

Lennartsson Jerusalem Collection MMX

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## IDENTITY AND UNITY EXPRESSED THROUGH THE JERUSALEM COLLECTION

What did Paul expect to achieve in Jerusalem through the collection mentioned in Romans 15:14-33? What made it so important that he personally had to deliver the gift and therefore make the long detour from Corinth to Rome and Spain via Jerusalem?

In this paper I will touch some possible implications of the collection regarding unity and identity in first century Christianity. What kind of interconnection between local churches in regions and provinces does the collection presuppose? What can the collection tell about the self understanding expressed by the contributors participating in the project?

### PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

According to his own testimony, Paul was commissioned by Jesus Christ to bring the Gospel of salvation to the Gentile world. This conviction came from the very beginning of his life as a follower to Jesus, at his conversion which at the same time was his call to ministry.<sup>1</sup>

Paul appeals to this awareness in the very beginning of his letter to the Romans. He is an apostle of Christ commissioned to the gentiles.<sup>2</sup> Considering his strategy from his extended travelling there are reasons to believe that Paul was not satisfied

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<sup>1</sup> Gal 1:15-16. On the issue of 'calling – conversion', see Hultgren, 'Foundations', 22f.

<sup>2</sup> Rom 1:1-5; 13b-16. To forward the blessings from Abraham to the gentiles (Gal 3:14, 16).

by merely reaching individual gentiles (i.e. non Jews), but rather ‘nations’ in sense of people groups.<sup>3</sup>

In Romans 15:16 Paul uses cultic language when he describes his tour to Jerusalem. Although being a Benjaminite (Phil 3:5), Paul presents himself in the metaphorical role of a priest bringing the gentiles as an offering (ἡ προσφορά τῶν ἐθνῶν).<sup>4</sup> Paul is probably thinking of the offering (προσφορά) as a ‘first fruits’ of the nations, a representative part of the whole gentile world.<sup>5</sup>

This is the background to Paul’s plans to visit Spain. After a fulfilled mission to Jerusalem, Paul planned to head for Spain to preach the Gospel. On his way there he intended to make a strategic stop in Rome in order to gain support for his coming enterprise (Rom 1: 11- 15; 15:24, 28-29).<sup>6</sup> Spain would be a natural choice for Paul’s strategic move, the Hellenized Roman province in the west - “the end of the earth”.<sup>7</sup>

Beside the apparent requests from the Roman church for help his mission to Spain (Rom 15:24) as well as prayer support (Acts 15:30-31) Paul also had pastoral concerns. He was longing to share Spiritual gifts with them and strengthen them in

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<sup>3</sup> In Rom 11:25 he speaks of the fullness of the gentiles (τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν).

<sup>4</sup> On ‘offering of the nations’ (ἡ προσφορά τῶν ἐθνῶν) taken as an objective genitive (‘of’ the nations) rather than a subjective genitive (‘from’ the gentiles), see Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:756-57. λειτουργός is a formal servant, minister in administration, most often in sacred connotations.

<sup>5</sup> Paul is using the word for ‘first fruits’ ἀπαρχή for those from Asia (Roma 16:5), and Achaia (1Cor 16:15).

<sup>6</sup> His mission in the eastern Mediterranean is finished acc. to Romans 15:23. Probably Paul’s drive is energized by Isaiah 66:18 where LXX has the expression ἄξουσιν ... ἐκ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν δῶρον κυρίῳ ( “They shall bring ... from all the nations as an offering to the Lord”) which resembles Paul’s own phrase in Rom 15:16 (ἡ προσφορά τῶν ἐθνῶν).

<sup>7</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 924, claims that Gibraltar was considered the end of the earth in antiquity. Possibly it was identified with Tarshis in Isaiah 66:19. If so, it would give an additional touch to Paul’s mission as Isaiah 66 seems to have been a trigger for his eschatological mission. Isaiah prophesies that gentiles will come to Jerusalem (2:3; 11:1; 42:1) and in 66:18-20 a priest will bring the gentile nations to Jerusalem as an offering. The identification of Tarshis with Gibraltar is questioned by Hultgren, ‘Foundations’, and 28 n21.

their faith through preaching in Rome (Acts 1:11-15). In his letter to Rome he brings up issues related to his ministry to the gentile world (Rom 15:14-15). It is likely that these are the issues he is referring to in Rom 12:1-15:13.<sup>8</sup> Besides that, and possibly partly overlapping, it is obvious that he had some insights about tensions in the church in Rome regarding relationship gentile Christians and Jews (Rom 11:25). It has been suggested that the role of Israel and the Jews in the salvation history was a major concern for Paul writing Romans.<sup>9</sup> This relationship is of great concern for Paul as the gentiles have a role in making Israel envious (Rom 11:11, 14) which at the end will save the whole of Israel (πᾶς Ἰσραήλ).<sup>10</sup> Paul was committed to share the Gospel of Jesus to the nations of the world, something which brought a prophetic dimension to his ministry (Isaiah 49:6; 51:4). His voyage to Jerusalem should be seen in this perspective.

### THE VOYAGE TO JERUSALEM

The aim for the trip to Jerusalem was to deliver a collection initiated by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Rom 15:26).<sup>11</sup> Paul is using geographical, political terms as he describes the contributors of the collection. Macedonia and Achaia are names of Roman provinces. He thinks in categories of regions and districts.<sup>12</sup> The geographical frame of his present ministry was Jerusalem in the east and Illyricum in the west (Rom 15:19) and uses the word circle (κύκλω) to describe it.<sup>13</sup> Within this region there are clusters of local churches. In Corinth the collection

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<sup>8</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 858.

<sup>9</sup> Stendahl, *Paulus*, 14; Discussion in Das, *Solving*, 26-52; Porter, *Opponents*, 162. Schreiner, *Paul*, 62.

<sup>10</sup> The expression πᾶς Ἰσραήλ, occurs some 64 times in the LLX for the Hebrew equivalent כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל. M Pirqa Avoth opens with the same expression and it signifies the wholeness of Israel's nation without necessarily include every single individual.

<sup>11</sup> Paul had even earlier collected money to Jerusalem (Gal 2:10).

<sup>12</sup> He does not have any more tasks in the eastern region (κλίμα) of the Mediterranean - in those regions (ἐν τοῖς κλίμασι τούτοις) Rom 15:23. See further Hultgren, *Foundations*, 27-28.

<sup>13</sup> The eastern limit is Jerusalem and not 'Arabia' – the area of the Nabateans - where he ministered early (Gal 1:17). That may indicate the importance of Jerusalem for Paul. Perhaps

had been on for a while (2Cor 9:2). Paul spent much time and effort during this third journey organizing the collection.<sup>14</sup>

### *Rhetorical strategy*

What role does the mentioning of the Jerusalem collection (Rom 15:25-33) have for Paul's writing strategy in the letter to the Romans? The rhetorical function seems to be a reinforcement of his pastoral concerns. He explains that the outcome of the trip will be a benefit for the believers in Rome (Rom 15:29, 32). Paul also presents the churches in Macedonia and Achaia as models for the Roman Christians to follow, good examples for them to imitate love for the Jews and spiritual dependence. The rhetorical function for the passage in Rom 15 about the collection is to reinforce the legitimacy for gentile Christians to relate attractively to the Jewish people.

### *A multiple of relations on several levels*

First of all - which I will come back to - the incitement for the collection is a mutual relationship between Jews and gentiles. The gentiles are blessed with salvation in Jesus through the Jews and therefore they rightly should show their appreciation and dependence by the collection (Rom 15:27). At the end the blessed gentile world will work jealousy on the Jewish nation (Rom 11:11, 14). This Christian-Jewish relationship, operating in two directions, is fundamental and lies underneath the text in Romans.

Secondly there is a networking on a local level, both within cities and their immediate surroundings. Macedonia which Paul is mentioning in Rom 15:26 is a Roman province which represents a number of cities such as Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. In a big city like Corinth there were several 'house churches' (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14; 16:15; Acts 18:7-8).<sup>15</sup> From a city 'sister churches' were formed in the surrounding region. We know from Paul in Rom 16:1-2, that Phoebe was a

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he thinks of the planned expansion to Spain as a completion of a 'semi circle' and later making it a 'full circle'. See Moo, *Romans*, 894-896.

<sup>14</sup> Munck, *Paul*, 290.

<sup>15</sup> On 'house churches', see Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 60-91; Blue, 'House Church', 119-222, Trebilco, *Ephesus*, 94-99.

patron of a church the port of Cenchrea near Corinth.<sup>16</sup> Similarly we understand from 1 Cor 16:19 that there were a cluster of churches in the region of Ephesus. Luke claims that the whole province of Asia was reached by the Gospel during Paul's long ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:26). The case of Epaphras is a good illustration of how this happen as he seems to have been engaged in the establishing of churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col 4:13). Possibly he pioneered by bringing the Gospel to Colosse (Col 1:7; 4:12), where we also know of the *oikos* of Philemon (Phil. v.2).

These are sufficient examples to show how networks of Christian congregations probably existed within cities, in their surrounding, and whole regions, and made the collection to Jerusalem possible. See appendix.

Third, Paul hints in Rom 15:26 that there were relationships between churches of the two Roman provinces Macedonia and Achaia. This inter provincial networking is also witnessed in Acts by Luke. See below. The realism of such communication is supported by a functioning system of transportation within the Roman society.<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, Paul builds an argument in the letter to the Romans where 'his' churches are presented as a model for the Roman Christians to follow. This means that the church in Rome (which consisted of networking 'house churches'<sup>18</sup>) – which was not founded by Paul, which he was very sensitive not to claim<sup>19</sup> - is in fact interconnecting with the 'Pauline circle' of churches. The collection initiated by 'Pauline churches' become in a sense 'ecumenical', to use a modern term, by inviting the Roman Christians to at least morally support of the collection to Jerusalem. This is implied in Rom 15:27 when Paul approves that gentile Christians generally do owe something in return to the Jewish nation, for their richness in Christ.

### *Prioritized trip to Jerusalem*

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<sup>16</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, *Corinth*, 182.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, 'Holy Internet', 49-70. Meeks, *Urban*, 16-23.

<sup>18</sup> Rom 16:5; 14; 15.

<sup>19</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 923-924.

Paul finds the collection to Jerusalem very important. The trip was prioritized which is clear from the fact that he decides to go there before the journey to Spain. Jerusalem is the nave in his ministry to where he always returns.<sup>20</sup> There are good reasons to compare Paul's trips and strategies with the pattern known from the networking between synagogues in the Diaspora and the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was never far away from the Diaspora as envoys sent out from Jerusalem in various ways helped and supported Jewish communities in practical and religious matters.<sup>21</sup>

However, why the trip to Jerusalem was so important that Paul personally must deliver the collection is not outspoken. Paul often used envoys like Timothy or Silas.<sup>22</sup> Why not so this time? Why did he have to himself when he aimed for Spain, on a mission that also appeared to be risky for his personal security (Rom 15:30b-31)? We are not told in what sense or why the deliverance of the collection was dangerous, but indicates that it was the transportation to Jerusalem – threat from pirates and thieves – that made Paul anxious.<sup>23</sup> It seems rather to be related to the nature of the collection, something out of Paul's control and circumstances connected to Jerusalem. How could a contribution of money to poor people cause trouble - why controversial?

### *Paul's opponents in Jerusalem*

Paul new from experience that the message about a crucified Messiah was a stumbling block to Jews (1 Cor. 1:23). However, that is hardly a reason for threat or fear. Neither the classical claim that Paul's 'law free Gospel' ('Hellenistic Christianity') as opposing a Hebrew 'Judaic Law abiding Christianity' in Jerusalem does explain does explain the hostility Paul felt from Jerusalem (Rom 15:31).<sup>24</sup> Paul

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<sup>20</sup> Holmberg, *Power*,

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gruen, *Diaspora*, 243-244; Bird, *Crossing*, 3-7.

<sup>22</sup> Titus had been involved for a while according to 2Cor 8:16. According to Acts 20:4 Timothy is among the travelers. Timothy is with Paul in Corinth according to Rom 16:21.

<sup>23</sup> Rom 15:31. Nygren, *Romarbrevet*, 454, thinks that Paul feared very trip to Jerusalem. However it is rather people in Jerusalem he is afraid of.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ferdinand Christian Bauer and the so called Tübingen school. See Neill/Wright, *Interpretation*, 23-25. Cranfield, *Romans*, 778.

already early anchored ‘his’ gospel - that the gentiles are not obliged to follow the Law of Moses - in Jerusalem (Gal 1:18f; 2:1f). This position was later confirmed by a decision in the so called apostolic council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:19ff). Nothing indicates that the Jerusalem church changed the mind on that issue.<sup>25</sup> It is hardly those “zealous for the law” in James’ congregation (Acts 21:21) that Paul feared. After all they represent at the most a potential ‘intra communal’ conflict. Paul’s feared from ‘nonbelievers’ (οἱ ἀπειθούντοί ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ, Rom 15:31) people apparently outside the church. Besides that we know from Luke that James was preventing a potential reaction from ‘zealous believers’ – obviously a pressure from within the church - by proposing Paul to make an offering in the temple together with Jewish believers (Acts 21:21-26).

Another suggestion that has been put forward is that Paul as a supposed ‘liberal Jew’ would trig the public opinion in Jerusalem against the congregation of believers. The idea is that Paul’s ministry among gentiles in an atmosphere of ‘nationalistic feelings’ in Jerusalem would create problems and put pressure on the church. For tactical reasons therefore the church, in order to avoid being targeted of reprisals, would have abandon any contact with the apostle.<sup>26</sup> However, this remains an unproven theory unsubstantiated by any text.<sup>27</sup> Interesting to notice though, is that this theory builds on a supposed public appearance of Paul in Jerusalem, or at least awareness among the population about Paul. This is probably correct assumption.

Paul mentions already in his letter to the Galatians that he faces some persecution due to his theological position on the gentiles (Gal 6:12). Augustine suggests that “the Jews were inflicting great persecution on those who seemed to be deserting their traditional observances such as circumcision”.<sup>28</sup> Some modern interpreters follow this line of understanding interpretation.<sup>29</sup> However, there is no real bearing

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Men from James’ (Gal 2: 12) should not be taken as they represented James, rather that they belonged to the church in Jerusalem where James ministered.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce, *Free Spirit*, 343; Bornkamm, *Paul*, 100. Dunn, *Romans*, 883

<sup>27</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 910 rejects the hypothesis of a threat from unbelieving Jews on the believers in Jerusalem.

<sup>28</sup> Edwards, ACC, 101.

<sup>29</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 54, seems to be one of them.

in this argument. First of all Paul was himself a follower of the law (1 Cor 9:19-20). Luke confirms Paul as a practicing Jew obeying the Law of Moses (Acts 28:17f).<sup>30</sup> Secondly, this is exactly the accusation based on rumors which was eliminated by James which just was mentioned. By sacrificing in the temple Paul proved himself loyal to the Law of Moses - he did not as the rumor told encourage Jewish believers to abandon the Torah (Acts 21:21-26). This means the fear of persecution could well be real and well founded, but not based on the cause Augustine suggested. The persecution caused by not preaching 'circumcision' (Gal 5:11; 6:12f.) concerned gentile believers – not Jewish. That issue was settled in Acts 15. Third, Paul feared not believer but nonbelievers in Judea. Paul seems to have expected his visit to Jerusalem to be somehow known. However how his presence and mission in Jerusalem would become public we are not told.

#### *Additional Information from Acts*

From Luke's writing we get more information of this project. In addition to the two provinces Macedonia and Achaia, Luke mentions another two, Galatia and Asia (Acts 20:4).<sup>31</sup> Acts describes how Paul operates in four Roman provinces planting churches: Galatia (Acts 13:13-14:20; 15:36-16:1-10), Asia (Acts 18:24-19:40); 20:7-38), Macedonia (Acts 16:11-17:15; 20:1-6) and Achaia (Acts 17:16-18:17). From these four provinces delegates travelled with Paul to Jerusalem, rejoining in Troas (Acts 20:4-6) – the full 'Pauline circle of churches'.

Originally Paul seems to have had intention to reach Jerusalem before Passover, but was delayed due to a plot (Acts 20:3). He therefore changed his schedule and decided to try to reach Jerusalem by Shavuot/Pentecost (Acts 20: 16). Luke's information regarding the timing could be helpful information to understand what Paul does not tell in Romans 15 about priestly service in bringing gentiles to Jerusalem as an offering (Rom 15:16). It is known that the first sheaves of barley were brought to the temple at the first festival day of Passover as a wave offering.

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<sup>30</sup> Hvalvik 'Jewish Believer', 121-153.

<sup>31</sup> From Macedonia: Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, from Galatia: Gaius from Derbe, and Timothy from Lystra, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia (Acts 20:4).

Also that Pentecost was the wheat-harvesting festival when two loafs was given in the temple as a food-offering.<sup>32</sup>

In Acts Luke presents Paul as the apostle travelling to Jerusalem as a Jewish pilgrim accompanied by gentile as well as Jewish Christians. Possibly Luke knows about the letter to the Romans, and added information concerning the collection. From Acts we do not know anything about the money, neither anything about Paul's intentions visiting Jerusalem, only that he was eager to be on time.<sup>33</sup> What then was the significance of the collection which Paul brought to Jerusalem?

### THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COLLECTION

The collection was something more than just charity, although alms in the Biblical world were a strong incitement for engagement for others.<sup>34</sup> It has been suggested that the collection was a Christian equivalent to the Jewish temple tax, but that is not likely.<sup>35</sup> It is clear that Paul differentiates between the offering which he brings to Jerusalem - the (first fruit?) of the gentiles - and the collection. The metaphorical offering of gentiles in Jerusalem is as suggested above a prophetic manifestation of the Isaiah 66. It is not difficult to imagine how the gentile converts brought to Jerusalem, even to the court of the gentiles, watching the ceremonies and processions of pilgrims with baskets on their shoulders reading Deut 26 about first fruits. Although that would be merely a symbolic attendance since they as non Jews would not be allowed to participate within the inner courts of the temple, it anyhow would be a manifestation of an eschatological fulfilling of gentiles coming to the temple in Jerusalem to pray.<sup>36</sup> Besides that, first-fruits from outside the land (*ertez Israel*) would not be accepted in the temple anyhow.

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<sup>32</sup> Safrai, "Temple", 892-893. Lev. 23:11-22; M Menaroth 10.

<sup>33</sup> According to Mishna one could be late one week (six days) with the gift.

<sup>34</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 906.

<sup>35</sup> Tellbe, 'Temple Tax', 36. Jewett, *Romans*, 928-929. Moo, *Romans*, 904 n46.

<sup>36</sup> M Bikkurim 3. Instone-Brewer, *Traditions*, 395-412. A further study would be to investigate how the gentile participation in the temple during the messianic era was perceived in contemporary Judaism.

It is most natural to assumed that the collection consisted of money (‘material’, σαρκικός, Rom 15:27). As already pointed out in the introduction, Paul seems to assume that the collection somehow should become a public manifestation. He fears the reaction from his adversaries among the nonbelievers (Rom 15:31). That implies that the delivery either was made publically (for example in the temple) or alternatively a ceremony in the church that later became known to the broad public in Jerusalem.

Beside the humanitarian aspect, the contribution signified for the donors’ dependence to the Jews. The gentile Christians acknowledged that their richness in Christ depends on the Jews (Rom 15: 27). Paul explained earlier in the letter the mechanism of that dependence. The salvation has come to the gentiles because of ‘their transgression’ and ‘richness for the world’ (Rom 11:11-12). Furthermore Israel’s rejection of the gospel leads in the present to “reconciliation of the world” (Rom 11:15). The church in Paul’s view is a continuation of the OT congregation, the *qahal* (קהל). In LXX the *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία) is identified with the *qahal*, into which the gentile Christians is ‘engrafted’ (Rom 11:17f). The church is thus supported by the Jewish roots,<sup>37</sup> rather than replacing it.<sup>38</sup>

In his letter to the Ephesians which is an example of how Paul’s theology is implemented in local churches, he shows how gentile Christians are depending on Israel. He elaborates how the gentiles have become rich through the Gospel: *Remember therefore you gentiles that you were without Messiah, citizenship in Israel and strangers to the covenants and their promises...without hope.. The two camps (Jews and gentiles) are gone in Christ, ‘the wall of separation in the temple’ is pulled down...those far away have come near and through Jesus Christ the gentiles are coheirs with us Jews and share the same body as us as well as out promises - this is the secret in Christ.*<sup>39</sup>

Clearly Paul was of the opinion that the believers lived in a continues spiritual dependence on the Jews. This is what the collection to Jerusalem aimed to express and rightfully so according to Paul (Rom 15:27). This is in fact a mutual dependence – the gentiles have a spiritual debt to the Jews, and the Jews on the other hand have material needs which the gentiles helped to meet.

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<sup>37</sup> Das, *Solving*, 259-260.

<sup>38</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*, 84, 482-483

<sup>39</sup> Paraphrase on Eph 2:11-19; 3:6-9.

The gifts were a spontaneous gift from the churches, nothing as far as we can tell imposed by Paul other than indirectly – through his teachings - but an expression of fellowship and belonging (Rom 15:26-27). It is also to be noticed that the contribution was not directed towards Jews in general - to Jews in the Diaspora - but was shipped overseas to *eretz Israel* and Jerusalem. This signals that the gentiles acknowledge Jerusalem as the focal point in God's eschatological acting. Cf. Isaiah 56:3-8; 66:18-21 Mica. 4:1-3. the word Paul chooses for the project (κοινωνία, Rom 15:25b) signals fellowship with the receivers and not just contribution of charity.<sup>40</sup> The collection is thus an act signifying Christian nearness and close fellowship with the Jewish nation.<sup>41</sup>

As already mentioned Paul gives himself an indispensable role in the expected coming event in Jerusalem. He could not be replaced with anyone else. At the same time he does not signal that this visit to Jerusalem is his last one or the collection his final. His plan was to go to Spain in order to bring in even more gentiles into the salvation, until the fullness is complete (ἄχρι οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ, Rom 11:25).

Paul had high expectations. He involved the Roman Christians to pray for success (Rom 15: 30). And somehow his future success in Spain appears to be dependent on the reception in Jerusalem. Note the two ἵνα; *so that* I will be saved (ἵνα ῥυθθῶ, Rom 15:31a) *so that* I can come with joy (ἵνα ἐν χαρᾷ ἐλθῶν, Rom 15:32a).<sup>42</sup>

It is likely that Paul sees his visit to Jerusalem in perspective of Isaiah 66:18-20 which he reads as a Midrash on his own prophetic mission.<sup>43</sup> That helps to explain how the 'offering of gentiles' and 'the collection' relate to each other. In Isaiah 66 'all nations and tongues' (v.18) shall be drawn to Jerusalem like an offering to the Lord (v.20), similarly to the first fruits (? offering, מִנְחָה) which Israel brings to the

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<sup>40</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 929.

<sup>41</sup> This sensitivity towards the 'source nation' of Christian faith (later abandoned!) could be compared to the 'overtake' of deities like Mithras, Isis, Osiris by other peoples.

<sup>42</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 880.

<sup>43</sup> Hultgren, 'Foundations', 32-33. Murray, *Romans*, 210-211. Cf. his reference to the Prophets in Rom 16:26.

temple.<sup>44</sup> The gentile Christians – made priests and Levites (v.21), thus accepted in God’s *ekklesia* - are themselves the offering to the Lord represented through the delegates mentioned by Luke (Acts 20:4). At the same time they are bringing alms to Jerusalem which is the collection to the poor.

This helps to explain why the trip to Jerusalem was so essential to Paul. As a prophetic scenario it takes place in the eschatological atmosphere of oracles like Isaiah 2:2f, and Mica 4:1f. In this Paul sees himself as personally having a role to play in a priestly mission (Rom 15:16). Naturally such a visit to Jerusalem must be prioritized: Rome can wait!

In perspective of a visit to Jerusalem with such a dignity, it is understandable that Paul feared that something could go wrong (Rom 15:31), something that could jeopardize the whole enterprise! Paul had a burden for his own people (Rom 9:1-3). They are the people of the covenant, although not saved (Rom 9: 4-5; 11:28-29). In Paul’s mind the gentiles have a decisive role to play in the salvation of Israel (Rom 11:11, 14). If Paul was expecting the realization of this vision at his coming to Jerusalem, it is of vital importance that the collection rather will stir up jealousy on the gentiles for the sake of the Gospel (Rom 11:11, 14), than have a genitive impact. This backdrop to Paul’s request for prayer support from Rome makes sense. The capital of the Empire of Rome was called in to contribute as a crucial moment appears in God’s salvation history.

At the background of this scenario the time has come to seek the identification of the group to whom this ecumenical collection was aimed.

#### *The receivers of the donation*

Different suggestions are given to the identification of the ‘saints’ in Jerusalem (Rom 15:31), and ‘the poor among the saints in Jerusalem’ (εἰς τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῶν ἁγίων τῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ, Rom 15:25b-26).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Shulam, *Romans*, 503, suggests that the expression to ‘seal this fruit’ (σφραγισάμενος αὐτοῖς τὸν καρπὸν τοῦτου, Rom 15:28) should be understood as a contribution to the temple. Paul mentions offering and giving alms in the temple (Acts 24:17). But that does not clearly refer to the collection. See discussion in Witherington, *Acts*, 712.

<sup>45</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 927 suggests that the expression διακονῶν τοῖς ἁγίοις in Rom 15:25b, is a short form for ἡ διακονία ἢ εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους.

1. It has been pointed out that the expression ‘poor’ (πτωχός) not necessarily has a social and economic ring, but rather a spiritual, similar to the meaning of ‘poor in the spirit’ (οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, Matt 5:3).<sup>46</sup> In DDS the expression *congregation of the poor* occurs (עדת האביונים, 4Q171, col II,10). In this religious sense the poor is the pious, an honorific title of those dependent on the Lord, and thus spiritually rich (Ps 40:17, MT v.18). Similarly the church of the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem has been suggested as the Poor of Lord.<sup>47</sup> For the collection focus falls on solidarity.
2. If the ‘the poor’ is understood in the economic sense, there are two options. Either (a) the saints in Jerusalem are identical with the congregation of those who follow Jesus, and all living under poor conditions.<sup>48</sup> These poor saints are not self supportive but dependent on aid.<sup>49</sup> In this case ‘saint’ and ‘poor’ are synonyms. Or (b) the poor are understood as a sub group within the congregation, the poor *among* the holy in Jerusalem’ (partitive genitive). Not all were poor, but these poor need helped from donors. In both cases the collection focuses on social and economic relief.

Why would a) an economical contribution to a local church become public, and b) how could an intra congregational gift become so controversial? There is a possible solution to these issues.

3. Joseph Shulam presents the challenging suggestion, that the collection was directed, not specifically to the congregation of Jesus followers in Jerusalem, but to the poor population of Jerusalem in general.<sup>50</sup> According to Shulam the collection was intended for the socially poor population of Israel – not

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<sup>46</sup> Hengel, *Earliest*, 118, 167.

<sup>47</sup> This sense of the word ‘poor’ probably explains why a branch of ‘Jewish Christians’ named themselves ‘Ebionites’. Pritz, *Nazarene*, 9-10, Skarsaune, ‘Ebionites’, 419-462.

<sup>48</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 903-904.

<sup>49</sup> This is the meaning of ‘poor’, not being able to support one’s own life. It is rather the issue of independence than the amount of material good someone possesses.

<sup>50</sup> Shulam, *Romans*, 501.

*per se* the poor among the Jesus believers. He suggests that the collection was donated to the temple.<sup>51</sup>

Shulam reasons that ‘the poor of the saints’ (Rom 15:26) are identified with the ‘saint’ in the Tanach as well as in second temple period Jewish literature, the Jewish people as such. The collection was aimed to the poor part of the population, an unconditional act of love. True love does not ask ‘who’, but respond to an act of grace: gentiles have received grace from God from the Jewish people. Now they ‘pay back’ some in gratitude. Shulam sees a confirmation in this reasoning in Paul’s cryptic expression ‘sealing this fruit’, σφραγισάμενος τὸν καρπὸν τοῦτον (Rom 15:28). There are various interpretations of this metaphor.<sup>52</sup> Shulam suggests that it means to transfer the currency of the collection into the currency of the Temple.<sup>53</sup> According to M Shekalim 5:3, there were four kinds of seals in the Temple, used by the assigned person when he received payment for offerings. This takes Shulam to the conclusion that the collection was deposited in the temple and intended for the poor general population in Jerusalem. This would explain why the collection would become known by unbelievers and thus in some sense public, which Paul assumes (Rom 15:31).

There is nothing unlikely about Paul ministering to his own people and showing it love. Nowhere in his letters has he signaled hostility from the Jewish people *per se*, nor that he himself was hesitant towards the Jewish society.<sup>54</sup> This is confirmed in Luke’s telling about the reaction of his in Jerusalem, as it is rather the mob stirred up by Jews from Asia the Diaspora (Acts 21:27) that causes Paul troubles – not the

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<sup>51</sup> M Shekalim 6, 1 mentions thirteen chests in the temple where money could be donated. The opening of these ‘poor-boxes’ had the shape of a shofar, broad at the bottom and narrow at the top so that nothing could be taken out from them.

<sup>52</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 931-932.

<sup>53</sup> Shulam, *Romans*, 502-503. According to M Shekalim 5:2 there were three treasures, funds in the Temple, with seven supervisors.

<sup>54</sup> Neither Paul’s harsh words in 1Thess 14-16, nor the effect of the way he was treated by his countrymen which he mentions in 2 Cor 11:24-25, makes him anti-Semitic.

authorities. It should be admitted that Luke does report how emotions rose against Paul in Jerusalem, however the picture is complex and the attitudes diverse.<sup>55</sup>

However, how could it be explained that Paul suddenly by ‘saint’ (ἅγιος) refers to Jews in general, when he always elsewhere uses it for believers in Jesus, whether Jews or gentiles. The word ἅγιος have the same reference in 1 Cor 16:1; 2Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12 as in Rom 15:25, 31. There is no clear example that he uses it with references to Jews in general – only believers in Jesus.<sup>56</sup>

### POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS ON UNITY AND IDENTITY IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

I will now summarize the discussion and give some concluding reflections on the questions regarding the purpose for the collection to the poor in Jerusalem, and why it was prioritized by Paul. What implications did the collection have for the identity of earliest Christianity, and which aspects of unity are noticeable within the Christian movement through the logistics of the collection?

#### *Unity*

Beginning with the unity, the collection as a joint enterprise, show that there were on various levels an awareness of the existence of other Christian churches in cities, districts, provinces and regions. The collection as a project covering big geographical areas presumes some interconnection between the involved Christian communities. They did not only know about other Christians, but also enough about their ideological motivation as well as willingness to cooperate, that efforts to initiate a contribution to Jerusalem would be worthwhile. The very participation in

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<sup>55</sup> From Luke’s reports in Acts we know that Paul had enemies (Acts 23:12ff.). However, the authorities were split, the Sanhedrin were not *per se* against him (Acts 23), as was high priest Ananias (Acts 24:1-9). Felix was rather indifferent (Acts 24:10ff), Festus was quite sympathetic (Acts 25:11), so also king Agrippa (Acts 25:25). The Jewish leaders in Rom had not heard anything bad about Paul (Acts 28:21-25).

<sup>56</sup> The word ‘saint’ (ἅγιος) occurs in Rom 16:15 referring to Christians in Rome; 1Cor 1:2, believers in Corinth, as well as in 6:1-2; 14:33; 2Cor 1:1; 13:13; Eph. 1:1, 15; 4:12; 5:3; Phil 1:1; 4:21, 22; Col. 1:2; Phil. V.5, and 7. Eph. 1:18 and 6:18 are ambivalent as ‘saint’ here could well refer to Jews – definitely Jewish believers. So also in Eph. 3:8, and most probably in Eph. 3:18. For non Biblical references see Witherington, *Romans*, 365.

the project makes it clear that financial resources and logistic abilities did exist within Christian congregations.

Four levels of partnership can be presumed on the basis of how churches were related to each other: local, regional, provincial, and towards Jerusalem. See figure.

The collection was an expression of fellowship between Jesus' followers in four Roman provinces; those areas were Paul so far had been operating. They sensed being part of a movement not only of universal dimensions, but also engaged in events with eschatological connotations – by bricks in God's drama of Salvation History on behalf of gentile Christianity expressing appreciation and relationship towards the Jewish nation.

### *Identity*

The experience of being part of Salvation History is closely linked to the identity which the collection mirrors. From an ecclesiological point of view a local Christian church in Paul's understanding was part of not only the universal Church, but also something even bigger – The Salvation History. The *ekklesia* is not an entity isolated from Israel and the Jewish people as it owes its origin, present existence and future to Israel. The collection was a sign to the Christians and proof to the Jews of loyalty and dependence. Gentiles have nothing when it comes to salvation; they owe everything to Israel (πνευματικός, Rom 15:27). Gentile Christians do not constitute the church on their own premises. Rather the Jews share the covenant promises fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth with the gentiles (Eph. 2: 18-19). This togetherness expressed through the collection to the saints, carried by Paul in a priestly mission to Jerusalem with gentiles as an offering to the Lord, was a contribution to the future. This offering of gentiles (Rom 15:16) as a part of the 'fullness of the gentiles' (Rom 11:25) which in a process which will bring about the *parousia* of Jesus.

Regarding the purpose for Paul going to Jerusalem with the collection, and his expectations of its impact, my conclusion is that Paul is not clear enough. We cannot tell from his letter to the Romans the details and full meaning of the collection to the poor in Jerusalem. Probably he saw his mission in the light of Isaiah 66 as a bringing in of a partial harvest of gentiles to the Temple. However, the eventual mechanisms, how eventually a monetary gift would effect in jealousy, nor where (in James' house or in the temple) or exactly to whom (James and the

elders in the Jerusalem church, or to the Sanhedrin) the gift should be handed over to, is not clear from the text. It should be noted that Paul in Rom 15:31 describes the alms in more general terms as ‘my ministry which is for Jerusalem’ (ἡ διακονία μου ἢ εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ), compared to Rom 15:26, which says ‘to poor among the holy in Jerusalem’ (εἰς τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῶν ἁγίων τῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ). This difference could signify two slightly different meanings, that a part of the money was donated to the congregation of believers, and another part to the temple for the general population.

What we know for sure is that the collection expressed gratitude from gentiles to the people of Israel for sharing in the salvation through Christ; that they as gentiles are dependent on the Jews; that they are committed to fellowship with Jerusalem; and that this act of compassion for poor is a true Christian attitude of love.

If Paul did deliver the collection to the Temple in Jerusalem in a public and official ceremony, that would make sense to the alluding to Isaiah 66:18-21. This would also explain why it was so important for him to be present in Jerusalem that he postponed the trip to Spain. After all he was coming in a priestly ministry bringing the (possibly the first fruits of the) gentiles from Diaspora to the holy mountain in Jerusalem. Furthermore it would help understanding how a success in Jerusalem would add blessings at his arrival in Rome (Rom 15:32); an acceptance of Jesus in Jerusalem would release further blessings to the gentiles (Rom 11: 12, 15).

However, what makes me hesitant that the collection was intended for Jews in general in Jerusalem, is not that it would be impossible to think of Paul ministering Jews other than believers - clearly he ministered to Jews (Rom 1:14-16; Acts 24:17). Nor would he be unable to address non believing Jews as ‘saints’ - although Rom 15:31 in that case would stand out as an exception. After all he did not hesitate to describe Jews in general as ‘God’s Israel’ (Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ, Gal 6:16).<sup>57</sup> Rather what makes me unsure is that the text appears too thin to make a decisive judgment. I would not be surprised however if Paul from his present high position looks down signaling affirmative to such a reading!

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### APPENDIX

Levels of networking between churches in the middle of the first century CE.

