

# What does Paul's approach to the Decalogue reveal about his attitude towards the Torah? : The case of direct references to the Decalogue in Romans

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# What does Paul's approach to the Decalogue reveal about his attitude towards the Torah?

## The case of direct references to the Decalogue in Romans

This question is a part of a broad debate about the use of νόμος in the Pauline Tradition. Although there are a lot of open questions, it is still commonly agreed that the use of νόμος is characterized by semantic flexibility, therefore, the meaning of the word depends on a specific context<sup>1</sup>. The discussion in the article does not centre on semantic possibilities of νόμος usage, nor does it centre on the precise definition of νόμος in any context. The article focuses on the texts in which a direct reference to the Decalogue is made, and hence where the Decalogue is supposed as νόμος in a specific sense. Such cases are in Rom 2:17–29, 7:7–13 and 13:8–10. 112 out of 118 cases of νόμος usage in the Pauline Tradition are found in protopauline letters, so it is almost exceptionally a protopauline term with a particularly high number of them in the Letter to Romans (71 case), while the Letter to Galatians counts 32 cases only. It is interesting to note that these cases of usage in the protopauline letters are characterized by the fact that when Paul speaks of the content of νόμος, he cites the Decalogue, in the above mentioned texts of the Letter to Romans.<sup>2</sup>

It is not a simple question to what extent, in general, Paul uses νόμος as a reference to the Decalogue,<sup>3</sup> but the question of whether he can refer to

<sup>1</sup> K.A. Burton notes, "From a literary perspective, many scholars have recognized the semantic possibilities for *nomos* in the writings of Paul and have suggested several referents: generic law, Torah (Mosaic law), Pentateuch, Tanak, collection of holy writings precious to Jews, Decalogue, Christianity as 'new law', revealed will of God, figurative law, and custom/tradition of Jews." BURTON, Keith A.: *The Decalogue as Essential Torah in Second Temple Judaism*, in: JATS 9 (1998) 1–2, 311. For more details concerning different meanings of νόμος in Paul, cfr. νόμος, in: BAUER, Walter: *Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, 4. Auflage. Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann 1952, 983–986; νόμος, in: KITTEL, Gerhard (Hg.): *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Bd. IV. Stuttgart: von W. Kohlhammer 1950, 1061–1063.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. BURTON: *The Decalogue as Essential Torah*, 312. For the debate on Paul's use of νόμος in Romans cfr. DUNN, James D.G.: *The New Perspective on Paul: Paul and the Law*, in: DONFRIED, Karl P. (ed.): *The Romans Debate*. Peabody: Hendrickson 1991, 299–308.

<sup>3</sup> K.A. Burton, for example, argues convincingly about Paul's use of νόμος as a reference to the Decalogue. He supports his thesis by linguistic and socio-religious evidences and takes the position, that the literary context of Paul's letter to the Romans provides ample support for the thesis that the primary referent of νόμος in this letter is the Decalogue. The

it as the essence of the Torah is rather a rhetorical than a direct one. Paul most probably sees the essence of the Torah in the words of the Decalogue, and this is not surprising. This attitude was typical of the Second Temple Judaism. In the rabbinical usage, the Decalogue was understood as the centre of Torah, and, as such, containing in itself the essence of the Torah, in this sense, expressing the whole Torah. The information we have from the period of the Second Temple Judaism supports this approach.<sup>4</sup> As the socio-religious context of this period was a native *Sitz im Leben* in Paul's thinking, it is actually a key to understanding Paul's own attitude towards the Decalogue. On the other hand, if Paul refers to the Decalogue as the essence of the Torah, then the way he does it in Rom 2:17–29, 7:7–13 and 13:8–10 says something important about his approach to the Torah as such.

question, of course, is far from simple. For this discussion and further references cfr. BURTON: *The Decalogue as Essential Torah*, 310ff.

<sup>4</sup> Socio-religious data on the issue are varied and convincingly support the understanding of the Decalogue as the axis of the Torah in a wide sense in the Judaism of that time: both in Palestine and in the diasporas. In his exact remark, E.E. Urbach suggests that the background for this concept is provided by the Torah itself, as it identifies Ten Commandments with “the words of the Covenant” (cfr. Ex 34:28; Dt 4:13). E.E. Urbach's study on the role of the Ten Commandments in Jewish worship is widely discussed the usage of the Decalogue in various Jewish religious practices. Let us take, for example, the recitation of the Decalogue together with the *Shema* (Dt 6:4–9) in the daily prayer of the liturgy in the Temple liturgy. Furthermore, the daily recitation of the Decalogue was not limited to the Temple liturgy only. This was a widespread religious practice outside the Temple as well, which is proved by, for example, *tefillin* or *mezuzot*, where the Decalogue stands next to the other fundamental texts underpinning Jewish identity. Of special interest in this discussion is the Nash Papyrus that which bears marks of being a liturgical text. Like the *Shema*, it contains the text of the Decalogue. In such a way it also witnesses the inclusion of the Decalogue in the liturgy of that time. For more information on the issue and other important details see URBACH, Ephraim E.: *The Role of the Ten Commandments in Jewish Worship*, in: SEGAL, Ben-Zion (ed.): *Ten Commandments in History and Tradition* (= Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research). Jerusalem: The Magnes Press 1990, 161–189; LINCICUM, David: *Paul and the Early Jewish Encounter with Deuteronomy* (= Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament II 284). Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010, 39–47; BURTON: *The Decalogue as Essential Torah*, 313–316. Interesting and valuable information on the issue is provided by E.E. Urbach, as he discusses the concept of Ten Commandments in the Rabbinic Literature, which confirms the approach to the Decalogue as the essence of the Torah. For more information see URBACH, Ephraim E.: *The Sages – Their Concepts and Beliefs* (= Publications of the Perry Foundation in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem). Jerusalem: The Magnes Press 1975, 315–399. Of course, regarding the question of understanding of the Decalogue as the essence of the Torah in Second Temple Judaism, the reflections of Philo, representing the mode of thinking of the Hellenistic Judaism, cannot be avoided. Philo says: “[...] we must not forget that the Ten Covenants [λόγοι] are summaries of the special laws [νόμων] which are recorded in the Sacred Books and run through the whole of the legislation.” PHILO: *On the Decalogue* 154, in: GOOLD, George P. (ed.): *Philo*, Volume VII. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1998, 83.

So, what is special about Paul's references to the Decalogue in Rom 2:17–29, 7:7–13 and 13:8–10, and what does Paul's specific approach, revealed by these texts, say about his perception of the Torah in general?

DIRECT REFERENCES TO THE DECALOGUE IN ROM 2:17–29; 7:7–13 AND 13:8–10:  
NOTICEABLE SPECIFIC ASPECTS

Despite the fact that the usage of νόμος in the Letter to Romans is very numerous, Paul referring to νόμος, cites the Decalogue only in the cases mentioned above. Yet these texts draw our attention not only because of this direct connection, which may imply the perception of the Decalogue as the essence of the Torah, but also due to the aspects that become contextually evident and are apparently emphasized by Paul. What can we say about them at the first glance?

It is obvious that in Rom 2:17–29, as in a wider context of this text, one of the fundamental questions Paul is concerned about is an attitude towards the Law. In these verses, he uses his oratory abilities and fervently poses questions that provoke Jews to change their thinking and attitude towards the Law. These questions are formulated when quoting the Decalogue.

“[...] you are sure [...] having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth [...]? While you preach *against stealing*, do you steal? You who say that one *must not commit adultery*, do you commit adultery? You who *abhor idols*, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonour God by breaking the law” (vv. 19–23).<sup>5</sup>

The visible ethics of the Torah: concrete, tangible outwardness, as it is fitting, is being stated. However, is it the only thing? The discussion centres on the following question: what does it mean to be a true Jew? Paul's definition is unambiguous, although it is interpreted differently: “But a Jew is one *inwardly* [...]” (v. 29) – ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ. In this expression, Paul is seeking to define the state of the true Jew, which he seeks to clarify here in particular in relation to the Law. The saying ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ may be understood as a reference to an absolute inwardness<sup>6</sup> and, if so, Paul's thought here is in total accord with the biblical tradition (cfr. Lv 26:41; Dt 10:16; Jer 4:4; 9:24–25; Ez 44:7).<sup>7</sup> The question of an attitude to the Law is resolved

<sup>5</sup> Here and further English text is cited according to the *English Standard Version* (2001).

<sup>6</sup> “[...] *il vero Giudeo*, l'erede genuino delle promesse antiche, membro del nuovo popolo di Dio, è il Giudeo interiore (lett. *Il Giudeo nel naskondimento*: l'espressione indica piuttosto l'interiorità assoluta, quasi gelosa di ogni manifestazione esteriore) [...]” VANNI, Ugo: *Lettera ai romani*, in: AA. VV.: *Le lettere di San Paolo* (Parola di Dio). Cinisello Balsamo: Paoline, 285–286.

<sup>7</sup> Also, for references in Jewish tradition, cfr. FITZMYER, Joseph A.: *Romans. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (= The Anchor Bible 33). New York: Doubleday 1993, 322.

in a persuasive and biblical way.<sup>8</sup> And yet the issue is far from simple because the thing that surprises us is namely the expression ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ. Would such a definition of a true Jew be not in contradiction with his true identity at that time, which was particularly based on the observance of the external practice of the Law? How to reconcile this unconditional interiority with the inevitable outwardness?

The case mentioned in Rom 7:7–13 is an interesting one and urges to raise questions. Paul develops a discourse on how the Law helps human beings to know their own state marked by the inclination to sin. In front of sin the Law opens one's eyes and places a person in a delicate zone of an ethical question: what to do with all the load of his/her fleshiness? In summary, Paul's attitude seems to be the following: the Law helps to know the truth about oneself, and human misery is also a part of that truth. In the context of this intense theological-anthropological question, Paul cites the Decalogue again, "[...] Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" (v. 7). So, in this discourse Paul makes reference to the only word of the Decalogue: οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις, which is obviously full of meaning and has a special place in the dynamics of the thought and structure of the Decalogue. Reasonably we can ask once more: why does Paul while revealing the identity of a human being in this passage choose to cite only one word of the Decalogue? And is it the one that *breaks through* the Decalogue's dynamics of *do – not to do* and refers to a state of mind.

And, finally, let us have a look at the case of citing the Decalogue in Rom 13:8–10. In this parenetic text, we are faced with the laconic synthesis made by Paul of the Law. As Paul cites the Decalogue, he reveals the essence of νόμος with the quotation from Lv 19:18, "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law". The Commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other Commandment, are summarised in this word, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom 13:8–10). The direction taken by Paul's thought does not surprise but what comes as a surprise is the abstractedness of the precept from Lv 19:18 ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν in the context of all the precepts held in Lv 19. As we know, the Decalogue is the conceptual background for this chapter,<sup>9</sup> at the base of which the priestly source develops very specific

<sup>8</sup> Concerning the antithesis in vv. 28–29 and Paul's art of arguing, cfr. PITTA, Antonio: *Lettera ai romani. Nuova versione, introduzione e commento* (= I libri biblici, Nuovo Testamento 6). Milano: Paoline 2001, 132–134.

<sup>9</sup> More about this issue cfr. MORGENSTERN, Julian: *The Decalogue of the Holiness Code*, in: HUCA 26 (1955), 1–27.

socio-cultic precepts. In this context, marked by concreteness, ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν sounds too abstract indeed. Does the phrase ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν aim to summarise all that one has or does not have to do? Now the question does not pertain to this matter. It is about Paul's aim when he refers to this levitic saying in order to express the fullness of the Law.

Thus, in all the three cases of quotes from the Decalogue in Romans, we are faced with Paul's way of speaking about the Law, which urges raising questions. What does ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ mean in Rom 2:29? Why does Rom 7:7 quote exceptionally οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις? What does the description of the fullness of the Law in Rom 13:9 mean while citing Lv 19:18 ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν? Are these aspects of the texts under our consideration conceptually linked to each other and, if so, what do they reveal concerning Paul's perception of the Torah?

#### THE CASE OF THE EXPRESSION ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ IN ROM 2:29

From Rom 1,18 we face, in an ethical view, a very uncomfortable discourse, while it is a very strong discourse from an anthropological point of view. The essential need for a human being to be saved is not conditioned by ethnicity: both the Greeks who do not have the revealed Law and the Jews who have it (Rom 1:18–2:29) “sit” in the pit of sin. As mentioned above, a discussion with the Jews centres on the question of how to accept/fulfil the Law in order to please God, that is to live in His presence. Paul's attitude in such a context seems to be summarized or even definitively defined by the expression ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ (2:29), which is often given a meaning of *inwardly*.<sup>10</sup> However, this emphasis may be more exceptional than it looks at the first glance.

First and foremost, it is fitting to make a remark on the translation of ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ because an answer to the question of how to accept/fulfil the Torah depends on how we understand this expression. Rom 2:28–29 reads, “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly [ἐν τῷ φανερωῷ], nor is circumcision outward [ἐν τῷ φανερωῷ] and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly

<sup>10</sup> Interpreting Rom 2,28–29 A. Pitta notes, “Con un'antitesi retta sulla sequenza «no... ma», Paolo introduce la definizione del vero giudeo, richiamandosi ancora alla querela profetica sulla circoncisione del cuore e non della carne. Anzitutto il giudeo si definisce per il *segreto* della sua identità e non per l'esteriorità. Paolo accentua questo primo contrasto non opponendo l'esteriorità all'interiorità ma al «segreto». In questo caso il termine «segreto» (*kryptos*) si relaziona direttamente al cuore, anche se egli preferirà opporre quest'ultimo alla carne.” PITTA: *Lettera ai romani*, 132. In a similar way, for example, cfr. also BARRETT, Charles K.: *The Epistle to the Romans* (= Black's New Testament Commentaries). Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark 1962, 60; SCHLIER, Heinrich: *Der Römerbrief* (= Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament VI). Leipzig: St. Benno 1978, 89; FITZMYER: *Romans*, 322–323; STUHLMACHER, Peter: *Paul's Letter to the Romans. A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox 1994, 50.

[ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ] and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God”. We immediately notice here that Paul emphasizes a contrast between ἐν τῷ φανερῷ and ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ. But it seems that this case may be interpreted as not about outward/inward duality.<sup>11</sup>

David Lincicum, in fact, notes that Paul has got a vocabulary to speak of *inwardness*. He points to Rom 7:22 where the expression ἔσω ἄνθρωπον is used to express the idea of *inwardness*, “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being [ἔσω ἄνθρωπον]”; and especially to 2 Cor 4:16 where the contrast outer/inner is expressed by using ἔξω ἡμῶν/ἔσω ἡμῶν, “[...] Though our outer nature [ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος] is wasting away, our inner nature [ἔσω ἡμῶν] is being renewed day by day”.<sup>12</sup> So, if such terminology is familiar to Paul, can the same idea of a contradiction between outwardness and inwardness be expressed as a contrast between ἐν τῷ φανερῷ and ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ in Rom 2:29? The answer to this question is predetermined by an argument rising from Dt 29:28 where the same pairing of τὰ κρυπτὰ/τὰ φανερά is uniquely attested<sup>13</sup>, “The secret things [τὰ κρυπτὰ] belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed [τὰ δὲ φανερά] belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Making reference to Dt 29:28, Lincicum suggests that ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ used in Rom 2:29 can be translated as *hiddness/in hidden* because this is something conceptually distinct. Why? In his opinion, the significance of the use of ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ in Dt 29:28 and the pairing of τὰ κρυπτὰ/τὰ φανερά becomes clear once it is realized that this text of Deuteronomy served an important hermeneutical function in Jewish thinking. The equivalent Hebrew terms for τὰ κρυπτὰ/τὰ φανερά are תולדות / תורתסה. These words were charged with meaning in certain streams of Judaism of that time (Qumran). They pointed to the matter of eschatological revelation of the *hidden* things: the true ἀποκάλυψις of God. So, the expression ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ in Rom 2:29 has an apocalyptic background and with its pair ἐν τῷ φανερῷ has roots in Dt 29:28. As Lincicum reflects further, Paul’s arguments in Rom in general suggest that the time of eschatological revelation has begun, especially if we have in mind the use of ἀποκαλύπτεται in Romans 1:17.18, even if full revelation must await the end (cfr. Rom 8:18). In Romans 2:28–29, the language of eschatological revelation also connects such eschatological concepts as the gift of the Spirit (Ez 36:26–27) and the Law written on the

<sup>11</sup> However, modern translations simplify the matter rendering ἐν τῷ φανερῷ/ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ as outward/inward. When discussing this issue, D. Lincicum makes a reference to modern English translations that contain exactly such a dualism. Cfr. LINCICUM: *Paul and the Early Jewish Encounter*, 151 (note 98).

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. LINCICUM: *Paul and the Early Jewish Encounter*, 151.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. LINCICUM: *Paul and the Early Jewish Encounter*, 151.

heart (Jer 31:33–34//LXX Jer 38:33–34). This is Paul's way of speaking about eschatological revelation; he believes it has been inaugurated in Christ.<sup>14</sup>

So, a true Jew is the one who stands in front of νόμος and is open to eschatological revelation. This revelation took place in Christ, so the content of this revelation demands radical eschatological thinking, that is, the internalization of νόμος from a christocentric perspective. The idea of internalization of νόμος was not new in Judaism of course but was rewritten by Paul in terms of the realized eschatological revelation in Christ.

#### THE QUOTATION OF οὐκ ἐπιθυμῆσεις IN ROM 7:7

As mentioned above, what is of interest in Rom 7:7–13 is that Paul, as he develops a discourse on the human condition and its knowledge, cites the only, therefore exclusive word of the Decalogue: οὐκ ἐπιθυμῆσεις (cfr. Ex 20,17; Dt 5,21). Namely this οὐκ ἐπιθυμῆσεις interrupts the usual dimension of the words *to do* – *not to do* in the Decalogue. Such a culmination in the dynamics of the Decalogue necessitates a question about the content of this word and its special function. And here we enter a broad field of discussion regarding the meaning of this climactic word of the Decalogue, which is disputed both by ancient and modern interpreters. Alexander Rofé points to the questions: does this word simply forbid envious *desire* for what is not yours? Or does it point more to concrete action, prohibiting the *taking of steps* to satisfy that desire?<sup>15</sup> In other words, is it the commandment on *mind* or on *action*? We could say that the structure of the mind is inevitably based on the action and there is nothing to discuss. Nevertheless, for better understanding of Paul's mind regarding the citation of οὐκ ἐπιθυμῆσεις in Rom 7:7, we need to look at this issue more attentively.

The Septuagint renders with ἐπιθυμέω the Hebrew roots אָוַה and חָמַד.<sup>16</sup> Now we are interested in this latter one, because of its use in the Decalogue in Ex 20:17 and Dt 5:21. The Hebrew root חָמַד originally denotes a feeling/attitude that, as such, inevitably leads to a certain action. As noted by Rofé, this is apparent in the frequent occurrence of the sequential pair חָמַד / לָקַח (take). For example, in Dt 7:25, “You shall not covet (חָמַד) the silver or the gold that is on them or take (לָקַח) it for yourselves” (cfr. also Jo 6:18; 7:21, etc.).<sup>17</sup> The ancient halakhic midrashim gives an interpretation which opts for the understanding of חָמַד / *coveting* as involving an actual

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. LINCICUM: *Paul and the Early Jewish Encounter*, 151–152.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. ROFÉ, Aleksander: *The Tenth Commandment in the Light of Four Deuteronomic Laws*, in: SEGAL, Ben-Zion (ed.): *Ten Commandments in History and Tradition* (= Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research). Jerusalem: The Magnes Press 1990, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. Θυμός, in: KITTEL, Gerhard (Hg.): *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Bd. III. Stuttgart: von W. Kohlhammer 1950, 170.

<sup>17</sup> More on the issue cfr. ROFÉ: *The Tenth Commandment*, 47–48.



deed.<sup>18</sup> This is the interpretation most widely accepted by non-Jewish scholars. One of the reasons why, as Rofé notes, is, “In a series of commandments that refers to deeds, one that forbids thoughts seems oddly out of place.”<sup>19</sup> Concluding the discussion, he states that according to this interpretation, “the Commandment ‘You shall not covet your neighbour’s house’ forbids not mere thoughts and feelings, but rather practical schemes and real actions aimed at acquiring the property of someone else.”<sup>20</sup> Not neglecting this tradition of interpretation, of course, we can intend the meaning of *דמק/coveting* as implying the action. But the action as such is always based on the attitude. So the question is whether the *coveting* (the desire), as it is suggested by the original meaning of *דמק*, is not the “starting point” of any action? Or is the action not something that really satisfies the desire?

At this point let us ask about the Septuagint’s interpretation of *דמק* with *ἐπιθυμέω*. The things seem to be interesting. The verb *ἐπιθυμέω* means *crave, desire, long for*. It is derived from *θυμός*, which connotes *spirit, soul, desire, longing*.<sup>21</sup> So, it denotes a strong impulse towards something. While discussing the matter, Rofé states that when one reads and sees it in this sense, *οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις* is understood as “forbidding envious thoughts or feelings about what belongs to someone else, even if unaccompanied by schemes or actions to obtain the desired object.”<sup>22</sup> He notes Philo’s interpretation which goes in such a direction:

“The last commandment is against covetousness or desire which he knew to be a subversive and insidious enemy. For all the passions of the soul which stir and shake it out of its proper nature and do not let it continue in sound health are hard to deal with, but desire is hardest of all. And therefore while each of the others seems to be involuntary, an extraneous visitation, an assault from outside, desire alone originates with ourselves and is voluntary. [...] Consider the passion whether for money or a woman or glory or anything else that produces pleasure: are the evils which it causes small or casual? Is it not the cause why kinsmen become estranged and change their natural goodwill to deadly hatred, why great and populous countries are desolated by internal factions, and land and sea are filled with ever-fresh calamities wrought by battles on sea and campaigns on land? For all the wars of Greeks and barbarians between themselves or against each other, so familiar to the tragic stage, are sprung from one source, desire, the desire for money or glory or pleasure. These it is that bring disaster to the human race.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> For wider discussion cfr. ROFÉ: *The Tenth Commandment*, 45–46.

<sup>19</sup> ROFÉ: *The Tenth Commandment*, 47.

<sup>20</sup> ROFÉ: *The Tenth Commandment*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. ROFÉ: *The Tenth Commandment*, 48. More on the meaning of *θυμός/ἐπιθυμία* and on its biblical usage, cfr. *θυμός*, in: KITTEL: *Theologisches Wörterbuch*, Bd. III, 167–173.

<sup>22</sup> ROFÉ: *The Tenth Commandment*, 48.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. PHILO: *On the Decalogue* 142.151–153, in: GOOLD: *Philo*, 71–78.81–82.

Philo, in fact, “detached the prohibition from the object “your neighbour’s house”, and read it as forbidding *epithumia*, i.e. desire and appetite in general.”<sup>24</sup> Rofé concludes that such a generalizing interpretation of Philo concerning οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις was an exception in Jewish exegesis. He notes that, at the beginning of the Middle Ages, Jewish commentators returned to the interpretation offered by the Septuagint rendering 777 into ἐπιθυμέω. So they rejected that of the halakhic midrashim. Ibn Ezra, Sforino, Luzzatto, and later on B. Jacob, M.D.U. Cassuto, N. Leibowitz, M. Greenberg have been mentioned by Rofé among the commentators who developed the Septuagint-Philo way of interpretation.<sup>25</sup>

Moshe Weinfeld, pondering on the Decalogue’s purpose in his reflection, especially points to οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις,

“This is not a code of detailed laws. This is a formulation of those conditions required for membership in the community. [...] Specific laws and the sanctions attached to them come later, in the various legal collections in the Torah. But these do not belong in the Decalogue, which simply sets down the fundamental obligations which Deity imposes on His people. Especially instructive in this connection is the command “You shall not covet”. As B. Jackson has shown, there is no reason to question the commonly accepted meaning of this Commandment, namely that it refers to a state of mind. Obviously, then, it deals with a prohibition that cannot be enforced, since sanctions cannot be applied to mere thought.”<sup>26</sup>

If it is so, we find a significant demarcation line in the dynamics of the Decalogue, exactly the demarcation between levels of *doing* and of *thinking*. In that sense all the words of the Decalogue converge towards this vertex of the Decalogue – οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις, and find in it the starting point for every kind of *do – not to do* level, i.e. it is *thinking* that underpins *action*. Moreover, if οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις supposes a state of mind, we face here the declaration of liberty of the person. Namely, we face here the deepest sense of the concept of a person, which is the axis of the Decalogue. Hence, we can say that Paul’s choice to recite only one word of the Decalogue in Rom 7:7, namely οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις, was probably not accidental. In this way he expresses what is the root of every kind of human misery,<sup>27</sup> namely the ἐπιθυμία,

<sup>24</sup> ROFÉ: *The Tenth Commandment*, 48.

<sup>25</sup> For further references to these commentators, cfr. ROFÉ: *The Tenth Commandment*, 49. Should be noted that in Rom 7:7–13 Paul passes from ἐπιθυμία, intended as a root of every sin, to death. So he is in consensus with the thought of the Second Temple Judaism, in which the relation between the desire and the sin is widely attested. Cfr. PITTA: *Lettera ai romani*, 270–271.

<sup>26</sup> WEINFELD, Moshe: *The Uniqueness of the Decalogue and Its Place in Jewish Tradition*, in: SEGAL, Ben-Zion (ed.): *Ten Commandments in History and Tradition* (= Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research). Jerusalem: The Magnes Press 1990, 9.

<sup>27</sup> H. Schlier reflects on: “Ἐπιθυμία ist auch hier, was Gal 5, 16 ἐπιθυμία σαρκός genannt wird: das selbst-süchtige Begehren. Hier ist sie mit der ἁμαρτία unmittelbar verbunden. Diese ist mit ihr und das Begehren mit der Sünde gegeben. Vgl. 7b: τὴν ἁμαρτίαν γινώσκει ent-

i.e. the passion appetite directed to the *other* to deprive him of who he is and/or what he has (what is actually his identity). That means the structure of thought which kills the *other*, negating the mystery of the *person* as such.

WHY SUMMARIZING THE DECALOGUE IN ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν?

So let us finally take a quick look at the case in Rom 13:8–10. What does the established tactics say about Paul's approach to the Decalogue, that is, the summary of the words of the Decalogue in one verse, to be exact, in the quotation from Lv 19:18: ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν? This is a unique precept in the unique Chapter of the Torah.<sup>28</sup>

As noted above, Lv 19 has the Ten Commandments as its background and as such elaborates on them. As Weinfeld notes, it elaborates different cultic precepts interchangeable with the variation of the Decalogue's words and as such is the unique text in the Priestly Code where the intermingling of cultic and the Decalogue's laws is found.<sup>29</sup> So, the variation of the Decalogue is based here on the idea of holiness, "The variety in Leviticus 19 has a common factor – the idea of holiness."<sup>30</sup> If at the heart of this chapter is the idea of holiness, the way to achieve it is to obey the very concrete orders, namely those of the Decalogue and cultic laws. But what does the idea of holiness mean? It centres on the question of *how* to be in the presence of God, that is, how to be in order to be able to live in the presence of God who came to live in the history in the Tent of meeting (cfr. Ex 40:34). This is the fundamental interest of the Priestly Code. So Lv 19, by integrating the Decalogue and the idea of holiness, gives us an answer: the Torah is the path.

spricht V 8 dem κατειργάζεσθαι ἐπιθυμίαν. Diese ἐπιθυμία, in der die Sünde wirksam ist hat der „Ich“, der hier spricht, auf den Einspruch des Gesetzes gegen das ἐπιθυμεῖν: οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις kennengelernt. Jetzt steht ἐπιθυμία für jenes ἀμαρτίαν γνῶναι in 7a. [...] Der Einspruch des Gesetzes wird nicht in diesem oder jenem Gebot gesehen, sondern summarisch als der Grundwille und die Grundfunktion des Gesetzes hervorgehoben: οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις, wozu Ex 20,17 LXX [...]. Es charakterisiert für Paulus den gesamten νόμος [...].” SCHLIER: *Der Römerbrief*, 221–222. In a similar way, cfr. also STUHLMACHER: *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 106–107. While interpreting the human drama narrated in Gn 2–3 and the principle of ἐπιθυμία as manifested in it, A. Wénin makes reference to Rom 2:7–13, seeing this text as Paul's exegesis of the Genesis texts, which goes in rabbinical direction. Cfr. WÉNIN, André: *Da Adamo ad Abramo o l'errare dell'uomo. Lettura narrativa e antropologica della Genesi. I. Gen 1,1–12,4* (= Testi e commenti). Bologna: Dehoniane 2008, 63–92. esp. 89–90.

<sup>28</sup> Lv 19 forms the *theological* center of the later part of the legal codes of Leviticus. All the attention in this text is centred on the call to holiness. For recent and informative interpretation with further bibliographical references, cfr. RADNER, Ephraim: *Leviticus* (= Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible). Grand Rapids: Brazos 2008, 201–218.

<sup>29</sup> For more information, cfr. WEINFELD: *The Uniqueness of the Decalogue*, 12–15.

<sup>30</sup> WEINFELD: *The Uniqueness of the Decalogue*, 12.

We can understand here why Paul makes a reference to the quotation from Lv 19:18 ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν, and in this way he summarises the core of the Torah, the Decalogue, and describes the fullness of the Torah. In this chapter of Leviticus, we find the elaboration of different *concrete* precepts, and in such a context the ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν seems to be too discrete or abstract. Regarding the question, M. Weinfeld states, “As for the injunction to love your neighbor, and to harbor no grudge or hatred (17–18) – these belong to the realm of homiletics. They are addressed to the conscience, and as such have no place in the Ten Commandments, which deal with concrete matters, and not with abstract generalization.”<sup>31</sup> But why such a generalization? Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν as not a concrete precept in fact tends to express the basis of every concrete precept: the attitude towards the *other* or such a system of thought / thinking that tends to recognise *the other* – to which νόμος points – as a πλησίον. This *other* implies the one that allows us to discover our identity and νόμος as essentially the place of relation: the relation with *the other* and, therefore, with *the Other*. If the inter-subjectivity is essentially possible only when a person transcends himself, then it must be acknowledged that he/she is empowered for to do so by his natural openness to transcendence.

So it seems that it is not by accident that in Rom 13:8–10 Paul summarises absolutely concrete words of the Decalogue by the precept ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν, which indeed generalises the requirements for sanctity. As such, it is full of meaning and, as such, only this precept can be qualified as a πλήρωμα of the Law, the qualitative sign of the Law, which does not essentially state the dimension of the Law *do* or *not to do* but implies the meaning of the Law: the dimension of the relation with *the other* and with *the Other*.

## CONCLUSIONS

All the three quotes from the Decalogue in Romans show a “strange” tactic that Paul employs. The Decalogue quoted in Rom 2:17–29 states concrete and tangible outwardness of the ethics of the Torah (vv. 21–22), however, the context puts emphasis on the relationship between a true Jew and the Law with expression ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ (v. 29) which implies more than outwardness. Thus outwardness of the ethics of the Torah is drawn into the inevitability of respective relationship with the Torah, which is the root of the ethics of the Torah. So a true Jew is the one whose relation to the Torah is characterized by this ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ – *in hidden* – quality, that is, by this openness to eschatological revelation in Christ, which means openness to the preserving of the essence of the Torah from the christocentric per-

<sup>31</sup> WEINFELD: *The Uniqueness of the Decalogue*, 15.

spective. This leads to the conclusion that the ethics of the Torah is determined by the christocentric principle where the outward *to do – not to do* dimension has the eschatological mark of inwardness *a person in front of a person*. The only word of the Decalogue οὐκ ἐπιθυμῆσεις, cited in Rom 7:7, proves Paul's seemingly tendentious desire to emphasise a dividing line between the levels of *doing* and *thinking*. The structure of thinking – the ἐπιθυμία, which is directed on to *the other* as a tendency to destroy this *other*, thus depersonalizing this *other*, is an antidote of the perception of the essence of the Torah. Finally, summarizing the Decalogue by using ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν in Rom 13:8-10, Paul shows again his desire to establish the basic principle of standing in front of the Law, which is not the dimension of *to do – not to do* but the meaning of the Law: the dimension of the relation to *the other* and to *the Other*.

It is obvious that the aspects highlighted in the three cases are conceptually interconnected. What does Paul's approach to the Decalogue – to the Law of the Law – generally say about his attitude towards the Torah?

In order to answer this question, we will use André Wénin's reflections.<sup>32</sup> In its description of the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25:18–22), the text of Exodus gives us the following image: the cherubim are fixed at the extreme parts of the mercy seat covering the Ark. They are at a distance from one another and from the cover, which is destined to preserve the Tablets of the Law. Thus, in some sense, cherubim are kept within a distance by the Law, while their wings tend to reach each other from above. They face each other, as the text says: *their faces one to another*. The Hebrew text in fact states: וַיִּפְגְּמוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אָחִיו, *their faces man towards his brother* (v. 20). This image suggests these two figures were *face to face*: each of them exposes his face to the one who is in front of him. Exposing one's face means exposing the most fragile, the most personal part of oneself. However, the most paradoxical element of the image are the cherubim, while being *face to face*, they look at the mercy seat (v. 20) and at the Law of God at the same time in such a way that the mercy seat covers the Ark which contains the tablets of the covenant. So, looking at each other, they also look at the mercy seat, and thus they gaze in the direction of the Law of God.

The meaning of this image can be explained in the following manner: if a person looks at the Law of God, which essentially means to respect the mystery of *the other* who is always in front, if a person rejects the ἐπιθυμία, the desire to appropriate another, he/she is capable of a proper *face to face* relationship. In fact, Adonai states in the end that the space which sepa-

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. WÉNIN: *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 90–91.

rates them in their *face to face* relation is the place of meeting with God: *there I will meet with you* (v. 22).<sup>33</sup>

Turning finally to Paul, some conclusions can be made.

1. If we start with an assumption that Paul perceives the Decalogue as the essence of the Torah, which was the attitude attested in the Second Temple Judaism, we can speak, from this perspective, about the Decalogue as the key to the meaning of νόμος in general.

2. If it is so, Paul unlocks that meaning with a special key: the principle of personalism, as we can see from reading Rom 2:17–29, 7:7–13 and 13:8–10 paying special attention to the expressions that link these texts conceptually and which we have discussed. The Decalogue – νόμος *par excellence* – is an intrinsic axis of all the νόμος. A *Person in front of a person* or *face to face* principle uncovers the meaning of the level *do – not to do* of the Decalogue, as well as that of all the νόμος.

3. The νόμος in such a way opens as a place of choosing between life and death, because it points to this axis: to face *the other* or to deny him/her and thus to live or not to live in the Presence of God.

#### *Abstract*

*Paul quotes the Decalogue in Rom 2:21–22, 7:7 and 13:9. The texts are discussed as connected not only at a formal level concerning the quotation of the Decalogue, but also – and this is the centre of the discussion – they are recognized as connected at a conceptual level regarding the way of making reference to the Decalogue and/or non-accidental contextual details. Since the approach to the Decalogue as the essence of the Torah was common to the religious context Paul lived in, we can state that also these texts that show his approach to the Decalogue can help us to see revealing a certain principle of the perception of the essence of the whole Law as such. The conclusion has been drawn that Paul unlocks the meaning of the Decalogue, and thus of the Law in general, with a special key: the principle of personalism.*

<sup>33</sup> Concerning this image Wénin reflects: “Paradosso dell’immagine: le facce sono rivolte allo stesso tempo l’una verso l’altra e verso La legge di Dio. Questo paradosso non raffigura forse, in qualche maniera, qualcosa dell’ordine di Adonai Elohim in Gen 2,16–17? Se ognuno, conformemente al precetto, acconsente al limite, alla distanza, alla differenza, se rinuncia alla bramosia e alla violenza del mistero dell’altro, sarà capace di un giusto faccia a faccia, a immagine dei cherubini. Se è così, questi non stanno forse «custodendo il cammino dell’albero della vita» raffigurando quel che la Legge di Dio, contenuta nell’arca, rivede possibile? Adonai, infatti, lo precisa alla fine: lo spazio che li separa nel loro faccia a faccia rispettoso alla Legge, è anche il luogo in cui Dio si offre per l’incontro, luogo in cui risuona la sua parola di vita.” WÉNIN: *Da Adamo ad Abramo*, 91.