

# The Catholicization of Neoliberalism: On Love and Welfare in Lombardy, Italy

Andrea Muehlebach

**ABSTRACT** In this article, I track the ways in which Catholicism articulates with contemporary neoliberalism. Grounded in an analysis of how neoliberal welfare-state reform in Lombardy, northern Italy, is rendered through core idioms of the Catholic imaginative universe, I argue that the Lombardian case offers general insight into the “moral style” of contemporary neoliberalism. In contrast to the messianic gospel of prosperity exhibited by the Protestant ethic at the turn of the millennium (a gospel that promised instantaneous rushes of wealth through quasi-magical means), the charisma of Catholicized neoliberalism lies not in its rejection of the market but in its injunction that parts of this wealth ought to be redistributed through charitable actions. Catholicized neoliberalism thus hinges on a loving empathetic subject that purportedly repairs the damages of excessive marketization. It couples market rule to moral sentiment, economic rationality to the emotional urgencies of *caritas*. Although this new culture of feeling and action tends to leave neoliberalism’s basic structural features intact, it also at times allows for the disruption of market rule. [*neoliberalism, Catholicism, love, voluntarism, moral style*]

**RESUMEN** En este artículo sigo las formas como el Catolicismo se articula con el neoliberalismo contemporáneo. Basado en el análisis de cómo la reforma neoliberal del estado benefactor en Lombardía en el norte de Italia, fue representada en modismos centrales del universo imaginativo católico, argumento que el caso Lombardino ofrece conocimiento general en el “estilo moral” del neoliberalismo contemporáneo. En contraste al evangelio mesiánico de prosperidad exhibido por la ética protestante al inicio del milenio (un evangelio que prometía instantáneas avalanchas de riqueza a través de medios casi mágicos), el carisma del neoliberalismo catolizado se sitúa no en su rechazo del mercado sino en su requerimiento de que partes de la riqueza deben ser redistribuidas a través de acciones caritativas. El neoliberalismo catolizado gira alrededor de un sujeto empático amoroso que supuestamente repara los daños de una mercadización excesiva. Acopla reglas del mercado con sentimiento moral, racionalidad económica con urgencias emocionales de afecto. Aunque esta nueva cultura de sentimiento y acción tiende a dejar las características estructurales del neoliberalismo intactas, también algunas veces permite la alteración de la regla del mercado. [*neoliberalismo, Catolicismo, amor, voluntarismo, estilo moral*]

**RIASSUNTO** In questo articolo vengono indagate le diverse modalità attraverso le quali il Cattolicesimo contemporaneo si interfaccia con il modello neoliberista. Muovendo da un’analisi di come la recente riforma neoliberista del sistema socio-sanitario Lombardo sia stata articolata tramite i tropi dell’immaginario Cattolico, la mia ricerca vede nel caso lombardo un esempio paradigmatico del particolare “stile morale” assunto oggi dal neoliberalismo. In

netto contrasto con il vangelo di prosperità messianica predicato dall'etica protestante di fine millennio (il quale ha prospettato al fedele opportunità di guadagno istantanee attraverso mezzi che rasentano il magico), il carisma del neoliberalismo Cattolicizzato non risiede nel rifiuto delle dinamiche di mercato, ma nell'imperativo morale che impone ai fedeli una redistribuzione sociale delle ricchezze scaturite dal mercato attraverso opere di carità. Il neoliberalismo Cattolicizzato si incentra così su di un soggetto animato da empatia ed amore nei confronti del prossimo suo, il quale si incarica di riparare ai danni di un'eccessiva mercificazione. Esso amalgama le regole del mercato con il sentimento morale, il razionalismo economico con le urgenze emozionali dettate dalla carità. Nonostante questa nuova cultura di azione e sentimento tenda a lasciare intatte le caratteristiche strutturali del modello neoliberalista, essa talvolta apre spazi per il dissolvimento del primato del libero mercato. [*neoliberalismo, Cattolicesimo, amore, volontariato, stile morale*]

I start with four scenes and one proposition.  
 Scene 1: It was 2005, and I was sitting in a parish common room with Michele, a young man who works for a nonprofit organization that trains Milanese high school students in the art of volunteering. His was just one of the many volunteer classes taught by various organizations in the northern Italian region of Lombardy today. As elsewhere in the world (Milligan and Conradson 2006), voluntarism has exploded in northern Italy in the context of the state's withdrawal from the provisioning of social services. Thousands of volunteers provide services in the form of care toward the elderly, immigrants, the poor, and the disabled. Michele started his classes by displaying images of human suffering, instructing students to "see with their hearts, not only with their eyes," and by then asking them what they felt (they said: "compassion, anger, pity") and who should act upon this suffering ("the state," whereupon Michele instructed them that, no, they themselves were responsible, or at least coresponsible, for the common good). Sitting under a giant banner with "I CARE" (in English) written across it, Michele elaborated:

Let's take the example of a boy who doesn't understand what hunger is. If he cuts his finger and makes himself suffer, even if it is only for ten minutes, half an hour, an hour—that's how he can begin to imagine what someone feels who goes through this for their entire life. That's how he understands. [Conversation with author, November 15, 2005]

Scene 2: Giorgio Vittadini, then-president of a powerful organization called the Compagnia delle Opere (Fellowship of Good Works, or CdO), spoke to five thousand members at its national assembly in 2000. This hugely influential business organization was founded in 1986 and consists of over 340 thousand member businesses and coordinates more than 15 hundred nonprofit organizations. The CdO is the economic arm of the conservative Catholic movement *Comunione e Liberazione* (Communion and Liberation), whose piety is combined with both free marketeering and a deep immersion in the traditional world of Christian Democratic politics (Ginsborg 2001:133). In his speech, Vittadini argued "for a politics that does not put obstacles into the paths that life

takes" and against "the manipulation of society by the state." Italians, he said, need a "state that is truly secular [and] in service of social life, according to the Aquinian concept of the common good" (Chiarini 2000). Years later, Vittadini, now president of the Foundation for Subsidiarity, argued even more explicitly against the "Hobbesian" welfare state and its incapacity to think of humans as capable of "positive impulses." Citing a papal encyclical and Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Vittadini argued for a "positive" conception of humans as "spiritual beings" who naturally realize themselves through "interpersonal relations" of sympathy, compassion, and pity (Vittadini 2009:1–3).

Scene 3: In 2003, I sat listening to speakers at a conference entitled "Creating a System of Proximity," organized by the Catholic organization Caritas. The keynote speaker was Don Virginio Colmegna, who was then the head of Lombardy's Caritas, an organization that mobilizes thousands of volunteers into service provisioning. Colmegna is a priest with strong Leftist commitments—a *prete operaio* (worker's priest) who worked in factories during the social uprisings in the late 1960s to be closer to everyday experiences of exploitation and struggle. Nowadays he vehemently battles the government's fiscal austerity and its abandonment of the poor. At the conference, he was giving one of his famously charismatic speeches. Eyes wide open and fixed on the audience, he spoke of volunteering as a pure act of gifting, with a content and temporality profoundly different from market logics. "Because people develop bonds, dependencies, even friendships," he explained, "the relationship initiated by volunteers should ideally continue indefinitely. This is what distinguishes volunteering from a service that is monetized and discrete. Volunteer work," he said, "is not discrete and not measurable. It is expansive and qualitative and productive not of measurable value, but of solidarity!" (conversation with author, November 13, 2003).

Scene 4: In 2010, the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences met to discuss the global economic crisis in light of the moral principles enshrined in the church's social doctrine. In his address to the academy, Pope Benedict XVI argued for the "essentially ethical nature of economics as

an activity of and for human beings”—for an economics that places the person at the center of its activities and that is not amoral and autonomous per se (Pope Benedict XVI 2010:15). Economics, like life more generally, ought to be infused with the ethics of charity (*caritas* or “authentic love”). Indeed, that “interior impulse to love authentically” is “planted by God into the heart and mind of every human person” (Pope Benedict XVI 2009:1–3).

I would like to propose that these scenes are refractions of an articulation currently under way between contemporary neoliberalism and Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> Why has Catholicism become good to think with for many social actors engaged in projects of neoliberalization today? Why are some features of neoliberalism so appealing to many Catholics? All of these scenes represent moments—albeit at vastly different scales—in Catholicism’s attempt to infuse the contemporary world with love (charity or *caritas*). The church does not consider love to be a human emotion. Instead, love is an expression of the divine. Love is neither “personal sentiment nor romantic emotion” but a “theological principle or ontological premise—a force on which being itself is based” and that is not “derived from anything that is” (Mayblin 2012:246–248). Indeed, a long Christian tradition starting with Augustine posits that the inaugural event constituting God’s creation was divine love—a gift free, gratuitous, and so unmerited by us humble humans that we could never dream of reciprocating it. Without this gift, without this primordial moment of life-constituting, revolutionary excess, all would “lapse into immobility and nothingness” (Fitzgerald 1999:391–392).

Yet love, like Catholicism itself, is a hybrid beast and can express itself in multiple ways. After all, Catholicism, like Christianity more generally, consists of competing centers of religious (as well as political and economic) power. Its “core,” characterized by the “inconsistent hegemonies of mystical and scholastic Catholicism,” is internally contradictory and shaped both by the “reverse flows of energy” from the “periphery” and by “the syncretistic transformations of official doctrine by local belief and practice” (Schneider 1991:183). Love can therefore appear in the form proposed by Giorgio Vittadini, as a sentiment felt by human “spiritual beings” desirous of relieving suffering through good works. Here, the poor are made objects of love and met with charitable acts. As an ethic of “distributive justice” this form of love sets forth “the obligation of the person with superior responsibilities to his/her subordinates” and makes sure “that the burdens and benefits are distributed among subordinates in equal or proportionate fashion” (O’Boyle 1998:18). Love here functions not to alter status but, rather, to reproduce it in the form of a highly differentiated moral order (Parsons 1942). In Lombardy today, it is this kind of love that is integral to the neoliberalization of welfare and that is systematically marshaled by the state.

Yet love can also be expressed by those unruly subjects who reject pity and who insist on developing “bonds, dependencies, even friendships” with the poor, as Don Colmegna

puts it. The love promoted by the worker–priest is a form of solidarity that resists the paternalism of charity and insists on social justice and equality. Here, love, rather than suppressing “equity consciousness” and obviating critiques of injustice (Schneider 1991:188), “easily reinforces ideologies of social and economic equality” and confers legitimacy to egalitarian critique (Schneider 1991:194). For Don Colmegna, love must be tied to a commitment to a redistributive system based on justice and rights. This love refuses to ground itself in often fleeting individual acts of fellow feeling and understands the gift as a refusal of market logics. How, then, does the appearance of this loving subject in the midst of welfare reform, a subject that can be both critical of and complicit in projects of neoliberalization, reinvigorate and reconfigure both neoliberalism and Catholicism?

Lombardy has in the last two decades seen the rise of a distinct mode of neoliberal governance steeped in elements of conservative Catholic social doctrine (Colombo 2008). The regional government, a stronghold of right-wing politics spearheaded by the People of Freedom party founded by Silvio Berlusconi and the anti-immigrant, secessionist Northern League, refers to citizens as clients who now freely choose services in a welfare economy increasingly governed by market logics. At the same time, the government is hyperinvested in the production of a sentimentalized public sphere organized around emotions such as compassion and solidarity. The state, while withdrawing its welfarist functions, mediates its own withdrawal by mobilizing thousands of volunteers into caring about and for the less fortunate. Many citizens, Catholic or not, agree with Giorgio Vittadini that the mass mobilization of a sympathetic citizenry replaces the coldness of the state with the warmth of citizens’ hearts. They consider neoliberal community care to be more “natural” than stifling modern forms of state provisioning and more effective because it is oriented away from a “distant” state toward more intimate, face-to-face forms of fellow feeling and action. The Lombardian model is thus in line with the Vatican’s official stance on social welfare. As Pope Benedict XVI put it, a commitment to the common good animated by charity “has greater worth than a merely secular and political stand would have” (Pope Benedict XVI 2009).

Love in Lombardy thus functions as a crucial corollary to the marketization of welfare and as a key sentiment in the restructuring of care. But the goal of the Vatican is for love to be a force in economic life more generally. When Benedict XVI insisted that capitalism had become a disenchanting machine deadened by the “impoverished notion of economic life as a sort of self-calibrating mechanism driven by self-interest and profit-seeking” (Pope Benedict XVI 2010:14), he attempted to counter market fundamentalism with Catholicism’s own charismatic magic. By reinserting *caritas* not only into “micro-relationships (with friends, family members, or within small groups) but also [into] macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)” (Pope Benedict XVI 2009), the pope proposed a global economic order where the boundaries between nonprofit and for-profit ought to

fall. Love, for Benedict XVI, must be recognized by all as a metaphysical force that ought to infuse the mundane and that allows eternity to enter the temporal world (Pope Benedict XVI 2009).

The task of this article is to track the role of love as a key element in the reorganization of Italian welfare provisioning and to thereby explore Catholicized neoliberalism as “moral style”—that is to say, as an ethic or cultural sensibility that is less ideology than diffuse disposition, less explicit doctrine than “collective psycho-moral stance” (Appadurai 2011:519). Although inspired by Max Weber’s writing on capitalism’s spirit, I do not think of the moral style outlined here as anterior to “concrete calculative capitalist behavior” (Appadurai 2011:519). Instead, I think of market and morals in corollary terms: moral disposition comes with market disposition. I here draw on Karl Marx’s brief statement on capitalism’s moral style when he argued that whereas “the ethics of political economy is *acquisition*, work, thrift, sobriety . . . the political economy of ethics is ‘the opulence of a good conscience, of virtue’ ” (Marx 1987:97). For Marx, liberal political economy exhibits not only a market but also a moral face. This moral face was one where political economy’s doctrine of ascetic self-denial (“The less you eat, drink and read books; the less you go to the theatre, the dance hall, the public house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save*—the *greater* becomes . . . your *capital*” [1987:94–95]) was dialectically intertwined with a political economy of ethics propelled by the desire for a good conscience. Just as the devaluation of the human world grows in direct proportion to the increase in value of commodities, so does the opulence of virtue flourish in proportion to market rule. Moralization abounds in proportion to commodification, the desire for good conscience in proportion to exploitation.

The Lombardian experiment is thus more than a mere local curiosity.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it is a variant of an articulation that is extending itself into and beyond Europe and that is transforming the Protestant into a Catholic ethic: an ethic that couples the market to moral sentiment, and economic rationality to the emotional urgencies of *caritas*. Catholicized neoliberalism thus differs profoundly from the messianic, salvational face exhibited by the Protestant ethic at the turn of the millennium—be it in the form of Wall Street bankers or Pentecostal sects who present the market as an end in itself, a gospel of prosperity promising instantaneous rushes of wealth through quasi-magical means (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). The charisma of Catholicized neoliberalism lies instead in the injunction that parts of this wealth ought to be redistributed through charitable action. As an ethical orientation, Catholicized neoliberalism thus combines material opulence with an opulence of clean conscience and good feeling.

## EXPERIMENTATION

The Wall Street crash of 2008 led to a host of exuberant proclamations that announced the death of *laissez-faire* and

likened the financial crash to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Others were more hesitant and asked instead whether “flamboyant denunciations of the follies of *laissez-faire*” in fact coincide with “desperate efforts to reboot some reformed version of the same system” (Peck et al. 2010:100). Yet others cautioned that the rhetoric of crisis obscured the by-now *de facto* embeddedness—indeed, “ecological dominance”—of neoliberalism in state structures and policy instruments (Peck et al. 2010:108). Yet others still have begun to explore the potential of a counterhegemonic moment in parts of the Latin American world especially (Hardt and Reyes 2012), a postneoliberal impetus carried forward by the Global South (Brand and Sekler 2009). Critics from the same region have cautioned against optimism by pointing to the emergence of curious hybrids: “nationally redistributive neoliberalisms” based on a violent neoextractivism that simultaneously sustains “the mirage of a new modality of state intervention” through social policies and the expansion of rights (Colectivo Situaciones 2012:142). Whether collapsed, perversely resilient, or reconstituted through social protections erected upon new rounds of injustice, questions remain about neoliberalism’s fate and future. The present is met, instead, with “moments of paralysis and panic, opportunism and obfuscation, visionary experimentation and catastrophic failure” (Peck et al. 2010:100). I here want to place emphasis on the sense of experimentation that seems to undergird the present, a present that is an indeterminate terrain into which a diverse array of actors—the Catholic Church being one of them—are attempting to insert themselves.

This insertion of the Catholic Church into global economic debates coincides with another trend well captured by Ananya Roy, whereby an emergent concern over poverty “not only shapes social life but also serves as a key part of the remaking of the global economy” (Roy 2012:105). This global ethic expresses itself through a “renewal of development through reconstruction, humanitarianism, and bottom billion capitalism” (the microfinance industry); through “the struggle to find a moral compass for the forms of market rule associated with poverty interventions” (“responsible finance” and “consumer protection”); and, most importantly for this article, through “zones of intimacy where poverty is encountered through volunteerism, philanthropy, and other acts of neoliberal benevolence” (Roy 2012:105–106). Roy insists that many of these “ethical subjects” foreground moral and medical rather than market values. This “moral vision” is not an afterthought to core business (Redfield 2012:159) and cannot be reduced to “crude neoliberalism” (Roy 2012:107). One might call this a moral neoliberal that has come to accompany the market neoliberal (Muehlebach 2012): a moral neoliberal that cannot easily be read as a thinly disguised weapon wielded to mask the realities of exploitation nor as a social palliative that “corrects socio-psychological disequilibrium” and helps individuals manage inner anxiety (Geertz 1973:201). Instead, this is a larger shift in the social conventions that govern collective moral responsibilities (see also

Haskell 1985a, 1985b)—a shift linked but not reducible to the intensification of marketization. As a social and economic phenomenon, Catholicized neoliberalism weds markets to a specific moral form, a form hinging on a core loving subject that may also ambivalently disrupt market rule.

### SACRED MODERN

From the perspective of the Catholic Church, the opening afforded by the current moment is a long-awaited opportunity. After all, it looks back on more than a century of attempts to rehabilitate the sacred in light of secular modernity (Smart 2010).<sup>3</sup> Such attempts grew out of a protracted battle between the church and representatives of the modern age, a battle over moral authority and sovereignty at a moment that Catholics would come to call “one of the greatest tragedies of the nineteenth century”—the de-Christianization of Europe (Camp 1969:2). By 1891, the church had formulated a body of theory in response to what it perceived to be a triumvirate of evils: the intense anticlericalism spawned by the French Revolution; the excessive individualism promoted by *laissez-faire* capitalism; and the collectivism, statism, and secularism of a burgeoning Communist movement. Spearheaded by an encyclical written by Leo XIII entitled *Rerum Novarum* [Of New Things], Catholic social doctrine, as this body of theory came to be called, was the church’s attempt to reconcile secular industrial society with Catholicism through Thomist philosophy (Camp 1969). These attempts continued during the 20th century in encyclicals written by successive popes, including *Quadragesimo Anno* (Pope Pius XI 1931), *Pacem in Terris* (Pope John XXIII 1961), and *Mater et Magistra* (Pope John XXIII 1963). The goal was to articulate a series of general moral principles applicable to all “just” societies (Camp 1969:25).

A first moral principle directly addressed the increased radicalism of the poor and their “moral degeneration” (Pope Leo XIII 1891:Article 1; Camp 1969). Capitalism was not to be fought but accepted as an organic order within which all members participated as organs would in a human body (van Kersbergen 1995). All social groups had their indispensable roles to play in the societal division of labor. Leo XIII considered cooperation and “tranquility” between classes to be possible and natural—indeed, “beautiful”—because the division of labor was a direct consequence of the divine scheme of things, as Thomas Aquinas had already argued (Pope Leo XIII 1891:Article 19; Camp 1969; Weber 1992). As Benedict XV later wrote in *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum* (1914), society functioned best if organized around the “mutual affection” between rich and poor (Camp 1969:92), bound together by ties of charity and “a recognition of their mutual need for each other” (Camp 1969:36).<sup>4</sup> Affection, once again, functions not to alter but to reproduce social differentiation (Parsons 1942).

This decidedly nonrevolutionary vision was accompanied by the church’s sacralization of private property as a natural right (Camp 1969). The church had recently seen the fledgling Italian nation-state expropriate its vast tracts of

land, nationalize its charities, and challenge its most sacred institutions (Schneider and Schneider 1976). These humiliations provoked deep hostility in Catholics toward state interference. The church thus proclaimed private property a “fundamental principle in every ‘upright’ economic and social order” (Camp 1969:72). *Rerum Novarum* was in this respect an unusual document because it was one of the church’s few interventions that did not conform with Thomist tradition. Instead, Leo XIII inserted John Locke’s theory of the propertied individual into papal social teachings. Neither Aquinas nor any other medieval theologians nor the scholastics had viewed private property as part of natural law (Camp 1969). Breaking with this tradition, the church proclaimed private ownership to be a natural—indeed, redemptive—agent in human life. After all, “men always work harder and more readily when they work on that which belongs to them; nay, they learn to love the very soil that yields in response to the labor of their hands, not only food to eat, but an abundance of good things for themselves and those that are dear to them” (Pope Leo XIII 1891:Article 47). It was private property that distinguished “man and the animal creation” (Pope Leo XIII 1891:Articles 5–6).

Yet the church did not promote a theory of the radically disembedded individual. Rather, it thought of all human beings as naturally inclined toward each other, not as individuals but, rather, as “persons” belonging to social groups. Human beings were considered to be embedded within *Gemeinschaft* (community) rather than aggregated within *Gesellschaft* (society). Social personalism, as this theory is called, spurns bourgeois theories of the individual and holds that man’s freedom can only be realized “amidst other men in their social and historical conditions” (Smart 2010:27–28; see also van Kersbergen 1995).

Crucially, it was the family that served as “the original human society” and “the foundation of all others.” The family was “the model for social entities at all levels” (Camp 1969:30). For Catholics, a just social order would allow the father to fulfill the sacred duty of providing for his family (Camp 1969). Analogously, the distributive mechanisms that ought to organize society were charitable, reflected originally in the love of the father and, transposed into the level of society, in the paternalistic love of the rich toward the poor. This emphasis on the embeddedness of individuals within a hierarchical yet loving order culminated in the church’s enshrinement of “subsidiarity” as a key organizing social principle. According to this principle, society grew out of “a delicate interdependence in which different social groups owed one another active solidarity . . . The state and politics had a role, but in facilitating, rather than substituting for, the active agency of groups and moralized individuals working together” (Holmes 2000:39). It is in this light that Benedict XVI’s proclamations must be read. “We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything,” he wrote in 2005, “but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and

combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need” (Pope Benedict XVI 2005). By considering reciprocity as the heart of what it is to be a human being, “subsidiarity is the most effective antidote against any form of all-encompassing welfare state” (Pope Benedict XVI 2009).

Wedding Aquinas to Locke and *homo oeconomicus* to what one might call *homo relationalis*, the church has spent more than a century crafting a social doctrine that combines the sanctification of private property with a conception of the person tightly enclosed within the reciprocal, loving relationality of families, neighbors, and local communities. Private property and (at least some degree of) social inequality are considered to be an expression of a divine order of things, as is the human capacity to love and give.<sup>5</sup> In fact, as Jane Schneider has argued, love and social inequality have in Christianity been intertwined from the start. As early Christianity arose in tandem with the expanding Roman Empire’s commercial and military rule, and its concomitant more stratified social order (Schneider 1991), new social inequalities cohered well with Christianity’s “ideas of a generalized, abstract love” that was supposed to infuse the entire Christian *communitas*, including relationships between enemies or between social inferiors and superiors (Schneider 1991:192). For Schneider, such “generalized a moral sentiment obviates dwelling on the consequences of one’s acts or venting moral outrage at local level injustices and encroachments.” Although whole “categories of distress” such as widows and orphans were recognized, their plight was interpreted as the outgrowth of a generalized worldly depravity that was beyond human comprehension rather than as a victimization by particular, responsible others (Schneider 1991:192). With the rise of a God who was “categorically forgiving” came the rise of an ideology of forgiveness that humans, likewise, should unconditionally practice (Schneider 1991:193). Such love was not merely preached but practiced as the reach of early Christianity expanded through small-scale communities of brotherly love—congregations where all children of God would come together despite their differences in status. Schneider recognizes the potentially radical egalitarian message entailed in the concept of brotherly love but shows that since its inception it was more often used in the service of reproducing social inequality. Indeed, much later, love would “enhance the legitimacy of proto-capitalists” (Schneider 1991:194–195) and “smooth over and even delegitimize the sharpened ethical dilemmas that accompany monetization, commercialization, and capitalist development” (Schneider 1991:205).

### THE MORAL AND THE MARKET SUBJECT

In Lombardy, 20th-century commitments to welfare-state building have long been replaced with the argument that the state ought not to have a monopoly over care. Reformers cast the privatization of social services onto the nonprofit and voluntary sector as a new democratic collaboration between the state and society, whose latent vitalism slumbered far

too long under the heavy blanket of welfare-state paternalism. Regional ex-president Roberto Formigoni repeatedly argued that the modern state stifled peoples’ natural desire for reciprocal relations because it never trusted them in their sovereignty and creativity. By summoning new social solidarities that challenge those of the modern state, welfare in Lombardy has for two decades now moved toward decentralized and privatized (or, in the language of Catholicism, subsidiary) forms of provisioning. Rather than monopolizing the sacred duty to care, the now “secular” state has made all equally responsible for the common good.

Formigoni, who is a member of the Compagnia delle Opere and who during his regional presidency was accused of filling numerous regional political positions with members of the same organization, built Lombardian welfare using the grammars of Catholic social doctrine. The key concept used was and is that of subsidiarity. Promoters of the Lombardian model of welfare argue that its original meaning was first expressed by Pope Pius XI, who referred to both the “vertical” distribution of powers away from the “colossus” state toward local intermediary bodies as well as the “horizontal” distribution of powers between public sector and private actors (“persons, family, non-profit organizations, market”). The aim was to mitigate against excessive individualism and the “destruction of the social fabric” (Colombo 2008:182–183).

Arguing that this vertical and horizontal rearrangement of responsibilities and duties will provoke a “cultural and even anthropological” shift in citizens’ conceptions of “man and society” (Casadei 2000), Formigoni insisted that Lombardy’s new “welfare society” differs significantly from neoliberal models of welfare because it is inspired by Catholic social doctrine.<sup>6</sup> Yet the deep structural shifts that have transformed Lombardian welfare can only thinly veil the fact that the lived reality of a Catholicized welfare system bears “a distinct affinity with strategies of public service liberalization” that have been pursued elsewhere “for efficiency’s sake” (Colombo 2008:193). Indeed, the subsidiary form that accompanies the restructuring of welfare in Lombardy strongly resembles the neoliberal rescaling of welfare in many parts of Europe and beyond—away from a Fordist–Keynesian government of society in the name of the national economy toward localized welfare communities, many of which are fraught by the new inequalities and poverties so characteristic of neoliberal entrenchment (Brenner and Theodore 2002).

Indeed, the restructuring of modernist state space through the idioms of Catholic social doctrine are not occurring in Italy alone. As Douglas Holmes (2000) has shown, much of the architecture of the European Union is similarly oriented around subsidiarity as a master trope. It was the Maastricht Treaty that first placed subsidiarity at the core of the EU political imaginary. Since the 1990s, the term has become the defining concept around which the European Union has structured its political visions of decentralization and devolution. Anyone asked to trace the concept’s origins refers to Jacques Delors, the key architect

of the European Union and a French Catholic Socialist very involved in France's Catholic labor movement. Deeply knowledgeable about the church's social teachings, Delors's championing of subsidiarity on the EU level profoundly influenced the architecture of the emerging EU polity, even though Catholic social doctrine is, of course, far from being its official doctrine (Holmes 2000). In this universe, it seems natural to leave welfare provisioning to the societal entities peopling civil society, as they are considered to be "closer" to the family and local community than the "remote" central state (Esping-Anderson 1990:61). Social personalism has similarly enjoyed remarkable revitalization not only in Lombardy but also in Christian Democratic politics in other parts of Europe as well, where welfare states are also being restructured through a moralized restoration of associational initiatives (Dierickx 1994). A recent open letter written by Georgetown University professors and addressed to ex-vice presidential hopeful Paul Ryan offers insight into comparable processes unfolding in the United States as well. Ryan was accused of misusing subsidiarity as a "rationale for gutting government programs" and that "subsidiarity is not a free pass to . . . abandon the poor to their own devices. This often-misused Catholic principle cuts both ways."<sup>7</sup>

In Lombardy, "horizontal subsidiarity" has in practice allowed for a drastic decrease in public funding. Hiring freezes prevented local governments from satisfying growing demand for public services directly. Provisioning was devolved and privatized to nonprofits, social cooperatives, Catholic institutions, and trade unions. Thousands of citizens were marshaled into voluntarily providing what reformers often call "proximity services" in the welfare community. All groups were made subject to market logics and now bid competitively against each another for public contracts (Bifulco and Vitale 2006). In this "quasi-market system" (Colombo 2008:191), providers operate according to new management procedures previously typical of the private sector. The "welfare society" came with a predictable set of problems. Local authorities reduced funding without serious planning and monitoring, awarded contracts to the lowest bidder, and paid little attention to the quality of services (Ascoli and Ranci 2002). Despite new state regulations aimed at halting the deterioration of services, ongoing waves of privatization have left many citizens with the sense that the historically unreliable state is further abandoning them at a moment of increased vulnerability.

At the same time, the last three decades have seen countless initiatives on all levels of government to represent volunteering as a deeply entrenched moral wealth of the nation and as an indispensable social resource for the welfare of the country. No other country in Europe relies as extensively on volunteer labor as Italy: about one-quarter of all nonprofit organizations exclusively utilize volunteers not paid labor (Ranci 2001). Voluntarism is also strongly promoted by the state, which uses 82 percent of its national social service budget to fund nonprofit and voluntary organizations (Ranci 2001). According to the most recent report made available

by the Ministry of Labor and Social Politics, the number of voluntary organizations has exploded by 152 percent since 1995. Much of this is made possible by the legal, institutional, and affective environment that has been fostered by the state—an environment that is heavily infused with core idioms and concepts drawn from the Catholic imaginative universe.

A national law governing volunteer work, for example, was passed in 1991 by the Italian parliament and became the first legal document that refers to voluntarism as gratuitous (*gratuito*). *Gratuità* (translated as "free gifting" and "free giving" by the Vatican) is central to the teachings of the Catholic Church and essential to the biblical revelation. The appearance of *gratuità* in law signals lawmakers' interpretation of voluntarism as an earthly expression of God's initial free gift to humanity: it is his divine love that precedes and thus constitutes the human experience (Baker 1983). Voluntarism was thus implicitly conceptualized as replicating this inaugural and life-constituting divine event. *Gratuità* is also a key concept in the Charter of Values on Volunteering (*Carta dei Valori del Volontariato* 2001), a document that circulates widely among volunteer organizations and was discussed in several of the volunteer classes I attended. Free gifting, the charter postulates, is the "distinctive element" of voluntarism and renders it original vis-à-vis other civic engagements.

*Gratuità* is also often appealed to by many members of the Italian public who question the nature of contemporary capitalism. The late Pope John Paul II was only one particularly prominent voice in this conversation when he insisted that society needs to convert to the idea of *gratuità*. As he said in a speech on Ash Wednesday in 2002, "Today's society has a deep need to rediscover the positive value of free giving (*gratuità*), because what often prevails in our world is a logic motivated exclusively by the pursuit of profit and gain at any price" (Pope John Paul II 2002). He argued that Christian faith, "reacting to the widespread feeling that the logic of the market's profit motive guides every choice and act," instead proposes "the idea of free giving, founded on the intelligent freedom of human beings inspired by authentic love" (Pope John Paul II 2002). Love and free giving—*caritas* and *gratuità*—have thus both become a concern of the church and the state at the very moment that care in Italy is privatized and commodified.

But how is the sacred vitality of society fostered, its energies captured and marshaled? How are citizens moved into becoming loving subjects? In some cases, local governments have explicitly called upon citizens to do good. One Lombardian municipality sent letters to 32 hundred pensioners inviting them "to not remain insensitive to the needs of the weak" and to provide services ranging from transportation to "affection" and "friendship" to the frail old, the disabled, and children (FIVOL 2005:29). In other instances, the state has sought to more systematically foster a "culture of voluntarism." Between 2003 and 2012, the state's National Agency for Socially Responsible Non-Profit Organizations

initiated a program that aimed at mainstreaming voluntarism into the country's high school curricula. Michele's class was part of this broader initiative. Today many other institutions, both religious and secular, offer courses ranging from interpersonal communication to the cultivation of relations of "proximity" among individuals. Thousands of members of the Lombardian volunteer sector are schooled in training courses every year. The state, together with its private partners, thus marshals the empathetic stances of citizens and puts "emotion"—conventionalized, stabilized, and qualified sensibilities (Massumi 1995)—to work.

These training courses are sites where one can track the concrete production of a normative moral subject governed by a particular moral style—a citizen responsive to suffering in ways reminiscent of Catholic demeanor and disposition. This was evident, first, in the exegetic exercises that students were instructed to engage in during several classes I observed in late 2005. One class, consisting of a group of middle-aged volunteers being trained over several weeks by a retired philosopher who made a point of announcing that he was *laico* (not affiliated with the church), spent a morning pouring over the Charter of Values on Volunteering. The attendees were instructed to "extract the key words that constitute the text" (they ended up focusing on *gratuità* as well as *altruism* and *solidarity*) and to critically illuminate their true meaning (*gratuità*, the group concluded, was to give without receiving). We were further asked to discuss the "essence" of voluntarism. The class responded, with the teacher writing our responses on the blackboard: *umiltà* (humility); *rispetto ed empatia* (respect and empathy); *generosità e costanza nell'impegno* (generosity and continuous commitment). One woman mentioned her desire for gratification, which the teacher wrote on the blackboard, followed by a question mark. He began to lecture on the fact that voluntarism, as an expression of *gratuità*, was entirely disinterested and that the desire for personal gratification was voluntarism wrongly understood. What he reiterated through authoritative textual exegesis was the affective core around which voluntarism in Italy is organized: gifting animated by selfless, sacrificial love.

Many classes further entailed pedagogical techniques whose very form bore resemblance to some core tenets of Catholicism: its teachings on the will and the will's education, its technique of confession (including the art of listening), and its interpretation of what it means to properly express love. Michele's pedagogy exemplified the cultivation of this moral style. For him, the necessary prerequisite for proper ethical action consisted of young citizens having their selves be pierced by images of suffering. Michele had instructed the students to view the images "with their hearts, not only with their eyes," thus leading them away from removed forms of visual contemplation and toward a visceral grasping of worldly suffering. This pedagogical technique once again echoed a long Christian tradition of divine love, also called "grace," making itself manifest on the level of bodily intensity. Indeed, the scriptures describe

God as pouring himself into human hearts through the Holy Spirit and instruct believers to glorify God in their body. The Holy Spirit thus comes to dwell in the Christian nervous system, "striking" the elect or by "softening their hearts" to respond to the word (Fitzgerald 1999:397). The human capacity to respond to divine love is not about autonomous choice. Instead, a "disposition" toward God's love is evoked and secured by divine mercy alone (Fitzgerald 1999:397). Grace, in short, is a form of affect. It is divine love received by human hearts having been struck.

The pedagogical technique deployed by Michele was further strongly reminiscent of Catholic teachings on the will and its education. In Catholicism, different kinds of will exist, including a deliberative will that results in formal choice and is often considered will in its fullest form. But Catholicism also holds that ordinary volition often takes the form of "spontaneous and immediate reaction upon very simple data" and that human beings often apprehend concrete situations "almost without reflection and achieved almost at a stroke." Will and emotion or affect are therefore treated under the general heading of appetition (or appetite) and usually distinguished from knowledge and intellect. Will as appetite is thus not pure affect or sensation. It is a "rational appetite" and distinct from the lower vegetative or sensitive appetites in that it can exercise control over them. Will, although originally moved by sensation, can and must be educated. Children, for example, are considered "creatures of impulse" who are constantly engrossed by impressions. The random actions that result from their impressionability must be tempered by the awakening of the rational faculties and the gradual development of a judicial power. This is how voluntary, *contra mere spontaneous*, attention is developed.<sup>8</sup>

Michele's class exemplified the education of will in this Catholic sense: the marshaling of citizens into bearing witness to suffering and into responding to suffering through proper affect and action. The latter were achieved through a specifically Catholic, confessional modality of self-knowledge and disclosure. Truths were considered to be hidden within individuals; revelatory acts of inscription and verbalization then allowed for steps to be taken toward reform (Giordano 2008). As is the case with confession, Michele summoned students into moving away from a past self that might have ignored suffering toward a future self that would not. It is important to note that this pedagogical form was integral to all classes I attended, including classes that were not linked to the church and instead part of what some commentators argue is an increasingly secular-democratic civil society (ONV 2006; Ranci 2001).

The cultivation of an emotive self was voiced also by many Catholic volunteers I met. "You see," one lady from a church parish providing elderly care explained to me, "the poor want to be understood in all of their pain. They want sympathy. Yes, that's what it is. It's about sharing their state of suffering. They need support that is moral, not only material" (conversation with author, October 24, 2005).

Knowledge of and encounters with the Other were considered to be best achieved through visceral rather than cerebral means, and as moved by the heart rather than the removed contemplative mind. This was clear also from the insistence, coming from both church and state actors as well as from institutions across the religious and nonreligious spectrum, that listening was central to voluntarism. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in 1984, “correct and ecclesial theology stresses the responsibility which Christians necessarily *hear* for the poor and oppressed” (emphasis added).<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Labor’s website at one point wrote that listening is central to voluntarism and “assumes its true significance . . . not as a pure and simple physical fact, but as a real and truly emotive and intellectual activity.”<sup>10</sup> Both church and state have thus created institutions that cultivate and promote this art. Caritas today manages about three thousand Centers for Listening (*Centri di Ascolto*) for the church. It describes these centers as “privileged pastoral instruments” and “an antenna of love [*l’antenna della carità*] that serves and animates local communities.”<sup>11</sup> A number of people I worked with who were staunchly laico and members of Italy’s ex-Communist party similarly insisted that listening was a key talent necessary for the proper execution of voluntary labor. Almost half of all antipoverty nonprofits in Milan offer listening as a service, in addition to the distribution of food, medication, and the provisioning of housing (ORES 2009). It is as though the encounter with poverty must be performed through more than mere material intervention and must instead be enriched by an emotive stance animated by concern and compassion.

### POST-WASHINGTON CONSENSUS NEOLIBERALISM

How does the mass mobilization of selflessness in Lombardy articulate with Catholicized neoliberalism more generally? Joseph Stiglitz, Columbia professor of economics, Nobel Prize winner, and senior vice president and chief economist to the World Bank in the late 1990s, is perhaps this new neoliberalism’s most famous proponent. Distinguishing between “Washington consensus neoliberalism” and “post-Washington consensus neoliberalism,” Stiglitz has criticized the Washington consensus’s all-too-strong faith in “unfettered markets” and its minimization of the role of government (Stiglitz 2004:1). Having dominated policies in global institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund since the 1980s (Fine 2001), the Washington consensus refers to a set of development strategies that almost exclusively focused on “privatization, liberalization in the form of structural adjustment and fiscal austerity, and macro-stability (meaning mostly price stability)” (Fine 2001:1). Proponents of the post-Washington consensus, in contrast, present it as a means to transition away from the orthodox, radically antistatist neoliberalisms of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher toward “benign” third-way neoliberalisms first introduced by Bill Clinton, Gerhard Schröder, and Tony Blair (who, nonincidentally,

converted to Catholicism as soon as he left office). Its program is, broadly speaking, made up of several key elements, some of which are crucial to the articulation that interests me here. First, the post-Washington consensus exhibits a strong skepticism vis-à-vis both laissez-faire and strong statism, promoting instead the reinvigorated figure of “society.” Rather than supposedly nonexistent (if we remember Thatcher’s famous 1987 quip that “there is no such thing as society”), society (or, as it is more often called, “social capital”) has now become a central means through which “market imperfections” are addressed (Fine 2001:139). Post-Washington consensus neoliberalism elevates nonprofits, civic associations, voluntary organizations, and other third-sector actors to key partners in policymaking and service provisioning. Promoted as adjective rather than noun (*social capital*, *social cohesion*, *social inclusion*), society comes as an addendum and descriptor rather than as an object sui generis, a relation produced voluntarily by local caring citizens rather than an a priori domain into which the state interjects.

Both Catholicism and post-Washington consensus neoliberalism ascribe a potent charisma to this form of the social. For the former, society’s intermediate bodies are animated by human beings’ divinely inspired capacity to love and gift. For proponents of social capital, trustful reciprocal social relations are conceptualized as a “powerful magnetic field” that makes some communities prosper in contrast to others (Putnam et al. 1993:153). This joint emphasis on the powers of the social, coupled with a concern about the “colossus” state and the excessive market, has made new kinds of posturing vis-à-vis the less fortunate through mutual help and charity central to post-Washington consensus neoliberalism (Fine 2001). These charitable posturings, identified by Ben Fine more than a decade ago, have today in the United Kingdom, for example, articulated themselves through a “red Tory” political theology (inspired largely by radical orthodox theologian John Milbank) that promotes a “return to ‘parish-led’ social services” (Cooper 2012:654). Such posturings have clearly also radiated outward from the “magnetic field” of “society” into the corporate world itself. As newly “ethical subjects,” corporate actors have developed their own stances toward human suffering and find themselves compelled to respond to it (Roy 2012).

Second, Catholicism and post-Washington consensus neoliberalism thus both combine a commitment to markets with the valuation of reciprocal relations. Under the post-Washington consensus regime, “stocks” of social capital accumulate if well exploited and invested, generating “social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement, and collective well-being” (Putnam et al. 1993:177). One can read this as a radical extension of the calculative rationality of neoclassical economics into realms that were previously not governed by such rules (Fine 2001). At the same time, the rise of social capital has also had economic and policy discourse shift away from focusing exclusively on “rational” market relations toward a heightened awareness of “real people’s values (not the

utility functions of *homo oeconomicus*), [and of] how people interact in their daily lives (locally, in families and work groups, not just as buyers, sellers, and citizens)” (Fine citing Bowles 1999:6). The science of *homo oeconomicus* has begun to include the science of *homo relationalis*: of humans who relate to one another not through self-interest but through dispositions—moral styles—that are, to return to Putnam et al., based on trust and reciprocity. It is not just material wealth but vibrant social relations and even happiness (Wali 2012) that are now considered key to the wealth of nations. The post-Washington consensus, although firmly wedded to methodological individualism and rational choice, nevertheless exhibits a tendency that attempts to capture and harness the powers of the relational and interpersonal. Yet this expansion of new frontiers of profit and accumulation might simultaneously entail the grounds for an “agonistic” ethics (Roy 2012:106). Like Catholicism, which weds Locke to Aquinas and the sacrality of private property to the sacrality of the social person, the post-Washington consensus similarly insists on both the disembedded propertied individual and the embedded person, on profit and trust, accumulation and reciprocity.

Yet both Catholic social doctrine and post-Washington consensus neoliberalism, even as they jointly criticize *laissez-faire*, propose theories of society and economy that tend to leave neoliberalism’s basic structural features intact. Their emphases on a new culture of cooperation and benevolence, while seemingly placing them at the vanguard in the reaction against market rule, in fact help make persuasive some of contemporary neoliberalism’s basic premises: its antistatism, its drive toward third-sector privatization and decentralization, and a generalized intensification of *caritas*. Certain strands of Catholicism and neoliberalism thus both unexpectedly share a common ethical, social, and political orientation: modes of conviction and moral sensibility that seem to suggest a fundamental realignment of the relationship of the privileged to suffering and how it should be encountered.

This displacement of a “Lutheran Washington consensus” with a “Catholic” post-Washington consensus, as Fine off-handedly puts it (2001:168), is more than a mere metaphor. In fact, the major proponent of post-Washington consensus neoliberalism, Joseph Stiglitz, is also a member of the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, founded by Pope John Paul in 1994. The academy has published on the changing world of work, the risks and opportunities presented by globalization, the dilemmas of democracy, and questions of intergenerational solidarity. The aim, says Harvard Law School professor Mary Ann Glendon, current president of the academy, is to focus on the deeper, underlying crisis of meanings and values (Glendon 2005). Through numerous meetings and a vast array of written interventions, the academy has become a vehicle through which the church has attempted to reassert its authority in worldly matters and to enchant the neoliberal project. Glendon argues that the academy has helped to “train the spotlight on the human dimensions of social issues—dimensions that are too

often ignored by value-free, or purely secular social scientists” (Glendon 2005). All members of the academy “share many of the concerns that animate the social doctrine of the Church” and appreciate continental European religious thinking because it is similarly interested in finding the key to a central puzzle that Pope John Paul II posed in his day: “how to provide a ‘moral and juridical framework’ to discipline, without stifling, the creative energies of the market” (Glendon 2005).

### MORAL STYLE

I have pointed to the co-occurrence of markets and morals, of a cold and calculating and a loving subject. What might this seemingly split moral universe tell us about neoliberal moral style? A rereading of Max Weber offers insight here.

Moral responsibility, Max Weber wrote, was cumulative in Puritanism and cyclical in Catholicism. Whereas Catholicism’s control over sinners is “at times scarcely perceptible in practice, and hardly more than formal,” Puritanism is characterized by an “unexampled tyranny” that generated an “intense form of every-day piety,” a system that focuses “on the control of conduct” (Weber 1992:36–37). Good works for the purpose of salvation does not exist in Calvinist thought. The sinner’s salvation cannot, as is the case for her Catholic counterpart, consist of a “gradual accumulation of individual good works” and of a “succession of individual acts” that can be used as occasion demanded “to atone for particular sins” or to “better his chances for salvation” (Weber 1992:115–117). Catholic realism lies in its recognition that “man was not an absolutely clearly defined unity to be judged one way or the other, but that his moral life was normally subject to conflicting motives and his action contradictory” (Weber 1992:116). Such contradictions could be temporarily resolved through the giving of alms to mendicant preachers, the undertaking of crusades and pilgrimages, the doing of charitable “works,” the saying of prayers, and the participation in the miracle of the Eucharist. All were “especially efficacious ways to hasten expiation for the ‘deadly sins’ of pride, avarice, envy, anger, gluttony, sloth, and lust” (Schneider 1991:198).

Contemporary neoliberalism’s moral style, like Catholicism’s, similarly consists of “cycle[s] of sin, repentance, atonement, release, followed by renewed sin” (Weber 1992:74). Weakness is accommodated by “various forms of penance,” such as, for example, “conscience money” (Weber 1992:74). Gifts are a means for the penitent to seek redemption and to constantly shift between “lofty ideals” and the “makeshift adjustments” necessary for the functioning of everyday life (Herzfeld 2009:10–11). In Lombardy, neoliberalism’s moral style expresses itself in precisely such terms. Its market-driven welfare system is intimately dependent on the hypermoralized world of volunteers who help resuscitate solidarity through their practices of “free gifting.” The public thus produced consists of both *homo oeconomicus* and *homo relationalis*, of both the disembedded individual and the embedded person at once. One might say that on a

global level, Catholicized neoliberalism operates according to the same corollary ethic. Cycles of extreme exploitation and dispossession are accompanied by a new ethical voluntarism; “sin” is accompanied by repentance through worldwide commitments to charity and philanthropy. Importantly, these acts of redemption—of striving for and achieving good conscience—require an Other dependent on and willing to receive our gifts and thus capable of operating as a vehicle for consolation. Structurally, such redemptive acts thus require and maintain unequal relations between giver and receiver, a paternalism that can wound because it places the receiver outside of the possibility of mutual ties (Douglas 1990). It tends to make the poor objects of love, not subjects of justice, as they are encountered through the kinds of paternalist posturing envisioned by someone like Vittadini.

Yet the problem lies in more than just paternalism. It lies also in the fact that ethical voluntarism is legally unenforceable and thus subject to the whims, fads, and desires of its agents. Because it relies on the “self-regulation and self-revelation” of individuals who then pose as “guardians” against what they deem to be the unacceptable effects of market rule (Appadurai 2011:529), this moral regime is fickle and characterized by limits that are fiscal, political, or emotional (and that, worse, differentiate between the “deserving” and the “undeserving” poor). A number of representatives of some of the most progressive volunteer organizations that I spoke to came to this conclusion very quickly. One particularly tireless volunteer said: “Until now, I have always said yes. But now, slowly, I am beginning to understand . . . that we are not a [public] institution. All we can do is offer support. We offer what we can, but we can also say no” (conversation with author, September 7, 2003). Here, the volunteer voiced precisely the inevitable logic of (voluntary) charity: that it can waver, dry up, desist, and begin to withdraw from certain kinds of suffering and certain kinds of people.

At the same time, this moral style—and the direction and meaning that love can take—is highly indeterminate. It is, after all, not a thing but a relation, and as a relation, it can harbor different meanings and practical expressions. Love does not need to take the form of paternalistic pity. It can also express itself through solidarity, which is “aroused by suffering but not guided by it” (Arendt 2006:79). For someone like Don Colmegna, the poor occupy a central ecclesiastical place in the Christian church and must therefore be met with love as a kind of friendship, an exchange that aims to overcome inequality and create lasting ties. The Leftist volunteers with whom I worked similarly insisted that their voluntarism was animated by something distinct from pity. As Natalina, a woman active in a powerful national voluntary organization that grew out of Italy’s Communist tradition put it:

We don’t go to church, but when I see a brother in difficulty, I hurry to help him out. Before this, we used to call these types

of activities “Christian gestures.” But I engage in gestures of love and brotherhood . . . We offer them [the needy elderly that her organization targets] coffee, and we help them out. We [leave] him with dignity, you see? Nearly everyone does it [volunteering], but there are different ways to do it. We do it with love, but we never have pity in our hearts. [Conversation with author, March 15, 2003]

Indeed, many volunteers I met combined, like Natalina did, their everyday “gestures of love and brotherhood” with active participation in demonstrations against government policies of austerity. Some worked double shifts in political organizations concerned with immigrant rights. Many insisted that voluntarism was an act of insubordination to market rule, a commitment to relations outside of the wage nexus. They lived and breathed the kinds of equity consciousness that brotherly love can, in their case, not suppress but enhance.<sup>12</sup>

What, then, can love be and become? The Catholic Church itself looks back on a long history of doctrinal battles over the meaning of love, ranging from liberation theology’s coupling of love to justice and solidarity with the poor to the church’s response that such commitments posit a “fundamental threat to the faith of the Church.”<sup>13</sup> Beyond the church, the questions that remain are how we differentiate between paternalist charity and justice, and how we make charity morph into radical solidarity.

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**Andrea Muehlebach** *Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON M5S 2S2, Canada; andrea.muehlebach@utoronto.ca, <http://anthropology.utoronto.ca/people/faculty-1/faculty-profiles/muehlebach/andrea-muehlebach>*

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## NOTES

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1. I use *articulation* in Stuart Hall’s sense in that the linkages described here are contingent and nonnecessary while at the same time productive of strong resonances and “unities” across a wide array of differentially positioned social actors (Hall, in Grossberg 1986:53).
2. Of course, it is not surprising that Catholicism is the vehicle through which neoliberal reform is here articulated (in Italy, modern state politics have since their inception been rendered through the core principles of the Catholic imaginative universe; see Acanfora 2007 and Muehlebach 2012). But I use the Italian case to make a larger argument about neoliberalism’s “moral

style,” the goal of which is to demonstrate that this articulation of neoliberalism and Catholicism is today not merely an Italian phenomenon.

3. I borrow the term *sacred modern* from Pamela Smart’s book of the same title.
4. Accordingly, 20th-century Christian democratic parties developed very specific visions of state–society relations. The Christian Democratic party in Italy, for example, developed what it called “social capitalism,” a term used also in France, where state intervention is understood very differently from the Social Democratic emphasis on the state as national actor in the name of equal rights. Christian democracy promoted a theory of state duty hinging on distributive, rather than social, justice. As a principle of justice, distributive justice “sets forth the obligation of the person with superior responsibilities to his/her subordinates” and makes sure “that the burdens and benefits are distributed among subordinates in equal or proportionate fashion” (O’Boyle 1998:18). Social policy thus functions not to alter status but, rather, to reproduce it in the form of a highly differentiated moral order (see Parsons 1942).
5. *Rerum Novarum*, although criticizing the ways in which some employers “look upon their work people as bondsmen” (Pope Leo XIII 1891:20), also naturalized social inequality by arguing that “there naturally exist among mankind manifold differences” that in turn “necessarily” lead to “unequal fortunes.” Leo XIII went so far as to argue that social and public life can only be maintained through these natural differences because “each man, as a rule, chooses the part which suits his own peculiar domestic condition” (Pope Leo XIII 1891:17).
6. The organization of society through the principle of subsidiarity also splendidly dovetails with the right-wing secessionist Lega Nord’s political program, with whom Formigoni’s (now flailing) People of Freedom party formed a coalition.
7. Open letter by Catholic leaders in response to Paul Ryan’s budget cutting: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JRLM7Jh9PnrxtafWYENXdAmxnXd4gQJMYTu3H4TFHA/edit?pli=1>, accessed September 21, 2012.
8. See “New Advent,” the Catholic Encyclopedia: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15624a.htm>, accessed January 6, 2013.
9. See “Liberation Theology,” by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger: <http://www.christendom-awake.org/pages/ratzinger/liberationtheol.htm>, accessed September 25, 2012.
10. Since 2012, CEAS has been outsourced to Caritas. See [http://s2ew.caritasitaliana.it/pls/caritasitaliana/consultazione.mostra\\_pagina?id\\_pagina=386](http://s2ew.caritasitaliana.it/pls/caritasitaliana/consultazione.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=386) (accessed Apr. 2013).
11. For more information see [http://www.caritasitaliana.it/pls/caritasitaliana/V3\\_S2EW\\_consultazione.mostra\\_pagina?id\\_pagina=01217](http://www.caritasitaliana.it/pls/caritasitaliana/V3_S2EW_consultazione.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=01217) (accessed Apr. 2013).
12. See also Napolitano and Norget 2009 and Norget 2010 for the role of Christian base communities in political mobilization in South America.
13. Citations can be found at the following sites: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19840806\\_theology-liberation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html) and <http://www.christendom-awake.org/pages/ratzinger/liberationtheol.htm>, both accessed September 25, 2012.

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