

“In order that there may be a Fair Balance”
2 Corinthians 8-9.
The Collection for the Jerusalem Churches:
Symbolic and Economic Consequences.

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Introduction

I turn to this text looking for the example of our first Christian brothers and sisters. My question has to do with the issue of economics: how did these people and communities look for answers to their economic problems.

The search in the biblical testimony brings me near to a world where the economic situation is possible because it is together to the faith, to the grace, to the love. Without these parameters the economy in the text of 2^o Corinthians doesn't have anchorage.

The capacity that I find in the first Christian communities for overcome the material poverty and to share resources it is a challenge for us in our times.

I arrive to the text with a necessity of discover in him ways to continue working in Latin America, in our societies that look for liberation and a better life. And, certainly, we have the inevitability (whatever we'll do, whatever we don't, will mark political trend) to discern the place of our Methodist communities in those roads.

I arrive to this text like a Methodist that understands the function of the personal sanctity. And, of course, I value the union between personal and social sanctity. But, I recognize myself more motivated by the social sanctity to which Wesley invited us. It is that social sanctity the one that takes me to read this text from a socio-economic perspective.

I. The flow of goods perceived in the biblical text

I want to begin this approach considering the perception that some biblical authors had of the circulation of goods inside the imperial system. I want to take into account two texts that flagrantly show in the Second Testament the perception of this circulation. In the first place it is a Luke's text, chapter 15, on the “prodigal” son. The other text is in Revelation 18. This approach looks for to find in a couple of texts of times of the Roman Empire some tools used to understand this phenomenon. With this I am opting for not beginning giving a theoretical mark that refers to modern interpretive concepts. Rather, I am trying to recover a form of perceiving of those times.

1. Luke 15:11-16

This text is a first witness of how the circulation of people is perceived. This circulation is shown by way of example in the little son's parabolic story.

Some data. The son is part of a family who lives far from some center that is “looked for” for the little son. This center is named in 15:13 as *cwra*, *makra*, in the same way

that in 15:14. The expression is used once again in the well born man's parable who will take a Kingdom in Luke 19:12. Here it designates the place where the man will receive the Kingdom. This concept can refer to several significances. Its "distance" can have two meanings: in the first place it can be understood as the person's conception living at the small cities and understands the big centers like "distant." Or, in a second significance, as the small cities' conceptions (those in the frontiers of the Empire, as Galilee, or the province of Judea) that saw the big cities far (as the central cities with Rome like example). This second form, more communitarian than the first, to understand the concept presupposes two *cwraj* with the meaning of "country." With regard to the use of *cwraj makra*, in 19:12, it can be understood as a well born citizen in a powerful city with citizens to position that will conquer an agricultural area. The concepts *cwra* and *polij* are understood inside the traditional investigation as rural area and city respectively. Although in this case we can see that the *cwra* toward which the little son goes seems to have more the city aspect (*polij*) and the place of which comes (where his father lives) seems to have the rural area aspect (*cwra*).

This distant place has the problem of the hunger, *limo.j ivscura*. This reality seemed to be seated, basically, in the cities in the imperial times.

Certainly, the hunger doesn't hit all in the same way in the city. This is registered in the citizen's situation, *polith.j*, that gives him a highly disturbing work: to feed in a city with hunger. But the fact really disturbing of this work is that the beneficiaries are those that will consume the fed pigs. The figure is certainly stirring because then the little son wants urgently to eat the food of the pigs. The reason by which cannot eat is because "nobody gave him" not even the food of the pigs. This is a hard accusation: there was hunger but it doesn't affect some citizens, there was hunger but it doesn't affect the pigs. To who then hit the hunger in this distant "city"? To the one that came from a distance. To the one that had arrived as cheap manpower. The parable evidences a circulation of goods that one can see in many cases from the rural areas to the city. The good, in this case, is a person. But, this person-good is not inserted in the material-good flow of the city. This person stays outside like a proof that the people from the rural area will not become a citizen.

2. Revelation 18:9-19

This text announcing the fall of the great city, Babylon, is another testimony that we have to recover the vision of flow of goods in the antiquity.

After the crying of the kings, that found in the city the seat of their power, cry the merchants, that found in the city the place where to change their shipments (*go,moj*). It follows a list of these shipments in 18:12-13 concluding in the v. 13 with the human merchandise. The list of the products includes mining, agriculture, textile, timber industry, etc. It is interesting to notice that the author declares the abundance of movements toward the Great City, and he recognizes the reason of disappearance of that Great City: the stop of the circulation which was constituent of her: the attraction of goods. This is a "type of being" of the city, like the v. 14 proposes it, the desire of goods.

Another fact that the author show us is that in the city a conversion takes place for which the shipments become wealth for the merchants: the merchants became rich (*verb ploutew*) thanks to these goods. The merchandise acquires value when arriving to the

city and that value favors (it enriches) to those that transported it to the city and don't have more than enough those that produced it. This situation stands out in the v. 19.

II. The answer to this perceptions

The crisis situations before described is responded by the authors. Each one of them considers a possible solution.

Luke 15:17-24

The first reaction is that the little son has a process of recovery of the memory. This recovery is given from the extreme necessity; there is not a reflection from the abundance but from the food absence. The recovery of the memory allows him to compare two economic systems: that of the father that feeds the journeymen in abundance in opposition to another system that is killing him of hunger.

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

But that recovery of the memory is not flat but rather it is already crossed by the systems of hierarchization of the *cwra*, *makra*. According to these, a person can lose his status falling: "*I don't deserve to be called your son, be I as one of your workers*" Luke 15:19.

However when he returns to the father's system, all the social roles became mobile if they are moved by the love (the father that runs to hug the returning son); but they are fixed at the same time if it is to maintain the person's dignity: the answer of the father to the probable loss of the son's status is *not*. The son continues in his place.

The contrast among the little son's image feeding pigs while he dies from hunger and the party with the young bull fed in the father's house/economy are strong and they express a deep accusation toward the *cwra*, *makra*.

Revelation 18:9-19

The apocalyptic answer in relation to the mortal greed of the Great City is a city that generates resources for the life: the New Jerusalem. In this city there is water free (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 of precious stones and the square of the city is made of gold.

I want to testify here that studying this text with very poor people of the suburbs of Buenos Aires the idea of the existence of all this gold was stressed; precious stones in the public space and nobody stole it! The common understanding was that nobody stole (the seats of precious stones for examples) because "it was not necessary". So, to understand a city with this level of public exhibition of the wealth has meaning only if the inhabitants of her don't have necessities to satisfy.

We can also see the topic of the health leaving from the same city through water, and feeding of trees of the square (22:2)

III. The situation of the Pauline collection

That seen previously gives us the perspective of two authors of the Second Testament. They are running the end of the first century. Now, I want to approach to the one that, for a while, I will call “the Pauline collection”. We came back to earlier text.

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

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

Finally, I revise a third part that seems to have a different discursive tone, directed to reticent addressees to participate in the collection. This last part is in the chapter 9 and we will pay special attention to the last part of this block where the value of the collection is explained.

As conclusion I explore the possibility to understand the action of the Pauline churches like a “liturgy”.

1° Part: The collection like grace (8:1-15)

This first block is an explanatory speech that will elaborate a definition of the collection. In a first moment Paul appeals to the example of the Macedonians (8:1-6) it stops then to challenge those of Achaia (8:7-15). Let us see some points of this collection.

1. Received grace, shared grace

Paul begins his speech enunciating the origin of the grace received in the churches of Macedonia, in the v. 1:

We give them to know you, brothers, the grace of God granted to the churches of Macedonia.

Paul in this beginning wants to show that he and his partners (1° plural person: Gnwrj,zw) can recognize the grace of God. We are in front of a speech that is not explanatory but testimonial (as some more verses below he will write: marturw, “I give testimony” in the v. 3). Paul and their partners don't make a theoretical speech on the grace of God but rather they give testimony of where they have seen it. The testimonial speech has in the characteristic of story of view-lived situation its truthfulness. He doesn't have to convince through arguments since the first person is positioned as teller of that really seen.

This grace has two tops: on one hand, its origin and for the other one, its destination. The first point is object of faith while the second is it of testimony. Paul affirms, in the first case, that the grace is God's donation. With this idea, he stresses that the divine origin of the same one gives it value. Without doubts that in the context of the conflict

of Corinth, where certain people were considered superiors because they consider themselves to be possessors of gifts (1° Corinthians 12 and 14 for example), this is locate the grace-gift's origin again.

On the other hand, Paul carries out an interesting option when he describes the destination of the grace. This option is not to put in an individual fellow the receivers but in a community: the churches of Macedonia. The subject itself is complex because it is not a group inside of a church but a region. In this we can see a conception of symbolic geographical construction. There is already a symbolic political organization that Paul names as “the churches of Macedonia.”

Paul advances about this idea, the concept of grace received, to show that the grace is something flowing. The human receiver in fact is a mean for which the action-gift of God cans arrives to other, preferably the neediest. Along 1° Corinthians we can see that the grace is grace only if it builds, it benefits to the other one and not to oneself. Here this idea is recaptured. In 1° Corinthians Paul worked the grace intra church; he understood it like a donation that qualified variously the participant members of the community. Now, in 2° Corinthians 8 and 9, the grace qualifies dispersed communities in two regions, Macedonia and Achaia.

2. Grace like spiritual gift - grace like material gift

The grace doesn't arrive in Macedonia amid the opulence of the communities, but on the contrary:

because, in the hard tests of suffering, the abundance of their happiness and their extreme poverty they increased the wealth of their generosity. 8:2.

The churches of Macedonia happened and they passed a hard moment possibly referred to persecutions (pollh/ dokimh/ qli,yewj) and it carries to an extreme poverty (h` kata. ba,qouj ptwcei,a) Or, perhaps, persist in the communities the memory of a famine that punished the area of Achaia in the 51 c.e. If it is the case, is excessively interesting that this famine marked the memory of outlying churches to the capital of the region: Corinth. But it doesn't seem that Corinth has memory of that famine, or of sufferings. Perhaps, pollh/ dokimh/ qli,yewj doesn't refer to persecutions but to this hard social situation of hunger. Here we remember the Luke's proposal in the parabolic speech above: the extreme necessity become possibility to change. In Luke is a personal situation (of course it is witness of a social famine); in Paul is a communitarian situation.

In this frame, Paul writes to the church of Corinth, with powerful patronage relationships that attempted to control the speech and the politics of the church. The example of Macedonia then is that the grace for them was not just spiritual and it was not something that structured a hierarchy, like it happened in Corinth. In Macedonia the grace was a gift that allowed them the survival.

In this last point we see a transformation of the idea of grace:

1° The grace is a gift of divine origin, inform, given to the churches of Macedonia. This donation in the v. 1 don't have a materiality.

2° The grace like resistance force. The grace now in the v. 2 seemed to be a force that allows overcome the poverty and the hunger.

3° The grace doesn't only resist but rather looks for alternatives. In the same v. 2 are allowed to see that the extreme poverty and the great happiness built "wealth of generosity" (plou/toj th/j a`plo,tthoj). Here already we can see the grace being materialized. It is not only a spiritual force but rather now it produces generous wealth. The conjugation of these two nouns sounds interesting since plou/toj has material character while a`plo,tthoj gives an idea of spirituality. The same one, double feature, is later on, 9:11, where the "generosity", a`plo,tthoj, it is linked with sharing the material wealth. This idea of sharing with "generosity" repeats in Roman 12:8.

4° The grace doesn't only produce wealth but communion through the cooperation. Now we have that the churches of Macedonia understand the grace like an active participation in the help to the saints:

Imploring of us, persistently, the grace and the communion of the help toward the saints. 8:4

The service for the saints was understood as grace and as communion. The necessity didn't contain but rather opened the door to be inserted in a wider system: the net of help that Paul and his collaborators were opening up. The community idea will repeat then, 9:13, associated with a generous community (recapturing the term a`plo,tthoj, seen previously).

3. Grace that produces equality

But this example of Macedonia was being used by Paul to persuade the Corinthians (or to all Achaia? For example, also to Cencreas?).

Here it is where Paul needs to appeal to arguments to justify the collection system that it was carrying out.

The block directed to the Corinthians to convince them (inside the first part) goes from 8:7 to 8:15. The main verse is the theological one in 8:9:

You know our Lord Jesus Christ grace that impoverished being rich because of you, so that you enriched of that poverty.

Here we see that the grace has the particularity of producing a flow of goods such that it modifies the situations of wealth and poverty among those that share that flow. In this case is Jesus who "loses" goods becoming poor; so other one "win" goods getting rich.

Before arriving to the v. 9 Paul highlights the wealth of the Corinthians in the v.7. This passage in certain form reminds 1° Corinthians 1:26. The Corinthians have abundance of faith, knowledge, word and love. But what Paul requests is that they make grow the grace, v. 7. The grace here is understood as the participation in the collection. One can see in the construction: "so that also in this (demonstrative adjective) grace grows."

This is stressed then in the v. 8. The concern for “everything” of the v. 7 should transform in “concern for the other one” (h; e`te,rwn spoudh) so that the love is manifested like something genuine. Until here it seemed to be that the concern for the other one is to cause the flow of goods toward the other ones: something characteristic of the love and of the grace.

Those vs. 10-11 seemed to point out some problem in the community for which the collection is being delayed.

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

As for remedying the necessity I understand that Paul conceives the grace like the contribution that it allows to fellows and communities not to fall in necessity. This is an immediate and urgent objective dedicated to the survival of the poor from Jerusalem.

As for the search of equality we can find in the v. 14 a kind of an ecclesiastic program, no longer immediate but dedicated to create a permanent net:

*Now, in this time (kairo,j) the abundance of you toward the necessity of them
So that, also, the abundance of them ends up being (ginomai) toward the necessity of you...*

Paul doesn't only hope to remedy the necessity of some communities far from the imperial center, but rather he hopes to find in this collection a system of flow of goods that achieves the equality, like he affirms the end of the verse 14:

So it ends up existing (ginomai) the equality

In definitive Paul hopes the circulation of goods that is given toward the periphery either has its economic answer of material or spiritual goods. For other texts we can understand that Paul considers that the necessity of Achaia is of symbolic goods that are contributed (from the past and presently) for the periphery of the empire while the necessity of the periphery of the empire is of material goods that are contributed by regions that are located more near the center of imperial power (Greece and Minor Asia) (Roman 15:26-27).

Paul and their group don't elaborate a circuit of goods that flow in a single address. The two direction prepositions of the v. 14 (eivj) show a flow and reflux of goods to fight against the necessity of both sides. Paul is also affirming that it only is not necessary to satisfy the material necessities but rather symbolic or spiritual necessities also exist.

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

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

Who are the participants of this institution?

Titus, the brother of fame; Paul's brother and their group, the other brothers sent by the churches. Here we are seeing at least six people and with security others more (we don't know how many brothers sent the churches)

It is good to keep in mind that for this group of people it is necessary a system that sustains them during their mission. This system can be seen in the recommendation of the brothers that are arriving at Corinth. This group needed residence, place in the road, foods and possibly another support type for the trips. Here we are speaking of an organization of volume that involved the participation of several churches and a flowing communication among them.

Some characteristics of this entity.

As for the conformation we can say that has two types of persons inside her. On one hand Paul, Titus, and two more people recognized by the church in general. But this group that participates without being chosen but keeping in mind its name inside the churches is not a closed group. On the other hand, the churches have the possibility to choose delegates as we see in the v. 23 (avpo, stoloi evkklhsiw/n). In fact, the brother of fame is chosen by the churches for the function of accompanying to Paul and his group.

In these delegates of the churches we suppose a form of election of the same ones. This kind of election isn't clarified and perhaps it can have been diverse according to the churches. But what we want to stress is that the collection was a movement that had an international dimension but at the same time it was rooted in the heart of the concrete community. That root was not only given in the gathering of material goods but in people's elections that took care of the good realization of the collection. Each community watched over and it promoted the realization of the collection.

A point has to add on the *auvqai,retoj* concept referred to those who participate of the group in charge of taking the collection ahead. This term is only in 2° Corinthians in the chapter 8, twice. According to this, the fellows are considered as entering to the group for their own will, freely. This is imperative in the new system. Paul here doesn't force to enter in the system like would make it the empire, but rather the entrance and participation of this group is free. The term repeats in 8:3-4 where it qualifies the entrance to the system of the churches of Macedonia "for its own will, freely, without obligation."

Although as the fact of the democratization as the voluntary participation could be in the voluntary associations that existed in the empire we can say that the new thing is firstly, the combination of groups of different economic levels as they were the churches of Macedonia and those of Achaia. Secondly, the Pauline proposal is given at level macro, inter churches, while the democratization and liberate election was, in the voluntary associations, at level micro, at the group.

In 8:20 and 21 we find the reasons for that which Paul understands necessary a structure that moves together with the collection:

Trying to avoid this that some finds us in lack with the enormous one adds this, guarded by us. Because we consider to not only make the good thing before the Lord but also before the men.

The group is a custodian of the offering but the delegates are also taken charge of controlling to the group. There is a strong concern for the transparency of the system. This would surely redound in more readiness to collaborate.

May be there was a growing in the conception of the group that manage the goods. If we see 1^o Corinthians 16:3-4 Paul and the Corinthians have no problem about the people's handling goods. Later, in 2^o Corinthians, there is a consideration about that people.

3^o Part: The churches of Achaia (9:1-15)

There was great difficulty in the insert of the churches of Achaia. Everything seems to indicate that in a first moment these churches entered in the system but then they bring back (9:2-5). This situation could have produced a reduction in the gathered quantity (9:6-10). Probably the conflicts about the Paul's apostleship are the reason for this bring back. Although I can suppose that another reason made that the churches of Achaia (especially Corinth?) questioned this collection.

It could look for the problem considering the securities that Paul wants to give in the previous chapter (transparency in the handling of the funds, freedom to participate, and free election of delegates to the administrating group). All these securities in fact are threat at different levels of the imperial culture. If some influential members in the congregation of Corinth were threatened in their social position or they could be questioned as for to sustain and to strengthen other mechanisms different to those socially set, then we can understand a strong problem in Corinth. Let us see some situations that can have caused difficulties in the church of Corinth.

In the first place that it had delegated of the churches to verify the handling of the funds it is to create a structure that is not vertical but rather it is supported in the audit of the community bases. Certainly, this was far from being representative of a denominated time "Principate" where the republican institutions in fact were a facade for an authoritarian government that didn't have reason to respond to the Senate. Although we have spoken of the democratization of the voluntary associations in fact one understands that those "patronus" of this associations not "surrendered bills" of its "generosity." In fact the positions in these associations were gotten by those "generous patronus" that donated big sums to carry out works.¹

In second place I have to think in that the freedom to participate of this collection is a wide alternative to the typical system in which difficultly one could opt to stop to be certain individual's client and to survive in the society. The v. 8:8 is overwhelming: this system is built starting from the necessity of the other one. There is not imposition (evpitagh,) but the creation of an interest for the other ones.

In third place that was chosen the delegates mark a process of decision that arises from the communities toward the construction of a bigger entity. I want to highlight that still the "The fame brother (o' e;painoj) for the gospel in all the churches" (8:18) it doesn't

¹ 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.

only arrive to the group for their status (characteristic method of the system of orders of the Roman society where you appealed to the honor inherited to be located inside the group of the society) but rather “it was chosen by the churches (ceirotanhqei.j u`po. tw/n evkklhsiw/n)” as partner (sune,kdhmoj) of Paul and their group

I can also find that Paul uses, in the speech that he goes from the v. 9:6 at the 9:15 where it appeals to the Corinthians (or all Achaia), the mention of the Scripture that keep in mind the concept justice (dikaiosunh). These mentions are together in 9:9 and 9:10. The first one is a mention of the Psalm 112 which describes to the fair human being. Giving to the poor a lot is inside these human being qualities. The second mention is taken of Hosea 10:12 and it is not already refers to the fellow's construction like in the psalm 112 but to that fellow's production: the products (ge,nhma) of its justice. This production is given for God's sake (9:8.10.14) by way of grace (9:8.10) not only spiritual but, in this context, highly material.

But apart from these situations that seemed to be looking for alternative to that socially given², I also believe that there is a problem that has to do with the construction of a road and a circulation of goods that it could differ that of the Empire, as much in their direction as in their form.

I find this last point that it is one of the objectives that Paul declares before the churches of Achaia. The collection is good not just for the immediate solution of the necessities of the sisters churches in Jerusalem but rather also make an ideology of solidarity beside to the imperial ideology (v. 9:12). This new ideology has to do with the grace of God instead of the emperor's grace or of the “patronus” that conformed the patronus-cliens system of the Roman socio-economic system. This new ideology causes a redistribution of goods (v. 9:11) with which the rich ones didn't agree possibly like the poor churches of Macedonia (8:2). This ideology has in the v. 13 their objective: through the service (diakoni,a) to create a community (koinwni,a) that confess Christ's Gospel (not Caesar's). But Paul will follow a more step in the v. 14 since hopes this ideology causes that the outlying churches return praying (deh,sij) toward those that took material goods and at the same time reward a great affection (evpipoqe,w). In sum, Paul is deviating the praying and the affection to the Emperor and their subsidiary ones (cf. 1° Timoteo 2:1).

Commercially speaking, this was a business that didn't seem to have a logic agreement at the imperial times. And it was the reason: the city of Corinth traded mainly with the cities of the Aegean Sea, of the distant east and Syrian before its destruction and reconstruction. That route that went toward the east is invested in the era change mobilizing the products and the trade in general toward the west, toward the new capital of the world, Rome. The kitchen elements and the pottery found in the forum of Corinth of this “new era” they are of the western cities of Corinth.

4° Part: Conclusion: The Paul's dream, a symbolic and material liturgy

We have many interpretations about the Paul's work toward Jerusalem. Some scholars understand it as part of the Paul's defense in 2° Corinthians³. Others see a Paul's

² Pixley, Jorge. *Los primeros seguidores de Jesús en Macedonia y Acaya*. In *RIBLA* N° 29. 1998. pg. 65

³ 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

strategy to join the two branches of the Christian church: gentiles and Jewish⁴, may be in satisfying the agreement with James, Peter and John. An apocalyptic action, or a Jerusalem Temple's taxes collection (by the Jewish Diaspora) background can be found explaining the shape of the Paul's action too. I want to think another accent.

This deviation, of material and symbolic goods, Paul understands like a *leitourgia*, a liturgy (9:12):

Because the service of this liturgy is not only replacing the necessities of the saints but also enriching because of the many actions of thanks to God...

The liturgy was rooted in the Greek culture in which certain facts of the city were covered economically by particular families instead of a central government. Paul maintains the honorary idea of the liturgy but it changes a fact that is radical: it is no longer carried out the liturgy for a powerful one but as an action of the whole net of churches. Paul uses the language of the benefactors found in the benefactions inscriptions,⁵ like *proqumi*, a (eagerness). Also our term, grace, we examine previously⁶.

The poor churches of Macedonia are invited to participate (in fact "they claim" their participation). On the other hand the liturgies that were optional in times of the Republic in the century I c.e. it begins to organize as obligatory, fixing the mount of the *summae honorariae* that should surrender to the city. Here I also rescue the Pauline idea of the insert in this system not for obligation but freely, like it was seen previously.

Arrived to this point it fits the question if Paul was organizing a collection or rather a liturgy. This last concept has strong connotations to cause the emergence of something new. Some differences.

The collection like it could understand each other in those times it would be the gathering of grains to palliate the hunger in some city of the empire. It had the first and only objective of satisfying the necessity of a city. We have the *frumentatio* example. The *frumentatio* was "a free monthly distribution of grain to 150,000 resident, adult, male, citizen"⁷ in Rome throughout the Principate.

Contrary, the liturgy not necessarily had to do with an emergency but with the possibility of improving the imperial infrastructure: roads, buildings, mail and transport system, and supply of grains to the army and lodging of the same one.

The collection was of products while the liturgy was fundamentally money.

I understand that to organize everything like a liturgy has the following challenges for the imperial system: firstly, the liturgy was understood like a sum of money surrendered to build, to improve the city. Paul and his companion here are proposing the construction or improvement of a "city", "region" different to the empire. Secondly, the refund of honor characteristic of the liturgy circulates for roads different to the

⁴ Murphy-O'Connor J. *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 1991.p.76

⁵ Witherington III. "*Conflict and Community...*" pp. 420 ss.

⁶ 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

⁷ Meggitt, Justin J. *Paul, Poverty and Survival*. Edimburgo. T&T Clark, 1998 pp.51 ss.

traditionally built ones. As different as that the honor could relapse in communities instead of people or families and it could relapse in poor communities as those of Macedonia.

Here it was present the idea of the “liturgical” construction of other “empire” sustained by rich and poor communities. Here we have more than a “simple act of charity”⁸ or a possibility to join the Jewish Christianity and the gentile Christianity. Here is something like the “Christian mutualism” for survival⁹, or may be in the African way: a *harambee*¹⁰. But, I estimate, there is more than it.

About that, in Luke’s text we saw the person circulation like a good. The person, like the little son, has no opportunity to create or to change the economic system. The person is an object of the economic system. Here, in the Paul’s liturgical construction there is person mobility too. But we have to realize the person here is a subject creator of a communitarian economy while he moves.

Another point in Luke’s text is about the good’s circulation. The outside person in the city is an example of a no circulation. The little son can’t get some food. May be the poor in Jerusalem community are in the same situation than the little son in the cwra, makra. The Pauline action looks for help the people like the little son. This help, as we saw, is not just transitory. The liturgy of the gentile community can create a flow of good inside of community of Jerusalem (the sum of money is for some poor people in the community, not for all, Rom 15:26). We have to remember they didn’t carry food, they carry money. May be this was one of the problems with the Jerusalem leaders (Rom 15:31).

In Revelation’s text the city is a centre. This centre reclaims tenaciously material goods. The circulation has one direction: to the City. Just in the City, the material good become wealth (only for the merchants). Here, in the Pauline liturgy, we note the goods circulation is not only in a single direction (8:14). This good, namely grace, has no one direction and after all is no circulating to a big city.¹¹ And more, the good has a double feature: is symbolic and is material. The grace-good obtain the mark of his double nature in the original place. It has no necessity of a specific centre to get his nature (like the good in Revelation that became wealth because the arrival to the City). The 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 the circulation, is grace when improve 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 of great mobilization in the related to the international market in Latin America.¹²

⁸ Murphy-O’Connor J. “*The Theology of the Second Letter...*”. p.76

⁹ Meggit, “*Paul...*”, pp. 157-160

¹⁰ Manus, Ukachukwu Chris. 2 Corinthians. In *Global Bible Commentary*. (455-462). Abingdon Press. Nashville, 2004. p.457-458

¹¹ 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

¹² 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)

The debate to which we have attended polarized positions strongly between two: on one hand the project of the ALCA (Area of Free Trade for America) and for the other side the project of the MERCOSUR (Common South American Market). The ALCA had in United States and the neoliberal associations its main instigators. For the other side the MERCOSUR had in the last times countries that work for its emergence and invigoration: Brazil in the first place and seconding Argentina, and Venezuela (that acquires its membership recently).

The idea of considering a common market among the Latin American countries was the dream from those who expect the emergence of Latin America. Certainly, this dream was threatened by the North American penetration on the continent. The imposition of the ALCA would have the effect of deepening of the misery on the developing countries and the improvement of United States. Once again.

As alternative, United States knitted a quantity of bilateral commercial treaties (TLC: Treaties of Free Trade) that harmed vastly to the countries that underwent them. A test is the use of this topic in the recent electoral campaigns, for example in Nicaragua. And in this example, the victory of the Sandinista party that doesn't favor the TLC is an entire message. Bolivia and Ecuador are in the same trend.

After the disastrous economic decade of the '90 where the neoliberal capitalism devoured the wealth of the Latin American countries, in the new century there are several intents of change the direction. The fight against the ALCA is one of them.

V. The Methodist churches in Argentina. Defense of the connectional system

Amid this international panorama we have the task of wondering for the situation and posture of the Methodist churches, in my case in Argentina.

In Argentina the connectional system of the Methodist churches was always an example with the one which "we evangelize" to the surrounding society. The shared economy of the rich and poor churches that allowed the existence of the small churches thanks to the connectional system should still be a sample of alternative.

This connectional system allowed that the church continued existing. And this connectional system extended internationally. The rich Methodist churches of other countries shared this system and they co-worked in the connectional system. The Methodist Church in Argentina was auto sustained in less than 50%. The rest was contributed generously by the churches sisters in mission of United States, England, Switzerland, Canada, among others.

This was an example in one decade where the neoliberalism established that each one should be sustained by itself. This was an example in one decade where many churches Methodist poor of the Argentina would have closed their doors and very possibly to sell their buildings. Without doubts the grace shared among the Methodist churches of different parts of the world helped and we can today to give testimony. Perhaps we should say that we should urgently in these times, to give testimony. Testimony that perhaps could be gathered by our historians to reinforce our times.

However I notice that presently a danger hangs on the conception connectional of the Argentinean Methodism. Their name is “congregationalism”. Their basic idea is that the economic support of each congregation is located in each congregation. This, contrary to the connectional, where the support of each congregation is located in a system of common contributions. The reduction of contributions of the churches of the outside of Argentina has taken us to be in an extremely risky situation. Here the roads to leave the crisis fork: “congregationalism” or “connectionalism”.

Without doubts that in our social milieu, where the polarization ALCA-TLCs-MERCOSUR it is effective, where the poverty of some churches would make them impossible to continue, the polarization congregationalism-connectionalism is an opposition that we should not leave of side like debate.

The text of 2 Corinthians 8-9 that I have analyzed previously want to offer some tools for rethinking in our times the connectional existence like Methodist church in Argentina.