

SSP General Chapter – 30 May 2022

Abbreviations:

EP = Pauline Publisher

GA = Giacomo Alberione

LV = Letter of d. Valdir (30/06/21)

RB = Benedictine Rules

*"Be transformed by renewing your way of thinking' (Rom 12:2).
Called to be artisans of communion to prophetically proclaim the joy of the
Gospel in the culture of communication. "*

Conference 1 – Macro-reflection

General Introduction and the Letter to the Romans

ASSUMPTIONS AND PRELIMINARIES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CHAPTER

1. **The Chapter is a "Christ" act**; in other words, an incarnation of the Word of God.

Because where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst. (Mt 18.20)

In Pauline language: it is a manifestation of the Body of Christ: *In him we live, we move and we have our being (Acts 17:28)*; but also vice versa, in us he lives and moves and exists.

Incarnation always leads to the Christian Easter → death to ourselves, in deep listening to the word, to our brothers and sisters, and to the world at this moment in its history, so that we can be instruments (better "artisans") of new life.

2. **The Chapter is a Synodal act**, which responds to the prophetic proclamation of the Pope, according to which the journeying together (σύν-όδος = "way together") of mutual acceptance and listening, is no less important than the conclusions/decisions reached.

3. The title or theme of the Chapter:

"Be transformed by renewing your way of thinking (Rom 12:2): Called to be artisans of communion in order to prophetically proclaim the joy of the Gospel in the culture of communication."

It is not just any linguistic title but rather a prophetic formula that the Lord is providing you (regardless of how you arrived at that title!), inviting you to deepen its implications.

4. The centrality of the "word":

I was thinking that it would theoretically be possible to give up the "word", and offer as the theme of the chapter a visual image, a piece of music, or even a perfume – but we are *"homines loquentes"*, so in communication the word always takes precedence. My approach is always linguistic, because of my training in literature. I try to elaborate the connotations of a word and observe the composition of groups of words.

Metaphor: Text comes from "texere" – fabric – we look at the whole, and also follow the threads.

5. Paul and the Letter to the Romans

"Paul, the disciple 'who knows the Master in his fullness' (GA) and who not only proclaims the Gospel in words and with his writings, but is himself a man of communication, skilled in working in a network with communities and with their collaborators" (LV, p 14 – 30/06/21 on the figure of the Pauline Publisher)

"Network" is an IT word; equal to "fabric" which is taken from the world of tailoring.

"The Letter of St. Paul to the Romans is the first and principal essay of the apostolate of edition, the exemplary on which every Pauline edition should be modeled" (GA, LV p 16)

6. Two ways of receiving Romans:

Personal: how can the word of God in the Romans touch, shape the personal life of each of us present here in these days, in order that we can "exude God" (LV, p 3) or show "the soul of the apostle: he who first of all is in love with God" (GA 1931, LV p 4)?

Evangelization: how can the word of God in Paul's Romans touch the life and mission/apostolate of the SSP, for which you, in a particular way, have a responsibility?

In fact: we must evangelize ourselves in order to evangelize the world.

THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

"The Letter to the Romans is not a systematic theology, nor even a summary of all that Paul thought or did; nevertheless, everyone agrees that it is his *Magnum Opus*. It eclipses the majority of his other works, an alpine peak overlooking hills and villages. However, not everyone sees it in the same light; it can be observed from different points of view; and there are so many different descriptions of what is seen" (NT Wright, in NIB, vol IX, p 319).

Using an urban metaphor: Romans is like St. Peter, compared to other basilicas (but somehow I prefer St. Paul → 1 Corinthians! ...)

Written between 55 and 57, perhaps from Corinth, before the last trip to Jerusalem, then to Rome (and Spain?)

If true, we know very well the communal and theological situation in which Paul was living when he wrote Romans – intimacy, affection, frustration, somehow "at home" in (his) Greek cities of the East → Rome is a different thing

Already in Paul a movement "abram-moving out" from his comfort zone towards "the ends of the earth" – restless man, apostolically driven, the love of Christ is the energy that does not give him "rest".

Can we see in the mere fact in Romans, and the intention expressed there, a challenge/invitation for Pauline Publishers to overcome the limits?

(Even more in the desire of Spain, for Paul it is a linguistic challenge)

Romans is Paul's only communication directed to unknown people and to a Christian community never visited – another style of communication. Isn't the majority of Pauline Publisher communication the same?

Division of the Letter

The structure of Romans is very clear: four divisions (1-4, 5-8, 9-11, 12-16).

Main theme: "The Gospel of God reveals the δικαιοσύνη of God"

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, of the Jew, first, as of the Greek. ¹⁷In it, for the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith to faith, as it is written: The righteous will live by faith. (Rom 1:16-17)

I – III deal with "theology";

IV deals with "morality or the concrete implications of theology" in fraternal life (but such a division is too simple).

I propose that Romans offers us a movement (path/journey/spiritual process) in four steps:

SIN (flesh, death, law) [*hamartia, sarx, thanatos, nomos*]

existential condition:

The Greek word for "sin" is ἁμαρτία – but let's see some statistics:

Consider only the noun ἁμαρτία (not related words such as the verb *hamartano* (to sin), or the noun *hamartolos* (sinner) etc.

TABLE OF ἁμαρτία

	Romans	Other Paul	Rest of the NT	Total
Nom Sing - ἁμαρτία	18	1	9	28
Acc Sing - ἁμαρτίαν	6	4	17	27
Gen Sing - ἁμαρτίας	15	3	17	35
Dat sing - ἁμαρτίᾳ	6	0	1	7
	→45 (=46%)	8 (== 55%)	44	97
Nom Pl 1 (Rm 4.7)	1	1	10	12
Acc Pl 1 (Rm 11,27)	1	1	21	23
Gen Pl 1 (Rm 7,5)	1	4	28	33
Dat Pl 0	0	4	5	9
	→ 3 (= 4%)	10 (==17%)	64	77

The difference in Romans (Paul) between the singular and the plural → fundamental because it distinguishes between sin (existential condition) and sins (offenses against a law) – one could almost say that Paul does not care so much about "sins"

JUSTICE (spirit, Christ, grace) [*dikaiosune, pneuma, charis*] →

RECONCILIATION (sonship, non-separation) [*huios
theou, a-chorismos*] and ...

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

.....

Conference 2 – Micro-reflection

Rom 12:1-2 and the theme of the Chapter

Have you chosen a text that forms the interface between the two parts of Romans →

Rom 1-11 (the theological part) and Rom 12-16 (the parenetic part).

Message for Pauline Publishers, provided by the very position of the quotation chosen in the body of Romans → to internalize "theology" and "transfigure" it into an apostolate among the people, that is, to be "interfaced".

So, it is a good choice!

LV has already elaborated the text of Rom 2:2; nevertheless I want to comment on the first two verses of chapter 12, then consider the second sentence of the title.

¹*I exhort you, therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, to **offer your bodies** as a living sacrifice, **holy** and **pleasing** to God; this is your spiritual **worship**.*

²*Do not conform yourselves to this world, but allow yourselves to **be transformed by renewing your way of thinking**, so that you may discern the will of God, what is good, pleasing and perfect to him.*

¹Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ, παραστῆσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν:

¹I plead with us, brothers and sisters, because of the creations of God, that you represent our bodies as sacrifices, who lived as the holy ones of God, our rational worship:

²καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός, εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον.

²And you are the one who is in the formation of this, but you are transformed into the renewal of the mind, as it tests us what the will of God, the benevolent and the perfect.

Rom 12:1

οὖν (*therefore*)

Since the text is the fulcrum of transition between the first part and the second part of Romans, we therefore note the strong weight on the second word οὖν.

Conjunctive Interface

Cf, in another way a significant moment of transition, application, realization, implementation, obedience, "mission" (emanating from ...), "apostolate" (mandate from ...) →

Cf . But he answered them: "My mother and my brothers are these: those who hear the word of God and put it into practice" (Lk 8:21 – mother and brothers)

But he said, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Lk 11:28 – blessed is the womb)

RB 5:5 → "It is of them that the Lord says: *As soon as you heard, you obeyed me*" (Ps 18:45)

παρακαλῶ (*please*)

Παρακαλῶ / *I urge* → word rich in meaning: a language meaning to push, not a simple invitation;

The esortation is based on chapters 1-8, and more on 9-11 –on the "mercies" of God

(οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ - plural (Hebrews) - οἰκτιρμός, οὔ, ὁ - x 5 in NT (2 Cor 1,3; Phil 2,1; Col 3:12; Heb 10:28) – "eleos" more frequent in Paul).

παρασῆσαι (*you are present*)

παρασῆσαι / *offrire*

Now a series of words of sacrifice/worship – as the circumcision of Israel was transformed, so was the worship/liturgy/temple of Israel: now for all in Christ

to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship

[But maybe EP is not essentially "homo liturgicus"?!]

Paul has already anticipated the cultic image: λατρείαν

The verb (λατρεύω) is used at the beginning of the letter:

God is a witness to me, to whom I worship in my spirit by proclaiming the Gospel of his Son, as I continually remember you (Rom 1:9) ὧ

λατρεύω.

Then, the noun:

They are Israelites and have adoption as sons, glory, covenants, legislation, worship, promises (Rom 9:4).

Cf *to be a minister of Christ Jesus among the nations, fulfilling the sacred ministry of proclaiming the Gospel of God so that the people may become a welcome offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit* (Rom 15:16)

εὐareston

"pleasing" (to God) used twice – repeated in v. 2 → in fact, Paul is reminding us that in the relationship in which God is always the greatest part, we (transfigured in Christ and the Spirit) can also give "pleasure" to him.

λογικὴν (reasonable)

word translated "spiritual" connected to "logos", with the sense of intelligent, well considered, reasonable, proposing the creativity (artistic?) of the activity of the EP.

Rom 12:2

συσχηματίζω only twice in the NT

1 Pt 1,14

As obedient children, do not conform to the desires of yesteryear, when you were in ignorance

ὑπακοῆς μὴ συσχηματιζόμενοι ταῖς πρότερον (the rest of the world with the formation of the erstwhile)

The verb is connected to the noun "schema" (from the verb "schein/echo" = to have/hold) → shape, perhaps figure, "frame".

Be careful not to put too much weight on the word (words have various meanings) but there is perhaps a sense of external appearance, of superficial imitation

(NTW “should probably not be pressed for further nuances”, p 607, n 489)

Paul → *of this world* (negative) - 1 Pt → *desires of the past*

Cf *those who use the goods of the world, as if they did not use them fully: in fact, the figure of this world passes!* (1 Cor 7,31) → παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου

In Latin → con-figurare

μεταμορφώω only four times in the NT (we will look afterwards)

The verb is related to the noun "morphe" – similar to "scheme" but perhaps more substantial/positive → an essential form, not just "appearance"

Let's look at the other texts:

[Mk 9:2 and Mt 17:2: the transfiguration]

2 Cor 3:18

And all of us, with our faces uncovered, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into that same image, from glory to glory, according to the action of the Spirit of the Lord.

ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν, καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος.

(We are all **revealed in the face** of the glory of the Lord, reflecting on these images, **transformed** by **glory** into **glory**, by the lord's spirit.)

For the EP → transform into the image – the language of non-oral visual communication.

If we use not the sense of sight, but that of the nose, we could say "exude God", sweat God – "smell of God" – like our communication.

In Italian "do not conform yourselves but transform yourselves" (pun)

In Greek there is no pun: can we read a deeper movement? A radical transfiguration, because of Christ, *dichiaosyne*, faith, grace etc?

An invitation to a dynamic of progress *from glory to glory*, according to the action of the Spirit of the Lord? To leave "pattern" and embrace "morphe"?

This is a speculation: in any case the EP is always dealing with "scheme" and "morphe" because they are intrinsic to communication

ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός (*renew the mind*)

renewing your way of thinking (a bit elaborate)

The transformation of the mind: always proposes new ways of thinking and communicating (in Christ), always resisting the constant pressure of the current world (while understanding, responding, transfiguring)

Cf GA → "edition" = "work or word that proceeds from a human thought ..."
(LV, p 3)

"Human thought" (*your way of thinking*) is always renewing itself in Christ

τέλειον (perfect)

The last word of the two verses – beautiful "choice"

→ "perfect", but not in the moral sense, more "accomplished", as "consummatum est" of John, connected to the word "telos" – the end.

All directed, pushed to a purpose –

Cf "which should spur us to join forces to look together at the horizon that guides us towards the future" (LV, p 2)

Second part of the title:

Called to be artisans of communion to proclaim prophetically the joy of the Gospel in the culture of communication. "

Called →

Paul's sense of being "kletos" is applied to the Romans (chiamata *called* (Paul), chiamati *those called* (Romans), chiamata the *call* (Romans)) in the initial greeting

He is called to the apostolate, they to holiness

Pauline Publishers is called precisely to the apostolate (with Paul) but with a specificity → in the "culture of communication"

You are "called" to a capitular responsibility

As an extension of the "called" in Greek, is always "**ekklesia**"

The satisfaction of collaborating together with good, humble and committed people ...

Content of the call:

artisans of communion → phrase used 6 times in LV, even in the title – without definition, however –

a metaphor ...

a profession rather than a profession?

A sense of immediacy, personal involvement, creativity "with the hands" rather than with the head (i.e. not academic);

Also the diversity of "artisan" gifts:

⁴For in one body we have many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we too, though many, are one body in Christ, and each for his part, we are members of one another. ⁶We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us: whoever has the gift of prophecy let us exercise it according to what faith dictates; ⁷whoever has a ministry should wait for the ministry; he who teaches should devote himself to teaching; ⁸whoever exhorts should devote himself to exhortation.

Whoever gives, do so with simplicity; who presides, presides with diligence; whoever does works of mercy, do them with joy. (Rom 12:4ff.)

SSP → a communion of artisans?

See RB 57, *De artificibus monasterii*

If there are brothers in the monastery who are experts in an art or a trade, they should exercise them with the utmost **humility, as long as the abbot allows it.**

But if any of them mount in pride, because it seems to him to bring some profit to the monastery, be taken out of his work and no longer allowed to take care of it, unless he returns to himself, **humiliating himself, and the abbot allows him to do so** again.

If you then have **to sell** some product of the work of these monks, those who have been in charge of dealing with the business, beware of any **dishonesty.**

[Always remember Ananias and Safira, so as not to run the risk that death, suffered by those in the body, strike at their souls and those of all people, who have nevertheless defrauded the substances of the monastery.]

However, greed must never creep into the prices of these products, but you always have to sell them a little **cheaper** than escular "that **God may be glorified** in all things."

communion → close correspondence between communion and communication: the second always serves the first

Communion is a Pauline concept (the body, in particular), signifying unity of mind and heart (Acts) and in the world, peace and collaboration in justice and generosity – and, in fact, in the light of Col 1:24 "co-redemption".

to proclaim prophetically → part of Paul's call, presupposing a knowledge of the prophetic tradition of God's word. The prophet is intimate with God, and speaks to his name without fear (cf. Pope Francis, etc.)

We sometimes hear: "I can't stand the Pope" – why? →

Question of the challenge of truth – the prophet is often (always) counter-cultural – then, challenge/criticize "the culture of communication"?

announcing is also an aspect of communication

the joy of the Gospel → LV (GA) speak of personal preparation: one must know in the depths of the heart the joy of the Gospel, which means "falling in love" with Jesus Christ, like Paul:

cf "impaolinarsi" (make ourselves Paul) to Cristificarsi (make ourselves in Christ)

the characteristics of Paul and of the Pauline:

- 1) Passionate love for Christ
- 2) Deep interior life.
- 3) Man of great balance.
- 4) The saint of universality and missionary anxiety.

joy → not "happiness", but rather a fruit of the Spirit,

Gospel → essentially means "communication" of a certain kind; a communication that can transform someone's life

culture of communication → a very "unstable" or "dynamic" culture, which requires great flexibility, sensitivity, willingness to be "uncomfortable" – to recognize the situations of today's world

in fact a constant: ***'Let yourself be transformed by renewing your way of thinking'***