



"The new horizons of the Economy of Communion"  
International Convention – september 10 -12, 2004

## **PANEL 1**

### **"THE SCHOOLS OF THE ECONOMY OF COMMUNION"**

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The schools of the Economy of Communion came to life April 5, 2001 when on the occasion of the first school for operators of the EOC at Castelgandolfo, Chiara launched the proposal to begin schools for business people, economists, professors, and students of economics; for all the components of a business as an initiative to re-launch and consolidate the project.

These are Chiara's words: "This involves following a spiritual itinerary, a journey, identifying with its various stages. The itinerary would be proposed by an expert member of the Focolare Movement and would then be applied to everyday living. Moreover, it would look at its implications in the world of economics and offer valid experiences. The gathering would last about two hours, concluding with comments and proposals on the part of those present."

The forming of a school was an answer to a need felt by persons involved in the EOC, particularly by business persons who are aware of the "solitude" often present as they conduct their activity, and the difficulty in applying the spirit of communion in the everyday work reality. They felt, as Chiara herself said at that meeting, "the lack of an adequate formation for this culture."

A few months later formation meetings began: first in Milan (the first four). Then after a year's pause, from November 2003 to May 2004 at Piacenza another four meetings were held which our commission in Bologna organized. Also in other parts of Italy and in other countries--I'm thinking of Rome and of Munich--these meetings were repeated. Other zones (the Mariapolis Ginetta for example) also held a school of formation.

In my presentation I will be referring to the experience of the School in northern Italy. In this school an average of 130 persons participated in every meeting. They came from all the zones in northern Italy. Even though in every meeting there was a turnover of participants, a



good number was present for all the meetings. With them we were really able to take formative steps. The structure of the meeting had been proposed by Chiara.. It began with a spiritual theme; then a talk that applied to the reality of the EOC, followed by experiences and ending with a dialogue. We held eight meetings in which we dealt with the following themes: God is Love, the will of God, the Gospel, the Art of Loving, Be the first to love, make yourselves one, love your enemy, mutual love. After an introduction given generally by Alberto Ferrucci, an initial moment of spiritual deepening by a member expert of the Focolare Movement (at Milan Dori Zamboni one of Chiara's first companions; at Piacenza Bruno Venturini and Antonia Benaglio alternated), a scholar of the EOC (Luigino Bruni or Benedetto Gui) presented a brief theme ( a small treatise actually) regarding the repercussions that putting these points into practice has on economic theory and on a business's life. These reflections gave rise to varied and often innovative suggestions which, without a doubt, will be taken up again and studied in our Congress and on other occasions. They begin to form a new "economic culture" of communion.

For example during the last meeting at Piacenza, in reference to the study of the theme "mutual love", Luigino Bruni gave a definition of "reciprocity" of communion that appeared to us to be enlightening for an application in an EOC company. "...the first characteristic typical of "social" reciprocity is openness. The response of the other, an attitude of reciprocity, is never only a return toward the one who was the first to give: reciprocity-communion is always open toward a third, someone else who guarantees that the communion does not turn in on itself and has the unction of true gratuity.

The talks were followed by experiences of business persons and a dialogue among the participants, in which there was a communion of ideas, reflections, experiences, difficulties and solutions. It was also an occasion to communicate the progress of the life of the Movement of the Economy of Communion in the world.

A common characteristic of the school's meetings is the commitment of the speakers to examine in depth the significance of living the spirit of communion in a business, in different concrete situations with all the difficulties that exist. To give an example: among the varied themes discussed in the different meetings, when the theme "love of one's enemy" was

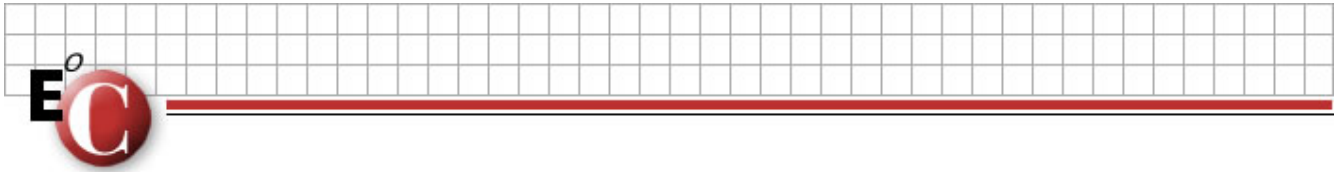


discussed, burning and timely questions were dealt with: the collaboration with a business rival for the general good, the relationship with insolvent clients or with dependents in times of crisis. The experiences offered and the reflections given by the scholars never resulted in "magic solutions" or "standard rules." Rather they are suggestions on how to search in the spirit of unity for the answer to every problem, making it become the "the culture of the company", knowing that the solution of that particular problem in that particular company can never be learned at "school" but will be the result of a complex and difficult process of dialogue and communion.

Without a doubt these meetings were a true school also for the experience of communion among the different "professional categories" of the participants: scholars, consultants, business persons. The continuity of these meetings, even if they are only twice a semester, is an important element both for the construction of a network of fraternity among the participants and for the deepening of the spirituality applied to the economy. In fact often the debate and the reflection among the groups of participants which followed the meetings have brought new proposals for study and for improvement of the meetings themselves.

From this school the prospective of new organizational solutions for the companies of the EOC; that is to go from the commitment of individual business persons or workers that make the daily effort to put the spirit of the EOC into practice to a real and actual manner of managing the businesses in such a way that they are structurally predisposed to spread and to live the spirit of communion at every level of organization. It's a new economic culture that seems to be arising from the communion among everyone.

The school that Chiara has proposed to us is therefore a very original school. It's not primarily a technical school (balance sheet, strategies, organization); nor is it only a school of economic ethics (social responsibility, social balance, etc.) And it's not only a spiritual school. It's something new that we are building and discovering as we go ahead together. At the end of this second cycle of lessons it seems that two exigencies are emerging: 1) the possibility to repeat these schools in capillary fashion in the zones or to connect more distant Italian zones through video conferencing; 2) the importance that every meeting of formation



be followed by other small meetings of reflection among groups of participants who are geographically near to one another and who can bring new contributions to the school itself. When in fact this has happened, the successive (formal) meetings have benefited.

Substantially it seems that the "way" that Chiara has suggested for us has begun and continues to bring the first fruits typical of the "formation" of new people.