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Obstacles on All Sides: Paul’s Collection for the Saints in Jerusalem

Part 2

Christoph Stenschke

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der erste Teil dieses Aufsatzes, der im Europäischen Theologischen Zeitschrift 24.1 (2015) veröffentlicht wurde, stellte die Sammlung des Paulus für die Heiligen in Jerusalem in Bezug zu seiner Biographie und erörterte kurz den Ursprung und den Fortschritt dieser Sammlung. Er untersuchte detailliert fünf Hindernisse, die seitens der heidenchristlichen Geber zu überwinden waren (besonders auf Seiten der Korinther), und die Antwort des Paulus auf jedes von ihnen. Die Heidenchristen mussten ihr Verständnis von einer Wohltätigkeit korrigieren, die *ortsansässigen* Mäzenen und *lokalen* Ehrenvorstellungen dient, sowie den in der Antike vorherrschenden Antijudaismus. Außerdem war die Beziehung von Paulus zu den Korinthern gespannt, und es gab einflussreiche Gegenspieler in und außerhalb der Gemeinde. Durch seine Aufforderung an die Korinther, sich zu beteiligen schien Paulus auch eine scharfe Kehrtwende in seiner Finanzpolitik gegenüber den Korinthern vorzunehmen, die einer Erklärung bedurfte. Zudem mag es vorherige, anderweitige finanzielle Verpflichtungen der Korinther

gegeben haben, die zu ihrer widerstrebenden Haltung führten, an einem weiteren Projekt teilzunehmen. Es wird deutlich, dass die Versöhnung, die Paulus durch die Sammlung anstrebte, mit einem hohen Preis für die heidenchristlichen Geber verbunden war.

Teil zwei untersucht nun die Hindernisse auf Seiten der Empfänger der Sammlung in Jerusalem sowie die vermutliche Antwort des Paulus an sie, soweit sie rekonstruiert werden kann. Darüber hinaus erörtert er die Hürden seitens Paulus und wie er diese anging oder ignorierte. Eine Versöhnung kostete sowohl den Empfängern als auch Paulus selbst einen hohen Preis. Die Sammlung beanspruchte mehrere Jahre im Leben von Paulus, und wir wissen nicht, ob sie schlussendlich erfolgreich verlief. Die Judenchristen in Jerusalem waren sehr misstrauisch den Heidenchristen gegenüber. Der Aufsatz greift auf Paulus’ Römerbrief zurück, um die fraglichen Anliegen zwischen den an Christus Gläubigen jüdischer und heidnischer Herkunft zu klären. Der letzte Abschnitt bringt eine Zusammenfassung und zieht daraus Schlussfolgerungen für den Dienst der Versöhnung in der Welt von heute.

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RÉSUMÉ

La première partie de cet article, parue dans le *Journal Européen de Théologie* 24:1 (2015), situait la collecte organisée par Paul en faveur des saints de Jérusalem dans le contexte de la vie de l’apôtre et exposait brièvement sa raison d’être et sa mise en œuvre. L’auteur considérait en détail cinq obstacles que l’apôtre devait surmonter du côté des donateurs pagano-chrétiens (en particulier les Corinthiens) et comment il y a fait face. Il lui fallait amener ces chrétiens d’origine païenne à aller au-delà de leur conception de la bienfaisance comme un service de leur cité attirant honneur publique, et à dépasser les sentiments anti-juifs qui prévalaient dans le monde d’alors. En outre, les relations de Paul avec les chrétiens

de Corinthe étaient tendues et il avait des adversaires influents, à la fois à l’intérieur et à l’extérieur de leur communauté. En demandant aux chrétiens de Corinthe une participation à la collecte, Paul paraissait aussi changer considérablement de politique en matière financière et cela appelait des explications. Il est aussi possible que ces chrétiens aient déjà pris d’autres engagements financiers, ce qui pouvait les rendre hésitants à contribuer à un nouveau projet. Ainsi, la réconciliation que Paul cherchait à produire en organisant la collecte paraissait avoir un coût élevé pour les donateurs pagano-chrétiens.

Dans la seconde partie, l’auteur considère les obstacles qui existaient du côté des destinataires de la collecte à Jérusalem et comment Paul a dû y faire face, pour autant que l’on puisse le déterminer. Il traite encore

des obstacles qu'il pouvait y avoir du côté de Paul lui-même et comment il les a surmontés ou ignorés. La réconciliation avait aussi un coût élevé à la fois pour les bénéficiaires de la collecte et pour Paul lui-même. Cette entreprise a occupé plusieurs années de la vie de l'apôtre et nous ignorons si elle a été finalement couronnée de succès. Les chrétiens juifs de Jérusalem avaient

de grandes suspicions à l'égard des chrétiens d'origine païenne. L'auteur s'appuie sur l'épître aux Romains pour éclairer les problèmes qui pouvaient se poser entre chrétiens d'origine juive et chrétiens d'origine païenne. Pour conclure, il propose quelques implications pour le ministère de réconciliation dans le monde actuel.

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SUMMARY

The first part of this essay, published in *European Journal of Theology* 24.1 (2015), placed Paul's collection for the saints in Jerusalem in the context of his biography and briefly discussed its origin and development. It examined in detail five obstacles that had to be overcome on the side of the Gentile Christian donors (in particular the Corinthians) and Paul's response to each of them. The Gentile Christians had to overcome their understanding of benefaction as serving *local* patronage and *local* honour and the prevalent anti-Judaism of the ancient world. In addition, Paul's relationship with the Corinthians was strained and there were influential opponents within the community and from the outside. In demanding the Corinthians to participate, Paul also seemed to deviate sharply from his previous financial policy with regard to the Corinthians, which needed explanation. There may also have been previous other financial engagements of

the Corinthians that made them reluctant to participate in another project. It becomes clear that the reconciliation which Paul sought to procure through the collection came at a high price for the Gentile Christian donors.

Part two now examines the obstacles on the side of the recipients of the collection in Jerusalem and Paul's likely response to them as far as it can be reconstructed. In addition, it discusses the obstacles on Paul's side and how he addressed or neglected them. Both for the recipients and for Paul himself, reconciliation came at a high price. The collection took several years of Paul's life and we do not know if it was ultimately successful. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were highly suspicious of the Gentile Christians. The essay makes use of Paul's Epistle to the Romans to clarify the issues at stake between Christians from Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. The final section of the essay provides a summary and draws out some of the implications for the ministry of reconciliation in today's world.

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4.1 Obstacles on the side of the recipients in Jerusalem

Only in Romans 15 does Paul write in more detail about the recipients of the collection. Only there does Paul voice doubts as to the actual acceptance of the collection: 'and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints' (15:31). Up to that point Paul appears to have been confident as to the benefits for both sides and the welcome and acceptance which the collection and its delegates would receive in Jerusalem (see 2 Cor 9:14, 'while the Christians of Jerusalem long and pray for you ...'). What obstacles to reconciliation were there on the side of the Christians of Jerusalem?

For them to accept the donation and – with the sum of money – also its donors meant – at least for Paul – the full recognition of these Gentiles as part of the people of God *as Gentiles*. (They had not become proselytes and had no intention of doing so.) In view of the massive Jewish prejudices against Gentiles in general,¹ some of which were based on the Scriptures and history of Israel,

accepting these Gentile Christians was a tremendous challenge and obstacle to reconciliation.

Apparently Paul planned to stage the delivery of the collection carefully:² not only he would be present, but also the delegates and representatives of the Gentile Christian churches of various regions. The delegation probably consisted of the people listed in Acts 20:4: Paul 'was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Beroea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by Gaius from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia'. Probably others were also involved.³

By accepting the collection, the Christians of Jerusalem would not only express their bond with the Jewish Diaspora and Jewish-Christian communities outside of Jerusalem (there is no evidence of this ever being problematic) but they would also accept the predominantly Gentile Christian donating churches with their drastically reduced observance of the law (according to Acts 15), and Paul and his disputed gospel. In accepting gift and givers, they would establish and express their bond

with the Gentile Christians as legitimate partakers in God's salvation for Israel. This step would require a *radical revision* of their estimate of Gentiles and the courage to read their Scripture in a new way or to jettison some of its regulations. This would probably also imply a *relegation of ancient Jewish privileges on their part* – see the objections voiced in Acts 11:1–18 and the demands that were made by some Christians of Jerusalem on the Gentile Christians of Antioch in Acts 15:1–29.

All this was to happen in Jerusalem and would probably not remain an inner-Christian matter but become a public act.⁴ Jews who would be seen as relativising Jewish privileges in this way and who accepted Gentiles as Gentiles into the people of God could count on resistance and criticism from their fellow Jews⁵ in a politically increasingly tense climate in the approximately twenty-five years leading up to the first Jewish war (A.D. 66–73). This was the time of increasing zealotism. Later on the *sicarii* (a particularly radical group) secretly killed those suspected of collaborating with the Gentile Roman occupants of Israel.⁶

This historical context is worth considering. We summarise its excellent description by Bo Reicke. Reservations against Gentiles were already strong in the forties of the first century. Reicke writes regarding the persecution of Christians through Herod Agrippa I in Acts 12:

this persecution of James about 42 A.D. was due to a feeling of prosperity and expansion among the Jews, which made them want to repress all elements that seemed alien to the nation. The removal of the leading Apostles, James I and Peter, was an attempt to cripple a movement that by now had many associations with Hellenism.⁷

When the land came under direct Roman control after the death of Herod Agrippa in 44 A.D., there was a strong and prolonged Jewish response:

The surprisingly violent Jewish reaction was more likely due to the political situation. The glory of Herod's kingdom, restored according to strict religious principles under Agrippa I, had suddenly to vanish. From the very outset, therefore, the Jews detested their new guardians. To this anger must be added the turbulent struggle between Greek and Jewish culture. About 50, Claudius had the Jews banished from Rome. In 52, however, he took the part of the Jews in the East against the Greeks. After the year 54, the world had in Nero an aggress-

sively Hellenistic ruler. The Jewish nationalists gradually developed a burning hatred of foreign domination. Aristocratic patriots on the one hand and demagogic Zealots on the other set the mood and gradually succeeded in inciting the population to rebel. ... Zealotism led to all kinds of complications, not only for the Greek residents and the Roman authorities, but also for the Christian congregations. For the church, the period of the second procuratorship bore a double stamp: on the one hand, the loyalty to Israel of James II; and on the other, the Gentile mission of Paul. Theological and personal differences hardly suffice to explain this polarity; *we must rather examine the historical circumstances under which the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians lived.*⁸

Reicke traces the development of this Jewish struggle against Hellenistic and Roman culture and power. In this struggle each Jewish success encouraged the patriots and zealots into further action.⁹ Thus already in the year 54 – two years before the visit of Paul and his delegation – ‘hosts of Zealots stood ready to intervene against foreigners and enemies’.¹⁰

In this political context, the church in Jerusalem faced different challenges:

... two opposing forces dominated the apostolic church. Loyalty to the Jews, conscious of their role as God's chosen people; love for the nations, which were interpreted as standing in need of salvation. These interests were represented characteristically, though not exclusively, by two Apostles, the one a leader in Jerusalem, the other in the mission field. These were James II, the brother of the Lord, and Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. Their life and work reflect the political and ethnic problems of the period.

Despite the Zealot movement, the church thought it theologically and politically important to maintain a positive relationship with Jerusalem and Judaism, until the martyrdom of James in 62, the growth of terrorism, and the first Jewish War finally forced a break with organized Judaism. This long association elucidated the connection between the Old and the New Covenant. It also facilitated the conversion of Jews and the growth of the Christian Community in the Roman Empire, where, from the time of Caesar to that of Nero, the prohibition of associations did not apply to the Jews and therefore also not to the Christians.¹¹

These developments also affected the Christian community of Jerusalem. In the words of Reicke:

Since in the fifties the nationalism and Jerusalem-centred politics of these circles could easily lead to Christian involvement in the Jewish Zealot turmoil, Paul spoke not theoretically but on the basis of painful experience when he wrote ... to the Romans in 58: in the first part, he warns against pride in the Jewish law (Rom 2:17–29); in the second, he urges obedience to the Roman government (Rom 13:1–7) and rejects combativeness and ‘zeal’ (Rom 13:13). Soon afterward, in Jerusalem, he was forced to discover that thousands of Jews who belonged to the church were also zealous for the law (Acts 21:20).¹²

Reicke also explains why Gentile money would have been welcome to the Christian community of Jerusalem earlier on when Paul and Barnabas were charged to (continue to) remember the poor (Gal 2:9f) and how this changed soon thereafter:

The historical background, however, must not be overlooked: the year of the Council, 49, was preceded by the years 44–48, a period of political calm but economic crisis. There was little fear of Jewish reprisals against the church on account of its Hellenistic ties; aid from abroad, however, like that now to be undertaken by Barnabas and Paul (Gal 2:10), was all the more welcome. After the Council, from the year 50, the pressure of Judaism increased once more, help from abroad no longer appeared necessary. ... As a consequence, the agreement of the Apostolic Council, despite ecumenical ideals, remained a product of peculiar circumstances.

The political events of the following years made it rather impossible for the ‘pillars’ in Jerusalem to maintain an ecumenical attitude, because the Hellenistic mission of the church exposed it once more and in greater degree to the Judaism of the Zealots.¹³

It is not clear whether Paul was aware of all the implications which his arrival with a larger group of Gentile Christians, a larger sum of money of Gentile origin¹⁴ and the requested acceptance of the collection could have for the Christians of Jerusalem within the framework of the inner Jewish disputes regarding Gentiles now under different circumstances in the fifties of the first century A.D.¹⁵ Klaus Haacker writes regarding the implications of the collection for the Christians of Jerusalem:

Die Annahme der Spenden wäre ein Akt der Anerkennung der von Paulus gegründeten Gemeinden, weil die Kollektenaktion ein Teil der Einigung beim ‘Apostelkonzil’ gewesen war. ... Mit der Annahme oder Ablehnung der heidenchristlichen Spenden hatte die Gemeinde von Jerusalem also eine Entscheidung in einem aktuellen innerjüdischen Streit zu fällen; sie konnte sich dabei Sympathien im Volk verschmerzen oder musste sogar mit Repressalien von Seiten der Sikarier rechnen. Dass Paulus eine ablehnende Entscheidung der ‘Heiligen’ für denkbar hält, bedeutet, dass er mit einem erheblichen Einfluß radikaler Kräfte unter den Judenchristen des Mutterlandes rechnet.¹⁶

On the situation in the Jerusalem church immediately prior to the arrival of Paul, Murphy O’Connor argues that we need to remember that James had asked Paul for financial help for his church:

Not only was that request no more than five years old, but Paul’s response must have become a subject of continual discussion. At the time of the Jerusalem Conference in the autumn of AD 51, a financial contribution from Gentile believers seemed like a reasonable *quid pro quo* for Jerusalem’s concession on circumcision, and no doubt would have been proclaimed as such to the church by the three Pillars. But as Paul’s radically antinomian stance became known in an ever more nationalistic Jerusalem church, there must have been those who insisted that they would accept nothing from hands so soiled. ... Others, more pragmatically, would have asserted that money has no smell, that it was necessary, and that it could be used to good ends without accepting Paul’s interpretation that it constituted a bond between the Jewish and Gentile churches. The final decision was up to James, but why should he endanger his authority by taking sides on a purely hypothetical problem? If and when the money arrived, which was not at all guaranteed, would [*sic*] be time enough to make up his mind.¹⁷

Murphy O’Connor also observes that

In principle Jews had no compunction about accepting gifts from Gentiles. Not only had the Temple been graced by the donations of foreigners, but the implication of Leviticus 22:25 that Gentiles could offer sacrifices in the Temple is well documented by Josephus. ... As relations with Rome deteriorated, however, such pagan participation in the Jewish cult became progres-

sively less acceptable to the more extreme elements. The climax came in AD 66. ... It is only in this political context that Paul's apprehension regarding the reception of the collection becomes understandable. He had experienced James' nationalistic attitude both positively (Gal 2:3) and negatively (Gal 2:12), and was well aware that a gesture which could be understood as forging a bond with Gentiles might meet with a rebuff. Paul could not be sure, however, because he did not know how much the Jerusalem Community needed the money.¹⁸

In addition to these political reasons, one should also note that already in the Old Testament not all money was acceptable for use in religious contexts. For example, the wages for male or female prostitution could not be used to redeem vows (Deut 23:18).¹⁹ The thirty pieces of silver which were returned by Judas Iscariot were not put back into the temple treasury since they were blood money (Mt 27:5–7). Towards the end of the history of Israel in the Bible, Nehemiah left no doubt that Gentiles would have no share or claim or historic right in Jerusalem (2:20).

4.2 Paul's response

In contrast to addressing and overcoming the obstacles in Corinth, Paul did not, as far as we know – in advance to the delivery of the collection – address the recipients in Jerusalem directly. He wrote to the *Romans* to explain to them why he is venturing east once more before eventually coming to them. He also requests their prayer support for the impending journey to Jerusalem. Thus we do not have any direct information. However, it is safe to assume that at least some of what Paul wrote to the Romans would also have been on his agenda for his impending visit to Jerusalem and for all the challenges involved in the delivery of the collection.²⁰ Some scholars (e.g. G. Bornkamm, J. Jervell and U. Wilckens) even suggested that the church in Jerusalem is the second, secret or inner addressee of the letter to the Romans anyway. Says Wilckens: 'Thus automatically and at the same time Romans takes the shape of a preparation of Paul's speech of defence in Jerusalem.'²¹

All of Romans 1:15–11:36 can be read as a preparation, theological justification and defence of Paul's collection mentioned in Romans 15.²² This case has been argued by Jacob Jervell:

The essential and primary content of Romans

(1:18–11:36) is a reflection upon its major content, the 'collection speech', or more precisely, the defence which Paul plans to give before the church in Jerusalem. To put it another way: Paul sets forth and explains what he, as the bearer of the collection given by the Gentiles for the mother congregation in Jerusalem, intends to say so that he as well as the gift will not be rejected.²³

While probably exaggerated, the letter to the Romans gives a number of clues as to Paul's probable argument on why the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem should accept the collection and their Gentile Christian brothers and sisters – despite severe obstacles. A brief survey has to suffice:

While Paul leaves no doubt about the state of Gentiles before coming to faith in Romans 1:18–32, he also notes in chapter 2 that the Jews have not used the privileges they had. At the end of this chapter, Paul relativises Jewish identity and privileges considerably. All people have failed and need justification by grace. This shared need for salvation unites Jews and Gentiles (ch. 3). Abraham is not only the patriarch and founding father of Israel but also of believing Gentile Christians (ch. 4). In chapter 5, Christ is compared to Adam, the first human being and origin of all humans. While the Law, spiritual and good, was Israel's treasured possession and privilege over the 'lawless' nations, it proved insufficient against the power of sin and the human flesh (ch. 7). The Law, the document of Israel's election and basis for her separation from the nations, has now come to an end in Christ (10:4). The crucial difference is made by association with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, expressed in baptism (Rom 6) and by living in the Spirit (8:1–18). Both options are open to Jews and Gentiles alike.

In Romans 9–11, Paul, on the one hand, affirms the special status and privileges of Israel and shares an eschatological promise that no other people enjoy. He leaves no doubt as to the *Jewish* nature of the Gospel²⁴ but on the other hand he relativises the status of Israel by showing that Jews need salvation as much as Gentiles do: all are under sin (chs. 1–3). Paul's reference to the collection is not surprising after his exposition about the lasting significance of Israel, of the Jewish Christians and of the future significance of Jerusalem ('Out of Zion will come the Deliverer ...', 11:26) and in view of his repeated affirmation of his own deep bond with Israel.

The Christians of Jerusalem can be assured that Paul has reminded the Gentile Christians of their ignominious past and surprising present status (wild shoots grafted into the rich root of the olive tree to replace the noble branches which for a limited period had been broken off because of their unbelief, 11:17, 20) and of their need to persevere in the faith (11:20: 'So do not become proud but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you'). The Gentile Christians who send their gifts to Jerusalem are truly believers, indeed children of Abraham and part of the people of God, although by faith only (Rom 4). Like Abraham, they were justified by faith without circumcision.

Paul also points out that all Christians are called to 'contribute to the needs of the saints' (12:13; there are also needy people in Rome). If love is the fulfilment of the Law according to Romans 13:8-10, then the Gentile Christians who participate in the collection are actually fulfilling the law.

In Romans 14 Paul argues for mutual tolerance in the congregations of Rome. There is to be no room for contempt or passing of judgement on each other. The 'strong', probably predominantly Gentile Christians, must limit their freedom for the sake of others so that the 'weak' – probably mainly Jewish Christians – may hold on to and practice what they cherish (Rom 14:2, 5, 21).²⁵ Therefore, there is no need to be worried by the influx of Gentile Christians into the people of God. Paul holds that those who wish to follow certain aspects of the law must be respected.

In Romans 15, Paul presents an exclusively *theological* rationale for the collection.

Yet his reference to the collection in this chapter is also important for the portrait that he paints of himself in Romans. It is a sign of his high appreciation and continuing concern for the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem. While he has up to now ministered in a wide circular movement from Jerusalem as far around as Illyricum (15:19) and while his attention now moves even further west, he has not forgotten the Christians of Jerusalem. His affirmations of the salvation-historical priority of Israel (and his wider salvation historical argument in Rom 1:1–15:13) and of his loyalty to Israel in Rom 9–11 were not a mere *theologoumenon* or mere rhetoric, but are supported by concrete action, as Paul also demands of the Roman Christians (15:24).

His efforts in the collection also show that despite the resistance which Paul faced from

Christians who appealed to Jerusalem, he is willing to go there and to face potential reservations and criticism of him (the same applies to his visit in Rome). Despite his later request for prayer support in this matter, Paul probably implies that he is welcome in Jerusalem. His opponents cannot claim the authority of Jerusalem for their case against Paul. While Paul betrays his agreement with the position of the 'strong' in Rome (14:20, 22; 15:1, without pushing this position and also defending the legitimacy of the position of the 'weak'), Paul has in no way broken with Judaism or its heartland.²⁶

Far more than a sharing of resources was involved:²⁷ the Gentiles have come to share in the spiritual blessings of the Jewish Christians, therefore they also ought to be of service to them in material things (15:27). Such service is not optional, but its necessity follows from the salvation-historical priority of Israel and the factual course of the early Christian mission in which the Gentiles received the Gospel through Jewish Christians. Like Christ himself (see 2 Cor 8:9), the Jewish Christians impoverished themselves by sharing with the Gentiles, by using their resources in order that the Gentiles would become rich. Through their contribution to the collection – obviously with some strong nudging by Paul! – the Gentile Christian communities acknowledge the origin of God's salvation and of the gospel in Israel.²⁸ Therefore, Jewish Christians should accept and honour what God has done among the nations (through Jewish Christian missionaries like Paul) rather than side with unbelieving Jews in their rejection of Gentile Christians. Now it is up to Jerusalem to acknowledge them.

All of the Epistle to the Romans can be read as an exercise in honouring the Jews and putting the Gentiles in their salvation historical place, particularly against the backdrop of the claims of the Roman Empire. This aim is achieved by affirming the Jewish Christians and by reminding the Gentile Christians that they are God's 'second choice' (see above). If this strategy also applies to his impending visit to Jerusalem, Paul will see to it that the recipients in Jerusalem will not be humiliated by their needy state²⁹ or shamed by having to receive this gift from the Gentiles. In this way there will be no dependency on the side of the Jewish Christians. In creation and salvation God is the ultimate benefactor of Jews and Gentiles alike.³⁰ Both the donors and recipients in this collection have tremendously benefited from the

manifold gifts of God. In comparison to these, all human gifts – be they given or received – are insignificant. Therefore there is to be equality between givers and recipients rather than inequality.

5.1 Obstacles on the side of Paul

Paul himself had overcome the reservations that some Jewish Christians still harboured against Gentile Christians being part of the people of God *as Gentiles*. He had developed a new vision on Jewish election and identity as well as its preservation in a Gentile world.³¹ He had also worked hard for the collection. Murphy O'Connor notes that by AD 55 Paul had already spent four years on the collection enterprise. He was willing to venture east once more although he considered his ministry there completed and his eyes were firmly set on new tasks in the West (Rom 15:18-32). Yet Paul

could not just breeze in, make contact with the Corinthian delegation, and leave for Jerusalem. Despite his optimistic words in 2 Corinthians 7:5-16, he was fully aware that the re-establishment of relations with the church left a number of serious problems unresolved. An extended stay was imperative. ... The more he reflected, the clearer it became that he would have to spend the winter of AD 55–56 in Corinth.³²

In addition, a number of his co-workers were involved (2 Cor 8–9). He was also fully aware of the dangers involved in travelling to Jerusalem³³ and Judea, and even asks the Romans to join him in earnest prayer that he may be 'rescued from the unbelievers in Judea' (15:31).³⁴ And shortly before departing to Jerusalem, Paul was aware that the collection might not be accepted by the recipients (see above).

The logistic side of the collection posed the challenge of bringing the delegates together at one specific time and place and then leading this larger group on the way to Jerusalem. Garland describes some of the challenges involved in the actual transport of money to Jerusalem:

If a large amount were collected, a larger number of couriers would be required to transport it. The security of the funds would have been a major issue, and Paul assumes that there is safety in numbers. He could not hire an armored chariot to transfer the funds! ... Pack animals would have invited the unwanted attention of bandits who controlled the countryside in many areas. More inconspicuous means

would have been chosen to convey the money. Murphy-O'Connor imagines that the couriers would carry the funds in a money belt or in a bag suspended from the neck and also would have sewed gold coins into their garments in such a way that they would not clink or misshape the clothing.³⁵

5.2 Paul's answer

Paul's answer to these obstacles was straightforward. Despite his own dark foreboding of what might happen (Acts 20:22-24) and serious warnings along the way (Acts 21:4, 10-14), he was willing to take the risk. Luke reports these warnings without commenting on Paul's insistence to travel onward to Jerusalem.³⁶ Was Paul right in continuing his journey despite these warnings? Was it a case of admirable commitment to Christ and the unity of the church – or of human stubbornness? Murphy O'Connor describes alternatives to Paul's journey:

Paul could have decided not to return to Jerusalem. His participation in the delegation was not imperative. The delegates of the contributing churches were with him, and he could have given back the money and opted out. Or they could have gone ahead without him. The only injury would have been to his pride. His decision to persevere, despite mortal danger and the possible futility of the gesture, underlines how deeply he felt about the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile churches.³⁷

The size of the delegation in Acts 20:4 suggests that Paul had indeed raised a substantial sum of money.³⁸ Murphy O'Connor acknowledges that we do not know how much but that it must have been large:

The symbolic value of the gesture would have been negated were the sum derisory (1 Cor 16:2); it would have been seen by the Jerusalemites as an expression of contempt. Unless an impressive amount of cash had been assembled, it is most probable that Paul would have considered the exercise a failure, and would have returned the contributions to the communities, accompanied, no doubt, by a bitter comment on their lack of generosity.³⁹

Acts 21 reports a warm welcome of the delegation in Jerusalem (v. 17). All went to see James and all the elders. Paul reports in detail the things

that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. (Divine approval of the Gentile mission as an argument for its legitimacy also appears earlier in Acts.) Paul's statement of account was met by approval and led to praise of God. Yet nothing is said regarding the acceptance or rejection of the collection. Paul was requested to demonstrate and prove his own loyalty to the law to the 'many thousands of believers who are among the Jews, and they all are zealous of the law' (v. 20). Apparently they believed the slander of Paul's opponents and now had to be convinced of the contrary. Luke does not report what other reservations the Jewish Christians might have had against Paul. Murphy O'Connor suggests that one of four things may have happened:

(1) the collection was accepted; (2) the collection was refused; (3) some Jerusalemites accepted the collection over the objections of others; (4) the handing over of the collection was impeded. In all cases, the one argument invoked is the silence of Luke! (1) Luke simply did not know of this happy ending. (2) Luke did not mention the refusal in order to preserve the image of a unified church. (3) The grudging 'unofficial' acceptance was omitted by Luke as insulting to the Pauline churches. (4) Since nothing happened, Luke had no need to mention it.

What differentiates the fourth possibility from the other three is that it takes into account what Luke does say. In order to maintain faith with a project which he had initiated, James' first reaction would have been to look for a way which would make it possible for him to accept the collection. His basic concern, then, would have been to satisfy himself and his right-wing constituency that Paul remained a practising Jew, and that his antinomian reputation was unjustified. profession of faith alone would not have sufficed. Paul had to make a public gesture demonstrating his Jewishness.

The simplest act, and the minimum which James could have accepted, would have been the purification required of all Jews coming from pagan territory, and who wished to enter the Temple.⁴⁰

After describing what was involved in acquitting oneself of a Nazirite vow (see Num 6:14-15) and the costs involved in this, Murphy O'Connor writes:

Given what we know of Paul's personal finan-

cial situation from his letters, it is most improbable that he had the wherewithal to pay for four Nazarites. It would have been necessary to draw on the collection money. The gesture was one which the Jerusalem church could hardly refuse from a visitor who had been ritually purified. Moreover, it relieved the church of a financial burden. Acceptance, however, meant that the church had already profited by the collection! Refusal, on the other hand, would mean recognizing Paul by reimbursing him.⁴¹

Thus, in order to demonstrate his own Jewish identity and his appreciation of it and to overcome the suspicions of the Law-zealous Jewish Christians, Paul went to the temple to sacrifice.⁴² Yet the attempt by non-Christian Jews to kill him prevented the completion of the plan. The Roman garrison saved him but he remained in Roman custody. Again Murphy O'Connor:

What his companions did with the collection will never be known. Once it was out of Paul's hands, Luke (like biographers of Paul!) loses interest.⁴³

The remainder of Acts is the account of Paul, the prisoner.⁴⁴ The prayers of Paul and the Romans were not answered, and the warnings which he received turned into sad reality. In Jerusalem Paul lost his freedom over the collection in his efforts to reconcile and unite the church.

Surprisingly, in his so-called prison letters Paul never mentions the collection, nor do these letters express his regret for going to Jerusalem and for trying to reconcile Gentile and Jewish Christians with each other. For him it must have been part of the good fight which he fought, of finishing the race and of keeping the faith (2 Tim 4:7).

While Paul expected other Christians to contribute to and to receive the collection under difficult circumstances, he himself was willing to risk his life in order to follow the charge to remember the poor given to him early on (Gal 2:10) and to bring about reconciliation. While he first considered to send the sum of money through delegates only (1 Cor 16:3), he eventually led the delegation himself under increasingly difficult circumstances. Those he had involved earlier in this project could count on Paul to carry it through to the end with determination and utmost transparency. He took the strains and dangers of a further journey eastward on himself, postponing his own plans for the immediate future. It is this integrity and readiness for personal sacrifice that others will have sensed

and that would have encouraged them to join in. How could others refuse to participate in view of the sacrifice that Paul was ready to make? This is an ‘argument by sacrifice’, a well-known rhetorical device which also appears elsewhere in Paul’s letters.⁴⁵

Due to lack of sources, many questions surrounding the collection must remain unanswered: did *all* Gentile Christian communities which Paul had in view contribute? Was the money received in Jerusalem and how? Was Paul right to press on despite all warnings? In the end, did he really do the Christians of Jerusalem a favour with the collection?

6. Costly reconciliation now

It has become clear that Paul’s collection involved a number of obstacles for all involved:

1) The *Gentile Christians* had to lay aside their natural and old loyalties to their communities. They were to forego an opportunity to use their means to promote their own comfort or honour in their place of residence. They were to side with the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem and to acknowledge that they had received the Gospel from the Jews and that the Jews were the primary recipients of God’s salvation in Jesus. None of them had any direct earthly benefit from contributing sacrificially to the collection. At least some of them also had to overcome their opposition to Paul, accept his financial policies and trust him that the money was indeed needed, would make it to Jerusalem and would be used wisely there.

Some of these challenges still apply today. In order to achieve reconciliation within their congregations, denominations, wider society and beyond, Christians are also called to use their resources not only for themselves but for promoting reconciliation. They are also called to overcome prejudices of all kind. They are called to trust their leaders and their assessment of the situation and are to trust that their contributions of all kinds will be used wisely and will not be in vain.⁴⁶

2) The *Christians of Jerusalem*, nudged along by their need and the prospect of a larger sum of money to meet it (did they actually have a choice?), were challenged to accept not only the money but also its Gentile Christian donors as brothers and sisters in Christ. This meant letting go of at least some aspects of their special status before God (some of which is affirmed by Paul in

Romans – other aspects are relativised or negated). They were to recognise their Gentile brothers and sisters as legitimate and rightful members of the people of God. In addition, and perhaps more difficult, they were called to identify themselves with these Gentile Christians and their new estimation of them in view of their non-Christian Jewish neighbours. They had to be ready to face the conflicts that this identification with other Christians might entail.

Are Christians today willing to accept all their brothers and sisters in Christ? Are they willing to let go of their own status and privileges? Are they willing to identify with other Christians publicly even if this might lead to conflicts within the wider communities in which they live? Are they tempted to betray their fellow Christians for the respect of the wider public? Will Christians be known not only for being reconciled to God but also for being agents of reconciliation among themselves, among the wider Christian community and the wider population?

3) For *Paul* and for a number of his co-workers, reconciliation involved tremendous efforts over several years to persuade the donors to participate. It delayed his plans for further ministry, meant further travel and required a willingness to take risks: in its final phase, the acceptance of the collection was far from sure; Paul had to fear for his own life and lost his freedom.

Many of these elements are peculiar to Paul’s particular situation; some apply more generally to all Christians who strive for reconciliation: the quest for reconciliation involves efforts in persuading others, it may mean the delay of our plans and the willingness to take risks, perhaps even serious risks. Reconciliation still comes at a high price.

A sequence in the film *Merry Christmas* (2005) provides an instructive example of the costs and chances of reconciliation. The film is based on true accounts from World War I, when at Christmas 1914, common soldiers of the warring nations fraternised with each other. One particular scene shows German trenches decorated with Christmas trees. On Christmas Eve, one of the German soldiers, an enlisted opera singer, sings Christmas hymns, including *Adeste Fideles*, ‘Come all ye Faithful’, for his comrades in the trench. When he hears the applause in the nearby enemy trenches, he takes one of the Christmas trees and while singing, climbs up a ladder and steps out of the German trench toward the French and British lines, risking

his life by presenting himself as a ready target. An officer tries to hold him back but the singer walks toward the enemy, no arms, no protection, only the tree and his singing as a sign of his peaceful intentions. As his comrades watch, the British and French soldiers who heard his singing all along, come out of their trenches, leave their own protection behind and come toward him. Moments later all soldiers are out, meet between the trenches and celebrate Christmas together. Nobody could have anticipated this result, the stakes were high. The scene brilliantly illustrates the risks that may be involved in reconciliation, the courage it takes and the new venue it opens.

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Endnotes

- 1 See G. Gilbert, 'Gentiles, Jewish Attitudes Toward' in J.J. Collins (ed.) *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge U.K.: Eerdmans, 2010) 670-673 and J.-C. Ferdouille, 'Heiden' in T. Klauser & E. Dassmann (eds) *Realenzyklopädie für Antike und Christentum* 13 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1986) 1113-1149. For a wider survey see Reinhard Feldmeier & Ulrike Heckel (eds), *Die Heiden. Juden und Christen und das Problem des Fremden*. (WUNT 70; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994).
- 2 In a similar way Paul had previously brought the Gentile Christian Titus with him to Jerusalem, Gal 2:3, 'But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was Greek'. N.Gerald Shenk, 'Reconciliation' in D. Patte (ed.) *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1054-1055 defines reconciliation as the 'process of restoring right relationships when harm or injury has come between two or more persons, through a process or ceremony to mark the resolution of difficulties' (italics mine).
- 3 With Acts 20:5 the second so-called 'we-passage' of Acts starts (up to 21:18). The group probably also included the author of Acts.
- 4 According to Acts 21:29, Trophimus was recognised as a Gentile Christian in Jerusalem by Jews from Asia/Ephesus. The presence of the Gentile Christian collection delegation in the city would not go unnoticed.
- 5 See the fierce resistance which Paul faced from various Jewish opponents according to Acts 21-25.
- 6 For a survey see Emil Schürer, Geza Vermes and

- Fergus Millar, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ I* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973), 455-470 and Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era. The World of the Bible from 500 B.C. to A.D. 100* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 197-224, 237-251.
- 7 Reicke, *NT Era*, 201. Ever since their ministry to the Hellenist widows, the appointment of Hellenistic men to serve them, and the ministry and persecution of the Hellenist Stephen, the Christians of Jerusalem will have been suspect in the eyes of the Judaists because of their association with Hellenists.
 - 8 Reicke, *NT Era*, 203 (italics mine).
 - 9 Reicke, *NT Era*, 205-206.
 - 10 Reicke, *NT Era*, 206. Traces of this can also be seen in the history of the Christian community in Jerusalem. During the first missionary journey, 'numerous proselytes, God-fearers, or Gentiles were received into the church. This disturbed the Christian Pharisees in Judea (Acts 15:1, 5), where Judaism was beginning to gather courage once more under the unstable procurator Cumanus (A.D. 48-52), and so the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians became a burning issue' (213).
 - 11 Reicke, *NT Era*, 211. Paul's predominantly Gentile Christian communities probably also benefitted from the close association of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem with Judaism.
 - 12 Reicke, *NT Era*, 222, who argues that the developments in Judea also had a strong impact on the Gentile Christian communities which Paul had founded. The wide-spread opposition to Paul must be understood against this backdrop.
 - 13 Reicke, *NT Era*, 214.
 - 14 Klaus Haacker, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (ThHKNT 6; Leipzig: EVA, 2012) 10 notes: 'Nach Josephus hat es in der Zeit vor dem jüdischen Aufstand im Judentum eine Diskussion darüber gegeben, ob Israeliten Spenden von Heiden annehmen dürften. Diese Streitfrage betraf u. a. die Zuschüsse des römischen Staates zu den Kosten des Opferkultes im Jerusalemer Tempel. Unter Führung des Tempelhauptmanns Eleazar setzte sich die ablehnende Haltung in dieser Frage durch, was von Josephus als Kriegserklärung an die Römer gewertet wird. Die gleiche Skepsis gegenüber heidnischen Gaben findet sich auch in einem Ausspruch, den die Tosefta R. Jochanan ben Zakkai zuschreibt.' The references are to *Bellum* 2,408-409 and *TSota* 14,10 (321). Schürer, *History I*, 486 summarises as follows: '... at the instigation of Eleazar, the son of Ananias the High Priest, it was now decided to suspend the daily sacrifice for the emperor and to accept no more sacrifices whatever from Gentiles. The suspension of the sacrifice for the emperor was tantamount to an open declaration

- of revolt against the Romans.’
- 15 According to Reicke, *NT Era*, 214, 1 Thess 2:14–16 suggests that Paul was aware of the developments in Judea: In the year 52 ‘the Christians in Palestine were harassed by the Jews, a situation over which Paul lamented bitterly during his second missionary journey’. Did this pressure on the Christians in Judea spur Paul on in gathering the collection so that the material needs of these Christians could be alleviated?
David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 756 observes that Paul’s coming to Jerusalem with the delegation was ‘similar to his gambit to bring along Titus to the first conference to Jerusalem to confront head-on the Jew/Gentile issue (Gal 2:1-5). Titus’s presence was intentionally provocative, designed to prompt a positive decision from the Jerusalem apostles about their acceptance of uncircumcised Gentile believers. In the same manner, the tangible evidence of the faith of the Gentiles and their gratitude represented by the collection probably was intended by Paul to provoke the acceptance of Gentile believers by the Jerusalem saints.’
- 16 Haacker, *Römer*, 9-10.
- 17 Jerome Murphy O’Connor, *Paul. A critical life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) 348.
- 18 Murphy O’Connor, *Paul*, 342-343.
- 19 See Frank Crüsemann, ‘Religiöse Abgaben und ihre Kritik im Alten Testament’ in Wolfgang Lienemann (ed.), *Die Finanzen der Kirche* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1989) 485-524.
- 20 See Haacker, *Römer*, 14. Presumably some of the content of the letters mentioned in 1 Cor 16:3 which Paul intended to write and send along to Jerusalem with the Corinthian delegates would have resembled the letter to the Romans. As Paul chose later to lead the delegation to Jerusalem himself, these letters were probably never written.
- 21 Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 2nd edn. (EKKNT 6.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1987) 46.
- 22 See Robert Jewett, *Romans. A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 83.
- 23 Jacob Jervell, ‘The Letter to Jerusalem’ in Karl P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate*, rev. edn (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) (53-64) 56.
- 24 See the survey in Christoph Stenschke, ‘Paul’s Jewish Gospel and the Claims of Rome in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans’, *Neotestamentica* 46 (2012) 338-378.
- 25 See the survey in Haacker, *Römer*, 329-356; Jewett, *Romans*, 829-899; M Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak. Romans 14:1–15:13 in Context* (SNTS. MS 103; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Volker Gäckle, *Die Starken und die Schwachen in Korinth und in Rom. Zur Herkunft und Funktion der Antithese in 1Kor 8.1–11.1 und Röm 14.1–15.13* (WUNT II.200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).
- 26 See Markus Tiwald, *Hebräer von Hebräer. Paulus auf dem Hintergrund frühjüdischer Argumentation und biblischer Interpretation* (HBS 52; Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2008).
- 27 Compare the diverging rationale for the collection in 2 Cor 8–9.
- 28 Christopher R. Little, *Mission in the Way of Paul. Biblical Mission for the Church in the Twenty-First Century* (Studies in Biblical Literature 80; New York etc.: Peter Lang, 2005) 168, observes that in addition to demonstrating their spiritual indebtedness, ‘more importantly, he specifically aimed at converting the nation of Israel to faith in Jesus as the Messiah in fulfillment of OT prophecy. Thus, it appears that the means to the end of fulfilling his redemptive program for Israel was by demonstrating indebtedness. What this signifies is that displaying Gentile indebtedness was necessary and subservient to accomplishing his primary goal regarding the salvation of his own nation.’ Paul’s collection aims at ‘saving Israel by way of demonstrating the Gentiles’ gratitude’ (169).
- 29 In 1 Cor 11:21 Paul demands that the poorer Corinthian Christians are not to be publicly shamed for their poverty, rather the resources of the community should be shared both locally and translocally. In 2 Cor 8:14 Paul suggests that there may come a time when the Christians of Jerusalem have abundance and will be in a position to share with the Corinthians (and others in need).
- 30 Stephan Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor. Reciprocity, Strategy and Theological Reflection in Paul’s Collection* (WUNT II.124; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) has read Paul’s collection against the backdrop of ancient notions of benefaction.
- 31 See 1 Cor 9:19–23 and David J. Rudolph, *A Jew to the Jews. Jewish Contours of Pauline Flexibility in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23* (WUNT II.304; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck: 2011).
- 32 Murphy O’Connor, *Paul*, 316.
- 33 See his safety measures according to Acts 20:13 (see also Acts 20:3). Murphy O’Connor, *Paul*, 344 writes: ‘Taking the statement at face value, Georgi (1992), 124, suggests that ‘the plot was to be executed on the high sea. This, in turn, tells us that there must have been a considerable number of Jews on the ship; that is to say, it must have been a ship-load of pilgrims!’ This interpretation goes back to Ramsay; see Ernst Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (KEKNT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, [1956] 1971) 581 n. 3. For an alternative interpretation see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) 837.
- 34 For Paul’s theology of suffering under persecution see Glenn M. Penner, *Im Schatten des Kreuzes*.

Verfolgung und Christusbefolgung – eine biblische Theologie (Witten: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2011) 257–339.

- 35 Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 756-757; Murphy O'Connor, *Paul*, 345 notes: 'The model that would have spontaneously occurred to people of the Apostle's background was the procedure for transmitting the annual half-shekel Temple tax from the Diaspora to Jerusalem. The money collected from the various communities was reduced to the smallest volume by being exchanged for metal of the highest value, namely, gold.'
- 36 This is one element of the parallelisation between Paul and Jesus in Luke-Acts; for a survey see Walter Radl, *Paulus und Jesus im lukanischen Doppelwerk. Untersuchungen zu Parallelmotiven im Lukasevangelium und in der Apostelgeschichte* (EHS XXIII.49; Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 1975).
- 37 Murphy O'Connor, *Paul*, 343.
- 38 Although it is possible that for Paul the representation of different areas was more important than the man-power of many carriers.
- 39 Murphy O'Connor, *Paul*, 345.
- 40 Murphy O'Connor, *Paul*, 349-350.
- 41 Murphy O'Connor, *Paul*, 350.
- 42 Murphy O'Connor, *Paul*, 351, suggests that Paul himself was responsible for this plan: 'The anxiety exhibited in Rom 15:31f ensured that his mind continued to worry at the problem of his reception in Jerusalem. He had plenty of time on the long journey from Greece to work out a plan that would both placate the Jerusalem believers, and confront them with a *fait accompli*.'
- 43 Murphy O'Connor, *Paul*, 351.
- 44 See Brian Rapske, *Paul in Roman Custody* (AFCS III; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994).
- 45 See G.W. Hansen, 'Rhetorical Criticism' in G.F. Hawthorne, R.P. Martin & D.G. Reid (eds), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, Leicester, 1993) (822–826) 825: 'In argumentation by sacrifice, sacrifice is presented as evidence of the value of the thing for which the sacrifice is made. Paul frequently points to the sacrifice of the cross as the basis for the value of the freedom in Christ which the false teachers were attempting to destroy ...'
- 46 For the application of reconciliation in the Bible to present-day problems and necessary steps in reconciliation and peace-making see Robert Schreiter, 'Peacemaking and Reconciliation' in W.A. Dyrness & V.-M. Kärkkäinen (eds), *Global Dictionary of Theology. A Resource for the Worldwide Church* (Nottingham, Downers Grove: IVP, 2008) 637-641.

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