

**The Italian Association
of Cultural Centers**

**Notes from the Assembly
with Julián Carrón**

**Sacred Heart Institute, Milan
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Marco Bona Castellotti: Welcome, everyone. I thank Julián Carrón for being here with us.

Julián Carrón: I am here first of all because of a friendship we share. I am happy and glad to be here. I am here with my whole self because I am interested in a thing like the one we are about to begin. It constantly interests me and challenges me, and so I am truly grateful for this opportunity. Now I would like to leave room for your contributions, and for the questions that came to me, because in doing so we will be able to help one another.

One of you says, “We strongly desire to understand the unifying point between our day to day life and the work of the cultural center.” This immediately gives us a starting point for a dialogue.

Along with this, I will also read the provocation that Marco sent you, which seems to me to have a lot to do with this question. Father Giussani says, “Culture is not a blank form to be filled in, when its beginning is something that has happened to us and that we can’t tear our eyes away from, a singular living reality.”

Someone else says, “During the assembly of the cultural centers in 2008, you asserted, ‘A cultural experience is the verification of what we have met, of individual experience, because individual experience is verified in the capacity it has to open one up to totality. Otherwise, over time, it ceases to be interesting. Father Giussani says again, in *Generare tracce* [*Leaving Footprints*], “Educating means helping man’s spirit to enter into the totality of reality.”” Does it not sometimes happen, even to us, that we close in on our plans, instead of opening ourselves up to totality? So what does it mean, then, to open up to totality?” This is the same concern that Francesco (of the Milan Cultural Center) has: “My cultural center does a lot of work; this is anomalous for a cultural center, because it is an honest to goodness workplace. And this fact means that the temptation to fall back into organizational concerns is always lurking. All other questions (‘Who are the people we are meeting? What are we following? What new culture are we communicating?’) are overwhelmed by the one question, ‘How should we be organizing things so we pack the hall?’ As soon as we meet someone, even someone great, a passionate witness, we immediately jump to concerns about how to arrange our next meeting with him or her. It often seems to me that we fall back into a blank form, and we conform to it. And I have become aware that it’s only in a tight comparison with those who love my work more than I do that I realize that the beauty that I am offering consists in the originality of the experience I am

living, or rather of how my self-awareness is decisive, of how important it is that I desire (or not) to be grounded in the original position, that is, the position of faith.”

So this seems to be the same concern to me: that is, what is our experience of how our work opens the person up to totality? What does opening up to totality mean? What is your experience? What difficulties are there? What issues come up along the way? What is the unifying point between day to day life and the work of the cultural center? How has the cultural center really been the spark for a work that has opened people up to totality?

I find myself deeply entrenched in the problem of organization, so much so that in the end I wonder, “I have so many meetings, but how have I grown; what have I learned?” I wanted to tell you something that nevertheless, in an awesome way, has happened: doing the School of Community (this provocation about reality, about striving to look at experience and track down the presence of Christ) has changed, at least a little, the way I look at the friends I have around me, and so I’ve been able to put my preconceptions aside a little, because I am running the cultural center with some friends, and when I start out I already know what works and what doesn’t, that this guy can tell me something interesting and this other guy can’t.

A form.

A form. Sometimes I don’t even listen. But what happened is that, with just a little openness, it was from the very people that I would have least expected that ideas came that brought me into something new. I started to get curious about how it could be possible that these real contributions were coming from the people I least expected. I was struck that, by following reality, I had to recognize something new that I could never have imagined, and that it showed me a method that fascinated me and made me grow: it made me find out a little better how this Mystery works, because the success of our initiatives and a renewed friendship that we share (okay, so we’ve fought a little, and yet sitting around the same table we talked about our own experiences)...

These are all wonderful consequences, but they are secondary. They may happen or they may not. What matters to me is that you leave here today, after finding the origin. What sparked you? What made you more open to totality? You said it.

The fact that I followed reality.

What does following reality mean to you?

That I see something new in reality – that I recognize the Mystery and so I follow Him.

The origin: I want you to understand the origin, because you said it.

The fact that there is a friendship, a relationship.

At the beginning there was no relationship. At the beginning, you thought that such things were stupid...

The fact that I had no preconception.

And how did you overcome this preconception?

By opening my heart, looking at reality.

You were smitten with curiosity, and you followed it. Do you see? It seems like nothing, but if you hadn't followed your curiosity, none of what you told us would have happened. This is interesting to me, because this dynamism can be blocked at its first stages – and then nothing else happens, except that our form holds sway; or we can allow ourselves to be challenged, struck by it. As Giussani says, it is in this love for our relationship with reality that everything plays out. It's almost unconscious, but everything else develops from this. If you had not given in to this dynamism, none of what followed would have happened; it would have been blocked. And see, my friends, that it is what someone else says is missing – this is how, when you see how it happens in you, you can learn to answer the questions that arise in reality: "Many of us often lack the curiosity to find out what is true, what is beautiful, in all the aspects of reality." Many times what you see is that people really couldn't care less about all your projects, making you more aware of a lack of curiosity around you; and very often it is first of all we who lack it. And it is only if we understand what reawakens this curiosity in us that we can help to wake it up in others. Otherwise, we think it's something mechanical; but if that were true, nothing would have changed in you! If we are attentive to how the things we learn happen, life is easy. What Giussani says is always striking to me: "The problem of life is not a problem of intelligence; it is a problem of attention." Attention is openness to reality that is so complete that it becomes true intelligence: the capacity to become aware of reality according to all its factors, excluding nothing, always discovering new things and still more things happening. And so you see that we can be ransomed from our form, thrown wide open to totality. And if we grasp this, then the activity of the cultural center forms a part of the great educational purpose which is the reality of the

movement, because we collaborate with this openness to totality. We have nothing else more interesting, more important to do.

I just wanted to tell you that later on I was amazed by the fact that this thing became a method. For example, I am becoming aware that, during the elections, I am moving in the same way.

This is the issue: you obviously had an experience because the “I” has grown. That is, your awareness, your self-awareness has grown. You learned something that doesn’t end once the backlash of sentiment has passed. It stays on as a richness of your “I,” because it has become yours. And so life becomes a path, it becomes a road where one gets richer all the time; he is different at the end from how he was at the beginning. Thank you.

This year the headquarters of the company I work for moved, so I ended up commuting. This forced me to look at the cultural center in a different way. At the beginning, I thought of it as a problem, something negative, but then I was forced to stay in a relationship with those who were running the cultural center with me, because I couldn’t do a lot of things anymore, whereas before I was doing a little of everything. Then I realized that staying in front of them and being concerned about everything they had to do, or didn’t have to do, how it was going, how they were living it, didn’t let me see myself as alone anymore. So it is not I who am running the cultural center; it is I, together with those faces. So, regarding the first question, about how it has to do with day to day life, I realized that everything is like this – that when I go to work, it’s like this. It’s not I, by myself: it’s I, within a friendship with those faces. It is not a question of “culture” for me.

This sentence has to be deleted, deleted from your brains, because if it isn’t, it means we are using the word “culture” in a reduced sense! You all know what Windows is, right? You have a friend who used Macintosh, which is what Windows then copied. When Windows crashes, the old DOS screen comes up; the “C:” comes up. When it crashes, the old screen comes up. This is exactly like us: as soon as we are distracted from our humanity, the old screen comes up. We can be talking about culture, but out pops the concept of culture that we have inside, buried in our bones. This is important, so that we realize how this screen, this form, comes out, which we drag along inside ourselves. I’m not saying this to scold anyone, but so that we recognize it. But I wanted to ask you a question about what you said, the same one I asked earlier: What forced you to come to this openness to totality? Do not back off even a twip from what you said, because you already said everything; it’s just that you didn’t realize it. What forced you to come to this openness to totality?

That by myself, I'm not enough for myself.

No! With your thought you would never have come to this; you could have gone on for centuries doing things by yourself. Right or wrong? You did it for years! What changed you?

The circumstances.

You had to commute. One aspect of reality forced you to come out of this form; it made you blow up your form. You say, "What has this got to do with culture?" It is only by living, accepting the challenged that reality constantly thrusts at us, that you are doing this; and this event, this extremely simple fact that seems to have no visible connection with the cultural center (that your workplace changed), made you become more aware of what culture is, and you started to do things differently. It opened you more to totality. You see how it is only if we live an experience in the first person, starting from an event that seems to have nothing to do with it, that we open ourselves up to a "beyond" and our "I" grows.

In answer to the first question that you read, at a certain point in my life, last year, at the age of forty-five, I wondered, "Why am I still not at peace? What is the reason that life is still not giving me the satisfaction that I am really looking for?" And yet I have a beautiful wife, three healthy children, I'm a musician, I play, I perform concerts, I teach at the conservatory... Basically, they're all questions that should lead a guy to say...

"What more do you want?"

Everything's fine, more or less, and yet it's not enough. And so I started to ask; that is, I started to pray as I had never prayed before in my life. I've been a Christian forever, so I had always used prayers I knew by heart; I actually started to really ask that His will be done, aware, as Father Giussani used to say, that His will is my complete fulfillment, because it's not "His will be done, and put up with it," like something negative; instead, His will adds to me, like a plus for me. And so really beautiful things came forth out of this, incredible things, a time of grace that I am still living now (and it's been months, almost a year now). They asked me to get involved in the cultural center and to take care, not of music, but film, which is another of my big passions, and I saw Andrei Tarkovsky's Solaris again for the first time in years: one hundred and sixty-five minutes, something that most people would call indigestible. For me, it was like I had seen the Mystery grasped and presented in this film; that is, I was so struck by this film that I asked some of my friends to watch it together

again and start a film club. For the first two films, thirty people showed up; for Solaris I sent out a letter saying that it had been something that had really changed my life: a hundred ten people showed up! It was a small event, and the leader of the film club, a leftist, was impressed, and now we're doing it again; we're going to show Andrei Rublev. Basically, it was something that bore a lot of fruit, but it really bore fruit first of all for me, because it was really one of those moments which most changed my life, and more than anything I glimpsed His hand that was always guiding me in all this, because the only reason I wanted to offer this film show was so that everyone could meet the beauty that I had glimpsed in that film and what I deal with every day when I play music. So I think it's something interesting: starting from what happens every day can become a cultural work. The fruit could be worse, or it could be better, but the fact is that it's changed me.

I'll ask you the same question: what opened you up to this totality?

The dissatisfaction that led me to start asking.

See, everyone? Being loyal to yourself: would the film have struck you so much if you wouldn't have had this wound? This is the point. Once someone starts to glimpse this, he begins to understand what culture is, as an answer. Then he dares to suggest certain things that, culturally speaking, from the point of view of the normal understanding of culture, have no appeal. It's only if you follow a path like this that you are right; otherwise, you wouldn't have had the nerve to suggest it. You would have nipped it in the bud, before thinking of it: "Wait: am I crazy, that I would suggest something like this?" Without this experience, we have the same culture as everyone else.

I was really struck by the sentence that was sent to us, that is, that culture is not a blank form when the beginning is something that has happened, something you can't tear your eyes away from, because when I think of my life, this "something" that began twenty-three years ago is more alive today than ever, so that for me not only the first stirrings with a few friends in the cultural center, but its unfolding, that is, the fact that it continues to go on, I can't separate it from something that is obvious in my life today, that is, that that beginning is like a spring for me, that many years later keeps on being renewed. When I look at my life, I realize that what makes me most grateful is that there is an experience that makes me start the day, not with the issue of the cultural center or of the school (I teach), but that the experience that I am living reawakens in me a desire to live, a desire to exist, which is solely the fruit of a grace, because turning forty and realizing that my desire to exist is more and more powerful, that my heart's desire is more and more powerful, is the proof for me that there is something else in my life.

So, tell me what opened you up more to totality.

What you said before, that is, being loyal to your heart, because being loyal to your heart for me means keeping your eyes wide open in front of what's happening.

We cannot, by the way we live, give ourselves this openness to totality. Having our eyes wide open to totality is only possible within this experience: someone takes hold of you and throws you wide open, which causes you to open your eyes. This is critical, if we want to not close ourselves in on plans, because this is what allows us to be free in certain things or certain projects. In the end, this is not the point, because you evaluate it together later, you see what is most appropriate, but in daily life what throws you open, what makes every day become your own, what censors nothing, is this. And so I ask you: What allows me to perceive any aspect of reality, each aspect, totality, as my own? Because this is the definitive principle of culture. Without it, we decide, or we get stuck by our tastes and by our opinions, by what appeals to us, but we let a lot of aspects of reality slip through the cracks, not letting them be embraced within this totality. What does it take for the beginning to keep living on like a spring? Christ here and now. Because without Christ here and now, we fall back into the form. It is not enough for you, for you to live now, if this beginning does not show itself to be true by living on now, if it does not throw you open. Otherwise, as happens to many people who are sincerely fascinated in principle, it decays and the thing that opened you (imagine a beautiful experience of being in love, that made even the sunset take on expressive power) says nothing to you after a while. You can see that the beginning is true by its capacity to last.

Seventeen years ago I went to a village in the Val di Susa, because my husband lived there. The desire that has always driven me was to not forget what had happened in my life, that is, an encounter that always made life new, and the chance to have met a different humanity. I thought that the only thing I could do, along with my husband, is to communicate it to other people, by selling Traces. After this, we also started to do School of Community at our house, and little by little we proposed the Event we had encountered to people we knew, by inviting them. Little by little, the Event became present and visible in the people we were meeting. The comings and goings of real life allowed us to meet a lot of people, especially through our charitable work of teaching catechism in our parish. Here, we started meetings with the parent, the pastor, and the catechists, but it wasn't enough for us. What it took was for the spark that we had met, started by the event, to encounter and challenge all of reality. So we started a branch of the cultural center, breaking the ice with the

presentation of Father Giussani's book Is It Possible to Live This Way? Afterwards we dealt with all kinds of topics, from work to suffering, and at the last one we had ten days ago on Caritas in veritate the bishop spoke, having us pray at the beginning. It was like opening up the School of Community to everyone and seeing the work of Someone else, way beyond our plans. Like, for example, the opportunity to have had these meetings with the pastor who got all the youth ministry of the diocese involved. There is something greater that conquers, when a simple and true humanity has a place to ask any and all questions about the event that it has encountered. Every time we have these meetings there are about a hundred fifty people, but each time I say, "Lord, you take care of it," and I remember what you told us last year: "It's for you; it's for each of you, even if no one comes." In fact, when we have the meetings, I never turn around, because I say that, even if no one comes, it's for me. Then I look at my friends from the center (there are six of us) and at the faces of the people as they are leaving and who want to meet us again. More than ideologies, people want to meet a new judgment.

Thank you! This is wonderful! In a tiny little village, something like this can happen! A presence with this level of cultural dignity: wonderful!

I really feel like I'm in the position of being blackmailed that was spoken about before, between doing and being, but I realize that in these past two years it's like I've started following a path again. By taking what you said to us two years ago at the Meeting seriously, about looking at what's happening and then about judging, I can't help but apply this to the experience of the cultural center too, even though, like I said, many times I live this thing about doing and being in rebellion: two days before an event, when everything is getting into focus, I'd like to drop everything and run away.

Why don't you?

Sometimes I think, "If something would happen and I would end up in the hospital, somebody should do what I'm doing." But I stay because I'm really stuck on day to day life these days: it's inside of everyday things that something extraordinary is happening. I could give a lot of examples, but I'll just give one. I have three children. One, my daughter, is a fourteen-year-old, and I'm kind of shocked how teenagers need some sort of buzz so that life becomes interesting for them, but we're sort of like that too – we need a "religious buzz," because we have to have something electrifying, or else day to day life bores us, and it just wears us down. But on the path that I am following, I'm really stuck on day to day life, on everyday things. That's where I want to see something beautiful jumping out for me.

Thank you. You see how, if not for this, none of all your cultural projects means anything to me, because they would not help us to enter into all the aspects of day to day life. This is what forces us to re-examine our concept of culture. This is why what you're saying – what educated you to perceive a new beginning – is tied to the source of the new beginning we were talking about before: the encounter, not a reflection on culture, is the movement's educational source.

At the beginning you were referring to the topic of curiosity. This struck me to the heart, because it's a word that's ambiguous when it comes to me, because I am extremely curious about what happens in reality, yet I realize that my curiosity sort of stops there.

This is not a problem of curiosity; it's that you stop, you block yourself at a certain point. This is where the ambiguity lies. Think of a child, when he's curious about how a toy works: if you linger on too many things and don't get to what lies beyond, to how it works, it all goes to hell. The child doesn't stop until he reaches totality. So the ambiguity is not in the curiosity, but in your freedom that blocks it at a certain point, in not being loyal to your initial momentum.

But this loyalty is an extremely hard thing to hold on to.

No, not extremely hard: impossible! Impossible, if a person is not constantly woken up. Like we were saying before, it takes the event to wake you up again. And then, once it happens (and we can't give ourselves this), is not extremely hard, because you just have to give in to it. This is exactly where we keep on going against Father Giussani. When someone would tell him, "You're great, because you are really loyal, but we are..." he would answer, "What more do I have that you haven't got? I have my 'yes' and that's it." Am I clear? We don't need anything, just to give in to it, because in order to struggle against it you have to use more energy than it takes to let it embrace you.

So this is what frees you from a certain danger of valuing the outcome of the encounters you have with people.

It's the only thing that frees you. Because if you don't get to that point, to what in the end is the source of your satisfaction, you rely on the outcome. And this is the whole thing about culture: if we stop ourselves before getting to that point, we don't find the answer, the meaning that fills the totality of our need, and so we rely on the outcome. But if a person finds the source of satisfaction,

then he's free. Even if he were alone, he would be at peace because it corresponds to him. This doesn't mean that we don't have to do everything possible to get a result. The point is whether we're free beforehand, before the result, because otherwise it's like we're living in complete dependence on the result, like slaves. Be aware of how this can often have an effect on a cultural proposal, because we then organize things that we expect a result from, and so we're blackmailed, and we end up doing the same cultural projects as everyone else, the ones acceptable to the dominant mentality. But acting in this way does not answer true curiosity, the true problem; instead, when we're not trapped in these things, then we can really offer something that truly answers the need for totality. Our ally, the ally of a concept of culture like the one we're talking about, is none other than man's heart, which is the need for totality! But just as it is in education, so it is with culture: only someone who has lived this experience can culturally challenge the other person. And this is impossible without an experience in the present, unless I have already found what truly answers my longing, that is, the only true culture, in such a way that it can be possible for me to offer it. Otherwise, as I always say, freedom is a very rare commodity, and this is why a lot of things, in the end, replicate the mentality that everyone else has. But watch out: it's not moralistic problem. We can't just make a muscle and push. It's something different, because you might even be able to offer it once, but the second time, you can't do it anymore. We're talking about a problem with our experience, just like the problem of the educator's experience, because only if a person's had this experience can he educate a youth at this level. Otherwise, there's no longer such a thing as education, if there aren't adults who have had experience. In my opinion, this is crucial. And it's also at the origin of the cultural choices that we offer. We're not aware of it, but this is what shapes them.

We've been in existence for five years, and now we have this problem that we've been arguing about: our meetings are open to the public. The goal is to be able to meet people, and so there are announcements (this word comes to mind) of a new method that can be used to face work and everything else. The problem that we've been arguing about is that our community is very fragmented, so there is no physical place for a person to meet us. I don't want everything to stay at the cultural meeting, but to be able to physically meet people afterwards, but we don't know how to make this possible.

This is going to depend on what possibilities you have. If someone wants to meet, you have to offer opportunities, meeting times. Everything else starts from there, until you have the money to buy a place to set it up. But the first point is that at every meeting you would be able to suggest new possibilities for getting together.

So, for example, inviting people to the School of Community?

Yes, for example. Then you can take a trip, a vacation, or other activities. In every activity, we can offer the chance to those who take part to continue a relationship. In my opinion, this is important, because it's like when you meet someone: you like him, and you make an appointment with him. Life is simple.

To conclude, I'm going to read this witness to you, because to me it seems like a beautiful example of trying to follow a path toward totality, starting from a particular detail. I believe it is meaningful for everyone: "I have been working with the activity of the cultural center for years – actually, of cultural centers – because I moved to a new city, and I always sought out the cultural center as a point of reference. The insight that first moved me, within my belonging to the experience of the movement and having esteem for someone, an instinctive fondness for art, literature, and culture in general, the same instinctive fondness that led me to follow a certain course of studies and to work, at first as a freelancer and later as a public servant, in the field of cultural activities and heritage. I thought, if I have culture as a career, I can't ignore how the movement works on these things, and so I started to work with organizing the cultural center, seeing cultural activities as valuable for their own sake. But life is complicated, and between work and family, the superstructure of the organization started to be a burden. Since last year, and more and more plainly this year, the cultural center's work started to challenge me in a new and unexpected way, especially by contradicting me. For example, in the face of what I felt was the generous offer of my expertise, volunteering to guide visits to places of art, what I got was the answer, 'I'm not persuaded; it's not appealing.' I took in the blow, and it forced me to work. I happened to run across a passage from *Qui e ora* [*Here and Now*], which accurately describes the danger of considering cultural activity as a benefit or something valuable for its own sake, detached from totality. Father Giussani says, 'Even action in service of a university that is more free and fair, even ... the creation of a conscientious and bold kind of student, even the creation of professionals who are truly and socially adept, becomes "hope-able," becomes the content of hope; but as a consequence (I say it paradoxically), as a consequence it is not required, because that Fact would be enough for me! This is a sort of a reward. And it's not a required reward, because it inevitably derives from taking part in that Fact. If it were required, it would introduce an alternative or a line parallel to the totality of this Fact.' Culture, as something per se valuable, was introducing an alternative, a line parallel to the totality of that Fact. I went deeper into my work on this. I was offered the job of working on the text of the Pope's address in Paris delivered to representatives of the world of culture: 'The place in which we are gathered is in a certain way emblematic. It is in fact

a placed tied to monastic culture, insofar as young monks came to live here in order to learn to understand their vocation more deeply and to be more faithful to their mission... From the perspective of monasticism's historical influence, we could say that, amid the great cultural upheaval resulting from migrations of peoples and the emerging new political configurations, the monasteries were the places where the treasures of ancient culture survived, and where at the same time a new culture slowly took shape out of the old. But how did it happen? What motivated men to come together to these places? What did they want? How did they live? First and foremost, it must be frankly admitted straight away that it was not their intention to create a culture nor even to preserve a culture from the past. Their motivation was much more basic. Their goal was *quaerere Deum*, to seek God. Amid the confusion of the times, in which nothing seemed permanent, they wanted to do the essential – to make an effort to find what was perennially valid and lasting, Life itself. They were searching for God. They wanted to go from the inessential to the essential, to the only truly important and reliable thing there is. It is sometimes said that they were “eschatologically” oriented. But this is not to be understood in a temporal sense [as referring to the future], as if they were looking ahead to the end of the world or to their own death, but in an existential sense: they were seeking the definitive behind the provisional.’ The interesting view is the *quaerere Deum*, lying at the origin of their cultural work. Starting from passion for Christ is what corresponds to the heart. This was not the image that I was approaching the cultural center with. On the contrary, I remember that a few years ago I almost opposed this sort of radicalism, as if it were stealing value from the technical-professional approach to going deeper into culture.”

This is the point: I am glad that someone feels challenged by the radical nature of our concept of culture! She started out with her whole intention, with all her fondness for a concept of culture, and it was challenged, not because it's not necessary, but because of a need for totality. And a person feels the objection, feels the pull, feels the challenge, feels the disturbance, truly feels the backlash of this radicalism. She goes on, “I remember an argument with someone who had challenged me: ‘So you would prefer to see the show guided by Giussani instead of an expert in art history?’ I was caught in the middle: my heart would have run toward Giussani, but my reasons weren't clear.” She's really good, in her loyalty to this struggle. This is the point; this is the dualism that we often feel inside: one the one hand, our impulses; on the other, our reasons. “For me, the question remains: what then is the difference between the work of the School of Community and the work of the cultural center? In the School of Community, everything's already there. I worked on the text from the 2009 Meeting of Carmine Di Martino; it was invaluable. The School of Community allowed us to understand how central the question about reason and knowledge is. Working on the text helps me to augment my critical awareness, and it

contributes to my development of a systematic cultural position. Working on the School of Community produces a concept of reason, a use of reason which makes the question of culture different. Everything is already there in the work of the School of Community, led with such authority as experienced in the videoconferences. All the tools for judging are offered there, but it's always an open challenge for the work to become ours." The proposal may be clear, but this doesn't mean that it's ours yet; tools are needed which are not supported by this world's forms. "While working on the proposal for the next assembly of cultural centers, what came out was that this world's forms imperceptibly become our forms." It seems that in doing this work, she realized how often this world's forms become ours. "We often see reality and judge things with these eyes, if truth be told. It takes an effort, a work, so that we become truly capable of looking at and judging reality. Otherwise, we conform to the world's forms, even when they are forms coming from the Catholic side. Now the cultural center is a cultural work for me, that is, I tackle the proposals with tools that make up my education toward a critical and systematic awareness. Even classical music is interesting, because this education is an identification, by way of osmosis, with a human position, so that I can become more and more capable of forming a true and free judgment on reality, a judgment that is my own, that can really allow me to breathe, like when Carrón had us question our position on the Eluana incident. This passage of Father Giussani in *What Kind of Life Gives Birth to Communion and Liberation?* strikes me: 'At the root of every truly great human culture, just as at the root of every truly great work of art or of every true philosophy, there is always a creative insight, which undergoes the rigor of a method. An approach that forgets the importance of the rigor demanded by every single object is sentimental, but a culture that systematically censors the original insight is abstract. In some ways, the beginning of the cultural approach of Christians is outlined in the exhortation of Saint Peter to "give the reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15)... If this starting point is missing, there can be no construction of a culture in the dynamic of faith. Christian culture, in fact, is human passion awakened and empowered by the encounter. In the Pauline understanding, Christ is "the keystone from which all beings are ontologically suspended" (Huby). Existentially, this means that Christ is the only vantage point which can allow one to face any aspect of existence."

All of this is striking as a path which the cultural center, that is, your activity, can arrive at: not alongside your work with the cultural center, but within it, taking your work seriously. From this same point of view, I want to read you a passage from Father Giussani which appears in the next book of the CLU équipes: "The encounter is not the end point [as so often happens with us: we've had the encounter, and it's the end point, not the start]... The reason why the encounter is not the end point, but the start, is that we only understand

what happened [in the encounter] in our relationship with our circumstances... Reality does not get archived because we already know, we already have everything [School of Community is what says everything, but be careful:] we already have everything, but we understand what this ‘everything’ is in the collision, or to say it better, in the encounter with circumstances, people, with events. There is no need to archive anything..., nor to censor, forget, or deny anything. We understand what the ‘everything’ that we have, the truth that we have... means, what this ‘everything’ means, in judging, facing things, because through the reality of encounters and events, through the encounter – meaning with this word the relationship with people – and in events. We need to bring a judgment to bear on these relationships and on events!”

This whole work faces us; it is all left to be done. The School of Community cannot mechanically bring it about. Each one of us has to do it in facing reality. We are constantly challenged by reality. When we organize something it’s to offer a verification that what Giussani affirms (that Christ is unifying vantage point) is not a theory (applying a form), but an existential need, in the way it sheds light on anything in reality that I meet. It is in reality that the significance of what happened to me becomes clear. If I don’t bring it into play – and this is the challenge all of you have in everything you do – to make it plain to my eyes and to the eyes of others, then in the end the encounter remains an end point and not a starting point. I don’t do the School of Community and then have nothing else to do: it is the start, and there’s everything to do, just as there’s everything to do in our affective relationships, as there’s everything to do in our work. It’s verifying the encounter in any aspect of reality, even in what we’re doing in a cultural center.

Marco Bona Castellotti: Warmest thanks to Father Carròn for this assistance. It seems to me that, aside from the liveliness and frankness, and also the problems, I must add, free of any emotional inflections, the opportunity we have today is to recognize the “form” as the great enemy of a cultural experience. The form is the opposite of totality but, if you will allow me, it is also the opposite of the desire for totality, because the basic meaning of totality, if it does not remain an abstract entity, is the fact that we desire it, in our life and in what we do.