

# WITH THE AUDACITY OF REALISM

by Julián Carrón

Notes from the dialogue at the General Assembly of the Companionship of Works,  
Fiera Milano Congressi, Milan (Italy), November 25, 2012

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**THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE PERSON**

**Bernhard Scholz:** These times are characterized by great difficulty for those who do social work and have businesses. It seems like an earthquake, with everything crashing down. In the last assembly, we rediscovered how to be free persons and not slaves of the circumstances, and heard many testimonies about how to live with a capacity for constructiveness. Today we find ourselves navigating “against the wind.” What can help us be audacious and realistic?

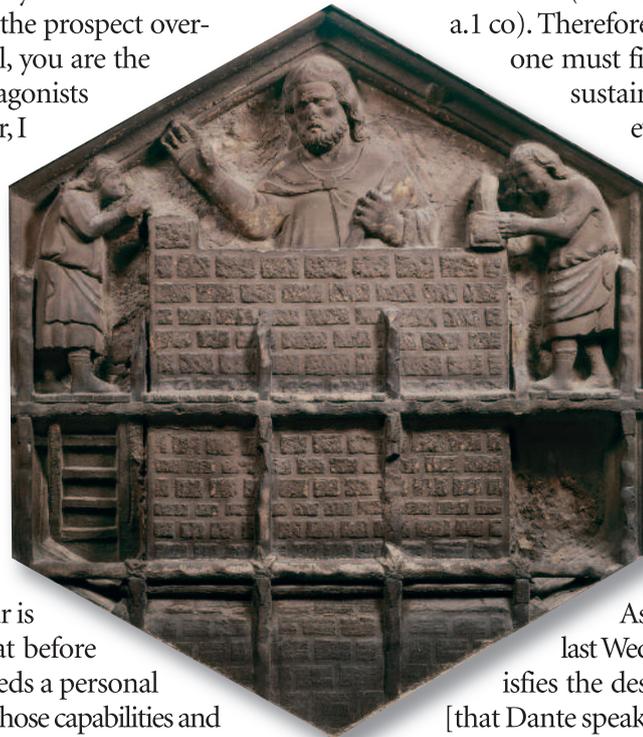
**Julián Carrón:** I accepted my friends’ invitation to speak to you even though the prospect overwhelmed me a bit; after all, you are the ones who are the true protagonists of this earthquake. However, I hope that I can help you grow in the awareness that each of you, entrepreneurs or those involved in various ways in businesses, are persons. It may seem like saying that water flows downhill, but it is not so obvious. Everybody takes it for granted, reducing the person to his or her own capabilities. But the person is a unique whole. Saying that an entrepreneur is a person means saying that before anything else, she or he needs a personal consistence, without which those capabilities and all the rest are insufficient. It is all too evident that today the earthquake hits the center of one’s “I,” one’s consistence, one’s substance. In this sense, the recession can be a precious opportunity for discovering the truth of oneself, the grounding for one’s substance, and thus lay a foundation suitable for facing the situation, the challenge we have before us, one that is never detached from the exercise of one’s profession. But what is the “I” of each of us? The genius of Dante comes to our aid: “Everyone confusedly conceives of a good in which the mind may be at rest, and desires it; wherefore everyone strives to attain it” (Dante, *Purgatory*, XVII, vv. 127–129). Where can such an “I,” with this desire for good that consti-

tutes it, find its own substance, in order to stand firm in the midst of an earthquake? This is the truest challenge of the circumstances we find ourselves facing. To find an answer, mere opinions, interpretations, and chatter are not enough, because they have no effect. We need to look at what, in our own experience (or in the experience of others), has the substance to keep us standing. Saint Thomas Aquinas provides us with the criterion of substance: “Man’s life consists in the affection which sustains him most, for there he finds his greatest satisfaction” (*Summa Theologica*, IIa, IIae, q. 179, a.1 co). Therefore, in order to have substance,

one must find that affection capable of sustaining life, precisely because everything is founded on one’s own satisfaction.

This is the level at which we Christians can offer our simple contribution, that is, if we are the first to accept the verification of faith in our daily circumstances. Only those who have verified this can confirm that only Christ present in the Church corresponds to the constitutive needs of the human heart.

As Benedict XVI reminded us last Wednesday, “Christ, He alone satisfies the desires for truth and goodness [that Dante speaks of] that are rooted in every human being’s soul” (*General Audience*, November 21, 2012). Only Christ ensures the satisfaction that generates affection capable of sustaining life in any eventuality, a sure grounding in the midst of the earthquake. This is where one sees whether the challenge of the circumstances has caused a certainty to mature in us that enables us to offer our fellow human beings a sure foothold. Only He can be the suitable foundation for an operative friendship like yours. In fact, only in the companionship of true friends will you be able to look at the reality of your businesses with truth, without being overcome by the fear that blocks you from acknowledging how things stand, the one condition for being able >>>





*Architecture. On the left, The Art of Building.*



» to face them with some possibility of success. I am talking about a companionship of friends that supports you in looking at all the signs of the situation in which you find yourselves without censuring any of them, a companionship that encourages and supports you in the willingness to acknowledge and obey the indication of all that has to be changed, a companionship that helps you to have the audacity to make decisions, even risky ones, most appropriate for facing the challenges that lie before you. Everything, if confirmed in experience, will make you discover the most precious value of your friendship: helping each other have a truer gaze upon reality. Compared

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to this, any other self-interest or advantage of any kind is too little, for times of earthquake and not. Saint Thomas understood well the nature of the challenge: “From nature springs the fear of death; from grace springs audacity” (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Super Secundam ad Corinthios*, 5,2:165). “So then, saying ‘audacity springs from grace’ means it comes from a Presence different from us” (L. Giusani, *Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia [An Event of Life, that Is, a History]*, Edit.: Il Sabato, Rome, 1993, p. 308). I can have the audacity I need only if I am willing to base everything on that Presence, on that true companionship that offers me the foothold for risking. There-

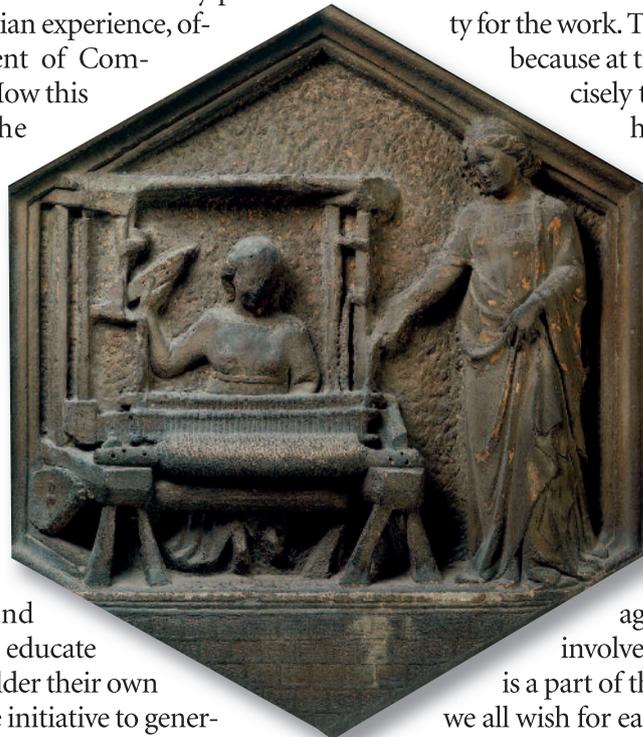
fore, Fr. Giussani said, “emblematic of audacity is *Navigation* by Andrea Pisano (a small bas-relief...). There are the silhouettes of two disciples rowing, parting the waves of the lake on their way to the other shore, and they are simultaneously tense but calm and sure: behind them in the boat is Jesus. The journey, the passage, the crossing toward destiny becomes possible only when there is *a presence* (if one were rowing alone, his sight would fog, and he would stop right away). The journey becomes simple if there is a presence, that is, let’s say it outright, if there is a *companionship*” (Ibid.).

### THE ORIGIN AND THE WORK

**Scholz:** Many works and firms associated with the Companionship of Works were founded by people belonging to the Christian experience, often lived in the movement of Communion and Liberation. How this origin reverberate in the works? How does it reverberate in the firms?

**Carrón:** Thank you for this question, because in these times it is particularly urgent to clarify the relationship between the movement of Communion and Liberation and the work done by people educated in the Movement.

1) The goal of the movement of Communion and Liberation is educative: to educate people who can then shoulder their own responsibility, and take the initiative to generate works; this responsibility is totally entrusted to the adult. The Movement does not enter into the management of the work, because it would be like admitting that the Movement is incapable of generating adults who shoulder their own responsibility; this would be the total failure of the experience of a movement like ours. It is not that the Movement does not care about the works. No. The Movement shows that it cares and is present by carrying out its own work, which is the generation of the adult. Fr. Giussani was so convinced that the Movement could generate adult subjects that he left people total responsibility for the works they created; he did not feel the need to set a “guardian” to keep



an eye on people. He betted and “risked” everything on adult awareness of responsibility.

2) The work is entirely of those who do it, thus there is no work “of” the Movement. The Movement has no works, except for the Sacred Heart Institute [a high school in Milan], which Fr. Giussani wanted as an example for everyone in the sphere of education. For this reason, the Movement has no direct responsibility for any other works. The Movement is not part of the board of directors of this or that work, and thus, not being part of it, does not take on responsibility for the decisions the board of directors makes. It seems to me that this is very simple.

All the people who, as adults, decide to give life to a work must be conscious of their total responsibility for the work. This is particularly important, because at times one notes a lack of precisely this awareness. And so it can

happen that things are left adrift when instead there should be an intervention, taking responsibility as adults. If everyone was truly aware of his or her responsibility, certain things would not happen.

This is a call to the personal responsibility inherent in being an adult, and thus it is a challenge to grow in this self-awareness in the way you manage the works in which you are involved. This taking responsibility is a part of the growth of the subject that we all wish for each other. This is the responsibility of the layperson that the Church wants each person to shoulder, so that, in doing things, laypeople can witness to all the newness of the Christian life, all the newness that is born of the new creature. This is why it seems to me that we have a long road before us, not out of a lack of many stupendous experiences among you, but because it is necessary to learn from what happens, or from the possible deficiencies that can reveal themselves in the works, to become aware and avoid mistakes or risks that one often finds oneself facing.

The capacity of an adult—who participates in the experience of Communion and Liberation—to generate a work is a sign of the vivacity of the Movement, of its ►►

» educative energy in generating people sensitive to the needs of others and able to get together to set up initiatives, works, that constitute answers appropriate to the needs. We will never give up on this. I cannot tell you how often I remain speechless before so much creativity, initiative, and generosity! This is the fruit of the education received in the movement of Communion and Liberation. It is a very beautiful thing that testifies to faith's capacity to generate subjects able to become protagonists through the creation of works. Such a richness of initiative is a fact, evident to all, and cannot be called into question because of our failures or the mistakes that anyone can make. Rather, acknowledging them, asking for forgiveness, and correcting ourselves offers us the chance to regain awareness of our own responsibility in the work in which we are engaged. Such richness cannot be put at risk because of a lack of personal responsibility.

This responsibility entails realism and prudence in realizing the works that God permits us to do; it also involves making the difference of these works shine out, for example, in the way you treat staff and the way you relate with clients and suppliers. These signs may seem simple, but we all know that they "cry out" the different-ness of a work.

Before concluding this point, I would like to take the opportunity to say something about the Companionship of Works Association [COWA], often presented by the newspapers as the "economic arm" of CL, leading some to think that CL depends economically on the COWA. Nothing is further from the reality.

Since the very beginning, the Movement has been supported exclusively by the economic sacrifices of the people who belong to it. Those who belong to the Movement commit to a monthly donation of a freely decided amount, the so-called "common fund" that Fr. Giussani always indicated as a gesture that educates to a communal conception of what one possesses, to the awareness of poverty as an evangelical virtue and as a gesture of gratitude for what one ex-

periences in the Movement. Precisely for this educative reason, what is important is not the quantity one gives, but the seriousness with which one remains faithful to the commitment. To support the life of our communities in Italy and the world and its charitable, missionary, and cultural initiatives, the movement of Communion and Liberation needs nothing else, and for this reason we are free from everything and everyone in carrying out our task as a movement.

**RESPONSIBILITY**

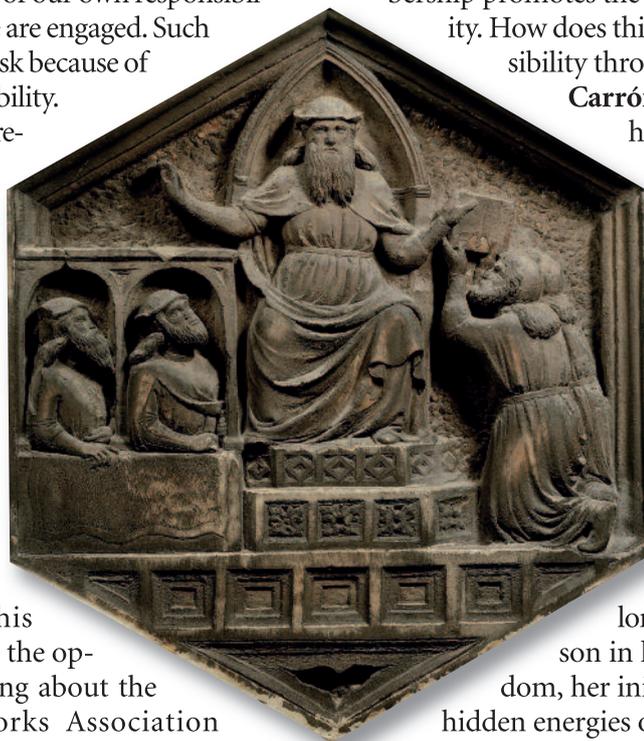
**Scholz:** Often, belonging to the Church or an ecclesial movement is seen as a limit to personal responsibility, but you insist on the fact that precisely such membership promotes the assumption of responsibility. How does this empowerment of responsibility through belonging happen?

**Carrón:** Everything depends on how one views the nexus between belonging and responsibility. There are types of belonging that instead of helping the member mature and grow in responsibility, step into his place, almost as if belonging to a certain group could spare the risk of personal responsibility and justify *a priori* one's behavior. Instead, there is a be-

longing that generates the person in her responsibility, her freedom, her initiative. It reawakens all the hidden energies of the subject.

"The communal dimension" Fr. Giussani said, "does not replace freedom, personal energy, and decision. Rather, it is the condition for their affirmation. If, for example, I place the seed of a beech tree on a table, it will not develop into anything, even after a thousand years (assuming that everything remains the same). If, on the other hand, I take this seed and plant it in the ground, then it eventually becomes a tree. Now, the humus does not replace the irreducible energy, the incommunicable 'personality' of the seed. Rather, the humus is the condition needed for the seed to grow.

The community is the dimension and condition necessary for the human seed to bear fruit. For this rea-





son, we can say that the true, the most intelligent persecution, is not the one employed by Nero and his amphitheater of wild beasts or the concentration camp. The most ferocious persecution is the modern State's attempt to block the expression of the communal dimension of the religious phenomenon. As far as the State is concerned, a person can, in conscience, believe what he likes, as long as this faith does not imply that all believers are one and, therefore, have the right to live and express this reality. To obstruct communal expression is like cutting off the roots that nourish the plant: the plant soon dies" (L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 1997, p. 131). It seems that we have before us many examples of what happens

when the opportunity for this decisive communal expression for the growth of the person is blocked.

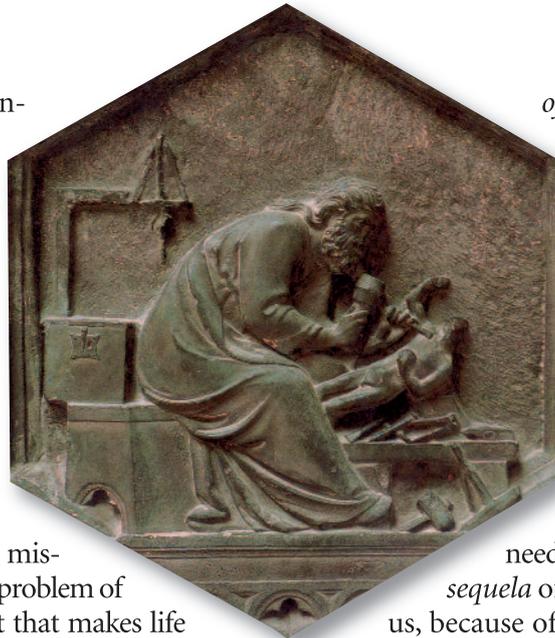
The test of belonging is one's capacity to cause the seed to germinate, that is, to generate adults with a capacity to stay in reality, to judge, to understand reality, to be willing to listen to it. At this level, affirmations of principle do not suffice. What is needed are testimonies that document how people flower through their belonging, and how belonging generates persons.

**"The test of belonging is one's capacity to cause the seed to germinate, that is, to generate adults with a capacity to stay in reality, to judge, to understand reality."**

Scholz: There are people who, with their talent and temperament, have had the gift of creating works and firms. They got involved personally, shouldering their own responsibility. But, in some cases, this personal commitment becomes >>>

» personalism, with attention centered on oneself, and consequent relativization of objective criteria. This personalism is also seen in the difficulty of the passage from one generation to the next. Where does this personalism come from, and what is the road for a real valorization of the responsible person?

**Carrón:** Personalism is a mistaken attempt to resolve the problem of life, to reach the fulfillment that makes life worth living. It is a pity that this attempt arises from the inability to understand the nature of the “I” and the failure to find an adequate answer to its needs. “By nature, man is relation to the infinite” we said at the last Meeting. If we do not realize that we are “made for the infinite,” we try consciously or unconsciously to respond to our human need—as you said—with “focus of attention on oneself” that will never satisfy the desire for the infinite that constitutes us. Personalism is not only mistaken, but it is also useless for responding to the need that causes it. But personalism thrives only when there is the complicity of all those who think they can resolve the problem of their life by dumping their responsibility on those who exercise this personalism, the so-called “responsible” (we can all be complicit with this personalism). So then, “the relationship with the responsible, when he is followed because he is the head of the organization upon which one has dumped all one’s hopes and from which one expects the actualization of one’s own project, tends to be absolutely closed in an individualistic dependence. The obedience that is established is obedience to the organization, of which the responsible is the crucial point and the guardian, and this eliminates the creativity of our persons, because everything is established and defined by the structure to which one adheres. Everything becomes schematic” (L. Giussani, *Il rischio educativo*, [*The Risk*



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can awaken in the other the desire to follow, to become engaged, and, so doing, help one’s collaborators to become themselves, putting them in the condition of offering their own contribution to the common work. In this way, all the human resources are placed at the service of the work. **I**

*of Education*], SEI, Torino 1995, p. 63.)

How does one get free of this personalism?

The way one gets free of idolatry is finding a presence that is so true that it provokes us; we are provoked by the promise of fulfillment that its very existence sets before us.

Only those who realize the true nature of their human need can understand that only the *sequela* of that presence that provokes us, because of the promise it contains, responds to our need.

But the key is the very conception of *sequela*. *Sequela* cannot be conceived of as following orders of someone upon whom we have dumped our own responsibility with the hope that this person will resolve the problem of our own life. “*Sequela* is the desire,” said Fr. Giussani, “to relive the *experience* of the person who has provoked you and who provokes you with his presence in the life of the community; it is the tension to become not like that person in his concreteness, full of limits, but like that person in the value to which he gives himself and that redeems him deep down even in his human limitations. It is the desire to participate in the life of that person in which something Other is brought to you, and your devotion is to this Other; you want to adhere to this Other, within this journey” (Ibid., p. 64).

Only a person committed to reliving the experience of the person who provoked him or her can reach the Other, He in whom one finds that to which one aspires: no longer needing to center everything and everyone on oneself, one can finally be free of all personalism. Only a person like this