

## THE WORK OF ART

Read the story below, and be prepared to discuss the questions that follow it.

Once there was a tourist couple who visited a small village in Mexico. As they wandered through the streets, they came upon a shop that sold traditional hand-made wooden furniture. They marveled at the exquisite craft work. “Excuse us,” they said to the shopkeeper, who was carving the back of a chair. “Your work is wonderful. We’d like to buy some chairs for our dining room table. How much do they cost?”

“Each chair in the shop is about one hundred dollars,” he replied.

Pointing to one of the chairs, the couple said, “We’d like a set of six chairs, just like this one. How much would six of them cost?”

“Six chairs, *just like* that one?” the shopkeeper replied. He paused for a minute to think. Finally he said, “Nine hundred dollars.”

The couple was stunned. Surely six chairs should cost no more than six hundred dollars! The man only needed to copy the original design, so it should take him less time to complete the additional chairs. In fact, the total cost should be *less* than six hundred dollars.

They explained this to the shopkeeper. He smiled and shook his head.

“You don’t understand,” he said. “I make these chairs to use the gifts God has given me. Each one of them is a work of art. Merely copying something I have already made takes away my time and creativity. If you ask me to do that, you must pay more.”

1. Distinguish between the objective and the subjective aspects of work in the story. Give examples.
2. How does the shopkeeper’s way of working “meet the test of human dignity”?
3. Is the shopkeeper filling a job slot, or is his work a vocation? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Give examples of ways the shopkeeper’s view of work is already present in our society.
5. Brainstorm a list of ways this view of work could be increased in our society.
6. Does Christian justice support such changes in our society? Explain.
7. Do you think such changes would be good for our society? Give reasons.