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Paul is aware of a struggle with his "body" (1 Cor. 9:27), but we note that the tone is one of confidence, not of a plagued conscience.

In Rom. 9:1 and 2 Cor. 1:12 he witnesses to his good conscience. This tone reaches its highest pitch in 2 Cor. 5:10f.: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive the retribution for what he has done while in his body, either good or evil. Aware, therefore, of the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade men, but to God it is clear [what we are]; and I hope that it is clear also to your conscience." Here, with the day of reckoning before his eyes, Paul says that the Lord has approved of him, and he hopes that the Corinthians shall have an equally positive impression of him, and of his success in pleasing the Lord (5:9). This robust conscience is not shaken but strengthened by his awareness of a final judgment which has not come yet. And when he writes about the tensions between himself and Apollos and other teachers, he states that "I have nothing on my conscience" (1 Cor. 4:4; N.E.B.—literally "I know nothing with me"; the verb is of the same stem as the word for conscience); to be sure, he adds that this does not settle the case, since "the Lord is my judge," but it is clear from the context that Paul is in little doubt about the final verdict. His warning against a premature verdict is not a plea out of humility or fear, but a plea to the Corinthians not to be too rash in a negative evaluation of Paul.

Thus, we look in vain for a statement in which Paul would speak about himself as an actual sinner. When he speaks about his conscience, he witnesses to his good conscience before men and God. On the other hand, Paul often speaks about his *weakness*, not only ironically as in 2 Cor. 11:21f. In 2 Cor. 12 we find the proudly humble words, "But He said to me: 'My grace is sufficient to you, for the power is fulfilled in weakness.' I will the more gladly boast of my weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (vv. 9-10). The weakness which Paul here refers to is clearly without any relation to his sin of his conscience. The "thorn in the flesh" (v. 7) was presumably some physical handicap—some have guessed at epilepsy—which interfered with his effectiveness and, what was more important, with his apostolic authority, as we can see from Gal. 4:13, cf. 1 Cor. 11:30. Sickness was seen as a sign of insufficient spiritual endowment. But there is no indication that Paul ever thought of this and other "weaknesses" as sins for which he was responsible. They were caused by the Enemy or the enemies. His weakness became for him an important facet in his identification with the work of Christ, who had been "crucified in

weakness" (2 Cor. 13:4; cf. also 4:10 and Col. 1:24).—In the passage from Rom. 5, mentioned above, we find the only use of the word "weak" as a synonym to "sinner," but there these words helped to describe primarily the power of justification as a past act (and the New English Bible consequently renders it by "powerless"). This is the more clear since the third synonym is "enemy" (v. 10), and points to Paul's past when he had been the enemy of Christ.

Yet there is one Pauline text which the reader must have wondered why we have left unconsidered, especially since it is the passage we mentioned in the beginning as the proof text for Paul's deep insights into the human predicament: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do is what I do" (Rom. 7:19). What could witness more directly to a deep and sensitive introspective conscience? While much attention has been given to the question whether Paul here speaks about a pre-Christian or Christian experience of his, or about man in general, little attention has been drawn to the fact that 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. The diatribe style of the chapter helps us to see what Paul is doing. In vv. 7-12 he works out an answer to the semi-rhetorical question: "Is the Law sin?" The answer reads: "Thus the Law is holy, just, and good." This leads to the equally rhetorical question: "Is it then this good (Law) which brought death to me?", and the answer is summarized in v. 25b: "So then, I myself serve the Law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the Law of Sin" (i.e., the Law "weakened by sin" [8:3] leads to death, just as a medicine which is good in itself can cause death in a patient whose organism [flesh] cannot take it).

Such an analysis of the formal structure of Rom. 7 shows that Paul is here involved in an interpretation of the Law, a defense for the holiness and goodness of the Law. In vv. 13-25 he carries out this defense by making a distinction between the Law as such and the Sin (and the Flesh) which has to assume the whole responsibility for the fatal outcome. It is most striking that the "I", the *ego*, is not simply identified with Sin and Flesh. The observation that "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do is what I do" does not lead directly over to the exclamation: "Wretched man that I am . . .!", but, on the contrary, to the statement: "Now if I do what I do not want, *then it is not I who do it*, but the sin which dwells in me." The argument is one of acquittal of the *ego*, not one of utter contrition. Such a line of thought would be impossible if Paul's intention were to describe man's predicament. In Rom. 1-3 the human impasse has been argued, and here every

