

“In the End Equality Exists”  
2<sup>o</sup> Corinthians 8-9.  
The Collection for the poor of the Jerusalem Churches.  
Symbolic and Economic Consequences.

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## Introduction

I investigate 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 8-9 looking for examples of how the first Christian brothers and sisters lived together. My question has to do with economics, how those people and communities looked for answers to their economic problems.

My search for biblical testimony gives me a glimpse at a world where faith, grace and love respond to economic challenges. The interaction between the aforementioned values and the economy gives anchorage to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians text.

I find a capacity, in Jesus' first followers, to overcome material poverty and share resources, which challenges us, as Christians, in our times.

I approach the text with a need to discover how it can apply my situation, working in Latin America, in societies that look for liberation and a better life. We, as Christian communities, will inevitably have an impact on political trends. Our action or inaction has political implications. Now we must discern how to act, as Christian communities.

I approach 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 8-9 as a Methodist who understands the function of the personal sanctity (individual way of receiving God's grace, personal devotion, personal praying, and personal Bible reading). And, of course, I value the union between personal and social sanctity (social and communitarian ways to receive God's grace). However, I find myself more motivated by social sanctity. My concern for social sanctity leads me to interpret this text from a socio-economic perspective.

### I. The flow of goods perceived in the biblical text

I want to begin by examining the perception that some biblical authors had of the circulation of goods inside the imperial system. I want to take into account two texts, in the Second Testament, that clearly exemplify the perception of this circulation. First I will consider Luke's text, chapter 15, on the “prodigal” son. Then I will analyze Revelations 18. This approach looks for to find in a couple of texts of times of the Roman Empire some tools used to understand flow of goods. Rather than using modern methods interpretations of the texts as a theoretical base, I will attempt to draw attention to how biblical authors perceived the economic situation.

#### 1. Luke 15:11-16

This text provides an example of how, in the Roman Empire, people were perceived as goods. Luke's parable demonstrates the circulation of people, as goods, through the experience of the younger son.

Some data. The son belongs to a family who lives far from a center (cwraj makra, as referred to in 15:13 and 15:14) that attracts the younger son. We find the concept of cwraj makra once again in Luke 19:12. Here it designates the place where the noble man will receive a kingdom. This concept can have several meanings. "Distance" (makra) can have two meanings: first, it can be understood from the individual perspective of someone living in a small city and sees the big centers as "distant." Second, it can be understood from the socio/political perspective of small cities (at the borders of the Empire, such as Galilee, or the province of Judea) that were far from the big centers (such as the central cities with Rome, for example). This second meaning, more communitarian than the first, presupposes two cwraj political entities. The use of cwraj makra, in 19:12, implies a noble man in a powerful city, in a position to conquer an agricultural area. Traditional investigation understands the concepts cwra and polij as rural area and city respectively. Although in this case we can see that the cwra, where the younger son goes seems more like a city (polij) and the place from which comes (where his father lives) seems more like a rural area (cwra).

In Luke's text, cwraj has the problem of the famine, limo.j ivscura. Famine primarily affected the cities in the imperial times.

Certainly, in the city the famine doesn't affect each person in the same way. We observe inequalities between citizens, polith.j, in the case of the younger son, whose employment seems disturbing: feeding pigs during the famine. However, the fact really disturbing of this employment is that the beneficiaries are those that will consume the fed pigs. The image is certainly stirring because the younger son wants to eat the pigs' food. However, the younger son cannot eat because "nobody gave him" not even the food of the pigs. This is a prophetic accusation: there was famine but the hunger only affects some citizens, there is hunger but it doesn't affect the pigs!

Now, who are those affected for the famine in the distant "city"? The answer comes through the parable: the outsiders. The famine affects the one who arrived in the city as cheap manpower. The parable makes evident a circulation of goods. The good, in this text, is a person. This person-good is inserted in the material-good flow of the city as an object. The outsider, a person from a rural area, will not have the possibility to share the goods of the city. In others words, He will never become a citizen because he is a commercial article.

## 2. Revelations 18:9-19

This text declares the fall of the big city, Babylon. Revelations 18:9-19 offers another opportunity to investigate the perception of economic flow of goods in antiquity.

After the kings, found in the city the seat of their power, cry, the merchants, who found in the city a place where they could change their shipments (go,moj), also cry. We find a list of these shipments in 18:12-13, concluding in the v. 13 with human merchandise. The list of the products includes mining, agriculture, textile, timber industry, etc. It is interesting to notice that the author denounces the abundance of circulation toward the Great City. He recognizes what would cause the destruction of the Great City: a halt in economic circulation that was constituent of her: the attraction of goods. The desire for goods, as proposed in v.14, constitutes a "kind of being" in the city.

The author of Revelations illustrates vividly how a conversion takes place in the city. Through this conversion the shipments become wealth for the merchants. The

merchants became rich (verb ploutew) because of this conversion in the city. The merchandise acquires value when arriving in the city and that value favors (it enriches) those who transported it to the city. However, what happens to the people who produce the merchandise? They are outside of the Big City. This situation stands out in v. 19.

## II. The answer to these insights

The authors respond to the aforementioned crisis situations. Each one considers a possible solution.

Luke 15:17-24

The first answer comes when the younger son enters a process of memory recuperation. Extreme necessity brings about this process; there is not a theoretic reflection resulting from abundance but rather a reaction to an absence (of food). The recuperation of his memory allows the younger son to compare two economic systems: that of the father, who feeds the workers abundantly, in opposition to another system, that will cause him to die of hunger.

This memory recuperation allows him to act and to choose. He acts, deciding the return, leaving that *cwra*, *makra* where life is mortal. He returns to another economic system where the life is still possible for the workers.

Memory recuperation has different dimensions it is already crossed by the hierarchical systems of the *cwra*, *makra*. According to these hierarchical systems, a person can lose his status and fall: *"I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."* Luke 15:19.<sup>1</sup>

However when he returns to the father's system, all the social roles became variable if they are moved by love (the father runs to hug the returning son); but they are unchanging when they support the person's dignity: the father's answer to the probable loss of the son's status is "no". The son continues in his place.

The contrast between younger son's representation feeding pigs while he dies from hunger and the party with the young bull fed in the father's house/economy is strong and express a deep accusation toward the *cwra*, *makra*.

Revelations 18:9-19

The apocalyptic response against the mortal greed of the Great City is a city generating resources for life: the New Jerusalem. In this city there is free water (21:6). The wealth of the city doesn't belong to some merchants or kings but rather it is in the public places of the city: the walls, the doors (21:15-18). In the same way the seats of the city are made of precious stones and the square of the city is made of gold.

I want to testimony here a paradigmatic situation. I studied this text with very poor people of the slums of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the idea of the existence of all this gold and wealth in the streets was distressing. Precious stones in the public space and nobody stole it! The common understanding was that nobody stole (the seats of precious

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<sup>1</sup> The Scripture citations are from the RSV.

stones for examples) because “it was not necessary”. A city with such a public exhibition of wealth can only exist if its inhabitants have few or no necessities.

We can also see the topic of the health. The health flows through the city like a river of life (22:2).

### III. The situation of the Pauline collection

The texts we saw above give us perspectives of two Second Testament authors. They occur at the end of the first century. Now I want to go back to an earlier text. I will call this text “the Pauline collection”.

I consider, as axis, the concept of grace, ca,rij (vs.1, 4, 6 and 9 in accusative; 7 in dative). ca,rij articulates a first part that justifies, or gives a theoretical framework to the collection. This first part begins in 8:1 and it concludes in 8:15.

Then I will explore a second part that has to do with the instrumentation of an entity that controls the realization of the collection. This part spreads from 8:16 up to 8:24.

Finally, I'll revise a third part that seems to have a different discursive tone. It's directed to addressees who are reticent to participate in the collection. This last part is the chapter 9. We will pay special attention to the last part of the chapter 9, where the value of the collection is explained. I keep in mind the possibility of two separates letters here. May be this is the reason for a different discursive tone. Yet, I'll take the text in the final form.

As conclusion I'll explore the possibility of understanding the action of the Pauline churches like a “liturgy”.

#### **1° Part: The collection as grace (8:1-15)**

This first part is an explanatory speech. It elaborates a definition of the collection. In a first instance Paul appeals to the example of the Macedonians (8:1-6) and then challenges those churches of Achaia (8:7-15). Let us consider some points of this speech.

##### *1. Received grace, shared grace*

Paul, in the beginning of his speech, enunciates the origin of the grace received in the churches of Macedonia (in v. 1):

*We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedonia,*

Paul, from the beginning, wants to show that he and his partners (1° plural person: Gnwrizw) can recognize the grace of God. In fact, here we find a speech that is not explanatory but testimonial (he writes some verses later: marturw, “as **I can testify**” in the v. 3). Paul and his partners don't make a theoretical speech on the grace of God but rather they give testimony of where they have witnessed it. The testimonial speech has the characteristic of a personal story, which is something more private and gives the

speech its authenticity. He doesn't have to convince through arguments because he speaks, in first person, of what he has witnessed.

On one hand the grace has its origin and on the other, its destination. The first point, the origin of the grace, is the object of faith while the second point, the destination, is the object of testimony.

Grace is God's donation; Paul affirms. Through the idea of God's gift, Paul highlights that grace has value because of its divine origin. In the framework of the conflict in Corinthian churches (where some people are perceived as superiors because they consider themselves to be possessors of gifts, i.e. 1° Corinthians 12 and 14 for example), Paul's affirmation relocates the origin of the gift of grace.

On the other hand, Paul provides an interesting option when he describes the destination grace. His option offers grace to an entire community (the churches of Macedonia) instead of a specific individual. The communitarian subject itself is complex because it is not a group inside of a church but a geographical region. Here we can see the construction of symbolic, geographical and political area. There is a symbolic and political organization that Paul names as "the churches of Macedonia."

Paul develops the concept of grace received to show that the grace is something that flows. In fact, the human recipient is the means for which the action-gift of God can reach from one to another, mainly the poorest. In 1° Corinthians we realize that the grace exists only if it builds, it benefits others and not itself. Here, the idea of 1° Corinthians is reworked. However, Paul goes one step more. In 1° Corinthians Paul worked grace in an intra church setting; he understood grace as a donation that qualified variously the participant members of the community. Now, in 2° Corinthians 8 and 9, grace expands to communities dispersed in two regions, Macedonia and Achaia.

## 2. Grace as spiritual gift – grace as material gift

The grace doesn't arrive in Macedonia in the midst of the opulence of the communities, on the contrary (8:2):

*for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part.*

The churches in Macedonia experienced difficult moments (pollh/| dokimh/| qli,yewj). One possible understanding pollh/| dokimh/| qli,yewj referred to persecutions. The situation of persecutions leads to an extreme poverty (h` kata. ba,qouj ptwcei,a) Or, perhaps, we can understand pollh/| dokimh/| qli,yewj as the memory of a famine that punished the area of Achaia in the 51 c.e. pollh/| dokimh/| qli,yewj and marked the memory of churches faraway from Corinth, the capital of the region. However, the Corinthian churches cannot remember a famine, or persecutions, or other suffering.

Here we recall Luke's suggestion in the parabolic speech above: extreme necessity becomes a possibility for change. In Luke we find a personal situation (of course it is witness of a social famine); in Paul, a communitarian situation.

In this frame, Paul writes to the church of Corinth, which had powerful patronage relationships that attempted to control the speech and the politics of the church. The religious patronage relationships in Corinth used the concept of grace to justify

submission. People with spirituals gifts are at the top of the ladder. People without spirituals gifts are at the bottom. The first are the *patronus*, the latter are the *cliens*. Macedonia was an example because grace, for them, was not just spiritual and it was not something that structured a hierarchy, as it happened in Corinth. In Macedonia grace was a gift that allowed them survival.

Now, we see a transformation of the idea of grace through the speech:

1st Grace is a gift of divine origin, given to the churches of Macedonia. Here, in v. 1, the grace hasn't materiality.

2<sup>nd</sup> Grace is the power to resist. In v. 2, grace seems to be a power that allows for overcoming poverty and famine.

3<sup>o</sup> Grace is not only the power to resist. Now, the grace looks for alternatives. In v. 2 we see extreme poverty and great happiness built a "wealth of generosity" (plou/toj th/j a`plo,tthtoj). Here we already can see the grace being materialized. It is not only a spiritual power, now it produces generous wealth. The conjugation of these two nouns sounds interesting since plou/toj has material character while a`plo,tthtoj gives an idea of spirituality. Later in 9:11 we find again a double feature, where the "generosity", a`plo,tthtoj, is linked with sharing the material wealth. This idea of sharing with "generosity" repeats in Roman 12:8.

4<sup>o</sup> Grace produces wealth and communion through cooperation. The churches of Macedonia understand grace as actively helping to the saints (8:4):

*begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints*

Service to the saints was understood as grace and communion. The needs of the communities created a problem, no doubt, but it also opened the doors of many communities to be inserted into a wider system: the net of help that Paul and his collaborators were opening up. The communitarian idea will repeat, in 9:13, associated with a generous community (recapturing the term a`plo,tthtoj, seen previously).

### 3. Grace that produces equality

Paul used the example of the churches of Macedonia to persuade the Corinthians (or, may be, to all Achaia? For example, also to Cencreas?).

Here it is where Paul has to work with argumentative speech to justify the collection system that was instituted.

The part (inside the first part) addressed to the Corinthians to persuade them, goes from 8:7 to 8:15. The central, theological verse comes in 8:9:

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.*

Here we see that grace has the particularity of producing a flow of goods. This flow modifies the situations of wealth and poverty among those that share it. In this verse, Jesus "loses" goods becoming poor and someone else "wins" goods getting rich.

However, before v. 9, Paul comments on the wealth of the Corinthians in the v.7. This verse reminds us of 1st Corinthians 1:26. The Corinthians have an abundance of faith, knowledge, word and love. However, Paul suggests that they should grow in grace, v. 7. Here, grace is understood as participation in the collection. We can see this idea in the phrase: “so that also in this (demonstrative adjective) grace grows.” This idea is stressed later in v. 8. The concern for “everything” in v. 7 should become “concern for each other” (h; e`te,rwn spoudh). Thus love is manifested as something genuine. Here it appears as though concern for one causes the flow of goods toward others: something characteristic of love and of grace.

vs. 10-11 point out a problem in the community that causes a delay in the collection.

vs. 13-15 want to put into practice the theological statement from v. 9. They propose a circulation of goods with two objectives. The first objective has to do with satisfying a necessity. The second objective has to do with finding equality.

I understand that Paul conceives grace as the contribution that allows people and communities overcome their needs. This objective is immediate and urgent, directed toward the survival of the poor from Jerusalem (Romans 15:26).

We find, in v. 14, something like an ecclesiastic program that aims for equality. The program no longer provides an immediate solution; rather it dedicates itself to making a permanent change:

*but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time (kairo,j) should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality.*

Paul worked to take care of the needs of some communities far from the imperial center. However, Paul and his co-workers' ultimate vision regards a system of flow of goods that achieves equality. He affirms it in v 14:

*that there may be (ginomai) equality.*

Paul hoped that circulation of goods toward the periphery would have a material and/or spiritual response. He considered, as we see in other texts, that Achaia needed symbolic goods. They were provided (in the past and presently) from the periphery of the empire. On the contrary, borders of the empire needed material goods. They were contributed by churches that were placed near the center of imperial power (Greece and Minor Asia) (Roman 15:26-27).

Paul and his group created a circuit of goods that flowed both from the center of the Empire and from its borders. The prepositions (eivj) of verse 14 show the flow and flux of goods. The double directions attempt to fight the needs of both sides. Paul also affirms that symbolic or spiritual needs exist too.

### **2° Part: The instrumentation of the grace (8:16-24)**

In this second part we observe the dynamics of an institutionalization that allows the realization of the service to the poor from Jerusalem.

Who are the participants in the institution?

They are: Titus (v.16), a brother of reputation (v.18) and Paul's brother (v.22). However, there seem to be other brothers sent by the churches (verse 23: avpo,stoloi evkklhsw/n). Here we see six people and, perhaps, others (we don't know how many brothers the churches sent).

We have to keep in mind that this group of people will need a system that sustains them throughout their mission. This system can be seen, as an example, in the recommendation of the brothers that are arriving at Corinth. This group needs residence, place in the road, food and possibly another kinds of support for the trips. Here we are talking about an organization of considerable volume that involved the participation of several churches and a communication flow between them.

Some characteristics of this entity:

About the conformation of this group, we see two categories of persons inside her. On one hand, in the group we find Paul, Titus, and two more people recognized by the church in general. These four people participate without an election process. But they open the group to other people.

On the other hand, the churches have the possibility to choose delegates as we see in the v. 23 (avpo,stoloi evkklhsw/n). In fact, the brother of upstanding reputation is chosen by the churches for the function of accompanying to Paul and his group.

In these delegates of the churches we presume a form of election. This kind of election isn't clarified in the text and may be it was diverse according to the churches. We want to draw attention to the collection as a movement that had an international dimension but at the same time was rooted in the heart of a concrete community. The gathering of material goods and people's elections formed a root that looked after of the well-being of the collection. Each community watched over and promoted the realization of the collection (1° Co 16:1).

We have a political concept in the text that is especially important: *auvqai,retoj*. *auvqai,retoj* referred to those who participate in the group in charge of taking the collection ahead. This term is only in 2° Corinthians in the chapter 8, twice. According to *auvqai,retoj* meaning, the members enter the group of their own, free will. This is imperative in the new system. Paul doesn't oblige anyone to enter in the system as the Roman Empire does. Access and participation in this group are free. The term repeats in 8:3.17 where it allows the community of churches of Macedonia to decide to participate "of its own will, freely, without obligation."

Democratization and voluntary participation exist in voluntary associations throughout the Roman Empire. However, there are a couple of innovations in the churches. First, there is a mixture of different economic levels people inside of each local group. The Corinthian churches provide an example of this situation. May be this mixture existed in Cencreas too. Secondly, the Pauline proposal speaks at a macro-level; inter churches, while democratization and free election are present in the voluntary associations, at a micro-level.

Paul believes in the necessity of an organization of church delegates that moves together with the collection, 8:20 and 21:

*We intend that no one should blame us about this liberal gift which we are administering, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of men.*

This organization is both custodian of the offering and overseer of the management of money. There is a strong concern for the transparency of the system. This concern would surely result in more readiness to collaborate.

Maybe there was a change in the constitution in the group that managed the goods. If we see 1° Corinthians 16:3-4, Paul and the Corinthians have no problem with the people's handling goods. Later, in 2° Corinthians, there is concern for those people.

### **3° Part: The churches of Achaia (9:1-15)**

There was great difficulty in the incorporation of the churches of Achaia. The text seems to suggest that at first these churches participated in the system but then they withdrew (9:2-5). This situation could have produced a reduction in the amount gathered (9:6-10). Probably the conflicts over Paul's apostleship were the reason for this withdrawal. Although I suppose another reason was that the churches of Achaia (especially Corinth?) questioned this collection.

If we consider the second reason, we must regard the framework for management that Paul wants to create -transparency in the handling of the funds, freedom to participate, and free election of people to the management group- as problematic. This kind of framework threatens, at different levels, the imperial culture. Maybe, because of the participation in these churches network some powerful members in the congregation of Corinth felt threatened in their social position. Maybe they were questioned because of their participation, support and strengthening of other mechanisms, different from those socially recognized. If that were the case, then we can infer a serious problem in Corinth. Let us examine some situations that could have caused difficulties in the church of Corinth.

First, the free election of people from the churches, to verify the handling of the funds, creates a structure imposes an audit of the community bases. Certainly, this kind of structure was far from being representative of the "Principate". The Principate was a time where the republican institutions were a facade for an authoritarian government that did not answer to the Senate. Although we had spoken above of the democratization of the voluntary associations in fact we understand that the "*patronus*" who participated in these associations did not "surrendered bills" out of "generosity." In fact the positions in these associations were obtained by those "*generous patronus*" that donated big sums to carry out works.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the freedom to participate in this collection was a strong alternative to the imperial social system. The *patronus-cliens* structure conserves situations of clientelism. In the Roman imperial society a person would hardly have the possibility of changing his/her status as client and to surviving on his/her own. In this context, the v. 8:8 is overwhelming: the Pauline system begins by considering the needs of the other.

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<sup>2</sup> Meeks, Wayne A.; *Los primeros cristianos urbanos*; Sígueme, Salamanca; 1987; pp.89. There is some examples about patrons getting charges in Corinth because their donations.

Instead of imposition (evpitagh,) we find the creation of an interest in others. This freedom will be a good opportunity to make new international and local relationships. And this was a powerful alternative to the *patronus-cliens* structure.

Finally, the local elections process marked a practice of decision, rising from the local communities toward the construction of a bigger entity. I want to highlight again that the “*brother who is famous (o` e;painoj) among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel*” didn’t arrive in the group because of his status (characteristic method in the system of orders in Roman society, where a person appealed to inherited honor in order to position him/herself inside the society) but rather “*he has been appointed by the churches (ceirotonhqeij u`po. tw/n evkklhsiw/n)*” (v.19) as Paul’s partner (sune,kdhmoj) and part of their group.

My last point has to do with the concept of justice. Paul refers to the Scripture in the speech in 9:6-15, where he appeals to the Corinthians (or all Achaia). The Scripture citations keep in mind the concept of justice (dikaios,nh). These scriptural references are together in 9:9 and 9:10. The first cites Psalm 112, describing a fair/just person. Giving to the poor figures heavily into the qualities of that person. The second mention is taken from Hosea 10:12 and it not only refers to the person's behavior as in the psalm 112 but also the person’s production: the products (ge,nhma) of its justice. This production of justice is given for God's sake (9:8.10.14) by way of grace (9:8.10). Grace is spiritual and, in this context, material too. Thus, the concept of justice has to do with the qualities of the person and the person’s material production.

However, apart from these situations, that look for alternatives, to what the society proposes<sup>3</sup>, I also believe that there is a problem having to do with the construction of a road and the circulation of goods, which could be different from the Empire’s way of circulating goods. The difference has as much to do with geographical location as form.

I find, in this last point, that Paul offers a goal for the churches of Achaia. The collection is good not only for the urgent solution of the needs of the churches in Jerusalem but rather the construction of an ideology of solidarity that contrasts with the imperial ideology (v. 9:12). This new ideology has to do with the grace of God instead of the Emperor's grace or “*patronus*” grace, which structured the *patronus-cliens* socio-economic system. This new ideology causes a redistribution of goods (v. 9:11). This ideology finds its objective in v. 13: creating a community (koinwni,a) through service (diakoni,a) that confesses Christ's Gospel (not Caesar’s). However, Paul will follow one more step in v. 14 because he hopes this ideology will produce prayers (deh,sij) and a greater affection (evpipoqe,w) between distant churches and those churches that give material goods. Here, once again, grace is material and spiritual as we see in v. 14: dia. th.n u`perba,llousan ca,rin tou/ qeou/ evfV u`mi/n. Paul is re mapping grace, praying and the affection circulation roads. The traditional road toward and from the Emperor and subsidiary ones (cf. 1º Timoteo 2:1) now going to and from the churches in Achaia.

Commercially speaking, this was a business that didn't logical during imperial times. And it was the reason: the city of Corinth traded mainly with the cities of the Aegean Sea, the distant east and Syria, before its destruction and reconstruction. In the imperial era, the route that went eastward was invested in transporting products, and trade in general, toward the west, toward the new capital of the world, Rome. The kitchen

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<sup>3</sup> Pixley, Jorge. *Los primeros seguidores de Jesús en Macedonia y Acaya*. In *RIBLA* N° 29. 1998. pg. 65

elements and the pottery found in the forum of Corinth from this “new era” are from the western cities of Corinth.

#### **4° Part: Conclusion: The Paul’s dream, a symbolic and material liturgy**

We find many interpretations concerning the Paul’s work regarding Jerusalem. Some scholars understand the collection as part of Paul’s defense in 2° Corinthians<sup>4</sup>. Others scholars see Paul’s strategy as an attempt to unite two branches of the Christian church: the gentiles and Jews<sup>5</sup>, maybe in order to fulfill the agreement with James, Peter and John. One could also explain Paul’s way of acting as an apocalyptic action, or an action modeled as Jerusalem Temple’s tax collection (by the Jewish Diaspora). However, I would like to suggest another possibility.

Paul understands his action, sharing material and symbolic goods, as a *leitourgia*, a liturgy (9:12):

*for the rendering of this service (leitourgia) not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God.*

Liturgy was rooted in Greek culture, where certain city projects were sustained economically by particular families instead of a central government. Paul maintains the honorary idea of the liturgy but he changes a fact that is radical: the liturgy is no longer carried on for a powerful citizen but for the whole network of churches. Paul uses the socio-economic language of the benefactors, found in the benefactions inscriptions,<sup>6</sup> as *proqumi*, a (eagerness). Paul also uses the term grace as we examined previously<sup>7</sup>. Now the traditional idea of a Pauline collection comes before of the idea of a Pauline liturgy.

The question will be: Was Paul organizing a collection or a liturgy? This last concept may have strong connotations and may cause something new to emerge. Let us examine a fundamental difference.

A collection, as understood in Roman imperial times, would be the gathering of grains to help alleviate the effects of a famine in some city of the empire. A collection was only intended to satisfy the needs of a city. We have the *frumentatio* example. The *frumentatio* was “a free monthly distribution of grain to 150,000 adult, male, citizen residents”<sup>8</sup> in Rome through the Principate.

On the contrary, the liturgy did not necessarily have to do with an emergency but rather with the possibility of improving the imperial infrastructure: roads, buildings, mail and transport system, and supply of grains, as well as lodging army.

The collection concerned products, basically, while the liturgy was, fundamentally, money.

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<sup>4</sup> Witherington III, Ben. *Conflict and Community in Corinth. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids; 1995 p. 412

<sup>5</sup> Murphy-O’Connor J. *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 1991.p.76

<sup>6</sup> Witherington III. “*Conflict and Community...*”.pp. 420 ss.

<sup>7</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, S.J. God, Benefactor and Patron: The Major Cultural Model for Interpreting the Deity in Greco-Roman Antiquity. In *JSNT* 27.4 (2005) 465-492. Pg. 490

<sup>8</sup> Meggitt, Justin J. *Paul, Poverty and Survival*. Edimburgo. T&T Clark, 1998 pp.51 ss.

The liturgies, which were optional in times of the Republic, became obligatory in the century I AD. The Imperial government determined the amount of the *summae honorariae* that each powerful citizen had to surrender to the city. Now I want to examine more closely the Pauline idea of free participation in the churches network. Maybe the poorer churches had no problem with sharing their goods in a liturgy. However, what happened with the richer churches? Did they accept to share their grace in the Pauline alternative liturgy? If not, did Paul have the political power (as the Roman Empire did) to oblige them? What political strategies did Paul use to make and improve the alternative liturgy?

In the Pauline liturgy, the basic strategy was to keep the Mediterranean honor system. Paul and his companion were proposing the construction or improvement of a “city”, “region” different and similar to the empire. The refund of honor, characteristic of the liturgy, was similar in the Pauline Liturgy and the Imperial Liturgies. However, it circulated, using different routes the ones built traditionally. The Pauline liturgy was different because honor could relapse in communities instead of people or families, and because it could relapse both in poor communities (as those of Macedonia) and in richer communities (as those of Acaya). (2° Co 9:14)

Here we find the idea of the “liturgical” construction of another “empire” sustained by rich and poor communities. We have more than a “simple act of charity”<sup>9</sup> or a possibility to join the Jewish Christianity and the gentile Christianity. Here is something like the “Christian mutualism” for survival<sup>10</sup>, or maybe, as an African might say: a *harambee*<sup>11</sup>.

#### Some remarks about the relation between Luke, 2° Corinthians and Revelations

In Luke’s text we observed the circulation of a person as a good. The person, like the younger son, had no opportunity to create or to change the economic system. The person was an object of the economic system. In Paul’s liturgical construction we also find people mobilized. However we must realize the person here is the subject creator of a communitarian economy while he/she moves.

Luke’s text also considers the circulation of goods. The outsider in the city becomes an example of a halt in circulation. The younger son cannot find food. Maybe the poor people in the Jerusalem community are in the same situation as the younger son in the *cwra, makra*. The Pauline action looks for help for people like the younger son. This help, as we saw, is not just transitory. The liturgy of the gentile community can create a flow of goods inside of community of Jerusalem (the sum of money is for certain poor people in the community, not for all, Rom 15:26). We have to remember they didn’t carry food, they carried money. Maybe this was one of the problems with the Jerusalem leaders (Rom 15:31).

In Revelation’s text the city is a centre. This centre tenaciously reclaims material goods. The circulation has one direction: to the City. The material goods become wealth (only for the merchants) only when they enter the City. However, in the Pauline liturgy, we

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<sup>9</sup> Murphy-O’Connor J. “*The Theology of the Second Letter...*”. p.76

<sup>10</sup> Meggit, “*Paul...*”, pp. 157-160

<sup>11</sup> Manus, Ukachukwu Chris. 2 Corinthians. In *Global Bible Commentary*. (455-462). Abingdon Press. Nashville, 2004. p.457-458

recognize the circulation of goods does not flow in a single direction (8:14). The “good”, namely grace, has no specific direction and, after all, it does not circulate toward a big city.<sup>12</sup> What’s more, the good has a double feature: it is both symbolic and material. The grace-good obtains the mark of this double nature in the original place. It has no need for a specific centre in order to define its nature (as the good in Revelations that became wealth because of its the arrival in the City). Grace (symbolic and material) is grace in Macedonia, in Corinth, in Galatia, and will be grace in Jerusalem too. In fact, it is grace because of its circulation. It is grace when it improves the circulation of goods/gifts between different communities.

#### IV. Latin America looking for new roads for their (symbolic and economic) trade

The last decades have been characterized by a great mobilization of the international market in Latin America.<sup>13</sup>

The debate, to which we have attended, has strongly polarized positions between two economic and political projects: on one hand, that of the ALCA (Area of Free Trade for America) and the other hand, that of the MERCOSUR (Common South American Market). The United States and the neoliberal associations constitute the main instigators of the ALCA. On the other side, recently countries that worked for emergence and invigoration of the economy in Latin America: Brazil in the first place and seconding Argentina, and later Venezuela have actively promoted MERCOSUR.

The idea of considering a common market among the Latin American countries is the dream of those who expect the emergence of Latin America. Certainly, this dream is threatened by North American penetration on the continent. The imposition of the ALCA would deepen the misery in the developing countries and improve the economy of the United States, once again.

As alternative, United States concocted some bilateral commercial treaties (TLC: Treaties of Free Trade), which have vastly harmed the countries that accepted them. As proof one can observe the use of this topic in electoral campaigns, for example in Nicaragua. For example, the victory of the Sandinista party that opposes the TLC sends a message. Bolivia and Ecuador are in the same boat.

However, we must realize that MERCOSUR, in some ways, repeats the injustice of the richest nations against the poorest. Thus, the little countries (like Uruguay) are considering the possibility of joining to the TLC instead of MERCOSUR.

After the economic disasters that characterized the nineties, where neoliberal capitalism devoured the wealth of the Latin American countries, in this new century there are several intents of change directions. The fights against the ALCA and the TLC and the lies that they promise constitute, I think, very important struggles of our time.

#### V. The churches in Argentina.

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<sup>12</sup> Horsley, Richard. 1 Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul’s Assembly as an Alternative Society. (227-237) in *Christianity at Corinth. The Quest for the Pauline Church*. Edited by Edward Adams and David Horrell; Westminster John Knox Press; London; 2004; Pp.236-237

<sup>13</sup> Míguez, Néstor O. Galatians. In *Global Bible Commentary*. (463-472); Krüger, René. Luke’s God and Mammon, a Latin American Perspective. In *Global Bible Commentary* (395-400)

Amid this international panorama we have the task of investigating the situation and posture of our churches, in my particular situation, that of Argentina.

May be this text can become a good opportunity to rethink our situation and options as churches in the post-modern, political and economic world.

How do we conceive the grace of God in the relationships between churches? How do the different churches get together to build an economic network grounded in social justice?

I recognize that there are many examples of churches sharing their resources. However I see, at the same time, new Christian movements with an ecclesiology that intentionally isolates churches. For them, the idea of God's grace is not a flowing and networking equality. For them God's grace is a possession. Consequently grace has lost the power to build an economic flow that will enrich the poor, "So equality can finally exist"