

“Do not be conformed to this world, let every person be subject to the governing authorities and love one another with mutual affection”

Romans 12-15 as a communitarian reflection on subjectivities

A. Introductory frameworks.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this little text is to approach to Paul’s letter to Romans from some questions of our time. Certainly, we can say that this kind of approach necessarily is always true; we cannot approach to a biblical text but from our own culture and concerns. But in our case these concerns are the reason which are made explicit and put as the main reason for this approach.

What is this current concern that leads us to the biblical text?

Nowadays Latin America and especially the country where I live, Argentina, is going through highly relevant political historical moments. We have Governments that have brought about changes in the cultural and social worldview. These changes occur at the same time as generators of props and strong denials. These rejections and props are not given in superficial levels or only within policy areas but they are lived as threats to social order or, on the contrary, as innovations that renew both justice as a more plenty life in society.

Such support and rejections are not maintained as extra-ecclesial discussions because of their moral, ethical and cultural nature. They are moved into the religious communities where in some cases they become situations of ruptures within these communities.

Taking into account this social and religious perspective, oneself tends to wonder what message is proposed within the biblical texts or if there were times in which something similar happened and if it could be a guide for us in our current time.

We will think about the text of Romans and will approach it as a text that can illuminate our concerns about these subjects in contemporary times.

2. Our presuppositions

The first fact we take into account and from which we think the text is how we are going to read Romans. We shall reflect about the traditional readings of Paul’s Letter to Romans because it has been usually considered as a legal text, which speaks us of grace versus law. In our case, we will take into account Romans in the way of Patte does.¹ He proposes to consider the text of Romans as a text that took itself three kinds of interpretations, or readings. The first of them is the forensic interpretation, the second is the covenantal interpretation and the third is the apocalyptic interpretation. We will work mainly with the second reading, which emphasizes the rhetorical interpretation. From this interpretation we will seek what Pablo is trying to change or to hold within the roman communities.²

¹ Patte, Daniel; *Romans* in Global Bible Commentary; Abingdon Press; Nashville; 2004. pp.429-433

² Castelli, Elizabeth; *Imitating Paul. A Discourse of Power*; Westminster/John Knox Press; Louisville, Kentucky; 1991; pp 53 ff.

We will work with a text that is mainly rhetorical and, specifically this text, an exhortative or parenetic speech. Chapters 12:1 to 15:13 could be conceived as a uniform bloc, with some literary independence (not as thematic or relational as we shall see) of the previous block 1-11 and the subsequent (or later depending on how to consider 15:14-33)

The limits of this text are clear enough beginning with the verb Παρακαλῶ in 12:1 and ending with a text of the Old Testament, its interpretation and closing/greeting in 15:13.

Considering literary characteristics, this block has a significant amount of verbs in subjunctive or imperative mode as well as indicative. We understand that some verb we found in indicative mode; in parenetic speech have same meaning to the imperative.

What we are trying to think in this writing is know how this series of imperative verbs can be read as a reflection between the outside and the inside of the community. We do that instead of just do a reading that consider these imperative verb merely as appeals directed to the same recipients, but living in different ethics and programmatic worlds. With this point of view we are approaching some questions: Does Rm. 12:1-15:13 reproduce the discussion within the Roman Empire? What does it propose as an alternative community but at the same time inserted in a social, economic, religious and political system?

3. *Ours theoretic frameworks*

We believe that to work with this text, as well as any text of our Bible, we have to have some references of the cultural, political and social frames when the text was made. It will allow us to position ourselves in front of a text produced by a given society. In this sense, we will think the text within the framework of certain debates which we suppose must have been in the Roman imperial context.

3.a. Debate about an Imperial society vs. a Republican society

Although the change towards a one-man-type Government was a fact that happened in the "framework" of the Republicans Institutions, it was not conceived as a genuine Government form, at least in the official discourse. We can appreciate this idea anytime when we see the Roman Senate never ceased to operate during the Empire. The Senate was kept as "legitimizing" the need for a strong and responsive Government all around the vast Empire.

However, we have to say that this debate occurs mainly in the Roman elite. Possibly the expectation of a return to the Republic was not present in certain social sectors. At the same time it is noted that the Republic, through its institutions, supported a type of Government and society that could be seen fractured or threatened during the Principality.

Although the Empire did not change essential structures, such as the economy, some social and personal rights were awarded during that time to social sectors which previously had no visibility in the Republican institutions.

3.b. Debate about a society grounded on the Law vs. a society which allow itself exceptions to the Law

This debate is fundamentally interrelated to the previous one because Roman law was held and applied by the Republican institutions. While this situation continues in formal terms, the fact is that several exceptions of the law are given in the Empire by the Emperors. These exceptions sometimes were discussed by the Senate, but many others were handled only by the Emperor and its close environment.

Certainly, the debate persists in the Imperial age since the law, as social agreement, is required to avoid personal decisions that could endanger public safety. But at the same time, institutional decisions of the Republic claimed the security and stability of the elites that accessing the institutions, leaving many times in danger to vulnerable, lower social classes or those that were not considered citizens.

3.c. Debate about a society with reifications vs. a society with empty signifiers.

What do we call reifications in our text?

We took Berger and Luckman in their traditional text:

"The reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, it means, in not human terms or possibly supra human. It can be expressed otherwise saying that the reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something other than human activity as if they were facts of nature, as results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of the divine will."³

In this sense the idea of the Roman Empire was enacted and believed as the only possibility of human existence as a society. The Empire was seen as a living organism that had evolved into the best possible way of existence. If it was the only alternative as society human then it was difficult to discuss.

Was not this idea of Empire what is seen in the imperial cult? The reification of the figure of the Emperor ended inevitably in the divinization. The emperor was conceived as the head of this organism alive and evolved.

One of the strong responses to this reifying position of the Empire has to do with the apocalyptic vision. While the Empire was proposed as the culmination of the human and social development, apocalyptic language and movement rescue and proclaim the end of these times. In the conception of the apocalyptic movement, present time does not represent the final and only possible state but a stage before the Kingdom of God.

What do we call empty signifiers?

An empty signifier is, strictly speaking, a signifier without a signified⁴

Its signified will be given in the particular context of each social or political situation.

In this sense, the empty signifier allows subordinated social strata, those without power, perform operations that permit them to get rid of the reification of the structures of power. The reification of an emperor is not named or worked in Romans 12-15 but we have inside of 12-15 a text like Romans 13:1-7, whose reading and interpretation throughout history has been too debated. It is in this text that conflict between the reification and the empty signifier is working at all and it allows Paul does not be against the reification, endangering life of the communities. We will see this opposition below.

B. Approaching to the text

³ Berger, Peter L. – Luckman, Thomas; La construcción social de la realidad; Amorrortu Editores 17ª reimpresión; Buenos Aires, p.116

⁴ Laclau, Erenesto; Emancipation(s); Verso, London; 1996; p 36 ff.

We will understand the text as one which deals with the conformation of the subjectivity. The debates we saw in our theoretical frameworks discussion will influence significantly in the construction of the subjectivity of the emerging communities, that of its members and the conception of society present in both. It is from this situation that both Paul and the first communities in general will be involved in real fights for the meaning, the symbolization of the human being, his place in the nearby community and their place in this world.

We will divide this idea or this task that is presented in the text as a triple task: the construction of personal subjectivity, communitarian subjectivity and social subjectivity.

The interaction between these three facets concerning the construction of subjectivity will produce an exhortative narrative and hermeneutic proposal in the emerging communities of followers of Jesus.

This interpretation leaves aside the idea of an exhortative text that tries to create behaviors into the inside of the community, looking for to make differentiations between its inner members and the social environment where they are living.

It is precisely for this reason that by dividing the text into personal constructions, communitarian or social constructions, we will do it from the conviction and security that this is not possible in the reality of everyday life, since the three constructions are deeply interconnected.

The first approach to the text, then, has to do only with to get evidence of the some emphasis. The construction of personal subjectivity cannot be isolated of the communitarian or social construction. For this reason it is that some of the divisions we make in the text will be debatably and this situation is precisely part of the problem of the text and the life of the communities. Here is where the question arises, is my inner being affected by my social being or by the communitarian being?

Perspective that we will see at this moment has to do with a kind of comings and goings on the formation of the subjectivity in the first Christian communities.

We then underline this last idea. We are not doing an exact division that would understand specific exhortation only destined to a specific kind of construction of subjectivity.

Let's see these emphases on the construction of subjectivities:

Chapter 12

12:1 personal construction

12:2 social construction

12:3-8 communitarian construction

12:9 personal construction

12:10-13 communitarian construction

12:14-15 social construction

12:16 communitarian construction

12:17-20 social construction

12:21 personal construction

Chapter 13:1-14 social construction

Chapter 14-15

14:1-6 communitarian construction

14:7-9 personal construction

14:10-13 communitarian construction

14:14 personal construction

14:15-21 communitarian construction

14:22-15:3 personal construction

15:4-7 communitarian construction

15:8-13 social construction

With this scheme we want to formulate the relationship between the personal, communitarian and social subjectivities inside of communities.

It will be in these communities where the debate is "embodied" in everyday life and in the self-perception of every one of the members.

We are framed in the context of postcolonial analysis, in which the question arises by the mode of construction of subjectivities, the mode of colonization of subjectivities. For this reason is that we consider that resistance made by Paul and the first Christian communities is given in three areas: the construction of personal, communitarian and social subjectivities.

The process of construction of subjectivities

We will consider a starting point to understand how subjectivity is constructed. It will be the flow of goods.

The construction of subjectivities, in the three areas we saw, is performed by several and specific interchange of goods. This, as we have previously stated, will be done in three areas: communitarian, social and personal.

Therefore, we go into this way of construction of subjectivities.

I - The flow of goods in the personal construction of subjectivity

The verses we have considered about the personal construction of subjectivity have some characteristics in common that we want to highlight:

The personal construction of subjectivity is related to goods received and given to God.

12:1. Body is a good which is given to God as a living sacrifice. This is what opens the entire block that we are considering.

It is essential in a slaveholding society that reflection is opened with this proposal of flowing of a good (like the body) which is a constituent of the individual itself. In this sense, it is the first

element that clarifies through action, the constitution of personal subjectivity without differentiating bodies of slaves or free person. Claim is directed to the recipient "brothers" without differentiating social categories.

12:9 and 12:21 are verses that are also suggesting a movement of the good and evil as constituents: "hate evil, follow the good"; "not be overcome by evil and overcome evil with good". If in the situation of 12:1 we could see a very specific suggestion since it was related to the body, here the circulation of goods has to do with abstract ones: the good, the bad. The administration of evil is rejected trying to manage it with the good. The good/bad dichotomy, in any case is not something that might endanger the constitution's own subjectivity. The bad is faced and even overcome by the human action.

14:7-9 these verses are closely related to 12:1. Ownership, or not, of the body has to do with anybody who we consider slaves without property on its body and, on other hand, those who owns its own body. We see this problematic over and over again in the proposal of the Pauline literature. By way of example we can see 1 Corinthians 6:20 or 1 Corinthians 7:22-23. So, personal subjectivity is constructed considering personal slavery to any master/Lord/owner. The dilemma is who is the master that owns our body or our life?

14:14 and 14:22-15:3 Change the focus of construction from the perception of slave/owner into the construction from the ability to define the symbolic endangerment of an element. 14:14 is very interesting since the human being is built as someone who can grant, remove, or modify a symbolic density situation. Thus the purity or impurity of something is linked to human activity which gives to the material this plus.

Verses 14:22 to 15:3 continue with the human ability to provide symbolisms to the material realities, but now transfer that capacity to the human relationship. Now, to be strong or to be weak is not something that constitutes a human differentiation but a mechanism to make relationships.

Other constructions of contemporary subjectivities proposed a definite clarification between the strong and weak and, at the same time, the proposal to build oneself as strong. Here the strong/weak differentiation establishes only a category that allows conveying property to the weakest: "We the strong must bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (15:1). This distinction actually establishes a directionality of the flow of property which, in this case, would be pleased and support/care.

II - The flow of goods in the communitarian construction of subjectivity

We noticed how the idea of body is already presented both in Pauline epistolary literature and other political literature of the Empire. The construction of this body, in the Pauline case, is given from a distribution of gifts from God.

That donation of gifts does not create fixed entities, or fixed charges, but that donations are viewed as functions. This idea is interesting in the context of the construction of collective subjectivities since the activity of a person into the community of which this person is part is what defines it. Inherited subjectivities are not given in Paul's letter, but the action originates them. In addition to this there is a selection of activities and therefore of subjectivities and a characterization of the mode in which it should be carried forward.

Another aspect that builds communitarian subjectivity is reciprocity. Actions not only define a subject but it also is defined by the reception of similar actions. The flow of goods then is of

double way to achieving a subjectivity of reciprocity inside of the community. We can say that the community is the space/time determined by the reciprocal flow of goods.

Finally, communitarian subjectivity is constructed from a kind of very specific flow which is the flow given from the powerful to the weakest. This flow, displayed in 14:1, seeks protection and reception of other subjectivities that are not built as normal within the community.

Therefore, the subjectivities here defined as weak in the faith (14:1 *Τὸν ἀσθενοῦντα τῆ πίστει*) are not focus of criticism but acceptance and reception as part of communitarian subjectivity. Communitarian subjectivity becomes so diverse and accepts all person inside of the salvation of Christ (14:9; 14:15)

Communitarian subjectivity works combining the latter specific flow (from strongest ones to weakest ones) with the previous one that we considered (reciprocity). Reciprocity is combined in the communitarian building with the reception of diverse subjectivities (15:7, *προσλαμβάνεσθε ἀλλήλους*)

If we remember that one of the debates existent in the imperial society was about the possibility of being society from the Republic or from the Empire, we could see here some interesting alternatives.

The Republic was founded as an institution that held and reproduced the social classes, or should we say the orders. In this sense, to think the reciprocity as constitutive of the community is rethinking a mode of subjectivity different to both the Empire and the Republic. Reciprocity, considering flow of all goods, became a deconstruction of the Republican or Imperial social structure that needs of classes (or orders) to work.

II - The flow of goods in the social construction of subjectivity

Considering social subjectivity, we can say that we notice a difficulty in the flow of goods.

It seems that social subjectivity has, unlike the personal and especially the communitarian, a lack of power. We can see this privation in some verbs such as those we have in 12:14. There the recipients of the letter can only bless or curse those who persecute: *εὐλογεῖτε τοὺς διώκοντας [ὑμᾶς], εὐλογεῖτε καὶ μὴ καταρᾶσθε.*

Block 12:17-20 reinforce this passive subjectivity: is God who will have the ability to avenge injustices. *μὴ ἑαυτοὺς ἐκδικοῦντες 12:19; ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις, ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω, λέγει κύριος.*

Chapter 13 begins with the imperative that reinforces this social subjectivity in all its content: *ὑποτασσέσθω.* So, one of the characteristics of social subjectivity is the recognition of a lack of power and the derivation of the action to God.

A second characteristic we want to point out considering social subjectivity is the use of biblical quotations. Biblical hermeneutics appears to be constitutive of this subjectivity.

We don't say that in the construction of other subjectivities the Scripture is not present, but what we want to emphasize is that the quotation is explicit in this social construction. What is the function of this biblical quotation? We can find in Paul himself the reason for the return again and again to Scripture: Romans 15:4-5 is attributed by us to communitarian subjectivity but we believe that it is worth to note these verses as a conception of the hermeneutic use of the Scripture:

The things that were written before, for our instruction were written, so that, by the resistance, and the exhortation of Scripture we might have hope

In this quotation I want to highlight two words which seem fundamental to me: resistance and exhortation. The term *ὑπομονή*, which is translated by patience in some cases, I prefer to translate it by resistance or perseverance. With this translation, we pointed out an active and positive attitude rather than simply an inactive waiting such as in some cultures the word patience can be understood. The other term is exhortation, *παράκλησις*, that we could translate as a consolation but also as exhortation which is the comfort involving an exhortation that promotes a movement.

This hermeneutic places us beside to a Scripture which is understood as essential in the same formation of subjectivity by giving two features/tools that form a resistant human being.

Finally, in this social subjectivity we can notice that there is a relativization of social places and the power of those places. In fact, the first literary block (12:2) we have considered as belonging to this social subjectivity has itself this imperative: do not fit: *μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε*

About this relativization, we want to note that the framework of the reification could be present as background. Something reified is what is naturalized through different political devices. Here Paul is questioning strongly these reifications giving merely the property of places of power and authority.

The relationship with these entities is based on the recognition not of a higher nature but of a power or greater authority. This leads to a worldview where the established authorities (Rm 13:1) are based on power management, authority (Rm 13:3.4). This authority requires the idea of service to the people, the *raison d'être* of an authority and power is the service to the people: Romans 13:4: "...is server of God for your good..."

The idea of criticism to the reification is completed in 13:7-8 where the flow of goods is strongly segmented. The reification needs, as a constituent element, a whole flow of both material goods as symbolic toward the reified entity.

By way of example, it can be said that material goods toward the figure of the emperor must be total: material and symbolic. In fact, the flow of symbolic goods seems to be fundamental in the naturalization carrying the reification. Only from the circulation of symbolic goods (honour, recognition of superiority, fear) the reified entity is conformed as such and it is also the reifying element.

In 13:7-8 there isn't a totalizing flow of goods. Symbolic goods and their recipients are differentiated of material goods and their recipients (v.7). At the same time, v. 8 produces unification, a new consolidation. The flow of a particular good, which Paul calls love, associates to all the human being in an equal treatment. Therefore, the constitution of any subjectivity in Romans 13:8 is marked by indiscriminate flow of love.

Taking into account the problem of the flow of goods, we have to note that the four passages of Scripture cited in 15:9-12 have, all of them, a string of correspondences evidenced in the word "gentiles". But we can notice that gentile's relationship chain is marked by linking these with God as the v.9 says: "so that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy".

Through that hermeneutic we can see that the Scripture suggests God as the recipient of several symbolic goods: confession (v.9), joy (v.10), praise (v.11) and hope (vol.12). The inclusion of another recipient, as God, would then modify the way of constitution of subjectivity prevailing in the imperial system.

C. Conclusions and appropriation of the text

By way of conclusion and appropriation of the text we will return to the preliminary concern that gave rise to our search.

The beginning of this work had to do with situations that involved us in deep discussions inside of our communities. These debates were not only issues or political statements but also discussions that reached the subjectivity itself both of personal and communitarian conformation. So, that return to this initial concern will help us to think our communities today.

We will start with the concern that, in my opinion, is crucial. I think the main concern is the subjectivity of the community. It is there where we are asking, in our communities, how to be Christians communities in the middle of our specific socio-political frame.

a. The communitarian subjectivity in Paul and today

Communitarian subjectivity in Romans would be marked by three elements: the reciprocity, the function within the community and the movement towards the weak. The formation of a different, alternative, community in Romans, has to do with the possibility of establishing these three elements as part indispensable of the community.

Our communities can now be wrapped in conflicts that have to do with other forms of constitution that aren't these three.

Inside our communities, it is essential to remind consistently about the reciprocity in the circulation of both material and symbolic goods. The flow inside our communities are often stratified or crystallized into structures of government that do nothing but naturalize a few members in leadership positions, others on administrative charges, others on liturgics ones, etc.

The reciprocal flow wouldn't be installed if the community can't be conceived as a space where the task of a person is what places it in the community. The opposite would be that a person is incorporated in a given community place because of its family origin, social class, etc.

Currently in our communities, we could add that the political belonging, supporting or not a particular Government can be transformed into a data that sets a person in a particular place within the community. This is the way of reifications, the mode by someone is located within the community not because the ability (the speech of the gifts in Paul) but because their membership in certain political idea.

Finally, in the formation of the community the weak brother is transformed again, as in other occasions in Paul, in that element that leads to relativize all others. All crystallization in community structures should be put in parentheses and should be questioned, in front of the existence of the weak. The reception of the weak, their full incorporation into the community,

their support, care and protection become the task of the community. The constituent element of the communitarian subjectivity becomes now these tasks towards the weak.

b. The personal subjectivity in Paul and today

We want to set this question or this concern within communities.

We cannot be in a community professing this or that political idea without being relocated within the community network in a certain place but also we are going to be conceived by other members in a particular way as human beings. So it will be a supportive or critical, pro-Government, popular or elitist according to the professed political ideology.

What does Romans propose us?

One of the visions that I find important to stress has to do with the opinion made above: our property, our owners and our slavery.

In our country one of the social fights is to disqualify or to qualify the mass media and it has to do with talking of their independence or not. In this sense, it is postulated the existence of media government which are dependent and on the other hand there are private media which, it is said, are independent media.

This argument has an important significance in the Western tradition where freedom is a defended good, literally, until death. For Western civilization to own freedom is a goal and this goal justify wars, to break down Governments and other political actions. The conception of the human being as an entity that is born free and has the right to remain free is constitutive of Western subjectivity.

However, Pauline vision appears quite far from our ideal. It seems that subjectivity in the Pauline ideology is slave subjectivity, owned by any force or power. In this way, the cultural and personal task to identify, to create, or play subjectivity is not the Western dilemma between freedom and slavery. Instead of that, the Pauline dilemma is who owns our life, our body. There isn't autonomy of human life but it belongs to someone. Our life is slave of a master, the subject is to know or choose from whom.

Possibly, it would be a good reflection, in these times, to recognize us dependent on someone. After all human autonomy, as a modern ideal, has been cracked by the postmodern studies. We are made of alliances, dependencies, debts. We are made of those options that we have been possible to take.

If the conformation of our personal subjectivity could recognize our masters, our owners and thus choosing who serve, perhaps it would be a good chance to start dialogues and agreements to the interior of our communities. When the discussion runs by the side if we are free or dependent in our decisions, our thoughts or our opinions, so, we will not get very far.

The idea of body, in this sense, is extremely useful. Everyone necessarily depend on the community. Everyone has to serve to the body. Then, our inclusion in the community, in the communitarian subjectivity, occurs from an existential need of belonging to it. This cannot be ignored, it cannot be forgotten.

This kind of communitarian inclusion then will facilitate the reciprocal flow of goods. We could propose that personal subjectivity will only be complete once it interacts within the community. It is the circulation of goods within the community which conclude of forming personal subjectivity.

Otherwise, the community approach could occur with the wrong idea of complete and closed personal subjectivity. If the latter is the case, the flow of community goods that involve such personal subjectivity would not influence on its existence, in its own conformation. But, as we have proposed from the reading of Pauline texts, this is not possible. We are, in one way or another, dependent on a body parts. Forget that is not recognizing who belong to.

c. The social subjectivities in Paul and today

Finally, we think on our social subjectivities. We understand that the personal, communitarian and the social subjectivities are imbricated, overlapping. The order in which they were exposed at the conclusion connotes a hierarchy or preponderance in our understanding of them. Probably, it may be an arbitrary choice and therefore shows the hierarchy that I awarded by the prominence of subjectivities. The communitarian will be molding our first membership. Personal subjectivity will then be constituted as a problem, to finish in the social factor as a general frame where we develop all our subjectivities.

What does Romans propose us?

Firstly, the idea that any entity becomes social authority or social power as soon as it fulfills certain social function. This is important since it is the social action that gives a certain status to social authority. It is not the name; it is not the political belonging. Paul will speak of servants of God for our good. This is a determinant point, not only for the understanding of the social political authority but also of our place within the social. The citizen is not a servant of the authority by the contrary the authority is required to be servant of the citizen.

Here we have a first constitutive element of a not reificative perspective of the authority.

On the other hand I would like to add another element to the idea of social authority. While in Paul's letters it could be present, it is not in the way that the biblical reflection has worked the Pauline texts.

Today we can't think in political authority as the owner of total power in our societies. Today we have recognized how other powers work, sometimes, more strongly than the political authority. We can think of economic powers, powers of the mass media and powers of religious institutions. If we don't consider the interrelationship of these powers we'll lose the outlook of the origin and flows of power. We should say it considering that political power is in any case visible. The movements of the economic groups are not displayed in the same way. We also should consider that the interests or connections of the mass media are not self-evident, even more so when these mass media are shown as independent.

In this sense, I think we have to pay attention here to the social subjectivity of Paul which suggests us a kind of passivity in terms of social powers. While this may sound as passivity, or self exclusion of social phenomena, this wouldn't be so in the general Pauline context.

Concerning this, will be the Scripture which prevent us of an ideology of rejection of the social politics affair. Paul builds social subjectivity together with a key element which is the hermeneutic of Scripture. This hermeneutic encourages us to resistance, to exhortation and not to seek a fight against social powers. The resistance works, grows and builds but without the attempt to destroy or change social powers. In this way, it seems that Paul, just writing to the heart of the Roman Empire, is quite cautious. Otherwise, if he were calling to insurrection he would be leading into death the recipients of the letter. Instead of that, his call has to do with be aware about the destinations of goods and how they circulate in society. After this comprehension, Paul recommends to act giving the accurate good to the accurate receipt.

Certainly, this is a first way of resistance and consequently a way to conform as social subject. To decide who give honor to, who fear to, who pay tax to, will be a work of subjectivation that constitutes in a certain way to human beings (Rom. 13:7)

We want to note that in these Biblical passages, Paul is reshaping the idea of socially constituted authority (and this new idea can be opposed to divinely constituted). For this, we emphasize the use of the preposition *hypo* rather than *apo* in 13:1⁵. The first one means "below" while the second one means "from". So, in 13:1 the authority is "under" (*hypo*) God and not "from" God. This preposition locates the authority in the field of human instead of divine world. This human world is constituted by actions performed by their inhabitants as we can see then developed through chapter 13. Some of the constitutive actions are the administration of justice and the collection of taxes.

We also underline that the imperial authority which is behind these comments, in chapter 13, continues to be of highest importance. We should be conscious that Paul hasn't, in his letters, a unanimous position toward social authority. If we take into account 1st Thessalonians 5:3 it seems to be quoting an imperial maxim concerning peace and security: "while people are saying peace and security". This saying, in Paul's conception, is the beginning of chaos. The imperial saying can't announce anything else but the opposite to peace and security. We can see, in this position and others in 1 Thessalonians, a position of semi open conflict towards the social authorities. However, in Romans this stance seems to be tolerance and re location. In sum, Romans exhorts to a posture of tolerance toward the authority while 1^o Thessalonians doesn't.

If we consider that the imperial authority in time of 1 Thessalonians was Claudio, who in the biblical memory could have been remembered as the man who expelled Jews from Rome, we can understand this position against authority. This report can be found in acts 18:2 where we read that two companions of Paul (Priscilla and Aquila) were affected by imperial decision.⁶

On the other hand, the imperial authority at the time of the letter to Romans was Nero. As we know, this emperor had two well-marked stages in his Government.⁷ The first one (A.D. 55-62) was characterized by a Government heavily influenced by Seneca and Burrus's elitist imprint, whereas the second one (A.D. 62-68) was characterized by a populist Government with strong changes in the imperial administration of the funds. While the first stage of Nero was characterized by a public expenditure fundamentally directed to the army and the Senate, the second stage had a reduction in these public sectors and an increase in construction activity, Imperial games and distribution of food and money for the common people.

Probably, the vision of Paul and that of the communities were strongly conflicted by this Government of Nero in its first stage. Pablo's opinion towards social authority could be a factor both of conflicts and alliances within the communities.

Today we can see in Argentina a Government that is qualified from one side of "populist" and from the other side of "national and popular". At the same time, some social, politics and religious parties reclaim to go back to a neoliberal way of life and economic system.

If we have to put side by side, we would say that we are living now in Argentina in a like second Neronian stage. But inside of our communities along with some powerful mass media

⁵ Some witnesses have *apo* while other more confident have *hypo*.

⁶ For the vision of different Imperators behind Pauline statements see for example, <http://www.claiweb.org/ribla/ribla4/romanos%2013.htm>

⁷ Thornton, M.K.; The Augustan Tradition and Neronian Economics; in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* t II/2; de Gruyter; Berlin-New York; 1975; pp.149-175

there are some subjectivities that were shaped in a like first neronian stage and they are pushing to go back to that first stage (or as we could call it, a neoliberal one).

The processes of social subjectivation in Argentina have been strongly modified since ten years to the present. These social changes have interacted with our communitarian and personal subjectivities.

We believe that to pay attention to a text like Romans 12-15 thinking in a context as the one just mentioned, with Nero and his first elitist Government as background can be useful on our own constructions of subjectivity.

In this regard, we repeat Pauline dynamics which returns to Scripture to find hope, strength and several new forms of subjectivation that will allow us to set up us as communities and to handle dynamically both social and communitarian subjectivities.

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