

(English translation)

Milan, 10 March 1995

### **The Economy of Communion**

answer given at a press conference in Milan

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**Journalist:** Atonio Missieri, from "*Il Sole 24 ore*" (The Sun for 24 hours).

*I read the words: economy of communion in this pamphlet - two words that are not closely correlated in our society: economy and communion.*

*Could you tell me more about this project and how it is applicable in countries where there is a more advanced economy (here I see that it has been applied in Brazil and other countries), and what unifying factor did you find to combine these two realities? Perhaps solidarity is not enough.*

**Chiara:** No, it's not enough.

In order to understand the *economy of communion*, we must begin with the Movement's concept of money; of the poor and the rich.

From the very beginning, we tried to look at the early Christian community where everything was held in common and no one was in need. We always tried to achieve this at least among ourselves, in order to be an example.

Now, the ones who fully achieve this ideal, that is, putting everything in common, are a few thousand, five or six thousand people, those who live in the focolare houses. They live a life in common and bring their entire pay cheque home; then each one receives according to his or her needs.

But then there are many others in the Movement, including the one hundred thousand who are members of the Movement, who cannot give everything because they live in their families or on their own, and so on. These people give their surplus, truly and concretely; they have always done so from the very beginning of the Movement.

Then there are all the other people, the two million we mentioned before, who are cultivated and educated in the culture of giving, right in these times of consumerism.

Because the Gospel says: "Give and gifts will be given to you: a good measure, packed together, shaken down and overflowing, will be poured into your lap," giving is a norm for us. So beginning with the little children, we teach them to give: they give their toys, whatever they have: ice-cream, money, they usually give everything.

These two million people become educated in this spontaneous giving.

Three or four years ago, I went to Brazil where I noticed that among the adherents of our Movement, about 200,000, there were still some who were poor, whom we had not succeeded in helping, not even with the complete communion of goods, the surplus and this culture of giving.

And so an idea was born, especially among the young people, to set up businesses or to orient already-existing businesses in a certain way. The plan was this: the profits of these new businesses, or others that want to be linked to this project because they might be directed by members of the Movement, the profits would be divided into three parts, more or less. One part would be used to bring ahead the business; a second part would be used to form "new men and women," because without "new people," educated in the Gospel, nothing can be accomplished in this field. We need people who know how to love, to give. But in order to form "new people," new structures are needed, like the little towns we mentioned before, like the centres we have, houses precisely for the purpose of forming these persons.

So, a third would go towards bringing ahead the business; a third for these structures so as to form "new men and women" in this new concept of money; and a third for the poor who are still unable to find a job, to support themselves, as in parts of South America where they do not even have a house, clothes and food.

This idea was launched and it was very successful, because now there are about 400, 500 businesses, some small and some not so small, that are following this plan and sending their profits. It's wonderful to see all this money arriving in our times when we know that everyone is so concerned about having their own savings.

And so it's possible to distribute this money among all. This year we were able to cover all of our people, at least for a little while. But we still have hope, because great progress is being made. Almost every day, I receive news of other businesses that are going in this direction, because there is truly this desire for something new.