Ian H. Henderson

'… quod nolo, illud facio' (Romans 7:20): institutionalising the unstable self

No reading process has been more influential as a perceived warrant and catalyst of, at least, early modern (Elliott 2008; Holder 2008; Chester 2017) individualisation than the reception of Chapter 7 of Paul's letter to the Romans. The reception-history of this tormented text dramatises the paradox, not only that individualisation and counter-individualisation may ebb and flow through the same channels, but also that texts themselves may institutionalise permanently ambiguous, dynamic whirlpools and eddies.

1 Early Christian individualisation and incipient institutionalisation

1.1 The Jewish-Stoic person in Paul (Troels Engberg-Pedersen)

Much of the following essay will lean upon the work of Troels Engberg-Pedersen. Engberg-Pedersen is closely associated with reasserting the relevance of Stoic notions of the cosmos and the self to understanding Pauline texts. Engberg-Pedersen is, however, not only the most recognisable proponent of foregrounding dialogue between Paul and Stoic thinkers, even beyond the 'normal' field of ethics; Engberg-Pedersen can also be perceived more suspiciously as an epistemologically overconfident historian of ideas across worldviews (Martyn 2002; Rowe 2016, 188–91; Engberg-Pedersen 2010, 8–10). That perception should be of concern to any project considering religious individualisation across historical cases. But I will start here from one 2006 essay in which Engberg-Pedersen evaluates Paul's 'concept of the person and self' and his 'actual use of various elements from his mixed cultural context', with special reference to the 'I'-passage in Philippians 3, and through the social-theoretical framework of Pierrre Bourdieu. This study is especially suggestive of the possibility of considering Pauline selfhood as verging on social-symbolic typification and habituation – steps towards institutionalisation – within a complex social and cultural context.

Engberg-Pedersen doesn't directly address the specific institutionalisation which would or did support social projection of a Pauline self, but the question is just below the surface (Engberg-Pedersen 2006, 71–4). The article appears in

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a volume entitled 'Beyond "Reception"', so Engberg-Pedersen notes that categories of 'reception' and 'influence' are too retrospective to be ideal for describing the 'Pauline project' expressed in Paul's core letters, to Jesus-devotees in Galatia, Philippi and Rome. Engberg-Pedersen argues that 'the actual production of ideas takes place in an altogether different manner from "receiving" them and being "influenced" by them' (ibid., 69). Paul's letters project his highly self-conscious, sectarian Jewish identity, asymmetrically hybridised with a somewhat ambivalent Roman Greekness, all further subordinated to Paul's gospel of Christ. Engberg-Pedersen is also keenly aware that 'Paul's own perception of his project' was (and, I would add, textually remains) ironically different from the culturally more ambivalent historical explanation of Paul's project to which Engberg-Pedersen might aspire. 'Paul himself saw the Christ faith very distinctly as a form of Judaism, indeed, in the best sectarian manner as the proper form of that religion or way of life' (ibid., 70). In this context Paul articulated a nascent 'philosophy of the self' without feeling the need to acknowledge affinities with 'a similar set of ideas in the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*' (ibid., 80). Engberg-Pedersen carefully recognises that Paul's 'personal relationship with the Greco-Roman side of his overall context was distinctly more distanced than that with the Jewish side' (ibid., 81).

Following on Engberg-Pedersen, then, I understand Paul as processing his Jewishness and Roman-Greekness not just rhetorically, but prophetically for a social future which Paul himself can just barely imagine. Moreover, receptions of Paul's own texts and discourse will tend to reproduce their designed effects of destabilising and reorienting individuals toward modified and intensified social imaginaries. This essay is meant as a thought-experiment in describing Paul's rhetoric in Romans 7 (with related passages, Philippians 3; I Corinthians 9), as re-institutionalising in a temporarily stable medium an intrinsically, programmatically unstable individuality, like a dangerous explosive suspended for handling in a malleable form.

1.2 The discovery of the self and the 'new perspective' on Paul

What follows here will therefore be a rhetorical-critical argument that in his letter-writing, especially in the monumental letter to the Romans, and in the conspicuous difficulty of Romans 7, Paul was rhetorically institutionalising in Jesus-devotion a dramatically ambiguous relationship between a transformed and intensified 'I' and a profoundly recontextualised Torah from God. I will claim that the authorial voice in Romans, especially in Romans 7, is a communicative instrument designed, to some degree consciously, to institutionalise in what we now call Christianity an awareness of personhood, structured – ironically both stabilised and de-stabilised – by the permanent tension between Jesus and Torah.

The last generation of New Testament studies reopened, and as a topic of historical rather than just theological enquiry, the question where we 'should place Paul in an account of the discovery of the self' (Engberg-Pedersen 2006, 70). Paul and, in particular, readings of the 'I' of Romans 7 have been made to occupy conflicting places in the history of selfhood. The movement toward the 'new perspective' on Paul in the last forty years may be said to have begun, with specific reference to Romans 7, with Krister Stendahl's famous 1963 article, 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West'. Stendahl's argument was that, whatever Paul was doing in Romans 7, he was not proposing justification of the individual by personal faith as the remedy for anguished selfhood, tormented with intensely individual awareness of sin. Stendahl's point is that attributing to the historic or implied author (and intended readers) of Romans a prototypically modern, Lutheran self-understanding, treats as central a misunderstanding of a relatively secondary feature and obscures Paul's deeper concern. Paul's essential concern in the classic 'I'-passages of Romans 7 is to defend the holiness and goodness of the God-given Torah even in the transformed context of Christ-faith. Such a defense was necessitated by Paul's insistence that Christian existence is conditioned by grace, not Torah (Romans 3:20, 4:15, 5:20, 6:14). In Stendahl's words: 'Paul here is involved in an argument about the Law; he is not primarily concerned about man's or his own cloven ego or predicament' (Stendahl 1963, 211). Or again,

> What was a digression is elevated to the main factor. It should not be denied that Paul is deeply aware of the precarious situation of man in this world, where even the holy Law of God does not help – it actually leads to death. Hence his outburst. But there is no indication that this awareness is related to a subjective conscience struggle. (ibid., 213)

Stendahl focuses on denying that Paul was interested in 'the dilemma of the introspective conscience' (ibid., 203) attributed to him in Augustinian, Western, especially Lutheran and post-Lutheran reception. A perceived consequence was that 'Paul's theology cannot be centred on the individual' (Sanders 1977, 438); Paul's gospel was not about individualisation. Stendahl was perceived as allied to a protest against excessive individualism of existentialist hermeneutics (ibid., 434–8). It was not Stendahl's task to deny or affirm that the author of Romans 7 may nonetheless be interested in activating for his argument some unusually intense perception of individuality. Precisely because Romans 7 had become the *locus classicus* for reformational, modern individualisation and conflicted selfhood, a re-reading of Romans 7 was the fulcrum for leveraging a less individualistic, more covenantal and nomistic understanding of early Christianity. Inevitably, the resulting, rather fluid 'new perspective' on Paul has attracted some defensive nostalgia in those for whom the self-divided, faith-justified Lutheran persona – or, in my case, a Calvinist, evangelical variant – remains a powerful identity marker.

Among proponents of the 'new perspective', James Dunn has insisted most emphatically that displacing Law-free justification from the centre of Paul's theology historically reconstructed does not necessarily falsify reformation soteriology and anthropology. But Dunn would not need to reassure, if no one had felt threatened (Schröter 2013, 195–7, esp. 196 n. 8; Dunn 2008). Certainly the 'new perspective' was intended to falsify historic misrepresentation of the function of Torah in Judaism and, therefore in Paul's Christ-devotion. Adolf Harnack famously distilled at least the Liberal Protestant verdict on early receptions of Paul: 'Marcion was the only Gentile Christian who understood Paul, and even he misunderstood him' (Harnack 1897, 89). The 'new perspective' has shown that reformational and liberal understandings of Paul have also been creative misunderstandings.

Here, however, I hope to illustrate the possibility that, after all, a certain deliberately de-stabilising individualisation was indeed part of Paul's argumentative strategy and therefore consequently at least latent in any Pauline-influenced Christianity. Although readings of Romans 7 are only quite ironically sources for reformational, enlightenment and romantic notions of the self, Paul the Greco-Roman, Jewish Christ-apostle and epistolographer may nevertheless still have imagined a mode of covenantal individualisation which could make intuitive sense to at least some proto-Christian readers. Although modernity constructed its types of individualisation on anachronistically decontextualised re-readings of Paul, we may still ask how far key Pauline texts were designed to institutionalise a historically possible kind of individualisation within at least one segment of an emerging Christian 'social imaginary' (Taylor 2002).

1.3 Modes of institutionalisation

In addition to reconsidering Pauline individualisation fifty years after the beginnings of the new perspective, I also want to attend to this publication's theme, to think particularly about textual modes of institutionalisation of a particular religiously imagined/constructed selfhood. Imagining early Christian institutionalisation in a historically disciplined way remains a problem: on the one hand, Jesus-devotion was relatively marked by ambitious institution building. On the other hand, our sources, including Paul's letters, allow a rich description of the varied social imaginary of some proto-Christians, but do not document the social mechanics of Christ-groups nearly so well. Standing as we are in societies which are not only hyper-individualised, but also hyper-institutionalised and hyper-organised, we are hermeneutically challenged not to misunderstand the impact of what look to us as rudimentary, almost subliminal institutions.

This is no place to sketch in any detail the initial institutional life of Christ communities, or to trace the institutional development of the Pauline groups. I want to emphasise, however, the strikingly unobtrusive, yet effective local and translocal institutional patterns that sufficed for the first generations of the Christ *ekklēsia*, as a basis for discussing the somewhat distinctive institutionalisation implicit in Pauline textuality itself. Thirty years ago Margaret MacDonald published her 'Socio-historical Study of Institutionalisation in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings' which views the Pauline texts as documents of the changing institutionalisation of Christ-groups as their focus shifted: from initial community-building, through stabilisation, toward protection from internal and external threats and competition (MacDonald 1988; compare Back, Koskenniemi 2016). MacDonald studied the extra-textual social institutions attested by the texts. In the case of Paul's baffling language in Romans 7, I think it is the text itself or, somewhere between the text and social groups, Pauline epistolography as a quite specific social institutional field within Pauline proto-Christianity, which is activated within 'a special type of institutions' (Engberg-Pedersen 2006, 71) of reading, writing, transmitting, and interpreting. MacDonald adopted her definition of 'institutionalisation' from the seminal work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman for whom,

> [i]nstitutionalization occurs whenever there is reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution. What must be stressed is the reciprocity of institutional typifications and the typicality of not only the actions but also the actors in institutions.
>
> (MacDonald 1988, 11 n. 21 citing, Berger, Luckman 1967, 54)

The whole social-rhetorical process of generating and using early Christian, especially Pauline epistolary literature participates in Greco-Roman cultural types and institutions. Epistolography was an important institution in Greco-Roman culture, despite the absence of a modern postal system. But early Christian epistolography was also a distinctively Pauline and para-Pauline (eventually post-Pauline) institution, designed to support particular imaginaries of Christ's *ekklēsia* in the world.

In recent German and Canadian scholarship, the actual organisation of early Christ-groups has been understood largely along the very wide spectrum of specific membership associations (literature: Last 2012, 175 n. 8; Ascough 2016, 87–9). Broadly speaking, it would have been hard in antiquity to produce a better generalisation about basic early Christian organisation than Pliny's famous dismissal of Christ-groups as *hetaeriae*, which might, even in their own adherents' eyes, come under prohibition more because of the frequency of their meetings than because of the content of their rather homespun mysteries and interestingly differentiated

leadership patterns. Paul assumes for his addressees in Corinth that an uninitiated person might conceivably enter where 'the whole *ekklēsia*' is gathered in the same place (I Corinthians 14:23–5). Paul expects that the intruder or visitor so imagined would remark on intense charismatic arousal, would experience the revelation of their own heart's secrets and would be conscious of divine presence. Paul does not suggest that the outsider would experience any great shock of religious-institutional novelty. The Corinthian Christ cult-group as imagined by Paul seems institutionally less marked than, say, a synagogue of Judaeans might have been.

One aspect of early Christian institutionalisation that seems relatively marked over a fairly long time span is the habit of translocal and transregional networking. Paul was an important agent of this process and his surviving letters are its most important documentation. Moreover, the Pauline evidence indicates plenty of (often rival) non-Pauline activity. It is thus impossible to make a balanced assessment of which habits were Pauline distinctives or innovations. Even before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD, and even with the accession of many non-Jews, Jesus groups seem not only to have participated in Judean geographical dispersion. They also mimicked the institutions of communication between diaspora communities and the Temple, sending and receiving *apostoloi* and transmitting sacred money to Jerusalem. This is the long-distance habit of ritualised communication within which the Pauline habits of writing, exchanging, sharing and preserving letters became an important institution, with ramifications for imagining individuals' roles within community.

1.4 Pre-Canonical textual institutionalisation

Some years ago I argued that earliest Christianity was more an 'agglomeration of rituals' (Ando 2003, 143) than an incipient 'religion of the book' (Henderson 2006). My point then was that it is interesting that early Jesus-adepts, including Paul, but not just dependent on his genius, institutionalised a certain distinctive bookishness, but with a noticeably lighter style of institutionalisation than in the bookishness of a more normal philosophical school or of more normal Jewish *haireseis*. Eventually, Patristic Christianity would institutionalise Scripture over against Rabbinic Judaism (Stroumsa 2015, 30–4, 53f.). The epistolary habit of Paul and his correspondents; the preservation and collection of some of his letters; the collections' pseudepigraphic extension; accretion of letters by other figures; fairly remote, generic imitation by Ignatius; perhaps even Marcion's project, all evidence a process of literary institutionalisation which is generically modest yet ideologically ambitious (Pervo 2010). My primary point here, which I will want to

turn back into discussion of individualisation, is that the Christian institutions of Scripture-reading and epistolography are well-attested analogues for thinking of other aspects of the Christian social imaginary as, paradoxically, very lightly, yet very powerfully institutionalised.

My earlier discussion was not intended to understate either the influence of prior Jewish scriptural institutions or the important marking of local Christ-groups and of the larger Christian network as, in Guy Stroumsa's words, '"reading communities", whose cultural and religious capital was, to a great extent, represented by its books' (Stroumsa 2012, 186). My concern was more to think about the paradox that early Christ-groups could be to a significant degree 'a "textual community"' (Gamble 2004, 29), '"reading communities"' (Stroumsa 2012, 186) or even a 're-reading community' constituted by reading Jewish books in deliberately un-Jewish ways, while only very gradually institutionalising a distinctive Christian sense of apostolic and evangelic literature. In his analysis of 'exaggerated exclusionary mechanisms' in elite reading communities, William Johnson notes that, 'there clearly were those in the high empire who were able to use their intellectual gifts to find a way around the exclusionary circles that the elite drew around themselves' (Johnson 2010, 205).

Motivated by the communicative necessities of the gospel, Paul became the model of such a possibility (Henderson 2011, 29–31). Brian Stock and others have described the institutionalisation of 'scriptural communities' in later Christianity in ways that go beyond questions of canonicity and definition of Scripture (Stock 1996; Grafton, Williams 2008; Klingshirn, Safran 2007; Clark 1999; Stroumsa 2015; Haines-Eitzen 2012; Krueger 2004). For the earliest generations of Jesus-devotees, both with regard to the rituals of textuality and with regard to the non-textual mysteries of baptism, commensality, exorcism, a very little institutionalisation went a very long way toward establishing and stabilising Christian identity.

Thus I continue to accept Harry Gamble's judgement that early Christian literacy and attitudes to textuality were continuous with those of Greek-language society generally – much more different from at least some Jewish attitudes towards sacred texts. I therefore still find exaggerated Stroumsa's emphasis on the 'revolutionary form of literacy' (Stroumsa 2003, 168) and 'characteristic status' of books (Stroumsa 2012, 186) in early Christianity, although, as Larry Hurtado reminds us, early adoption of the codex and scribal features such as *nomina sacra* do suggest some specifically Christian consciousness of textual institutionality (Hurtado 2006; 2012). I admire Stroumsa's earlier formulation, that 'Christianity was from the beginning, rather than a religion of the book, one of the "paperback" (if one is allowed an anachronic metaphor)' (Stroumsa 2003, 173). The early Christian institutionalisation of textuality seems physically marked by an almost shabby pragmatism. In Gamble's words,

> when Christians began using the codex not merely for notes but as a vehicle of texts, they did so not because those books had a special status as aesthetic or cult objects, but because they meant them to be practical books for everyday use, the handbooks, as it were, of Christian communities. (Gamble 2004, 34)

The paradox in the institutionalisation of Christian textuality is, for the earliest period, even more marked and much better attested in the especially, though not exclusively, Pauline habit of letter-writing, than it is in the emergent habit of codex-use. The earliest specifically Christian literature was in the letter genre, indeed, not only in the epistolary genre, but actually within the social institutions of letter-writing, sending, receiving and preservation. Proto-Christian institutional use of texts is usually assumed to be continuous with Jewish synagogic Torah-reading, about which we also really know remarkably little. Dan Nässelqvist argues well that continuity with synagogue practice does not account for the little we know of initial Christian collective reading practices (Nässelqvist 2016, 96–118). Notably, the earliest Christian admonition toward collective, institutionalised reading is the repeated command to read out apostolic (or pseudo-apostolic) letters (I Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16; I Timothy 4:13; Acts 15:22–35) or prophetic oracles including angelic letters (Revelation 1:3). Paul's letters often cite the Septuagint (Gamble 2004, 29 n. 1), especially when he needs to display his expertise, but he does not presuppose systematically that his addressees are constituted as communities by institutionalised liturgical Bible-reading. Famously, II Peter 3:16 implies a rather advanced institutionalisation of reading Paul's letters, as authoritative along with other, unspecified scriptures, precisely despite the interpretative difficulties and attendant dangers of misinterpreting Paul.

As far as I know, Melito of Sardis is the first attested Christ-preacher to assume explicitly that a pre-Christian Scripture (Exodus) has actually been read as part of a Christ-centred (paschal) liturgy (*Peri Pascha* 1), but the liturgical situation is not presented as typical. The earliest description of collective reading within Christian weekly worship is strikingly vague (Rouwhorst 2002, 326), surely deliberately minimalist and synthetic: by mid-second century, Justin Martyr can claim that weekly Eucharistic assemblies might typically include readings of flexible length from 'the memoirs (*apomnemoneumata*) of the apostles', which Justin earlier says were 'called *euaggelia*', 'or [*sic*] the writings (*suggrammata*) of the prophets' (Justin, *First Apology* 67). Justin claims that reading is a marked part of regular Christ-ritual; he does not really inform his audience about the rather discretionary selection of texts to be read.

Harry Gamble expresses clearly the position I seek to qualify and the under-warranted assumption on which it is based: 'We must assume [*sic*] that originally and continuously Jewish scriptures were read in Christian assemblies,

but it is clear that from a very early time Christian writings began to be read alongside them [...]' (Gamble 2004, 33; compare Gamble 1995, 211–8).

An interesting alternative imagination, based on identical evidence, is expressed equally dogmatically by Valeriy Alikin:

> The reading of authoritative writings took place in the social session connected with the supper. That was the context in which apostolic and other important letters, Prophets and Gospels were read aloud to the community gathered for its weekly supper and conviviality. There is a close analogy between the reading of texts during non-Christian banquets and that during the Christians' gatherings connected with their weekly supper.
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> (Alikin 2010, 157f., cited in Näsellqvist 2016, 101)

My intuitions are closer here to Alikin's, but clearly Christ-groups very early began the habit of producing, exchanging, and re-reading texts, which supported their ecclesial identity and incipient institutionalisation. This textual habit began with letters, mostly Paul's letters, informed by general consciousness of a special Christian way of re-reading Jewish texts.

2 Romans 7

2.1 Romans 7:1 'I am speaking to people who are aware of Torah'

Paul's great letter to Christ-groups in Rome exhibits most of the institutionalising paradoxes of early Christian textuality. In terms of length and elaboration, Paul's treatise-letter to Jesus devotees in Rome explodes norms for epistolary genre, yet it was, socially speaking, a real letter, engaged not only in developing Paul's apostolic philosophy, but also in the pragmatics of travel arrangements and intergroup diplomacy. Notably Paul displays his erudition and ingenuity in scriptural argumentation, but rarely in ways that presuppose or require much actual textual knowledge from his correspondents. Nonetheless auditors of Paul's letter to the Romans cannot ignore that he is engaged in a monumental struggle to make sense of himself between the Gospel and the Torah.

Some of the interplay between the emerging institutionality of a particular attitude to texts and the projection of a strong habit of individuality appears already in the first words of Romans 7. These mark with a rhetorical question a quite strong transition from the topic of Sin to the topic of Torah-Law. Romans 6 begins with the formula, 'What shall we say then?' followed by an absurd question, 'Shall we continue in Sin, that Grace might abound? *Mē genoito!*'

followed in verse 3 by the further formulaic question, 'Or are you unaware that [...]?' Chapter 7 reverses and extends the pattern. So Chapter 7 begins with the formula, 'Or are you unaware [...] that [...]' (7:1), followed a paragraph later by the formula, 'What shall we say then?' followed by its absurd question, 'Is the Law Sin? *Mē genoito!*' (7:7). The reader/hearer of Chapter 6 on Sin recognises that Chapter 7 is a new section and that it will be about Law. Because Romans 7:1 introduces the chapter as a whole it is clear that Paul has, as is usual, the Torah in mind when he speaks about Law/*Nomos* (sixteen times in Romans 7). Paul does not operate with a generic sense of 'law' of which 'Mosaic Law' is even a very special case; Paul works with the God-Revealed Torah, which when represented by the word *nomos* might acquire some ironic connections with merely human legal institutions (Hellholm 1997).

Romans 7:1 beautifully crystallises Paul's first-person self-projection and his interest in institutionalising his hearers' relationship with the Torah in Christ – in the sense of epistolary and discursive institutionalisation that I am trying to capture. Almost everything that I want to say about Romans 7 as a whole can be said about Romans 7:1; at any rate I agree with David Hellholm's observation that Paul's assertive language here is 'sehr viel beachtenswerter als oftmals erkannt' (Hellholm 1997, 401). Paul begins this new section, 'Or are you unaware, kindred, – for I am speaking to people who recognise Torah/Law (*ginōskousin gar nomon lalō*) – that the Law rules a person only as long as s/he lives?'

The aside, 'for I am talking to people who recognise Torah', is especially important, though almost casually passed over by commentators, precisely because it so directly invokes the epistolary communicative situation, both in its institutional character and in its intensely typified personal character. This is the first time since the vividly personal comments in Romans 3:5–7 that the putative authorial voice has appeared in the first person singular; the strong presence of the first person that is so strongly marked later in Romans 7 by the repeated *egō* begins in 7:1 already with *lalō*, 'I'm talking'. In a complex 'jeu des pronoms' (Gignac 2014, 241 and *passim*), Paul is deliberately (re-)activating the epistolary convention of fictional orality and personal presence here, after several chapters, and especially chapter 6, in which the 'I' has been absorbed into 'we'.

Now the 'I' which is here invoked is not the introspective self of modernity, nor is it some objectively real Paul: it is emphatically the rhetorical self, perhaps the prophetic self, consciously institutionalised as authoritative speaker addressing fictive kin. All through Romans there is a character 'Paul' who habitually addresses some people in Rome whom the real Paul has never met. In Romans 7, however, even in the opening words 'Paul' typifies himself – using the institutional frames of epistolary rhetoric – as a certain kind of self, able to speak to a

certain kind of audience about the Torah, which is a little different than the way the same 'Paul' has just spoken to essentially the same audience about Sin. In any letter and all through Romans, the authorial voice and the auditors are typified rhetorically: that is a key part of the institution of epistolography. In Romans 7, however, Paul typifies himself and his auditors differently by slipping so noticeably into the first personal address, eventually emphasised as we shall see by the repeated *egō* of 7:7–25.

It is no coincidence, then, that Paul also here suddenly resumes addressing his auditors typically as fictive 'kindred', *adelphoi*, for the first time since Romans 1:13 where it also complements the first person singular and the wish to overcome possible lack of awareness: 'I do not wish you to be unaware, kindred, that I have often intended to come to you and have so far been prevented.' We may regard 'kindred', *adelphoi*, as simply the typical reciprocal Christian address within the institution of the *ekklēsia*, but this typification of Paul's epistolary audience is not randomly distributed in Romans. In Romans 1:13 and in Romans 7:1 Paul invokes several of the same epistolary conventions/institutions. In Romans 1 the epistolary 'Paul' works hard to establish himself with listeners who do not know the real Paul; in Romans 7 Paul reinitialises or reinstitutes both his epistolary/prophetic self and his relationship with his audience as their senior cognate in order to speak to them about the Law. After Romans 7:1, Paul will address his audience as 'kindred' seventeen more times, distributed throughout the remainder of the letter. Thus Romans 7:1 is a marked turning point in the long letter. For our purposes, however, what matters is that the turning point turns not only on Paul's use of prevenient rhetorical-epistolary possibilities, but also specifically on Paul's typification of an epistolary self in relation to epistolary as well as cultic kindred. At this particular moment in Romans we are witnessing a sudden stress on rhetorical typification of actors and individualisation of an epistolary self in close kinship with the imagined auditors.

The 'I' of Romans 7:1 is, however, not only reminding his auditors that they are his next of kin: he also suddenly refers to them as 'people who are aware of Torah', *ginōskousin gar nomon lalō*. Unless it becomes impossible, we should understand Paul's *nomos* to refer to God-given Torah. In 7:1 and in the illustration from marriage-law in 7:2–4 I doubt that Paul, as Dierk Starnitzke puts it, 'meint einfach die allgemeine menschliche Kenntnis bestehender Ehegesetze'. A page later Starnitzke does a little better to suppose that *nomos* 'hier nicht nur die jüdische Tora meint, sondern allgemeiner die bestehenden Ehegesetzte' (Starnitzke 2004, 232f.). I think Paul would find the phrase 'jüdische Tora' reductive and misleading: Paul knows that Torah does or should define Jewishness (Gal 1:13f.), but I do not see that he could think that Torah is Jewish in anything like the ways that Roman law is 'Roman'. The Torah defines Jewishness, but for Paul Torah certainly

has 'application to non-Israelite humanity' (*pace* Esler 2003, 236). In Romans 7, 'it is not only Jews who are concerned with the Law' (Gaventa 2013, 88).

Thus Romans 7:2–4, like I Corinthians 7:10f., 39, apparently regards all married women, at least Christ-devotees, Jewish or not, as bound by a version of marriage law which is restrictive and idealised, even by the standards of Second Temple Judaism. As we shall see again, in Romans 7:7, Paul does not randomly select an aspect of Torah to illustrate his argument: Paul assumes that both Jewish and non-Jewish Christ-devotees can marry and that their relationships are structured by Torah – and therefore also in a certain sense by death.

At the same time I do not think that with *ginōskousin gar nomon lalō* Paul means to flatter his correspondents for their knowledgeability, still less actually to suggest that they were anything like his equals in Torah expertise or authority, or that they have Numbers 5:11–29 (LXX) actively in mind, as I guess Paul himself does (Witherington 2004, 175). I think Paul understands his audience throughout Romans to be a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish Jesus-devotees with no uniform level of biblical or ritual knowledge; it seems incredible within the pragmatics of a letter actually sent to be read outside the sender's total control, that Paul is signaling with 7:1 a change from a mixed, but largely non-Jewish audience to an essentially Jewish or Torah-observant audience (still less is Paul focusing on an exclusively Gentile audience sunken in extreme, entrenched immorality).[1]

Paul does not expect his correspondents to know much about the content of Torah as a legal system, but he does expect them to be aware of two, for Paul basic, principles: that Torah is binding during the life of the covenant subject and that a woman once married (*hypandros* [compare Numbers 5:20, 29 LXX]) may not marry again while her first husband lives. Paul constructs – typifies – his hearers as junior siblings who as such are supposed to have at least some minimal awareness and interest in how Torah works when its centre has been displaced, or replaced toward Christ. This re-institutionalisation of self and of the auditors as kindred is for the author of Romans significantly more urgent in relation to the topic of Torah/Law than it was to the topic of Sin, because it will be necessary to institutionalise some on-going positive role for Torah within the Christ-covenant.

1 *Contra* Wischmeyer 2005, 101 n. 50, 'Kap. 7 passt nur auf Juden'; Esler 2003, 222, 225, Romans 7:1 is 'an aural cue' that Paul is now focusing more on Judaeans than on non-Judaeans among his recipients; Wasserman 2008, 148, Romans 1–8 is 'addressing a particularly Gentile plight', compare 6f., 114f., 125f.

2.2 Romans 7:7–25

2.2.1 Egodocument

We turn at last to consider the heart of Romans 7. My concern here is only to argue that this chapter of Romans did rhetorically institutionalise within Pauline Christianity a kind of Pauline self – not inevitably a modern, introspective self, not inevitably *simul justus et peccator*, but still remarkably individualised in relation to Sin, Death, God's Law, and, eventually life in the Spirit of Christ. Here I want to return to Engberg-Pedersen's description of Pauline individualisation as the emotional-cognitive individuality of an acratic self, radicalised in the painful awareness of moral and cognitive self-contradiction (*akrasia*) by encounter with divine Law. I agree with Engberg-Pedersen that 'there are plenty of reasons for finding a full-blown concept of a "person" in Rom 7:14–25' (Engberg-Pedersen 2011, 103), but I want to take a further step and note that Paul specifically in Romans 7 institutes an intensified and at least temporarily divided self as part of his correspondents' new Christian social imaginary. This section will describe the exegetically controversial individualisation I am finding in Romans 7. In a concluding section I will then reflect on the kind of institutionalisation I am attributing to Paul's action in including Romans 7 in his monumental letter.

From the moment Paul composed it, Romans 7 has been seen to be simultaneously one of the most important and one of the most difficult passages in Early Christian discourse (Schröter 2013, 198). Throughout its reception history it has been both unavoidable and problematic. Even apart from such high reception-historical and theological stakes, there is therefore not the slightest chance of 'solving' the passage's many exegetical puzzles. Nor is it conceivable that any exegetical 'solutions' I might endorse would become a consensus. I propose to claim this impasse as an opportunity to confine myself to sketching an answer to the questions whether/how the passage individualises and institutionalises a 'self'. The bibliography cited will only serve to document my own process, though Jens Schröter gives a good general orientation (Schröter 2013, 195–207).

From a rhetorical-critical point of view, it is inescapable that the historic composer of Romans consciously and successfully intended Romans 7 to be especially impressive and dramatic, at some expense to argumentative and propositional clarity. By Chapter 7, the author to the Romans has shown himself to be communicatively highly competent, so the oddity of Romans 7 must be taken as purposeful. That communicative decision is the basis for all the exegetical problems and all the hermeneutical attention the text has generated. Because Romans announces itself as a strongly representative text, that is, as a text

introducing 'Paul' the slave and apostle of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1), it is particularly important to recognise that, throughout, the implied author 'Paul' and, more subtly and variably, the authorial voice in the text, are constructs, never simply related to the historic person to which they refer (Starnitzke 2004, 239f.). In some sense the whole of Romans is about the initial institutional representation of one particular 'self' as the authoritative representative of another, Jesus, who is much less personally realised. Within that constructive project, however, and to some extent interrupting it, is the construction of the deeply conflicted 'I' of Romans 7. What is going on in Romans 7 with regard to selfhood is not straightforwardly related to what is going on with 'Paul' in the rest of the text. Although all Paul's authentic letters are 'egodocuments', '[D]ocuments in which an ego deliberately or accidentally discloses or hides itself' (J. Presser cited and translated in Mascuch, Dekker, Baggerman 2016, 11), they contain relatively little autodiegetic, autobiographical narrative. Paul writes enough about himself, however, for Romans 7 to stand out as an argument about *egō* and Torah, not a memoir (Wischmeyer 2005, 101f.).

2.2.2 Torah and akrasia

The most original aspect of Romans 7 is the fact that it is the encounter with the Torah which radicalises the tension of *akrasia* into an inescapable crisis, however we analyse that crisis in relation to the 'self'. Niko Huttenen has shown just how far in content and diatribic style Paul resembles Epictetus on law; for Huttenen, however, 'Paul identifies Torah with more general moral principles' (Huttenen 2009, 117f.). The intensity of Romans 7 only makes sense, however, in Paul's apocalyptic discovery that general moral principles are implications of divine Torah, locked in implacable struggle with Sin and Death.

Paul could have imagined an acratic crisis emerging retrospectively, and therefore with much less emotional force, triggered by the experience of radical transformation and resolution in Christ. Thus in Galatians 2:15–21 in a moment of autobiographical candour Paul refers to himself and Peter/Cephas as 'we Jews by nature, not Gentile sinners', but then asks rhetorically, 'if we, in the process of seeking to be rightwised in Christ, were found ourselves to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not'. Paul to the Galatians can imagine himself and Peter as a non-acratic, Jewish Torah-observant 'we', retroactively discovering themselves to have been sinners all along, scarcely better than Gentiles. In Galatians 2, the discovery comes not because of the Torah, but because of the experience of a new righteousness in Christ. By contrast, the Paul of Romans 7 chooses to give Torah the role of inducing or intensifying an *akrasia* which will

only be relieved in the next chapter, Romans 8, by the new life in the Spirit of Christ. As Stefan Krauter puts it, in Romans 7, 'either the "I" wants to say "sin used the law to deceive me and therefore I have become akratic," or the sense of the passage is "since I am akratic sin was able to use the law to deceive me and make my situation even worse." [...] the former is far more plausible' (Krauter 2011, 115).

We noted above Paul's deliberate choice of marriage-law in 7:1–3 to introduce his discussion of the ambiguous, but indispensable role of the Torah. In Romans 7:7 there is an equally non-random choice of *ouk epithumēseis*, 'You shall not desire', as Torah's only direct speech in the passage. The point is not that Paul is quoting from Exodus 20:17 or Deuteronomy 5:21, where *ouk epithumēseis* has direct objects in personal law. Instead the prohibition of *epithumia* understood absolutely, apart from a particular prohibited object, universalises Torah beyond exclusively Jewish concerns (see Schröter 2013, 212 n. 97 for Jewish texts citing *epithumia* as paradigmatic, attitudinal sin). Understanding *epithumia* as 'desire' not 'coveting' internalises and clarifies the possibility of Sin using Torah in individuals, 'to lead humans into the miserable state of akrasia' (Krauter 2011, 122). Epitomising Torah by the prohibition of *epithumia* institutionalises and internalises Torah as the universal possibility of individual moral failure.

Among the things that make Romans 7 text-linguistically so distinctive within Romans and the wider Pauline corpus, it is salient that 'this relatively brief passage is marked by eight verbs of perception/recognition' (Martyn 2002, 93), in addition to many verbs of intention and action; there is both a tension internal to cognition and a tension between cognition and action. Even very different readings of this passage as about the experience of acute *akrasia* share the virtue of identifying the drama of the passage as a cognitive process imaginable essentially within human personalities (compare Wasserman 2008; Krauter 2011; Engberg-Pedersen 2011).

We have also already noted the sudden, dense reintroduction of the first person singular, twenty-seven times in 7:7–25. This is heightened by association with 'the emphatic pronoun ἐγώ, which has previously appeared in the letter only at 3:7' (Gaventa 2013, 78). One of the eight occurrences of *egō* in Romans 7:7–25 is textually insecure; moreover, it has long been conjectured, without manuscript support, that Romans 7:25b with its even more emphatic *autos egō* may be a very early, intrusive gloss (possibly misplaced after v. 25a rather than with v. 24: Schröter 2013, 207f.). I distrust such conjectures, but if I knew that 7:25b with its *autos egō* was indeed such an early gloss, it would be astonishingly early evidence that Romans was understood as positing an emphatically self-divided self, incorporating a Torah divided by the self who internalises it. If

Romans 7:25b did not originate as an intrusive gloss, it is a remarkable rephrasing of the argument of the section in language which recalls that the character 'Paul' in Romans first introduced himself as 'slave of Christ Jesus' (Romans 1:1). So Engberg-Pedersen notes, 'it is not at all surprising that Paul should end up summarising his description in 7:25b as follows: "Consequently, *I myself* (αὐτὸς ἐγώ = *autos egô*) am enslaved to God's law with my mind (νοῦς), and to the law of sin within my flesh."' (Engberg-Pedersen 2011, 103).

Despite contrasting overall approaches, Engberg-Pedersen and, in a famous article to which I shall return, Paul Meyer agree that the dichotomy of the Law which appears not only in 7:25b, but also in vv. 21–23, 'the Law of God related to my inner person' and the 'other counterattacking Law in my members' refers throughout to the one Torah, differentially experienced by the divided, paralysed self. Whatever else the Torah does, it radicalises or even causes the situation of a divided self, who fully intends to do what is good and then actually and knowingly does what is wrong.

> '[W]hat [Paul] does in Rom. 7.7–25 is precisely to develop, spell out and almost "celebrate" that crux for thought in its most emphatic and impressive form: in the recognition of a schizophrenic split in the mind of a person who basically sees the Mosaic Law as God's own law, a split that has such proportions that it even generates a kind of split in the Law itself' (Engberg-Pedersen 2002b, 54).

> '[...] the "two" laws are whatever they are – *as seen by*, or from the *perspective of*, those other two anthropological parts of the I-person. [...] Paul Meyer is right on target when he concludes that "not only the 'law of God' (v. 22) but also this 'different law' (v. 23) is the Mosaic law!" [...] The point is precisely that these two things – Law and self – go together' (Engberg-Pedersen 2002b, 50 and n. 24 quoting Meyer 1990, 79).

2.2.3 'Apocalyptic' and 'acratic' readings

In a 1995 article published in a volume edited by Engberg-Pedersen, Stanley Stowers argued that Romans 7:7–25 is an exercise in 'speech-in-character' (*prosōpopoiia*); that is, at the very least, the Ego-voice in 7:7–25 is not supposed to be heard as representing the implied authorial voice of 'Paul'. Certainly it is valuable to see that the heavy marking of the Ego-voice is likely rhetorically to differentiate it and generalise or universalise it over against the usual discursive voice of the letter (compare Schröter 2013, 210). In fact, Stowers goes further, approvingly quoting Origen as saying 'that the discourse has different characterisations (προσωποποιίαι) and the sections conform to various qualities of characters (πρόσωπα)' (Stowers 1995, 194). That is, the passage is not only not

to be heard as in the voice of the main speaker of Romans as a whole; it should be internally distributed among a plurality of characters in fierce dramatic dialogue (Dodson 2008). Origen also understood the passage as broadly about *akrasia*, but apparently across a range of moral types (Stowers 1995, 196f.). Readings of Romans 7 through a plurality of voices, none easily identified with the authorial voice of the letter as a whole, cohere well with readings which emphasise the agency of the superhuman powers of Death, Law, and, especially Sin – perhaps especially where the 'I' character is identified with some sort of transpersonal 'Adam' (Schröter 2013, 209–11) or 'Eve' (Krauter 2011, 116–9). As Beverly Gaventa summarises Paul Meyer's influential reading, 'Sin continues to be the major "character" in the argument. [...] the primary concern in Romans 7 is neither the Law nor the "I" but the way in which Sin's power can reach into and use even the holy and right and good Law of God' (Gaventa 2013, 77 referring to Meyer 1990).

From the standpoint of such broadly 'apocalyptic' readings of Romans 7, Susan Eastman accuses Engberg-Pedersen of omitting 'any serious reckoning with the role of sin as an agent acting on and through persons' (Eastman 2013, 104 n. 23). J. Louis Martyn went further, contrasting Engberg-Pedersen's 'de-apocalypticising' reading of Romans 7 with Meyer's reading to emphasise the dramatic struggle between Sin and God:

> 'What the self comes to know is rather a *drama* marked – as in apocalyptic dramas generally – by the presence and doings of actors other than human beings. Far from being a merely anthropological "element of sin in oneself", *hamartia* is an actor who, being the subject of verbs, plays an essential part in the drama as nothing less than the opponent of God' (Martyn 2002, 94; compare Rowe 2016, 98).

Engberg-Pedersen has tried to incorporate the strengths of 'apocalyptic', mythopoetic readings of Romans 7 into a reading which also sees Paul as arguing for a strongly individualised 'person (cognitive and bodily)' defined pathologically – murdered (7:11) – by the encounter with Sin and Torah – to be redefined in Romans 8 by the encounter with the Spirit (*pneuma*) also understood quite concretely (compare Engberg-Pedersen 2002a with Engberg-Pedersen 2011, quoting 111 n. 56; on the materiality of *pneuma*, 106 and n. 50). With regard to '"apocalyptic" powers' Engberg-Pedersen argues,

> 'for seeing them [in Paul] as *physical* entities that are present both in the world at large and also within human beings. They are also to be seen (from a Pauline perspective) as *personal* powers. Finally – and most importantly [...] – they are to be understood as *cognitive* powers. [...] This point is of huge importance. It is precisely by *accepting* the "apocalyptic" reading of Paul that one may also come to see the importance of the "philosophical" one' (Engberg-Pedersen 2011, 94 and n. 25).

3 Paul's 'I' as 'spectral institution' within a Christ-centred social imaginary

We return now, belatedly, to the issue of institutionalisation. The reception-history of Paul and Romans 7 has been characterised by productive misunderstanding, from Marcion (Schmid 1995, 333) to Harnack, to the 'new perspective', and the debate in English-language exegesis between 'apocalyptic' and 'acratic' readings. Even if the (here preferred) acratic reading is not fully embraced, it justifies the strong presumption, that Romans was composed and transmitted – including Romans 7 – with an expectation of predictable communicative effectiveness. The letter credibly claims to represent the voice of 'Paul' on a monumental scale and with a rhetorical intensity transcending normal epistolography, to a network of Jesus devotees in Rome who on the whole do not independently know Paul. Romans both used and exceeded existing social institutions of letter exchange. On any account, Romans 7 was from its conception unusually difficult to ignore or to understand. No doubt Romans became easier to misunderstand as it became distanced from its originally designed occasion and setting, but it seems exegetically inescapable that at least Romans 7 was designed to have a generalisable literary function within which it was worthwhile to be conceptually provocative as well as impressively dramatic.

Romans presented itself as a monumental, representative letter transmitted within a pioneering religious network, from a controversial authority figure, to unfamiliar recipients prior to a possible visit. As such Romans should have reflected and contributed to 'community-building institutionalisation', in terms of MacDonald's typology of community-building, stabilising, and defending institutionalisation. Few would deny that 'Paul' goes well beyond what was likely useful or even prudent for those kinds of social function. Few indeed would now claim that the Ego-voice in Romans 7 is in any sense autobiographical for the extra-textual Paul. Still, the text-internal figure, 'Paul', clearly has work in hand to stabilise the heavily-qualified institutionality of the Torah within the emerging new institutions of the *euaggelion* and *ekklēsia*. I cannot tell how influential Torah-reading and Torah-observance were among Christ-devotees in Rome. I doubt that Paul knew. But the Torah is still massively important as well as problematic within the social imaginary which Paul is trying to institutionalise between himself and his correspondents.

At some later stabilising and defensive stages in the institutionalisation of Christianity a reading of Romans 7 like Peter Meyer's may have become stronger, in which Romans 7 became more about the tyranny of Sin than about the power of God-given Torah. In the institutional moment within which Romans was

imagined, however, Torah is still a live voice in the epistolary network, saying, *ouk epithumēseis* (Romans 7:7), more clearly and with greater authority than any other possible voice. Paul therefore resorted to prosopopoeia in order to imagine an intensely individualising human voice not immediately identifiable with 'Paul' or 'Adam' or 'Eve', but available to attract the provisional imaginative identification of auditors from different backgrounds in a still fluid sectarian network. The apocalyptic drama of Sin, Torah and the 'I' is essentially narrated by the murdered 'I' (7:11); it is the same somehow ghostly 'I' who reflects on the acratic situation which is radicalised when the same divine Torah is internalised as simultaneously revelatory and fatal. Engberg-Pedersen's work has been decisive for me in helping me to imagine historically an actual Paul who might more-or-less consciously have elaborated such a confrontation of Sin, Torah, and an internalising Self.

The author to the Romans believed that the proto-Christian self was and should somehow remain normatively unstable specifically in relation to God's Torah. Paul therefore needed to invent an internalising, surprisingly alienated 'I' in order to teach his auditors how to engage Torah as the normative preparation for transferring into 'the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:2). In this way 'Paul' in Romans 7 retained Torah and invented an 'I' to be permanent ghostly presences within the Christ-centred social imaginary he was elaborating. As a parting intuition, then, I would suggest that both the Torah and the acratic 'I' of Romans 7 are designed to work within the Pauline social imaginary as instances of something like Derrida's notion of 'spectral institution' (Derrida 1993), as permanently institutionalised, but always destabilising, momentary and haunting presences.

Appendix

Romans 7

This rough translation is only intended to bring out the general character of the text. 'I*' glosses *egō*.

I

[1] Or are you unaware, kindred – for I am talking to people who recognise Torah (*nomos*) – that the Torah governs a person only as long as s/he lives? [2] For a married woman is bound by Torah to her husband while he lives, but if the husband dies

she is released from the Torah concerning her husband. [3] Accordingly, she will be deemed an adulteress if she belongs to another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from the Torah, so that if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

[4] Likewise, my kindred, you also have died to the Torah through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to the one who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. [5] For while we were in the flesh, the passions of our sins, aroused by the Torah, were at work in our members to bear fruit for Death. [6] But now we are released from the Torah, having died to that which held us captive, so that we slave in newness of Spirit and not in antiquity of text.

II

[7] What then shall we say? That the Torah is Sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the Torah, I would not have been aware of Sin. For I would not have known what desire is, if the Torah were not saying, 'You shall not desire'. [8] But Sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of desire. For apart from the Torah, Sin is dead. [9] I* was once alive apart from the Torah, but when the commandment came, Sin came to life [10] but I* died and the very commandment that promised life is found to be death for me. [11] For Sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. [12] So the Torah is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

[13] Did that which is good, then, cause death for me? By no means! Rather it was Sin, in order that it might be shown to be Sin, which was enacting death in me through what is good, in order that Sin through the commandment might become utterly wicked.

III

[14] For we know that the Torah is spiritual, but I* am fleshly, sold under Sin. [15] For I do not recognise my own action. For I do what I do not want, but I do the very thing I hate. [16] Now if I do what I do not want, I am agreeing with the Torah, that it is good. [17] So now it is no longer I* who act, but Sin dwelling in me. [18] For I know

that nothing dwells in me, that is, in my flesh, that is good. For the will is present in me to do what is right, but not the ability to enact it. [19] For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. [20] Now if I do what [I*] do not want, it is no longer I* who enact it, but Sin dwelling in me.

IV

[21] So I find with regard to the Torah, that when I want to do right, evil is present for me. [22] For I delight in God's Torah, in my inward person, [23] but I see in my members another Torah subverting the Torah of my mind and taking me prisoner in the Torah of Sin in my members. [24] Wretch that I* am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? [25] Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I* myself serve God's Torah with my mind, but with my flesh I slave to the Torah of Sin.

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