problems will be looked at together. B.L. Martin (1989, 76-77; see also 1981, 39-47) has posited that the immediate context (8b-10) points to the first man, Adam, as the referent of the ‘I’, since Paul’s argument is that ‘law’ is the stimulant and instrument of desire leading to sin and death. One also observes that the passage seems to depict a sort of historical sequence with the use of the aorist tense with past tense significance (vv.7-13), in contrast to the consistent use of the present in the following verses. In addition, the explicit reference to Adam in the wider context of chapter 5 may suggest that Paul is indeed alluding to the prototypical man under, and confronted by, law. Romans 7:13 should then be understood in the light of its parallels to the story of the fall of Adam in Genesis 3. This would explain why *You shall not lust* is used in verse 7 as a possible echo of Genesis, 2:17 (cf. Genesis 3:6 LXX).

But as far as Busch (2004, 13) is concerned the ‘clearest allusion to the Genesis narrative appears in [Rom] 7:11, where Paul writes . . . “sin deceived me” . . . clearly echoing Eve’s “confession” of Gen 3:13 . . . “the serpent deceived me”. Earlier in the chapter Paul also talks about the ‘fruit’ of death (v. 5), as he begins discussion of the law. Busch (2004, 13) then explains the Pauline ‘I’ in this context as the ‘common Graeco-Roman rhetorical device of *prosopopoia* . . . (speech-in-character) . . . [i.e., Paul] speaking as Eve in the primeval transgression.’<sup>11</sup> Keck (2005, 180) also finds echoes of Genesis 3 in Romans 7, where the ‘Adamic self (not simply Adam himself)’ is reflected in light of the revelation of the Last Adam. D. Moo (1986, 128-130),<sup>12</sup> on the other hand, has recently defended a position put forward earlier by Stauffer (1964, 343-362) that both the ‘I’ and the command in verse 7 have close links with Israel. While Moo does not deny that there are reminiscences of Adam in the pericope, he insists that this is only secondary. Moo points out that ‘desire’ and its cognates do not appear anywhere in the first three chapters of Genesis. Coupled with the fact that they occur in reference to the wilderness sojourn in Psalm 106:14 all seem to give credence to Moo’s position. The clear reference to Ex. 20:17 should remove all doubt. In a later work Moo (1996, 431) writes, ‘a . . . factor favouring reference to Israel as a whole is the similarity between the sequence of vv.9-10a and Paul’s persistent teaching about how the giving of the Mosaic Law made the situation of Israel worse, not better. The Law, Paul has

<sup>10</sup>Neither here nor in 7:4 is the nature of the fruit bearing specified.

<sup>11</sup> Busch (2004, 15) is also convinced that Paul invariably attributes the primeval deception to Eve and never to Adam (cf. 2 Cor 11: 1-21; Rom 5:12). See also Keener (2009, 91-92, n.17) and Witherington (2004, 179) on *prosopopoia*.

<sup>12</sup> Two British scholars (Cotterell and Turner 1989, 81) have come out in support of Moo’s thesis. Also Turner (1996, 129).

affirmed, “brings wrath” (4:15), turns sin into transgression (5:14; cf. Gal. 3:19), and “increases the trespass” (5:28).

Other interpreters believe that limiting the ‘I’ in this way is unnecessary. Fitzmyer is representative of those who see the passage as having a more universal scope. Closely tied to the Adamic view is the novel reading of Wright (1991, 227-229) who sees echoes of Cain in Romans 7. Wright believes that the Adamic reference is correct, but it does not fully explain the passage. He therefore seeks to demonstrate that seeing Cain in the whole scenario gives depth to the analysis of 7:7-25, and to rule out this allusive reference for an exclusive Adamic one is, in Wright’s opinion, a false disjunction. But how does Cain really fit here? First, Cain is viewed as ‘the archetypical possessor’ of the evil impulse. This is seen by some as part of Paul’s background in Roman 7. Second, Cain is counseled to do good while he can, lest he be overcome by sin. ‘In Roman 7:18, Paul summarizes the description of 7:13-20 as follows: When I want to do what is right, evil lies close at hand to me.’ Third, Cain is viewed in some circles as a spiritual schizophrenic, a description closely paralleling 7:13-25. Fourth, Cain is presented as being ignorant (Gen 4:9:*And he said, ‘I do not know’*). This is echoed in Romans 7:15a: *What I am doing I really don’t know*). ‘The result of the whole episode,’ Wright further observes, ‘is that Cain is cursed, and laments his plight . . . (Gen 4:14) . . . even so, Romans 7 ends in the well-known lament: [v. 24)]. ‘All these considerations suggest to me that we are right to see the same kind of allusion to Cain in Romans 7:13-25 as to Adam in 7:7-12, and with the same kind of intent.’ Despite this conviction, Wright sees the ‘Cain connection’ as only tangential to his understanding of Romans 7,<sup>13</sup> which is summarized in the following analysis:<sup>14</sup>

- 7:1-6: two marriages
- 7:7-12: the Law is not sin but its arrival, in Sinai as in Eden, was sin’s opportunity to kill its recipients
- 7:13-20: the Law was not the ultimate cause of ‘my’ death: it was sin working through the Law and in ‘me,’ unwilling though ‘I’ was, and thus swelling to its size.
- 7:21-25: the results in terms of Torah; Torah bifurcates –and so do ‘I’
- 8:1ff: in Christ and Spirit, the life that the Torah could not give (Wright 1991, 218-219).

Recognizing the rhetorical character of the passage, Fitzmyer (1993, 464) believes that the ‘I’ is a literary device used ‘to dramatize in a personal way the experience common to all unregenerate human beings faced with law and relying on their own resources to meet its obligations.’ Here the apostle is viewing humanity through Jewish eyes, trying to achieve right standing before God by observing the Mosaic Law. Black (1973, 94) also believes that it is ‘clear [Paul] intends us to understand them [i.e., vv. 7-25] as a description of a typical human experience; it is for everyone he is speaking in this famous passage.’<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the most attractive way to understand the ‘I’ in Rom 7 is to believe that Paul was speaking autobiographically. This understanding has a long history and is defended today, with different levels of sophistication, by scholars such as Banks (1978) and Gundry (1980, 232). Gundry argues that the best way to understand the presence of the tenth commandment in the passage and the ‘I’ is to see some reference to Paul’s own *bar mitzvah*. Paul, he believes, slipped into the ‘I’ style ‘precisely because becoming *bar mitzvah* applied to him but not to most of his readers, who were Gentiles’ (his italics).<sup>16</sup> He further points out that *epithumia* in Paul’s vocabulary quite often connotes sexual lust (cf. ‘venditus in servitutem concupiscentiae’; Zerwick 1984, 347). He cites Rom 1:24 and I Thess 4:5 as examples. ‘Any sensitive *bar mitzvah*,’ Gundry theorizes,

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<sup>13</sup>Anticipating the criticism that the Cain-connection is an exegetical *tour de force* (‘how submerged does a reference have to be before it drowns altogether?’), Wright (1991, 226) delineates three criteria of assessment: 1) verbal echoes which would be meaningful to hearer and reader alike; 2) thematic echoes; and 3) ‘*the greater coherence* that results in the text under scrutiny when the “echo” is allowed to be heard in this way.’ (Italics his).

<sup>14</sup>Only the main headings are given. His detailed outline spreads over three pages (217-219) and covers 7:1-8:11.

<sup>15</sup>The ‘I’, according to him, is unredeemed.

<sup>16</sup>Because, in his view, the passage refers to a ‘timeless age to which all men belong’ Barth (1959, 75) considers the passage as a description of a situation ‘from which we have been called away in faith.’

'would be worried by the tenth commandment, especially because he is catapulted into adulthood to keep the law at the very time his sexual urges become so active he is unable to avoid defiling sexual emissions (cf. Lev 15).' But what about the fact that the *bar mitzvah* was not ceremonialized until medieval times? Anticipating this criticism, Gundry points out that the legal shift from boyhood to adulthood has early attestation and so the objection is not fatal to his thesis. The final proposal we will look at, before returning to verse 7, is that of Seifrid (1992, 313-322). After surveying the various options proffered since Kümmel's (1929, 1974) groundbreaking work, Seifrid suggests that Paul is deliberately portraying himself according to a particular pattern reflected in Jewish penitential prayers, 'from the limited perspective of his intrinsic soteriological resources' (333). Two significant features of the passage are said to substantiate this claim: first, the shift from first person plural to singular. When this is done elsewhere in Paul, according to Seifrid, a paradigmatic element associated with the apostle's desire to explain or exhibit his theology is usually present (e.g., Rom 8:38; 14:14; 1 Cor 8:13, 13:11; Gal 2:18, 21; Phil 3:4-14).

The second feature is the change of tenses (from augmented to non-augmented). Drawing upon the work of Stanley Porter (1989) on Greek aspect, Seifrid concludes that the augmented tense was used for narrating (a remote) event whereas the present was employed to describe a condition present at the time of writing. Therefore, Paul does not demarcate 7:14-25 as belonging solely to his present, contrary to what those who read the text as belonging to Paul's Christian experience suppose. But he does indicate that the condition of *egM* extends into his present, contrary to what those who read the passage as a depiction of Paul's past argue. 'The change to the present tense in 7:14-25 signals a change of description' (333). This change, according to Seifrid, establishes continuity between the apostle's past and present, both having a striking similarity to the collective experience expressed in the Qumran *Hodayoth*. 'They [i.e., the confessions] share with Rom 7:14-25 a concentration on the condition of the individual not found elsewhere. And it is possible for such confessions to appear outside the context of prayer, like Paul's statements in Rom 7:14-25. An important parallel that interpreters have missed is that the penitential prayers represent the guilt of a group from a limited perspective, "while acknowledging that a broader framework exists.'" Perhaps the strongest link with Romans 7 is the rehearsal of past transgressions and the 'description of the resultant state<sup>17</sup> of the penitent in imperfective aspect and present time.' (Seifrid, 322). A major difference between the two corpora, Seifrid points out, is that Paul's language is explicitly argumentative. This should not be surprising, given the disparate literary genres. This fact by itself raises questions about how much the penitential discourses have really influenced Paul, especially at the time of writing Romans. If the founder of the Qumran community, the so-called Teacher of Righteousness, is responsible for the *Hodayoth*, then the 'I' statements found therein may be attributed to him. Some feel, however, that it 'is more probable that the "I" reflects the personal experiences of [him] in some hymns but in the other passages it represents the collective consciousness of the Qumran community . . . The language is heavily influenced by Biblical Hebrew' (Charlesworth 1986, 413).

As to which of these positions best explains the passage will be determined only after we have closely examined verses 8-25. In the meantime some of the other details of verse 7 will occupy our attention. The verse begins with two rhetorical questions which continue the diatribe style<sup>18</sup> seen earlier in the epistle (e.g., Rom 6:1) and which are employed in later portions (9:19; 11:19). Their function is to focus the reader's attention on the point of importance being discussed, namely, the real nature of the law. To the second

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<sup>17</sup>He cites 1QH 1:21-27, 3:19-29; 1QH 11:9, 10. Interestingly Vermes (1997, 244) expresses the view that the two fundamental themes of 1QH etc. are 'salvation' and 'knowledge'. One also sees these motifs in Rom 7 in terms of the Pauline expressions of self-knowledge (e.g., vv. 7, 18) and the salvation of the *ego* (vv. 24, 25). Another possible influence may be that of Plato (1994, xxxvi *passim*) 'who thought he detected three main sources of motivation in people. . . . The desire to satisfy one's instincts . . . the desire . . . for preservation of one's sense of "I"; and there is the desire for understanding and truth.' Lesses (1987) has an interesting exploration of these Platonic 'desires'.

<sup>18</sup>As a literary device it is characterized among other things by 1) stereotyped address (e.g., Rom 2:1); rhetorical objections (11:19); catechetical exchanges (Rom 6:1); personified abstractions (Rom 10:6-8); parataxis (Rom 2:21-22; 13:7); parallelism (Rom 12:4-15); vice lists (Rom 1:24-31); imperatives (Rom 12:14-15) and exclamation (7:7; 9:14); Soulen (1981, 55).

question the apostle gives a strong and categorical NO!<sup>19</sup> The collocation of ‘law’ and ‘sin’ in the question is itself scandalous, but Paul’s quick response negates any outrage that a nomistically informed Christian in Rome (whether ethnically Jew or Gentile) may have had. On the contrary, declares Paul, the ‘law’ (Torah) was very much instrumental in his spiritual education,<sup>20</sup> with reference to sin. Is the Apostle Paul’s reference to ‘sin’ in this context a concrete act or that which underlies it? The citing of the tenth commandment seems to tilt the balance in favour of a specific act. Dunn opts for the view that here ‘sin’ is presented as ‘a personified power.’ The succeeding verses, he says, use the term in this way. The way ‘sin’ is used in the previous two chapters seems to favour Dunn’s conclusion, but even he (1988, 378) has to admit a degree of ambiguity of the term in verse 7.

In any case, Paul’s knowledge of ‘sin’ came by way of the final injunction in the Decalogue. The knowledge, Dunn<sup>21</sup> believes, has to be experiential in the context, bearing testimony to the tyrannical nature of sin. It also provides some rationale for the provocative declaration of verse 5. The specific sin that the tenth commandment prohibits and that which the ‘I’ became acutely aware is lust. Here in verse 7b the apostle uses a synonym of *ginMkM*(know) employed in the first part of the verse. The juxtaposition of the two terms strongly suggests, in my view, nothing more than a stylistic shift. But what is the significance of the tenses?

Dunn (1988, 378), taking the pluperfect ”ˊμ<sup>1½</sup> as an ‘inceptive’ imperfect, offers the following translation: ‘I would not *have come* (my emphasis) to that experience of covetousness which I still have.’ However, Porter (1989, 286 n. 27) judges this understanding of ”ˊμ<sup>1½</sup>as a ‘miscontrual’ of the verb’s aspectual features within its context, without himself adding much to the sense of the verse. He may be correct, though, in pointing out that ‘the two verbs . . . are not synonymous here or the parallelism would break down’ (286). In verse 8 Paul now explains how the ‘I’ came to learn about the sinister nature of sin. Sin, he says, took the opportunity through the commandment ‘and produced all kinds of wrong desires’<sup>22</sup> (REB) in ‘him’. Here ‘sin’ is personified. A different imagery is used from the ones in the previous chapter in which sin is presented as monarch (v. 12)<sup>23</sup> and slave master (v. 16). ‘Desire,’ that which ‘sin’ produces, appears many times in the Pauline literature. The word group covers a semantic range that includes desire for food (Luke 15:16), or as the context of Romans 7:7 denotes, for something illicit (cf. Matt 5:28; Mark 4:14; Rom 1:24; 6:12; Eph 2:3; 1 John 2:16; 1 Pet 2:11; Titus 2:12 etc).<sup>24</sup> Of course there are numerous examples of what we might call ‘negative desire’ in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the inter-testamental literature. The passage 2 Esdras (3:20-22), for example, traces this kind of desire to the first ‘I’: ‘Yet you did not take away their evil heart from them, so that your law might produce fruit in them. For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the hearts of the people along with the evil root; but what was good departed, and the evil remained’ (NRSV).<sup>25</sup> What this passage shares with Romans 7 is a concern about Torah and man’s inability, on account of wrong desire, to follow it. Despite the parallels and the mention of the first man, one should not merely assume the Adamic postulate mentioned above.

Now judging from the military language, it would appear sin is playing the role of a soldier seizing someone or taking an enemy captive (Ryken 1998, 736). Whatever the precise understanding Paul intended to convey, what seems clear is that a ‘vicious’ triangle is now in place involving the law, sin, and the ‘I’. If for a

<sup>19</sup>This appears in 3:4; 6:2,15. It can be rendered ‘No way!’ in English, and in JT, ‘yu mad?’ [Are you crazy’]; cf ‘Das kannnoch sein!’ (DGNDB).

<sup>20</sup>Something approaching ‘experiential knowledge,’ according to Dunn.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Cranfield (1975, 348) and Fanning (1990, 308-309). Fanning points out that ”ˊμ<sup>1½</sup> occurs only here in the NT epistles. But it occurs in the Gospels and Acts (John 31,33; 11:42; Acts 23:5). The clause μοι τι πλέον is positively identified as a second-class condition in Blass 1961, 182, but with some reserve by Boyer (1982, 86).

<sup>22</sup>‘Desire’ is not qualified but the REB’s rendition appears correct at this point.

<sup>23</sup>Also in 5:21.

<sup>24</sup>Buschel, *TDNT* 3:167-72.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. this to Pascal’s (1958, 98), ‘Man’s nature is not always to advance; it has its advances and retreats.’

moment we treat the last mentioned as neutral, we have a scenario where the law is good (v.12) but powerless to energize the ‘I’, and on the other hand, sin is powerful, antinomian and manipulative. The result of sin’s maneuvering is the outworking of all manner of covetousness (NRSV). Two terms are used to underscore sin’s maneuver and manipulation of the ‘I’: •*Ἄλλα* ½ and °*πλάνα*. The former is employed approximately six times in the NT, all of which is to be found in the Pauline corpus.<sup>26</sup> Previous references include Gal 5:13, where Christian liberty is both affirmed and qualified (‘do not use your freedom as an occasion [•*Ἄλλα* ½ for the flesh]),<sup>27</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:12, where Paul is once again giving the church an *opportunity* (‘cause’; NRSV) to express some pride in its founder, and chapter 11:12 (*bis*) of the same book. This last reference, in my view, features a Pauline pun (‘But I will continue to do what I do, to cut off the pretext (•*Ἄλλα* ½ of those wishing such (•*Ἄλλα* ½’). In Romans 7:8, sin, as it were, uses the tenth commandment as a pretext to wreak havoc with the ‘I’. The second term (°*πλάνα*) that highlights the evil intent and machinations of ‘guerilla *hamartia*’ is the one rendered ‘wrought’ by the NRSV. In Greek it is a compound word appearing approximately 24 times in the NT, and is variously employed by Paul. In fact, apart from the apostle to the Gentiles, only James (1:3) and Peter (4:3) employ the term. Paul uses the verb to denote various productions of virtues and vices, for example, in 1:27; 2:9, the latter, and in 5:3 and 7:18, the former. What is produced here? The subject of °*πλάνα* is the personified inward perversity—‘sin,’ found in chapter 7 no less than six times, the first of which is in verse 8. It therefore should come as no surprise that its object is ‘all manner of lust/every kind of desire’, precisely that which is proscribed by the Decalogue.

On ‘every kind of desire’, Fitzmyer (1993, 467) may be correct, that ‘all sorts of possibilities of doing evil’ is the meaning intended by Paul, but this seems too broad. In other words, though ‘lusts’ lead to other sins, in a cause and effect connection, the emphasis falls on the former and not the latter, thus narrowing the purview of evil’s expression in the context. Several Bible students have related this verse to the rabbinic belief of the time of a bipolar force within humanity, one aspect of which is evil oriented and the other good. In this fundamental understanding of the human condition there is only one panacea: obedience to Torah (Edwards 1992, 188). Paul will later appear to contradict this notion (e.g., 8:2; cf. 7:6) by replacing Torah (v. 12a) with Spirit (8: 14). Edwards’ (1992, 187) illustration is apt: ‘Until now the law has been depicted rather like a watch dog which keeps trespassers out of private property. But that is only the half of it. The same law can become a hound dog nipping at the heels of a trespasser and chasing him further *into* forbidden territory.’ Edwards also raises the question of the psychological significance of the verse in light of the tendency to gravitate toward that which is forbidden-- the so-called ‘reverse psychology’ syndrome.<sup>28</sup> He then downplays the idea by rightly pointing out that the pericope itself is obviously theological and not psychological. Cranfield (1975, 350) summarily dismissed this idea as well.<sup>29</sup>

That the passage is highly theological is beyond dispute. But if psychology is essentially about the study of human behaviour, should it come as a surprise that the two disciplines, rightly interpreted and applied, might in fact shed some light on these verses? For instance, in Edwards’ example above, one may wonder: why would a person want to trespass on the forbidden territory in the first place? The observation of behavioural patterns across cultures may suggest some kind of a dynamic (psychological/sociological) that is not at variance with any established canonical or theological norm, if one can speak like this in a postmodern context.<sup>30</sup> The final clause in verse 8 is debated. In what sense is/was sin dead without law? At this point the various proposals for the identity of the ‘I’ jostle for attention. For Dunn (1988, 383), the sentence clearly

<sup>26</sup> Assuming here 1 Tim 5:14 is genuinely Pauline.

<sup>27</sup> The thought is that believers are free from the Mosaic Law. It is the Messianic law (Gal 6:2) that provides the qualification.

<sup>28</sup> The homonymic ‘syndrome’ easily suggests itself.

<sup>29</sup> We shall not do justice to Paul’s thought here, if we settle for a merely psychological explanation . . . . Looking at the text from both perspectives (i.e., from psychology and theology), should not be seen as a *mere* explanation, provided the task is carried out with care. For attempts in this direction, see Beck (2002) and Theissen (1987).

<sup>30</sup> A strength of the postmodern agenda is its openness to look at texts through various spectacles.

alludes to the period prior to the issuing of the first ever commandment recorded in Genesis 2.<sup>31</sup> Moo (1996, 437), however, expresses doubt that the Genesis narrative in question allows sufficient time for such a development. What Paul had in mind, according to Moo, is the pre-Sinaitic period of Israel's existence. When the sequence of clauses is correlated with the time after the Exodus, Moo does appear to have a point. In addition the 'chiastic pattern' (Moo 1996, 437) below also seems to buttress his case, when viewed in the light of the giving of the law:

‘Apart from law’	‘When the commandment came’
‘sin is <i>dead</i> ’ (v.8c) ‘I was <i>alive</i> ’ (v.9a)	‘sin sprang to <i>life</i> again’ (v.9b) ‘I <i>died</i> ’ (v.10a)

Moo (1996, 437) then cautiously concludes, ‘while what is narrated in vv. 7-8a may, therefore, have been experienced by Paul personally, what is narrated in these clauses was experienced by him only through his involvement with the history of his people.’ Although verse 8c appears incongruous with the autobiographical view, Moo’s concession to that position demonstrates once again the difficulty of the passage, and, possibly, his own unease with the Israel view. However, the declaration ‘sin is dead apart from the law’ best fits a pre-Sinaitic scenario, if only because the tenth commandment is quoted. In this sense *nekra* (dead) will mean something like ‘lacking in power’, lacking in power, that is, to carry out its evil intention against and through the human personality, whether corporately or individually construed. For the first time in the pericope Paul explicitly mentions *egM* as the battleground of sin (v.9). What is difficult to miss is the strong allusion to the Adamic experience in Eden (Witherington 2004, 184). According to Edwards (1995, 188), ‘Adam’s fate anticipates the human race to follow . . . and the entire human race . . . is implicated in Adam’s fall.’ This may fit verse 9a comfortably<sup>32</sup> (*at one time I was alive without the law*).

But while Adam in the account of Genesis was once without law, how does this relate to his descendants? The reference can possibly be to the experience of Israel, as we have seen above, but that is certainly not the ‘entire human race,’ unless of course we take the ‘Israel’ position (Moo’s suggestion) in some representative way. However one resolves this difficulty (i.e., whether or not the ‘I’ alludes to Adam or Israel, etc) the growing consensus that *egMis* used in some typical fashion appears more and more attractive. For this awareness most give credit to Kümmel (1974), who is the first in modern times to seriously challenge the autobiographical view. Kümmel’s contribution to the debate allowed interpreters to explore other possibilities of understanding verse 9 especially, which Theissen labels ‘non-biographical’. However, Kümmel, it would appear, swung the pendulum too far in the opposite direction in failing to see *any* reference at all to Paul in the chapter. Responding to this Theissen (1987, 201) declares, ‘anyone who denies to Paul the *ego* in Romans 7 has to bear the burden of proof for this claim. What suggests itself most readily is to think of an “I” that combines *personal* and *typical traits*.’ (My emphasis)<sup>33</sup>

But Kümmel (1974a, 214) seems to have softened his position from the hard line fictive ‘I’ to the more nuanced posture taken by Theissen, for in another place he writes (commenting on Gal 2:19-20): ‘Here it is said of the Christians—the “I” does not describe *Paul alone* [my emphasis]—that they are crucified with Christ and are thereby dead to the law.’ One can see why 7:9 is seen as fictive, but cannot the other personal references be both typical and experiential at once? Granting the difficulty of

<sup>31</sup> Dunn (1988, 383); the allusion is also recognized by Gundry (1980, 231).

<sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding Moo’s disavowal.

<sup>33</sup> Theissen further observes that were it not for ‘the [alleged?] contradiction to Philippians 3 . . . and . . . Rom 7:9, probably no one would ever have come up with the idea of considering the “I” fictive’ or ‘representational’ (cf. Russell 1994, 511-527). Kümmel (1974, 121) ‘responds,’ ‘Und zwar findet sich dieser Gebrauch Röm. 3, 5.7; 1. Kor. 6, 12, 15, 10, 29f., 11, 31f., 13, 1-3. 11f., 14, 11. 14. 15; [und] Gal. 2, 18.’

interpreting verse 9 as autobiographical, we still need to ask if the ‘either/or’ approach to the passage in general and verse 9 in particular is not bankrupt. Only a fresh and complete assessment of the Pauline ‘I’ can, I believe, satisfactorily answer such a question. Our tentative conclusion at this juncture, then, is that the ‘I’ of verse 9a is both typical and personal--not just fictive, but inclusive. But to what extent? Wright (1991, 226-230) has already mentioned Cain as a candidate for inclusion. That suggestion may find support in the language of 9b, particularly τηε' ερβ τρανσλατεδ Λσπρανγ το λιε, ἀνέζησεν'. since ‘The image suggests that sin is like a beast of prey poised to leap upon its victim’ (Schreiner 1998, 367). Schreiner does not mention Cain at this point, but his reading of •½¶· Ἀπλα as ‘sprang to life’ is definitely reminiscent of Genesis 4:6ff where ‘sin’ like ‘a beast of prey’ (Gesenius 1949, 755), ‘a lion crouching at the door—lethal’ (Waltke 2001, 103), or demon (Walton 2001, 264), is ready to overpower Cain (cf. Rom 6:14).

Käsemann (1980, 192) seems to speak for everyone who wrestles with the passage when he says that much insight may be lost ‘if the general “I” style of confessional speech is allowed to remain so formal that a vague reference to every man is seen’. But he appears to have taken himself too seriously by unnecessarily restricting the ‘I’ to Adam.<sup>34</sup> I believe it is better, like Dunn (1988, 381), to see Adam in the ‘I’ but only in an allusive sense. However, Käsemann may be correct, I think, in inveighing against the ‘I = every man position.<sup>35</sup> The only plausible options, then, would be those which attempt to correlate the events (?) implied in ‘and I was once alive apart from the law, but with the coming of the law sin sprang to life and I died; vv.9-10a’, with some historical reference in which ‘law/command’ figures prominently.<sup>36</sup> But if the ‘I’ in the passage is typical, with possible allusions to Adam and/ or Israel, in what sense is it personal? To the many interpreters before Kümmel (1929) this question would have been quite strange. But it is the ‘strangeness’ of verse 9, among other things, that caused Kümmel to doubt any authorial self-reference. The difficulty is felt by all.

We now explore some suggestions as to how verse 9 may fit Paul’s profile. Alford (1861, 380) identifies the period when Paul was ‘alive without the law’ as ‘*all that time, be it mere childhood or much more, before the law began its work within him*--before the deeper energies of his moral nature were aroused’ (his italics). Denny’s (1912, 640) position is this: ‘There is not really a period in life to which one can look back as the happy time when he had no conscience.’ Bruce (1985, 139) and his former student, Gundry (1980, 228-245), speculate that Paul is referring to his ‘ante-pubertal’ years, especially those prior to his *bar mitzvah*.<sup>37</sup> Though Murray (1968, 250) refuses to identify a period with any pinpoint accuracy, he nevertheless shares his own brand of speculation: ‘[Paul] is speaking of the unperturbed, self-complacent, self-righteous life which he once lived before the turbulent motions and conviction of sin, described in the two preceding verses, overtook him . . . the coming of the commandment is *undoubtedly* the coming home to his consciousness and the registration in consciousness by which sin took occasion to work in him.’<sup>38</sup> This quotation not only seeks to explain verse 9a, but 9b as well (but with the coming of the commandment sin sprang to life). The compound •½¶· Ἀπλα (sprang to life/rise) seems to support Murray’s argument once we do not exclude Paul from the purview of possibilities. But how does one account for the fact that elsewhere *anastasis* (rising) is a synonym of *anastazM*(rise; Louw and Nida 1988, 2:262)? Could the verse somehow be a reference to another ‘stage’

<sup>34</sup> Says he (1980, 196): ‘We do not have an autobiographical reminiscence [here]. . . . In the full sense only Adam lived before the commandment was given. Only for him was the coming of the divine will in the commandment an occasion for sin as he yielded covetously to sin and therefore “died”. . . . There is nothing in the passage which does not fit Adam, and everything fits Adam alone.’ But since the ἐντολή is positively identified as part of the Decalogue, how can ‘everything’ fit Adam alone?

<sup>35</sup> This was articulated this way by Armstrong (1983, 49): ‘When Paul uses the pronoun “I” in this instance, he is not referring to himself personally. . . but . . . unredeemed mankind.’

<sup>36</sup> Stott (1994, 203) speaks of four distinct stages.

<sup>37</sup> Bruce believes that 7:14-25 refers to Paul’s post-conversion experience; for Das (2007, 232), the section (including 7-13) deals with the experience of a God-fearing Gentile.

<sup>38</sup> Emphasis mine.

in the writer's experience? If so, what is this stage? To ask these questions is, perhaps, to assume too much concerning the force of the prefix *ana-*. If it has any significance at all, it perhaps conveys the perfective idea of 'springs to life' (Bauer *et al.*, 53; Cranfield 1975, 351-352) or 'begins operation' (Louw and Nida 1988, 2:511).<sup>39</sup>

Like Murray, Harrison (1976, 80) argues that the thought of verse 9 must be taken in a relative sense, since there was no period in Paul's pre-conversion life that was 'unrelated to the law,' (having been a Pharisee's son [Acts 23:6] and a Pharisee himself [Acts 26:5]). So what does he mean by 'once I was alive apart from law' (NIV)? According to Harrison (1976, 80): 'He seems to mean . . . that there was a time he was living in a state of blissful indifference to the intensely searching demands that the law made on the inner man. He was careless and self-deceived as to his own righteousness. This state is reflected in Philippians 3:6 where he speaks of his pre-conversion days when he was "faultless" with respect to legalistic righteousness.' In this reckoning, 'and I died' (v.10a) is to be understood subjectively in the sense of a coming to an end of Paul's intellectual struggle, particularly with reference to Jesus of Nazareth and the Messianic claims his followers made about him. The dying, then, was more like 'the sentence of death' (so Harrison) representing the 'hopelessness and despair' which is to be contrasted with the almost smug complacency that characterized the young Pharisee (Harrison 1976, 80).<sup>40</sup> This is yet another attempt at making sense of an abbreviated account of a crucial stage (or possible stages) in Paul's life, a stage that also serves to dramatize<sup>41</sup> that which is typical of humanity (Adam/Israel/Every man?) when faced with the true character of the law's demands. To press to find a definitive answer to the question of what exactly is the writer's experience behind his deliberately terse language is to ignore his overall purpose (the 'forest') to concentrate, so to speak, on a forbidden tree. Whatever we make of verse 9-10a, the contrastive *I . . . I* is of some significance in that it serves to highlight even further a popular biblical merism (life/death).<sup>42</sup>

Verse 10b seems to complicate matters even more by its mention of 'the command' that is in one sense associated with 'life' and in another, 'death'. What is this commandment? And in what sense(s) is it related to these diametrically opposite experiences? Questions like these have engaged the minds of some of the best interpreters for nearly two millennia, and like many other items in the passage, no altogether satisfactory answers have been given. There is, however, some agreement that Paul is alluding to Leviticus 18:5.<sup>43</sup> He will quote the verse in 10:5. It also appears in an earlier epistle, (Gal 3:12), which has a lot in common with Romans. According to Theissen (1987, 209), verse 10 is possibly referring to, 'the nomist expectation that the law can confer life.' But what might this mean? Life in the sense of salvation, or longevity of life with a qualitative dimension? Moo (1993, 311; 1996, 439) defends the former view. To him the law was intended to give eternal life once it was obeyed perfectly. Here he might want us to distinguish between purpose and result. The fact that no one has ever met this theoretical possibility should not let us lose sight of the fact that the original purpose of Lev 18:5 is salvific in its fullest sense.

Moo's position is difficult to disprove, precisely because authorial intention is not always easy to determine with any confidence.<sup>44</sup> But there is nothing in either the context of Leviticus or Romans 7:10 that demands such an understanding. It is better, in my view, to limit the meaning of 'life' to something

<sup>39</sup>It is located here under a special semantic domain. Either domain may be supportive of Murray's historical reconstruction, though, in the opinion of some, such autobiographical reconstruction is implausible and unnecessary.

<sup>40</sup>Witmer (1983, 446) also locates 'I was alive' during Paul's youth (his childhood even) and the coming of the commandment at the stage where the full impact of God's law was felt resulting in 'the dawning of the significance of the commandment ("Do not covet") on Paul's mind and heart before his conversion.'

<sup>41</sup>*The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (1994, 216).

<sup>42</sup>E.g., 6: 23; 8:13. Cf. the Deuteronomy's (chapt. 28) blessings and curses.

<sup>43</sup>So, representatively, the apparatus of Aland *et al.* (1994, 546).

<sup>44</sup>Notwithstanding Hirsch (1967, especially 164-244).

other than salvation, since Paul's strenuous argument elsewhere is that righteousness, and the saving act of God of which it is a part, is 'apart from law'; 3:21a). And if the gospel that Paul expounds and defends in this epistle is to be found in the Hebrew Bible (3:21b), then one could not expect any commandment to be given for eternal life.<sup>45</sup> This kind of life is *always* a divine gift (6:23).<sup>46</sup> In essential disagreement with this perspective is Feinberg (1969, 110) who writes: 'The promise of life which accompanied the law ("If a man do, he shall live by them") was genuine, but there was no enablement provided to keep the law (Rom 8:3).' But even with this qualification, Feinberg still goes on to declare, 'obedience would have brought life physically and *spiritually*, temporally and *eternally*.' However, as was pointed out above, 'life' in verse 10 should not be given its pregnant sense. I think an examination of its antonym supports this interpretation. In this regard, Black's study (1984, 418-419) is quite useful. After having surveyed the Jewish and Hellenistic thought world with reference to 'death', Black comes up with the following taxonomy:

*Death as Completion*

- a. Part of the natural order
- b. The payment of an account owed to God or payment made through atoning sacrifice (principally Semitic)
- c. Release from suffering
- d. An occasion for hope or witness (Semitic) or heroism and glory (Hellenic)
- e. The incentive for ethical behaviour and the fulfillment of a righteous life

*Death as Depletion*

- f. A terrible thing to be feared
- g. The loss of the richness of life
- h. An intrusion into the creator's design . . . .
- i. A tyrannous, cosmological power
- j. Something associated with sin: either<sup>47</sup> derived from, or finishing transgression.

The above 'conceptual laws,' suggests Black, provides a useful framework within which to come to grips with 'death' and its cognates in chapter 7. In verse 10, I believe that Paul is viewing 'death as depletion' in the specific sense of loss of the 'richness of life' (g.).<sup>48</sup> Therefore, what Paul is saying in verse 10b is that the commandment (or better, his failure to live up to it) resulted in a miserable existence. This is possibly what Paul means by 'death' in this context. The opposite thought, then, has to do with the kind of life which is akin to that mentioned in John 10:10b, without, of course, the overtones of the eschatological dimension.<sup>49</sup> Verse 11 continues to reveal the destructive effect sin had in the life of Paul. Again the parallel between Genesis 3 and the author's experience is drawn out. This is confirmed by the construction •¾ Ä¬Ä Ä½¼ (it deceived me), which first appears in Genesis 3:13 (LXX).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Note the attributive article in 'the one (meant) for life' (Robertson and Davis 1977, 200); Robertson (1934, 539) plausibly suggests that *moi* (v. 10a) should be taken as a dative of disadvantage.

<sup>46</sup> See also the apostle's illustration of this truth in chapter 4 of the epistle. But if *zM*, according to Turner (1980, 487), is invariably salvation in the NT, then my understanding of 7:10 is definitely wrongheaded. However, *zM* can mean ordinary life (Acts 17:5; Phil. 1:20; Moulton 1977, 43).

<sup>47</sup> The above schema, according to Black, can also be expressed biologically, mythologically, and metaphorically.

<sup>48</sup> This applies to both the verb (10a) and the noun (10b). Black's ii.c appears to contradict his earlier affirmation: 'For the ancient Israelites death was not viewed as an absurd, inimical intruder but was accepted as a constituent of an orderly, supervised creation' (414). He does, however, point out that in 'no historical stage or community of ancient Judaism was there a single, uniform definition of death or attitude towards it' (416).

<sup>49</sup> *zM* in this sense can hardly be so divided. But if that were possible, it is the 'already' dimension (minus spirit?) to which the 'commandment unto life' pointed.

<sup>50</sup> Actually the LXX lacks the prefix.

In an earlier epistle, this compound verb is also used (2 Cor 11:3), and in a later one it appears in a passive form (was deceived; I Tim 2:14). The term does appear, then, to be a crucial one for Paul. Like Adam and Eve<sup>51</sup> in the Genesis narrative, the apostle was both deceived and slain by sin. Again the concept of death in this verse should be understood in terms of ‘depletion’ as above. In contrast to the demonic-like character of sin (Black 1973, 98), described especially in verses 8 and 11, the law is holy. If sin has taken on diabolical qualities in this passage, then the law is divine. We must never forget that Paul’s primary purpose here is the vindication of the law. So far he has said some things about *nomos*(law) that appear to place it in a bad light. For example, in 5:20 law ‘increases’ sin, in 7:4 it is that to which the Roman believers died, and, as a result, were freed (7:6; cf. 6:14). Statements like these beg for clarification and in 7:7 Paul set about this task. In calling the law holy in verse 12 is clearly the climax of his *apologia*. But in what sense is the law holy? So far Paul has used this adjective in relation to the OT writings (1:2), the believers at Rome (1:7) and with the divine Spirit (5:5). Within the aforementioned Scriptures (1:2), particularly in the book of Isaiah, ‘holy’ is a term that applies to God in his special relationship to his people (e.g., Isa 6:1ff). This is its benchmark employment. All other uses take their cue from this. The law, then, is holy because it is the expression of the holy divine will (cf. 2:18). It is righteous and good and spiritual for the same reason(cf. v.14; 3:26).

Again we draw attention to the strange triangle Paul is discussing in this passage: the law that is holy, sin which is not, and the ‘I’ which, as we shall see, is pulled in both directions. But if the law is holy, righteous and good and was not responsible for Paul’s moral failure, what is it then that is responsible for his ‘death’? And is not there a certain relation between law and death in Paul (e.g., ‘The soul who sins shall die’)? Paul’s own question is much sharper and to the point: ‘Did that which is wholesome become in my experience the basis on which quality life was forfeited? (v.13).<sup>52</sup> Paul’s stereotypical ‘outburst’ is even stronger: ‘No way!’ Following this, Paul cogently explains that the real culprit is ‘sin’, the utterly unwholesome member of the aforementioned triad. It is sin that wrought death in him, and in so doing demonstrated its true colours, in a manner of speaking. Brunner’s (1959, 61) summary is apt: ‘That [the bringing of death] is not the fault of the law itself, but of its connection with sin. And in this way, too, the Law fulfils a divine mission: it makes sin manifest, it makes it break out, it brings it to terrible maturity and thus makes the cure possible. For it creates the knowledge of sin; without the knowledge of sin there is also no justifying faith. In that the Law is able to do just this in its deadly effect, it shows once again that in origin it is God’s law and therefore holy, just and good. ‘This now sets the stage for our reading of the next major pericope.

### Romans 7:14-25.Whose Story?

The apostle will add one final adjective to his eulogy and apology of the law: spiritual. This appears in verse 14,<sup>53</sup> the verse in which Paul switches to the present tense. P. Althaus (1996; cited in Käsemann 1980, 198) views the previous adjectives used in verse 12 as part of Paul’s rhetorical strategy. This observation, I believe, is correct. I also think that the descriptive lexeme ‘spiritual’ should be added to this pleonastic presentation, but it was skillfully delayed to set up the new contrast between the law, the object of Paul’s defense, and the ‘I’, the captive of sin.<sup>54</sup> The identity of the ‘I’ is once again called into question, precisely because of the strong statement of verse 14b regarding its status in relation to sin. We have already accepted the position of people like Theissen that *egMin* some way refers to Paul, despite its rhetorical and allusive function in the passage. But does the passage refer to the unregenerate or regenerate Paul? The question is regarded as crucial, not only to an understanding of Paul’s anthropology,

<sup>51</sup>While Paul’s ‘deception’ was similar to that of Eve (cf. 2 Cor 11:3), it does not follow that Paul’s ‘I’ includes Eve, as Dunn (1988a, 385) suggests. He is, however, right in stressing the paradoxical role of the law in this connection. Elsewhere ‘the “I” is an existential self-identification with Adam . . . humankind (cf. 2 Baruch 54. 19)’ (Dunn 1998, 99).

<sup>52</sup>This is my periphrastic rendition.

<sup>53</sup>Moo (1996, 452), following Morris (1988), does not take the verse as the beginning of a new section, but as part of vv. 14-25, since, like v.7, it contains a question.

<sup>54</sup>‘The antithesis is formulated with ἐγώ (“I”) in the emphatic position, contrasting with the “we” ’ (Jewett 2007, 461).

but his perspective of the nature of spiritual formation (Martin 1981). In addition, answering the question may provide meaningful insight into Paul's perception of the addressees, as well as his own perception of self (Vorster 1990, 107).<sup>55</sup> According to Moo (1996, 446-447), those favouring the regenerate position more or less argue that:

1. *EgM* must refer to Paul himself, and the shift from the past tenses of vv. 7-13 to the present tenses of vv. 14-15 can be explained only if Paul is describing in these latter verses his present experience as a Christian.
2. Only the regenerate truly “delight in God’s law” (v.22), seeks to obey it (vv. 15-20), and “serve” it (v.25); the unregenerate do not “seek after God” (3:11), and cannot “submit to the law of God” (8:7).
3. Whereas the mind of people outside Christ is universally presented by Paul as opposed to God and his will (cf. Rom. 1:28; Eph. 4:17; Col. 2:28; I Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8; Tit. 2:15), the mind of *egM* “serves the law of God” (vv. 22, 25).
4. *EgM* must be a Christian because only a Christian possesses the “inner person” (cf. Paul’s only other two uses of the phrase in 2 Cor 4:16; Eph. 3:16).
5. The passage concludes, after Paul’s mention of the deliverance wrought by God in Christ, with a reiteration of the divided state of the *egM*(vv. 24-25).
6. This shows that the division and struggle of the *egM*that Paul depicts in these verses is that of the person already saved by God in Christ.

Moo in fact argues for the contrary position and his detailed exposition of verses 14-25 seeks to put that position on a firm exegetical footing. But before he does so, he also provides the ‘most important reasons’ why he and others embrace the view that the verses under scrutiny depict an unregenerate person. The reasons are as follows:

1. The strong connection of *egM* with “the flesh” (vv. 14, 18, and 25) suggests that Paul is elaborating on the unregenerate condition mentioned in 7:5: being “in the flesh.”
2. *EgM* throughout this passage struggles “on his/her own” (cf. “I myself” in v.25), without the aid of the Holy Spirit.
3. *EgM* is “under the power of sin” (v. 14b), a state from which every believer is released (6:2, 6, 11, 18-22).
4. As the unsuccessful struggle of vv. 15-20 shows, *egM* is a “prisoner of the law of sin” (v.23). Yet Rom. 8:2 proclaims that believers have been set free from this same “law of sin and death.”
5. While Paul makes clear that believers will continue to struggle with sin (cf. e.g., 6; 12-13; 13:12-14; Gal 5:17), what is depicted in 7:14-25 is not just a struggle with sin but a defeat by sin. This is a more negative view of the Christian life than can be accommodated within Paul’s theology.

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<sup>55</sup>For Vorster such insight can best be had through application of certain ‘conversational’ and rhetorical tools to the letter.

6. The *egM* in these verses struggles with the need to obey the Mosaic Law; yet Paul has already proclaimed the release of the believer from the dictates of the law (6:17; 7:4-6).<sup>56</sup>

This last point in particular has led some to take a mediating position. Stott (1994, 208-209), for example, draws attention to the fact that mention of the Spirit is virtually absent from the chapter, with only one reference in verse 6. This leads Stott to approach the chapter from the perspective of *Heilsgeschichte* ('salvation history'), enabling him to posit that Paul's use of the 'I' is likely the depiction of an Old Testament believer. A representative of such a believer could be any Israelite living under the law up until the time of Jesus' death. This would take in a John the Baptist, for instance, or any of the disciples.<sup>57</sup> A third way to understand the 'I' in these verses is to posit that Paul has in mind human beings in general (Christian or not). This is how Kümmel (1974a, 178) and others understand the entire chapter. Verse 14, for instance, is key to Kümmel's understanding of the universal character of sin.<sup>58</sup> The difficulty of identifying the 'I' in this passage has elicited the following confession from a grammarian (Wallace 1996, 532 n. 52): 'I have struggled with this text for many years (in more ways than one!), and have held to three different views. My *present* view is that the apostle is speaking as universal man and is describing the experience of anyone who attempts to please God by submitting the flesh to the law. By application, this could be true of an unbeliever or a believer.'

But what about the shift from past to present tenses? Wallace suggests (in keeping with his 'present' understanding) that the tenses in 14-25 are gnomic. Harrison (1976, 84-85) defends a similar position. Paul, according to him, deliberately writes in such a way as to 'demonstrate what would indeed be the situation if one is faced with the demands of the law and the power of sin in his life were to attempt to solve his problem independently of Christ and the enablement of the Spirit.' Harrison sees in the book of Ecclesiastes an apt parallel to his position, in that 'the writer knows God . . . but purposely and deliberately views life from the standpoint of the natural man in order to expose it as vanity, empty of lasting value.' In Ecclesiastes 3:17-4:8, we read:

I said in my heart God will judge the righteous and the wicked. . . . I said in my heart with regard to the sons of men that God is testing them to show them that they are but beast. . . . Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. . . . And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. . . . Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbour. . . . Again, I saw vanity under the sun: a person who has no one, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself pleasure?" (RSV).

Dodd (1999, 226), on the other hand, expresses the view that the quasi-generic identification of the letter itself goes a far way in explicating Paul's 'I' in chapter 7, particularly verses 14-25. As early as 3:6-7, according to Dodd, one discovers a 'revealing clue' to the apostle's rhetoric. Immediately after 'may it never be!' a diatribal ejaculatory phrase, we have the conjunction of a stylistic 'I' piece. A similar combination is to be found in Gal 2:17-18. This raises the possibility that both these texts owe their origin to the dialogical/diatribal form of argumentation, which is usually characterized by short statements, conversational tone, personification and rhetorical interrogatives, et cetera. Both Galatians 2:18 and Romans 3:7 are responses to rhetorical

<sup>56</sup>This is the view of Manson (1962, 946) and, more recently, Schreiner (1998, 385), who presents the following structure in defense: [A] Life under the Law: Unregenerate . . . (7:5); [B] Life in the Spirit: Regenerate . . . (7:6); [A'] Life under the Law . . . (7:7-25); [B'] Life in the Spirit . . . (8:1-17). Stuhlmacher (1994, 116) has a similar scheme.

<sup>57</sup>This is really a variant of the 'regenerate' position. Stott also cites a variant of the opposite view, which states that the 'I' in question is a person under the Spirit's conviction who struggles to keep the law in his/her own strength.

<sup>58</sup>Kümmel (1974a, 181) is so certain that the 'I' represents every man that his problem with the passage lies elsewhere. Thus he probes, 'obviously it can be asked . . . how Paul can speak of man's responsibility before God when man yet as flesh is sold under sin and cannot go further than the cry ' of 7:24?

questions. Assuming that ‘Paul creates a composite character whom he labels [*egM*]’<sup>59</sup> the aspectual shift in 7:14 becomes a crucial clue for Dodd (1999, 226) that we have in this pericope an adaptation of the diatribe begun in 7:7. Another important element of the diatribal style found in the passage is the personification of the abstract, so that Fitzmyer (1993, 465) could write: ‘In this passage Paul once again personifies sin and the law and treats them as actors on the stage of human history’. All this enables Paul to express theologically the ‘impersonal’ struggle among the law, sin and ‘I’, with the ‘I’ as a virtual third literary character (Dodd 1999, 229).

Nevertheless, these three ‘protagonists’ in Paul’s script do not only serve as ‘rhetorical devices since they have literal referents’ as well. The law can refer concretely to the tenth commandment, sin, the experience of a Jewish and/or Christian believer and the ‘I,’ according to Dodd (1999, 230), ‘a composite of various elements which defy a single identification.’<sup>60</sup> For Dodd (1999, 230-231), this composite ‘I’ functions in two ways: (1) as part of Paul’s defense strategy of the law (7:7-13; cf. Adeyemi 2006a; and especially Adeyemi 2007, 55-57), and (2) as ‘a showcase for the liberating power of Christ’. These two sections are clearly marked by the tenses, along with the stylistic indicator, ‘For we know that.’

As we examine verse 14 more closely, what becomes readily apparent is the stark contrast between the law and ‘I’ with the ‘spirituality’ of the former dwarfing the latter in its ‘carnality’. The truth concerning the law was evidently common knowledge among writer and addressees. But the carnal character of the ‘I’ was, it appears, a revelation. It is the ‘I’ in this light that is the main stumbling block of the ‘regenerate’ view. The problem is compounded by the perfect tense participle ‘sold’ and its complement (cf. 1 Kings 21: 25; Schlatter 1995, 164). Unless Paul is contradicting himself, says Achtemeier (1985, 121) ‘still a slave of sin’ cannot be a meaningful reference to him, especially in light of 6:6, 7, 11, 17, 18, 22 and 7:6. Here Achtemeier agrees with Räisänen<sup>61</sup> (1986, 109: ‘it is hardly necessary to argue once more . . . that the famous . . . Rom 7:14-25 is not intended by Paul as a description of the Christian.’) and Wright (2002, 551-555). But as we have seen above, a few interpreters are returning to the view of Luther (1972, 328-329; cf. Martin 1989, 84) that 7:14b contains the words of a believer, ‘for it is characteristic of a spiritual and wise man to know that he is carnal and displeasing to himself.’(Cf. Luther’s [1954]: ‘No one regards himself as a miserable man who is not spiritual.)

But what is the nature of the ‘carnality’ predicated of the ‘I’? An exploration of this question may shed some light on the identification of the ‘I’ as well. Answering the question concerning the carnality of the ‘I’ means in part determining the semantic value of ‘flesh’ (*σάρκινός*) within the sentence. The problem is slightly compounded by the fact that the majority of manuscripts have *σαρκικός* (fleshly?) instead of its above synonym. However, the external evidence and other factors seem overwhelmingly in favour of *σάρκινός*. But if we were to adopt the inferior reading, would it make any material difference to the meaning in context? In a brief examination of the two terms, M.C. Parsons (1988, 151-152) points out that older grammarians preferred the meaning ‘made of flesh’ for *σάρκινός*. *σαρκικός* on the other hand bore the sense ‘characteristic of, or determined by.’ While there are some lexicographers who would prefer to maintain this distinction (e.g., Trench 1880, 270), Parsons says that the trend nowadays is towards seeing the words as interchangeable terms within the Pauline corpus.<sup>62</sup> This is also how Thiselton (2000, 288) treats the terms in the context of I Cor 3:1. He translates *σάρκινός* as ‘people moved entirely by human drives.’ So what Paul is asserting concerning ‘I’ is its antithetical character to the law. The succeeding verses will elaborate on the thought of verse 14b further.

<sup>59</sup>While this “I” does not refer straightforwardly to Paul, it incorporates his experience’ (Dodd, 1999, 226).

<sup>60</sup>This composite ‘I’ incorporates elements of the Adam story, as well as the Jewish/Christian experience.

<sup>61</sup>He believes that Paul’s statement about the law (v.14) ‘stands indeed in an irreconcilable contradiction’ (45) to his assessment elsewhere, notably in 2 Cor 3.

<sup>62</sup>The burden of Parson’s article is to dispute the claim of BAGD that the aforementioned distinctions are not observed in the manuscript tradition, a claim, he believes, that is contradicted by a study of F and G.

In verses 15-25 the reader senses a measure of the confusion predicated of the ‘I’ throughout. For example, verse 15 is almost certainly the confession of one who becomes disoriented by virtue of the intense and continual inward struggle. Thus ‘I do not approve<sup>63</sup> what I am doing’. Again we come across another pair of verbs that pose a challenge to the interpreter as to the precise semantic value, if ever such was intended. ὃ+Ἄπειρος οὐκέτι, the first of the two, has already appeared in the chapter with the sense of ‘produce’ (v. 8). Does it have the same meaning in verse 15? This is tentatively suggested by Moo (1996, 455), while Dunn (1988a, 389), with the same tentativeness, says it ‘probably has the vaguer sense “do”, rather than the more specific “produce, create.”’ Paul continues, ‘for not that I will, this I do [πράσσω]; but what I hate, this I practice [ποιῶ].’ Here we are confronted with two other verbs denoting the action of ‘I’ in the face of the struggle with sin, ‘do’ and ‘practice’ (Darby 1929). If κατεργάζομαι is vague, then its synonyms, πράσσω and ποιῶ, are perhaps even more so, within the context. There may be some subtle stylistic distinctions that are intended, but so far efforts to recover them have largely been unsuccessful (Louw and Nida 1988, 2: 512 n. 2).

Although Moo (1996, 455) recognizes this fact, he nevertheless translates ποιῶ as ‘do,’ πράσσω as ‘practise,’ and κατεργάζομαι as ‘produce.’ Citing other scholars, he points out that κατεργάζομαι is sometimes understood to lay stress on the outcome of an action as against the more ‘colorless’ ποιῶ. When it comes on to πράσσω and ποιῶ it is thought that the former underlines the ‘habitual nature of what is done.’ Moo (1996, 455 n. 40) further points out that in passages like 1 Thess 4: 10-11; 1 Cor 5:2-3; Phil 2: 22, 13; and Rom 1: 27-28, 32; 2:3; 13:4, it is virtually impossible to distinguish their senses, because of the considerable overlap among them. Perhaps it is best to take the three terms ‘in an all-embracing sense to cover all action of the “I”,’ as Dunn (1988, 389) suggests. It is precisely at this point that Black (1973, 99), Dunn (1988, 389), Fitzmyer (1993, 474) and Moo (1996, 457 n. 46) introduce a few important parallels, namely, those from Ovid and Epictetus. The relevant lines from Ovid read, ‘[S]ome strange power holds me down against my will. Desire persuades me one way, reason another. I see the better and approve it, but I follow the worst’ (LCL 1916, 343; cited by Theissen 1987, 217), and that from Epictetus are translated, ‘Every error involves a contradiction. For since he who is in error does not wish to err, but to be right, it is clear that he is not doing what he wishes’ (LCL 1928, 423).

But none of the above quotations constitutes a genuine parallel as far as Huggins (1992, 153-161) is concerned. Why is this so? Because they all raise the issue of tension in man ‘from a markedly *anthropocentric* perspective. . . . Paul, in contrast, addresses the entire problem from a markedly *theocentric* [his italics] and covenantal perspective’. This perspective is closely tied to the conviction that the divine will expressed in the law denotes strict obedience on the part of the ‘I’ it addresses (Huggins 1992, 160). Huggins’ main contribution, in my opinion, is his careful examination of the various contexts in which the parallels have appeared. This enables him to make a sharper comparison than would otherwise have been possible. Following this he concludes that the above parallels are virtually meaningless in understanding Paul in Romans 7. That may be so. However, I believe there is a sense in which one could still accept the lines from Ovid as parallels to 7:15, without compromising the meaning of the canonical text. For instance, one could accept the correspondence in form though not in function, notwithstanding the criticism that such acceptance would be lacking in significance where the hermeneutical process is concerned. What the parallels reveal is the fundamental human struggle against the backdrop of some agreed upon standard. In the case of the ‘I’ in Romans, the unyielding standard is the Torah. The difference, then, is not of kind but degree.

Understood in this way we can somewhat agree with Huggins, while at the same time register our disagreement with his false disjunction. It appears then that Ovid and all those who have uttered a semblance

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<sup>63</sup> Burdick (1974, 161; cf. Silva 1980, 184-207) concludes that the meaning of *ginMkMs* inconclusive here.

of what is expressed in Romans 7:15, would, if given the chance, say like Paul: *For I do not know what I am doing; what I mean is this: what I desire I do not practise, but what I detest I do* (cf. Black 1973, 100). Huggins, I believe, has correctly observed that the parallels do not reflect the depth of moral conflict expressed in the verse. However, I think he overstated his case by trivializing the conflicts of the non-canonical writers in not recognizing theirs to have any theological orientation and significance. This, in my view, tacitly denies them an important component of their humanity—the *imago divinitas*. In fact, without this vital link they would have no moral struggle, and there would be no verbal expressions of such struggle, however superficial. That is why I think it is important to extrapolate from Romans 2 the presence of a universal ‘Mesographic law,’<sup>64</sup> against which backdrop the aforementioned parallels and others can be properly gauged.

If I am correct, it should follow that a better approach to evaluating parallels would be to determine their proximity to this or that proposition. Another service that Huggins has rendered in this regard is to demonstrate how far the respective extra-canonical parallels are from the biblical ones; so wide is the gap between them that one *cannot* meaningfully speak of parallels. Others have been content only to speak of points of contact, leaving it up to the reader to draw his/her conclusion as to the degree to which a desired parallel is illuminated. Perhaps another contribution of Huggins is his boldness in joining the chorus of ‘watchmen’ who seek to warn of the dangers of what Sandmel (1962) dubbed ‘Parallelomania’ (cf. Sanders 1977, 42-44; Boring *et al.*, 1995, 16-17). Perhaps bolder still is Boring, who, fully cognizant of the pitfalls of ‘parallelomania’ and the impressionistic value of citations *qua* citations (i.e. without the benefit of their respective contexts and individual *Sitz im Leben*), still provides a highly suggestive assembly of non-Jewish pieces like the following: ‘[T]he eyes love the enjoyment that can be seen outside [of wives] . . . men too are always lustng after what they are not permitted to see [Euripides] . . . We are rebels against restriction—in love with the illicit (Ovid)’.

We have already noted some of the differences that caused Huggins to reject these parallels out of hand. Before we move on, a couple more must be mentioned. Dunn (1988, 1: 389) further points out that Epictetus’ (LCL 1928, 422) ‘he is not doing what he wishes, and what he does not want that he does’, while having formal correspondence with Romans, differs in the resolution of the problem. For example, Epictetus (1928, 423) says: ‘Now every rational soul is by nature offended by contradiction . . . He, then, who can show to each man the contradiction which causes him to err . . . is strong in argument. . . . For as soon as anyone shows a man this, he will of his own abandon what he is doing.’ What is lacking here, according to Dunn (1988, 1: 389), is the ‘sharpness of the existential frustration which comes to increasingly anguished expression as the passage continues.’ As we shall see later, there is at least one common thread running through all these extra-canonical Jewish and Hellenistic parallels: what may be called the common clay of humanity and its weakness in the face of the divine demand. This is accented in a much greater way in the rest of the pericope (vv. 17-18).

Moving on to verse 17a it appears that Paul has lost his focus with the phrase ‘But now it is no longer I doing it’, in making an excuse for the poor performance of the ‘I’. But this is not the case. What the apostle is doing is to identify precisely the centre of weakness from which springs the I’s miserable failure.<sup>65</sup> Instead of evading responsibility, Paul hastily informs that ‘the sin inside of me’(v.17b) is the source of the problem; thus the further clarification and confession in verse 18a, ‘I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature’<sup>66</sup> (NIV). This appears to be at the very heart of the problem. If we recall and adapt the bold language of 5:21a of sin’s despotic career, then the ‘sin living in me’ (v. 17a; NIV) depicts a place in which and from

<sup>64</sup>What Lewis and Demarest (1996, 1: 95) call ‘the implanted law.’ Cf. Segal (2003, 166), who mentions the ‘seven commandments which the rabbis assumed were given to all humanity before Moses.’

<sup>65</sup>‘Now the split that is portrayed in vss. 15-20 should also be made clear: the object of “willing” is “life” . . . the result of “doing” is “death”’ (Bultmann 1960, 183).

<sup>66</sup>This term is often used as the epitome of ‘weakness, the distinctive mark of the mortal, [which] arises only according to nature’ (Philo LCL, 5: 237; cf. Davis 1994, 3). The NIV (and others like it) is ‘translated incorrectly’, according to Grieb (2002, 75). Following Keck (1999, 66-75), she prefers, ‘For I know that *the good* does not dwell within me’; the ‘good’ being a possible reference to the law (7:12). Either translation supports Paul’s weakness language at this point.

which the tyrannical monarch engages and crushes everything that opposes him.<sup>67</sup> Paul had previously identified ‘sin’ as the real culprit as he sought to exonerate the law. What appears new here is his locating sin within the ‘I’ (cf. ‘The evil impulse is at first like a passer-by, then a lodger, and finally like the master of the house’ [Beier 1968, 6]). The Apostle then summarizes the point he just made<sup>68</sup> by observing an operative principle that was no doubt applicable, at least, to his original auditors: ‘I discover, therefore, this principle that in my resolve to do good, evil is at hand’ (v.21).

I have rendered *nomos* in this verse as ‘principle’ instead of ‘law’ (i.e. the Mosaic code) as Dunn has argued. Crucial for Dunn is the thought that the main burden of 7:7-25 is the defense of the Torah, which, according to him, is synthesized in verse 21. Support for this is seen in the correspondence between two critical verses: 10 and 21. What is expressed in verse 10, according to Dunn (1988, 392), is ‘the frustrated goal of the law.’ Verse 21 goes a step further in adding the relative impotence of the ‘I’. ‘But in both cases what is in view is the harsh discovery through personal experience of how the law, which should be for life and should promote the good, actually helps bring about the opposite’ (Dunn 1988, 392).

Dunn (1988, 392-393) goes on to make the astounding claim that all occurrences of *nomos* in the previous sections refer only to the Torah. He even goes as far as to argue that in chapter 8:2 the meaning of ‘law’ is related to the Torah in both instances. There he draws attention to the strong link between the Torah, the Spirit and life established in chapters 7. For example, 7:14 (the law and the Spirit) and 7:10 (the law and life). Against this background, Dunn (1988, 416) understands the phrase ‘the principle of the Spirit of life’ as ‘little more than a compact summary of earlier verses’. Perhaps Dunn should be commended for his consistent line of interpretation in regard to ‘law’ in the book of Romans. However, I feel that what he has managed to do is to sacrifice Pauline subtlety for his own neatness and consistency. Admittedly, chapters 5-8 have a difficult set of ‘law’ occurrences in an already challenging epistle. But I believe that Dunn’s reductionist understanding of ‘law’ in these chapters obscures rather than sheds light on them. Dunn (1988, 393) does admit, however, that if Paul meant something like ‘principle’ or ‘pattern’ it would be difficult for him to find a suitable term apart from *nomos*.

A better approach, we believe, is taken by Katoppo (1991, 420-426), who surveys the way *nomos* is used throughout the book. The following is a summary of his investigation. The first two occurrences of *nomos* in Romans (2:12, 13a) are definite references to the Mosaic Law, according to Katoppo.<sup>69</sup> The third at 2:13b is a possible reference to the divine will in a general sense (Katoppo 1991, 422-423). ‘Of the four occurrences of *nomos* in [v. 14], the first and fourth refer to the Law of Moses, and the second occurrence refers to God’s will. . . . The third occurrence refers to a general set of rules’ (Katoppo 1991, 423). The ‘work of the law’ in Romans 2:15 is taken as a collective singular by Katoppo. He points out that the phrase could be rendered ‘the effect of the law’ (‘what the Law commands’, GNB; Katoppo 1991, 423), but says nothing about its referent. I believe that the following phrase ‘written in their hearts’ points to what may be termed the ‘mesographic law’.<sup>70</sup> Romans 2:26, 27, says Katoppo (1991, 423) is a reference to God’s will, but in 3:19 we have the first occurrence of *nomos* to designate Scripture (also 3: 31). However, in 3:27; 7:21 and 8:2 ‘principle’ or ‘power’ seems to be the best translation (Katoppo 1991, 424-25; also Adeyemi 2006, 440; *contra* Das 2001, 228-233). The point of citing the above is to show that Dunn’s suggestions that ‘law’ in Romans must invariably be taken as a reference to the Mosaic code is questionable. So although Katoppo’s study is not exhaustive, it at least opens the way to explore other possibilities of meaning that may shed light on the dilemma of the ‘I’ that is partly the focus of our investigation.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Sin appears as a demonic person and exercises a rule of terror over humanity’ (Laato 2004, 359; cf. Burrowes 2006, 314; Jewett 2007, 467).

<sup>68</sup> Following Moo (1996, 460), we see verses 19 and 20 as recapitulation of 15b and 16b/17b respectively.

<sup>69</sup> Also 2:25; 3:20; chapters 4-5; 6:14-15; 7:4 (?); 9:31 (?); 10: 4; 13:10 (Katoppo 1991, 423-426).

<sup>70</sup> Borrowed from *mesographos*, ‘drawn [or written] in the middle [heart?]’ (Liddell and Scott 1997, 500); cf. Kasali (2006, 1363).

Verse 22 introduces a contrast that concerns the ambivalence of the ‘I’ toward the two ‘laws’ in opposition to each other. On the one hand the ‘I’ agrees with the expression of God’s will, here referred to as the *nomos tou theou*. This could be a reference to the Mosaic code or the precepts and principles of the Messianic covenant orally transmitted among early Christian believers. But on the other hand the ‘I’ is aware of a more sinister law (*another law*; v. 23), which Calvin ([1539], 171) calls *une loi tyrannique de Satan*.<sup>71</sup> What is this? Before addressing this question, something ought to be said about the ‘inner man’ that is at the heart of the ‘I’’s full approval with God’s will (v. 22). Betz (2000, 315-341) traces the concept of this, what he calls ‘inner human being’, in Paul’s earlier letters and makes the following observations. Because these earlier letters demonstrate very little interest in anthropological dualities, the absence of *esManthrMpos* (inner being) is understandable. Not that Paul showed no interest in anthropology during this period of his ministry, for we have, for example, in I Thessalonians 5:23 a terse description of total humanity.

Unlike I Thessalonians, Galatians appears to be the first letter of Paul to show some appearance of ‘problems for the anthropological concepts’, though *esManthrMpos* is also absent. Here we find a dualism not between the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ man but between the ‘flesh’ and the ‘spirit’ (cf. 5:17, 19). Important for Betz’s investigation is the co-crucifixion of Christ along with the ‘I’, mentioned in 2:20. This being the case, the co-crucifixion of the believers is presumably the ground from which the antagonism between ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’ is instigated. Betz then moves to Philippians. ‘As far as this anthropology is concerned, this letter is close to I Thessalonians and Galatians.’ Human beings in Philippians are constituted of body (1:20; 3:21) ‘and/or flesh’ (1:22, 24; 3:3, 4), and ‘soul’ (1:27; 2:30). The mention of these entities, according to Betz, does not provide any precise definition of humanity. It is in the Corinthians correspondence that a ‘new level of intense reflection about anthropological problems is reached,’ beginning with the first letter. I Corinthians brings together both protology and eschatology to sharpen the focus of essential humanity in 11:7, 15:22, 45-46, 49, and theologically modified by Paul’s Christological vision (e.g., Rom 5:12-21). Betz also raises the crucial question as to whether verses like 2:13, 15; 3:1; and 14:37 betray ‘a radically dualistic anthropology or merely a conceptual inconsistency.’ No direct response is forthcoming from Betz, but the general tenor of his article is away from the notion of any dualism in Paul.

It is in 2 Corinthians 4: 16, Betz observes, that the anthropological phrase, *esManthrMpos* (along with its antonym), first makes its appearance. There it is clearly identified with the facet of Christian humanity that is under spiritual reconstruction. Betz (2000, 337) then concludes his discussion of *esManthrMpos* by posing a question about its relation to the ‘I’, which, to him, is a symbol of the human self: ‘Is the *egM* divided?’<sup>72</sup> Paul’s answer is that it is the same *egM* but there are two important aspects to it. . . . [O]ne aspect . . . rejoices being associated with the law of God. This aspect is identical with the *esManthrMpos* . . . [T]he other aspect of the *egM* . . . could be called the *exManthrMpos* [outer being], but Paul does not use this term in Rom 7. . . . Therefore, the self-experience of the *egMis* that of one and the same *anthrMpos*, including the antagonisms and frustrations.’

We may now return to the question posed earlier concerning the identification of the ‘other law’, first mentioned in verse 23. Is it some antagonistic principle working in conjunction with indwelling sin, sin itself, or the Mosaic Law in its ‘sinister role’ of sin’s pawn? For Schreiner (1998, 377), the ‘other law’ ‘is used to denote the alliance of sin with the law so that the “I” does not obey the Mosaic Law’. However, I think it is better, with Haacker (2004, 68) and others<sup>73</sup> to see it as a ‘governing principle’ or ‘power’. This is in keeping with the analysis of *nomos* as outlined above. This sinister ‘law’ operates in and through the ‘organs’ of the ‘I’. The operation is militaristic (*fighting against the law of my mind*) and inimical to personal freedom (*taking me captive*), resulting in the kind of frustration vividly expressed in verse 24.

<sup>71</sup>As a result, ‘S. Paul ditquesa chair le tient captif/[Saint Paul] says he is held captive by the flesh’ (Calvin [1539], 171; 1960, 153).

<sup>72</sup>C. H. Dodd (1932, 114) speaks of ‘a very intense experience of divided personality’, but Betz’s treatment is much better nuanced. For a competent handling of the question from the standpoint of psychology, see Beck (2002, 119-120).

<sup>73</sup>For example, Vine 1948, 108; Moo 1996, 464; Kroll 2002, 117; Osborne 2004, 187.

The employment of *egMin* verse 24 is the most dramatic in the NT and possibly in the entire Greek Bible. There is also very little to compare with it elsewhere.<sup>74</sup> It is difficult not to agree with Dunn (1988, 410; contra Chang 2007) that here (v. 24) ‘certainly Paul speaks for himself and not merely as a spokesperson for humanity at large.’ This is, perhaps, a strong reason why the debate over the identification of the ‘I’ has returned with a vengeance. Is this Paul the believer in verse 24, or is it the pre-Christian Saul? Or is *egMat* this point a highly dramatized picture expressive of humanity in general? Kümmel (1974, 171,181, 185, 140, 230, 253), despite some equivocation, maintains this last position, while Moo (1996, 465) remains the champion of the pre-Christian position. On the agonizing cry of verse 24 Moo writes: ‘Certainly the Christian who is sensitive to his or her failure to meet God’s demands experiences a sense of frustration and misery at that failure (cf. 8: 23); but Paul’s language here is stronger than would be appropriate for that sense of failure.’ Moo was responding in part to Cranfield’s (1985, 158) strong statement to the effect that ‘the more the Christian is set free from legalistic ways of thinking about God’s law and so sees more clearly the full splendor of the perfection towards which he is being summoned, the more conscious he becomes of his own continuing sinfulness, his stubborn all-pervasive egotism.’

But ‘What interest could Paul possibly have in telling us at this point in the argument how tough he finds life as a *Christian*?’ (Campbell 2004, 206). As the pre-/Christian debate rages on, what is virtually certain is that Paul includes himself in the crucial concluding verses of the chapter (Robinson 1979, 91). Thus ‘I am a wretched person!’ (*Miser ego homo* [Augustine 2002, 132]) is the apostle’s cry of frustration, even if it is at the same time the cry of everyman. The phrase is emphatic both in its structure and semantic expression, and is painfully descriptive of the human condition of suffering and weakness in the extreme, in a culture at that where ‘infirmity and weakness . . . are inconsistent with a virtuous character’ (Philo *Viture* 1: 167).

The following interrogative clause (*Who shall deliver me from this body of death?*) is equally emphatic; it complements the idea in the first part of the verse. But what is this ‘body of death’<sup>75</sup> from which Paul earnestly desires freedom? And what is the nature of this freedom? Although answering these questions does not seem as difficult as those surrounding the identity of the ‘I’ in the chapter, the difficulty must not be underestimated. One response to these questions comes from Phillips (1969, 119-120) who posits that Paul was possibly drawing an analogy based on a first-century custom. He writes: ‘Certain types of criminals were executed by the Romans with special brutality. Sometimes if a man had committed a murder, he was bound hand to hand, face to face with the corpse of his victim and then thrown out into the heat of the Mediterranean sun.

As the corpse decayed, it ate death into the living man and became to him, in the strictest literal sense, “a body of death.” To Phillips the situation in verse 24 is that of the carnal Christian ‘bound to the old nature and truly a wretched man.’ While this perspective on the ‘carnal’ man finds plausibility in some circles, the custom on which the analogy is based is unattested during Paul’s time.<sup>76</sup> What the apostle is affirming by his use of ‘body of death’<sup>77</sup> seems much broader than the frustrated experience of the ‘carnal Christian’. The phrase is best thought of as a description of humanity in its enslavement to sin and its inevitable judgment of death. This, no doubt, includes the Christian at any stage of the journey (Gundry 1976, 36, 40). And it is from

<sup>74</sup>Cf. Epictetus(1: 26, 32); and the more recent statement from Rahner (cited in Moltmann 2006, 192): ‘Ich bin von vornherein in diese Grässlichkeit [‘wretchedness’?] hineinmentiert’, in parallel with 7: 14 and 7: 24.

<sup>75</sup>Or ‘body of this death. . . . It was . . . only after his conversion that Paul was able to discern his body as a body of death, imposing death on others and doomed to a divine sentence of death as punishment for murder’ (Jewett 1997, 106). For the textual issues surrounding the phrase, see Swanson (2001, 108).

<sup>76</sup>Bruce (1985, 147), however, writes of ‘Virgil’s account of the Etruscan king . . . who tormented his living captives by tying them to decomposing corpses’. Cf. the 1250 BC statements of equal abhorrence: ‘What I doubly detest, I will not eat . . . I will not consume excrement, I will not approach it . . . I will not tread on it with my sandals’ (Faulker 1998, plate 24).

<sup>77</sup>John Wycliffe (1850) has ‘bodi of this synne,’ which appears to be influenced by Rom 6: 6, where he has the identical phrase with the exception of the demonstrative. This does not appear to be the reading of the Vulgate, from which Wycliffe and/or his followers translated.

this enslavement (and consequent ‘entombment’) that Paul laments<sup>78</sup> to gain deliverance. In regard to the nature of the freedom, Paul’s answer is explained both in chapters 6 (1-14) and 8 (1-14) in particular. At this point (v. 25a) he joyfully gives thanks to God ‘through Jesus Christ our Lord’ for the prospect of full deliverance. It could hardly have come any other way. In other words, one is not surprised at the mention of the Lord Jesus Christ in close connection with the concept of liberation. So far in the epistle (and at various points) the reader is informed and reminded of the salvific significance of Jesus’ coming. Passages like 1:1-17; 3:21-25; 5:1; 6:23, readily come to mind. But the thanksgiving (BAGD, 878) is not directed to Jesus but through him, as is customary (cf. 1 Cor 15:57; 2 Cor 1:20; 3:4; Rom 5:11; 16:27).

Dunn (1988, 397) suggests that the preposition in ‘through our Lord Jesus Christ’ may have a double thrust in underlining Jesus’ mediatorial role in prayer, as well as his agency in the enterprise of divine liberation. Some seem to understand the desired deliverance expressed in verse 24 to be entirely futuristic. It is surprising that Dunn (1988, 397) in particular has taken this position in light of his clear understanding of chapters 6, 7 and 8 as being Paul’s centerpiece of the ‘already but not yet’ eschatological scheme. That is why, as Schriener (1998, 391) remarks, ‘it would be a mistake to conclude’ that since the apostle contemplates a future deliverance that deliverance is exclusively and entirely futuristic. Why? Because the ‘genius of Paul’s eschatology is that the future has invaded the present’. Equally mistaken, perhaps, is Denney’s (1912, 2: 643) perspective: ‘The exclamation of thanksgiving shows that the longed-for deliverance has actually been achieved.’ Denney’s assumption is that verses 14-25 are reminiscent of Paul’s unregenerate days and verse 25a his regenerate cry.<sup>79</sup> The cry itself may be an echo of and ‘response’ to the words of deliverance found in Exodus 3: 6-8 (LXX; so Edwards 1992, 194).

More of the nature of the deliverance is delineated in 8:1-3 (a part of Paul’s conclusion); but for the time being we have to contend with Paul’s summary to 7:14-24 in v. 25b. It is in this summary that we encounter Paul’s most emphatic ‘I’ locution: *Therefore, then, I myself serve the law of God mentally, but with the flesh the law of sin.* Moo (1996, 467) appears to find this conclusion quite troubling, since he unnecessarily restricts the referent of *egMto* to the writer’s pre-conversion experience. For him the dividedness in verse 25b and in previous verses can only characterize the wo/man that has not yet come into contact with the liberating Christ. But as we have indicated above, such a conclusion is reductionistic, especially in light of Paul’s rhetorical skill (Longenecker 2005, 88-93), soteriology, and eschatology.<sup>80</sup> That ‘I myself’ is emphatic can hardly be doubted. But how do we translate it? For some reason *Die Gute Nachricht Die Bibel* does not translate this phrase at all. Its English counterpart (GNB) renders the phrase ‘on my own’. *Autos* is the most frequently employed pronoun in the NT (Wallace 348-349). Its force is normally intensive, particularly when it occupies the predicate position. There is simply no hint by recent grammarians (e.g., Porter 1992, 120) that the translation ‘by myself’, or the like, is any improvement over the more traditional ‘I myself’ (‘Left to myself’, REB).

The construction *autos egMoccurs* five times in the NT and they are all accounted for by Paul. Three of those occurrences are in Romans (Baaij 1993, 456 n. 101), with the others in a previous epistle (Denney 1912, 2: 644). Interestingly, it is rendered ‘I myself’ in that epistle (2 Cor 10:1; 12:13) by the NRSV, as well as in Rom 9:3 and 15:14. But in 7:25 the NRSV (not following its predecessor by translating ‘I of myself’) opted not to translate *autos*. The RSV’s rendering is consistent with other uses and is not necessarily out of line with the passage. In fact it seems to fit quite well, both in the wider context and in the contrastive and antithetical construction which forms the summary of verse 25b (*men . . . de*).

Taken this way the writer may be saying ‘I of myself, i.e., without divine enabling, attempt to serve the divine (messianic) law, but this being the case, I end up serving the law of sin.’ This might be reading too much into

<sup>78</sup>This lament is ‘a prayer in the form of a question,’ according to O’ Brien (1977, 217).

<sup>79</sup>As Tennyson, in *Morte d’Arthur*, cried, “O for a new man to arise within me and subdue the man that I am” (Johnson 1974, 115). Cf. the mild ‘I am quite upset’; Moulton and Milligan 1930, 153).

<sup>80</sup>*Mutatis Mutandis* ‘The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free’ (Mandela 1995, 624).

the translation. But is such a paraphrase consistent with Paul's Greek? Grammatically it does appear to stand (cf. Blass *et al.*, 1961, 67). And culturally, there are at least two interesting parallels that place Paul's summary statement in context. The first is from a Jewish perspective: 'Man, while he lives, is the slave of two masters: the slave of his Creator and the slave of his inclination. When he does the will of his Creator he angers his inclination, and when he does the will of his inclination, he angers his Creator. When he dies, he is freed, a slave free from his master' [cf. Rom 6: 6, 7] (cited in Davies and Allison 1988, 1:642). The other, from a more Hellenistic provenance (Seneca), is cited by Witherington (2004, 200): 'It is an error to think that slavery penetrates to the whole person. The better part is excluded: the body is subject to and at the disposition of its master; the mind, however, is its own master.'<sup>81</sup>

However, the intended meaning of Romans 25b cannot be derived just from close parallels and the grammar of its terse statements. One has to bear in mind the entire semantic contribution of 7:14-24. And here one's ignorance appears to come full circle. But there is no need to despair at this point, for much has been learnt along the way. For example, the emphatic phrase we just examined (*autos egM* plus the present verbs of verse 25b hardly allow one room to exclude the writer from the 'experience' described in verses 14-24, though it has to be conceded that the pericope may have a wider application as well. Another lesson coming out of the passage is the thought that the writer may not have intended the strictures with which we have been working (is the 'I' biographical? Christian? general? fictive?). In fact it does appear that we have been ignoring a crucial element in the discourse: the writer is employing the marked personal pronoun (*egM*) as part of his weakness language literary device/genre (contra Jewett 1997, 2007). This device is not limited to the Pauline corpus but it is quite prominent there. In the Gospels, for example, the image of weakness is used to describe 'the general human condition' (cf., Matt 26:41b; Mark 14:38b). The 'weak' are also seen to be the special objects of divine concern and care as seen for instance in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and Zechariah's prophecy (Luke 1:68-79). Also we see: 'Throngs of the weak gather around Jesus. . . . The blind, the deaf, the sick, the leprosy, the demon possessed, all present us with concrete images of weakness. And although the Beatitudes do not mention the weak per se, the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek and the persecuted all share in a weakness that qualifies them for the blessing of the Kingdom of God' (Ryken 1998, 933-934).<sup>82</sup>

In the Pauline literature the image sometimes reflects the crippling effect of sin even on the Christian community (1Cor 11:30; cf. 2 Tim. 3:6) and in a bold literary move Paul attributes 'weakness' even to God (1 Cor1:25). But 'what the world regards as weakness is for Paul a *subversive symbol* of divine power, an encrypted image of God's triumph,' (Ryken 1998, 934. Cf. Socrates' 'I am in infinite poverty for the service of God'; cited in Davies and Allison 1988, 1:644). All this is against a Graeco-Roman world in which weakness is invariably associated with shame instead of triumph.

In some of Paul's letters the theme of weakness is also evident.<sup>83</sup> For example, in the first three verses of 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's 'I', though on the surface appears 'powerful', is in actuality impotent by virtue of the fact that it fails to embrace love, 'the power of the new age' breaking into the present-- 'the only vital force which has a future' (Thiselton 2000, 1035). The same thing can be said of Philippians 3:4 where Paul admits that what he previously thought was of inestimable value (his Jewish pedigree, etc) turned out to be somewhat of the same piece as 'the weak and beggarly elements' of human experience. For example, (following Silva 2005, 6) Philippians 3:7-8 may be schematized to make the point as follows:

<sup>81</sup>Cf. also Epictetus' 'For where one say "I" and "mine," to that side must the creature perforce incline . . . I am where my moral purpose is.' (1: 389).

<sup>82</sup>The article goes on to say that what the 'Gospels embedded in narrative Paul formulates in life and letters. Perhaps no biblical writer uses the imagery of weakness more effectively than Paul.' He felt 'happy and secure because of the complete adequacy of God's grace in Christ to meet and make good his own inadequacy' (Xavier 1983, 294).

<sup>83</sup> And, of course, Paul glories in his own 'weakness' (2 Cor12:10). There was indeed some method to his madness, for even from the standpoint of psychology it may be said that 'the basis of educatablity lies in the striving of the child to compensate for his weakness. A thousand talents and capabilities arise from the stimulus of inadequacy' (Adler 1927, 35).

The Old Life

*These I have counted loss*

*I also count all things loss  
knowledge of Christ*

*I have suffered the loss of all things*

*I count them as rubbish*

The New Life

*for Christ*

*for the excellence of the*

*for whom*

*that I may gain Christ*

‘If we focus on the items under the left column, we notice a significant progression of thought; clearly, Paul expresses with increasing intensity his sense of dissatisfaction with those things that had previously been most important to him’ (Silva 2005, 156). And the unadorned ‘I’ statements (i.e., without *egM*, each with overtones of weakness, serve to strengthen the personal testimony. Therefore, we see that Paul’s penchant for using ‘weakness’ language is by no means limited to the use of *astheneia* and its cognates.<sup>84</sup> Whenever such language appears, it is part and parcel of a deliberate literary strategy, not just in polemical or apologetical contexts such as Philippians 3 and 2 Cor 11-13, but in paraenetic ones as well. Henceforth, when we come to the book of Romans we are not surprised to find the employment of weakness language strategically located in crucial sections of the epistle. For instance, Rom 5:6 describes what he and the recipients of his letter were spiritually before Christ died in order to empower them through the gospel. Rom 6:19 justifies his use of slavery language in regard to the Christian life by employing the phrase ‘the weakness of the flesh’ (cf. Keener 2009, 96), which in turn is expounded in the latter part of chapter 7 in relation to the law and with reference to the self (the ‘I’).

### Summary

The foregoing discourse has sought to locate the epistle of Romans within the wider frame of the Hebrew Bible, noting and interacting with the proposals of various New Testament scholars in this regard. It has been plausibly suggested that there is a narrative substructure that underlies chapters 1-8 and that this substructure betrays some connection to certain pentateuchal patterns. In this way of reading the letter some have seen echoes of the prototypical Adam and Eve and even their first son, Cain. Other scholars are more convinced that select episodes from the books of Exodus and Psalms provide the best backdrop for a proper understanding of the early chapters of Romans. In our exegesis of chapter 7 some of these intertextual concerns were factored in as we examined the major theories that are proffered relative to the identification of the ubiquitous ‘I’. All of the theories have been found wanting, though for the time being we lean toward seeing this emphatic first person pronoun as some kind of composite expression (cf. Osborne 2004, 166-191; Porter 2015, 144-154; Longenecker 2016, 627-646; Keener 1994, 258-284; Kruse 2012, 288-320).

What appears certain is that the writer is at pains to defend the very law that forms the backbone of the corpus from which he has drawn in composing what is arguably his most mature literary output. We also noticed that in chapter 7 (as well as parts of Chap. 8), Paul highlights his own weakness even as he writes in defense of the law. This weakness (and the anticipated deliverance from it), we believe, is inextricably tied to the central

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<sup>84</sup>‘The root . . . appears in the NT 83 times and in the Pauline epistles 44 times or 53% of the total. . . . The motif is most extensively developed in Romans, 1Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians’ (Black 1983, 15). For the concept in Revelation, see Blount (2004).

section of the epistle (8:18-39).<sup>85</sup> After affirming the fact that believers are dead to the law (vv. 1-6), and after launching a spirited defense in its behalf (vv. 7-11), Paul then employs a form of weakness language to further exculpate the law by pointing out its inability to effect change in the ‘I’ (vv.14-17), enable the ‘I’ to do good (vv. 18-20),<sup>86</sup> and to emancipate the ‘I’ (vv. 21-24). Paul at one time may have agreed with the sentiments expressed in Ben Zoma’s (Danby 1933, 453) midrash on Proverbs 16:32 (‘Who is mighty? He that subdues his [evil] nature.’); but at the time of writing 7:14-24, his utter weakness was the route to divine power (Rom 8). That is why the pericope at the same time illustrates the human condition (Caragounis 2004, 562, n. 279), and his soteriological scheme outlined in the previous chapters. Finally,

*I, who am I, and no man shall deny it,  
I, who am I, and none shall bid me nay;  
I, who am I, lo! from the hills I shall cry it . . .  
I have forgotten what [else] I meant to say!* (Anonymous)

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<sup>85</sup>Glorification: Gospel for a Suffering Entity (8:18-39); see above (p. 108) on **Romans as a Structured Story**.

<sup>86</sup>‘The pursuit of the good is accompanied with tension, conflict, anxiety, and doubt’ (Kappen 1977, 139), with the result that ‘we live a life of victory, but it is qualified victory. We are not yet what we shall be. . . . We live in the tension between the “already” and the “not yet”. We are genuinely new persons but not yet totally new’ (Hoekema 1987, 190).

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