

(English translation)

Castel Gandolfo, 5 April 2001

### Some Aspects of the *Economy of Communion*

Dear entrepreneurs, workers and managers of the *Economy of Communion* enterprises, professors and students, members of the *economy of communion* commissions and of the economy and work bureaus,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are here to examine that still small, but important, economic reality which began in the Focolare Movement in 1991 and which has so far developed almost exclusively within the Movement, under the name "*Economy of Communion*".

During this meeting it will be studied in depth and examined from the viewpoints of the various sectors which you, entrepreneurs, economics professors, and experts think best.

For my part, I would like to offer some thoughts on the typically spiritual aspect upon which it was founded in São Paulo, Brazil. This spiritual foundation, which has animated and sustained it, must always be there as a guarantee of its authenticity.

...

But how can we describe the quality and quantity of suggestions, intuitions and also inspirations that have so far guided the *economy of communion*? I think we can say that there have been a significant number of very valuable ideas.

...

We want to reconsider them here, together, in order to interpret them correctly and to carry them out very faithfully. They concern: the aim of the *economy of communion*, that is, the purpose for which it came to life; its characteristic "culture of giving"; "new men and women", indispensable for managing the *economy of communion*; and "schools of formation" for these men and women, which are absolutely necessary and which we need to provide.

### The aim

The aim of the *economy of communion* is expressed in its very name: it is an economy that has to do with communion among people and a sharing of things.

Actually, because the *economy of communion* is a fruit of our Ideal, its goal will necessarily be a partial expression of the global aim of our Movement, namely, to work for the unity and brotherhood of all people as Jesus asked in his prayer to the Father, "May they all be one", all becoming one heart and one soul through mutual charity.

This unity can be accomplished through our characteristic "spirituality of unity".

... We can note that the aim of the *economy of communion* has been present since 1991, the year of its birth, in a writing which says:

"It was born for the glory of God, to revive the spirit and practice of the early Christians: 'The multitude had one heart and one soul, and no one among them was in need' (See Acts 4:32-34)."

And in 1994 we see the same idea: "If we put the *economy of communion* into practice, in time we will see in our Movement the fulfilment of a marvellous page of the early Church: 'The multitude had one heart and one soul... they had everything in common... no one among them was in need' (Acts 4: 32-34)."

In 1994 we also called to mind the first steps that had been taken so as to keep before us the importance of the *economy of communion* and its aim. Let's read those words which can help us today too:

"When we announced the *economy of communion* in 1991, the whole Movement was thrilled and everyone was convinced and conquered by the idea. It was evident to us that there could not be those who are hungry and those who are full in the same house (the Movement).

“People made their land and houses available; they deprived themselves of their dearest possessions – family jewellery, for example. They thought of many different systems for orienting their businesses towards the goals of the *economy of communion*. It was quite a scene, not only in Italy, but throughout the world.”

A year later, with the same intent of better achieving the aim of the *economy of communion* and encouraging others to do the same, we gave a description of these brothers and sisters who benefit from it:

“Who are these brothers and sisters of ours?”

I know them and I’ve seen photographs of some of them: they are cheerful, dignified, and proud to be children of God and of this Movement.

They are not in need of everything, but of certain things.

For example, they need to be relieved of the anxiety that oppresses them night and day. They need to be assured that they and their children will have enough food; that their homes, at times nothing more than a shed, will at some point be improved; that their children will be able to continue their education; that the treatment for some illness, which has always been put off because too expensive, will finally take place; that it will be possible to find work for a father.

Yes, these brothers and sisters who are in need are often the ones who help others in one way or another. They are a special kind of Jesus who deserves our love and who one day will say to us: ‘I was hungry, I was naked, I was homeless, or in a house in need of repairs... and you...’, We know what he will say to us.”

Thus, the aim of the *economy of communion* is clear. But how can we achieve it?

## The “culture of giving”

In our environment, in our meetings, we often speak of the “culture of giving” and we like these words, they’re wonderful. Are they not the antidote to that “culture of having” and possessing so dominant today, and precisely in economy? Yes, certainly.

At times, however, we might have placed too much confidence in the expression “culture of giving”, giving it a rather simplistic and reductive interpretation. Actually, it is not always a question of depriving ourselves of something in order to give to others. In reality, these words stand for that characteristic culture which our Movement brings and spreads in the world: the culture of love.

The “culture of love”, of that very profound and demanding evangelical love which sums up all the Law and the Prophets, therefore, all of Scripture. Consequently, whoever wants to live this love necessarily needs to live the entire Gospel.

But how is this possible? I will come to that in a moment. First, I would like to read something we wrote in 1991 about the “culture of giving”:

“Unlike a consumeristic economy based on a culture of having, the *economy of communion* is the economy of giving.

This could seem difficult, arduous, heroic. But it is not so because the human being made in the image of God, who is Love, finds fulfilment precisely in loving, in giving.

This need is in the deepest core of one’s being, believer or non-believer as he or she may be.”

And the quote concludes:

“It is precisely this awareness, supported by our experiences, which gives us the hope of a universal spreading of the *economy of communion*.”

Thus the *economy of communion* is expected to go beyond the boundaries of our Movement.

Again with regard to giving, but also to the wonderful consequences of giving, we find this quote of the following year, 1992:

“We must give, give; we must practice “giving”, we must bring about, increase the culture of giving.

We should give our surplus or even what is necessary, if our heart tells us to do so.

We should give to those who do not have, knowing that employing our goods in this way will reap an immeasurable amount of interest because our giving opens the hands of God. In his Providence, he will fill us superabundantly so that we can continue to give and give much and to receive again. In this way, we will be able to meet the boundless needs of many.”

However, the cause of the *economy of communion* does not demand that we love only the needy, but everyone, because this is required by the spirituality of unity. Therefore, it wants us to love all those who are involved in the business. For example, I wrote: “Let’s give always, let’s give a smile, understanding and forgiveness; let’s listen; let’s give our intelligence, our will and availability; let’s give our experiences and capabilities. Giving: let this be the word that gives us no respite.”

In 1995 we pointed out a deeper meaning of giving:

“What is this culture of giving?”

It’s the culture of the Gospel, it’s the Gospel, because we understood ‘giving’ from the Gospel. ‘Give,’ the Gospel says, ‘and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap’ (Lk 6:38). And this is what we experience every day.

If everyone lived the Gospel, the big problems of the world would not exist, because our Heavenly Father would intervene to fulfil Jesus’ promise: ‘gifts will be given to you’.”

Furthermore, over the years, clear indications, especially from certain saints, reminded us of the most obvious meaning of giving, of giving concretely.

St. Basil says: “The bread you set aside belongs to the hungry; the mantel you put away in your trunk, belongs to the naked; the money you keep hidden, belongs to the needy.

The number of injustices you commit are in relation to the number of people to whom you could give all these things.”

St. Thomas Aquinas says: “When the rich, for their personal ends, consume the surplus necessary for the sustenance of the poor, they are robbing from them.”

Since we are here with business men and women today, I would recall another passage:

“A bit of charity, a few works of mercy, a small amount of surplus from individual persons is not enough (to reach our goal): we need entire businesses and firms which freely put in common their profits.”

## “New men and women”

Finally, during this past decade between 1991-2001, the need emerged for the *economy of communion* to have and to form “new men and women”.

But who are these “new men and women”?

First of all, they are lay people, and lay people are living a privileged moment today.

All of us are probably familiar with those wise words of the Old Testament which say: “There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens. A time to be born, and a time to die. (...) A time for keeping silence, and a time for speaking. (...) He (God) has made everything appropriate to its time (Qo 3:1-11).

Well then, what time are we living now? What time is this for the Church?

John Paul II tells us: “Today we can speak of a new era of group endeavours of the lay faithful.”<sup>1</sup>

If this is so, it is our time, your time, that of the laity.

Now, because the Lord guides the history of the world and of the cosmos and at the same time, the small life-story of each one of us, his sons and daughters, we should ask ourselves: how does he want us, lay people, to be in this moment?

The Holy Spirit has already answered this question in two ways: through the Second Vatican Council and the rising up of new Movements in the Church.

1. See John Paul II, To the Polish Bishops during their *ad limina* visit, 12 January 1993.

The message that the Council gives us is this: lay people must sanctify themselves where they are, in the world. Therefore, as labourers, employees, teachers, politicians, economists, truck drivers, housewives, and so forth.

Wherever they are, they are called to Christianize (to renew through the Gospel) the various ambits of human society: through witness and the spoken word because the Holy Spirit gave special gifts to lay people for this very purpose.

Moreover, the various Movements are all different ways which help lay people to achieve what is expected of them by the Council: they must sanctify themselves by animating human realities.

They are the ones who can do this, and especially them, through the Gospel, by living the entire Gospel.

In fact, the Movements have this characteristic: their members are called to live the Gospel in a radical way, to live the Gospel with authenticity. This great vocation enhances their dignity.

And through them the Gospel can really penetrate every aspect of the worlds of economy and work, of politics, law, health, education, art, and so on, transforming everything, as happens in our Movement. By means of a new economy, which puts the human person at its centre and destines considerable amounts of profit to the needy; or by means of a new politics, which requires that at the basis of each politician's life there be love for every other politician, even those belonging to opposition parties, so that they can understand and complete one another. And while remaining faithful to one's own ideals and commitments, to work together with others in order to safeguard the basic values of man, of the common good.

In 1998, we pointed out that these are lay people, yes, but special lay people, called to such achievements perhaps for the first time in the history of the world. The concepts of that talk are as follows:

“When we consider the *economy of communion*, we must look at one of the factors which makes it so beautiful and alive, an example in the world: it is set up and brought forward by lay people.

I remember that in the past lay people were considered as persons who could only learn. So as a layman, Igino Giordani felt that he belonged to the proletariat in the Church.

Now, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, and in view of the new Movements, like ours which originated with lay people, we see the lay person coming forward and taking a leading role. Why? To our wonder and surprise, we are discovering, with great gratitude to God, that certain lay people today have something special about them. They do not find fulfilment in a job, a career, or simply in their family life. It's no longer enough; they are not satisfied, they do not feel that they are themselves unless they can also devote themselves to humanity explicitly.

This is why their decision to become involved in the *economy of communion* is not a burden for them; on the contrary, it's a joy because they find a way to fulfil themselves completely.

And it is indeed moving: they could put those profits in their own pockets, buy a fur coat for their wife, new gifts for their children, a car for their son... But they don't. They live for a great Ideal and they are consistent.

They become holy not in spite of politics, economy, and so forth, but precisely in the life of politics, economics, etc.

May God bless them and repay them a hundred times over already in this life and afterwards with the fullness of everlasting life.”

What more can we say about these “new men and women”?

First of all, they are people with a strong faith because they have a profound interior life. Again, in 1998 we said: “If in carrying out the *economy of communion* we live the Gospel, we seek his kingdom because our relationships with our workers, our employees, is a relationship between Jesus and Jesus; with customers or clients, between Jesus and Jesus; with competitors, between Jesus and Jesus; if we live in this way, the Eternal Father will look after us.

We see small and not so small miracles of grace taking place in the world of the *economy of communion*. Companies that began with three workers now have two hundred.... Industries that were

ready to close down, but continued to hope, saying: ‘We can go ahead for another day...’ found the means to get them over the critical phase.

In other words, there is Someone else, and there is another fund which is not the one we have in our office. It’s a heavenly fund that opens at the right moment.”

More new horizons were opened in 1998. The *economy of communion* requires new commitments, and we saw how this ennobles those who work in it and enhances their dignity.

“The *economy of communion* must not be limited to the concrete examples of the new firms it inspires, with a few comments by those who are more or less experts in the field. It 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 degree theses, but to schools from which many can learn.

It must become a true science that gives dignity to those who are called to demonstrate it with facts and reveal it to be a true ‘vocation’ for those who are involved in it in any way.”

Chiara Lubich