

1. The Economy of Communion Experience

Alberto Ferrucci (Italy, entrepreneur)

Premise

We would like to start by expressing our gratitude to the High Commissioner for Human Rights for giving us the opportunity to speak about “Poverty and Development from the perspective of reciprocity” and in particular to point up on the proposal of the Economy of Communion. It is a specific experience of economy based on solidarity that developed some years ago in the ambit of the Focolare Movement.

The origins of the Focolare Movement date back to the experience of Chiara Lubich and her companions had during the Second World War in the city of Trent in northern Italy. Its lifestyle is animated by a new spirituality, which is both personal and collective: the spirituality of unity. The Movement is present in 182 nations among people of all ages, races, languages, cultures, and faiths. The majority of its members are Catholics, but there are also Christians of 300 different Churches, faithful of the main world religions, and men and women without any particular religious belief who share many values with us all.

Since 1987 New Humanity, the NGO of the Focolari, has the special consultative status with the Ecosoc.

The facts

In 1991, Chiara Lubich, President of the Focolare Movement, crossing the immense town of San Paulo to reach Araceli, one of the Centre’s of the Movement in Brazil, witnessed the violent contrast between the multitude of modern skyscrapers and the large number of slums that surrounded the city.

She was shocked by the misery of the slums, in particular being aware that were living in the slums also people sharing her Ideal. The Ideal that Chiara Lubich chose in 1943, under the air raids of the Second World War, in Trent, in Northern Italy, had sharpened her sense of neighbourly love in such situations. During the war, she had understood, with particular clarity, some words of the Gospel, which she and her companions always carried with them.

These were the words of the prayer that Jesus said, at the Last Supper, before being crucified: “Father, that all will be one, as You and I”. This was his spiritual testament: an expression of reciprocal love, the new commandment that brings Unity, and that brings back the divine between people through human activities.

This Ideal became the reason for existence for the first members of the Focolare Movement, while air raid destruction demonstrated the precariousness of human

POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RECIPROCITY.
THE PROPOSAL OF THE ECONOMY OF COMMUNION

objectives. Today, this Ideal has spread and involves about 4 million people throughout the world.

These include people of all ages, social condition, ethnic origin, religion or belief. Trusting in the Ideal of a United World, they embarked on more than a thousand social projects including schools, hospitals, social centres, activities for economic development, and also thirty international towns complete with schools, houses, families and small economic enterprises.

At this point the, pressing to find out how to insure a dignified way of living was felt at least to the Brazilians that joined this Ideal. In fact, they were presently oppressed by the distress how to provide the basic needs of their family, food, education, health, housing. The practice of sharing the superfluous, adopted from the beginning in the Focolare Movement, was no longer enough.

Chiara Lubich, urged by their need, launched the proposal of “The Economy of Communion” to the two hundred and fifty thousand members of the Movement in Brazil. She proposed that they freely pool together their resources – “We are poor but we are many people.”

The proposal to the people was to become shareholders in Economy of Communion companies, to create work places, and to distribute the profits in three directions. One part would be allocated for company development, a second part would be shared with people in need, and the third portion would be allocated for education to forward the ideals of the Economy of Communion.

The idea was to develop ‘pilot towns’ that would promote the “culture of communion” as expressed in the Gospel. She suggested that similar companies in different areas would contribute in a similar manner, thus creating jobs and generating profits to be distributed according to this new concept.

The project developments

This proposal seemed to defy any economic logic, yet after thirteen years 797 companies are today involved in the Economy of Communion. These include: 226 in Italy, 178 in Western Europe, 65 in Easter Europe, 122 in Brazil, 60 in Argentina, 44 in Central America, 43 in North America, 41 in Asia, mainly the Philippines, 8 in Australia, 7 in Africa and 3 in the Middle East.

They vary from small and middle-sized companies in various economic sectors: 202 in production, 159 in commerce and 385 in different services, 51 other. Two hundred of them are share or limited companies, 58 personal partnerships, 288 personal companies, 30 co-operatives, 15 non-profit associations. Forty-eight companies have sales ranging from 1 to 60 million dollars. Seven companies have sales that exceed 10 million.

Today, nine companies operate near the Brazilian Araceli Citadel. These produce clothing, plastic containers, and detergents. There are also a financial organisation and a marketing centre for pharmaceuticals, a school and a policlinic. The majority of the four thousand owners of the company that is managing the industrial zone are small shareholders: some are people living in slums that started new activities to raise the five dollar needed to buy one share.

The Economy of Communion entrepreneurs are required to make good quality and useful products, to pay taxes and not to pay bribes, to avoid pollution and to operate in an open manner with their employees, the public administration and competitors, in so called reasonable “economic disarmament”.

What are the effects of this different behaviour? The entrepreneurs following Economy of Communion face the difficulties of similar economic activities, and sometimes the difficulties are even greater because the Culture of Communion implies discipline.

At the same time they frequently experience positive events, which point to the intervention of a “hidden shareholder” to whom they are paying profits. The Gospel says: “*give, and it will be given back, in good measure*”.

On several occasions, they also experience that the continuous search for unity among workers and managers, as with suppliers, clients, and public administration, leads to what some economy scholars call “trust reflexivity”, the reciprocity of an open and disinterested behaviour of people with whom we operate, including the competition.

This results in an economy based on a “commitment to grow together” rather than a struggle for existence.

The entrepreneur in the Project

The Economy of Communion seeks to put the human being in the forefront, starting with the entrepreneur who has the power to mould his company according to his values and beliefs. The Economy of Communion highlights the figure of the entrepreneur, who, it claims, is not well represented by the “Homo oeconomicus”, the model of a person with the unique goal of personal *utility* and with the unique logic of rational *self-interest*.

Luigi Einaudi, an Italian liberal economist and also Italian President of the Republic, stated that the entrepreneurial motivations are more complex: “*he has the impulse to work, to produce and to save, notwithstanding what we are able to invent to disturb him, to obstruct him, to discourage him*”; this because he has the vision and the intuition that “*his company will prosper, will acquire credit, will inspire trust to more and more clients*”. This is a mainspring of success, which is “*powerful, as profits, that the entrepreneur should obtain in different ways, with less effort and more safety.*”

Chiara Lubich enters more deeply in the truth of the human person saying:

“Unlike the consumer economy, based on a culture of having,
The Economy of Communion is based on the culture of giving.
This might seem too difficult, ambitious, heroic,
But it is not so, because human beings made in the image of God who is love,
Find their fulfilment in loving, in giving.
This need is in the deepest recesses of their being, whether they have faith or not.
In this belief, confirmed by our experience,
Is the hope of a universal diffusion of Economy of Communion.”

(Chiara Lubich, December’91)

The experience of entrepreneurs of Economy of Communion in the past thirteen years confirms that this is true: they have discovered that they are loved by God, and also that they are in his constant presence also at work. They feel the strength of this ‘invisible shareholder’, as if He should have obtained for them an unlimited credit in a bank. They leave space for Him to operate, and are no longer surprised at His interventions.

In a company oriented towards the Economy of Communion – and between similar companies – “a capital of relationships” is formed. The value of this relationship cannot be quantified. It is a resource that cannot be acquired through financial manoeuvres or speculations. This relationship is useful in difficult moments, and it grows in an environment of trust, where everyone respects each other, and where everyone is free to give.

This atmosphere leads to bright and innovative technical solutions, or generates the idea of a new successful product. It brings a sense of peace and personal realisation to everyone involved, all of which benefit from a sense of fulfilment and job satisfaction.

An Economic Action of Communion

Can this project spread and help the world today? It is not a new economic model, but an economy for new persons who are living the Culture of Giving.

In politics, economy and finance, a culture which is able to overcome liberalism is needed. George Soros defined this outdated liberalism as “*market fundamentalism, a true ideology, applied also in sectors in which the market has no write to enter. An ideology more dangerous for the open society than the planned economy of Marxism.*”

The danger is particularly evident today when, to solve the problems of excess industrial production, the media is used to create new markets. This compels various cultures to amalgamate in a culture of consumerism.

There appears to be attempts to indiscriminately apply the western consumerism model, forgetting that it is not possible to apply it on a global scale, and generating various

upheavals in the process. For example, sixteen per cent of the world population who today adopt this model utilise 52 per cent of the renewable oxygen of the atmosphere.

This has been in particular evidence in last years, though not without resistance, as demonstrates the No Global Movement, and also the present world struggle with terrorism, that is finding fruitful soil in countries fearing to loose their cultural and religious identity.

We need to find new parameters for a sustainable future, but in my opinion, to achieve this aim we need a new culture. This is a culture that is able to achieve personal fulfilment. We also need to develop a way that is more respectful of nature, and of future generations.

An “Economic Action of Communion” is being proposed for the human being of today. This applies to the human being acting either on the supply side as an entrepreneur, or as a consumer on the demand side, or as an investor financing economic activities, or as a citizen with the task to contribute to the design of institutions.

A congress in Genoa in June 2001, to which took part John Langmore, Director of Social and Development Policies Division of ECOSOC, economist, scholars and entrepreneurs from all the continents, proposed the “Genoa Document”, with concrete proposals for the Eradication of Hunger and Poverty.

This document is included in the book “For a Global Agreement Towards a United World”, in Italian and English, and in the book in Italian “Economy of Communion - a new culture” of which some copies are today available

The Document was brought on the G8 table in Genoa: a meeting that unfortunately is remembered for the town turmoil linked to No Global demonstration instead of for practical results.

We would be glad to re-research this document in depth with the help of people that we meet around the world, to build together an economic and political action program on the struggle against Hunger and Poverty, towards a United World.

2. Economy of Communion, poverty and a humanised economy

Luca Crivelli (Switzerland, University of Lugano)

Alberto Ferrucci has illustrated the idea, the main facts and the developments followed by the EoC project in recent years. My contribution is to make more explicit the link existing between the EoC and the objectives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights, in particular with regard to the human rights approach to poverty reduction.

The Spiritual Humus of the EoC

Let me start my talk by reminding that the EoC is not an economic model that has emerged from a discussion held by some economists around a conference table or a project drawn up by experts in sustainable development. The EoC is an experience based on a «spiritual humus», which gives the EoC its identity and meaning. While maintaining a continuous and fruitful dialogue with various expressions of the so called “social economy, the EoC follows its own trajectory. The culture from which the EoC has emerged is well described by Vera Araujo, a sociologist who has accompanied this project from its very beginnings. She writes: *“EoC isn’t a matter of being generous, of giving charity ; it isn’t philanthropy or merely a way of providing assistance. It has to do with acknowledging and living the dimension of giving and giving of oneself as essential to one’s own existence.”*

This culture of giving, therefore, is above all a culture of “self-giving” and of unconditional giving. It requires a mentality that leads people to develop certain ways of behavior not so much for the benefits they will bring but because they have value in themselves, because we experienced their goodness and truth in our lives.

In April 2001, Chiara Lubich explained that “giving” and “unconditional giving” in the EoC are synonymous with “loving”: *“Love your employees, even your competitors, your clients and suppliers too, love everyone. The life-style of the company has to change, everything has to be evangelical, otherwise it isn’t Economy of Communion”*.

By speaking explicitly of love, the EoC goes against the mainstream with respect to the ordinary way of understanding economics in theory and in practice.

The conviction that love as communion must characterize the life of the company lies at the heart of this project. And this conviction, that love must have a central place in the world of business, is a nonconformist and revolutionary proposition. Apart from a few luminous exceptions, the mainstream of economics has not only used terms that are less challenging to describe unselfish conduct (like altruism, philanthropy, donation), but, above all, it has been skeptical of behavior motivated by love for others and has dismissed it as inefficient. Economics has focused on the sphere of human life in which love can be avoided and considers that the more the market is able to cut down on “love”, the more efficient it will be. There is also a second cause of conflict between love and economics: love requires the gift to be free, unconditional, which is a scandal for economics which believes a price must be attributed to everything.

Unconditional giving isn’t present in the EoC companies only in the form of devolving a part of the profit, but it is manifest in many other actions as well, that change in a very deep way the operating of these businesses. Love means the ability to create options even when a correct carrying out of one’s own role would not seem to allow them. Love doesn’t only give or do something for others, it also knows how to “live” its neighbor, to stand by him or her, to put itself in its neighbor’s place without being intrusive. When a solution to the problems does not emerge in the short run, love requires to be concerned by sharing the difficulties of the employees, providing support in seeking an alternative solution and in certain cases in offering help which goes beyond the

company's expected role. This "something more" of unconditional giving in relationships is the secret behind the companies of the EoC.

There is plenty of room for action and choices, which no contract could ever regulate. In those situations, the decision to love or not to love come into play and the company's values matter greatly, as we will hear from the experiences of 3 EoC businesses in few minutes.

A Different Attitude Towards Poverty

The EOC project shares the fundamental values and the objectives of the United Nation Millennium Declaration, in particular those regarding development and eradication of extreme poverty, but fulfils them in a peculiar way. Central to the ethos of solidarity underpinning the Focolare is the idea of building relationships based on communion, emphasizing the importance of overcoming material inequalities principally through radical sharing. The EoC recognizes that there are two different kinds of poverty. On the one hand there is a poverty which people suffer, almost always brought about and fomented by the injustices of human beings and by the "sinful structures": this is indigence, misery, the lack of the most basic needs so as to live a life worthy of human beings; it is poverty which must be opposed with great commitment and on all levels (personal and institutional), because it attacks the dignity of the human person and cannot make anyone happy and fully human.

In the last years, as EoC we tried to support some initiatives promoted under the leadership of the United Nation with the objective of fighting against this form of poverty. For instance we could be part of the United Nations Expert Group Meeting in Copenhagen on Social Responsibility of the Private Sector and give our modest contribution to others UN initiatives in the area of development financing.

On the other hand there is a second type of poverty, one that is freely chosen and which truly renders a person blessed. This is the poverty which is born from the awareness that all that I am has been given to me; likewise, all that I have must, in turn, be given. This is the foundation of the dynamics of reciprocity. This poverty prompts us to free ourselves of goods as absolute possessions in order to make them gifts, and thus to be free to love, the only thing that is truly important.

In this way the goods themselves become bridges, occasions of community, paths of reciprocity. Consequently, while the first indigent poverty is suffered (by persons or events), this second poverty can only be chosen. Therefore, in addition to the measures which directly address the first type of poverty, the economy of communion fights against misery and indigence also by proposing to all a "chosen poverty" in accordance with the evangelical meaning of poverty. A chosen poverty which is the precondition for understanding the logic of communion and for experiencing the greater freedom and profound happiness that constitutes the typical characteristic of communion.

In one word, the proposal, the humanism of the economy of communion, aims at defeating indigence (the poverty that is not chosen but suffered), by inviting everyone to freely choose a moderate and poor style of life. Being convinced that every interaction

both on the inside and on the outside of the company can be transformed into personal face-to-face encounters, the EoC logically alters also the attitude towards the poor.

Poor people are understood and considered as crucial stakeholders and they actively contribute to spread this concept of communion to other persons who live in similar circumstances of poverty.

In fact the Economy of Communion is much more than a simple process of redistribution of goods and resources. It is a new process of production that through sharing goods and activities of a company “generates” an immaterial yet touchable output: the experience of communion. A new understanding of poverty emerges therefore from the manifold experiences of the Economy of Communion with the poor: we could even use the term of a new “culture of poverty”, where everybody involved would experience a climate of substantial equality between those who give and those who receive, as everybody gives and receives at the same time. On the one hand, the poor people assisted by the Economy of Communion find themselves on an equal level of human dignity. Many people who were supported by the EoC started sharing spontaneously and voluntarily what they have received.

So it does not come as a big surprise to find former persons on need among today’s entrepreneurs of the Economy of Communion. On the other hand, through the choice of the second type of poverty, the entrepreneur himself becomes poor: not indigent, but the one who out of love uses his talents in order to generate resources to be put in communion, even by taking economic risks.

Humanizing the Market Economy

Therefore, the EoC can also be seen as an attempt to humanize the market economy. The vision of the market (understood in the broad sense of the term) and of a business entity that emerges from the EoC is substantially positive but not blind to the damage and harm that a wild market could cause. (To make that clear it is enough to remind ourselves that the founding intuition emerged precisely in Brazil where the market miserably failed to solve the problem of extreme poverty.)

The EoC recalls all economic activity to its original vocation which is a peaceful encounter between free persons. That is why the EoC does not radically condemn private entrepreneurship and the free market, but admonishes us to see them too as places where true well-being, happiness and authentic encounters between people can be brought about. At the same time the EoC is also a radical criticism against today’s common understanding of market economy and its ways of thinking. The EoC try to propose a multi-dimensional view of entrepreneurial activity, where efficiency has its place but is not the only factor that counts. Apart from efficiency, the businesses adhering to the EoC add other, just as essential dimensions to their business models such as giving, solidarity, reciprocity, beauty, gratuity and – why not – spirituality and the sense of communion. Moreover, the EoC challenges market economics in at least three additional ways.

1. When Chiara Lubich launched the Economy of Communion in 1991, she did not suggest the creation of foundations, of charity or social assistance organizations – as one might naturally expect. Instead, from the very beginning, she spoke of companies

as an unusual instrument for resolving a problem of solidarity. The fact is that “communion” penetrates these seemingly “normal economic organizations” and installs itself therein. With the creation of production areas which have been built beside the “settlements” of the Focolare Movement in recent years, something new is occurring. The construction of these areas gets the entire community involved in a kind of “popular shareholding”. It enables the raising of capital necessary to start up new companies, especially in developing countries where it can be very difficult and costly to access capital markets (“we are poor, but many” was the slogan of the EoC from the beginning). These areas are becoming an original and important form of production. They are not classical business groups (holdings) nor are they a simple industrial district (meaning areas characterized by the almost exclusive presence of one industry which leads to the development of many small companies), even if the social culture that accompanies them plays an important role as it does in traditional industrial “districts”. The development of these zones represents a new stage for the EoC, a “coming out” of the project into public life and a qualitative leap on the institutional-organizational level.

2. Secondly the Economy of Communion shows that it is possible to overcome the dichotomy between the production of wealth and the distribution of it. This is an old dichotomy. Many think that in business one can behave in the following way: no ethical norm must be binding at the moment of production, since the only objective is to maximize economic results and therefore efficiency. Once the maximum size of the cake has been obtained (even if it means that a certain behavior violates fundamental norms and infringes upon fundamental human rights), that’s when one can remember the existence of others and their needs and can therefore be generous at the time of distribution. This is the conception that dominates in today’s economy, even among Christians at times. Many think that the important thing is to make a lot of money and then to try to distribute it in an equal way according to some law of redistribution.

Unfortunately this is a perverse logic because it tends to dichotomize the person. It makes people schizophrenic. The same person can not ignore others to obtain better economic results or more profit and then go on to handle the distribution of that wealth. And that’s because he will never be able to do justice for the evil produced at the moment of generating that wealth, even if he works towards a more equal distribution. The EoC represents an example of going against the trend demonstrating that it is possible to remain in the market successfully without following this dichotomizing logic.

3. The third contribution to the humanizing of economy is the following: the Economy of Communion shows that economic transactions are inseparable from human relationships. For this reason exchange – even that which takes place in the market – can not be anonymous or impersonal. The principle language used by economists today is the language of incentives. Economic science tells us it is necessary to offer an economic incentive in order to direct the choices of the individual towards desired behavior. However, using systems of incentives always hides a relationship of power. Certainly power is better expressed in the form of an incentive than in direct coercion. Nevertheless there is a third path which provides an alternative to both, incentives and coercion, in directing individuals in a certain direction as opposed to another. The

alternative is persuasion. Perhaps this is the ultimate secret of the Economy of Communion model: those who are involved act without a scheme of incentive – which is always expensive and can produce undesired side effect, by crowding out intrinsic motivation; they act because they are deeply persuaded. And this persuasion is derived from the precise adhesion to the very strong cultural matrix which is the one Chiara Lubich so vigorously upholds.

Solidarity in a spirit of “Brotherhood”

In seeking a new relationship between market and society, the Economy of Communion sees companies as a social good and as a collective resource and it transcends the idea of the market as a place where relationships are only self-serving. In envisioning and living business in this way while remaining fully inserted in the market, the experience of the EoC joins together the market and civil society, efficiency and solidarity, economy and communion. And this is not trivial. If market economy wants to function and to have a future which is sustainable and human, it must allow for the development of behavior founded on these other principles.

Most human communities are sustained by the interaction of three fundamental principles: exchange, redistribution of wealth and donation. In the course of history there have been villages without exchange but there have never been villages that have survived without some form of donation. In our view, market economy, which is centered around the principle of contract, has a tremendous need to incorporate the “principle of unconditional giving”. But how can we justify the extension of unconditional giving from the private sphere – which no one contests – to the economic sphere, to markets? With the French Revolution modernity has launched its civil and cultural program: freedom, equality and brotherhood. Liberty has given rise to and is fully expressed in market exchange, equality has given rise to the experiences of “the Welfare State” founded on the redistribution of wealth. Brotherhood has been recognized as an important element for a peaceful cohabitation of people. For instance we can find explicit mention of brotherhood in article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the spirit of brotherhood has still a long way to go in order to enter, with equal rights, into the framework of modern society.

Unconditional giving could become a regulating principle of economics and of society if acting towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood is recognized as a founding principle, of which communion is the most immediate concrete expression.

A New Approach to Scientific Work

The fact that an ever growing number of scholars, economists, entrepreneurs and cultural leaders show attention and interest in the EoC seems to be a sign that there may be some universal elements in this concept that started as the experience of a small group of people. In other words: while the EoC in strict terms is a concrete project with a history and a well-defined scope, some principles stick out that are universally applicable in order to create the category of communion in economics.

A detailed presentation of the first elements of economic theory emerging from the studies on the EoC goes surely beyond the objectives of this round table. However, I would like to quickly highlight one aspect. In the EoC we encounter a different type of economic actors, who can inspire also economic theory. They are quite different from the *individual* economic actors (the so-called *homo oeconomicus*) that dominate most of economic theories and can provide undesired legitimacy for the behavior of many people in business. Nevertheless, the EoC does not question the centrality or autonomy of the subject that chooses and decides in an autonomous way. What it does, is to “complicate” the image of human being, proposing a new anthropology. It doesn’t substitute the individual subject with the community or with the group. Rather, it substitutes the subject – defined without reference to its relational dimension – with a *relational-subject* which has been called *person* by a typically Christian tradition coming out of 20th C. philosophy. The EoC challenge to economic theory is to go from the *methodological individualism* – which explains collective phenomena as a result of individual’s actions and choices – to a *methodological personalism* in which the person, seen intrinsically and ontologically as being in relation to others, is at the center of the theory.

The theory that emerges from the experience of the EoC tells us in various ways that relationships with other people can also be considered as goods (that is: good things that satisfy us and meet our needs) and that poverty is not only defined by the lack of resources but just as much by the lack of genuine relationships. If business and markets interactions become a qualifying moment for civil life, we can hope to brake the massive growth, all over the world, of relational poverty in addition to material poverty.

3. Expériences

José Luis Berriel (Uruguay)

Je m'appelle José Luis Berriel, je suis uruguayen. Je suis marié avec Marie Thérèse depuis 21 ans et nous avons six enfants.

Depuis que nous nous sommes mariés, nous vivons - avec d'autres familles du Mouvement des Focolari - l'expérience de la communion des biens. Nous formons une communauté où nous avons appris à voir dans quelle mesure un bien peut nous être utile en le confrontant avec les nécessités des autres. Dans nos maisons, nous cherchons de ne pas garder de côté des choses uniquement parce qu'elles pourraient peut-être nous servir un jour. Tout circule entre nous : les vêtements pour les enfants et les adultes, les meubles, la nourriture, et la disponibilité de temps et souvent d'argent aussi.

Il y eut une époque où, malgré toutes nos heures de travail à Marie Thérèse et moi, et notre vie austère, nous n'arrivions pas à faire face à toutes nos dépenses familiales. Par les familles qui nous entouraient, il nous a été offert une aide de l'Economie de Communion, pour payer au moins l'assistance sanitaire de nos enfants. Pour moi, c'était difficile d'accepter cette aide, parce qu'il me semblait qu'il y avait beaucoup de gens qui enduraient des situations économiques pires que la nôtre. Mais avec le temps, j'ai compris qu'avec cette nouvelle manière de vivre en relation avec les autres, nous avons tous quelque chose

à donner et quelque chose à recevoir et qu'il est tout aussi important d'accepter de l'aide que de la donner. Le fait d'être aidés nous a donné une plus grande sensibilité envers ceux qui, autour de nous, vivaient des situations difficiles.

Dans notre quartier, il y avait toujours plus d'enfants et de femmes marginalisés qui demandaient de l'aide en passant de maison en maison. Les voisins commencèrent à bien fermer leur maison en mettant de hauts grillages, pour se protéger des vols. Quant à nous, tout ce que nous avions était un cadeau de Dieu et notre véritable souci était que toute personne qui venait sonner à notre porte puisse toujours trouver quelque chose : de quoi manger, des habits, un sourire, un peu de compagnie. Peu à peu quelques-uns de nos voisins, voyant tous ces allers et venues chez nous, se sont mis à nous porter des vêtements et d'autres choses en nous disant : "Si cela ne devait pas vous servir, vous sauriez sûrement à qui le donner". C'est ainsi que dans la maison, on a réservé un coin où il y aurait toujours quelque chose à donner.

Donner c'était aussi donner quelques heures de travail, par exemple pour différents projets de formation des parents dans l'école de nos enfants ou bien pour une action sociale suivie par le Mouvement des Focolari dans un quartier de périphérie, cela nous a semblé une façon de rendre un peu de l'aide que nous avions reçue.

Dans les années 90, (je ne me rappelle pas exactement l'année), je travaillais dans une multinationale comme technicien électromécanicien, quand j'ai appris que l'unité de production d'Uruguay devait fermer. Dans mon secteur nous étions un groupe de 5 personnes, et notre chef pensait que le seul à pouvoir rester était moi car, à cause de ma formation, j'étais le seul en mesure d'assurer certains travaux. En parlant avec mes camarades de travail sur la situation de l'entreprise, je me suis rendu compte que pour l'un d'entre eux l'idée de perdre son travail était tragique, car précisément ces jours-là sa femme venait de perdre son emploi elle aussi.

En voyant la souffrance de cette personne, je compris que si je voulais être cohérent avec mes idées, c'était là l'occasion de le prouver. Nous en avons parlé avec ma femme, et nous étions bien d'accord sur le fait que notre richesse ne consistait pas à rester attachés aux choses que nous avions, mais à les donner librement aux autres. Par conséquent, j'ai proposé à ce camarade de l'aider à se former dans certains aspects du métier qui lui manquaient, pour qu'il puisse garder son emploi. Même si cette proposition l'a beaucoup étonné, il a accepté et mon supérieur aussi.

Peu de temps après, je trouvai un nouveau travail dans une usine (de montage). C'était un emploi bien meilleur et pas seulement au point de vue du travail, car il nous a permis, avec l'indemnisation de licenciement, d'obtenir un crédit immobilier pour acheter une vieille maison. Nous avons travaillé dur pour remettre ce logement en état. Pour ne pas trop prendre sur nos salaires, nous avons travaillé nous-mêmes comme manœuvres sur le chantier de cette maison et en plus nous avons fait en sorte que tout soit fait dans la plus grande légalité : avec les permis de construire délivrés par la mairie et le paiement de toutes les contributions sociales des personnes qui ont travaillé à ce chantier avec un salaire.

Il y a trois ans, vu que les possibilités d'emploi devenaient toujours plus difficiles pour moi et que les nécessités de la famille augmentaient avec les enfants, nous nous sommes sérieusement posé la question d'émigrer vers l'Europe.

Devoir partir après tous les efforts que nous avons faits, c'était pour nous comme un contre sens ! Et lorsqu'il nous a été offert la possibilité de nous transférer en Italie, pour un certain temps, ce fut pour nous un signe concret de l'Amour de Dieu pour notre famille et cet Amour nous voulions le faire arriver à d'autres aussi.

Nous nous sommes demandés quoi faire avec notre maison. Dans un premier temps, nous avons pensé qu'en la louant, nous aurions pu continuer à rembourser le crédit immobilier et gagner une petite rente qui aurait pu être utile en Italie. Mais nous nous sommes rappelés que plusieurs familles de notre communauté avaient des problèmes de logements trop petits, et qu'elles n'avaient pas la possibilité d'obtenir une maison plus grande. Une de ces familles vivait dans un très petit logement. Nous leur avons proposé de venir habiter chez nous et d'utiliser tous nos meubles aussi. L'argent du loyer de leur maison à eux nous donnait juste de quoi continuer à payer le crédit bancaire de notre maison. Le plus petit des enfants, en comprenant tout cela, a fait ce commentaire : "C'est Dieu qui nous aime". Actuellement ils vivent tout à fait contents dans notre maison et ils continuent à y faire les travaux comme si c'était leur maison.

Dans cette économie divine on ne peut pas interrompre cette chaîne de dons, on doit la continuer et l'étendre à d'autres qui en ont le plus besoin.

Philippe Prégardien (Belgique, entrepreneur)

Je m'appelle Philippe Prégardien, et je dirige avec mes deux frères l'entreprise « SPPRIMOGLASS ». Nous sommes une entreprise de 150 personnes et nous avons un chiffre d'affaire de +/- 25.000.000 € Notre activité principale est la transformation du verre plat. Notre production journalière est de 3000 M2 de vitrage isolant pour le bâtiment, 500 M2 de vitrage feuilleté de sécurité, 100 M2 de vitrage trempé et sérigraphié. Nous avons également une filiale informatique (SYNERGLASS) de 12 personnes, qui vend et développe des logiciels dans ce secteur d'activité.

Pierre et moi avons adhéré à l'économie de communion depuis 1991. Notre frère aîné, Vincent, travaille aussi avec nous mais ne partage pas pour le moment cet esprit dans lequel nous essayons, Pierre et moi, de porter l'entreprise de l'avant. Toute fois c'est en le respectant dans ses valeurs, que l'on essaie de vivre l'EdC.

En venant au contact de l'EdC, je me suis rendu compte que grâce à elle, il était possible d'avoir une justice sociale entre personnes différentes, c'est-à-dire entre les salariés et les responsables d'une entreprise. Pour moi, ce fut la réponse à un de mes problèmes : en effet, je me sentais mal à l'aise devant un ouvrier parce que je gagnais bien ma vie et lui, pour différentes circonstances, il subissait un traitement différent souvent non mérité ! Donc pour moi, un horizon nouveau s'est ouvert et me donnait beaucoup d'espérance.

Je peux dire que la seconde chose que l'EdC m'a fait comprendre, est l'importance de se maintenir dans la plus grande légalité : c'est-à-dire d'être honnête vis à vis de l'Etat

(même si ce n'est pas toujours facile et qu'il faut souvent se remettre en question), être honnête aussi vis à vis du personnel.

Depuis que j'essaie de vivre selon l'esprit de l'EdC, ma relation vis à vis de nos employés a changé : par exemple, je les écoute avec beaucoup plus d'attention, surtout s'ils me parlent d'un de leurs problèmes qu'ils vivent soit en famille soit dans l'entreprise. Maintenant je ne peux pas faire autrement, quand j'arrive le matin je dis bonjour à chacun. Avec les clients j'essaie de les considérer avant tout comme des personnes à aimer d'abord et pas seulement comme une possibilité de gagner de l'argent, même si cet aspect ne doit pas être négligé pour le bon fonctionnement de l'entreprise. J'essaie également de rester le plus honnête avec eux. Parfois le rapport que je crée avec eux amène le dialogue, ils me parlent peut-être d'un de leurs problèmes au sein de leur entreprise ou dans leur famille ; avec quelques clients, s'est même établie une relation vraiment profonde.

Il est vrai cependant qu'il n'est pas toujours facile d'appliquer l'EdC d'un point de vue économique et commercial. De fait, pour moi, deux problèmes émergent : le premier est que si on veut qu'une entreprise fleurisse, il faut vendre ; pour vendre on est souvent contraint à faire des prix de revient bien calculés et – si on prend un marché on peut faire concurrence à d'autres collègues ou à des entreprises qui ont la même activité. On se trouve donc souvent devant un problème de conscience, car si je prends le client d'un concurrent, ce dernier aura moins de travail et se verra obligé de licencier l'une ou l'autre personne. Le chemin à parcourir n'est donc pas toujours simple, mais si on vit toute cette réalité à chaque instant, c'est à dire d'aimer la personne dans le moment présent, c'est beaucoup plus facile.

Je voulais vous partager quelques petites expériences :

- J'essaie maintenant de dire bonjour à chaque personne qu'employé que je rencontre, sans le juger, mais en le voyant chaque jour nouveau et en étant de bonne humeur. Si bien qu'un jour, préoccupé par une situation, la secrétaire m'a dit : « tiens Philippe ! Aujourd'hui tu ne siffles pas ! ». Ce qui m'a bien sûr remis tout de suite sur le bon chemin !
- Lorsque par moment il y a beaucoup de travail ou qu'il fait chaud, Pierre fait venir le marchand de glace, pour que tout le monde puisse s'arrêter et prendre un petit moment de détente. Un jour d'absence de Pierre, nous devions, suite à un problème technique, travailler un samedi matin et le responsable de production me dit « dit Philippe quand nous devons venir le samedi matin, Pierre nous amène un petit pain au chocolat ». Cela m'a fait grand plaisir, car j'ai vu que celui-ci avait osé me le dire, et que lui aussi se préoccupait de ses ouvriers, et bien sûr le lendemain, j'apportais les petits pains au chocolat.
- Je m'occupe plus personnellement de « SYNERGLASS » et je suis donc souvent amené à partir vendre les logiciels et visiter nos clients. En cours de visite je vois également des ouvriers qui sont « ignorants » en informatique, et c'est pour moi chaque fois important de me mettre à leur niveau, sans qu'ils se sentent inférieurs. Si bien qu'un jour, je me rendais chez un client qui avait nos logiciels depuis un an, et soudain, l'ouvrier de production m'interpelle et me dit « Hé Philippe tu à vu, je pense maintenant mieux connaître le logiciel que toi ! » et je pouvais ainsi sentir le fruit d'un amour concret que j'avais eu pour lui.

POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RECIPROCITY.
THE PROPOSAL OF THE ECONOMY OF COMMUNION

Bien sûr les difficultés ne nous épargnent pas, et nous devons aussi pardonner les personnes qui nous entourent, comme aussi leur demander parfois pardon. Je me souviens d'un jour où devant tout le monde je m'étais fâché sur un responsable et j'avais bien sur compris que cette personne avait été humiliée devant tout le monde. Le lendemain matin, je l'ai appelé pour lui demander pardon d'avoir agit comme cela.

L'éthique de l'entreprise est aussi très importante pour nous. Refuser les marchés frauduleux, payer les taxes imposées par notre pays.

Nous vivons aussi l'EdC par le partage. Avec Pierre, nous examinons chaque année ce que nous pouvons faire pour donner une partie de nos bénéfices à l'EdC.

Klemens Fritschi and Michele Michelotti (Italy, entrepreneurs)

My name is Klemens Fritschi.

I am Swiss and went to school in Switzerland, but since 1959 I live in Italy and 1969 I founded with others the Ridix. Ridix is a commercial firm, that means that we represent mainly foreign firms on the Italian market.

In our case we do our business in the mechanical industry selling machine tools, accessories and tools; practically a full range of products needed in the mechanical industry. Our job concerns not only the sales promotion and the sales contract as such, but also the technical assistance for the installation and the maintenance of the machines and products we sell.

Our office and warehouse are in Turin and in the different regions of Italy we work with a own net of agents and resale firms. All our products manufactured by the foreign firms are of very high technology and quality and therefore we need mainly qualified personal. So much about our job.

During the holidays this year I have been in Brazil where the Economy in Communion was born and having visited different realities and spent some time with all kind of this joyful people in this big and wonderful country I understand now even better the reason of this project which we try to live as much as possible in our firm.

I think that you would like to know what it means to be part of this project. Very simply I can tell you with my own experience that I feel to be very lucky and happy to work in this new way which surely will be necessary in order to improve economy in general and therefore the life of Humanity.

New is the reason for which I work.

Not any more in the first place the profit only, but the happiness; the success is the happiness, but in order to be happy I have to make happy the persons who work with me and when we work together like this we surely produce profit, because everything I do (working, writing, talking) everything is done in the best possible way for the happiness of others.

Of course it is not possible to be always happy or to make others always happy, but all the persons who work with me must feel that I intend to make them happy. For example I almost never close the door of my office and everybody knows that they can come to talk

POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RECIPROCITY.
THE PROPOSAL OF THE ECONOMY OF COMMUNION

to me, maybe to complain. I put away all papers and listen carefully. Very often I do not have the solution for all the problems, but it is anyhow important to pay full attention.

My name is Michele Michelotti. I work for the Ridix Company since 1980 and I am CEO of the company since 1987.

I'd like to share with you some thoughts related to the Alberto Ferrucci phrase: " The communion begins in the relationship between the business man, and the collaborator. "

I would say that the Ridix key of success is the communion between the partners. Clem Fritschi, who is the founder of the company, located and created a group of person, who was ready to share, in spirit of communion, the working experience in the company. In reality, this meant, for us, to organize a meeting once a week to discuss and examine the different aspects of the company job, to be able to take together the important decisions. This group was made of people who had very different working background: some of us had a technical background, some of us an administrative one, others a commercial one, but everybody could give an equal contribution to the different aspect of managing the company.

We can synthesize the result of this way of working in some points:

- The taken decisions are more corrected when taken by a group of person who has different working background.
- Everybody feels he has an important role in the company, working with major pleasure and if possible even with more commitment and care.
- We complete each other. For instance, I'm not a technician or a seller, but through this communion with the other, I learned to understand their point of view, and sometimes, I take decisions considering most of all technical or commercial aspects.
- We share the difficult moments, so the heavy burden seems to be lighter.
- The company had, from different points of view, great success. In 35 years we had two years only of deficit. Besides those two years, we always had profits, sometimes-good profits.
- Even in those last years of general economy crisis, we had profits.
- We contributed to the Economy of Communion with more than 200.000 Euro.
- We participated to the realization of several social works in the Third World.
- When the Ridix Company was founded, they were 7 persons, now we are 57.
- Some of the foreign firms we represent, as the Blaser Company for instance, show our firm to their agency, as a model of success to follow.
- We decided to include on our group of collaborators, people with special needs, who could in this way access the job market.
- Some of our collaborators are quite happy of their job, and those who left, still look at the company with pleasure.
- With many customers, lawyers, banks, distributors, financial controllers, and even with some rival business firms, we have good relationship based on mutual respect and esteem.

POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RECIPROCITY.
THE PROPOSAL OF THE ECONOMY OF COMMUNION

So far I told you the positive aspects of the Company, but of course we encounter several difficulties as well. For instance:

- Now that we are not a small firm anymore the actual dimension doesn't allow keeping everything under control. As a consequence, sometimes, not all the collaborators are always happy.
- The continuous growing number of things to do, problems to solve, and the frenetic rhythms that the actual job market impose, sometimes prevent us to find those special moments of sharing. Because of the quick time of reaction, that today is often required, not always allow the time for concrete moments of mutual opinions exchange.
- The age of some senior partners requests a generational turn over, that not always that is easy to realize.
- Growing as a company, requests the involvement of a major number of persons. This can improve the number of problems related to interpersonal relationship, new distributions of company roles and responsibilities.

What helps us to front those difficulties is knowing (because we went through that) that being correlated and share, is a way of lead the company. Nobody is independent from the others.

Sharing those difficulties between partners and collaborators helps to carry the burden and share the profits.

The results we obtain are team result and not personal goals. Ideas and solutions grown up thanks to the mutual love between us and develop if we are able to keep it alive.

Jean Michel et Patricia Besson (Suisse, entrepreneurs)

Nous possédons une exploitation agricole qui produit de la viande de veau et du fromage de chèvre.

Le fait d'engager librement notre entreprise dans cette aventure de l'EdC à été pour nous comme d'en faire don à cette idée généreuse. Dès lors nous nous considérons nous - mêmes plus comme les administrateurs de nos propres biens que comme leurs propriétaires.

Nous nous sentons plus libre face à l'argent que nous gagnons. Une petite expérience qui a été très éclairante pour moi à ce propos. Pour obtenir un subside de quelques centaines de francs j'aurais pu frauder légèrement une déclaration, personne n'y aurait jamais rien vu. Mais à un certain moment il m'est apparu très clairement, comme une lumière, que cette somme au travers des bénéfices que je partage à l'EdC c'est à Dieu que je la donnais, et qu'aurait 'il bien pu faire, lui, d'un argent gagné frauduleusement ? C'est donc sans regret que j'ai renoncé à cette tentation. Je me suis aperçu que faire les choses pour Dieu et devant Lui me rend plus libre et m'aide à faire des choix en paix.

À travers l'économie de communion, qui incarne l'idéal du don, nous apprenons à faire les choses pour les autres ce qui aide à dépasser une certaine timidité et à se détacher de soi. Nous n'étions ni ma femme ni moi des vendeurs nés. Aller au-devant des gens pour leur proposer nos produits n'est donc pas pour nous chose très naturelle, mais sachant qu'on le fait dans un but de partage, pour les frères qui sont dans le besoin renforce notre motivation et nous donne du courage. C'est ce que j'ai expérimenté lors de promotions

POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RECIPROCITY.
THE PROPOSAL OF THE ECONOMY OF COMMUNION

que nous organisons dans des supermarchés. Je me sentais plus libre d'aborder les clients pour faire goûter nos produits et, devant mon attitude d'ouverture, ils peuvent réagir et dire ce qu'ils pensent.

Nos clients sont aussi des frères que nous voulons respecter. Par amour pour eux nous essayons d'imaginer de nouvelles présentations de nos produits. Ainsi lors des fêtes de fin d'année nous apportons une décoration spéciale à nos fromages. Cette réalisation me donne toujours une grande joie parce qu'elle est belle et s'intègre dans cet amour des autres

Notre entreprise étant familiale, ma femme et moi, sommes constamment ensemble. De plus en plus se fait sentir la nécessité de discuter les problèmes et de partager nos points de vue sur le développement de l'exploitation. Ceci nécessite un effort constant de communication qui nous pousse à maintenir l'unité entre nous. Dans notre réflexion sur le développement futur de notre exploitation nous essayons de comprendre qu'elle est la volonté de Dieu sur nos projets.

Il y a quelques années, nous avons envisagé d'abandonner la production de fromages de chèvres qui est très exigeante en travail. Notre revenu aurait aussi diminué de même que les bénéfices partagés. Mais cette option ne nous a pas paru en accord avec notre volonté de vivre cet idéal de l'économie de communion. Nous avons donc maintenu cette activité en cherchant à la développer à travers de nouveaux marchés. Rapidement les résultats ont dépassé nos objectifs.

Cette décision a eu une autre incidence heureuse puisque peu après est survenue la crise de la vache folle qui aurait sérieusement menacé notre exploitation si elle n'avait été orientée que sur le secteur bovin.

Ces événements nous ont fait comprendre que lorsque l'on fait le choix de donner, la Providence nous accompagne.

Dans notre rapport avec les personnes qui travaillent avec nous (un employé permanent et un apprenti ou stagiaire) nous cherchons à établir un lien fraternel et non pas seulement un rapport de patron à employé.

Appartenir à l'économie de communion nous relie à cette grande espérance de changer la mentalité de notre société et de contribuer à soulager la pauvreté dans le monde.

Nous sentons aussi la nécessité de nous rencontrer régulièrement avec les autres entreprises pour partager nos expériences, nos difficultés et nos réussites pour avancer ensemble sur ce chemin de la fraternité universelle.