

International Eucharistic Congress 2012

Economy of Communion - A Model of Business based on Living the Gospel

Introduction – Donal Lawlor

Good afternoon everybody and welcome. With the short amount of time we have today it will be difficult for us to get to know each other well. However I assume that like me you are all people who are interested in our theme on how living the gospel relates to business life.

I am somebody who was brought up as catholic and as I grew into adulthood I was looking to make a deeper experience of Christian living. In my early twenties I first met the people of the Focolare Movement here in Dublin and was really enriched by the life of that community. At the same time I was training as an accountant. For a while I didn't really see the connection between trying to live as part of a Christian community and trying to get on in my career in working with a multinational company. However as we will hopefully show today this deep connection and integration of one's life as a Christian working in the business world is indeed possible even though, as in the rest of life, there are a lot of difficulties and setbacks.

The Economy of Communion is an initiative that grew out of the life of the Focolare Movement, which is a movement founded by Chiara Lubich in Italy in 1943. It's spirituality of Unity is based on Jesus' prayer for unity, "That all may be one" (Jn 17:21).

It has since then spread throughout the world, to more than five million people of all ages, religions and backgrounds, and came to Ireland in the 1970's.

All of our speakers today have been endeavouring to live the Focolare spirituality for a number of years. One of the features of the movement is the idea of living the Gospel in all aspects of our lives and as you know this offers great challenges to all of us. In particular our panel of speakers have been involved in the worlds of Business and Economics and today we would like to share with you how we have tried, inspired by the gospel, and in particular, by the Spirituality of Unity to bring Gospel values to our own particular fields.

This desire of people, involved in the Focolare Movement and working in business to bring gospel values to the world of business was given particular impetus by Chiara Lubich in 1991 when she visited the city of São Paulo in Brazil. There she was struck by the contrast between the rich and poor when she saw from the plane, as she flew over the city, the modern city centre, with its business district, surrounded by the poverty of the slums or favelas on the outskirts. She likened this to a crown of thorns.

Chiara was aware that within the favelas in São Paulo there were people who were members of the movement. Some of the people engaged in the alleviation of this poverty were business entrepreneurs who were also members of the Focolare. Up until then there had been initiatives in the movement for members to create a communion of goods so that the less well-off could be helped by those with more resources. This was in line with what we read in the Acts of the Apostles, of the first Christians, that "No one among them was in need".

However in São Paulo, on seeing the scale of the favelas, Chiara felt that something more needed to be done. So in accordance with the Spirituality of Unity she met with the Entrepreneurs and launched the idea of the Economy of Communion. This would see businesses committing to sharing their profits in three parts, one part to be shared with the poor; one part to be retained for

reinvestment in the business and one part to be used for promoting the ideals of the Economy of Communion. But there was also another important effect in that the people involved in the businesses then wanted to ensure that their businesses were being run on gospel principles. This as you all know is easier said than done but because the people involved are committed to an Economy of Communion experiences are shared and we are encouraged to go ahead in Communion with Christ and with one another.

So today we would like to share our experiences on this journey. We do this not in any way looking for praise or recognition but simply in order to share the enrichment that we have received from trying, however imperfectly, to live the gospel together in the economic and business fields.

Many of you may be aware of the recent document on the 'Vocation of the Business Leader' from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. In it there is reference to the origin of the words "company" and "companions" —*cum* (with), and *panis* (bread) suggests "breaking bread together" and the origin of the word "corporation" from the Latin *corpus* (body) suggests a group of people "united in one body". This is the experience we are trying to live and in so doing endeavouring to bring this meaning back to the places where we work. I think this is very much in line with the theme of this Eucharistic Congress

So let me introduce our speakers today all of whom are Focolare members.

Dr John McNerney is Head of Chaplaincy at University College Dublin and in particular acts as Chaplain to the Quinn School of Business and the Smurfit Business School. He has studied philosophy and in his book "Footbridge towards the Other" explored the meaning of love and how that can be lived in work, in the economy, in art and in politics. As part of his work John delivers modules on Business Ethics at the Smurfit Business School.

John Mundell is Chief Executive of Mundell and Associates, an Earth and Environmental Services Consultancy in Indianapolis, USA which employs 18 people and is a company of the Economy of Communion. He is also a member of the International Economy of Communion Commission.

Paul Connolly is an Optometrist with a practice employing 4 people in Cavan town, which is also a business of the Economy of Communion.

Dr Lorna Gold is Policy and Advocacy Advisor at the Catholic Development Agency, Trócaire. Lorna has studied Economics and in particular has studied the phenomenon of the Economy of Communion and has published two books on the subject. She has also served on the International Co-ordinating body of the Economy of Communion. Lorna will share with us on the global spread of the project and in particular on some of the ventures funded by the Economy of Communion and how these are in some way a new model for helping those who are in need with human dignity.

So now I'd like to call on John to get us started with a reflection on the economic crisis with special reference to Christian Social teaching and how the Economy of Communion fits into this.