

EoC 4 Sophia from Living City July 2009

Straight synergy

The EoC and the Sophia University Institute

By Giampietro Parolin

At the inauguration of Sophia University Institute in December, the noted physicist Ugo Amaldi commended it as a “place of trust” — a trust that becomes more necessary each day because of the demands of modernity. More and more we see that hyperspecialization leads to an intense distrust of each other’s ideas and motives. Sophia, offering a degree in Foundations and Perspectives of a Culture of Unity, takes significant steps toward rediscovering trust in another’s ideas. Sophia, which was born from the culture of unity that it hopes to further, is committed to examining these relationships and introducing their relatedness to modern global culture at large. Sophia’s President, theologian Msgr. Piero Coda, explained that Sophia aims to be “a laboratory of spiritual education and research in which the profound bonds between life and thinking, between studying and experience, are reconnected. It is a university looking toward the future, attentive to the needs of our time so that citizens of tomorrow may become more and more people with a heart and mind open to the whole world.”

Sophia is a forum for dialogue in several dimensions: a dialogue of knowledge because of the interdisciplinary nature of the courses that range from theology to management, from literature to the environment — just to mention a few of the 60 offered; a dialogue of people and cultures evidenced by the internationality of both the professors and the students, who currently come from 16 different countries; and a dialogue with numerous civil, religious and academic institutions that encourage and support this new university.

Sophia in Greek means divine wisdom, but it also indicates human wisdom and knowledge.

As the French philosopher Hadot reminds us, true knowledge is actually a “knowing how to,” and true “knowing how to” is to know how to do good.

This idea of knowledge highlights the profound bond between Sophia and the Economy of Communion in Freedom, a bond that lies in their common DNA and is expressed in many facets. Sophia has inherited a precious patrimony of economic thinking that originated from the innovative EoC system. And Sophia is a formidable instrument for training “new people” in the “culture of giving” and in reciprocity — people who, to use Hadot’s phrase, know how to do good. Without this “new” human capital, it is not possible to bring about an Economy of Communion in Freedom.

The EoC is a worldwide laboratory of life and experience where we can test and see the nexus of economic theories as they are practiced in the context of lived mutuality. Sophia’s campus is favorably located near the EoC Lionello Bonfanti Business Park near Loppiano, Italy. This offers the opportunity for consistent interaction between the students and professors at Sophia and the workers and entrepreneurs of the EoC businesses. We hope that the unique opportunity of once again integrating theory and practice will produce both concrete applications for EoC businesspeople and a forum for continued research among those who have a new vision of civil economy at heart.

EoC business practice results in a highly nuanced look at the meaning of investment and what each element of the economy contributes to the goods and services that arise. Understanding the potential impact of this collaborative effort between EoC and Sophia, the EoC has chosen to invest a substantial portion of its annual profits (ear-marked for education) in Sophia.

In this partnership with Sophia, we at the EoC are making a qualitative leap, because here there is an opportunity for formation and education based on knowledge that has become life — which can develop distinctive competencies in the economic world and encourage the birth of new enterprises.

Students at Sophia are acquiring tools to recognize and build upon the challenges of globalization and the complexities of our time. The partnership we have begun with Sophia provides a unique milieu for rigorous academic work to welcome and benefit from the rigor of business practices

informed by the spirituality of Chiara Lubich. We look forward to fruitful progress toward building a culture of unity that exhibits more permeable boundaries and a larger sense of trust.
—with Julie James in Boston

Giampietro Parolin is a member of the international commission of the Economy of Communion and financial manager and lecturer at Bicocca University in Milan.

Captions:

Acquiring tools for the future. Sophia University Institute, located near Florence, Italy, offers training in the culture of giving, to meet the challenges of globalization and the needs of today's world

Five of the EoC business parks worldwide where enterprises integrate EoC principles in their operations

Abrigada, Portugal
The Giosi EoC industrial park

Bruyères les Châtel, France
Entrepreneurs at the business park

Aguacai, Brazil
The EoC Spartaco business park near Sao Paulo

O'Higgins, Argentina
An aerial view of Polo Solidaridad

Krizevci, Croatia
An electromechanic business at Mariapolis Faro, near Zagreb