

The promise of the Economy of Communion



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750 businesses operate according to the principles of the Economy of Communion in Freedom around the world.

BY AMY UELMEN

IN THE WEEKS AFTER THE release of Pope Benedict XVI's social encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), the Internet was abuzz as journalists dissected shifts in style and speculated about the various influences at work in the drafting.

Many U.S. journalists were intrigued by the reference to the “diversified world of the so-called ‘civil economy’ and the ‘economy of communion,’” which the pope discussed as part of a “broad intermediate area” of “traditional companies which nonetheless subscribe to social aid agreements in support of underdeveloped countries.”

National Catholic Reporter's John Allen was quick to associate the “economy of communion”

with the Focolare Movement's network of more than 750 businesses that share profits for direct aid to people in need and for educational projects that foster a culture of giving.

Catholic author and activist George Weigel, acknowledging the influence that the “economy of communion” academics had in drafting the document, noted that this school of thought would merit further discussion and debate.

This opening became an opportunity to share more about the Economy of Communion in Freedom with a broader audience.

The deeper questions

From a North American perspective, often when we look at the problems that plague humanity we start by asking: “What should we do? What strategies might

help to solve this particular set of problems?”

The encyclical invites us to dig much deeper. It does not ask, at least in the first instance, “What should we do?” Instead it asks, “Who are you? What is the meaning of your life? Who are we? What is the meaning of our life together?”

Only if we answer these fundamental questions of our human vocation — only if we face the truth about ourselves — can we then begin to work through the questions of what we should do to foster integral human development.

Think of how Jesus approached his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:4-42). When Jesus asks her for a drink, she is mystified that he is even talking to her. Then he switches

gears, saying, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

The woman does not get it on the first try. Instead she focuses on the practical problem at hand: Jesus does not have a bucket. “You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep.” It was only when Jesus had told her the truth about her own life that she was able to enter into a different, deeper dimension.

Some of the recently generated interest in the EoC is going to be on a “bucket” level. Those involved in the project will be asked to field practical questions about how these businesses operate in the market, what kinds of policies they have in place to face specific challenges, and so on.


Even when interest is framed in these terms, we should take a cue from the encyclical and not miss the opportunity to tell the deeper story about who is involved in the EoC, the community that sustains them and the project as a whole, and the deeper dimensions of the EoC's vocation.

The broader vision

The encyclical will also help us imagine all human development, including the EoC project, in the broadest possible terms: as an integral part of humanity's journey to unity. As the pope put it, “The development of peoples depends, above all, on a recognition that the human race is a single family working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side.”

Unity, then, is the driving vision of the whole encyclical. It

Caritas in Veritate ushered in a broader audience for the Economy of Communion. Yet the business network can only truly be understood within a **broader vision of unity**

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is the “summit of human development.” It is the fuel for the journey: “Only if we are aware of our calling, as individuals and as a community, to be part of God’s family as his sons and daughters, will we be able to generate a new vision and muster new energy in the service of a truly integral humanism.”

Unity is the guiding light. Because God wants to bring us into the life of unity at the heart of the Trinity — “that they may be one even as we are one” (Jn 17:22) — the life of the Trinity illuminates a model for social relationships in which “true

openness does not mean loss of individual identity but profound interpenetration.”

Within this vision, efforts to assure that each person has what they need to lead a dignified human life are simply a logical consequence of being part of the one human family.

Focolare founder Chiara Lubich captured this well when she wrote: “Your neighbor is another you, and you must love him or her bearing that in mind ... They are members of Christ, and if one or the other is suffering, it is the same for you. What has value for you is God, who


is both their Father and yours” (*Essential Writings*).

Within this vision, sharing material goods is, as Chiara put it, neither “difficult, arduous or heroic ... because the human person, made in the image of God who is love, finds fulfillment precisely in loving, in giving. This need to love lies in the deepest core of our being, whether we are believers or not.”

Or as the pope put it, we are “made for gift.”

What makes the EoC such a powerful model and example of the potential for a genuine shift in our framework for business

life is the fact that it is grounded in this broad vision of the unity of the human family. Participants in the EoC have experienced the reality of being a “single family” and how a life of “true communion” can transform every aspect of business life and human development.

The encyclical itself will help us to explain in the light of this vision the promise that the EoC holds. 

Amy Uelmen is the director of the Institute on Religion, Law and Lawyer’s Work at Fordham University School of Law in New York.



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“...the best part of the EoC internship was the great Focolare youth I met there and the even more amazing families that took care of me.”
Dan Mundell
Indianapolis, U.S.A.
International studies/Spanish



“It was an incredible experience!”
Javier Coll-Vincent
Barcelona, Spain
Industrial Engineer



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