

# THE DIVERSITY OF A WORK

by Julián Carrón

Notes from the Assembly of the "School of Works" for the Associates  
of the Companionship of Works. Milan, June 13, 2012.

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**Bernhard Scholz:** The School of Works was born to promote dialogue, comparison of ideas and experiences, and ongoing formation on all the themes that concern social works. We have spoken of freedom as the source of real building by those who do not leave the task to others, but get involved personally; we have spoken of helping young people enter the world of work, of economic sustainability that is not a goal but an absolutely decisive instrument, of how works must be open to the world, of collaboration, because this is also decisive for the development of a work. Through this itinerary it has become increasingly evident that such development depends on the subject or, better, on the set of people who labor for and within a work. We have also become more conscious that in this world—where there are many projects that try to substitute the person and his responsibility with models and mechanisms—we discover a human beauty when we realize that everything, the work and one’s professionalism, are expressions of an “I” who puts himself on the line. Thus, an authentically human position is needed for a work to be truly at the service of man. For this reason, we are very grateful that Fr. Julián Carrón has accepted our invitation to be with us this evening; it is a great opportunity to discover more about this human authenticity, to learn more about a true, creative position, one capable of transforming reality for the good of all.

**Monica Poletto:** The questions we are asking this evening emerge primarily from the work of this year’s School of Works, and touch upon many themes. In the dialogue and the journey of these years, we have often brought up challenges and difficulties, and along the way we began to enjoy this, because we realized that the fact of facing together all the challenges that emerge in our work is part of a journey as women and men and as friends. The fact that this evening we will face some of these difficulties is linked to the perception of a great positivity, which makes us capable of looking at everything.

**“It is not enough to know that the work is imperfect, not enough to know that the only chance is to have Jesus—no, Jesus must be so really present, that I can look at my limitation, without being scandalized.”**

**Contribution:** Working on formation, which for us means helping the works be more professional, more capable of an operative solidarity, we are interested in better understanding the nexus between two affirmations that often seem contradictory. The first is “you can tell a tree by its fruit,” in the sense that to some degree the result has something to do with the validity of our action. The other affirmation, which we repeat often among ourselves, is “we have to be free from the outcome.” We often find we resist looking with realism at the outcome of our actions. It is easier to stay with the premise—the reasons why we do things—and grasp the outcome partially, emphasizing almost exclusively the successes and instead censuring the negative points, those related to our incapacity. We have come to realize that a certain way of saying, “We are free from the outcome,” when it is not an outright expression of irresponsibility, belies a great fear of looking at the outcome, because our whole being is wrapped up in that outcome. At the same time, we are discovering how fascinating and humanly worthwhile it is to strive to look at the outcome of our actions with the desire that all the factors emerge, so that we can let ourselves be corrected by what happens, by the result. How is the striving to learn from the outcome of our actions, on the one hand, united with freedom from the outcome, on the other?

**Julián Carrón:** A simple clarification is not enough to be able to internalize an answer. It is very important that we realize that explanations are not enough; we need what enables us to realize what we have heard as a response. To acknowledge and realize what we have heard as an answer, we need a human experience, a substantiality without which the answer remains theoretical. This is decisive. If today’s whole assembly is not inserted into the journey we are making in School of Community, I can assure you that it is a waste of time, even if we manage to respond perfectly to all the questions, because it is not enough to “know” the answers. This is a clear example: deep down, how can I be free from the outcome? To begin to be free, the



Vincent Van Gogh, *The Harvesters* (1888), Paris, Rodin Museum.

first thing one must understand—as each of us can recognize right away from his or her own experience—is that every work, every attempt to meet a need is always imperfect. This is not just because we are sinners—not even the holiest of saints can accomplish more than a fallible attempt. If we begin to acknowledge the imperfection of every human act, of every human gesture, of every human attempt, then slowly we will be able to be free to begin to look at what does not work, to recognize it, without feeling judged or undermined just for this, because imperfection is part of every human gesture. Even though we all recognize this, because we experience it every day, at times, as you say, we are willing to acknowledge the things that go well, emphasizing the successes, but we are less willing to acknowledge the negative points. Why? Because of great fear. I remember it very well. There was nothing less pleasant for the teachers of the school I directed than judging what was happening. I asked a simple question: “After four years at our school, what experience has a student had? Can we give a judgment to begin to understand the outcome of our educational attempt, in order to improve and change?” They were

willing to do anything but accept a judgment. At best, our students are left with a sentimental attachment, so that if our graduates meet us on the street, they greet us with pleasure. Well done! Is this the best we manage to attain? So often we are afraid because we think the substance of our being lies in what we do. Fr. Giusani said this very well in an article from 2000, re-published in the June *Traces* [issue No.6, 2012, p.36], in which he defended John Paul II, who apologized for the errors the Church committed in history. At a certain point, he says, “All the ideologies have an aspect for which man is sure of at least one thing that he himself does.” In other words, a person ruled by his ideology sees the substance of his being in what he does. What is the consequence? He will never want to give up” what he does “nor allow [it] to be challenged.” Simple, clear as water. This is ideology, “but the Christian knows that his efforts and all he possesses or does must always yield before the truth,” because he is imperfect and thus the truth is greater than what we manage to do. This is true on the personal level and on the operative level, whatever work we do. So then, what enables a person to acknowledge the limita- ➤

» tions of what she or he does? Fr. Giussani says it with this sentence: “The Christian is attached to no one but Jesus” (L. Giussani, “That Great Strength of the Pope on His Knees,” *la Repubblica*, March 15, 2000). Only if we are attached to Jesus, if we do not put the substance of our existence in something other than Jesus, can we succeed in acknowledging the limitations of what we do. For this reason, it is important that we realize that it is not enough to know that the work is imperfect, not enough to know that a person ruled by ideology sees the substance of his being in what he does, not enough to know that the only chance is to have Jesus—no, Jesus must be so really present, must be such a real experience, that I can look at my limitation, my evil and my incompleteness without being scandalized, because my substance does not lie in that, because my substance is truly in Christ: “The Christian is attached to no one but Jesus.” You cannot improvise this by “working on it,” because it is not work, but a journey of faith each one makes. And if you do not make it, then it is evident in the incapacity of acknowledging the limitations of the work; thus, the problems are often unresolved personal problems. They are not problems of the work—they are our problems. We do not have sufficient substance to recognize what is imperfect and what is not right. Therefore, only a person who has substance can constantly be oriented toward learning, being free of the outcome. Without an experience like this, which precedes or matures through what one does, we are not able to answer the questions, even if we know the theoretical response.

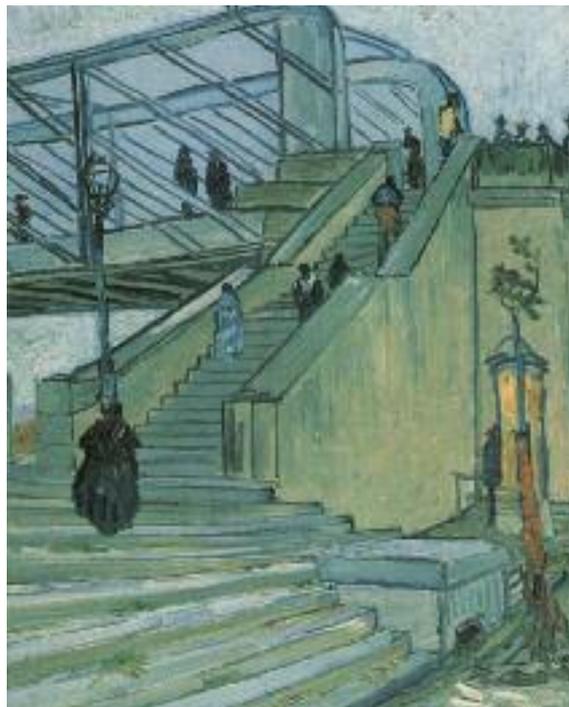
**Contribution:** When the work is in its smaller initial stages, it is very easy not to lose the origin; the mission of the work is clear, and generally the people who lead tend not to lose sight of the objective. But for many, bit by bit as it grows, there is a deviation from

the path, and when one realizes it, one no longer has the clarity of the mission of the work and of its origin. What concerns me is that our work grows more and more, and new volunteers arrive, and with them new proposals for modifications. This pressure for change has a positive aspect, because it sets us into motion and does not leave us complacent, but it carries the risk of distancing us from the origin and from the goal of the work. Every day we are fighting real battles to keep alive the mission of the work and at times

I think I cannot keep it alive for long. I would like you to help me understand how I can live this natural growth of the work without it straying from the origin and losing the clarity of the goal.

**Contribution:** We, too, in these years, have had to deal with the economic crisis the country is going through. Some works are at risk, and if they close, experiences that are rich for others and for those who run them would come to an end. Certainly, it is not a very easy moment. With the economic crisis, the normal way of working is disappearing, and we have to learn, introduce, and develop some functions that up to

now were not habitual—for example, commercial or management ones. We have to re-examine the type and quality of our services. In short, we have to interact profoundly with the reality we have in front of us, with a context in radical evolution. This work is spontaneous and natural. We are constantly asking ourselves what we are doing, and where we are going. In facing reality, the questions of the origin of the work and its goal often emerge. Many of our cooperatives were born many years ago out of experiences of volunteer work, charitable work, maybe somewhat of a pioneering sort, in an absolutely innovative way, to respond with generosity to the needs of the people one met, and those who founded them truly gave generously so they would exist. In this work of con-



Vincent Van Gogh, *The Bridge of Trinquetaille* (1888), private collection.

stant comparison with the current situation, I have noted a certain way of looking to the origin of the work, above all when this has not been nourished by the experience lived throughout the years and thus today is fixated on the initial modality, blocking the drive to compare against the context and thus limiting the development of the work itself. How does one overcome this form almost of possession of the origin of the work that, when push comes to shove, turns out to be an obstacle to the development of the work? What is the source of this error?

**Carrón:** It is evident that in any work in which there is life, there is risk. If there is life and the life moves, there is always risk. This is inevitable, because life passes constantly among us through freedom. Thus, it is not so much a problem of growth or lack of growth, but that every work always passes through the freedom of the person. Even if it did not grow, in fact, this would not ensure the permanence of the origin. The difficulty of what you ask is another indicator of that nihilism we spoke of at the recent Fraternity Spiritual Exercises. We would like everything to always be mechanical, without risks. We always reach this point: the scandal of freedom. I have already recounted the story about the taxi driver who, as soon as he understood I was a priest, told me that it is scandalous that God left humans their freedom, and I asked him, "Listen, would you like it if your wife loved you not of her own free will, but because she was forced by a biological mechanism?" "Absolutely not!" "And do you think the Mystery would enjoy that any more than you!? The Mystery generated a free being precisely because He enjoys freely given love as much as you do." All of the laws of the universe do not add up to the value of a freely given "yes." When someone loves you, this is more important for your life than all the laws of the universe. Thus, freedom is not the toll to pay or something to endure, but is this fascinating faculty that we humans have that enables us not to be mechanical, and to live, to risk, to participate in the adventure, and thus to grow, to become increasingly more ourselves because we are increasingly involved in what we do. So then, instead of being frightened of this, we should use all the opportunities as chances to grow in our self

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awareness. And if others arrive and get involved in your works, they are a challenge for each of you, because it is the opportunity to generate this perspective in them, too, to make them become women and men, to help them participate. What is the use of the work if it does not make men more men? It would be useless, a failure from the start. Instead, if each person who arrives is a possibility and a challenge for us (because this person does not allow us to take things for granted and asks us to be present as if it were the first day), then it gives us an opportunity of the other world not to be closed up in our own little universe, in our inertia, in our “already-know-it-all,” because we have to testify to this person about what moves us. And this, paradoxically, is the greatest opportunity for the work not to lose the origin. I am the one who constantly needs the origin in order to live every situation! For this reason, the origin cannot be seen as something static, because I need to respond to and face the challenges of the present, which is the place for verifying the origin itself (for verifying whether it is able to accept all the challenges that an ever new reality always sets). Just think of how faith has always had to face, in every era of history, the challenge of communicating the same message with another language, understanding that to remain faithful to itself, it had to develop. Mechanical repetition of certain words was not enough, because the words had changed meaning, or other terms were used. So then it was necessary to develop the origin, otherwise it got lost. See? It is the contrary: the origin endures only as something living. Otherwise, it is dead and buried, or it gets lost along the road, changing the wellspring. Instead, precisely the constant need of the origin to face the challenge of the present makes it possible for the origin to remain alive. We need this, and a formal repetition will not suffice. Fr. Giussani said that to communicate Christianity in some way it is necessary to continually “recreate” it. If Giussani had not done this, many of us would not be here. A formal repetition of the origin is not enough, because the origin is never formal! The origin is an event, an inflamed point that at a certain moment sparked someone’s freedom. If it no longer exists, then everything goes flat. For this reason, Fr. Giussani always said that the method is ►►

» always the same—there is something that comes first. But this holds not only at the origin; it is something that always comes first at every point of the road, because it is precisely an event. The origin is an event, a push, a spark of genius, a newness. This origin must endure, not like at the beginning, but that of the beginning.

**Contribution:** We are understanding how important it is that the places that guide the work be places of real assumption of responsibility, where the assumption of responsibility often among us has been and is marked by the affirmation: “I am in that place for *me*.” It seems to us, though, that this dualism should be judged as such. In fact, in my experience, I cannot think that a place is for me if I do not assume the responsibility implicated in the place. Having said this, we often realize that the passage from what we tongue in cheek call “monarchy” to shared leadership is still a bit of a struggle, and the difficulty in sharing goes hand in hand with the difficulty in delegating, in enabling people to grow. Where this passage happens, we have witnessed impressive experiences. In this period of economic crisis, there are cooperatives in which everyone has taken on responsibility, but this has been the fruit of a work by those who guide them, to involve people. It is not something you invent, and at the same time this is a fruit for which we are grateful. In the works, there are beginning to be a lot of young people who grow and become responsible. It seems to us that this ongoing difficulty depends on a problem of conception. I do not engage in co-responsibility unless I think this is “something more” for me, part of my nature, in some way a response to reality through the acquisition of new factors, that it is a good for me and for the work.

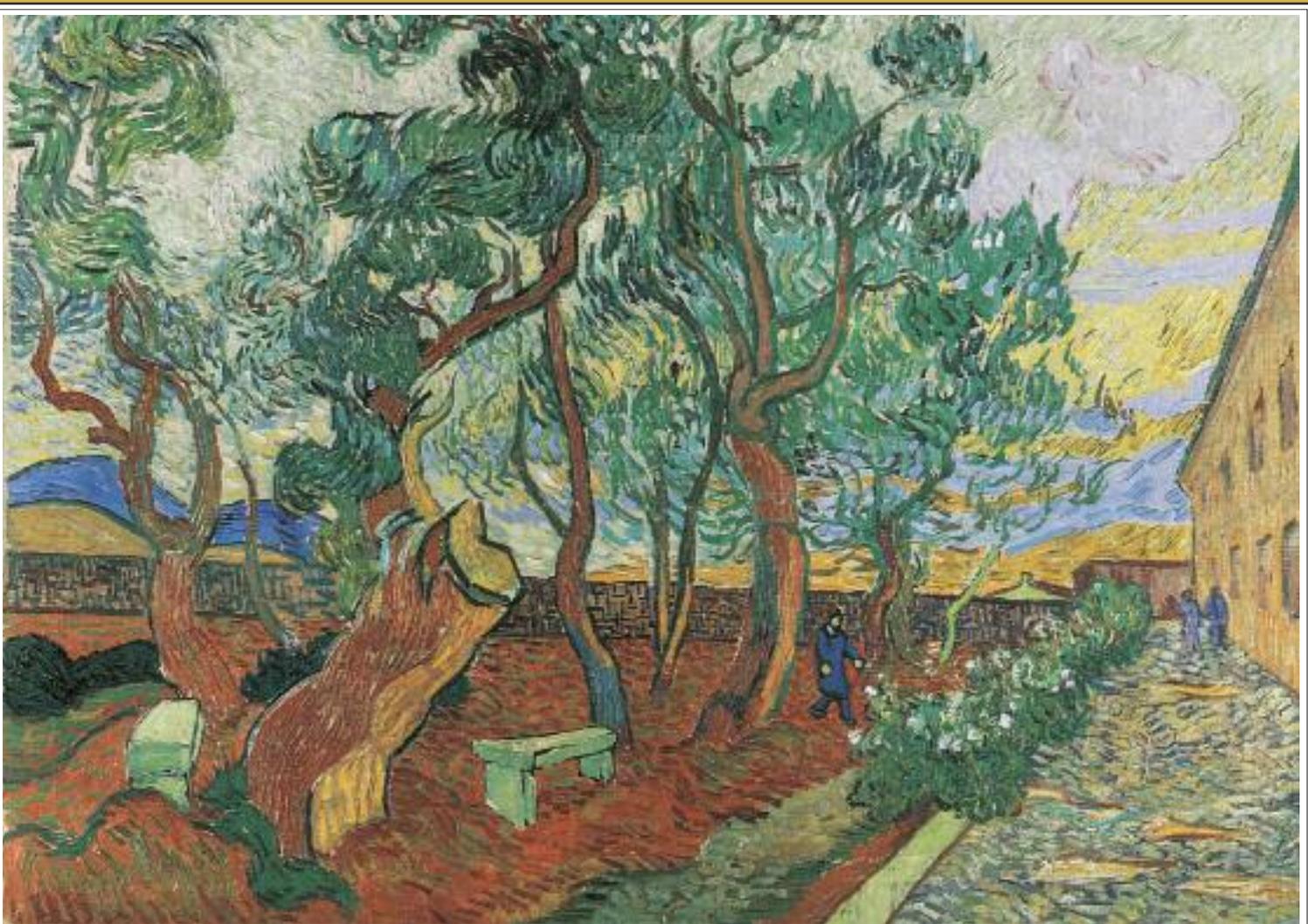
**Carrón:** Assuming responsibility is a sign of the maturity of the adult; without assuming responsibility, we are still children. Assuming responsibility is the sign that we are growing as women and men. This is decisive for us, because this is how we fulfill our humanity. We are realized as persons on this journey. It is not that the realization of my life goes one way

and the work another, as if there were a dualism. No. I am realized in facing all the challenges that life sets—at home, in relationships, at work, and also in the responsibilities I must take on. For this reason, life is learning the relationship between the “I” who each of us is and the people, things, challenges, and circumstances that we come up against. If we do not respond to this, we do not respond to the modality with which the Mystery calls us through reality, and thus we do not grow. Just imagine if reality did not challenge you, if it did not exist, if it were there without provoking you. We would have a flat encephalogram, as we see in many around us. If you begin to look at reality this way, you begin to see that the fact that reality provokes you is a good, because the “I” does not remain in a state of flat encephalogram. So then I begin to look at reality as a friend, every circumstance

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as a friend, and whoever enters my horizon, regardless of the intentions with which she or he does it, right or wrong, sets me in motion. If each of us does not respond to this, life passes by for us without achieving the goal for which it exists, that is, making us become ever more ourselves. Fr. Giussani, in the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, says that a person who is not intensely challenged by reality cannot have the self awareness of another who has been so challenged, not because the person is more good or less good, more intelligent or less intelligent. No, it is

that if reality does not challenge you and does not provoke you and does not set into motion all your resources, it is like someone who does no physical exercise; if you do nothing, it is not that you hurt yourself, but you simply remain there, paralyzed. You do nothing “against,” but since exercise is an essential part of the physical state, if you do not do it, we know what happens. It is a banal example of what happens in life, in being human. If my intelligence is not challenged, if my freedom is not challenged, if my affection is not challenged, I am like the living dead. And if we do not understand that this is a good, we defend ourselves, put the blame elsewhere, and always complain about the challenges of living. If, instead, I begin to understand it, then I want to be spared no challenge, because it is an opportunity, because whatever the



Vincent Van Gogh, *The Park at the Hospital in Saint Rémy* (1889), Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

Mystery permits, even if we do not understand it, is given to us for our maturity, for our growth, for our humanity. This is the value of time and history: making us become more ourselves. If we do not understand this, we defend ourselves. What do we most defend ourselves from? From what can most challenge us: the “you” of the other. So why do we often have this “monarchical” conception? Because the other asks me for things and it would be better if he did not exist. This conception is very difficult to challenge. It is a mistaken conception of the “I”: I think I can say “I” without saying “you,” and I defend myself from the other instead of acknowledging, as often happens (if we are honest) that if we sit down together around a table, a whole lot more ideas emerge than if I were on my own. So then, we see that the other is a decisive point, and gives me something worth my while, and that defending myself from this other is stupid. The other is not something to avoid, to keep at a distance because he or she is a bother. On the contrary, I begin to see the other as someone who can make a contribution to my work, to what I want to

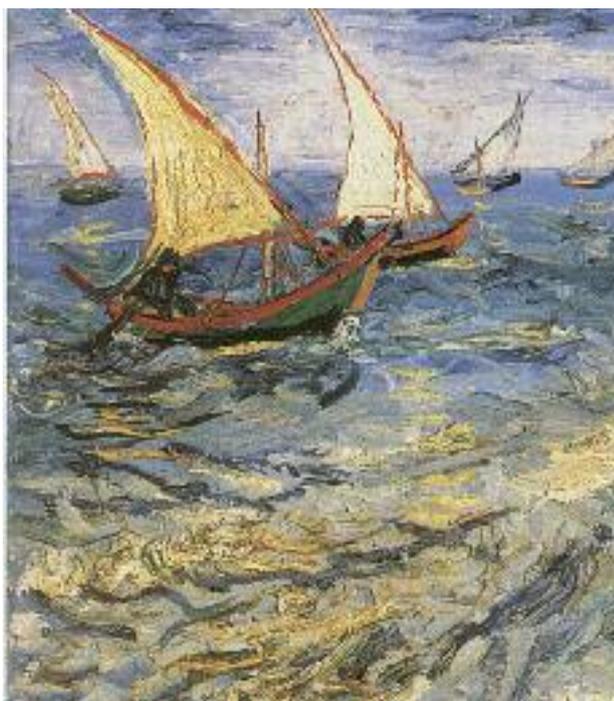
build. The other can contribute only if I give him or her space to do it. You can see what conception you hold with a very simple question: Do you defend yourself from others or do you honor them as a good and a resource? In answering, you will understand right away what conception you have of your “I.” Life is simple, because in every thing in which we are in relationship, we demonstrate to ourselves whether the other is part of the modality with which I say “I” or whether the other is extrinsic and juxtaposed to my “I.” The “I” is conceived of as relationship or as isolation. This is the great challenge.

**Contribution:** We have come to realize that another aspect of responsibility that plays an important role is the question of the oneness of the form and the substance of things. The fact of not obeying the form that is the work, so that the formal places of responsibility do not correspond to the substantial places of responsibility, places a point of disobedience within the work that has repercussions on everything, including on the fact that the one who leads projects himself and his image. >>>

» **Carrón:** This is the dualism of the work. One very simple thing is sufficient to empty the places of responsibility: making decisions outside of those places. You have already killed it, because you bring into the place of responsibility things already decided. So then it is just a farce! Thus, the places of responsibility become formal, and it is a farce for the people you invite to the places of responsibility: “If you have already decided, why invite me? And if you invite me here, why not decide here? It means you have no need of me.” You must have the freedom to tell those who treat you this way to go jump in a lake: “I’m not coming any more to a formal place.” This is the tomb of your works, because this promotes personalism, which produces nothing good. If we set up certain organs for running things, it is not because we do not trust each other, but because we know all our own limits. When I was a school principal, one of the things that created the most confusion was doing the timetable for the lessons. It was the great annual debate, because if you have a good schedule, the academic year already is very different. What was the method for getting through the problem? Saying, “In order to avoid doing something conditioned by my subjectivity, and your trying to blackmail me, let’s decide the criteria together first, so you won’t constantly come to me with demands, and I won’t yield to my subjectivity (I can yield because of my fragility, like you); but also you can yield, not just me. So then, let’s give ourselves a criterion and apply it.” For this reason, ever since I came to Milan to lead the Movement, I have just one rule of operation: everybody is free to have all the relationships she or he has, with whom she or he wants, because not only is this not negative, but it is a good for all of us. However, there are places of decision, and nobody had better decide

something about the Movement outside them. That’s all; there is no other rule. This is the method for not emptying a place of leadership, because if things are decided outside, then you empty it automatically.

**Contribution:** In 2009, you said at a Companionship of Works meeting: “The ideal that gratuitousness should penetrate the interstices of our calculations must always be before us, something we should



Vincent Van Gogh, *Fishing Boats at Sea* (1888), Brussels, Musée des Beaux-Arts.

yearn for, because we’re all sinners, and not at all exempt from the fall from gratuitousness into pure calculation, thinking we’re safe only because we belong to a friendship like ours. We always run the risk of entrenching ourselves in a corporate defense of what we do, maybe containing a project of political hegemony. The fact that gratuitousness is in our best interests means a race in seeking the good that passes through respect for the laws, but that makes of this gratuitousness affection, construction for the common good, correction without reticence in the face of the continual

fall” (J. Carrón, “Your Work is a Good for All,” in *Traces*, Vol. 9, No. 11 [December] 2009). This began to be for us a point to work on. I’ll tell you about something that happened. In a recent institutional work, we were called to give our judgment on a proposed law, and had very little time to do it. This could have been a big source of complaint: the same old public administration that pretends to be interested in our opinions, a useless job that will bear no fruit, because other dynamics will prevail.... Instead, we set out to do a good job, certain that in a changing world, active and uncomplaining work is a true resource. As an unexpected outcome of this intense and fervid work, those who requested it took our judgments into account. I’m not telling you this to pat ourselves on

the back, but to say how humble work of comparing ideas and experiences, and an open position that prizes the common good as an ideal, gives first of all the outcome of very great satisfaction and, God willing, also bears these unexpected fruits. But there are also moments in relationships with institutions when we clash with ideological positions, with harshness in these people, followed by complaining that limits the gratuitousness and striving for the common good of which you spoke. Very often it seems that the position that has the upper hand is inertia, which clashes with the position we recently discovered. How can we keep this striving for gratuitousness alive, even in moments when conflict with the institution seems the only accessible road?

**Carrón:** What keeps gratuitousness alive? In other words, what experience of living recharges it in you? This does not depend on the institution, or on our capacity, but on participating in a place of life that constantly reawakens you, that makes you increasingly able to participate in an experience that fills you to overflowing with that fullness from which gratuitousness can be born. Gratuitousness is the overflowing of a fullness. We can start out from a full tank or an empty one, but if we start out from the latter we will always be prey to the outcome, to what we manage to do, and if it is this way, as soon as the road gets tough, we will tire and throw in the towel. Instead, in order to live gratuitousness, it is not enough to say the word “gratuitousness” or to know what it means. Gratuitousness has to happen; we need to participate in an experience such that no defeat can stop us, because we do not depend on it, because the wellspring of our gratuitousness is elsewhere! This is the value of the Christian experience as the wellspring of a modality of staying in reality in a different way, truly new. After all, everyone else complains. Why? Complaining is inevitable, not because they are bad, but because they do not have an experience in the present that fills them constantly. This is not a problem of the work, of the other who does not listen to you, of the institution.... Everybody could do what you say, and the problem of your gratuitousness would still not be resolved. Only a different origin makes us protagonists of a work, not a hit or

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miss work but a profound work. We cannot think that since we live a beautiful experience we will be spared this work, as if just saying a magic word were enough. No, you have to enter into the issues and show through what you do that you keep in mind all the factors and know better how to solve the problems that come up. As we know, this does not happen overnight, but is a work, as you said very well. At times, you have to battle against an ideological position. So it is a challenge for your creativity. After all, don't you have to do this with your children, who at times get confused and into trouble? What do you do? Do you tell them to go jump in a lake? Or are they a challenge for you? “What can I tell him? What can I recount? What can

I give him to read?” And you go to bed, and start fresh in the morning and go to work, and then—“aha!”—something happens to you that gives you the idea to offer them. It is no different with people at work, because we are also in relationships with them. See if, each time you find yourself in front of a certain situation, you engage yourself; imagine that, instead of complaining about the other person's ideology, you constantly ask yourself, “How can I enter into a relationship with this person? What can I tell him so he won't defend himself? What can I offer him? What can I recount to him?” Often the other will not understand. I sometimes give the example of Abraham. Imagine if when he was called, he went to God to complain, “Look, these people don't agree with me, they don't understand, they're ideological...” (all things we say). What would God have said? “Well, this is precisely why I called you! They do not understand; this is what I called you for, so that they will begin to understand!” God gives grace to one so that, through this one, the others may come too. Instead, we blame the other because he does not understand. No! You had this perception, this grace, this spark to begin something; the grace is for you, and through you it will reach the others in a way and through a design that you do not know. Imagine if Abraham had begun measuring how much time had to pass for the others to understand... He would have tired after a couple of days. The design of God to enable others to participate in what He gives us is not something we decide. **»»**

» **Contribution:** What you call “the project of hegemony” seems like a shortcut. At times, it seems that this position of gratuitousness is the weaker one. I would like to look at this more closely, because it seems instead that the result you obtain is qualitatively different, because hegemony presupposes that there is no freedom.

**Carrón:** Exactly. With hegemony, you can reach your destination because you have a climbing partner on your same rope, but not because you have convinced him. So you do not do a work on the reasons for your contribution to the world. Often, we can settle for prevailing by means of hegemonic, authoritative dominance but, deep down, we lose culturally. Instead, we can win culturally, even if we do not prevail by way of hegemony. This means that we have nothing other to communicate to our neighbor than what has happened to us (and we do not know how much time we will need and how long it will take for this to win—when Saint Benedict began, who would have thought how many centuries would be necessary?!). But we think that I either put my coin in the vending machine and the drink falls, or otherwise it is all wrong. No, it is not mistaken, it is simply the rhythm decided by an Other, the design of an Other. For this reason, if one lacks an adequate foundation, how long will he endure? The problem is not that things do not function according to our forecasts, but that we do not have substance. So then, we complain, and begin to participate in the general complaining, or we simply throw in the towel. This is why it is very easy for many people—after one, two, or three tries—to tire and give up. The problem is the striving, as you do with your children. Imagine if your wife had to count how many smiles she would have to give before the baby smiles back for the first time. Look how many times you have treated people at work this way! Think about this, and you will see that there is not much difference.

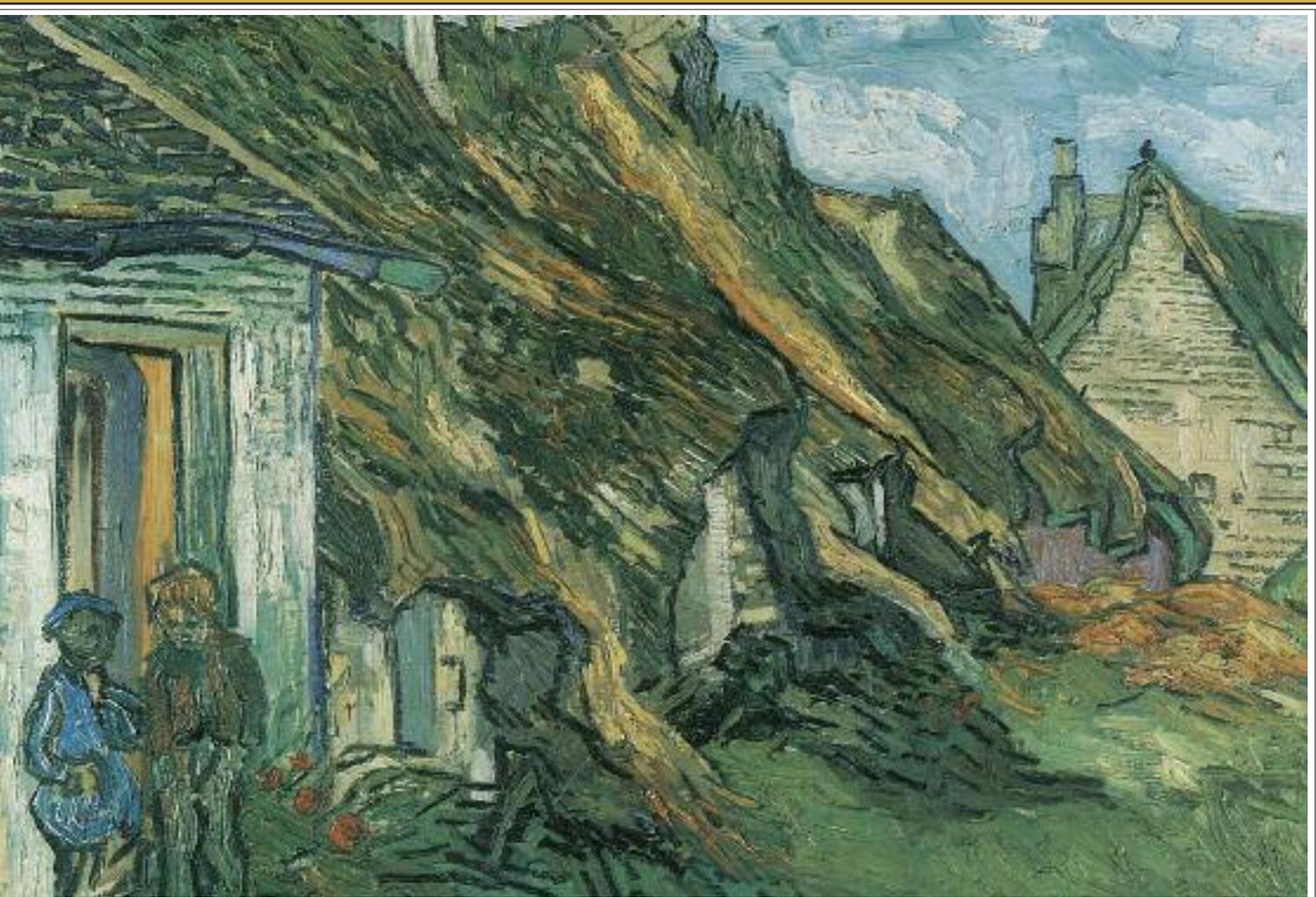
**Contribution:** My question is about work with other collaborators. The workplace is a place of formation and education. Entering into the reality of work, one learns simultaneously the profession and human

stature. One of the most important aspects of my work is the formation of operators (teachers, tutors, educators). Having the responsibility of teaching a trade, and above all having many young people who begin to work with me, I must have at heart the transmission of a method. It is never mere technical information, and cannot be limited to just the professional aspect, and at the same time it is through the precision of transmitting a professional method that one transmits a human position. I still have a lot of difficulty with this unity between learning a profession and an authentically human position, because I realize that I can easily slide into approximation in teaching the trade, with the call to a human position remaining just an exhortation.

**“Only a different origin makes us protagonists of a work—not a hit or miss work but a profound work. We cannot think that since we live a beautiful experience we will be spared this work.”**

**Carrón:** This is not useful, because you can only awaken the human position through what you do. It cannot be that you wear out your students during the hour of lesson and then you preach at them for the last five minutes! The issue is whether you manage to keep them engaged an hour because, through the instruments you use to explain and the method you use, you make the material so interesting that you are able to teach a skill and awaken the human. Otherwise, the awakening of the

human is reduced to preaching. Here, as Fr. Giussani always taught, content and method coincide. Jesus did not first preach to Zacchaeus and then tell him, “I’m coming to your house.” No. He told him just one thing: “I’m coming to your house.” Zacchaeus understood immediately, and received it very happily. The content (His gaze) and the words He used (the method) coincide; they are not two different things. If we are not attentive to the method, it is because we do not love the content; in fact, the content is communicated only through a form, a method. This is why Fr. Giussani cared so much about the methodological question, because through methodology you make something enter the fiber of the being of the kids. This morning, a teacher was telling me about a very good colleague who enchants her students by the way she explains things that others find boring. A mother told her, “I’m envious of my daughter because she has such a teacher!” What must the



Vincent Van Gogh, *Thatched Sandstone Cottages in Chaponval* (1890), Zurich, Kunsthaus.

mother of this girl have seen, to envy her daughter! This unity of content and method cannot be invented in a day.

**Contribution:** Still today, when asked to describe the origin, the generation of our works, we usually say that they began in an attempt to respond to a need. But experience has taught us that the development of a work cannot be characterized by the need, and must be characterized by realism and prudence. Fr. Giussani also said this in 1987 in Assago: “The characteristics of works generated by authentic responsibility must be realism and prudence. Realism is connected with the importance of the fact that the foundation of truth is the intellect’s adjustment to reality, while prudence, which in Saint Thomas’ *Summa* is defined as right reason applied to action, is measured first on the truth of the thing, before its morality, on the ethical aspect of goodness. The work, precisely because of this need for realism and prudence, becomes a sign of imagination, of sacrifice, and of openness” (L. Giussani, *L’io, il potere, le opere* [*The “I,” Power, Works*], Marietti 1820, Genoa, 2000, p. 169). On the other hand, we know that

every activity we do, every human activity in general, contains a portion of risk—what we call “throwing the heart beyond the obstacle.” And often we have observed it in experience, precisely in the less structured and less planned moments when something happens, and Providence opens up new and unexpected roads for us. However, we constantly run the risk—and this is the heart of the question—of caging and changing the nature of our works in the attempt to guarantee their economic sustainability. Very often, the economic need that prevails and, especially now, the need to safeguard jobs, risk changing the nature and caging the work itself. Therefore, my question is about how this realism and prudence can avoid becoming a measure and a hindrance to development. In front of a suggestion offered by reality—a need encountered, the opportunity, the proposal, the new relationship that is born, the desire to help new works—how do realism and prudence suggest what steps to take?

**Carrón:** Realism and prudence must constantly cause us to take stock of the situation. If the situation changes, realism and prudence can lead you to change the ►►

» dimensions of the work. You do not need to stubbornly continue, against realism and prudence, to go ahead as if nothing had happened. Realism and prudence are the modalities for overcoming the dualism. Faith sparks reason and makes us use it according to its characteristics of knowledge of reality, according to all the factors, thus with realism and with the application of prudence as right reason, the right criterion (as Saint Thomas says) for the things one does. If you begin to become abstract in the work, you begin to go against reason. Do you want to respond to the need or do you want to affirm yourselves? Jesus could have solved the problem of the NGOs in the Third World, just yielding to the first temptation in the desert, to “turn these stones into bread.” He could have done it and the problem would have been solved. Why didn’t He? Because it was not the plan of God; it would have been a way of affirming Himself against the plan of the Father. So then, not everything that seems good, if it is against the plan of God, is right, because often we do not know whether we are affirming the plan of God or only our own navel. How do we know? If we obey the way the Mystery gives us the resources. If we have the resources to do five—I always say this—let’s do five, not four and a half. Five. But if we can only do three, let’s do three, because before responding according to our measure, we have to learn to obey. For that matter, even if we did twenty-eight instead of three, it would still be just a drop in the ocean of need. This is our presumption: we think that by blowing the work up a bit more we will solve something. We do not solve anything! We solve just a tiny little piece more of the endless need that remains to be met. So, at a certain point, if it becomes necessary to downsize the work out of realism and prudence, you have to downsize it, because this is the modality by which you obey. If then the situation changes and you can once again do what you did before, you need to re-size it again, because it is still an obedience. If you do not act this way (in the name of the need, in the name of what is good, in the name of the fact that it is a good work, in the

**“Not everything that seems good, if it is against the plan of God, is right. How do we know whether we are affirming the plan of God? If we obey the way the Mystery gives us the resources.”**

name of I don’t know what), you are doing your own thing, affirming yourselves because you do not accept the signs of reality. In this way, you get yourselves in trouble, but this is not God’s plan. This is the affirmation of your navel. The fact that a work is truly a presence depends not on the dimensions of the work, but on the diversity it bears. This is why Fr. Giussani used the word “example.” Works are not the attempt to respond to all the need there is; they are only examples of how to respond. You have heard me say other times that Jesus did not heal all the sick people of His time. He could have done it;

it is not that He did not have the resources to do so. But God’s design was different. If God does not do it, is it because He does not have the resources, or because His design is different? Perhaps we should ask ourselves this very simple question, because this will give us peace, not to make us comfortable so that we do not do what we need to do (as if it were a narcotic that tranquilizes us) but to keep present the fact that the design of God is what must “command” the works. How do we know that we are obeying the design of God?

Simply if we obey the signs. An example: our friends in Ireland, to mark the Eucharistic Congress, wanted to do something meaningful. One of them said, “Let’s present the exhibit ‘With the Eyes of the Apostles,’ on the life of Jesus in Capernaum, first presented at the 2011 Rimini Meeting.” It was madness! It seemed crazy. “Let’s try. Let’s try to see if we can manage to find the means to do it.” It seemed impossible—such a little community, and such a big expense! I encouraged them from the very start. “The only condition is to obey the signs. If we find people who understand the importance this can have for the Church in Ireland, we’ll do it. Otherwise, peace, it will be what the Lord wants. If He wants, He will move what must move.” In fact, He moved it, and they were able to present the exhibit beautifully! Today they were telling me amazing things that are happening. This is the modality: if it is possible, let’s do it, with audacity, without sparing ourselves. But if we are not able, let’s stop, so as not to cause damage. **T**