



# The Economy of Communion Movement as Humanistic Management

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## Abstract

In this essay we will demonstrate that the Economy of Communion (EoC) movement provides a very good example of Humanistic Management (HM) as characterized by Domènec Melé in particular. EoC provides a unique lens through which to conceive of Humanistic Management which is extraordinarily person-centered, and which maps onto many of the key themes and principles of Humanistic Management practice. We will here present nine features of Humanistic Management which are clearly displayed in EoC scholarship and practice. We will show the commonalities of thought between EoC and HM through their parallel scholarly explanations of business practices, and also through concrete lived examples of EOC entrepreneurs. Our hope is that the Economy of Communion movement and businesses will become a fruitful source of study and investigation for further Humanistic Management research.

**Keywords** Economy of Communion · Humanistic Management · Domènec Melé · Dignity · Gratuity · Common good

## Introduction

Although the humanistic management movement has recently come to the fore again, humanism in business itself is an old idea. In 1766 Antonio Genovesi the first economist ever to hold a chair in “civil economy” wrote,

If everyone were to look out for their own interest, no one would be able to do anything other than think of their happiness, and would be less a man; but if you can, in as much as you can, try to make the others happy. It's the law of the universe that we cannot create our own happiness without looking for that of the others (449).

This statement is as true today as it was in 18th century Italy. Today we live in a globalized world where we all impact each other. As Dierksmeier et al. have pointed out, this ‘globality’ is “a state of affairs where a global impact of individual actions, local business practices and

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national politics is no longer the exception but has become more and more the rule" (Dierksmeier et al. 2011, 1). In our interconnected world, we see that we all share challenges of inequity, poverty, terrorism, mass migration, environmental destruction, and Covid, and many others besides. We cannot remain isolated. In the face of this, groups like the Humanistic Management Network have sought to develop an alternative paradigm for business, "one based on the protection of dignity and the promotion of well-being rather than mere wealth" (Pirson 2017a, 1). Humanistic Management is a movement directly challenging the economicistic model of thought assumed in neoclassical economics, which is considered an obsolete and even dangerous model of economic thinking (Dierksmeier 2011, 2016; Laszlo 2019). Rather than a transactional approach focused on profit maximization, humanistic management is concerned with the human and societal impacts of business practices and how these contribute to the common good of community (Dyck 2020; Melé 2012; Laszlo 2019).

While humanistic management has existed in multiple forms for decades (Melé 2003), the growth of the Humanistic Management movement in the last few decades has coincided with some very exciting movements arising from the Catholic and Jesuit traditions. The 1986 document *Economic Justice for All* put out by the Conference of US Bishops was followed shortly by *Centesimus Annus* in 1991. In 1996 the International Association of Jesuit Business Schools was established and the United States-based Colleagues in Jesuit Business Education soon followed, building up a substantial networks of scholars concerned with business' impact on the common good. Pope Benedict's 2009 *Caritas in veritate* and the offspring of that encyclical, *Vocation of the Business Leader* (2012) have prompted an avalanche of scholarship in the fields of business ethics and management (Goodpaster 2011; McCann 2011; Melé and Naughton 2011). More recently, Pope Francis has given a talk addressing the EoC movement direction in 2017 at the Vatican, and he has promoted the use of economics for brotherhood of all of humanity in *Fratelli Tutti* (2020).

In 1991, the same year as *Centesimus Annus*, the Economy of Communion was founded as a network to encourage and promote like-minded entrepreneurs who see entrepreneurship as an opportunity to provide dignified work, and especially to help the poor to become empowered (Lubich 1999, 2001; John Paul II 1991). It has been said that the EoC is an attempt to develop an "economics as if people mattered" (Zamagni 2014, 48).

The EoC is a living example of humanistic management and entrepreneurship at work, and while some scholarship has begun to develop this connection (Esteso-Blasco et al. 2021), we will show this by theoretical analysis and concrete examples. Building on the principles of Humanistic Management developed by Melé (2016) we will clearly show how the principles and practices of EoC parallel those of Humanistic Management. For the comparative theoretical analysis, we will rely on EoC scholars and also Pope Francis' 2017 talk on EoC delivered at the Vatican, and we will also provide concrete empirical EoC examples which correlate to the key features of Humanistic Management. The goal ultimately is to engage with the Humanistic Management project from the point of view of EoC and show the unique but parallel insights of EoC thinking and practice for the development of a Humanistic Management.

## The Economy of Communion

The Economy of Communion has Christian roots but is ecumenical, with adherents who are Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish and even atheists (Gold 2010). Its clear reflection of Catholic Social Teachings is well documented (Lopez et al. 2013). EoC is a sub-movement of the

Focolare, a lay-run ecumenical group founded on the principle of sharing with others in Italy during WWII. Chiara Lubich, the founder of Focolare, discovered in 1991 that many of their members in São Paulo, Brazil were unemployed and living in extreme poverty. She helped rally the local members who could to start up entrepreneurial ventures to help provide employment to those in need and generate profits that could provide a revenue stream to help a greater number of people (Bruni 2002a, b; Bruni and Zamagni 2004; Gold 2010; Lubich 2001). The idea was not just to help provide financial aid, but to help establish real communion between every person involved. The motivation of the entrepreneurial ventures was not primarily for their owners to get more wealth but to give assistance, employment, and dignity to others. The EoC is unique in that it has its origins in practice, since the EoC project emerged from a lived spirituality and was immediately brought to life in the real world. Only later have academics come to describe some of the principles underlying the movement (Gallagher and Buckeye 2014; Gold 2010). Many Italian scholars, and more recently other European and American scholars have been developing empirical and theoretical scholarship on the Economy of Communion's unique approach to entrepreneurship and management (Beabout 2020; Bruni 2002a, b, 2014; Bruni and Gold 2002; Bruni and Uelmen 2006; Bruni and Zamagni 2004; Buckeye 2020; Gallagher and Buckeye 2014; Cloutier 2020; Crivelli 2020; Crivelli and Gui 2014; Ferrucci 2002; Gallagher 2014, 2020; Gold 2010; Gustafson 2020a, b, c; Gustafson and Harvey 2020a; Harvey 2020; Sibley 2020; Zamagni 2014).

In what follows, we will provide nine important common goals and values shared by the Economy of Communion and humanistic management, drawing on key humanistic management scholars, especially on Melé's 2016 article which outlines seven principles of humanism.

## Shared Theoretical Goals and Values between Humanistic Management and EoC

### Beyond Transactional Business

On a transactional understanding of business, “doing business” means exchanging one type of value for another, usually money for goods or services. The exchange is one of “this” for “that” and the basis of the business relationship is simply economic and instrumental—I want something, and I give you something you want in exchange for it. We are both in the relationship for what we are going to get—it's a purely functional relationship and limited to our own self-interests working in a win-win cooperation. If one person gives more than they get, the relationship is economically flawed because it is not fully efficient. It is assumed that the interests of both parties are served by the transaction so long as the transaction is free, informed and consensual.

One common feature found in both EoC and Humanistic Management concerns is a rejection of mere transactional business practices, and the embrace of a higher ideal of generosity, gratuity and gift giving in business. The criticisms of merely transactional business decisions has been central to humanistic management from its inception (Pirson 2017a, b). Domenec Melé, highlighting James MacGregor Burns' important distinction between transactional leadership and transformational leadership, points out that “No doubt leadership is important in business, but a leadership based only on transactions and interests is quite poor” (Melé 2012). In place of this merely transactional model, a logic of gift and gratuity has developed (Schlag and Melé 2019; McCann 2011). The idea is that business

is not merely a transaction of this for that; rather, it is an opportunity to build communion with others, benefit others and transform society. The EoC speaks of this in terms of gratuity and pursuit of communion. When in 2017 Pope Francis spoke to an invited audience of EoC members from around the world at the Vatican, he said of the EoC,

Economy and communion. These are two words that contemporary culture keeps separate and often considers opposites. Two words that you have instead joined, accepting the invitation that Chiara Lubich offered you 25 years ago in Brazil, when, in the face of the scandal of inequality in the city of São Paulo, she asked entrepreneurs to become agents of communion. She invited you to be creative, skillful, but not only this. You see the entrepreneur as an agent of communion. Business entrepreneurs who see themselves as agents of communion believe they have been called to business for a purpose – as a vocation – to help the poor, to benefit the common good, and to use business to bring about improvement in people's lives and a transformation of society for the better. (Pope Francis 2017)

A very basic value of the Economy of Communion is that business is founded on gratuity and reciprocity in order to help foster communion. Business begins with an act of giving, gift, or gratuity, which in turn brings reciprocity.<sup>1</sup> This is the basis of real human interaction and the communion hoped for, and it is in line with Catholic Social Teaching and recent advice from Pope Francis' 2017 speech.

Zamagni puts it well when he says that “The ultimate challenge that EoC invites us to take up is to strive to bring the principle of gratuitousness back into the public sphere” (Zamagni 2014, 52). Gratitude is not merely giving or getting something for free, but “the content of gift as gratuitousness is the specific interpersonal relation that goes to be established between the donor and the donee” (Zamagni 2014, 46). This giving without strings is the beginning of real human trust and real authentic relationship. Business certainly involves contractual obligations, and legal obligations, and justice, all of which provide a stable edifice and foundation for market transactions. (We know this simply by looking at countries where rule of law is ignored, and the economy accordingly is in sad shape). But we also know that any real relationship involves much more than following contractual and legal obligations. If marriage is merely a relationship based on contract and legal obligations, it is not much of a truly human relationship. Likewise, in business a company may exceed the expected contract, or an employee goes above and beyond what their job requires. This is why it has been said that the gift of self is the opposite of rational egoism which is always first concerned with one's own wellbeing (Bruni and Uelmen 2006, 662). And Bruni has written that “Gratitude is the fundamental taboo of capitalism” because capitalism assumes purely self-interested market participants (Bruni 2020). As Bruni and Uelmen explain, “the principle of gratuitous gift of self is crucial—and it is important to acknowledge that it can never be fully expressed or transformed into contract, even in its most sophisticated forms” (663). And the gift need not be merely

<sup>1</sup> We attempt to explain this more below, but as *Vocation of the Business Leader* points out, “The Church calls upon business leaders to receive—humbly acknowledging what God has done for them—and to give—entering into communion with others to make the world a better place” (Dicastery 2018, 3) While Christians are called to this mindset, business naturally involves a stance of trust and gift which expects reciprocity—faith that the customer will pay for their meal (which they eat first), or that they will pay for the order or service call which they will be billed for. But when business provides more than the absolute requirements necessary or paid for, there is gratuity involved, and in nearly any truly human interaction, there is some gift.

material: “Giving need not be confined to material or quantifiable items, rather understanding, attention, forgiveness, a smile, time, talents, ideas, and help are also gifts to share” (Bruni and Uelmen 2006, 654). EoC companies live out this principle of gratuity both insofar as they value the relationship with those who lack material resources and also insofar as “they aim to develop a business culture and governance which fosters the gratuitous gift of self that can penetrate the entire vision of the business” (Bruni and Uelmen 2006, 663). So this gratuity leads to “a form of loving obligation to the other and so the special ties that bind us to one another” (Zamagni 2014, 53). Perhaps not exactly the same, but similar ideas have also been developed in Humanistic Management literature (Pirson et al. 2021). So while contracts and law provides a fundamental minimum basis for ethical and/or legal trust, when we go beyond that expectation of justice to gratuity, “It has more to do with the supra-ethical sphere of human action; its logic is that of superabundance” (Zamagni 2014, 53) rather than mere equivalence (this for that) which is the domain of justice and ethics. In seeking to help the poor and establish communion, EoC seeks to transform society through business, using private enterprise to develop businesses which not only provide a living for people but which provide dignity, community, and even communion with one another and God, and being willing to suffer the wounds which are added when you pursue the blessings of those relationships (Bruni 2012).

### **Beyond Profit Maximization: Business Focusing on Constructive Contribution, Not Mere Acquisition**

Much of management and economic theory take as a given that the ultimate goal is to get and acquire as much as one can, frequently without concern about the end or benefit of the gain. As Frank Knight the Chicago economist memorably put it,

Whatever our philosophy of human motives, we must face the fact that men do ‘raise more corn to feed more hogs, to buy more land to raise more corn to feed more hogs to buy more land,’ and, in business generally, produce wealth to be used in producing more wealth with no view to any use beyond the increase of wealth itself. (1921, 146)

Rather than merely acquiring all one can get with no particular end in sight except to acquire even more, Humanistic Management focuses on the purpose of business beyond profit-making. Rather than such a narrow financial focus, it looks at the power of the firm to benefit society and others. Humanistic management scholars have clearly criticized a ‘homo economicus’ view “which reduced man (and of course woman) to an individual with preferences and (economic) rationality seeking to maximize such preferences” (Domingo and Melé 2022, Dierksmeier 2011). This focus on the self-interested financial concerns of the individual provides a stunted conception of the human being, ignoring the importance of others, community and giving for true human flourishing.

The EoC sees business primarily as a vehicle to help humanity, particularly the poor. The initial motivation for the movement was to provide employment to the desperately poor in São Paulo. In his 2017 address to over 500 EoC members who had come from around the world to hear his message at the Vatican, Pope Francis challenged the EoC to be “agents of communion” and to resist the currently dominant economic logic. He said,

But you can share more profits in order to combat idolatry, change the structures in order to prevent the creation of victims and discarded people, give more of your leaven so as to leaven the bread of many. May the ‘no’ to an economy that kills

become a ‘yes’ to an economy that lets live, because it shares, includes the poor, uses profits to create communion. (Francis 2017)

Entrepreneurship in this EoC mode is not merely a seeking for profit, rather, EoC entrepreneurship has a vision of transforming lives and society for the better by bringing people into community.

EoC sees the purpose of business as being oriented primarily around intentionally giving to others through business activity (for example, giving grace, communion, dignity, and freedom through empowerment). This displaces me from the center focus of my business activity and turns the focus towards others. When we (again as the Vocation of the Business Leader advises) accept what we have as a gift (gratuity), the entrepreneur is then empowered to reciprocate by practicing business in light of that grace (reciprocity) (Bruni 2020). This is frequently referred to as a “culture of giving” and set in opposition to a “culture of having” or acquisition (Bruni and Héjj 2011, 378). As Ferrucci summarizes the thought of Lubich: “Aside from keeping man at the center of the enterprise, fostering genuine relationships among all stakeholders, compliance with ethical practices (not just legal because even legal practices can be unethical), other guidelines for EoC firms are respect for environment, conservation of resources and energy, continuous training and constant communications (Ferrucci 2002, 35). In short, business can be about far more than acquisition and profit maximization.

## **Business for the Common Good**

Catholic teaching defines the common good as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (Pope Paul VI 1967, 26). Insofar as humanistic management is pursuing the flourishing of all individuals and to create a world that works for 100% of humanity, humanistic management is certainly concerned with the common good—the conditions necessary for people to flourish (Pirson 2017a, b; Pirson et al. 2021).

While there are many important aspects of the common good on which business can have an impact on, a very important one is creating a context that supports development of human capacities as a part of human flourishing. Both EoC and Humanistic Management have put a strong emphasis on this. As Melé has pointed out,

Humanism sees the human being in permanent development and calls on him or her to flourish as a human. This is the responsibility of each person, but since the material, social and cultural environment can favor it, humanism seeks to foster the conditions for such flourishing... (Melé 2016, 42)

Job design, assignment, and growth potential are key conditions that create a context in which workers can either flourish or stagnate. Pursuit of the common good leads us to create the conditions for flourishing, which for a human being means space for growth and development. There are a lot of dead-end jobs—jobs which provide no opportunity for advancement or personal growth or development. They are frequently repetitive, fairly simple jobs which essentially trade wages for the employee’s life rather than meaningful work which allows the person to develop and flourish. Such jobs typically just use up the employee’s energy, body, and time over the course of years in exchange for money.

EoC businesses show extraordinary attention to the role of the business in creating a context for work within which the worker can flourish as a human being. This can be seen in concrete action, such as when a rural Filipino bank offered its employees not only health

insurance and pension benefits, but profit sharing, all uncommon for that region (Ruggiu 1999), or the EoC bed and breakfast in Rome that focuses on the creation of job opportunities for the unemployed and refugees (Ruggiu 2001). Other examples include distributing the menial tasks so that all workers take a turn (Gold 2010, 140), or encouraging employees working in a violin factory to develop their skills and personal reputations at making fully hand-made instruments (Gallagher and Buckeye 2014, 102–104), or developing detailed career plans that provide a road map to greater skill levels and responsibility (Gallagher and Buckeye 2014, 100), or even encouraging employees who are ready for professional advancement to take a job at another company when no path is available for internal promotion (Gallagher and Buckeye 2014, 102). The EoC seeks to help people to flourish. EoC businesses “foster communion with employees by paying particular attention to their health, well-being, and development” (Bruni and Uelmen 2006, 651).

### **Central Place of Community for the Firm**

In his 2012 article on “The Firm as a ‘Community of Persons’: A Pillar of Humanistic Business ‘Ethos’ Melé points out that for a ‘humanistic business ethic’ which has a more complete view of the human being than traditional business theory, “It seems more appropriate to understand the firm as a human community” (Melé 2012, 89). Along these same lines, Harvey sees EoC businesses as striving for community in a robust and rather intentional way. In her essay describing the similarities and differences between EoC and other recent social entrepreneurship movements like Certified B Corps, Harvey identifies this emphasis on community as one of the things that makes EoC businesses distinct. “EoC companies aim to be more than a group organized around a product or service” (Harvey 2020, 133). The firm itself is seen as a social space (Gold 2010, 192), a space for the cultivation of authentic human community. Gallagher and Buckeye also see community as the key distinctive of EoC firms:

EoC companies are indeed different. And that difference is centered on a conviction of the business as a set of relationships, or more accurately, a *community*, and the conviction that the purpose of economic activity—the production and distribution of goods and services—is to bring people together, to create *community*. For us this is the defining characteristic of the EoC. (2014, 188)

The EoC thinks of the firm as a community and as a community-building entity. Zamagni points out that “According to the EoC perspective, the firm is visualized as a community, not as a commodity that can be bought and sold in the market according to the conveniences of the moment” (Zamagni 2014, 46). The firm itself is a community, quite different from what we frequently see today. Frequently, a company may be bought or acquired, and the local office is shut down in the acquisition, and the local workers are simply laid off or asked to uproot and relocate.<sup>2</sup> A reciprocal model takes more seriously the relational aspect between all members of the company, as well as the company and the community (Bruni 2008). This relational aspect is the central focus of the company. Far from a transactional this-for-that approach, this view of reciprocity sees business as

<sup>2</sup> One recent example of this was when Bass Pro Shop purchased Cabela’s outdoor equipment company and simply closed down the Cabela’s headquarters, which was the lifeblood of the small Nebraska town of Sidney. See “Life After Cabelas: How Sidney Plans to Rebuild its Economy.” Site Selection Magazine, March 2018 <https://siteselection.com/trustbelt/life-after-cabelas-how-sidney-plans-to-rebuild-its-economy.cfm..>

a communal practice where everyone is committed to the good of the whole, and each is willing to sacrifice and give to the other. This is not a guarded relationship, but a free relationship of real trust which risks my wellbeing in the hands of others without caveat—and this is the basis of community and communion.

The reciprocal nature of the EoC way of doing business leads to personal concern for others being standard practice, leading to community. When reciprocity is the principle of economic behavior, “transfers cannot be dissociated from personal relationships” because “the objects of exchange, are not detached from the subjects who create them, with the result that the exchange that takes place within the market ceases to be anonymous and impersonal” (Zamagni 2014, 50). This is why the statement “it’s nothing personal, it’s just a business decision” is nonsensical to an EoC way of thinking about business and life. This is what Pope Francis was speaking of when he commented on the unique way that EoC brings economy together with communion.

Business is not only incapable of destroying communion among people, but can edify it; it can promote it. With your life you demonstrate that economy and communion become more beautiful when they are beside each other. Certainly the economy is more beautiful, but communion is also more beautiful, because the spiritual communion of hearts is even fuller when it becomes the communion of goods, of talents, of profits. (Francis 2017)

## Recognizing the Whole Person

Melé (2016) suggests that Humanism recognizes the whole person, without reducing the human being to a few aspects and believes this characterizes humanistic management. This is a significant shift in perspective, compared to traditional management thinking for which it is quite common for the relationship with workers to be an autocratic relationship, or that with customers to be seen as a financial transaction relationship only. We see this in the thinking of Frederick Taylor, the early pioneer in management science. Taylor’s view of the employer-worker relationship was summarized succinctly in his quote, “In our scheme, we do not ask the initiative of our men. We do not want any initiative. All we want of them is to obey the orders we give them, do what we say, and do it quick” (Taylor 1914, 705). In seeing the worker only in their productive capacity for how much and how quickly they could perform tasks, Taylor also presents a severely reduced view of the motivations for cooperation between employees and employers, claiming that what workmen want from employers beyond anything else is higher wages, and all employers want from workmen is low labor costs (Taylor 1911). This truncated view of the motivations of both employers and workers misses much of the human element of business activity. Whether it is in relationship to workers or customers, this one-dimensional relationship ends up objectifying others through business encounters.

The Economy of Communion similarly sees every person as a whole human being, resisting the temptation to reduce the person to their economic function. This is seen particularly in how EoC considers poverty and poverty alleviation. As Luigino Bruni has written, “poverty means above all exclusion from productivity, the community, and society” (Bruni 2014, 37), and a solution which focuses only on the financial needs of an individual fails because it rests on a very thin anthropology of the human being, and does not meet the full needs of human beings.

As an example, the owners of Communion Properties have found that just as important as wages is a sense of accomplishment and a place to use one’s talents, to gain recognition,

and to become integrated into a community. When living without work, not only is one poor and unable to meet one's basic material needs, but one ends up socially isolated and without an outlet for one's talents. When "Vernie" (not his real name) started working with Communion Properties, an Economy of Communion restoration and property rental firm, he was homeless, living in his truck. But he was also a skilled mason. Being drawn into the community of the firm meant that he had an outlet for his skills, earned recognition for his contributions, developed friendships with the company owners and relationships with those at the local hardware store, and earned trust and grew friendships with the tenants that he served. The unique life challenges that lead Vernie into poverty and a life living out of his truck would never be solved simply with more money or higher wages, but they were often ameliorated with a sense of purpose for his day and a desire not to let down those who were relying on him.

## Uniqueness and Dignity of Each Person

In valuing the whole person, Humanistic Management also values the uniqueness of each person, and acknowledges the unique talents and gifts each person brings to any business interaction or task. In the words of Melé, "Humanism seeks a comprehensive knowledge of the human being and therefore is aware of the substantial specificity of all human beings due to the spiritual element –mind or soul– that distinguishes them from other animals, and the uniqueness of each person" (Melé 2016, 41). This way of thinking is clearly modeled in Bob Chapman's company BarryWehmiller, whose basic vision is summed up in his book about the company: *Everybody Matters: The Extraordinary Power of Caring for Your People Like Family* (2015). BarryWehmiller, in an attempt to show respect and trust towards all of their employees, removed timecard clocks for employees, as a sign that they trusted their employees, and did away with their locked equipment and supply room as well, which was formerly housed in a caged area.

Traditional management practices have a tendency to break things down to quantifiable calculable criteria, to make for more efficient management practices. Frequently this happens through one-size-fits all practices and policies which help to professionalize the encounter and alleviate the personal aspects. In contrast to this management tendency, Melé points out that "Humanism respects, protects and promotes the constitutive dignity of every human being and the innate rights associated with such dignity" (Melé 2016, 42). Typically business practices towards employees and customers conform to the requirements of relevant rules and laws—and nothing more. If minimum wage is allowed, and the market will bear such wages, that (and no more!) is what most businesses will pay, regardless of whether or not it is a livable wage. If a company operates in a foreign country which legally allows for long workdays without breaks and without benefits, that (and no more!) is what the company will expect to do in that country. Why do more than required for one's employees, if they will bear it, and it is legal? Humanistic Management sets a different bar—the basic human dignity and associated innate rights of each individual are the fundamental basic expectation, regardless of what the law or regional expectations allow.

There are of course some legitimate reasons for a company to develop policies and procedures to follow. But those policies and procedures can at times become a barrier to truly human and humane engagement with others. In his book *The Wound and the Blessing* Bruni talks about the establishment of policies and procedures as an attempt to eliminate the wounds which might be encountered in business activities. Instead of engaging

someone directly, we can simply apply the policy to their situation. They are no longer Jim or Jill, they are the employee who (unfortunately, of course) does not qualify due to our HR policies (“but there is nothing that I can do about it, sorry”, etc.). In this way policies help insulate us from real personal encounters and help us maintain professional relations with our employees and customers. But in keeping all encounters at an impersonal distance we also fail to experience the blessings of real authentic human encounter in our business exchanges. What was meant to protect us from awkward or uncomfortable situations frequently keeps us from being fully human.

EoC, likewise, being a movement which puts the person first, considers the dignity of the person first and foremost. EoC companies “commit to a management and operation style that stresses the dignity of every person and aims at creating relationships of mutual recognition and openness among all those who are involved in the enterprise’s activity.” (Crivelli and Gui 2014, 28).

EoC emphasizes the uniqueness and equality of each person. “Those assisted by the Economy of Communion are not an anonymous mass, but share in a relationship of equality and community with everyone” (Bruni and Uelmen 2006, 654). The entrepreneurs see their resources as an opportunity to “put their goods into communion and to face, out of love, the risks of business.” (Ibid) As one Brazilian collaborator with the EoC project explained,

It is not merely a question of reaching the right persons and of giving priority to the most urgent needs.... It also involves making sure that the assistance be part of a fraternal rapport that does not tolerate positions of inferiority and superiority because it sees the other person as ‘another me,’ as a brother..... (quoted in Bruni and Uelmen 2006, 654)

One powerful example of an EoC company living out this vision of respect for the dignity of each person has been shared by Nick Sanna, an EoC member who is also an executive at his company. During the 2007–08 downturn, he had to lay off many employees, and finances were very strained. It was an extraordinarily difficult situation, and Nick knew that things looked quite bleak in the moment, and he felt terrible for those employees, so Nick went to his board and asked them to give the employees two times the normal layoff benefits. The board was quite hesitant, but eventually agreed, laying the responsibility at Nick’s feet. The company actually soon recovered and all was well again, and Nick began to hire employees again. While he did rehire some of the ex-employees, he hired many new employees who told him that they had been told by the prior employees who were laid off how well the company had treated them through that process—and they had encouraged their friends to apply for jobs with Nick (from talk by Sanna at EoC Conference, 2017).

## Promoting Freedom and Worker Autonomy

There is a word in Catholic thinking called “subsidiarity” which essentially means that each of us has particular roles which give us particular responsibilities. For example, I am responsible to my wife in a way no one else should be. As a father, I have a responsibility to take care of my children. As a professor I am responsible to create my courses and teach well. I am certainly responsible for my own well-being and health. Subsidiarity is thwarted when responsibilities are taken by another. This is most likely to happen when those with broader authority and power subvert lower-level authorities and usurp the proper decision-making authority and control of responsible lower-level decision-makers. Naughton et al.

point out that “Within organizations, subsidiarity serves as a moral principle that directs leaders to place decision making at the most appropriate level of an organization so as to utilize the gifts of employees for their own good, and the good of the organization...” (Naughton et al. 2015, 2).

Anyone who has been subjected to micromanagement knows what it is like for roles and responsibilities to not be respected. Frequently subsidiarity is applied in a worker context by encouraging those most affected by policies to have some voice in helping to shape and form those policies. Rather than centralized top-down autocratic management, those at the ground level are given responsibility and freedom to make decisions when appropriate. Melé points out that

Humanism emphasizes both individual freedom and sociability, and consequently is in favor of respecting free initiative, dialogue, participation, cooperation and oneness in social life (Melé 2016, 43).

This contrasts with the traditional hierarchical transactional relationship between management and employee as exemplified in the Taylor quote from above: “In our scheme, we do not ask the initiative of our men. We do not want any initiative. All we want of them is to obey the orders we give them, do what we say, and do it quick.” Such an attitude from management sees the employee as someone who should obey orders, complete tasks assigned, and act on behalf of the interests of their employer for the time they are at work. Such an attitude does not encourage subsidiarity or individual initiative, participation, or a unified vision related to a common good for worker and management.

In contrast, the EoC approach exhibits a high degree of subsidiarity in principle and practice. The original purpose of EoC is rooted in a fundamental desire to help the poor while giving them renewed dignity and autonomy through employment. EoC wanted to get beyond charity and handouts to provide a means for people to have jobs and earn money with dignity. Part of the flourishing and dignity of any individual is for them to be as self-reliant as possible, and so, EoC wanted to provide opportunities for the poor to get out of the cycle of poverty, through intentional and purposive entrepreneurship aiming at that societal and human end.

In Gold’s study of EoC businesses, she found a number of changes that were inspired by a firm’s decision to join the EoC. One of those was an intentional effort to engage workers more in decision-making processes within the firm. Implementation was rather straightforward in the smaller firms, but “some of the larger businesses in Milan and São Paulo said they had introduced formal schemes aimed at involving workers in decision making within the business. These schemes included workers’ councils and formal structures within the business to facilitate greater communication between different levels of responsibility” (Gold 2010, 139).

This notion of nurturing freedom and autonomy applies not only to the worker, but also to the entrepreneur. The original name of the EoC was the Economy of Communion *in Freedom* because it was self-consciously an attempt to use private enterprise in a free market situation of competition to provide community and empowerment to people. In this way it respects the freedom of persons to choose community, and the freedom of entrepreneurs to choose to live sacrificially and to take on risks for the common good, rather than just in hopes of personal profit. Unsurprisingly, the Economy of Communion tends to emphasize the sociability, cooperative participation and common sense of community in all the relationships involved—with and among employees, with customers and even competition. There is a strong countercultural logic of fraternity in the EoC movement. This is a shared intention for mutual benefit in economic life (Bruni and Sugden 2008). This brotherhood of all is central to EoC thinking:

The ultimate goal of EoC enterprises...is promoting “communion”, that is the highest degree of mutual openness and brotherhood among people, within the economic Sphere. Business relationships are not seen as sources of insanable clashes of interest, but rather as opportunities for entering into rapportos of mutual recognition and respect, up to “communion.” (Crivelli and Gui 2014, 37)

The owners freely choose to provide work which empowers workers and helps them to be more fully human. EoC seeks to pursue not only fraternity but subsidiarity in the workplace where workers have proper autonomy to make decisions proper to their role and knowledge. Subsidiarity in this way provides a more harmonious workplace.

### **Ecological Stewardship, Harmony and Sustainability**

Some might mistakenly think that humanistic management is anthropocentric in its orientation—unconcerned about things beyond the concerns of humans. Chris Laszlo has cautioned against these the potential species-exceptionalism which might arise from a humanistic management (Laszlo 2019). But there seem to be two reasons why humanistic management will not lead to the demise of all which is non-human. First of all, given that the continuing sustainability of the planet—of plants, animals, and the general environment—is essential for human flourishing, it is in the interest of humanity to be concerned about planet stewardship and sustainability. Second, humanistic management sees it as a uniquely important human responsibility to help ensure the vitality of the planet and to devise sustainable harmonious business practices. Melé points out that “Humanism, although it stresses the preeminence of the human beings, also shows respect for the identity, worth and interconnectivity of every living [thing] and for the whole of nature; it encourages people to act with a sense of stewardship, promotes harmony between humans and nature and a sustainable development of humanity” (Melé 2016, 44).

Care for the environment and stewardship of resources is an essential part of care for the common good. People find themselves living in an environment which is not of their own creation, but which necessarily impacts their health and ability to live well. Polluted air, water or soil create conditions adverse to flourishing. Bruno Dyck in particular has highlighted that humanistic management is best related to integral common good—one which integrates social and ecological well-being (Dyck 2020, 9) which he conceives as derivative of Pope Francis’ idea that “An integral ecology is inseparable from the notions of the common good” (Francis 2015, § 156).

The EoC is rooted in a mutual concern for all other people as being equal, and a vision of business which sees it as a means to help support others and promote the common good of all—including the ecological common good of all living things. EoC begins with a stance of stewardship towards others and all of creation. The EoC has a unique means of rooting environmental obligations, as they have in EoC industrial parks in Germany and Italy (Del Baldo and Baldarelli 2015). Others argue that while the EoC puts humans and their spiritual and material needs at the forefront, this actually helps contribute not only to sustainable economic and social progress, but even environmental development (Kopecki et al. 2014).

While there are certainly businesses devoted to environmental protection and care, like Mundell and Associates which provides consulting on environmental clean-up and Ecoar which manufactures environmentally conscious cleaning products, research into EoC firms suggests a broad and shared recognition of the importance of care for the planet. For example, “Business directors in Brazil shared a heightened sense of responsibility toward

environmental concerns. In the industrial park near Araceli where seven businesses were established, one of the prime concerns was to create an *ecologically sustainable* facility. Thus, much effort was made to construct building that economized on energy, to plant trees, and above all, to recycle waste from the various factories" (Gold 2010, 147).

EoC firms exhibit a strong recognition of the need for and responsibility to care for the environment as a part of the common good. In her survey of business practices of EoC firms in Brazil and Italy, Gold found that "in industries where there was a risk of pollution from the extraction of raw materials or toxic waste, EoC ventures put pressure on existing suppliers or switched to suppliers who were known to use technology that minimized environmental impact" (Gold 2010, 147).

### **Seeking Transcendent Purpose for Our Business Practices**

Melé (2016) points out that "Humanism recognizes than humans are self-transcendent beings, seeking a meaning for their lives, and is respectful with religions and spiritual behaviors" (45). This seeking for transcendence is frequently expressed in religious meaning, but can also be seen in what Chris Laszlo has referred to as "the quantum worldview" which seeks a "full-spectrum flourishing, defined as a world in which people and all life thrive now and across future generations" (2019, 85). Traditional business maintains an a-religious secular atmosphere, and frequently, as the quote from Frank Knight about hogs and corn above suggests, it does not ask ultimate questions or provide ultimate answers. Economics cannot give us the ideals to pursue—that is a matter of values and ethics (Knight 1923). So business frequently discourages personal faith expression or spiritual practices or other personal development at work. From a traditional business perspective, *why* you are doing what you are doing is not a question for business, but a personal matter, so, ideally, the workplace should be religion-free and spirituality-free.

The Economy of Communion, although begun by Catholics and endorsed by multiple Popes, is an ecumenical movement in the broadest sense of that word—one need not be religiously affiliated with any formal religion to be involved. It was Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare movement who initiated the Economy of Communion movement, and her spiritual goal for the Economy of Communion as a movement of the Focolare was "may they all be one" (Lubich 1977). The express vision of Focolare and the Economy of Communion is to bring about unity among all people, regardless of creed, economic status or any other differentiator. However, given that the spiritual poverty of individuals who find themselves outside of community is one of the key focuses of the EoC, spiritual wholeness is certainly one of the primary motivations of the movement.

In some countries, like Brazil, people's religious commitments coincide with their commitment to EoC. In one example from Brazil, Gold says:

Of the twenty-four business directors interviewed, twenty-one responded that the main motivation for their participation in the EoC was "religious." ...deciding to link their business to the EoC project or to start a new business was a consequence of realizing that the Focolare spirituality could, and ought to be, lived out within the business. (2010, 119)

For many of these business owners, it is not just that business should be respectful of religion and spirituality (though it should), but that they recognized that "their businesses no longer stood outside the realm of the spiritual" (2010, 119). The operations of the business were actually a way to live out their spirituality.

In the US context, the direct spiritual connection is not as clear. Gallagher and Buckeyefind that EoC businesses in North America tend to maintain the secular status quo, with the equivalent of a moral muteness about the business's participation in EoC. Their employees tend not to know that the business is EoC affiliated. Despite this though, there is certainly a transcendent purpose which drives the vision of EoC and Chiara Lubich's hope that through the way EoC practices business, progress might be made towards the goal that "all may be one."

## Conclusion

Humanistic management is a lived-out reality in EoC firms. In this sense, EoC companies provide hundreds of potential concrete examples of humanistic management in practice, and a rich field of study. Case studies could be built to help students of management think through the concrete difficulties that will be faced by as a manager or owner who seeks to operate according to such high-aspiring values. Just as one example of the kind of thing that might be encountered: While building a community of persons around the work is certainly a more fulfilling and humane approach to the organization of work, how should we respond when an employee—a member of the community—resigns and moves on to greener pastures? Is a sense of betrayal or abandonment legitimate? (See the Case of Mundell and Associates in Gold 2010, 168–169). The ideal of community is, after all, not simply the idea of a paternalistic commitment of management to the well-being of employees. "Community" implies reciprocity and common concern. And yet, businesses and employer-employee relationships are, at the end of the day, economic relationships. If the firm becomes a "community," it is a unique kind of community and the loyalty and fidelity one owes one's community might be different here than elsewhere in life. This is just one example of the ways in which the study of Economy of Communion principles and the practices of EoC firms could advance the goals and objectives of humanistic management.

In this essay we have suggested that EoC companies are exemplars of a humanistic management approach, and that there are at least nine strong shared values which the humanistic management approach and the Economy of Communion approach share in common:

1. Beyond Transactional Business.
2. Beyond Profit Maximization: Business Focusing on Constructive Contribution, not Mere Acquisition.
3. Business for the Common Good.
4. Central place of Community for the Firm.
5. Recognizing the Whole Person.
6. Uniqueness and Dignity of Each Person.
7. Promoting Freedom and Worker Autonomy.
8. Ecological Stewardship, Harmony and Sustainability
9. Seeking Transcendent Purpose for our Business Practices

Research into EoC approaches would be quite fruitful for further developing the field of humanistic management.<sup>3</sup> This essay is limited in that it has been in large part oriented around Dominic Mele's article on Humanistic Management, and of course there are other

<sup>3</sup> For a contemporary bibliography of EoC research in English, refer to Gustafson and Harvey (2020b).

rich interpretations of Humanistic Management which should be engaged, including Pirson 2017a, b; Pirson et al. (2009), Dierksmeier (2016), Laszlo (2019), Aguado and Eizaguirre (2020), and others. Some good business cases of concrete humanistic management practices exist (Pirson and Bachani 2018; Pirson 2017b; Von Kimakowitz et al. 2011) as well as some cases drawn from EoC companies (Gallagher and Buckeye 2014; Gold 2010) but fresh empirical research could be done on the EoC companies using a humanistic management analysis, with concrete business case-studies resulting. Books have been written on a humanistic management approach to marketing (Varey and Pirson 2013), Humanistic Management on International Business and Management (Lupton and Pirson 2014), dignity in humanistically oriented organizations (Kostera and Pirson 2016; Bal 2017) and even humanistic management and love (Pirson 2022), but it is likely that the insights from humanistic management found in those studies could be enhanced by looking more closely at the humanistic elements lived out in Economy of Communion companies, not only in the US, but throughout the world.

## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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