



Review of Andrew Gustafson & Celeste Harvey's *Finding Faith in Business: An Economy of Communion Vision*, New City Press 2024, 297 pp.

Anke Teeuw

Erasmus University Rotterdam / Utrecht Theological University

Andrew Gustafson and Celeste Harvey have done a great job collecting essays that together provide an accessible, inspiring, and comprehensive introduction to the Focolare's Economy of Communion (EoC). Due to my unfamiliarity with the Focolare and its vision on economy, business, and policy, this collection provided me with an introduction to the movement. However, I can imagine that, for those already engaged with this vision, the book could also serve as a significant resource. You would, however, need to read more selectively, due to the considerable overlap between the essays (which is less of an issue if you are exploring this topic for the first time). As the book itself mentions, "in the sphere of business worldwide, the EoC is still relatively unknown" (p. 259).

The edited volume consists of three parts: Introduction, Practice, and Theory. Essays in this book were presented at the Business, Faith and the Common Good annual symposium in 2018 at Creighton University. Alongside the original scholarly contributions, the book reproduces speeches given by Pope Francis and Chiara Lubich, founder of the EoC movement, in the introductory part. Furthermore, the theoretical section includes a previously unpublished essay by renowned EoC scholar Luca Crivelli. The other scholars contributing to this volume—and the 2018 symposium—include those who have long been familiar with the EoC, as well as others who have deepened their understanding of it throughout the course of the initiative.

The editors of *Finding Faith in Business* invite readers to explore the dual meaning behind the title (pp. 14-16). The EoC offers a way of viewing business not merely as a tool for profit, but as something far greater: a means to build community and create positive change in society. In other words, the collection encourages belief in the positive potential of business to help society. But it does not stop there. The book also demonstrates how doing business while keeping in mind the EoC principles of generativity, reciprocity, and gratuity (p. 22) can become a spiritual exercise. In this way, business can be transformed from a mere task into a beautiful and transformative activity, filled with purpose and faith—helping us to *find faith in business*.

The EoC model operates within the free market, without centralized government planning, yet with a positive view of business's potential to promote the common good

alongside profit. It recognizes three legitimate purposes of profit: direct assistance to the poor, the promotion of a culture of giving, and reinvestment in the business (p. 19). The EoC focuses on giving rather than acquiring or having, prioritizes relationships over transactions, and values profit without centering on its maximization (p. 259). Business ventures are seen as meaning-producing activities that enhance human well-being and improve the common good. Thus, business itself helps to “correct the unjust and wrong distribution of goods” (p. 21), rather than relying solely on government welfare-distribution policies. The EoC believes that business can help those in need, build community, and enhance humanity. Rooted in Christ’s teaching to love one another, the EoC offers an inspiring way to rethink business (ethics). The EoC thus goes beyond being just a process of redistributing goods and resources. It introduces a new way of production where sharing goods and activities generates the experience of communion (p. 147).

Helpful and illustrative case studies appear throughout the book. For example, a key case study in the *Practice* section is written by one of the editors—and EoC entrepreneur—Andrew Gustafson. He had been running his business for a long time before encountering the EoC, where he found like-minded people who shared his vision of business (p. 120). Furthermore, the relationship between the EoC and the principles of Catholic Social Thought (CST) is explored across several chapters. To illustrate, the EoC vision is connected to ownership and stewardship in chapter 4, “Ownership and Business Succession: Considerations from Catholic Social Teaching and the Economy of Communion.” Another example is chapter 12, “Exploring Subsidiarity: The Case of the Economy of Communion” on the “management trio” subsidiarity, solidarity, and participation (p. 255).

My attention in the theoretical section was drawn to the essay of the other editor, Celeste Harvey, in which she contrasts the EoC model with traditional governance models. This was something I had been curious about throughout my reading, as I sought to understand how the EoC model fits within, interacts with, or contrasts to traditional models such as stockholder and stakeholder approaches, as well as other socially conscious business movements like B Corps, social entrepreneurship, and corporate social responsibility. Earlier in the book, it was already emphasized that the EoC “does not present itself so much as a new form of enterprise, alternative to those already existing. Rather, it intends to transform from within the usual business structures” (p. 43). Although an EoC business could be classified as some sort of form of social entrepreneurship, its main difference lies in the emphasis on the gift, according to Harvey, which sets it apart from the traditional profit-driven governance models (p. 204); the EoC is “the economy of giving” (p. 173). In the EoC vision, “the business is a place to give the gift of oneself and to receive the gift of others” (p. 204). Governance theories can know about justice, but most of them do not know about reciprocity or gift. As Gustafson pointed out: “the logic of gratuity and gift is different. It is a logic of superabundance, where people act for and on behalf of the other out of love, and gratuity goes above and beyond what is due” (p. 125). In contrast to the traditional governance models, where the focus is on maximizing profit first—and then potentially distributing some of it

through philanthropy, the EoC stresses the importance of the way in which profit is generated. EoC businesses aim for adequate profits rather than maximum profits (p. 106). As stated in this chapter, “the way profit is generated is as important as that profit is generated” (p. 208). The generation of profit must align with the higher ends and values those profits are meant to serve.

After reading the book, I was left with just a few questions: might more attention have been paid to how the EoC principles also honor and care for nature, alongside the focus on the person (“the person at the center,” p. 283)? While the environment is occasionally mentioned (see, for example, p. 101; p. 274), one of the essays in the book might have further explored how the vision of the common good includes not only human flourishing but also the well-being of nature. The earth, after all, is a gift to us. Additionally, how is the ‘economic’ aspect of business defined when the “purpose, obligation and effect of business” is communion (p. 284)? How is it defined when the original vocation of economic activity—the “production and distribution of goods and services” (p. 165)—is “a peaceful encounter between free persons” (p. 148)? This raises broader questions about the responsibilities and boundaries of business activity. Responsibilities are framed around the common good, around communion, yet less attention seems to be given to the specific nature of these responsibilities. Are the economic, ethical, and social responsibilities of business essentially the same?

In conclusion, in times of growing social, economic, political, and environmental challenges, the EoC model provides a valuable perspective on the purpose of business and its place in society, grounded in CST. This book serves as an informative introduction to the EoC vision and an insightful resource for those seeking to rethink the role of business in today’s world, highlighting its potential to foster positive change and contribute meaningfully to the common good. By addressing many of the questions that arise while reading, the book offers a range of engaging perspectives—from philosophical and anthropological reflections to economic considerations and practical case studies. Through its combination of in-depth exploration and practical insights, it bridges the gap between theory and practice, making it accessible and relevant to a wide audience.