



**TEACHING TODAY.
NEW CONTEXTS AND NEW CHALLENGES.
A DIALOGUE WITH JULIÁN CARRÓN***

Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan
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Promoted by *The Risk of Education Cultural Association, CDO Educational Works, Diesse, and DiSAL*

Groups that participated in the initiative:

A.Ge - Associazione Italiana Genitori [Association of Italian Parents]; A.N.I.N.S.E.I. Lombardia e Emilia Romagna - Associazione Nazionale Istituti Non Statali di Educazione e Istruzione [National Association of Non-State Institutes of Education and Instruction]; ADi - Associazione Docenti e Dirigenti scolastici Italiani [Association of Italian Teachers and Principals]; AGeSC - Associazione Genitori Scuole Cattoliche [Association of Parents, Catholic Schools]; AIMC - Associazione Italiana Maestri Cattolici [Italian Association of Catholic Elementary School Teachers]; ANP - Associazione Nazionale dirigenti e alte professionalità della scuola [National Association of Principals and Highly Qualified Professionals of the Schools]; A.P.E.F. - Associazione Professionale Europea Formazione [European Professional Association for Formation]; CIDI - Centro di Iniziativa Democratica degli Insegnanti [Center of Democratic Initiative of Teachers]; CNOS SCUOLA - Centro Nazionale Opere Salesiane [National Center of Salesian Works]; ConOpera; CSL - Consorzio Scuole Lavoro [Consortium Schools and Work]; ENAIP - Ente Nazionale ACLI Istruzione Professionale [ACLI National Board for Professional Instruction]; Federazione Scuole Steiner-Waldorf in Italia [Federation of Steiner-Waldorf Schools in Italy]; FIDAE - Federazione Istituti di Attività Educative [Federation of Institutes of Educational Activities]; FISM - Federazione Italiana Scuole Materne [Italian Federation of Kindergartens]; Forum delle Associazioni Familiari [Forum of Family Associations]; ONM - Opera Nazionale Montessori [National Montessori Work]; Portofranco; UCIIM - Unione Cattolica Italiana Insegnanti Medi [Italian Catholic Union of Middle School Teachers].

TINO GIARDINA

Greetings to everyone. In the name of the associations promoting today's gathering, namely *The Risk of Education Cultural Association, CDO Educational Works, Disal e Diesse*, welcome to this highly awaited moment. I would also like to welcome those from more than fifty locations in Italy and abroad who are following us by direct streaming.

I would like to greet and extend warm thanks to all the numerous representatives of the authorities present here today, and those who could not be here but sent their greetings. In particular, I would like to greet Professor Luigi Berlinguer who is here with us today.

Over twenty associations of the world of Italian schools are participating in this conference, and I would like to express our gratitude for their support and for sharing the desire that gave rise to this gathering, the wish to offer Italian schools a reflection and a contribution for facing the great topic of education, schools, and teaching today in our country.

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The Director of the Emilia-Romagna Regional Scholastic Office wanted to be here with us today, but was not able to do so because of a commitment abroad. However, he has sent us this brief message: *“I received with enthusiasm the proposal of the National President of DIESSE, my friend Professor Tino Gardina, to organize this important moment of study in Bologna, the city of the Alma Mater Studiorum. Unfortunately, institutional commitments require my presence abroad today.*

Even so, I would like to greet Professor Carrón and all you participants with a reflection on the desire that I trust will be explored more deeply during the day. Recently, a physician reminded me that the school is under the scrutiny and “pressure” of the entire civil and political society.

And yet, when the teaching begins, this often noisy world remains outside.

The reality remains only that of the human relationship between teacher and pupil: this is the point of the uniqueness of the risk of education that goes along with being a teacher. Here, too, arises the necessary condition for being able to carry out this arduous professional task: the condition is to renew daily the “desire” to teach. Reality can support this desire or severely test it.

This is also our task as the Administration: to make it possible and to facilitate your daily teaching.

We betray our service to the nation when we complicate instead of facilitating your being teachers.

This desire—which by nature is fragile, just as human nature is fragile—supports professional research and nourishes the body, heart and mind of teachers in their daily lives.

However, whatever these condition may be, even if positive, none can guarantee the preservation of this “desire” to teach.

Therefore, a day like today is necessary, because it helps to seek the heart of one’s educational task, because at the same time it reminds us of the method to follow in order not to yield to our own fragility. The first method is to continually renew professional communities that become capable of supporting the difficult daily work of teaching.

I am grateful to DIESSE and the other associations promoting this conference, who work hard to keep alive and support your original desire to teach. The desire to teach, supported by professional communities, is the condition needed to escape the “sad passions” and hold onto the hope without which it is impossible to educate. Thank you, and I wish you a successful day.”

We would like to express particular thanks to the University of Bologna for hosting us in this prestigious location, and in particular the Rector, Professor Ivano Dionigi, who welcomed us with kindness and openness, and whom I invite to say a few words of greeting.

IVANO DIONIGI

A warm welcome to all those present, in particular to the teachers and workers from schools outside Bologna.

It falls to me to welcome you for a dual reason: not only as a formality, as your host, but also because I, too, belong to the world of formation, and thus am one of you.

Today’s gathering is a great opportunity for reflection, made easier by the circumstance of Sunday morning, a day when time is somewhat more of a friend to us because it flows more slowly. We have a great need to stop to think; we need long thoughts, as Empedocles admonished us, above all in a period characterized by short thoughts of one hundred forty four characters, by *mignon* thoughts.

So, I would like to reflect briefly with you on the value of a few words, first among them, the word “school.” What does the word “school” mean? Is teaching is something that leaves a sign in you, a *signum*? Is a professor someone who professes something?

When we say school today, we generally imagine either a building or the Cinderella of our Ministries. Is this school? Is it a specific, content-driven, technical sphere, or is it rather a field of energy, an openness to the possible, a something that has yet to exist? Here I am speaking to the teachers, operators, and administrators of the world of school: if school has something to do with children, with adolescents, with young adults, it will not be a something given forever but a something that has yet to exist. School derives from *scholé*, a Greek word corresponding to the Latin *otium* and the opposite of *polypragmosyne*, which in turn corresponded to the Latin *negotium* and meant “the industrious, busy life,” precisely of those with jobs and also—we could say—and those who are alienated. Viceversa, *scholé* was the time that the citizen reserved for himself and his own formation and education: what the Greeks called *paideia*, which they meant as a complete, comprehensive, total education of the person, *enkyklios*, “circular.” Someone already has preceded us in the theory and above all in the practice of interdisciplinary and horizontal knowledge.

School is and must remain the place of the formation of the critical spirit. We must not be ashamed to use this word. Yes, school is the unique place for the formation of critical thought, comparison, and discussion, the counterbalance to a certain modernity that we do not like and that is no friend of ours. Modernity derives from *modo*, which means “now,” “this moment,” “the present moment.” Yes, I believe that school must be the counterbalance to the monocultural dimension, to the simplification algorithm, to the one thought, to this mercantile and utilitarian universe proposed daily to our children, young people, adolescents, young adults, and adults, to everyone. English can be learned well abroad; young people learn Internet without the need to go to school; businesses provide on the job training in their own technology. The first priority of school is not Internet or English or Business: it is the place for forming—and I say it with the words of the great Nietzsche—complete citizens, not useful employees. It is the universe where one reflects on the entire world, because it is the place where one learns the culture of *et et e*, not of *au taut*, the place of dialogue. For us today, the word *dialogue* is worn out, but it is well to remember that dialogue derives from the Greek *diálogos*, that is, *logos*—understood both as “word” and as “reasoning”—that “crosses through” (*dia-*) everything. If this does not happen at school today, where will it happen? Where there is dialogue, there is no conflict, because conflicts are due to ignorance and not to culture. Culture only comes from dialogue among different cultures. “Teaching” is the title of today’s gathering. So then, let us re-establish the primacy of the teacher. As a parent, I had a very bad experience of parents: parents who verbally and morally attacked the teachers, delegitimized them, claimed they could teach them their trade, and always and in any situation defended their own children. No: the teacher is at the center. Up to twenty, thirty years ago, together with the physician, the teacher was the most important and socially recognized figure, economically as well. This is no longer the case. We have forgotten that the teacher is a *maestro*, which—please forgive my linguistic and philological obsession—derives from *magister*, “the person who knows and is worth more” (*magis*) and who sets himself in relation with others (*ter-*), as opposed to *minister*, “the person who knows and is worth less.” These were terms of Roman religious language: *magister* was the main celebrant, *minister* was the secondary celebrant, the assistant, the server. I ask you: today in our country, who is more respected, the *maestro* or the minister? It is far too evident that we have replaced respect for *maestri* with the cult of ministers.

And then the word “professor,” from *profiteer*: what does a professor profess? Passion, rigor, and above all, *duties*. In a country that has devoted the last thirty years to the various declensions of the word *rights*, who remembers the word “duties”? As far as I know, the word “duty” has not been expunged from the dictionaries of the Italian language. We should thank the teachers who remember that there are duties.

This noble and thankless task of the teacher is called first of all to remind us of two other values: “word” and “history”. Today we are all absorbed with environmental ecology, which is a welcome sensibility. But there is another ecology that precedes it and of which we have a great need: linguistic ecology. I don’t know about you, but sometimes I have the impression that I am living in Babel: with the same word we indicate different things and with different words the same thing. Speaking well, Plato said, not only is a beautiful thing in and of itself, but it also benefits the soul. Today, however, we can make ours the lament of Sallust’s Catiline: *vera vocabula rerum amisimus*, “we have lost the true meaning of words.” And so someone will have to teach these darned words well, will also have to educate us to speak well. Let us remember that speaking well is proper to those who think well. I believe this is the role of school. We need to have as much respect and care for words as we do for people: we cannot wring their necks, but rather, in front of words we must “crouch down with respect and devotion” (Elias Canetti). Just one example: the words East and West. What do they mean? I’ll remind you: as far back as the earliest versions, we encountered *sol oritur*, “the sun rises” and *sol occidit*, “the sun sets.” The East is the thing, the person, the reality, the country, the continent that rises; the West is the thing, the person, the reality, the country, the continent that sets. So then, we would do well to set aside our presumption and our pseudo primacies. Today we risk discounting all the criticality of the world “West” and of our condition as Westerners, if we do not understand that a necessary and natural alliance with the East presses, if we do not learn to distinguish the wails of those who are born in the East from the lament of those who end in the West.

And finally, history. The world has changed: for some time now the dimension of geography and the dimension of demography have been dominant. We are forgetting the third dimension, history, the one that has always guided us and that has characterized Europeans. Above all in our youth there is a great deficit of historical knowledge. We are all spectators of the glittering screen of the *net*, of the web, of internet in the dictatorship of the present, such that our youth believe that the world is entirely a matter of the *hic and nunc*, of the “here and now.” But just as in a painting there is a foreground and a background, so it is with knowledge. It is necessary to learn not only the fleetingness of synchrony but the *continuum* of diachrony. Memory and history are a great instrument of defence, the foundations for any competition. I am speaking of history conceived of in the dual dimension of vision (according to the Greek work *historia*) and of action (according to the very Latin expression of *res gestae*).

Are not the various phases of life, from infancy to old age, the most evident existential expression that we ourselves are essentially history?

TINO GIARDINA

Heartfelt thanks to Julián Carrón, Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, for his presence among us and for the sacrifice he made this morning to be here.

For some time now, following your various contributions and your constant attention to the theme of education, so well illustrated also in your recent publication, published by Rizzoli, *La bellezza disarmata [Unarmed Beauty]*, we felt the desire to have an opportunity to dialogue with you on these themes. In order to have a real dialogue with the world of school, we chose to

prepare for this conference by involving scores of teachers, principals, managers of public and private schools, from elementary to high school and centers of professional formation. We asked them what it means for them to teach and live school today, and what they see as the greatest needs in their work. The questions we ask you this morning reflect some of the themes that most frequently came up.

The first question was prompted by the contribution of a teacher: “Returning to school after eleven years of absence, I found an uneasiness in the students I had never seen before, to the point of pathology. I met many psychologists, neuropsychiatrists, and psychotherapists. The students suffer because evidently something is broken and I would say that they have lost the evidences that were part of the experience of being sons and daughters.”

In this period of history in which everything seems uncertain, provisional, how do you see the situation of the world of youth today? And how do you see the bewilderment of adult society in front of this situation?

JULIÁN CARRÓN

Good morning to everyone. I’ll begin by considering the situation of young people, because to my mind the first thing to do is to identify the problem well. As I was coming here to Bologna on the train, I read that this question also emerged at the Synod on the family: in one of the working groups it was observed that often “we try to resolve the problems without knowing what their origin is” (*L’Osservatore Romano*, October 10, 2015). It is also true that in every attempt to offer a response, whatever it may be, there is already a diagnosis of the origin. We see this for example when, in response to this distress in youth that is so frequently spoken of, teams of psychologists, neuropsychiatrists, ect. are engaged, or rules are increased and multiplied to try to staunch the difficulty, so as to be able to get something done in class. All this indicates that the reason for the difficulty has been identified as a psychological or ethical problem. But the evidence that it is not enough to multiply rules or provide psychological help to respond to the problem makes us understand that maybe the origin is not exclusively of an ethical or psychological nature. Often we educators fall prey to the confusion between the symptom and the cause, taking the consequence for the origin.

Frankly, I find no better explanation of the origin of this situation than what Fr. Giussani said many years ago. Back then it seemed like a strange statement, outside the chorus of the usual interpretations, but now it is clear to everyone. He held that the origin of this unease in young people was a weakness of energy, an affective weakness, such that they found it difficult to adhere—first of all to recognize and then to adhere—to the reality they had in front of them. Fr. Giussani called it the “Chernobyl effect”; the radiation provokes a change in the organism that you do not see, but dynamically the person is no longer the same. He added that what is listened to is not truly assimilated (cf. L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro. 1986-1987 [The “I” Is Reborn in an Encounter]*, Bur, Milano 2010, p. 181). This provokes further disquiet in the young people. When a boy spends hours and hours in a classroom with all his unease and without assimilating anything, it becomes even more difficult for the transmission of a content to take root in him. For this reason, said Fr. Giussani, what one transmits has trouble becoming conviction in the students. The ultimate reason, he said, is that all this is the consequence of the fact that there is no longer any real evidence, no evidence other than fashion.

But what does it mean that there is no longer any evidence, or, as the question said, “they have lost the evidences that were part [of our being] of the experience of being sons and daughters”? It

is not that reality is not in front of us as it was before; the evidence as an “inexorable presence” is in front of us just as it is in front of the kids, but something has happened that we have identified, using Benedict XVI’s expression, as the “collapse of ancient [religious] certainties,” the collapse of evidences; this is due to the fact that the capacity to recognize reality has weakened in us and thus in the kids. Our capacity to see it, to grasp it in its deep meaning has weakened. The issue is to realize what we have in front of us, but this is not as easy as it was in another time. The capacity to recognize reality is what has become numbed and twisted. So it is not a matter of ethical weakness, as we often think, but a weakness of energy of consciousness.

To my mind, this is crucial for understanding the challenge in front of us. It would be nothing if it were just a matter of ethical weakness, because it would mean that there is still all the energy of the human person and it was just a matter of giving the right orientation, the right push to that energy. But here, the problem is the lack of the capacity to grasp the evidences, and thus the incapacity to mobilize the whole “I” as consequence of the recognition of what exists. This means that we find ourselves in an existential situation that is new in a certain sense, one that concerns every aspect of life, from family to all the rest. We adults verify the difference of the challenge because when we are in front of the kids, we recognize that the relationship with them is not immediate and that our attempts do not make things work. This is why I like to quote a line from Hannah Arendt: *“A crisis forces us to return to the questions; it demands of us new or old answers, as long as they flow from a direct examination; it becomes a catastrophe only when we try to face it with preconceived judgements, that is, prejudices, thus aggravating the crisis and worse yet, giving up on living the experience of reality, using the opportunity to reflect, that the crisis itself constitutes.”* (translated from the Italian translation of H. Arendt, *Tra Passato e Futuro [Between Past and Future]*, Garzanti, Milano, 1991, p. 229.)

A crisis like the present one is a precious opportunity to understand the nature of the human person and thus to ask ourselves how to intercept her being, so as to be able to offer a contribution that truly responds to her unease. This situation makes us feel even more helpless, because we adults are children of our times; we come from a century in which our whole culture, from psychology to sociology to Marxism, has emptied the “I” of each of us, exempting it from any responsibility. We all try to explain our unease with something that has happened to us in the past, with the influences of the environment, blaming various factors as the origin of our trouble. Antonio Polito recognized this well in a book in which he summarized this problem (A. Polito, *Contro i papà. Come noi italiani abbiamo rovinato i nostri figli [Against Fathers. How We Italians Have Ruined Our Children]*, Rizzoli, Milano 2012).

It seems to me that Fr. Giussani has given one of the most precious contributions, at least I have always perceived it this way, when he identified the origin of the challenge that lies before us: we adults have reduced the “I” to its antecedent factors, psychological, sociological, cultural, historical, etc. But if we adults look at a young person reduced this way in his “I,” imagine the uneasiness! In front of us there no longer an “I” to address. There is not an “I” that is more than the sum of the antecedent factors. When this mentality takes root in us adults, it blocks us mentally and keeps us from standing as women and men in front of the young people with whom we must engage. This cannot fail to have terrible consequences, because it is as if one rejected one’s task as an educator. If the young person is reduced in her “I” and if I can no longer engage with her, what is my task? This is why we “hand over” our responsibility to the psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists who, by all means, should carry out their own work, but if education is reduced to this alone, then we teachers can all go home; we cannot first of all wait for the experts to put everything back in order, so that then we can decide what to do.

Unfortunately, at times this happens with the complicity of the parents who, lost themselves, do not understand the situation of their children and thus do not know how to face it. A friend, a philosophy professor, told me about a mother who said to him, “Look, my son already has enough problems. Please don’t awaken any more questions in him.” Imagine how that mother looks at her son, and what this means for that teacher! The kids find themselves in this situation, with paralyzed adults who cannot understand the nature of their children’s trouble. In this way we all collaborate in making them even weaker. Accepting this situation uncritically means having already made a judgement on the human person, having formulated a diagnosis of the unease; but if we all look at the kids this way, imagine what can issue from this situation. Whether we like it or not, we all collaborate in worsening the weakness of our youth.

The challenge we have before us is at this level of depth of the “I.” It is no less than this, and it concerns the possibility of reawakening the “I” so that it can truly become interested in something that helps it emerge from the uneasiness it experiences, from the reduction of itself almost forced upon it by the way everyone looks at it. For this reason, the true challenge is for the “I” to once again be present with all its needs. This is the value of a gaze on the “I” that perceives it according to its true nature, thus with all its elementary needs and evidences. The “I” needs an adequate provocation to reconstitute itself precisely as an “I.” Again, Fr. Giussani says, “our original human experience does not exist actively, if not within the form of a provocation, in other words, within a modality in which it is stirred” (*Dall’utopia alla presenza. 1975-1978 [From Utopia to Presence]* Bur, Milano 2006, p. 193). What we call provocation is a form of action.

What is this provocation? What can provoke in the “I” the activation of its constitutive needs? The “I” is challenged, is provoked only by reality; in particular, the “I” of a young person is provoked by reality inasmuch as it is present through adults, teachers. The question, then, is whether we constitute an adequate provocation for the kids, otherwise sooner or later we will give up without having helped them at all, just complaining about the situation. Only an encounter able to reawaken the “I” can be adequate to the situation of young people. Just think, already back in 1960 Fr. Giussani identified in this the very grave deficiency of modern teaching: “The young person is not sufficiently helped to enact the experience of correspondence between reality and his or her consciousness” (*Porta la speranza. Primi scritti [Bring Hope. First Writings]* Marietti, Genova 1997, p. 17), between reality and oneself, the needs and evidences within. The young person is not sufficiently helped to enact the experience of the truth that is actuated in the encounter between the elementary needs of the human person, which notwithstanding everything remain—remain!—and that which corresponds to them. We all know that they remain. Just do something unjust to a boy and you’ll see that the most solar elementary needs remain in him, for example, that of justice. We observe this also with our children: try to cheat with them and they see it. It is useless for us to reduce them to the antecedent factors: their needs endure.

Notwithstanding all the influence of the environment, of the powers that be, notwithstanding the attempt to reduce the “I,” there is something that endures, even under tons of debris, under a thousand distractions. It is there! It is the nature of the “I.” It is the elementary experience, that nobody can entirely erase. Therefore the first question is whether we enter school thinking of our kids as facts of elementary needs and evidences or whether we look at our children this way. First of all, before any attempt of ours, a judgement, a gaze on the “I” must characterize us. It is a conception, before all our attempts that at times may be blundering ones. It is a cultural position to take concerning them. If we succumb to a reduced gaze on the person, we are finished, and consequently we will be incapable of challenging the young people. A young person does not find himself in a certain situation because he is “wrong” or because he has suffered certain wrongs in

the past. Precisely because he has experienced all these things, the only hope for him is that there be someone who still looks at him for what he is, who does not reduce him to his antecedents, because only this gaze can give him the hope to start again.

For this reason, the grave thing is not so much that certain things happen and that the kids can live in a certain situation. Graver still is that we have yielded to a mentality that first of all is false because notwithstanding all the psychological or biological or sociological or circumstantial influences, the “I” exists, and how! If one does not start from this cultural position, which is first of all a conviction of the teacher, the possibility of having an impact on the young person is reduced to practically nil. We could end here, because gaining awareness of the urgency of finding again an unreduced gaze on the kids is what I have most at heart, and all the rest depends on this.

TINO GIARDINA

Another teacher, this time from Sicily, has written us about the situation of Italian schools in recent months. *“The recent massive protests in the scholastic world were the sign of an unease that sought relief in the possibility of becoming united “after so long” against a change seen as an enemy. Now, after the protests in the streets, the unease persists, worse than before, and we have seen in our schools solitude and individualism, a certain defensive corporativism, the culture of complaint, the propensity to react rather than reflect and dialogue. But [this teacher asks] nobody or almost nobody has talked about the task of the school, its nature and its purpose.”*

What do you think is the authentic task of school, the nature and purpose of school, and what can help to recover its authentic purpose?

JULIÁN CARRÓN

The unease does not concern just the kids, but first of all us adults who find ourselves in the fray, as this teacher reminds us. This is why it is interesting to remember what the task of the school is, but in doing so we cannot ignore the current unease, because without keeping in mind both factors we will end us saying, “Okay, school has this job, but then in reality there are issues that keep us from achieving this purpose for which it exists,” and so we end the game. The task of school is to teach—it seems that no great acumen is needed to understand it—that is, to transmit to the new generations the accumulated wealth of a people, so that each new member need not travel the whole journey all over again. If this were not the case, we would still be living in caves.

We all desire to hand on to our children the wealth of experience that we have accumulated, what we call “tradition.” In fact, tradition is the wealth of a past. The issue is how we can transmit this wealth, which must pass from the person who possesses it to those who must receive it. This transmission always takes place within a dialogue. I am struck by an observation of Fr. Giussani’s, because it seems to me crucial from the point of view of method—many of you know it—“I’m not here so that you can take my ideas as your own, but to teach you a true method that you can use to judge the things I will tell you.” (*The Risk of Education*, The Crossroads Publishing Company, New York, 2001, p. 11). What teacher on the first day of school puts in the students’ hands the method for judging everything, even what he himself will tell them? What a wager on the truth of what he will propose! What faith in the fact that the student can recognize the truth or not of what is proposed!

This means that Fr. Giussani was aware that education does not happen without the constant collaboration of the students, and therefore constantly engaged them starting with the first moment, not merely to have them repeat what they had been taught, but above all so they could

verify and judge everything that had been handed over to them. He put in the students' hand the criterion of judgment. This forces both the student and the teacher to refrain from cheating: the teacher cannot cheat after offering the criterion of judgement, but neither can the student. The teacher offers instruments for this dialogue, so the student constantly engages in action, interested to verify the truthfulness or not of what is transmitted as a working hypothesis. In fact, what we have received from the past, what has already become in us a certainty, we offer to the students as a "working hypothesis"—I like this expression of Fr. Giussani's very much—for entering into reality, and thus not only to obtain a formal repetition, but so that they can verify themselves the truth of what we say, recognize it and embrace it because of reasons intrinsic to the evidence of things.

"What from your father you've inherited, you must earn again, to own it straight" (*Faust*, vv. 682-683, A.S. Kline 2003 <http://www.iowagrandsmaster.org/Books%20in%20pdf/Faust.pdf>) said Goethe. This demands that the student be constantly in action in the reception of a tradition, that will be able to become conviction in him if it is verified in experience. For this reason, already in the first moment of the educative act, the other is involved. Only in this way can the young person grow aware of having in her hands a method that allows her to walk ever closer to certainty. I must acknowledge that one of the things that most fascinated me when I encountered a personality like Fr. Giussani, with a unique capacity for educating, was the fact that he put in my hands the criterion of judgement to be able to verify in experience the truth of any thing. In this way I could discover the truth from within my experience, instead of repeating certain things in a formulistic way. Before meeting Fr. Giussani I had already learned many things, but it is one thing to repeat the words without living them, without discovering the luminosity, the evidence from within experience itself, because only in experience are things truly known.

I often repeat a line of Fr. Giussani's: "Reality makes itself evident in experience." And again, "Experience is the phenomenon in which reality becomes transparent and makes itself known" (*In cammino [On the Road]*. 1992-1998, Bur, Milano 2014, pp. 311, 250). Reality makes itself more transparent for people in experience. The Mystery, to make us understand something, makes it happen in our experience. Instead of giving us a lesson on love, He has us fall in love, He causes us to be born in a family. To make us understand what freedom is—another of the great words of the life of the human person—He makes us have an experience in which we feel free. To make us understand what justice is, He lets us experience something unjust. All this happens in experience. For this reason, if we do not constantly stimulate this verification, willing to run the full risk of the freedom of the other, it is unlikely that what we want to communicate will truly interest the life of our students.

What we have received from the tradition is not transmitted in an abstract discourse, but through the subjects that each must teach during lessons. Without this the young person will not be able to perceive the nexuses between things and thus will not understand, and studies will be an accumulation of data that she cannot hold together. For this reason students often repeat things—and now, with Internet, they take information from here and there, copy and paste and it is done—while the fundamental activity of the "I" is to perceive the nexuses between things. What has become of this capacity? What kind of kids are we educating? And instead, what type of subject emerges from a teaching that respects the method indicated? No matter what aspect of reality we want to face, it cannot be dealt with without the nexus with everything.

This seemed even more evident to me presenting the encyclical *Laudato si'* in Naples last week. It faces the problem of the relationship with nature, ecology, a theme to which we are all still sensible, toward which we feel a spontaneous fondness; other evidences may have collapsed, but

this one has not yet entirely collapsed. When we go to the mountains we would like them to be clean and for the kids to have an experience of beauty, to be truly struck by the beauty of nature. But when we begin to look into the subject, we ask ourselves, why is there concern today about ecology? Why didn't something go as it should have, according to the example that is stupendous from the point of view of the method, which Benedict XVI gave at the Bundestag: just an example was needed to make the ideology to the contrary collapse, simply the experience of a few young people in the 1960s who perceived—do you see what elementary experience is?—that something was not right in the way of treating nature. Now it is clear to everyone. All of us are concerned, and from this has arisen the desire to face the question of ecology. But the Pope explains that in order to be able to use reality well, in order to be able to have an adequate relationship with it, a new humanity is needed, because we humans were the ones to use nature badly, to have a mistaken relationship with it. Therefore, until man has a different attitude, there is no use complaining, because we will continue to treat the environment badly. If man does not respond to the totality of his drama, if he fails to fill the void in him, he will continue to multiply the attempts to possess and use everything in a mistaken way, and there will never be a different ecology.

It is impossible to educate without starting from a particular question, but in doing so it is impossible not to engage the totality of reality and of the conception of man and the awareness of what can respond to the emptiness of man so that he is not forced to appropriate reality in a mistaken way. If, in the way we introduce a young person to the reality of a subject we do not have present all the nexuses, it is impossible that we can interest him; consequently we find ourselves dealing with the unease of the class. But we, too, feel this uneasiness, as we were saying shortly ago, we too have all the problems that the teacher's question posed. Why? Because we are women and men, and just as the young person can be determined by the facts of his or her own life, so we too can be uncomfortable because of a particular situation, and so then individualism prevails in us, solitude, complaint. This is the reason why, after having articulated in words the task of school, we often say, "Yes, yes, fine, but this is unattainable in my situation because...". We are the first to do the test in front of the kids; it is not just them doing it with us.

Therefore, it is a matter of seeing whether we have a way of facing all the problems that interfere with teaching, testifying to the kids how one can face the various forms of unease we have, in such a way as to offer a hypothesis of solution for their forms of unease as well. The problem is whether we perceive all these issues as an obstacle or as an opportunity for us to verify our hypothesis of interpretation of the reality of life, that is, whether we have a meaning for living also in these circumstances. If we do not have it, this will be clear to the kids. How? Because they will see us enter the class determined by the circumstances, and we will not be able to avoid transmitting to them an unease and, with it, our incapacity to face it.

For this reason, our problem is whether a situation like the current one represents the opportunity for an adventure in our human journey as adults. This is the most fascinating aspect of our educative task: we are not spared all the challenges of living, and the fact that we have to live them in front of the kids can be a stupendous opportunity not to cheat with them, and not to cheat with ourselves. Why? Because the students, like our children—the issue is not different—understand very well when we are not responding to these challenges, when we have an answer to these challenges and when instead we are the first to be defeated, thinking that life or school goes well when there is no trouble. This does not mean that one does not try all the ways possible to resolve the problems, but at times we dream of systems that are so perfect that they spare us being good. And in the meantime what are we doing? We remain inert or we complain.

Only people who have a response that measures up to the present situation will be truly able to be part of the real renewal of school. Only if there are experiences underway will colleagues and students be able to see witnesses to another way of living and teaching in the same situation as everyone. This is the challenge, because school will not change only through the directives of the Education Ministry, which will always be useful—and it is better that there not be mistaken things—but it is not the decisive question for me. The problem is whether the circumstances of living are fundamental for our human journey, not only as teachers, but as women and men who teach. This is the challenge we all find before us. How can I enter into a class in the morning, after a day spent in the midst of various forms of unease? Only if I live an experience, only if I find places where I can live in such a way that all these issues do not define my “I,” can I enter into the class with a hypothesis of response visible on my face. This does not depend on anybody, except each of us. We cannot dump this responsibility on others, because in any situation there is always an “I” who can live the circumstance differently. This defines one’s own greatness, one’s own dignity as a human person. We all would like to have companions, colleagues, students who help us in living this way. For this reason, if you meet them on your road, you cannot help but be grateful, and if the kids find them in class, they will only be grateful.

I would like to read a passage from Fr. Giussani that seems to me to summarize what we have said: “Teachers are not actors, not tightrope walkers, not instruments, even if alive, in action: they are people. The source of education, the source of a communication of life, the communication of a help to develop life, comes from my life, not from my being a teacher. [...] [I] am an educator if I communicate myself” (*Realtà e giovinezza. La sfida [Reality and Youth. The Challenge]* SEI, Torino 1995, pp. 174-175).

TINO GIARDINA

In your experience as an educator, as a teacher, how do you live this relationship between the discipline and the reality, between education and teaching? Precisely because it is a life, can you tell us how you live this aspect of teaching?

JULIÁN CARRÓN

I’ll give a personal example of this intertwining between teaching and experience. For years I was a professor of Introduction to Sacred Scripture. The first hour of lesson, I tried to explain to the kids how to introduce themselves to the study of a subject like the Bible. I asked them, “According to you, how should one introduce oneself to the Bible?”, because each person, even without having reflected too much, deep down already has some idea of how one should introduce oneself to the study of any thing. Therefore, the first day of lesson I had them all talk and wrote on the board everyone’s answers, for example: you need to know the date of composition of the book in question, you need to know the literary genres of the text, the meter of the verse, if it is a poem or a psalm, the circumstances in which it was written, the language. After they had made the whole list, I said, “Let’s do a simple verification. Imagine that I propose a love poem, giving you all the information you listed to introduce you to the knowledge, the understanding of the text: the meter of the verse, the date of composition, the circumstances in which it was written, the dictionary in case there are some words you do not know, everything, everything.” Once I had transcribed all their answers, I challenged them, “According to you, is someone who has all this information able to perceive all the density of the poem?”. I don’t know for what mysterious reason, but every time the kids told me, “No.” “Why not? According to you, why not? Why not, if I

have given you everything you considered indispensable for understanding a text?" (Beyond the example, this holds also for a Greek or Latin text, or one by Leopardi). There was something in the kids' intuition that made it clear that their long list of conditions was not enough.

At that point, I continued the lesson by asking them, "So then, what is a poem?", precisely to help them understand why their answers were not sufficient. "A poem is the literary expression of a human experience, for example, a love. A person has lived a certain experience and wants to communicate it; when he has literary talent, he expresses it in the form of a poem. So then, to be able to understand the poem you have to discover the human experience that is behind the literary work." I gave an example: "Imagine that you are going through a difficult time and you feel lost. You don't know where to go; you are confused. At a certain point, after various efforts, you reach the conclusion that it would be good to ask for help. Now, when you are in this situation, you don't confide your concerns to the first person who passes on the street, but you look for the right person, someone in whom you can trust, who can understand what it is about, who can truly illuminate the situation and offer some suggestion for facing it." And I added, "When you have identified her and begun speaking with her, after a while you stop and ask yourself, "Does she understand me?". "Certainly," the other says, and yet you know she doesn't understand. You don't feel understood. From her reactions you know she doesn't understand." Therefore, there is not an insuperable distance between me and a Latin text of the tenth century, there is not a distance with the poem, but there is a dialogue between two people, as in the example I gave.

So it is not a problem of vocabulary or distance from the text, but of syntony with the human experience that emerges from the text. And so I asked, "Why, according to you, doesn't she understand you? You chose her. She's a person you trust, a good person; you know this for other reasons as well. What is missing? What is lacking in her? Why doesn't she understand? Because, contrary to what we often think, the listener's good intentions or knowledge are not enough. This is not enough. So then, what is missing? Something in the origin of the person who listens is missing, that is, an experience of living that enables her to understand your experience. If there is this lack at the origin, it is impossible for her to understand you. Analogously, to be able to understand a text, it is not enough to have all the technical instruments, because you need to grasp the human experience that is behind the poem, behind the literary expression or behind a human experience. And who can understand the human experience of the other? Only someone who has taken seriously her own human experience; only someone who has lived, who has acquired a familiarity with the human, only this someone can understand. For this reason, kids, the first thing is not to study Hebrew, the first thing is to live. The first thing for understanding a poem is to live a human experience, because only those who have this experience will be able to understand it without reducing its content. It is evident that anyone can grasp something of a love poem, but if you have not experienced being in love, you evidently will not be able to grasp it according to its own measure, *ad modum recipientis recipitur*, and so you will reduce the experience. Why? Because the vibration that you feel when you are in love is not transmitted to you by the poem. Either it is there, and so any sign suffices to trace it in me, because I have lived it, because I have perceived what human experience is love, or I fail to understand this experience."

In this way I enabled my students to realize that in order to understand, you have to live, because you cannot detach the phenomenon of understanding from a human experience without which even the deepest literary expressions elude me in their density, in their intensity. This happens in daily life: the deepest experiences elude us because we often live on a superficial level or in

appearances, so that nothing remains; everything is a desert in relationships, everything is an incapacity to vibrate in front of the experience of an other.

This is why I told my students: “If this happens with a human experience accessible to everyone, like love, imagine what experience is needed to understand those who say they have experienced a relationship with the Mystery present in history, because this is the testimony contained in the Bible.” In order to enter into that text, to understand without reducing it, the totality of an experience is needed. I need to participate in a present place in which I can have the same experience as the protagonists of the Bible. Without this experience it is impossible to understand. Saying all this as you teach the subject of study does not mean delivering abstract discourses outside the subject, but helping students to understand a text in its density, helping them to discover that all the technical instruments that we can provide them are insufficient, because understanding, knowing, is something more than all our technical knowledge. For this reason, a teaching reduced to technical instruments and notions to be learned is no longer teaching, because it does not enable them to know deep down, does not give them a complete, real knowledge of what I communicate. In any type of knowledge, everything—everything!—is always present, the “I” that knows and the object that I want to know. Without an adequate attitude, since in any case I know something, I think I knew, but actually I am reducing the content of what I think I know. The heart of the matter, the most interesting thing, eludes me. If the most interesting thing eludes you when you are teaching, why should the kids be interested in your subject? This is not an appendix, not a hat to put on top of the subject you teach, but it is decisive for attracting the students, decisive for reawakening their attention, for reawakening their interest, for reawakening all their capacity to know. It is necessary to provoke it. It is necessary that they have in front of them a teacher who provokes them to this.

As Fr. Giussani said, the transmission of a content is identified with an experience that the person lives. For this reason, the first condition is that the synthesis has already happened in the person who wants to transmit a certain content. It is the concept of generation: a person generates something if the synthesis is already inside. Given this, then there is the whole problem of the attention to dedicate to the modality of transmission. But the first question, I repeat, is that something has happened in ourselves and then, more or less clumsily, we will succeed in communicating it, in transmitting it. There’s no avoiding the need for the “conception” to have happened in us, because in the final analysis we transmit the ineffable and total vibration that a text—whatever it may be—has provoked in us.

In this process of knowledge, everything, the totality of the “I,” constantly enters into play, because you cannot detach one thing from the other. I saw this clearly when, before working as a professor of Sacred Scripture, I taught in a high school. I remember that once during religion lesson as I began to speak about the gospels as a source for knowing Jesus, I had barely finished writing the word “gospels” on the board when a boy had already raised his hand: “You don’t really think that the gospels truly allow us to understand who Jesus is? They were written by Christians, and so what credibility do they have?”. Since he added that he was not a simpleton, I answered, “It’s obvious that you are not a simpleton. Therefore this morning, when your mother put a cup of hot chocolate in front of you, you told her ‘Mom, until you certify that the hot chocolate isn’t poisoned, I won’t drink it.’”. I remember the boy’s reaction. He raised his hand and exclaimed, “But how can you say these things? I’ve been living with my mother for sixteen years!”. “Ah! So there are occasions in which it is unreasonable to be suspicious in the relationship with reality.” “Certainly.” “So what is the difference between the reaction to the world ‘gospels’ and that of the cup of hot chocolate your mother served you this morning? What is the difference?”

Both are provocations. You got up without knowing what awaited you in your lessons, that I would have written the word 'gospels' on the board, that you would have reacted in that way and that I would have compared it with your mother's cup of hot chocolate. Do you see? In front of the word that I wrote, you reacted with suspicion, but in front of the example that I gave you, you could not help but acknowledge that the most critical attitude is not that of suspicion. In fact, this morning you did not have any suspicions about your mother. What is the difference?" The boy himself had hit the point full center, and I reminded him: "As you said very well, 'I have lived with my mother for sixteen years,' so it was not reasonable for you to be suspicious, because you have sixteen years of reasons, thousands of reasons for you not to suspect your mother. So then, what is the difference between your mother and the word 'gospels'? That in the latter case you do not have sixteen years of co-existence with a fact that helps you not be suspicious. Without this, you would be perfectly justified in being suspicious; lacking the opportunity for shared living with a real present that convinces you of the truth of the gospels, it is inevitable that this suspicion should prevail. Without this shared living you will not be able to access the truth of what the gospels say." I could keep talking about these things until midnight, so crucial is it to recognize that education involves a constant intertwining of the teaching of the discipline, the position of the teacher and the student's attitude toward reality, that you need to constantly challenge and educate. Without this, there is no chance of teaching, nor of the student's having the right attitude for relating to reality in a true way and not just with her own imagination or preconceived notions. This is the most fascinating thing for an educator, that is, to be able to facilitate this acquisition of awareness through simple examples. Instead of giving a speech about suspicion, about the immorality of suspicion, which would have been useless, I brought an example that caused that boy's entire ideology to collapse. An example! This is part of our task. In the midst of the fray, when we manage to give certain examples, we see their efficacy on the students right away. It is the fascinating task of the teacher, and I will always be grateful for how much I learned in this adventure, because all the difficulties that there can be are not worth the human adventure that one lives with oneself, with the kids, no matter what the situation in which one finds oneself, because it is a constant opportunity to learn from each other.

TINO GIARDINA

It will be very interesting to see how all you have told us about the Bible applies for a Maths teacher, for a nursery school teacher. It will be very interesting to challenge ourselves on this level.

JULIÁN CARRÓN

Teaching is always a relationship with reality, any type of reality, even mathematics. I gave the example of the discussion on the gospels because you asked me to talk about my experience. But it holds for any subject.

TINO GIARDINA

I saw two math teachers looking at each other as you spoke because they were full of questions on this count...

JULIÁN CARRÓN

What kind of education to mathematics is needed so that what I said does not hold only for a lesson on the gospels! Often it can be difficult to introduce students to mathematics because we

are too abstract. Think of what a challenge it means for us, to introduce us into a way of teaching mathematics that provokes and arouses the interest of the kids.

TINO GIARDINA

It can happen that the adults who are involved in the educative adventure experience conflict rather than collaboration, for example, parents and teachers who blame each other for the situation of the students, or, as a teacher wrote us, *everything is reduced to a forced collegiality among different extraneous subjects*. But last year, on May 10th, Pope Francis reminded us instead that it takes a village to educate a young person.

What does it mean today to live a unity among teachers, principals, families, and students that is useful for supporting the growth of the child, the young person, in the adventure of knowledge?

A second question: what contribution and prospects for work do you see for associations like ours, for the twenty, twenty-five associations that are here for the good of future generations?

JULIÁN CARRÓN

It's the same the whole world over. I have been out of the sphere of school for twenty years, but I see that there are still the same problems. In fact, when I was Principal, one of the dialogues I had with my teachers was about the fact that they said they were "only" teachers, and problems that did not concern teaching were the responsibility of the families. And so they washed their hands. Instead I challenged my teachers and colleagues, saying, "Imagine that it is as you say, that a young fellow has certain problems at home and that, coming to our school, he is condemned to be looked upon as a problem; if you had son marked by a negative experience at home, wouldn't you like it if he found someone at school who looked at him differently, and that at school he found a different itinerary, without everything being dumped on the family?". The kids arrive at school as they arrive; they do not decide the family into which they are born. They do not decide what difficulties there can be between their parents, and we cannot limit ourselves to saying, 'Poor kids, what can we do?!'. On the contrary, precisely where we are, at school, we are challenged by this situation to enter into the fray. I believe all of you can understand this very well; this is certainly no big discovery! Notwithstanding the situation, we all desire and expect that kids who attend a school for years can be helped to face the challenges of their life. This is why I understand very well the image of the village used by the Pope, because we truly find ourselves having to look at reality with a united gaze that enables us to collaborate and not only lay blame on each other, parents on teachers, teachers on parents, teachers and parents on the system, and so on. The premise for this collaboration is the desire of all to participate in the adventure of education: teachers, parents, those who are engaged in school on the administrative level and the kids, because we are all in the same boat and we need to have the same goal.

This first thing we need to become aware of is that, having to face the same situation, it would be better to participate in this adventure together, first of all for ourselves. Otherwise it will be increasingly difficult to do our work as educators. From what we have said up to now, it seems to me that the first element of this collaboration is to help each other reach unity of judgment on the situation that at times asks for patience, welcoming the contribution of all those who participate in the life of the school, so as to have present all the factors. Before anything else, it is a collaboration in looking, before it is one of acting, because if we manage to form for ourselves a united image, a complete perception of the reality, we will be better able to respond throughout the educative process. This introduces the need for a dialogue among teachers, students, and

parents, each called to report the element that can help to see all the dimensions of the problem. Imagine what this means, for example, for those parents who at times cannot be totally aware of the situation of their children, when the teachers or the principal give them time to help them understand why the school makes one choice and not another. It enables the parents to collaborate, involving them in the process of education of their children. Sometimes it can seem useless, because involving everyone can slow the journey and seem more complicated because it does not go as quickly as we would like; but then later if we have to waste time explaining certain decisions to the parents, instead of involving them from the beginning, actually we do not save any time. The initial involvement of everyone is a modality of this collaboration.

Another element of this collaboration are the attempts—because what we do in the relationship with others are always attempts—the educative attempts that the teachers make, sharing with the other subjects of the school, keeping in mind all the elements in play. For example, how important it is for young teachers who arrive in your schools to find a place where this constant verification of the teaching is brought forward, where they can ask questions without feeling judged, where they can be oriented and find suggestions from people who already have a lot of experience and who sense the new questions they have.

This whole journey together cannot help but be fruitful for everyone. In this context, the work of the associations is precious. I beg you not to reduce them merely to the level of representation, but to make them places of true companionship, of answers to real problems, where the attempts made are constantly verified through reciprocal sharing and support, to be able to collaborate more and more in this fascinating adventure that is the transmission of the gusto of living to our kids.

Thank you.

TINO GIARDINA

Thank you for this fascinating re-proposal of the goal of our work as teachers and of the work of those who live school in all its facets.

The Italian school is certainly rich in people who strive daily to live their own commitment within the school for the good of the students, but experience teaches us that if one remains isolated, this engagement toward the goal of one's work over time slackens or risks weakening, and one gives up.

For this reason, we welcome Julián Carrón's last suggestion, because the main goal of our associations is to work together to support and promote the freedom and responsibility of each person within her or his own work, respecting its nature and purpose.

Thus beyond and before the task of representation, we would like our associations to be fundamental places for comparison of ideas, mutual support, and maturation of one's professional life. Working together is a value for the person who adheres and at the same time it begins the construction of a good for everyone, even starting with the little daily things.

School, young people and society need adults who live their work as protagonists with freedom and responsibility. We augur that this freedom and responsibility will always be the horizon for political and institutional choices as well. It is increasingly necessary to make it possible for those who live school every day to take on responsibility, and it is also necessary to support the freedom of the families who choose the school for their children.



Dialogue with Julián Carrón
Bologna, October 11, 2015

We hope that the things we have heard today can be the beginning of a dialogue, an encounter with all those who, each with her or his own specificity and task, live this challenge of education in the school to help and enrich each other.

The video and text of the dialogue are available at www.insegnareoggi.org

Translated by Sheila Beatty