



NAIROBI | MAY 27-31
KENYA | 2015

5th International Congress of Economy of Communion – Nairobi (Kenya), 27-31 May 2015

“Yes to an Economy of Communion”

The culture of communion in the perspective of the charism of unity.

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Mariapoli Piero, 28 May 2015

"I am what I am because the others are, without exception, we are."

Ubuntu

At Polo Lionello in Loppiano, in Italy, near the Citadel of the International Focolare Movement, when a during the heat felt economic crisis a year ago, a "Permanent Bassoon (Bundle)" was opened. This is a place of an exchange of goods marked by the culture of giving and economic cooperation. It is an environment especially opened, dedicated and regulated, not only at the hours and during the care of the environment, but also with the principle that whoever gives, is committed to bringing clean clothes, books, appliances, tools which are in good order. Whoever takes, discreetly do so, and takes just enough and is aware that the available goods in the bundle is intended first of all for those who are in immediate need. In turn the available offer is free and proportionate in order to cover the local costs.

The fruits of the experience of the "bundle", are often of two types: the sharing of responsibility both for those who give and for those who receive such that it is reciprocal, in a fruitful and rich exchange integrating multiple forms of resources and currencies: material goods, time, skills, ideas, new relationships, as well as the discovery of the richness of the other, of the brother and sister, with the intervention of divine providence that leads you to discover the love of God who answers our everyday need.

"In the Focolare Movement from which the Charism of unity or of communion emerged, there is not only an attitude of human solidarity, emphasized by several secular humanism nowadays; not only an attitude of fraternal solidarity with the "fellow companion". The Charism of unity revealed that the brother is not just a colleague, a sibling, someone entrusted to my guide or a companion in joy, and even a rival in the fight but the brother is a creature loved by Jesus, in whom he who is always present even though in different ways, must take shape. In the brother, Jesus comes in contact with me as a gift, as enrichment, as a spur, as purification. In the brother, Jesus wants to be loved and served. "

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Our congress was also inspired by an analysis of an anthropologist who has traveled the world. “The anthropologist proposed a game to the children of a tribe of South Africa. He puts a basket of fruits near a tree and told the children that the one who comes first will win all the fruits. At his signal all children hand in hand simultaneously snapped...! Then they sat down together to enjoy their reward. "When the anthropologist asked them why they had done so while one of them could have got all the fruits? Ubuntu replied "how can one of us be happy if everyone else is sad?

This trend towards community solidarity expresses the essence of our African culture. We can share the joy, the pain, the goods, the difficulties. The opening to the other, even if he is a foreigner, is complete, to the point that our homes in our traditional society did not have the keys and the doors were not closed.

The analysis reveals that traditional African societies were generally "communitarian societies" where there is so much emphasis on work and cooperation, unity, friendship, and on shared businesses. Even if the individual could have a significant role, the emphasis was put on the community center and there was no room for selfish individualism. Various proverbs express these patterns of behavior. In fact one of these proverbs says: "A poor relative can never lack a place to rest." Moral values like mutual relations or gratitude are essential and radical rights. A person must not only be grateful when she gets something, but also had to be generous to others.

This is the basis of the peculiarities of our culture, of our cultures. This may be the God’s gift of our continent to humanity.

On the contrary, our so-called global modern society today is often characterized by selfishness, fear of the other, the tendency to close in on ourselves. This tells us that we have to rethink and find the right path.

The world is now going through a crisis: an economic crisis, social, cultural, and of course a crisis of values. Perhaps many of us will definitely not produce wealth or create jobs, but what we can certainly do is to put ourselves in communion, and communion is the first response to all the various situations of all crises. And in this way we can create these foundations that have relationships, peace, and confidence with God and with our brothers. The confidence in the certainty that communion is more important than any economic wealth. Afterwards there will also be the wealth, the economic wealth which we need. It will not be a show off wealth, but the goods that we need will come, because God is Father, and certainly does not make us lack what we need if we trust Him.

"Our asset is communion. With communion, each one can also get the fantasy (initiative), find courage to live in the present moment; then due to the existing communion there will be an executive of a company and likewise anyone else who will understand that maybe, something more can be done. As a consequence there is a push, a push that is communion. There will be the desire to do something with others and for the others. This will not only be for us but also for others and together with others. And then we witness that communion is also inventive as well as fruitful. "

The culture of communion is not simply a communion between the rich and the poor, between a person in need and another that offers help, not even just communion with someone I know personally, but it's a total giving of self to the other, to a group, to humanity, to a person of equal dignity. It is the culture of



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love, where all give and all receive. The first communion is that of souls, of life, of hearts, and everyone has the heart. Everyone has life and soul to give and share with others.

To get to a genuine culture of communion we must first make the experience of a real encounter with the person who is none other than Jesus. When two people meet they have the opportunity to discover each other, to offer love and when love becomes mutual every person has equal dignity and that is why each one is a gift for the other.

In front of a destitute, let us remember that it is poverty that exists, not 'the poor person'; the poor person is first of all a brother, it is Jesus who has a name and that for which I have the duty to love. He/she is a person who has a great dignity and great potentials that maybe are hidden or buried with traps of poverty and misery, from which he/she can be pulled out and flourishes. But even when he/she cannot be able to get out of these traps, the person can always love, always has a gift to give and to receive from others. There are many gifts that are not donated and not received because we do not have eyes to see them. The Gospel, and the Charism of unity, first of all gives us these new eyes to see the beauty where others only see problems and poverty.

In front of a person, of a people, if we are concerned only to help, we highlight his poverty, and he loses his richness, he doubly becomes poor thus entering into a circle which makes him dependent on us and from which he cannot get out because he thinks of not being capable. If, on one hand, we enter into the other person's life putting into evidence his richness, we establish with him a relation of equal dignity; he discovers that he is one like us and in this way he starts sharing with us, a reciprocal exchange is born, we compensate what is lacking in the other person. It is then that from the level of same dignity, we can then exchange our poverty and our wealth. Thus communion arises. Wealth and poverty belong to everyone, and in communion we can transform and multiply them.

We give the possibility to everyone to share its wealth and its poverty. We must find new ways to penetrate the culture of the other, of a people, to reach out to the diversity of the other, while recognizing his wealth because we must start from wealth to discover his poverty - and vice versa. Of course, the value of the content given and received may be different, but in communion reciprocity is total, is of equal dignity, and measuring meters are not the quantity but the quality, whereby even the two loaves and five fish of a boy can feed the crowds. We must not think of the poverty: we come into a relationship with a person and in him you find everything: wealth and poverty that need to be complementary to the realization of being a human being.

Chiara said: “In front of everyone stand in a position to learn, because you really have to learn. It is only nothing that can accept everything in itself and holds dearly everything in unity: one must be nothing (Jesus forsaken) in front of each brother to dearly welcome him in Jesus: "Whatever you did to the least ..." "

Here Chiara speaks of the proper attitude to be taken in front of any one we meet. She says that we have to put ourselves in a position to learn, to learn and not to teach, not to know more than the others: it also implies that we have an attitude of esteem and respect for those we have before us, clear our soul completely from every concern of that present moment and from any program, free from everything else and being nothing.



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We actually have to learn from each person. With such an attitude, we grant to the person who is before us, the ability to give us something, and then the commitment is to find out what is the gift that that given person can make to us. This is possible if we practice the art of loving. In this way I give the chance to the other person to feel that he is important to me, I need him.

But I can however prove that I do not need the other, so as to humiliate him and to make him feel useless in my regards. The truth is the person: the real person is Jesus.

The readiness for an exchange: I give a help, but do I accept to receive?

If all of us who are here today, it is because we are a people of communion, the title of our conference testifies it clearly. We said our yes to be here today. Yes, we can give, give; but we will be the other, in communion, when we accept his gift, this makes us poor and in turn it gives us the grace to receive. Everyone is poor, everyone is rich. Let's be careful when we get into another person's culture, which can perhaps be represented only by a person who is different from us. We cannot know the diversity of the other if we demand that he be like us. To penetrate the other person's culture, we need an extra effort: give opportunities to the one who is different from us to be the real him. It is the diversity in communion that generates true riches and even that of economy.

I can donate a house to a poor person, a home which for him/her is an absolute necessity, it is what he/she needs, a vital asset. In return the poor gives me a piece of cloth of which the objective value of these gifts cannot be compared. If we weigh it with a human scale, it will tip to infinity. The poor man has not even tried to figure out if this clothe will be useful and important for you, as is the house for him. He simply gives you just what was most precious for him. This is as if to tell you that he/she cannot give you the much you gave him but that he can give you the most precious thing he/she has. Unless we learn to see and to appreciate the humble fabric, no donated house can become wealth. Whoever receives a gift must first make the experience of being welcomed as a gift. This is where the secret of communion lies.

It may be that this fabric is the clothe that he/she had kept to wrap his/her body at death, or what he had to wrap his/her parents or her sick child. How much is this fabric? The value of things is a mystery, it is only in the relationship of brotherhood that we can find out, or guess. Things, goods, are sacraments, symbols that tell the dignity and value of the things that we are being given. Without this profound way of looking at things, one can donate without generating anything. The rich person gives the best of what the poor need and the poor has given the best of what he has, or he has all that he possesses, both have given the best of themselves. We find ourselves in such a reciprocity that gives equal dignity, which makes us brothers. This is how a full communion begins. But be careful: the use of this reciprocal exchange of gifts testifies to the value that each would give. And when communion is true, there are no more splits, it becomes contagious, multiplies and becomes culture.

Obstacles and difficulties will not fail, but nothing can stop this life that is continuing.

Every man, every woman, always have their dignity, it's up to us, at all times, in front of each person whose dignity seems in danger, drop prejudices and believe that Jesus is present in him/her. I repeat again, the truth is the real person and the person is Jesus.



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In the world we find that the search for belonging and of communion is nothing else but the search for life. It is the desire to fill the loneliness, even when there is life and thousands of people around. There is so much hunger, violence, indifference, selfishness. There are those who feel the presence of God more and those who are more distant from God. We have problems of poverty, unemployment, human rights, the environment ... and all these are the challenges that we are called to respond to. We need to discover the value of life that everyone carries within rather than looking at poverty in an anonymously, sociologically economically and racial manner. It is from the renewed encounter with the poor that we become just, become witnesses; the tears of others coupled with our own (we do not become brothers until we learn to cry together), we will become a source of living water that will quench the thirst and renew our lives. The first reciprocal help that can be given to Africa is to first of all learn to look at its wealth and then at its poverty.

Returning again to Africa, I would say that the culture of communion helps us to reflect together, to create together, to look around us, not to be closed in our own poverty. Certainly by trying to give what is true and beautiful in us, we become free, happy and worthy. Even the poor must learn to give their own poverty-wealth.

The most important thing is that we finally understand from the experiences that we will live in these days here in Nairobi at the conference of the Economy of Communion, does not mean that to get out of our insecurity we have to stretch out our hands or to depend on the help of the other but we must give, be and give together. With the Economy of Communion we saw people who are really poor, regain their full freedom of life, dignity, joy, responsibility and a new relationship with their society.

In this project we do not only see the salvation of our continent, but the strength that will help us come out of ourselves to give ourselves to others, to give ourselves to the world, to all of humanity who awaits us.