



“The new horizons of the Economy of Communion”
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PANEL 1
“THE NEW HORIZONS OF THE ECONOMY OF COMMUNION”

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Dear entrepreneurs, workers,
economists, professors and students,
friends involved in different ways
in the economy of communion project,

You are gathered here at the Mariapolis Center of Castel Gandolfo for an important international congress aimed at looking more closely at the present-day situation of the *economy of communion*. You will examine its various dimensions according to your respective competencies so as to give it new impetus and to highlight the new horizons opening up before it.

I have always thought – as I wrote in 1998 – that the *economy of communion* “must become a scientific theory with the input of competent economists capable of outlining both theory and practice, comparing it with other economic systems, and giving rise not only to numerous theses, but to courses from which many can learn. It must become a true science that gives dignity to those who are called to demonstrate it with facts, showing that is a true ‘vocation’ for all those who are involved in it.”¹

As we all know the inspiring idea of the *economy of communion* was that of giving birth to business enterprises whose profits could be used in favor of those in need. I was prompted to do this when I realized that we were unable to cover even the most urgent needs of our members, notwithstanding the communion of goods practiced in the Movement. Moreover, as the plane was making its descent over the city of São Paulo, I was shocked by the host of

¹. Letter written from the Mariapolis Araceli 7 May 1998.



skyscrapers surrounded by an infinite number of *favelas* or slums, what Cardinal Arns called “the crown of thorns”.

The *economy of communion* project was helping us to achieve, in a different way, the genuine idea with which the communion of goods had begun among all of us at the beginning of our Movement: so that no one would be poor. Now it was a matter of setting up business enterprises that would produce profits always for the benefit of the needy, thus giving an example of economic activity inspired by Christian principles.

From its inception, we seemed to glimpse in this project a concretization of a possible “new way”, in line with our Ideal, towards which the future would tend, a way of communion in freedom. Later on, an economist dared to tell me that he saw it as the “hope of the future”.

In this moment you and many others are intent on expanding the *economy of communion* and on explaining its contents in such a way that a real and true economic movement can develop from it. The studies, the educational seminars, the books published and this international congress itself are already a promising beginning.

This economic movement should become the economic expression of what we call – borrowing a term from St. John Chrysostom – the “*inundations*”.

In recent years, in fact, we have observed in our Movement an effect of its spirituality lived as one body: the springs of living water which the Gospel speaks of (see Jn 4:14) inundating a wide range of human realities. This gives origin not only to a new economy (the *economy of communion*), but also to a new politics (*the Movement of Unity in Politics*), to a new art, law, psychology, pedagogy, new because renewed by the Spirit.

These *inundations* would therefore be the outcome of a specific dialogue – the dialogue with culture – in which the Focolare Movement has been engaged, considering the different ambits of knowledge and human endeavor through the lens of wisdom which the charism of unity offers.

The numerous contacts on the part of our experts with outstanding economists on the national and international level, and with institutes and currents of thought such as that of



Gandhi (whose ideas appear to converge with those of the *economy of communion*), are already expressions of this dialogue with culture.

Naturally, these *inundations* will remain such only if they are constantly animated and nurtured by the light that emanates from the gift of God which is the charism of unity, without which both thoughts and actions would fall back onto a merely human level. For this reason, also in the case of the *economy of communion*, it will always be opportune and necessary to return to the inspirations that gave it life and to those which made it progress.

This is what we did in April 2001 during the large-scale congress which, ten years from the birth of the *economy of communion*, gathered together in this center more than 700 people. On that occasion we focused on what heaven may have suggested to us regarding four subjects which came into special evidence during those years:

- the first: the aim of the *economy of communion*, that is, the purpose for which it arose: to reach the point, as I mentioned above, in which no one in our Movement is poor – as it was among the early Christians – so as to give an example to the world and then to open ourselves to it and to serve it wherever we can;
- the second: the “culture of giving”, which is characteristic of the *economy of communion*. We learned to give from the Gospel, and it means loving, loving everyone, not only the people in need for whom we work, but also employees, competitors, suppliers, customers;
- the third: “new men and women” who cannot be missing in the management of the *economy of communion*, “new men and women” who are renewed by the wisdom of the Gospel;
- and finally, the fourth: “schools of formation” for men and women who can and want to become like this, which is absolutely necessary so that we can be steadfast in our Ideal and not be suffocated by the world.

In this regard, the schools that have begun in past years have been very fruitful.

The Holy Spirit had suggested many ideas on these various subjects and in the 2001 Congress we carefully took them into consideration so as to interpret them exactly and to achieve them very faithfully.



In May 2003 I too had the joy of meeting in Loppiano the Italian entrepreneurs who are already involved in the *economy of communion*. With them we reconsidered the most important aspect of the project, the fact that it is the expression of a Work of God, a Work in which he is the principal actor. And we emphasized that those who are called to give their contribution to it, must do so as his instrument, allowing Jesus to work in him or her, that is, loving as he loved.

On that same occasion we also noted the great timeliness of the *economy of communion*.

In fact, we could not help but recognize that one of the deepest causes of terrorism, which weighs heavily over our world, lies in the tremendous economic disparity which still exists between rich and poor countries. This disparity generates resentment, hostility, revenge, thus favoring fundamentalism which is more inclined to take root in such terrain. We affirmed that our world urgently needs solidarity and fraternity if we do not want to see it plunged into a sea of disasters, fears, hatreds, wars. In this context, the *economy of communion* could be of light to many and contribute, along with other positive forces, to a trend that moves in the opposite direction, towards universal fraternity, the necessary foundation – God willing! – for some form of communion of goods on a high level.

And here we are now at this new congress!

What is my small contribution? I would like to consider with you a subject we have not yet addressed in our meetings of the *economy of communion*, even though it concerns all of us personally.

The *economy of communion* is not an exclusively spiritual reality. On the contrary! It's a very concrete reality even though it is inspired by spiritual motives. It is a human activity for which we need to use our brains and roll up our sleeves; in other words, we need to work.

This is why I would like to consider with you today the working habits of those who devote themselves to the *economy of communion*.



And because the *economy of communion* is the expression of a Work of God, we should look for signs and models, also with regard to the way to work in it, in the spiritual and religious world more than in the earthly and human one.

We always marvel at the fact that the Word of God, having become man, did not only withdraw into solitude to meditate and pray during the years of his private life, but he was also a worker. This choice clearly shows us that work is constitutive of the human person and in accordance with the intentions of God. It is such an important aspect of human life that if it were lacking, we would have to consider the human person as being less human.

Human beings fulfill themselves especially through their work.

Therefore, we should seek to carry out the *economy of communion* in the best possible way. Indeed, we should feel called to make of every hour devoted to it a masterpiece of precision, order and harmony. We should be keenly aware of having to use our talents in order to improve our work and to perfect ourselves also through studies related to our professions.

Moreover, considering that the Focolare Movement, of which this economic movement is an expression, received its first inspiration in a house that sheltered three workers, Jesus, Mary and Joseph (the house of Nazareth transported to Loreto), those who work in the *economy of communion* should feel, above all, that they are carrying out the will of God by working, as Jesus, Mary and Joseph did. Therefore, they should not work for the sole purpose of making money which can be used also for the benefit of others, but first and foremost, for the love of God.

Then they will need to remember that behind the papers they process, beyond the strenuous work they apply themselves to, behind the machines they operate; beyond the items they are packaging and producing, as recipients of their labor, there are brothers and sisters, or better still, there is Jesus who considers done to himself all that we do for the community or for individual persons.



The people who work in the *economy of communion* will also need to make themselves one with the individuals and collectivity they serve; they will need to work in such a way that each and every aspect of their work is the fruit of love. The voice of their conscience, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, will not fail to admonish them wherever they have not yet done things well, or to approve and console them when everything is in order.

In the Focolare Movement we underline the conscious effort to complete one's work well, developing positive attitudes of listening and openness towards the other, courtesy towards clients, colleagues and management. This type of conduct assumes, together with the tools of their trade, the value of true virtue, and will become the instrument of their sanctification.

This is the way it should be for those who work in the *economy of communion*.

And in the burden of the tasks entrusted to them, in the difficulties of interpersonal relationships and in the contradictions they may encounter, they will recognize their characteristic penance which is never lacking in the life of a Christian or in whoever sincerely wishes to do good.

In order to give human work its proper value, we would like to see also in the *economy of communion* the realization of a principle which might seem to contradict what has been said up until now, but in fact it does not. This principle calls everyone to work with a certain detachment from their work.

It is a principle which every person should live by because – at least in their spiritual application – all the words of Christ hold true for everyone: “Everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or **fields** for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29).

Everyone should be detached then, at least spiritually, from their “lands”, which also means from their job or profession. “Lands”, work, should be loved, yes, but for God, not more than God. With what results? They will “receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29). “A hundred times more”, the hundredfold, which means an indefinite number – a hundred times more also in goods and financial gain. So from the little detachment asked of us, the abundance of the Father's Providence pours forth.



And we know that the *economy of communion* businesses have experienced this.

There is still another dimension of the spirituality that animates all of us and which cannot but have important consequences on the way we work and act in the various ambits of economic life. Our “spirituality of unity” is, as we know, both personal and collective. In conformity with the vision of the Church as communion, highlighted again by Vatican II, our spirituality greatly emphasizes the principle of fraternity and the communitarian dimension of human and Christian life.

So then it is not enough for anyone who wishes to live it, to look after his or her own interior life and personal commitments. It also requires that we put at the basis of our life, in each of its aspects, reciprocal love according to St. Peter’s invitation to the first Christian communities: “Above all, let your love for one another be intense” (1 Pt 4:8). This is the only way to ensure unity among all and to attract the presence of Jesus in the collectivity.

This presence of the risen Lord in the midst of brothers or sisters united in his name is what must characterize the group of persons who work in the *economy of communion* businesses.

Not to feel the duty to constantly revive, through mutual love, this presence of Jesus would be equivalent to personal and collective failure.

This is the way work is viewed by those who are called to serve God and brothers and sisters in the *economy of communion*.

What more could I wish then in this congress than for all the members who work in this field – entrepreneurs, employees, workers – to carry out their work as we have stated here?

Mutual love will lead everyone not only to reciprocal understanding and esteem, to making their own the fatigue and problems of the others, but also to finding together new forms of organization, participation and management. Christ in their midst will “renew” their businesses which will become, for many others, models of communion: “God’s dwelling among men and women”, a real foretaste of heaven.



The Church teaches that human beings, through their work and the fatigue involved, participate in the work of the Creator and of the Redeemer.²

And Vatican II adds: “When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise – human dignity, brotherly communion, and freedom – according to the command of the Lord and in his Spirit, we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom.”³

This is the way we should see and understand the *economy of communion*: a construction in accord with the mind of God, a work that will endure not only on this earth, but which will remain also in the Other Life where we will have the immense joy of finding it again in the new earth and new heaven which await us.

² . *Laborem exercens* 25-27.

³ . *Gaudium et spes* 39.