

SIMUL IUSTUS ET PECCATOR THROUGH THE LENSES OF PAUL

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Abstract: *The mutual agreement on the Joint Declaration between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on the doctrine of justification was rejected in the official response of the Roman Catholic Church in 1998 over objections to the Lutheran notion of simul iustus et peccator (Christians as righteous and sinners at the same time). What does Paul have to say in connection with this ecumenical dead end? In this article, the validity of simul iustus et peccator is demonstrated from Romans 7:14–25 in conjunction with its larger context and other passages of Scripture. The interpretation of Rom 7:14–25 as a description of Paul himself (or any Christian) has wide-ranging effects on the understanding of Pauline theology. Interestingly, Ernst Käsemann once wrote that the reading of verses 14–25 from that perspective would undermine his whole exegesis, not just his analysis of the context, but in truth also all that “Paul says about baptism, law, and the justification of the ungodly, namely all that he says about the break between the aeons.”*

Key words: *ecumenism, justification, simul iustus et peccator, covetousness, flesh, sin, depravity, Adam and Eve, the Mosaic law, introspective conscience*

In the 1960s, there were distinctive hopes that through the research results of modern exegetic, traditional dogmatic disagreements and conflicts between diverse church bodies could be solved. However, the delusion was dispelled rather quickly. Surprisingly, the enthusiasm evaporated. By and large, the ecumenical negotiations came to a dead end. No breakthroughs. Despite several sincere efforts and many fresh perspectives the old doctrinal controversies survived. Presently they are back—if they ever left the meeting hall.¹

This has been seen recently during the process which led to the mutual agreement on the Joint Declaration between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on the doctrine of justification.² To be sure, the document has commonly been celebrated and commended as a great leap forward to visible unity throughout Christendom. On closer examination, the state of affairs seems more complex and complicated.³ Without going into details, there is one issue worth taking note of here. In the Joint Declaration itself, the thought of

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¹ See T. Laato, “Paavali ekumeenisena erotuomarina. Mistä löytäisin perustelut yhteiselle julistukselle?” in *Turbentuuko uskonpuhdistus? Rooman kirkon ja Luterilaisen Maailmanliiton uusi selitys vanhurskauttamisopista* (ed. S. Kiviranta and T. Laato; 2nd ed.; Kauniainen: Perussanoma, 1998), 80–81.

² E.g., S. Kiviranta and T. Laato, “Yhteinen julistus ja kirkkomme virallinen keskustelu. Selvennys vai hämärrys?” in *Turbentuuko uskonpuhdistus?*, 243–264.

³ *Ibid.*

Christians as righteous and sinners at the same time (*simul iustus et peccator*) is rather vaguely accepted as a specific Lutheran expression or assertion (see §29). However, afterwards that aspect was explicitly and absolutely rejected by the official response of the Roman Catholic Church: It is incompatible with the doctrinal declarations of the Council of Trent.⁴ On the contrary, it still falls under their authoritative anathemas or collegial condemnations.⁵ Indeed, the notion of *simul iustus et peccator* represents one of “the major difficulties preventing an affirmation of total consensus” between Roman Catholics and Lutherans in “the fundamental truths concerning justification.”⁶ These (s)words are hanging over the heads of all who are engaged in the discussion on the subject.

In their response to the Joint Declaration, the Roman Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith unreservedly longs for “a deeper reflection on the biblical foundation that is the common basis of the doctrine on justification.”⁷ This request is to be affirmed. Without a doubt, there should be much more discussion and interaction between systematic theologians and NT scholars. Occasionally it is stated briefly and directly that Paul “did not produce textbooks on dogmatics.”⁸ Of course not. But to conclude that his theology could then only be discerned “behind” the text or “behind” what is actually said goes too far.⁹ An approach such as

⁴ See “Response of the Catholic Church to the Joint Declaration of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on the Doctrine of Justification,” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_01081998_off-answer-catholic_en.html (all quotations from the “Response” cited in this essay are taken from this online source).

⁵ Especially §1: “So, for all these reasons, it remains difficult to see how, in the current state of the presentation, given in the Joint Declaration, we can say that this doctrine on ‘*simul iustus et peccator*’ is not touched by the anathemas of the Tridentine decree on original sin and justification.” In the same way §5: “If, moreover, it is true that in those truths on which a consensus has been reached the condemnations of the Council of Trent no longer apply, the divergences on other points must, on the contrary, be overcome before we can affirm, as is done generically in n. 41, that these points no longer incur the condemnations of the Council of Trent. That applies in the first place to the doctrine on ‘*simul iustus et peccator*’ (cf. n. 1, above)” (italics original).

⁶ Right away at the outset of §1 it is made absolutely clear: “The major difficulties preventing an affirmation of total consensus between the parties on the theme of Justification arise in paragraph 4.4 *The Justified as Sinner* Even taking into account the differences, legitimate in themselves, that come from different theological approaches to the content of faith, from a Catholic point of view the title is already a cause of perplexity. According, indeed, to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, in baptism everything that is really sin is taken away, and so, in those who are born anew there is nothing that is hateful to God It follows that the concupiscence that remains in the baptised is not, properly speaking, sin. For Catholics, therefore, the formula “*at the same time righteous and sinner*”, as it is explained at the beginning of n. 29 (“*Believers are totally righteous, in that God forgives their sins through Word and Sacrament Looking at themselves . . . however, they recognize that they remain also totally sinners. Sin still lives in them . . .*”) is not acceptable. This statement does not, in fact, seem compatible with the renewal and sanctification of the interior man of which the Council of Trent speaks . . .” (italics original).

⁷ According to the formulation in §7.

⁸ L. Thurén, “Was Paul Angry? Derhetorizing Galatians,” in *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture. Essays from the 1996 Malibu Conference* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps; JSNTSS 180; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 302.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 302–3. He asks “whether a student of Paul’s theology can take his expressions at their face value.” Accordingly, his critical remark is not merely applied to “simple misconceptions of certain stylistic devices” (as, e.g., hyperbole) but “the whole text” (p. 303). Additionally, “we do not directly know” what the Apostle actually thinks. His intention “was not even to make his addressees believe what he

this runs the risk of drawing a line of demarcation between the text and its overt meaning as well as rejecting a comprehensive exegetical analysis of the message of an ancient writing.¹⁰ Instead, we should more often study whether some dogmatic expressions (e.g. *simul iustus et peccator*) really convey a way of thinking as it occurs in the Bible. Otherwise, biblical scholarship falls short of enriching contemporary ecumenical discussions. Obviously the interpretation of the canonical text has to determine the theological value of systematic doctrines, not vice versa. The Roman Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is right inquiring for “a deeper reflection on the biblical foundation.” This was not done in the Joint Declaration.

I. THE AIM OF THE STUDY AND THE STATE OF RESEARCH

The aim of my study is to examine whether the notion of Christians as righteous and sinners at the same time (*simul iustus et peccator*) indeed represents the Pauline way of thinking. The most fundamental passage (*locus classicus*) is Rom 7:14–25 but other relevant verses are taken into account as well. The NT as a whole will not be discussed. My hope is that an investigation such as this sheds some light on one of the notoriously difficult subjects (*crux interpretum*) in NT scholarship.¹¹ To be sure, as a result of “a deeper reflection on the biblical foundation,” the ongoing ecumenical negotiations are advanced as well. Yet no one should think that modern exegesis could, by and large, settle the doctrinal tensions and controversies between diverse church bodies that have so far lasted hundreds (if not thousands) of years. It makes no sense to demand the impossible. God alone works miracles! And he always performs them through his mighty word. Hence, it is worth trying to elucidate the Pauline line of reasoning.¹²

wanted them to believe” (ibid.). Yet Thurén speaks of Paul’s “ideological religious system” which still should be found “behind his letters” and calls this kind of procedure “a dynamic approach” (ibid.).

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., L. Thurén, “Romans 7 Derhetorized,” in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible: Essays from the 1998 Florence Conference* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps; JSNTSS 195; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 420–40. He discusses Romans 7 at length and concludes after all that his rhetorical approach impedes “any attempt to create a balanced picture of Paul’s thinking” and that rhetorical criticism should not be used as “a facile solution to theological problems” (p. 438). Maybe he is right. In that case, it is not astonishing that to my surprise, the content of his article appears very thin.

¹¹ For the notoriously difficult passage of Rom 7:14–25, see commentaries on the whole. The problem of *simul iustus et peccator* as a Pauline principle has caught the attention of many NT scholars (and systematic theologians). See first and foremost Peter Althaus, *Paulus und Luther über den Menschen: Ein Vergleich* (2nd ed.; Studien der Luther-Akademie 14; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1951), *passim*; M. Byskov, “Simul Iustus et Peccator: A Note on Romans vii. 25b,” *ST* 30.1 (1976): 75–87; W. Joest, “Paulus und das Luthersche Simul Iustus et Peccator,” *KD* 1.4 (1955): 269–320; H. Lichtenberger, *Das Ich Adams und das Ich der Menschheit: Studien zur Menschenbild in Römer 7* (WUNT 164; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 27, 82, 83, 159, 174; V. Stolle, *Luther und Paulus: Die exegetischen und hermeneutischen Grundlagen der lutherischen Rechtfertigungslehre im Paulinismus Luthers* (Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 10; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002), 221–22 (cf. 225). Cf. even W. Russell, “Insights from Postmodernism’s Emphasis on Interpretive Communities in the Interpretation of Romans 7,” *JETS* 37.4 (1994): 511–27. Of course, many other monographs and articles treat the subject.

¹² Since the subject in the monologue of Rom 7:7–25 is clearly a human being, I prefer using the personal pronoun “he” when referring to the “I” (a comprehensive and thorough definition of the subject will follow below, shedding more light on my decision).

As to Rom 7:14–25, most exegetes nowadays take it for granted that the passage does not depict the Christian life but human existence under the law. They all refer to the influential dissertation of W. G. Kümmel (*Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus*, 1929).¹³ Generally, the discussion does not need to be continued. The door for other possible interpretations is kept firmly closed.¹⁴ So why bother?

Still, whoever is working in a branch of science must always be ready to reexamine even the results considered most certain. Besides, even though Kümmel's interpretation enjoys much support in the German-speaking world, in the English-speaking world it is the target of increasing criticism. Maybe the time for a full-scale revision has come.¹⁵

II. THE INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 7:14–25 IN THE CONTEXT OF ROMANS

1. *Romans 7:5–6 in relation to the Christian life.* As a starting point in the interpretation of Rom 7:14–25, it has often been remarked that Rom 7:5–6 sums up the whole presentation in the rest of chapter 7 and the subsequent arguments of chapter 8. To put it more accurately: verse 5 recapitulates 7:7–25 and verse 6 encapsulates 8:1–30.¹⁶ Since Rom 7:5 illustrates the vile human existence in the flesh, sinful passions working in the members, resultant death, the long monologue of the “I” in verses 7–25 portrays the same state of affairs in more detail. Accordingly, it is not about the Christian experience and self-understanding after conversion, an issue which is first anticipated in Rom 7:6 and described in depth in chapter 8 afterwards.¹⁷

Although the analysis of the disposition according to the aforementioned parameters is quite commonly shared, ultimately, it is not all that convincing. To be sure, 7:5 makes “the sinful desires” (τὰ παθήματα τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν) which were at work in the members of the body especially problematic. Then the monologue of the “I” in verse 7 fittingly begins with various troubles ensuing from the encounter with the commandment “Do not covet” (οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις). Furthermore, in verse 8 this commandment is expanded with the notion of “every kind of coveting”

¹³ Werner Georg Kümmel, *Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* (UNT 17; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929); repr., Lexington, KY: American Theological Library Association, 1965.

¹⁴ See esp. Timo Laato, *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach* (trans. T. McElwain; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 115; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 109–11. The German original is *Paulus und das Judentum: Anthropologische Erwägungen* (Åbo: Åbo Akademis, 1991). Page numbers below correspond to the English edition.

¹⁵ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 110–11.

¹⁶ In particular, O. Hofius: *Der Mensch im Schatten Adams: Paulusstudien II* (WUNT 143; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 109–11 and 153–54. In a similar way already Rudolf Schnackenburg, “Römer 7 im Zusammenhang des Römerbriefes,” in *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für W. G. Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. E. Earle Ellis und E. Grässer; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 297–98. Also H.-K. Chang, “The Christian Life in a Dialectical Tension? Romans 7:7–25 Reconsidered,” *NovT* 49.3 (2007): 259 and 269–70; Mark Seifrid: “The Subject of Rom. 7:14–25,” *NovT* 34.4 (1992): 319. Similarly, S. J. Chester, “The Retrospective View of Romans 7: Paul’s Past in Present Perspective,” in *Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin: 3 Views of Romans 7* (ed. Terry L. Wilder; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 80–81.

¹⁷ See the works listed in n. 16.

(πάσαν ἐπιθυμίαν) and subsequently discusses the perplexity resulting from a depravity that holds the strongest bastion in the members of the body (vv. 14, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24).¹⁸ Obviously, the focus is not only on sexual lusts but everything that is at odds with the Mosaic law (the Decalogue in particular).¹⁹ On the whole, even if sinful passions are not allowed to “be at work in the members,” strictly speaking, the overall picture of evil *desires* as a dreadful threat depicts nothing that belongs solely to the past, the time before conversion. It is simply not true that the new eschatological existence through faith falls utterly outside the enticements provoked by them as illustrated in verse 5.²⁰ The matter definitely needs further clarification.

Romans 6:12 shows that evil desires arising from the human body still harm Christians and try to exercise mastery over them.²¹ In that respect there is no clear-cut contrast between the before and after of conversion.²² In any case, baptism marks the great difference. The baptized are now able to offer resistance to their diverse heinous penchants. They are free *not* to carry them out. The demonic power of sin has definitely been broken. Yet the enduring fight against evil unmistakably indicates that the portrayal in 7:5 has something in common with the admonition in 6:12.²³ In a similar way, the debatable phrase τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιήσθε εἰς

¹⁸ Cf. A. Busch, “The Figure of Eve in Romans 7:5–25,” *BiblInt* 12.1 (2004): 18–19.

¹⁹ Pace particularly Robert H. Gundry, “The Moral Frustration of Paul Before His Conversion: Sexual Lust in Romans 7:7–25,” in *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce* (ed. D. A. Hagner and Murray J. Harris; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 228–45. For a more thorough analysis, see J. G. Janzen, “Sin and the Deception of Devout Desire: Paul and the Commandment in Romans 7,” *Enc* 70.3 (2009): 29–61. Here he also cuttingly discusses some fatal errors in Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, 2007); see especially pp. 30–34. However, cf. Robert Jewett, “The Basic Human Dilemma: Weakness or Zealous Violence? Romans 7:7–25 and 10:1–18,” *ExAud* 13 (1997): 96–109. He strictly rejects the explanation of Gundry: “I know of no one who has accepted this implausible hypothesis” (p. 99). But yet, Jewett confines his own interpretation to an equally restricted view which fails to carry conviction. He affirms: “What Paul describes in Romans 7 is the dilemma of this fanatical zeal, as he had experienced it and as his fellow Jewish nationalists were promoting it in hostile competition with the Christian mission.” See also Grant R. Osborne, “The Flesh Without the Spirit: Romans 7 and Christian Experience,” in *Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin*, 16–18. Similarly, Chester, “Retrospective View,” 72.

²⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988), 371 on Rom 7:5: “The description of what characterized their previous life ‘in the flesh’ provides the clearest echoes of the preceding exhortation, with almost every word or phrase paralleled in 6:12–23: ‘sinful passions’ (6:12), ‘the law’ (6:14–15), ‘in our members’ (6:13, 19), ‘to bear fruit for death’ (6:21). One difference is that what 7:5 refers to their preconversion state, 6:12 envisaged as still a possibility for the Roman Christians . . .” See below. Cf. in addition F. Varo, “La lucha del hombre contra el pecado: Exégesis de Rom 7,14–25,” *Scripta Theologica* 16.1–2 (1984): 29–30.

²¹ Of course, the genitive αὐτοῦ refers undeniably to σῶμα (“body”) and not to ἁμαρτία (“sin”).

²² See Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 114–18.

²³ Cf. Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, vol. 2: *Römer 6–11* (EKK 6.2; Zurich: Benzinger, 1980), 67–69. In a similar way Dunn, *Romans*, 371. Additionally, he comments on Rom 7:7: “But the use of the pluperfect in the second half of v 7 (‘I would not have known’) probably already reflected Paul’s awareness that his experience of coveting was not something confined to his pre-Christian period” (405). In reference to him, see Don B. Garlington, “Romans 7:14–25 and the Creation Theology of Paul,” *TrinJ* 11.2 (1990): 212. Moreover, see my article “Crucified with Christ and the New Life of Christians: Romans 6:1–14 (and 15–23) Revisited,” in *Fri och bunden. En bok om teologisk antropologi* (ed. J. Hellberg, R. Imberg, and T. Johansson; Församlingsfakultetens skriftserie 13; Gothenberg, Sweden: Din Bok, 2013),

ἐπιθυμίας in 13:14 should be translated as a warning to make no provision for the flesh so as to fulfill its desires.²⁴ Instead the believers should “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Thus, they are to live in love.

Likewise, in Gal 5:24 Christians are characterized as those who “have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires” (σὺν τοῖς παθήμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις). In other words, they have not been able to destroy or extinguish their evil inclinations. Verse 17 asserts explicitly that their “flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit” and “the Spirit desires what is contrary to the flesh.” The present tense in Greek (ἐπιθυμεῖ) denotes a continuous activity: the flesh and the Spirit are in conflict with each other all the time. However, verse 16 insists that Christians living by the Spirit will not gratify the desires of their flesh (ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκὸς οὐ μὴ τελέσητε). They must and they really can bid defiance to them and avert them to be realized. On the contrary, if Christians perform the *works* of the flesh, which are enumerated in verses 19–21, they are totally lost. In that case they “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Yet until the last day they are not able to abolish the *desires* of the flesh.²⁵

Apparently, the line of thought is identical in Galatians and in Romans. In addition, the two words πάθημα and ἐπιθυμία are synonymous in Gal 5:24 as in Rom 6:12 and 7:5.²⁶

2. *Romans 7:4 and 8:13*. For the time being, the new eschatological existence through faith endures in the shadow of the old corrupt world. Christians have indeed died from sin, but sin has not died at that very moment. It still remains in them and yet it should not reign over them.²⁷ The paradoxical state of affairs is illustrated by a comparison of Rom 7:4 and 8:13.

Romans 7:4 describes the “indicative” side of death: Christians have already died with Christ in baptism (see chap. 6). They have been put to death explicitly “through the body of Christ.” Why does Paul make use of such a bizarre and puzzling phrase instead of simply writing “through the death of Christ”? What does he in fact intend? There has been a lot of discussion on these matters previously but here it is not possible to go into the detailed contentions in length.²⁸ I think, however, that the underlying meaning is quite evident. Christians have died—though

114–21. The article has been published simultaneously in *Scandinavian Evangelical E-Journal [SEE-J]* 4 (2013): 68–88. In this case, see pp. 80–84.

²⁴ E.g. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 826 n. 53. See as well M. P. Middendorf, *The “I” in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7* (Saint Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 209. Paul speaks alternately of the body (σῶμα) and the flesh (σάρξ) of Christians. See below.

²⁵ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 143–44. See also below.

²⁶ E.g. Wilckens, *Römer*, 20 and 67.

²⁷ Precisely, e.g., Moo, *Romans*, 358: “It is not sin, but the believer, who has ‘died,’ and sin ... ‘remains’ even though it does not ‘reign.’” In a similar way, Udo Schnelle, *Gerechtigkeit und Christusgegenwart: Vorpaulinische und paulinische Tauftheologie* (2nd ed.; GTA 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 85: “Doch, er ist der Sünde gestorben, aber die Sünde ist nicht tot!”

²⁸ To be sure, the expression “through the body of Christ” does not refer to the church as “the body of Christ” (see 1 Corinthians 12). Christians have not died to the law through the church. For discussion in more detail, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT 6; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 352.

not yet their body. Thus, they have died “through the body of Christ.” He is the only one who (at the moment) has died to sin and to the law “once and for all” (6:10). The notion of “death” presupposes the physical death of the one who has died. In view of the fact that Christians have not died physically, it makes you wonder how to talk about their death in any case. The confusion is ultimately resolved by suggesting that they truly have died “through the body of Christ” on account of their baptismal union with him as already stated in chapter 6.²⁹ As a result, the line of thought remains absolutely cogent and coherent.³⁰ Moreover, in order to express the truth of the death that all Christians have experienced Paul makes use of passive aorist form *ἐθανατώθητε*. He stresses thereby what *God* has done to them (divine passive) and what has taken place *once* in their life (punctiliar aorist). They have not accomplished it themselves. Their freedom from sin and law does not in the slightest depend on their own merits and works. It is God’s gift, once given to them by him in baptism.³¹

On the other hand, Rom 8:13 prescribes the “imperative” side of death: Christians are warned not to live according to the flesh but to put to death the works of the body, or else they will die, in other words, perish forever. In this context Paul makes no use of passive aorist as in 7:4 (see above). Now he prefers active present tense *θανατοῦτε* which indicates a continuous action and an unceasing involvement of Christians in the course of the whole sanctifying process. The imperative form further intensifies the impression of their cooperation. The strong literal meaning of the verb (“to mortify”) displays perspicuously the immense difficulty of the undertaking. The mortification will absolutely require a great deal of effort. It never comes spontaneously but by the power of the Spirit. He alone is in control of all that stems from the flesh. In addition, the object of the imperative deserves to be noticed carefully. Paul encourages Christians to put to death explicitly the evil *works* of their body. He has in 6:12 taken for granted that in any case the evil *desires* of their body constantly remain in them (see above). Those they cannot extinguish. Yet their fight has to continue as long as they live in the world.³²

The aforementioned variation of passive aorist form *ἐθανατώθητε* (7:4) and active present tense *θανατοῦτε* (8:13) explains the twofold truth that Christians have already died from sin but sin has not yet died. Therefore, they are supposed to oppose the sin. Thereby they are becoming what they truly are: free from all that turns against the divine will. Nevertheless, for the time being, Christians who are able to impede the evil works of the body are not able to inhibit the evil desires of the body. This tension does not cease during their life on earth.³³

²⁹ Pace Moo, *Romans*, 418 n. 45. He maintains that it is not justified “to read into this text connotations of baptism from 6:1–3.”

³⁰ The interpretation of the expression “through the body of Christ” above corroborates the thesis that owing to the crucifixion of the “old self” the “body of sin” has not already been annihilated completely (Rom 6:10). See Laato, *Crucified*, 114–21 (*SEE-J*, 80–84).

³¹ Cf. further Laato, *Crucified*, 106 (*SEE-J*, 75).

³² Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, esp. 130–31 and Schreiner, *Romans*, 421–22.

³³ The eschatological tension of “already—not yet” permeates the whole of Pauline theology. See first and foremost James D. G. Dunn, “Rom. 7:14–25 in the Theology of Paul,” *TZ* 31.5 (1975): 264–73.

3. *Sinful desires in Romans 7*. Such being the case, it is strictly speaking not right to maintain that Rom 7:5 on the whole speaks of the past of all Christians. They are still subjected to pressure of their depraved passions. But now they can master them. Their slavery has passed away. The sinful desires, once without restraint, are no longer *at work* (ἐνηργεῖτο) in “our members” (bodies), no more *bearing fruit* (καρποφορῆσαι) for death. Yet they have not ceased to bother. They are latent and lurking in wait to gain supremacy again.³⁴

Hence, the preceding question of the relationship between Rom 7:5 and the following monologue of the “I” in verses 7–25 compellingly emerges once again. The problem worth a special inquiry relates to the crucial thesis that the latter passage is only reiterating more broadly what has been anticipated in the former more briefly (see above).³⁵

To begin with, the “I” confesses frankly that he does not succeed in doing what is good (v. 15): “I do not understand (οὐ γινώσκω) what I do (κατεργάζομαι). For what I want to do I do not do (πράσσω), but what I hate I do (ποιῶ).” Obviously, the verb γινώσκειν does not mean “to know” here. The “I” is well aware of his sinfulness and wickedness in doing evil against his better will. Rather he is entirely embarrassed, not really understanding what he is doing or not doing.³⁶

Verse 15 does not explicitly point out which iniquity the pronoun ὁ hints at. In general, it is simply or tacitly taken for granted that transgressions of the law are brought into focus.³⁷ However, that needs to be somewhat clarified. In the light of the context there is a lot more to be said.

The verb κατεργάζομαι occurs later on in verse 17 as well as in verse 20 (primarily a word-for-word recurrence of v. 16a and the former passage). Here the “I” explains that it is in reality sin which works what he does not want to do. He would rather fulfill the divine will but cannot do so. In addition, the same verb occurs in verse 13. Sin appears there as the subject as well. Now it “produces (κατεργαζομένη) death” in the “I” by using the holy and righteous commandment

Of course, cf. his *Romans*, too. In reference to him, see in particular Garlington, “Romans 7:14–25,” 197–235. For further discussion, see in particular Chang, “Christian Life,” 257–80. In brief, cf. J. I. Packer, “The ‘Wretched Man’ Revisited: Another Look at Romans 7:14–25,” in *Romans and the People of God. Essays in Honor of G. D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (ed. S. K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 77–78.

³⁴ Cf. Laato, *Crucified*, 119–21 (*SEE-J*, 83–84).

³⁵ Cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 374: “This final antithesis between law and Spirit [in Rom 7:6] becomes the heading and synopsis for the next two sections: 7:7–25 on the law, and chap. 8 on the Spirit.”

³⁶ W. G. Kümmel, *Römer 7 und das Bild des Menschen im Neuen Testament: Zwei Studien* (TB 53; München: C. Kaiser, 1974), 59. Further, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (BNTC; London: Black, 1967 [=1957]), 147; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1: *Introduction and Commentary on Romans I–VIII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004 [=1975]), 358–59; and John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1: *Chapters 1 to 8* (NICNT 6; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982 [=1968]), 261–62. See also Wilckens, *Römer*, 87. In addition, cf. Varo, “La lucha,” 41–42. Nevertheless, Osborne goes too far as he understands the verb in the sense of “approving” or “condoning” (“Flesh,” 30–31). For a thorough discussion, see C. Cataldo, *A Spiritual Portrait of a Believer: A Comparison Between the Emphatic “I” of Romans 7, Wesley and the Mystics* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 83–88.

³⁷ See, e.g., Kümmel, *Römer* 7, 59.

as a deceiving device. Accordingly, his death follows through that which is good. Further, the same verb occurs also and already in verse 8. Even there, sin appears as the subject. This time it seizes “the opportunity afforded by the commandment” and “produces (*κατεργάσατο*) every kind of covetous desire” in the “I” on the pretext of allowing the law to forbid precisely the opposite. Before long he succumbs to temptation and transgresses the given order.³⁸

Such being the case, the line of thought as elaborated in chapter 7 insinuates that the objects of the verb *κατεργάζεσθαι* in verses 8, 13, and 15 explain each other. The pronoun *ὃ* (v. 15) has thus two antecedents. It refers back to *πάσαν ἐπιθυμίαν* (v. 8) and *θάνατον* (v. 13).³⁹ The “I” prolongs his monologue and expresses his intimidating embarrassment. He does not understand (nor accept) that sin has brought him death by calling forth every kind of covetous desire. He lives continually in tension with himself and cannot escape the black hole of his miserable condition.⁴⁰

In Romans 7 it is hence all about sinning against the commandment “Do not covet.” Covetousness is the chief of sins which most of the time remains out of sight, hidden in depth of the heart, but which still contaminates everything that comes out of it with a taint of depravity.⁴¹ Covetousness militates against love. They rule each other out entirely. Where the one holds sway, the other fades away. As the opposite of love which is “the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13:10, Gal 5:14) covetousness then is *the* transgression of the law. On occasion it certainly engenders blatant and odious vices, but conceals itself even behind seemingly blameless piety.⁴² The “I” sins each and every time he does not do good from the bottom of

³⁸ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 124–25. Additionally, see Mark Seifrid, “Romans 7: The Voice of the Law, the Cry of Lament, and the Shout of Thanksgiving,” in *Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin*, 156: “There is no reason to suppose that he [i.e. Paul] now [in v. 15] has shifted his attention away from the prohibition of coveting that he has cited in v. 7.”

³⁹ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 125.

⁴⁰ On the meaning of death in Paul, see Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 102–4.

⁴¹ In contrast, Rudolf Bultmann, “Römer 7 und die Anthropologie des Paulus,” in *Imago Dei: Beiträge zur theologischen Anthropologie* (ed. H. Bornkamm; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1932), 53–62. He proposes a puzzling “transsubjective” interpretation which “bezieht sich gar nicht auf die empirische Tat der Übertretung, sondern auf das Ergebnis des Tuns, das für die gesetzliche Existenz bei jeder Tat herauskommt: auf den Tod” (p. 60). Accordingly, the “I” sins because he attempts to *fulfill* the law (and establish his own righteousness), not so much because he really has to *transgress* the commandments. He errs as a result of his “nomistic” desire. Of course, Bultmann deserved much credit for his interpretation among his followers. See, e.g., G. Bornkamm, “Sünde, Gesetz und Tod: Exegetische Studie zu Röm 7,” in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol. 1: *Das Ende des Gesetzes: Paulusstudien* (5th ed.; BEvTh 16; München: Kaiser, 1966), 54–57, 62–63; Hans Hübner: *Das Gesetz des Paulus. Ein Beitrag zum Werden der paulinischen Theologie* (FRLANT 119; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 65–69 and particularly Käsemann, *Romans*, 194–204. For biting criticism see first and foremost H. Räisänen, “Zum Gebrauch von ΕΠΙΘΥΜΙΑ und ΕΠΙΘΥΜΕΙΝ bei Paulus,” *ST* 33 (1979): 85–99; E’T = “The Use of *ἐπιθυμία* and *ἐπιθυμῆν* in Paul,” in *idem, Jesus, Paul and Torah: Collected Essays* (JSNTSup 43; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 95–111. A similar criticism has been presented already by Althaus, *Paulus und Luther*, 47–49 and E. Ellwein, “Das Rätsel von Römer VII,” *KD* 1.4 (1955): 259–60 (and many others).

⁴² Cf. J. M. Espy, “Paul’s ‘Robust Conscience’ Re-examined,” *NTS* 31.2 (1985): 161–88, as well as J. A. Ziesler, “The Role of the Tenth Commandment in Romans 7,” *JSNT* 33.1 (1988): 47–52. See already E. Fuchs, *Die Freiheit des Glaubens. Römer 5–8 ausgelegt* (BEvTh 14; München: Kaiser, 1949), 71–72. What

the heart. An “outer” fulfilling of the law without “inner” consent does not suffice. The commandment “Do not covet” always calls for absolute perfection with renunciation of all evil desires. Nothing less is enough.⁴³

By and large, it is in Romans 7 a matter not primarily of evil *works*. The accent falls in the first place upon impure *motives*. The commandment “Do not covet” bans all sins (see above). By transgressing that single commandment, the “I” is therefore transgressing the whole law (cf. Jas 2:10). As a result, he has to confess in verse 19: “For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”

Indeed, no one always *does* only evil and never good. Being so bad is out of the question.⁴⁴ The excessive pessimistic tone in the lamentation of the “I” originates from his total impotence to carry out the commandments (if at all) from *pure motives*. Despite earnest striving he cannot attain the distant ideal of not coveting. Concupiscence constantly remains latent in his heart. At times also occasional lapses occur. As a result, an immeasurable defeatism or resignation accrues within him devoid of any alleviation of anxiety through himself. In view of the perfectionistic perspective, explicitly written in the law, the “I”—as expected—always does evil and never good. What else could he do?⁴⁵

Besides, here the verbs *ποιεῖν* and *πράσσειν* most likely express a focus on action that is by no means manifested exclusively in works. In agreement with the usage elsewhere in Romans, man actually “does” evil also when he carries it out

the “I” desires “to accomplish, is not a particular deed, but the moral perfection which is contained in the Law as a whole” (Seifrid, “Subject,” 328 n. 45). Further Osborne, *Flesh*, 35: “Still, the ‘good’ here means that which God requires, not just good deeds. One can perform good acts without truly being ‘good’ in a divine sense.”

⁴³ Differently T. Kjær, “*Jeg’et*” i *Romerbrevet* 7,7–13 og 14–25 (Copenhagen: Forlag1.dk, 2010), 136: “and the motives of the ‘I’ are pure, because the ‘I’ wants to do the good, delights in God’s law and hates the evil.” However, someone definitely can yearn to have pure motives and solely do what is good—only to realize that he is not able to change himself. So it goes in Romans 7. In addition, Kjær does not sufficiently take into account the context, especially the object of the verb *κατεργάζεσθαι* in vv. 8, 13, and 15 (see above). Therefore, he fails to discuss the problem of covetousness in the whole passage (see pp. 222–23). Neither does Kjær sufficiently allow for the difference between the “I” who is “fleshly” and the “I” who *has* the “flesh,” nor for their mutual agony (see below).

⁴⁴ Particularly against H. Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (WUNT 29; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 109–11 and E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 74–81, 124–25. See further Gundry, “Moral Frustration,” 238; cf. A. Nygren, *Pauli brev till Romarna* (Tolkning av Nya Testamentet 6; Stockholm: Verbum, 1979), 296–303. He suggests that the “I” (the Christian) “verkliggen och entydigt har sin lust i det goda” (298), but “i utförandet slår det ständigt fel” (300). For criticism see P. Althaus, “Zur Auslegung von Röm. 7,14ff.: Antwort an Anders Nygren,” *TLZ* 77 (1952): 478. On the contrary, Kjær (see “*Jeg’et*,” 170, 181–82, 223) tries to convince that the present form of some verbs in chap. 7 (as “I do” and “I will”) is “iterative,” designating only what occurs occasionally. Then he concludes that Christians sin now and then. Finally, the text is telling us nothing else! But do we really need such an extensive passage to tell us simply that? And how should the reader know when and why some verbs (but obviously not all) are “iterative”? In trying to solve one big problem, Kjær actually engenders more troubles to himself.

⁴⁵ Cf. further Ziesler, “Role,” 51. See also the discussion of the “radicalized” law, introduced by J. K. Bruckner, “The Creational Context of Law before Sinai: Law and Liberty in Pre-Sinai Narratives and Romans 7,” *ExAud* 11 (1995): above all 104–18.

either in thoughts or words. The long list of vices in 1:28–31 includes along with various “large” offences some “small” aberrations, even such as a person does not necessarily “do” (e.g. greed, depravity, envy, malice, slander, hatred toward God, and arrogance). At any rate, they are enumerated as the object of *ποιεῖν* (1:28, 32) and *πράσσειν* (1:32). No clear-cut division into thoughts, words and acts appears appropriate. Evil is “done”—be that “merely” a matter of the mouth or mind.⁴⁶ In the Septuagint as well, there are numerous exhortations to “do” (*ποιεῖν*)⁴⁷ the law or respectively the Decalogue (see, e.g., Exod 24:3, 7; Lev 19:37; Deut 5:1, 31–32; 6:1, 24; 28:58; 31:12), though one cannot fulfill every individual commandment through good works (e.g. to honor God, not to take God’s name in vain, not to bear false witness against one’s neighbor or not to covet one’s neighbor’s house).⁴⁸

4. *Paul’s “robust conscience”?* In consideration of the tangible emphasis on coveting especially in Romans, it seems less convincing to maintain that Paul was simply a man of “a rather robust conscience,” not being in accord with the so-called “introspection” of Western Christianity ever since Augustine and in particular Luther.⁴⁹ On the contrary, the apostle appears to be conscientious at least vis-à-vis the unconditional demand of the divine law. He thoroughly knows his total inadequacy as a consequence of the commandment prohibiting concupiscence in every form. To be sure, the heart-rending or heart-breaking description in Romans 7 does not spring from the soul of “a rather robust” person. It is serious, not in the least theatrical.⁵⁰ Neither, for example, does the great, magnificent hymn of love (the oppo-

⁴⁶ See Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 90–91, 126–27.

⁴⁷ The verb *πράσσειν* appears only sometimes. See Ziesler, “Role,” 55 n. 25.

⁴⁸ First and foremost, Ziesler, *Role*, 50.

⁴⁹ K. Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *HTR* 56.3 (1963): 199–215, here in particular p. 200. It is highly symptomatic that Stendahl does not at all discuss the problem of coveting in Pauline writings but dwells chiefly on the Pharisaic past of the apostle, his later call to apostleship which should not be misunderstood as his conversion, his apostolic ministry in sincerity and his weakness in the course of the missionary work—but without any specific relation to his sin (see pp. 204–11). However, see Althaus, *Paulus und Luther*, 87–88 and H. Räisänen: “Myyty synnin alaisuuteen: Kuvaako Rm 7:14–25 kristittyä?” *Teologin Aikakauskirja* 81.5 (1976): 434–35 (but cf. “Zum Gebrauch,” 90–94). They assert that Paul did not consider lusts as such sin. Yet, see my arguments above. Rightly Espy, “Paul’s ‘Robust Conscience,’” and Ziesler, “Role,” 47–52. Similarly already H. Möller, “Röm. 7 ist und bleibt das Bild des Christen II,” *Deutsche Theologie* 6 (1939): 76. Cf. also Josef Blank, “Der gespaltene Mensch. Zur Exegese von Röm 7,7–25,” *Schriftauslegung in Theorie und Praxis* (Bibliche Handbibliothek 5; Munich: Kösel, 1969), 167, and E. Fuchs, “Existenziale Interpretation von Römer 7,7–12 und 21–23,” *ZTK* 59.3 (1962), 288–90. Certainly due to Roman Catholic theology, Varo speaks here merely of *fomes peccati* (see “La lucha,” 50 *passim*), concluding: “esos actos de la concupiscencia desordenada no son pecados mortales si falta la advertencia del entendimiento o el consentimiento de la voluntad” (41).

⁵⁰ See Dunn, “Rom. 7:14–25,” 260–61. Later Dunn (*Romans*, 394) writes: “The illogicality of arguing that the passage here expresses with Christian hindsight the existential anguish of the pious Jew—which as a pious Jew he did not actually experience and which as a Christian he still does not experience!—is not usually appreciated.” Cf. H. Deuser, “Glaubenserfahrung und Anthropologie. Röm 7,14–25 und Luthers These: totum genus humanum carnem esse,” *EvT* 39.5 (1979), 422. Further, e.g., also D. H. Campbell, “The Identity of *ἐγώ* in Romans 7:7–25,” *Studia Biblica 1978: III. Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors. Sixth International Congress on Biblical Studies* (ed. E. A. Livingstone; JSNTSS 3; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), 60; Gundry, “Moral Frustration,” 229; Anders Nygren, *Pauli brev till romarna: Tolkning av Anders Nygren* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelsens bokförlag, 1944), 308. Also, J. I. Packer,

site of covetousness) in 1 Corinthians 13 support any idea of moral pragmatism. Outward outstanding outcomes of superior behavior are nothing, if not done out of pure motives. Even the gifts of the Holy Spirit weigh nothing without an altruistic mindset. Indeed, all you need is love, real love which flows from God through Christ to you. In that context, the notion of a “robust” conscience does not comport with the overall picture.⁵¹

Yet it would certainly not do justice to Paul—if not having a “robust” conscience—to portray him as holding something like an “introspective” mindset. The whole of his theology and missionary diligence rests on Christ alone who has died for the fallen world and atoned for their sins. While passing judgment on Gentiles in general and Jews in particular (Romans 1–3), he is naturally not attempting to show the whites of their eyes and make them gaze into themselves. No, on the contrary, he is begging them to look away from themselves and focus on the cross of the Calvary where they are freely forgiven. Truly, they are not to learn “introspection,” or at least they have not to stick to that attitude obstinately. Instead, they are—in line with the Gospel—to be taught “Christ-spection” through faith. Nothing else will save them. I suppose neither Augustine nor Luther would disagree.⁵²

5. *Similarities between Romans 6:12, 7:24, and 8:10.* In this respect, the inner conflict of the “I” in Romans 7 and the spiritual fight of the Christians on the whole

“The ‘Wretched Man’ of Romans 7,” in *Studia Evangelica II* (ed. F. L. Cross; TU 87; Berlin: Akademie, 1964), 623, as well as idem, “‘Wretched Man’ Revisited,” 74.

⁵¹ Like Paul, many of his contemporaries in the field of religion, philosophy, or culture were engaged in differentiating inner motives of people making moral decisions. For parallels in ancient Jewish and Greek literature, cf. A. van den Beld, “Romans 7:14–25 and the Problem of *Akrasia*,” *RelS* 21.4 (1985): 495–515; H. Braun, “Römer 7, 7–25 und das Selbstverständnis des Qumran-Frommen,” *ZTK* 56.1 (1959): 4–15; L. A. Burgland, “Eschatological Tension and Existential Angst: ‘Now’ and ‘Not Yet’ in Romans 7:14–25 and 1QS 11 (Community Rule, Manual of Discipline),” *CTQ* 61.3 (1997): 163–76; H. Hommel, “Das 7. Kapitel des Römerbriefes im Licht antiker Überlieferung,” *ThViat* 8 (1961): 90–116; S. Krauter, “‘Wenn das Gesetz nicht gesagt hätte, ...’: Röm 7,7b und antike Äusserungen zu paradoxen Wirkungen von Gesetzen,” *ZTK* 108.1 (2011): 1–15; Lichtenberger, *Das Ich Adams*, 177–86; E. W. Smith, “The Form and Religious Background of Romans VII 24–25a,” *NovT* 13.2 (1971): 127–35; Gerd Theissen, *Psychologische Aspekte paulinischer Theologie* (FRLANT 131; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 213–23; Frank Thielman, *From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework for Understanding Paul’s View of the Law in Galatians and Romans* (NTS 61; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 104–7; E. Wasserman: “The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Revisiting Paul’s Anthropology in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology,” *JBL* 126.4 (2007): 793–816, and her more detailed monograph *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Sin, Death, and the Law in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology* (WUNT 2/256; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008). Most of all, see the critical remarks in R. V. Huggins, “Alleged Classical Parallels to Paul’s ‘What I Want to Do I Do not Do, But What I Hate, That I Do’ (Rom 7:15),” *WTJ* 54.1 (1992): 153–61. Similarly, Garlington, “Romans 7:14–25,” 229 n. 140. Also, Dunn (*Romans*, 389) speaks here of “significant differences” referring to the eschatological tension in Pauline theology.

⁵² In addition, cf. T. J. Wengert, “The ‘New’ Perspectives on Paul at the 2012 Luther Congress in Helsinki,” *LQ* 27.1 (2013): 90: “as interesting a thesis as Krister Stendahl’s proposal in his brief article on the ‘introspective conscience of the West’ is, it is unfortunate that New Testament exegetes are willing to believe his unproven argument about fifteen hundred years of church history [!] rather than employ the careful work of historians. And yet they would never allow a historian of biblical interpretation to write the definitive work on Paul in an equivalent fifteen-page essay—nor should they. That is, New Testament scholars simply need to stop using a meditative piece by Stendahl as the lens through which to judge all interpretations of Paul from Augustine through Luther to the present.”

are similar. Moreover, there are other common traits between them as a wide-ranging comparison of Rom 6:12 and 8:10 with Rom 7:24 against the background of the respective context in detail shows. The former two passages in chapters 6 and 8 describe beyond doubt the Christian experience while the latter verse in chapter 7 summarizes the precarious situation in the entire monologue. I have discussed the matter more thoroughly elsewhere, which should suffice.⁵³ In brief, the many similarities are simply enumerated here. They are:

(1) The body hinders the Christian and the “I” from fulfilling the law of God completely.

(2) The lusts and the wrongdoings of the Christian and the “I” actually have their origin in the body.

(3) Death still plagues the body of the Christian and the “I” because of constantly present sin.

(4) Sin is as it were a demonic person which continuously torments the Christian and the “I” through the body.

(5) God will redeem the Christian and the “I” definitely from the body of death on the last day.⁵⁴

Hence, both the Christian and the “I” face many problems of the same kind arising from the body. The new eschatological situation does not yet alter everything. There is still time left for expectation before consummation. Such being the case, it is hardly true that Christians are free from the body of death which the “I” struggles with and suffers from.⁵⁵ They, too, are fighting their battle with the mortal body.⁵⁶

6. “*Fleshly, sold under sin*” (Rom 7:14). All the same, the “I” frankly confesses that he is “fleshly, sold under sin” (v. 14). Specifically, that announcement sounds too harsh if coming from the mouth of the one who already has been released from the old aeon. Consequently, the miserable and pitiable monologue in chapter 7 does not render the Christian existence but on the contrary the way of life in opposition to it. No doubt this has been the most crucial and decisive argument ever since W. G. Kümmel published his well-known masterpiece *Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* in 1929.⁵⁷

Whatever one thinks about the possibility of moral faultlessness or perfect sinlessness in Christian life, the new mode of living in the Spirit does not mean that

⁵³ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 113–21. See also David Wenham, “The Christian Life: A Life of Tension? A Consideration of the Nature of Christian Experience in Paul,” in *Pauline Studies*, 84–86.

⁵⁴ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, esp. 118 and 121.

⁵⁵ Pace Kümmel, *Römer 7*, 65, 68 (and many commentaries with reference to him). See my arguments in *Paul and Judaism*, 113–29.

⁵⁶ See further my article, “Crucified,” 114–21 (*SEE-J*, 80–84).

⁵⁷ Kümmel, *Römer 7*, 58–61, 98–105, 135–36. In reference to him, see, e.g., Herman Ridderbos: *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. J. R. de Witt; 2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987 [=1975]), 127–28. Further, Chang, “Christian Life,” 273–74; Espy, “Paul’s ‘Robust Conscience,’” 173; Hofius, *Der Mensch*, 111–12; Murray, *Romans*, 259–61; Osborne, “Flesh,” 26–27, Russell, “Insights,” 523–24. Similarly also Middendorf, *The “I” in the Storm*, 91.

the flesh abruptly or gradually ceases to exist.⁵⁸ The characterization of the “I” as “fleshly” is an assertion of a common human trait, a feature that Christians still fully share. The same adjective *σάρκινος* (and the synonym *σαρκικός*) is explicitly applied to them in 1 Cor 3:1–3.⁵⁹ A similar thought occurs in a number of other passages too, as the following examples show:

- Rom 6:19 speaks of the weakness of the flesh of Roman Christians (cf. 8:3 as well)
- Rom 13:14 warns Christians not to make any provision for their flesh to carry out its desires (cf. above)
- 1 Cor 15:50 asserts that “flesh and blood” (of Christians) cannot inherit the kingdom of God (see below)
- 2 Cor 4:11 expresses the wish that the life of Christ may be revealed in the mortal flesh of the apostle
- 2 Cor 7:1 encourages Christians to purify themselves from every contamination of “flesh and spirit”
- 2 Cor 10:3 affirms that Paul and his coworkers still live “in the flesh” and yet do not fight “according to the flesh”
- Gal 2:20 explains similarly that Paul still lives “in the flesh” but at the same time by faith in Christ
- Gal 5:16–17 and 24 clarify the fight between the flesh and the Spirit (cf. above; see below)
- Gal 6:8 advises Christians not “to sow in their flesh”
- Phil 1:22–24 describe the benefit of still remaining “in the flesh” and “bearing fruit” among Christians

All these passages (and some others) show that the concession of the “I” as being “fleshly” does not fall outside the Christian experience.⁶⁰ Properly speaking, it is not about a “neutral” manner of being “in the flesh” (not even, e.g., in Gal 2:20 nor in Phil 1:22–24). Rather, it is a matter of being in contradiction to or at least in tension with the new eschatological situation.⁶¹ The extremely negative sense stands out principally in Rom 7:14. The “I” concedes that he is “fleshly” and “sold under sin” at the same time. The two phrases explain each other. Besides, the context completes the overall picture with sayings about the power of death and the impact

⁵⁸ E.g. Kümmel, *Römer* 7, 25: “und wenn der Christ Sünde tut, so ist auch bei ihm noch die *σάρξ* die Ursache ...” Also p. 26: “Im Christen ist bis zum Tode das psychische Leben zwar ebensowenig wie das sarkische aufgehoben ...” See Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 130–31.

⁵⁹ Accurately Moo, *Romans*, 454: “Since ‘fleshly’ in 1 Cor. 3:1 is applied to Christians, it is clear that this adjective itself does not require the *ego* be unregenerate.” See also Murray, *Romans*, 260. Moreover, in 1 Cor 3:1 “fleshly” is contrasted with “spiritual” as in Rom 7:14 and Gal 5:16–17. Cf. below. To be sure, the words *σάρκινος* and *σαρκικός* are synonyms. Pace Nygren, *Romarbrevet*, 305 and Varo, “La lucha,” 38.

⁶⁰ In the OT people are “flesh” simply in *distinction* from God. Paul maintains recurrently that people are “flesh” also in *contradiction* to God. See Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 76.

⁶¹ Cf. Byskov, “*Simul*,” 78: “In my opinion it is meaningless to talk of a neutral use of anthropological terms in the Pauline letters.” In the same way Dunn, who contends that “the fleshliness of the believer, his belongingness to this world, is almost always something negative” and that a distinction between a “non-pejorative” and “pejorative” sense of *σάρξ* can be maintained “on no occasion of soteriological significance” (“Rom. 7,14–25,” 266–67).

of the law (especially the commandment “Do not covet”). On the whole, all distinct aspects are mixed together. They coalesce into a terrific *circulus vitiosus*: As long as the “I” lives in his flesh, he suffers from sin. He has to struggle with every kind of evil desire. Occasionally he falls into overt act. Therefore, the law condemns him and the sentence of death hangs over him.⁶²

7. *Nothing good “in my flesh” (Rom 7:18)*. The confession of the “I” as being “fleshly” in verse 14 is matched by the harshness of his concession in verse 18a. They are verbatim almost one to one:

v. 14: οἶδαμεν γὰρ ... ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκινος

v. 18: οἶδα γὰρ ... ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου⁶³

In addition, the echo of being “sold under sin” in verse 14 is heard in verse 18 as the total absence of goodness. The “I” emphasizes that no good dwells in him or properly speaking in his flesh (οὐκ οἰκεῖ ἐν ἐμοί, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου, ἀγαθόν). More clearly, verses 19–20 relate the absolute compulsion of not doing the good (ἀγαθόν) respectively of doing the evil (κακόν) explicitly to the indwelling sin (ἡ οἰκουσα ἐν ἐμοί ἁμαρτία). The similarity in terminology is evident (cf. ἀγαθόν and the verb οἰκεῖν) substantiating the linkage between flesh and sin. Their close relationship is also shown by the using of some copulative conjunctions (γάρ, δέ, or ἀλλά) which join together the subsequent phrases in mutual dependence. Besides, verses 19–20 illuminate verse 18 and reiterate word for word most of verses 15b–17 which in turn elucidate verse 14. Hence, verses 14 and 18 are parallel clarifying each other.⁶⁴

To sum up: the line of thought in verses 14–20 appears somewhat complex. The passage is composed of two parts (vv. 14–17 and vv. 18–20) which initially correspond to each other. Apparently, it is not quite easy for the “I” to put his struggle within himself into plain and simple words. He develops his story while at the same time repeating it.

8. *Serving “the law of sin with my flesh” (Rom 7:25)*. Further, the lethal coalition of flesh and sin emerges in verse 25 as well. The “I” (who delightfully serves the law of God with his mind) still has to serve (the present tense δουλεύω indicating the continuous activity) “the law of sin” with his flesh.⁶⁵ This closing line in the mono-

⁶² Moreover, cf. Cataldo, *Spiritual Portrait*, 89. He comments on v. 24: “However, it must be said, that the sorrow and pain that the emphatic ‘I’ experiences is not only for what it does ...; the sorrow and pain of the emphatic ‘I’ of Rom 7 is also because of what it is.”

⁶³ Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 390. See also Hofius, *Der Mensch*, 138.

⁶⁴ Cf. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 390–92 and Seifrid, “Subject,” 326–29. For the structure of vv. 14–17 and 18–20 see in particular Hofius, *Der Mensch*, 136–38 and Seifrid, “Subject,” 326–28. Cf. Garlington, “Romans 7:14–25,” 210–11, 218.

⁶⁵ Of course, v. 25b is no gloss. All manuscripts have it (see Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 127–28). On the history of the interpretation of v. 25b see first and foremost W. Keuck, “Dienst des Geistes und des Fleisches: Zur Auslegungsgeschichte und Auslegung von Röm 7,25b,” *TQ* 141.3 (1961): 257–80. Some commentators even place v. 25b behind v. 23. See, e.g., F. Müller, “Zwei Marginalien im Brief des Paulus an die Römer,” *ZNW* 40 (1941): 249–52, as well as W. Schmithals, *Die theologische Anthropologie des*

logue of the “I” refers back to verse 23 where “the law of sin”—which is “another law” and not precisely the Mosaic law—is at work in his members and taking him captive.⁶⁶ The slightly different expressions have essentially a similar meaning: The “I” who has “the law of sin” in his members (which together form the flesh) is the “I” who serves “the law of sin” with his flesh (which consists of members). This portrayal exposes only the one side of the coin. Verse 22 uncovers the other side of the coin. In his inner being the “I” delights in God’s law. He longs to follow it. (But, alas, he cannot.) Verse 21 takes into account both sides of the reality, stating that the “I” is split into two opposing parts: the one who holds to the good and the other who hangs on the evil. Verse 25b repeats the whole story briefly. Before that, verses 24–25a stand out as a hopeful exclamation. The “I” cries for the future deliverance from his “body of death” in assurance of the coming salvation. To be sure, the “body of death” is the entity of the members (v. 23) or synonymous with the flesh (v. 25b) which bears fruit for death (v. 5). Consequently, the petition implies the same dichotomy as verses 21–23 and verse 25b. The “I” is incarcerated within himself. He cannot (yet) get rid of his depravity.⁶⁷

9. *Romans 7:14, 18, and 25.* On the whole, Rom 7:14–25 is divided into minor units which all uncover from their respective perspective the antagonism holding sway over the “I” in his wretchedness. He tries to explain his extraordinary situation as well as possible: two rather parallel passages to begin with (vv. 14–17 and vv. 18–20), followed by a deeper analysis (vv. 21–23), after that a shattering cry for deliverance (vv. 24–25a) leading to a concluding summary (v. 25b). Every part of the monologue discloses a serious and unending conflict. The “I” has to face his own depravity which in his innermost being he earnestly and fervently protests against but which he, nonetheless, does not overcome. He calls it the “law” or the “rule” of sin. It denotes the compulsion of sinning contrary to his better will. However, such a usage certainly has a “deeper” meaning as well. It is reminiscent of the fatal misuse of the Mosaic law through sin which seized the opportunity afforded by the commandment “Do not covet” and consequently produced in the “I” plenty of evil desires killing him (vv. 8–9, see above). That kind of association appears entirely deliberate.⁶⁸

Paulus: Auslegung von Röm 7,17–8,39 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980), 81–82. Rightly, e.g., Packer, “‘Wretched Man’ Revisited,” 79.

⁶⁶ For the meaning of νόμος see in the first place H. Räisänen, “Das ‘Gesetz des Glaubens’ (Röm. 3:27) und das ‘Gesetz des Geistes’ (Röm. 8:2),” *NTS* 26.1 (1979): 101–17; ET = “The ‘Law’ of Faith and the Spirit,” in idem, *Jesus, Paul and Torah: Collected Essays* (JSNTSS 43; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 48–68. Cf. in addition Hofius, *Der Mensch*, 142: “Für das angemessene Verständnis des Textes ist die Erkenntnis wichtig, dass in ihm nicht ein univoker, sondern ein äquivoker Gebrauch des Wortes νόμος vorliegt.” In other words, Paul plays upon the word νόμος. He obviously suggests that the “law” of sin commands and demands obedience as does the Mosaic law. Similarly, Osborne, “Flesh,” 37.

⁶⁷ See Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 117–23. The expression αὐτὸς ἐγὼ in 7:25b stands for “I myself.” It certainly does not convey the strange idea of “I alone (without Christ).” Pave J. Kürzinger, “Der Schlüssel zum Verständnis von Röm 7,” *BZ* 7.2 (1963): 272–73. Correctly already Kümmel, *Römer*, 66–67. For the structure of vv. 21–23 see in particular Hofius, *Der Mensch*, 141–43 and Seifrid, “Subject,” 326–28.

⁶⁸ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 137.

Such being the case, verses 14, 18 and 25b all are marked by similarities reflecting on the relationship between flesh and sin. However, in the course of the story the narrative becomes more and more detailed. Phrases containing various copulative conjunctions (such as *γάρ*, *δέ*, *ἀλλά*, and *ἔρα*) follow one after the other. An isolated line of thought alone does not explain the whole thing. The next line is needed as well. And the next and the next. Perhaps the entire story—before one can fully understand it. The condition of the “I” appears exceedingly complicated and it simply does not “fit” in one phrase only. He has to make use of plenty of words.⁶⁹

A closer look at verses 14, 18 and 25b sheds light on this. In the first round (vv. 14–17), the “I” depicts himself as fleshly and sold under sin, straightway specifying that he is protesting against the state of affairs in his life. Hence, he is—so far he indeed wishes to do the good—not *wholly* fleshly nor sold under sin. In the second round (vv. 18–20), the “I” begins and finishes his story in a similar way as at the first (see above) showing that he still has to clarify what he was just saying. A short clarification follows immediately in verse 18. Ultimately, it differentiates between the “I” who is wholly fleshly and the “I” who has flesh. The “I” who speaks of “my flesh” has flesh. By contrast, the “I” in whom “no good dwells” is wholly fleshly.⁷⁰ Then in the third round (vv. 21–23), both sides of the “I” are elaborated further. After crying for deliverance from the body of death and giving thanks to God for his (imminent) help (vv. 24–25a), in the end, the “I” summarizes the enduring dichotomy by making a clear-cut existential distinction between serving the law of God with the mind and serving the law of sin with the flesh at the same time (v. 25b). Consequently, isolating verse 14 from its context would not do justice to the multifaceted contention and the continuous progress of the monologue in verses 15–25.⁷¹

10. *Romans 6 and 7: the “outer” and the “inner” side of the Christian life.* Against the background of chapter 7, some significant implications for the interpretation of chapter 6 come to the forefront. Even if Christians already have died from sin through their baptism, sin has not yet died. It still longs for mastery over them. In

⁶⁹ Cf. Seifrid, “Subject,” 326–29. Chester (“Retrospective View,” 89–93) thinks that “the content of 7:14–25 simply does not support the contention that the division of the self is what Paul regards as the fundamental problem” (p. 89).

⁷⁰ In particular Varo (“La lucha,” 38–39) in reference to some Church Fathers: “La primera vez podría parecer que a todo el hombre, facultades superiores e inferiores, se aplica la debilidad significada por el atributo ‘de carne’; pero so San Pablo especifica en el versículo 18c que no habita nada bueno ‘en su carne’, no en todo el ‘yo’ sino solamente en la carne.” See also especially J. Thurén, “Paulus och torah. Reflexioner kring Heikki Räisänen’s arbete Paul and the Law, 1983,” in *Judendom och kristendom under de första århundradena I* (ed. S. Hidal et al.; Stavanger: Universitetsförlaget, 1986), 171. Cf. Cranfield, *Romans*, 360–61 as well as Kümmel, *Römer*, 61. In the same way already Möller, “Röm. 7,” 11, 15, and Theodor Zahn, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (ed. F. Hauck; 3rd ed.; KNT 6; Leipzig: Deichert, 1925), 355. Here it is not required to decide on the old controversial question whether *τοῦτ’ ἔστιν* has a defining or limiting sense (cf. various commentaries), though I myself opt for the latter interpretation.

⁷¹ Cf. Packer, “‘Wretched Man’ of Romans 7,” 627: “‘I am carnal, sold under sin,’ is stated categorically and without qualification, not because this is the whole truth about Paul the Christian, but because it is the only part of truth about himself that the law can tell him.” See also “‘Wretched Man’ Revisited,” 73 n. 5.

so doing, it makes use of their body (or flesh) which constantly generates evil desires (6:12; see above). Even if Christians also have died from the law being no more “under it” (v. 14), the commandment “Do not covet” nonetheless condemns evil desires in their body, ultimately culminating in an absolute refutation of their piety. All in all, an in-depth reading of chapters 6 and 7 shows their interwoven relationship. Strictly speaking, they do not describe two different cases but one, yet from two different perspectives. Throughout, the subject remains fundamentally the same. Chapter 6 illustrates the “outer,” victorious side of the Christian life. Sin does not reign any more, and yet sinful desires are not extinguished. The spiritual day-to-day fight keeps going. On the other hand, chapter 7 illuminates the “inner,” frustrating side of the Christian life. Covetousness spoils every effort to obtain moral perfection. Doing good involves completely pure motives. These both sides of the Christian existence are required to gain a sharp picture of the transition, already begun in baptism.⁷²

11. *The implications of the Greek word σῶμα.* Moreover, the depiction of the “I” in verses 14–25 follows the linguistic and philosophical outlines of the ancient Hellenistic world. He has to combat his “body of death” (v. 24) or its “members” (v. 23) or “flesh” (v. 18, see also v. 14). In Greek, the word σῶμα is used (when used with reference to individuals) primarily of slaves and prisoners of war. It does not denote the active subject who is free to decide on his own life unprompted but in particular the passive object compelled and determined by the others.⁷³ In line with Hellenistic terminology, the vocabulary in verses 14–25 focuses on the military and slavery. The “I” is “sold under sin” (v. 14). He sees “another law” in his members, fighting against “the law of his mind” and holding him captive in “the law of sin”

⁷² Just like 6:13 (cf. the utterances in v. 16 and v. 19) ties “your members” (τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν) and “yourselves” (ἑαυτοὺς), so 7:17 (or equally v. 20) and v. 23 connect the terms “in me” (ἐν ἐμοί) and “in my members” (ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου). Christians are encouraged to offer their members to God and live according to his will (ch. 6). Anyway, they cannot extinguish those evil desires which nevertheless are dwelling in their members (ch. 7). Hence they fail to fulfill what the commandment “Do not covet” demands. Cf. in addition Garlington, “Romans 7:14–25,” 223: “Our ‘members’ are to be presented to God as the implements of righteousness (Rom 6:13). Even so, the ‘body,’ ‘flesh,’ and ‘members’ of the believer are never unambiguously identified with the new creation; only the consummate phase of redemption will place the outer man into a position of non-ambivalence with respect to the age to come.”

⁷³ See L. Scornaienchi, *Sarx und Soma bei Paulus: Der Mensch zwischen Destruktivität und Konstruktivität* (NTOA/SUNT 67; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 71: “Schließlich wird σῶμα auch zur Bezeichnung von Sklaven und Gefangenen verwendet. Gerade diese Bedeutung gilt es zu betonen, nicht nur aufgrund der Häufigkeit ihres Vorkommens in den griechischen Texten und Inschriften, sondern auch, weil dadurch der Begriff eine klare Kontur bekommt. Das Individuum als σῶμα ist von daher nicht der frei handelnde Mensch, sondern der Mensch, der fast zum Zustand eines Objekts entwertet und von anderen bestimmt wird.” There are two potential exceptions to the rule in the Pauline Epistles: “Ausnahmen von diesem Schema bilden Röm 6,12, wo die ἐπιθυμῖαι ihren Ursprung im σῶμα haben und nicht, wie zu erwarten wäre, in der σάρξ (oder der ἁμαρτία), und Röm 8,13, wo der Ausdruck τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σώματος eine aktive Rolle des σῶμα voraussetzt.” (p. 345). However, it is more exactly not the body as such which in Rom. 6:12 and 8:13 causes troubles but rather sin living in the body (cf. above). Therefore, the body does not here denote the active subject who is free to decide on his own life unprompted. Moreover, one reason for the peculiar Pauline usage which only relates to the Christian existence may be the fact that “σῶμα can cross the boundary of the ages, whereas σάρξ belongs firmly to this present age” (Dunn, *Romans*, 391; see already his article “Rom. 7,14–25,” 266–67).

that works in his members (v. 23) and in his “body of death” (v. 24). Therefore, he is “a wretched man” who needs freedom and deliverance (v. 24).⁷⁴ Such strong expressions in the context do not bear out that verses 14–25 describe the man under the law. Neither do they designate the man without the law. The “I” is Paul (or the Christian) who lives a bodily life, suppressed by sin and death. He makes use of a severe terminology which is perfectly natural in Greek as regards *σῶμα*. It does *not* show that he is not talking about himself.⁷⁵ Admittedly, this has not been taken into account in mainstream exegesis.

12. *Romans 7:14–25 as a description of the Christian life.* In consequence, as to both terminology and theology, verses 14–25 reflect on the Christian experience which stems from a conscientious encounter with the Mosaic law. Besides, there are various details which further confirm the conclusion to which the thorough analysis of the text has arrived. They have often been taken into consideration on diverse occasions. Also, I have discussed them elsewhere (see below). For that reason, they are here merely enumerated and not examined at length.

(1) Chapters 5–8 deal on the whole with the relation of *Christians* to different factors of the old aeon: in regard to (God’s) wrath (chap. 5), to sin (chap. 6), to the law (chap. 7), and to death (chap. 8). For that reason, 7:14–25 depicts the Christian confrontation with the Mosaic law. If not, it would be a long excursus not developing the theme of the overall context.⁷⁶

(2) It is asserted in 8:5 that those who “are according to the flesh” set their minds on “the things of the flesh.” It is further affirmed in 8:7 that the mind of the flesh is hostile to God, because it does not submit to his law, nor can it do so. In contrast, the “I” truly delights in the law of God “according to the inward man” (7:22). Thus, he is not fleshly minded but spiritually minded.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Moreover, cf. Hofius, *Der Mensch*, 139: “Zum Verständnis des Gegensatzes von Wollen und Tun ist die Beobachtung aufschlussreich, dass in antiken Befreiungsurkunden die Wendung ‘tun, was man will’ als Ausdruck für die einem Sklaven geschenkte Freiheit erscheint. ‘Tun was man nicht will’ und ‘nicht tun, was man will’ ist mithin kennzeichnend für den Sklaven, der nicht Herr seiner selbst und seines Tuns ist.”

⁷⁵ Also in chap. 6 (particularly vv. 12–23) the usage focuses on the military and slavery: e.g. the phrases “to obey either sin or God,” “to be slaves either of sin or God,” “to present one’s members as weapons either to sin or God,” “to be free from sin and enslaved to God,” or “the wages (or provisions) of sin.” As stated above, Christians are urgently admonished to keep the “outer” actions of their “members” under control and yet they are not able to have a hold over the “inner” motives of their “body” (which results in an eschatological tension). See Laato, *Crucified*, 118–20 (*SEE-J*, 82–83).

⁷⁶ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 139–40.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 123, 130. To be sure, Dunn mistakenly affirms that “in 8,4ff. Paul does not contrast believer with unbeliever; rather he confronts the believer with both sides of the paradox, both sides of his nature as believer” (“Rom. 7,14–25,” 263). Varo (“La lucha”) erroneously maintains that Rom. 7:7–25 should describe not only Christians but all human beings, e.g. their (uncorrupted) “razón” (pp. 31–32, 45–46, 49 *passim*), “facultades propiamente humanas, racionales” (p. 36), “potencias superiores” (pp. 42, 45), “libertad” (pp. 43–47), “la facultad volitiva” (p. 45), “las facultades superiores del hombre” (p. 48). He seems to read into the text much of Roman Catholic doctrine and theology. In contrast to Rom. 8:5–8 and even without discussing those verses he speaks about “la potestad de la voluntad cuya capacidad de querer el bien no quedó viciada como consecuencia del pecado original” (p. 43) concluding in the end that “San Pablo en ningún momento pretende quitar el libre arbitrio” (p. 47).

(3) Although the Spirit is not explicitly mentioned in 7:14–25, a mere *argument e silentio* does not prove that the text would in no way presuppose his influence. The Spirit is explicitly mentioned neither in chapter 6 and yet definitely taken for granted. Every time the larger context should be kept in mind. Otherwise, the right track is lost. Accordingly, the positive attitude of the “I” towards the “spiritual” law (v. 14) originates obviously from the impact of the Spirit on him.⁷⁸

(4) Apparently, νοῦς (7:23, 25) is synonymous with πνεῦμα (cf. Rom 11:34; 12:2; 1 Cor 2:16).⁷⁹

(5) The expression “inward man” (7:22) is used only of Christians (see 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 3:16).⁸⁰

(6) The deliverance from “this body of death” in 7:24 is evidently identical with the “redemption” of the body in 8:23. Since the latter verse speaks about the Christian hope, so does the former.⁸¹

(7) The swift change of tense in the middle of the monologue (in vv. 7–13 mainly aorist, in vv. 14–25 mostly present) suggests that the story moves from the past to the present. In that case, verses 14–25 describe the condition after conversion.⁸²

Additionally, one substantial supplemental point which is overlooked in mainstream exegesis.

(8) The most natural interpretation of the word σῶμα is obviously a reference to the physical body as representative of the *whole* person. Of course, even Christians have their body after their conversion or baptism. They are no ghosts! All this hardly needs corroboration. The interpretation of the “I” as Paul himself (or any Christian) indicates that the word σῶμα in 7:24 maintains the most obvious meaning. He will be released from his body of death (and sin) on the last day. On the

⁷⁸ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 123–24. See also Campbell, “Identity,” 59. He remarks sarcastically: “There is, for that matter, no reference to the Spirit in ch. 6, yet no one seems to think that this precludes a description of Christian experience there.” Cf. Garlington, “Romans 7:14–25,” 224 and Möller, “Röm. 7,” 24–25. Similarly, Packer, “‘Wretched Man’ Revisited,” 80: “the lack of reference to the Spirit in 7:14–25 proves nothing; not only because arguments from silence are intrinsically inconclusive, but because Paul’s theme here, focused by his own question in verse 7, is sin’s antipathy to God’s law.”

⁷⁹ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 124 n. 264. See further p. 129.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 121 and 129. Pace Chang, “Christian Life,” 276–77. He makes a clear-cut distinction between “a struggle, which a man has with sin within himself” and a “struggle with sin in the world, sin in circumstances, sin in trials, troubles, and tribulations that come to us in this life” (p. 276). In that case Rom 7:24 would refer to the former and Rom 8:23 to the latter. However, I suspect that Paul never put up such a well-defined dividing line without mixing the both parts together. Cf. his talk about the final salvation (8:24, 38–39) and the present justification (8:30, 33–34), “our weakness” owing to not knowing “what we ought to pray for” (8:26) as well as Christ’s death for us (8:32). Moreover, see my article “Cruified,” 102–3 (*SEE-J*, 72–73). Rightly, e.g., Packer, “‘Wretched Man’ Revisited,” 76.

⁸² Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 139. Definitely, Packer, “‘Wretched Man’ Revisited,” 79: “To shrug off the shift [from past to present] as a rhetorical device for giving extra vividness to what, essentially, he has said already would be exegetically evasive and grammatically hazardous. The use of the historic present in the Gospels and other Greek literature to add vividness to narrative does not provide any parallel to putting the narrative in the aorist (7:7–13) and the explanatory comment (which is what, on this view, 7:14–25 would be) in the present. The supposed rhetorical device of using the present tense for lively comment on what is past and gone does not exist in Greek.”

contrary, if the “I” portrays either a person under the law or without the law, then his release from the body of death stands for conversion in some metaphorical sense. Consequently, the body of death is brought to nothing already through faith! Moreover, a similar line of thinking pertains to 6:6 and 8:10 as well. Both verses are understood along the same lines (partially in order to be comported with 7:24).⁸³ This kind of reasoning seems, however, very arbitrary. In chapters 6–8 there are several occurrences where the word *σῶμα* without doubt retains its common meaning (see 6:12; 7:4; 8:11–23). The body consists of members, and the word *μέλη* retains an equally concrete meaning (see 6:13, 19; 7:23). Who in Rome would ever have figured out that the apostle abruptly and frequently moves from one denotation to another in a totally chaotic manner? Supposing something like that turns his mode of arguing topsy-turvy.⁸⁴

In short, there is nothing in 7:14–25 that does not fit Paul (or any Christian), and everything fits him alone. He is the “I” telling his story in very personal terms.⁸⁵

III. THE INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 7:14–25 VIS-À-VIS GENESIS 2–3

1. *Romans 7:7–13 in light of Genesis 2–3.* The monologue in chapter 7 begins already in verse 7 and comprises verses 8–13 as well. To be sure, the subject in verses 7–13 must agree with that of verses 14–25. Accordingly, Paul (any Christian) is speaking. However, the change of tense (from aorist to present, see above) infers that both passages do not depict the exact same situation in his memoirs. Elsewhere I have argued that verses 7–13 refer to Genesis 3 telling the story of Adam and Eve or, more accurately, the history of their fall.⁸⁶ There are obviously many

⁸³ Here it is not possible to go at length into a detailed discussion. I only refer to Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 114–16 and *Crucified*, 117–18 (SEE-J, 82).

⁸⁴ Kümmel (*Römer 7*, 68) maintains further that 8:1–2 answers the question in 7:24. But liberation from the *law* of sin and death serves no sufficient parallel to redemption from the *body* of death. To be sure, the two expressions do not conform to each other. Moreover, 8:10–11 shows beyond doubt that Christians who are already free from sin and death are not yet free from their mortal body (Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 118–19 and 130). Cf. already Möller, “Röm. 7,” 25–26. See further Garlington, “Romans 7:14–25,” 231. He affirms: “In chaps. 6–7 this phrase [the ‘body of death’] is paralleled by ‘body of sin’ (6:6), ‘this mortal body’ (6:12), ‘my flesh’ (7:18), and ‘my members’ (7:23). ... This is the body which is dead on account of sin (8:10).”

⁸⁵ Particularly in reference to Thurén, “Romans 7 Derhetorized,” 430: “Summing up, if Paul spoke in first person singular excluding himself, but without giving any sign thereof, he must have assumed that his audience was well aware of such a technique. But evidence from ancient rhetoric shows that no such commonly known device existed.” Further Varo, “La lucha,” 11: “Ciertamente cuando Sa Pablo se sirve del pronombre ‘yo’ no miente: está hablando en nombre propio.”

⁸⁶ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 134–39. Similarly, Lichtenberger, *Das Ich Adams*, 125–35. See also J. Dochhorn, “Röm 7,7 und das zehnte Gebot. Ein Beitrag zur Schriftauslegung und zur jüdischen Vorgeschichte des Paulus,” *ZNW* 100.1 (2009): 59–77. He takes notice of diverse Jewish texts where the role of Eve is to some extent transferred to Adam. In particular God’s question, “What have you done?” (Gen 3:13), which was originally spoken to Eve turns into his question to Adam (p. 68). For further discussion, see S. Krauter, “Röm 7: Adam oder Eva?,” *ZNW* 101.1 (2010): 145–47. Cf. already Busch, “Figure,” 1–36.

other intelligent interpretations of the meaning of the text.⁸⁷ They should on the whole not be abandoned as false. I have learned very much from them, given that they (no matter how) reflect on the *consequences* of Adam's and Eve's fall. It lies hidden beneath diverse human experiences or encounters with sin. Therefore, different details in verses 7–13 seem to match so well with different interpretations of the text.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the only reading that truly does justice to the *entire* story is the artistic rereading of Adam's and Eve's fall in Genesis 3. They alone were "alive" (ἐζω) before the commandment came (v. 9). Their fate has subsequently sealed the future of their descendants for all time. Since then, everyone belongs to fallen humankind.⁸⁹

Such being the case, two further explanations are needed:

(1) As stated above, the "I" in verses 7–13 is neither Adam nor Eve. No, he is indeed either Paul himself or any Christian. He understands his own past in the light of the primeval history. He participates in the fate of Adam and Eve. In other words, he identifies himself with them who as antecedents of the human race embody the whole of humanity. Their fall has brought depravity not merely upon themselves but upon him as well. In verses 7–13, the "I" draws on Genesis 2–3 and reflects on his own existence as a descendant of Adam and Eve ("Evadam"). He reads his story in (or maybe from) their story. Thus, there are strong allusions to the primeval history of Genesis but no particular mention of Adam and Eve. Still, they are found implicitly in the text.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ For an overview of distinctive interpretations ("The Identity of the 'I' in 7:7–25") see, e.g., Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 314–21. Similarly, X. Léon-Dufour, "Arbeitspapier zu Röm 7," in *Exegese in Methodenkonflikt: Zwischen Geschichte und Struktur* (ed. X. Léon-Dufour; trans. G. Haefner und H. Schöndorf; Munich: Kösel, 1973), 70–71. He presents a much shorter summary.

⁸⁸ This is true especially as to the interpretation of reference to Israel in vv. 7–13 since Paul maintains a very close analogy between Adam's sin against the commandment in paradise and numerous different sins against the Mosaic law from Sinai onwards (see below). Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 362: "The claim that the reference here is to Israel is quite attractive and explains many features of the text in illuminating ways. Nevertheless, weaknesses in the theory render it ultimately unconvincing." For the understanding of Rom 7:7–12 as a reference to Israel, see particularly Douglas J. Moo, "Israel and Paul in Romans 7.7–12," *NTS* 32.1 (1986): 122–35 and his *Romans*, 431–41. Cf. further, e.g., Russell, "Insights," 521–25. Equally Mark W. Karlberg, "Israel's History Personified: Romans 7:7–13 in Relation to Paul's Teaching on the 'Old Man,'" *TrinJ* 7.1 (1986): 65–74. For a more well-balanced view, see Dunn, *Romans*, 383: "The typicality of the experience of everyman expressed in the archetypal language of Gen 2–3 presumably therefore should be allowed to embrace a wide and diverse range of particular experiences."

⁸⁹ Käsemann, *Römer*, 195–96. Similarly, B. L. Martin, "Some Reflections on the Identity of ἐγὼ in Rom. 7:14–25," *SJT* 34.1 (1981): 43. Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 454 n. 38 with reference to the perfect πεπραμένος in v. 14: It "may allude to the sin of Adam as the occasion when all people became subject to the bondage of sin."

⁹⁰ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 138–39. Käsemann (*Romans*, 197) asks in great confusion: "The only question is why Paul uses 'I' instead of naming Adam." To be sure, his question is a good one under the condition that Paul uses "I" only as a rhetorical device and in a fictive sense. Why not then speaking about the "one man" (as already in Rom 5:12)? Why not directly refer to Adam (as in Rom. 5:14)? The simple answer is that the "I" is Paul—but seeing his present existence in relation to Genesis 2–3. Pace also Varo, "La lucha," 12: "Ciertamente hay rasgos que presentan semejanzas con la narración del pecado del primer hombre, pero si el Apóstol hubiese querido referirse a nuestro primer padre parece

(2) Accordingly, the commandment “not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:17) is not without further relevance for Paul (nor for any Christian). He truly does not live in paradise! On the other hand, the story of the fall associates covetousness with the transgression of Eve. She ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because it appeared “desirable” in her eyes and aroused coveting in her heart (Gen 3:6). Her initial sin was thus concupiscence. Afterward, especially in rabbinic tradition, those details were expanded more and the line of thought developed further.⁹¹ Still, the core of the story was there in the OT from the very beginning: Because Eve began to covet, she soon sank into iniquities. Her covetousness stands out as the sin that the last commandment, “Do not covet,” forbids as well. In both cases, the same root of the verb occurs in Hebrew.⁹² Besides, in both cases it is about a transgression of the divine order (anything that is explicitly and strictly prohibited). In this respect, the primeval era of the paradise and the entire epoch of the Mosaic law are analogous, corresponding to each other (see Rom 5:13–14).⁹³ Indeed, the law “came in to increase the trespass” (Rom 5:20), viz. the one and only trespass of Adam and Eve in paradise long ago. The pathway from the savage Garden of Eden leads in the end to the stony Mount of Sinai where thunderstorm and lightning get worse and worse. A dramatic and tragic reading of the human history!⁹⁴ As a result, Paul links together the story of the fall which was launched by the initial sin of covetousness and the last commandment in the Decalogue which bans every kind of coveting. However, he evidently does not share the Jewish notion that the Mosaic law would be eternal and therefore present already in paradise. He insists that the law came first 430 years after Abraham (see Gal 3:17). How many years, then, after Adam and Eve?⁹⁵

lógico que lo hubiera indicado de algún modo más explícito.” Besides, Theissen (*Psychologische Aspekte*, 253–62) borrows from psychology the concept of “Rollenübernahme” suggesting: “Das Ich übernimmt in Röm 7,7ff. die Rolle Adams und gestaltet sie im Lichte der eigenen Konflikterfahrung um” (205). But the idea of interpreting the text according to these lines obviously misses the mark. The “I” does not play the role of Adam but identifies himself with him. See above.

⁹¹ S. Lyonnet, “Tu ne convoiteras pas” (Rom. vii 7), in *Neotestamentica et Patristica: Eine Freundesgabe Herrn Professor Dr. O. Cullmann zu seinem 60. Geburtstag überreicht* (NTS 6; Leiden: Brill, 1962), 161–62. See also Dochhorn, “Röm 7,7,” 59–68. He discusses additionally some relevant and parallel passages in the Apocalypse of Moses.

⁹² Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 136. See also Dochhorn, “Röm 7,7,” 63–64.

⁹³ Dunn, *Romans*, 276. Pace Schreiner, *Romans*, 361: “especially since Paul argues in 5:13–14 that the era of the law is to be distinguished from the time of Adam.” I am not at all convinced by the idea that the commandment in Rom. 7:9–13 should refer to “the commandment of Christian righteousness” (or “the commandment inherent to faith in Christ”) as in a rather tentative article of L. A. Jervis, “The Commandment which is for Life” (Romans 7.10): Sin’s Use of the Obedience of Faith,” *JNT* 27.2 (2004): 206. Rightly D. Napier, “Paul’s Analysis of Sin and Torah in Romans 7:7–25,” *ReiQ* 44 (2002): 20: “with the coming of Torah sin would once again be ‘in the likeness of Adam’s transgression.’ This is precisely what transpires in 7:7–12.”

⁹⁴ See, e.g., Moo, *Romans*, 348. Also Seifrid, “Voice,” 127–28.

⁹⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 361. He concludes: “Paul’s own writings demonstrate that he did not follow Jewish tradition in the theory that Adam knew the Torah.” Subsequently, Schreiner contends: “To sum up, the view that Paul refers to Adam is attractive, but it should be rejected since Adam did not encounter the Mosaic law.” But he does not make allowance for the fact that Paul speaks “of the law as a whole,

2. *Genesis 2–3 as a paradigm for being under the Mosaic law.* In consequence, the story of Genesis 3 confirms that sin (the serpent in paradise) can abuse the divine commandment to provoke transgressions. Exactly the same condition pertains to the Mosaic law as well. The power of covetousness is truly not broken by forbidding it. On the contrary, every distinct prohibition adds further fuel to human coveting. Therefore, the Mosaic law will never set anyone free from the bondage of sin. The Jewish concept of the Torah as the best remedy for moral fallacies and faults verges on delusion.⁹⁶ Knowing is not following—principally as soon as the question of overwhelming evil desires and lusts is at issue. In Romans 7 Paul indeed does his utmost to argue for his new Christian insight into the inadequacies of the Mosaic law owing to the “weakness of the flesh” (Rom 8:3). Throughout the analysis he expresses his theological way of thinking in anthropological terms. Those should not be disregarded. The depravity of the “I” is the very problem but not solved by the Mosaic law. His inborn covetousness is subjected to the condemnation of the commandment “Do not covet” constantly.⁹⁷

Hence, chapter 7 does not principally establish an apology for the Mosaic law.⁹⁸ More precisely, it portrays an indispensable supplement to chapter 6 emphasizing that the new eschatological situation has not totally broken through. For the time being, the tension persists. Truly, there is no room for an enthusiastic triumphalism. The ultimate victory is still to come. It does not in the slightest depend on “doing” the Mosaic law. Quite the opposite, chapter 7 expounds that an adherence to the Mosaic law hits a dead-end, making matters only worse (much worse indeed) and therefore being no solution to the problem. Surprisingly, the opposite of transgression is actually not obedience. In reality, obeying divine commandments would end more deeply in the predicament of wickedness since sin abuses them to produce every kind of coveting. Accordingly, chapter 7 explains why it is absolutely necessary to die to the Mosaic law in order to live in Spirit. Those who die from the

seen archetypally in Gen 2:16–17” just as Paul speaks “of humankind as a whole, seen archetypally in Adam” (Dunn, *Romans*, 385).

⁹⁶ See especially S. K. Stowers, “Romans 7,7–25 as a Speech-in-Character (προσωποποιία),” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (ed. T. Engberg-Pedersen; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 200–202.

⁹⁷ In particular, Dunn contends that the tension in Romans 7 is to be understood not so much in anthropological categories as in eschatological terms of being caught between the two epochs of Adam and Christ. The “I” is split not due to (creation and) fall, but primarily as the result of redemption (see *Romans*, 394–96). Yet the ontological dimension of the concept “flesh” cannot be separated from the salvation-historical perspective. Paul speaks about a “mind-set” of the flesh (Rom. 8:7) as well as the works and desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:19, 24). Moreover, he says, e.g., that the flesh “desires” (Gal. 5:17). Consequently, there is an anthropological component involved in that kind of usage. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 354. Cf. Seifrid, *Subject*, 330. Both Burgland (“Eschatological Tension,” 169–70) as well as Garlington (“Romans 7:14–25,” 231) uncritically refer to Dunn.

⁹⁸ *Pace* Kümmel, *Römer* 7, 9, 74, 89 (and many commentaries in reference to him). See further Schnackenburg, “Römer 7,” 292: “Der Abschnitt wird öfter überschrieben ‘Apologie des Gesetzes’. Diese Kennzeichnung trifft sicher eine Intention des Apostels, erschöpft aber sein Anliegen nicht.” Cf., e.g., Karl Kertelge, “Exegetische Überlegungen zum Verständnis der paulinischen Anthropologie nach Römer 7,” *ZNW* 62.1–2 (1971): 109, and T. de Kruyf, “The Perspective of Romans VII,” in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica II* (ed. T. Baarda, A. F. J. Klijn, and W. C. van Unnik; NovTSup 48; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 141. Similarly, Hofius, *Der Mensch*, 110, and Seifrid, “Subject,” 324.

Mosaic law (in baptism) fulfill it by “walking according to the Spirit” (8:4). At the same time, they distance themselves wholly from all that sin living in them (in their body) begets (7:17, 20).⁹⁹

On the whole, Rom 7:7–25 has something to say about sin in the Christian life. Before arriving at any conclusions, some parallels are to be examined first. They shed more light on the subject matter.

IV. THE INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 7:14–25 IN LIGHT OF NEW TESTAMENT PARALLELS

1. *Galatians 5:16–17*. A related line of thought emerges in Gal 5:16–17. On purely formal grounds there is a remarkably close similarity among

Gal 5:17d: ἵνα μὴ ἂ ἐὰν θέλητε ταῦτα ποιῆτε,

Rom 7:15: οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω τοῦτο πράσσω, and

Rom 7:19: οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω ποιῶ ἀγαθόν.¹⁰⁰

Despite such strong external evidence, many NT scholars still maintain that the two passages do not at all relate to each other.¹⁰¹ For example, W. G. Kümmel states that Gal 5:16–17 affirms “the capacity of Christians completely to overcome the *σάρξ*” (“die Fähigkeit der Christen, die *σάρξ* vollständig zu überwinden”) with the help of the Spirit.¹⁰² By contrast, Rom 7:14–25 shows according to him the incapacity of the “I” while trying to obey the law without the Spirit and thus remaining in sin. As a result, the two passages obviously speak about different circumstances in different cases.¹⁰³

However, upon closer examination Galatians 5 does not assert a complete and conclusive triumph over the flesh anywhere. Verse 16 admonishes: “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not *fulfill* (τελέσητε) the desire of the flesh.” In other words, Christians have to hinder the *fulfillment* of their desires. Anyhow, they cannot extinguish the desires themselves.¹⁰⁴ Verse 17 founds (conjunction γὰρ used to express cause) the exhortation on the remark that the flesh relentlessly desires (ἐπιθυμεῖ, present tense used to express ongoing action) what is contrary to the Spirit, just as the Spirit desires what is contrary to the flesh. The tension goes on and on without

⁹⁹ See also Laato, *Crucified*, 103 (SEE-J, 73).

¹⁰⁰ P. Althaus: “... Dass ihr nicht tut, was ihr wollt’ (Zur Auslegung von Gal. 5,17),” *TLZ* 76 (1951): 17, and Lichtenberger, *Das Ich Adams*, 255.

¹⁰¹ E.g. Althaus, “Dass ihr nicht tut,” 17; Chang, “Christian Life,” 274–76; Hofius, *Der Mensch*, 145; Lichtenberger, *Das Ich Adams*, 255–56; Martin, “Some Reflections,” 41; Napier, “Paul’s Analysis,” 18. See also S. D. Toussaint, “The Contrast between the Spiritual Conflict in Romans 7 and Galatians 5,” *BSac* 123.492 (1966): 310–14.

¹⁰² Kümmel, *Römer* 7, 106.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 105–6.

¹⁰⁴ Correctly H.-W. Beyer, *Der Brief an die Galater* (13th ed.; NTD 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), 47: “Wandelt der Christ aber im Geiste, dann ist damit das Begehren des Fleisches, des natürlichen selbstsüchtigen Ich zwar nicht ausgetilgt ... aber es wird nicht mehr zur Tat (Röm. 8,13).” Similarly, H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 278. See further Varo, “La lucha,” 28.

interruption. No deliverance follows gradually, bit by bit. In their struggle, Christians, to be sure, gain the upper hand over their wickedness by living in the Spirit, not *doing* the manifest works of the flesh (vv. 18–21) but crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires (v. 24). Even so, they know that their lusting flesh is not yet to be disarmed.¹⁰⁵

By and large, Gal 5:16–17 and Rom 7:14–25 relate closely to one another in content. Due to their flesh opposing to the Spirit the Galatians cannot do what they sincerely wish. They have to continue their struggle against evil desires. In that respect they remain in their depravity. There is for the time being no way out of it in spite of the fact that they are able to hold sway over their flesh by the power of the Spirit. Admittedly, Gal 5:13–26 underscores far more the positive idea of not fulfilling evil desires but serving one another in love. This is not so in Rom 7:7–25 where the “I” describes his total incapacity to obey the commandment “Do not covet.” The shift of perspective causes the illusion that the two passages speak about two different circumstances such as the condition before and after conversion. Still, despite distinct emphases the truth is that in both cases a depiction of Christian existence occurs.¹⁰⁶ Neither Galatians nor the “I” really get done what they to all intents and purposes want as long as their flesh desires. Therefore, a sort of pessimism, respectively resignation, endures in them until the end. They must live in tension with themselves and within themselves. On account of their impure motives (and occasional lapses) they never attain moral perfection.¹⁰⁷ The overall picture does not alter in the least, although Gal 5:16–17 in contrast to Rom 7:14–25 explicitly mentions the Spirit. Nonetheless, a similar line of thought emerges.¹⁰⁸

2. 1 *Corinthians* 15:50–57. Likewise, 1 Cor 15:50–57 calls for a thorough observation.¹⁰⁹ It portrays the Christian existence before the return of Christ as follows: Christians are not definitively free from death. They are still mortal. Their

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. See further Franz Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (HThKNT 9; Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 377–78; Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (NICNT 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981 [=1953]), 203–4; H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (6th ed.; KEK 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 249–50. On a syntactical problem in v. 17, see, e.g., Lichtenberger, *Das Ich Adams*, 253–55 and A. Oepke, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater* (ed. J. Rohde; 4th ed.; THNT 9; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1979), 174–76.

¹⁰⁶ *Pace* Oepke, *Galater*, 175–76. He affirms that Paul in no way explains the conflict between Spirit and flesh as “irgendwie normal,” but wishes to urge “vielmehr zur Überwindung desselben durch völlige Hingabe an den Geist” (p. 176).

¹⁰⁷ See above. Similarly, O. Modalsli, “Gal. 2,19–21; 5,16–18 und Röm. 7,7–25,” *TbZ* 21.1 (1965): 30. *Pace* A. A. Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 209 n. 14. In confrontation with me he wonders that I (see my *Paul and Judaism*, 144–145) “incomprehensibly” affirmed “a deep pessimism” in Gal. 5:16–17. As to the question of eradicating wholly the evil desires of the flesh there is indeed no other choice left (v. 17). A triumphant optimism pertains to the ability of stopping “sinful desires from expressing themselves in action” (v. 16) in line with the fine formulation of Das (see p. 209).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Althaus, “Dass ihr nicht tut,” 17–18 (!) and Möller, “Röm. 7,” 69–70.

¹⁰⁹ Many commentators have remarked on the close relationship between Rom 7:14–25 and 1 Cor 15:50–57. But—insofar as I know—the first one to discuss the subject question (the identity of the “I”) in Rom 7:14–25 with regard to 1 Cor 15:50–57 was Thurén, “Paulus och torah,” 171–72. Cf. Osborne, “Flesh,” 44.

physical existence constantly threatens to dissolve into nothingness. Death results from sin (v. 56). As Christians must die, they are also not definitively free from sin. Occasionally they succumb to temptation. Their depravity and mortality interweave.¹¹⁰ Sin further has its power in the law (v. 56).¹¹¹ As Christians must die on account of their sin, they are also not definitively free from the law. Their final redemption from the law, sin, and death will be completed first at the last day with the arrival of Christ. Already now, the awareness of the coming victory awakens gratitude in Christians toward God (v. 57).¹¹²

In consequence, the common traits between Rom 7:14–25 and 1 Cor 15:50–57 are obvious:

- (1) The “I” and Christians are not yet fully free from death.
- (2) Death menaces the “I” and Christians as they make themselves guilty of sin.
- (3) On account of their depravity the “I” and Christians cannot fulfill the law thoroughly.
- (4) The law binds the “I” and Christians to sin, since the power of sin comes from the law.
- (5) Only on the last day the “I” and Christians will be fully free from the law, sin and death.
- (6) Then the “I” and Christians will be redeemed from their mortal body (respectively the old man).
- (7) Redemption takes place through Jesus Christ.
- (8) The awareness of the future salvation awakens gratitude toward God.¹¹³

Moreover, both passages close with an anticlimactic end. After thanksgiving (see the last point) a phrase follows establishing the state of affairs that still prevails at the moment (see Rom 7:25b and 1 Cor 15:58). The meantime means time for assiduous working in faith and love.¹¹⁴ Further, in the context of both chapters the story of Adam and Eve is told (see Rom 7:7–13 and 1 Cor 15:20–49).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ The words ἡ φθορά and τὸ φθαρτὸν in vv. 50, 53–54 indicate both depravity and mortality. See, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968). He makes an elegant translation using the words “corruption” and “corruptible” (378).

¹¹¹ V. 56 is no gloss. In contrast to already J. Weiß, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), 380. Still, F. W. Horn, “1 Korinther 15,56: ein exegetischer Stachel,” *ZNW* 82.1–2 (1991): 88–105. He frankly admits that the suspicion of a gloss remains as “eine subjektive Überlegung des Exegeten ohne jeglichen textgeschichtlichen Anhalt” (p. 104). To be more precise, v. 56 stands out as a Pauline interpretation of the given quotation Hos 13:14. See C. Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, vol. 2: *Auslegung der Kapitel 8–16* (THNT 7/2; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1982), 209. Likewise, in other places the problem of the law is taken up as rashly as in 1 Cor 15:56 (e.g. Rom 4:14–15; 5:13–14, 20; 6:14; 7:7–25, Gal 3:22–23; 5:18).

¹¹² See the commentaries.

¹¹³ Laato, *Paul and Judaism*, 142–43.

¹¹⁴ J. Thurén: *Roomalaiskirje* (Helsinki: Sley-kirjat, 1994), 130.

¹¹⁵ Additionally, the confession of the “I” in Rom. 7:14 resembles the broad and more common statement in 1 Cor 15:50. “Being fleshly” (Rom 7:14b) denotes that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the

On the whole, Rom 7:14–25 and 1 Cor 15:50–58 match perfectly. The latter passage corroborates persuasively and compellingly that the former passage accounts for the eschatological tension. Freedom from the law, sin and death truly pertains to the Christian life by faith. However, as long as living in the mortal body continues it is still totally lost under the law, sin, and death. The transfer from the old aeon to the new does not yet take place wholly and completely. The definitive change comes only on the last day. Until then, gloom and shadows fall over the bright sunrise.

3. *1 Corinthians 9:27*. Obviously 1 Cor 9:27, too, forms a close parallel to Rom 7:14–25. Paul talks about his body which threatens to carry him into destruction. He has to prepare himself for a fight against it. However, nowhere does Paul say, *why* he must ὑπωπιάζειν (accurately, “strike under the eye”) or δουλαγωγεῖν (literally, “enslave” or “bring into subjection”) his own body. He was in no way a Gnostic who considered all material evil. Rather, 1 Cor 9:27 bears on Rom 7:14–25. Paul finds himself in the middle of the eschatological tension. Already free from sin and death he lives in his mortal body which still persists with sin and death. Sin works in his members bringing about death (Rom 7:23–24). Despite the change of aeon the old and the new prevail side by side (more exactly, side against side). Therefore, Paul tries very hard to restrain his body. Else he will not escape rejection.¹¹⁶

4. *2 Corinthians 12:7*. Further, it is worth the effort to take into consideration 2 Cor 12:7 although it does not truly compare to Rom 7:14–25. At any rate, diverse remarkable features emerge through a closer comparison. They uncover an exceptional and distinctive illustration of a Christian condition which extends beyond all the ordinary.

To begin with, 2 Cor 12:7 shows that Paul does have problems with his body. He has “a thorn” in his flesh. It relates to “the angel of Satan” who torments him. This extremely peculiar thought is due to the fact that Paul over and over again strives to restrain his arrogance but simply fails in all of his endeavors. He has to admit that the evil desire of haughtiness—on account of “the abundance of the revelations” he has envisioned—holds sway over him. He knows what he should do but cannot. The contrition pertains particularly to impure motives, a characteristic that absolutely does not fall under a “robust conscience” but rather attests to a diligent self-examination (see above). As the most striking detail here stands out the announcement that the angel of Satan (ultimately given by God, ἐδόθη as *passivum divinum*) in the end paradoxically fulfills the divine intention! Without doubt, he causes much harm and yet he finally prompts humility. Paul plainly says that he needs “torment” (whatever it means) lest he “should be exalted above measure.” He repeats the phrase in order to put more emphasis on it. The repetition simulta-

kingdom of God” (1 Cor 15:50a). “Being sold under sin” (Rom 7:14c) indicates that corruption or the perishable does not inherit incorruption or the imperishable (1 Cor 15:50b). Such being the case, the harsh announcement in Rom 7:14 makes real sense in a Christian setting (see above).

¹¹⁶ Cf. already Möller, “Röm. 7,” 74–75.

neously suggests that arrogance tempts and provokes him not only once but many times (if not all the time).¹¹⁷

By and large, 2 Cor 12:7 comes quite close to Rom 7:14–25. In both passages, wrestling with evil desires is ongoing, depravity utterly resides in the flesh, and as a result inability to fulfill what God will emerges. Moreover, one common denominator might be added. As far as sin in Rom 7:7–25 represents the serpent in paradise (devil in disguise, see above), it is consonant with the angel of Satan in 2 Cor 12:7. They inhabit the flesh intruding upon the new life in faith. But they do not absolutely reign over the whole person (neither the “I” nor Paul). Their power is at present strongly restricted.

However, despite all the similarities, 2 Cor 12:7 does *not* in contrast to Rom 7:14–25 depict every Christian, but Paul and maybe him alone! This time, his situation seems even much *worse* than ever. The angel of Satan beats and buffets him, who has died to sin, who has been set free from death and who currently serves Christ, the Lord. Indeed, this would be hardly believable—if it were not clearly written down in the text.

Such being the case, 2 Cor 12:7 sheds some new light on Rom 7:14–25 and makes it easier to understand the passage as a portrayal of Christian existence.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The line of thought in Romans 5–8 accounts for the ambivalent nature of Christian existence. Christians have already died from sin, whereas sin has not yet died. It remains in them but it should surely not reign over them. As long as they live in their mortal body, they are still “fleshly, sold under sin” (7:14). Particularly the commandment “Do not covet” (7:7) points out their depravity. By living in faith it is possible not to fulfill the evil desires but it is not possible to extinguish the evil desires themselves. They constantly lurk and loom striving to gain mastery once again. Besides, they spoil every effort to obtain moral perfection (based on pure motives). Ultimately, covetousness originates from the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). Since then it has invaded all their descendants, all of humankind. Not even the Mosaic law thwarts evil desires by explicitly prohibiting them. On the contrary, it paradoxically invokes them and makes things much worse. Therefore, the law never saves. Salvation comes only through faith in Christ who has already set Christians free from sin and death. Yet in the near future he will redeem them finally and conclusively from their mortal body in which covetousness resides. A similar approach as in Romans 5–8 occurs also in 1 Cor 9:27, 15:50–57, and Gal 5:16–17. In 2 Cor 12:7, Paul seems—rather surprisingly!—to take one step forward. He no longer portrays himself as a representative of every Christian. Now he alone is wrestling with the “angel of Satan” in confidence on the grace of God and in the hope of the everlasting victory.

¹¹⁷ See commentaries, in the first place Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 851–59 and Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC 40; Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 410–16. Cf. Middendorf, *The “I” in the Storm*, 180–81.

At large, the interpretation of Rom 7:14–25 as a description of Paul himself (or any Christian) has wide-ranging effects on the understanding of Pauline theology. Ernst Käsemann rightly recognizes that reading verses 14–25 from that perspective (culminating in the acceptance of v. 25b as part of the original) undermines his whole exegesis, not just his analysis of the context, but in truth also all that “Paul says about baptism, law, and the justification of the ungodly, namely all that he says about the break between the aeons.”¹¹⁸ To be sure, very remarkable words. Nevertheless, there is no time left for a further clarification on this point. A more thorough discussion has to be continued in the future.

As to the question of *simul iustus et peccator*, Paul maintains without a shred of doubt that the new life in Spirit has to follow justification by faith. He definitively rejects every kind of libertinism. Self-indulgence leads to never-ending punishment. In this sense, there is absolutely no suggestion of a person being righteous and sinner at the same time. On the other hand, the present eschatological tension of “already now—not yet” permeates Paul’s theology, informing all of it. He conclusively disapproves every kind of triumphalism. Moral perfection turns out to be absolutely unobtainable. Christians become what they already are; conversely, they are not yet what they will become. Due to evil desires still persisting in their body, they again and again fall short of fulfilling especially the commandment “Do not covet” in the Decalogue. Occasionally, they indeed succumb to temptation in an “outward” manner. At any rate, they sin in an “inward” manner as a result of their impure motives. In this sense, they truly remain sinners even after their conversion, but then on account of Christ concurrently stand firm as righteous through faith alone. The notion of *simul iustus et peccator* genuinely renders the core of the Pauline soteriology and anthropology, based on several central passages in the Apostolic Epistles.

The complete rejection of the Lutheran *simul iustus et peccator* by the Roman Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in their response to the Joint Declaration appears thus very strange and problematic, as mentioned above. It is not followed (nor preceded) by any “deeper reflection on the biblical foundation,” a request that the document itself calls for. A succinct reference to the doctrinal declarations of the Council of Trent is enough, as mentioned above. Indeed, a rather short passage in the decree concerning original sin during the fifth session at the

¹¹⁸ Käsemann, *Romans*, 211: “The price which has to be paid for assuming authenticity [of Rom 7:25b] should not be underestimated. For in this case it is not just our interpretation of the context that falls. All that Paul says about baptism, law, and the justification of the ungodly, namely all that he says about the break between the aeons, will have to be interpreted differently.” Similarly, Dunn, “Rom. 7:14–25,” 257: “Rom 7 is one of those key passages in Paul’s writings which offers us an insight into a whole dimension of Paul’s thought and faith. Even more important, it is one of the few really pivotal passages in Paul’s theology; by which I mean that *our* understanding of it will in large measure determine our understanding of Paul’s theology as a whole, particularly his anthropology and soteriology. As interpretations of Rom 7 differ, so interpretations of Paul’s anthropology and soteriology markedly alter in content and emphasis. Dispute about a tense, a phrase, a half-verse in Rom 7 means in fact dispute about the whole character of Paul’s gospel.” In a similar way Garlington, “Romans 7:14–25,” 197–98 and Terry L. Wilder, “Introduction,” in *Perspectives on Our Struggle with Sin*, 1–2.

Council of Trent seems to principally allude to Romans 7 and therefore has special relevance for the ongoing discussion. It runs as follows:

Hanc concupiscentiam, quam aliquando apostolus peccatum appellat, sancta synodus declarat, ecclesiam catholicam nunquam intellexisse peccatum appellari, quod vere et proprie in renatis peccatum sit, sed quia ex peccato est et ad peccatum inclinat. Si quis autem contrarium senserit, anathema sit. (“This concupiscentia, which the apostle sometimes calls sin, the holy Synod declares that the Catholic Church has never understood it to be called sin, as being truly and properly sin in those born again, but because it is of sin, and inclines to sin.”)¹¹⁹

The Council of Trent acknowledges here that the apostle Paul calls covetousness sin. So he really does, especially in Romans 7. It is in fact absolutely crucial for his line of reasoning. The monologue of the “I” suggests from beginning to end precisely covetousness as the underlying dilemma. Likewise, it holds true that evil desires come from sin (*ex peccato*) and lead to sin (*ad peccatum*). The story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 or retold in Romans 7 cogently endorses the doctrinal statement of Trent. The serpent made the forbidden fruit sweet, initiating the fall by a pious fraud. Paul clings to the same incident but revises the plot in his own way. He recognizes that all kinds of evil desires came from sin (devil in disguise) and led to death (fall in wide-ranging dimensions and effects). Indeed, as the first and main sin in humankind, covetousness—more than anything else—is “truly and properly” sin. As far as sin in Romans 7 further stands for the serpent (Satan) in paradise, covetousness that he provokes always and in every case is “truly and properly” sin; it is like the opening of his diabolic mind. The Mosaic law subsequently corroborates offences against the commandments as transgressions of the divine will. Beyond doubt, the nomistic principle of strict reckoning applies to the tenth commandment as well. To covet something that belongs to another means to sin. There is surely no exception to the rule, neither before nor after conversion. That explains in line with the Council of Trent the Pauline usage of calling covetousness “sin.”¹²⁰ Evidently, it is definitely another question why the Roman Catholic Church later on has no more understood concupiscentia “to be called sin, as being truly and properly sin in those born again,” an inquiry best to be answered by Roman Catholic theologians.¹²¹ I am not indebted to any suggestions.

¹¹⁹ See the online version “The Council of Trent: The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent” (ed. and trans. J. Waterworth; London: Dolman, 1848), http://documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1545-1545_Concilium_Tridentinum_Canons_And_Decrees,_EN.pdf (scanned by Hanover College students in 1995) (yet not translating the last phrase regarding anathema.)

¹²⁰ Cf. also Dochhorn, “Röm 7,7,” 72. He compares the relationship between covetousness and sin in Romans 7 with the one in the Apocalypse of Moses concluding: “Terminologisch gesehen zeigen sich die Verhältnisse bei Paulus gegenüber ApkMos 19,3 sogar umgekehrt. Nicht die Begierde bringt bei ihm ‘jegliche Sünde’ hervor, sondern die Sünde ‘jegliche Begierde.’”

¹²¹ Of course, the Roman Catholic Church maintains that Christians are not only *counted* as righteous through faith but bit by bit in fact *made* righteous on account of charity. Therefore, covetousness in them should not be regarded as “truly and properly” sin. Otherwise they would remain sinners.

Accordingly, as to the “deeper reflection on the biblical foundation” in the ecumenical discussions concerning the thought of *simul iustus et peccator*, a wide-ranging agreement seems to exist between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. They together see the point of discussing the problem of concupiscence. In addition, they both confess that Paul calls covetousness “sin”; in that respect they both could confess as well that *he* considers Christians as sinners (on account of evil desires) and righteous (for the sake of Christ) at the same time. So far, modern exegesis obviously helps the diverse church bodies to understand each other. But as we all know and as stated above, the thought of *simul iustus et peccator* represents according to the official response of the Catholic Church to the Joint Declaration one of “the major difficulties preventing an affirmation of total consensus” in “the fundamental truths concerning justification.” Unfortunately, this is still the case. Nevertheless, I am happily blessed being able to refer to what the apostle Paul writes to his beloved brothers and sisters in Rome. His friends (and their spiritual descendants) are my friends.¹²²

¹²² Interestingly enough, both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas (the two main theologians, highly and largely respected in the Roman Catholic Church) assert that Rom 7:14–25 speaks of Paul and every Christian. More closely on the development of their theology and their respective interpretations, see especially Varo, “La lucha,” 19–24 and 31–32 (see further 37–52). On Augustine, see also Chester, “Retrospective View,” 59–66.