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Volunteering and Catholicism in Europe. The Inside Perspective

Part 2: Empirical

Abstract

In the paper we analyse the social activity practices of Catholic persons, as a set of individual and collective action emerging from the Catholic identity and – to more or less extent – structuralised under the Church-related formal non-profit initiatives. The purpose of the study is to clarify: (1) to what extent the Catholic unpaid social activities of different kinds could be classified as forms of volunteering and (2) to what extent the third sector definitions of volunteering are included in specific Catholic activities. Three tendencies have been observed with respect to not including religion-oriented volunteering in voluntary studies. Firstly, while using tools for collecting data adequate for the secular world, researchers face methodological difficulties to successfully cover social activities organized in parishes and congregations. Secondly, a reductionist approach reflects the ideological-rooted tendency to treat religion as a matter of private life. Thirdly, some religious-based entities tend to keep social activities of the believers within the Church-related circle. From the Catholic perspective, volunteer engagement represents an important aspect of faith-based every day activities, the so-called lived religion. At the same time, social engagement of believers provided within the Church-related entities, as well as outside them, usually fulfils all main features of volunteering.

The relation between volunteering and religion is to be referred not only to the general position of faith-based and religious organizations in the public sphere, but also to the embeddedness of religious life in the society, as in fact both religion and volunteering are categories social *per se*. We illustrate our reflection on volunteering and Catholicism by presenting empirical evidence from the 2018 panel expert research among representatives of 29 Catholic Bishops Conferences across Europe.

Keywords

volunteering, civil society, Catholicism

1. Methodology and theoretical frame

The Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE) was established in 1971 with the approval of the Vatican. The members of CCEE are the Bishops' Conferences of Europe, represented by their presidents. Throughout its history, the CCEE has organized numerous initiatives, conferences and publications that promote Catholicism in Europe. It is made up of thirty-nine members that, all together, represent the Catholic Church in forty-five countries in the European continent. The Secretariat of CCEE is based in St. Gallen (Switzerland). In 2018, the Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE), under the presidency of cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, organized a plenary assembly in Poznań (Poland) from the 13–18 September 2018, on the topic entitled "Solidarity and voluntary service". The central goal of the assembly was to present and discuss 29 country working reports based of the research designed by one of the authors of this paper (Wojciech Sadlon).

The 'panel method' invited individual experts to respond to an analysis of the country's data, local specific situation of Catholic volunteering and to present a regional perspective on Catholic volunteering. Experts shared their experiences and viewpoints. Semi-structured questionnaires formulated in six languages (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Polish) included open questions that the Secretary of the Council of Bishops' Conferences of Europe sent to all members of the Conference. The questionnaire was introduced by short citations from the Pope Francis' speech to volunteers in 2016 and the Pope Benedict's XVI speech to the European volunteers on behalf of this European Year of Volunteering. The questionnaire included twenty nine open questions concerning the following topics: (1) basic facts such as statistics and

legislation concerning Catholic volunteering; (2) historical development of the Catholic contribution to volunteering in the country; (3) the attitude towards cultural context of Catholic volunteering such as individualism and indifference; (4) motivations of Catholic volunteering both in Catholic community and to the needs of non-Catholics; (5) the relationship between faith and volunteering; (6) the interrelationship between Catholic volunteering, evangelization and Catholic pastoral work. Special focus was placed on Catholic youth volunteering, and the questions distinguished between formal and informal volunteering.

The questionnaire was officially distributed in March 2018 by the Secretariat of CCEE. Until July 2018, the following participated in the panel: 27 European Bishops' Conferences representing 29 European countries. Individual Bishops' conferences designated representatives of the country – both clergymen and laymen experts – who collected data and formulated answers. They presented the way in which Catholic social activities are defined in their countries by Catholic actors (perspective of agents). Their opinions and reflections have been collected as the package of working (non-published) country reports (CR).

In our analysis of the collected data, we use the concept of agency and reflexivity elaborated by Margaret Archer. In this perspective, Catholicism represents both cultural system (ideas, theological concepts) and socio-cultural interactions motivated by reflexively elaborated religious experience. Both systems actively shape individual biographies and life projects. In this perspective Catholics become actors if they find their roles in which can “invest themselves” as actors “acquire their social identities from the way in which they personify the roles they choose to occupy.”¹ The Realist approach developed the model of the human person as first a ‘self’, then a ‘primary agent’, a ‘corporate agent’ and an actor. Progressive elaboration by which the human self gradually comes to acquire a social identity includes three phases: (1) the development of primary agency in which society ‘impinges upon’ the human self; (2) the development of corporate agency in which primary agents collectively transform themselves in seeking to transform society and (3) the development of social actors in which social transformation affects the social roles and potential social identities.²

¹ M.S. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, Cambridge 2000, Cambridge University Press, p. 261.

² M.S. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, Cambridge 2000, Cambridge University Press, p. 260.

In this perspective, Catholic agential powers are conditioned by the socio-cultural context and actively elaborated in the relationship to this context. Structural context includes both Catholic elements such as Catholic institutions and organizations, as well as religious or even anti-religious elements of the cultural system in late modernity. Catholicism emerges in the interplay between agency of Catholics and socio-cultural structures of modern pluralistic and secularized societies. In late modernity the “morphostatic synchrony between structure and culture” crumbles and new powerful promotive interest groups arise. “More and more groups acquire the characteristics of Corporate Agency – namely organization and articulation.”³ “In sum, these are the proliferation of more and more Corporate Agents, whilst Primary Agency not only shrinks accordingly, but eventually becomes residua and disparate in composition.”⁴ As a consequence the ‘matrix’ of competing and diverging Corporate Agents occur with high level of interaction and search for structural and cultural advancement. In addition, Catholic interest groups become involved in cultural interaction.

Under such formatted analytical perspective we decided to focus the qualitative analysis of 29 country reports on three cross-sectional issues: inside perspective of defining Catholic volunteering by Church authorities and engaged believers, links between faith and volunteering, and (reconstructed) institutional approaches to volunteering formulated by Church authorities in specific legal and environmental conditions.

2. Defining Catholic volunteering – the inside perspective

Throughout Europe, Catholics perform volunteer actions in various forms which manifest as a result of the way in which Catholic organizations operate. The definition of volunteering reconstructed from 29 country reports is also extended to very religious activity. In some countries volunteering is reduced rather to social work, however, most often, volunteering involves most fields of pastoral work, not only social but also in parishes or even in liturgy.

³ M.S. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, Cambridge 2000, Cambridge University Press, p. 288.

⁴ M.S. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, Cambridge 2000, Cambridge University Press, p. 288.

In Italy, “there are no pastoral areas which are not covered by volunteering” (CR Italy). In Portugal, “usually volunteers are available to give support in all the areas they are needed. Therefore, they are engaged in all the pastoral work, side by side with the local clerical communities” (CR Portugal). For example, the Catholic Church in Belgium recruits volunteers throughout the year in order to drive pastoral missions or provide ‘temporal’ services (relationship, management, advice, etc.). A wide range of activities is offered in various services (Youth Ministry, catechesis, pastoral care of health, funerals, management activities, works administrative, human resources, law, communication, computer science, management, etc.), including diversity of qualification availability of individuals (CR Belgium). In Luxembourg, parish catechesis, based on a structured curriculum, was introduced in September 2017. In a good part of the parishes, the catechists are supported by volunteers. This type of volunteering mainly involves parents who accompany their children and who will probably remain active only for the catechetical time of their children (CR Luxembourg). In the Netherlands, volunteers act also within as governance and administrative assistance of the Catholic organizations, such as dioceses and parishes (CR Netherlands). Specific model of Church-State relations in France shapes very extensive commitment of non-professional and unpaid laymen in pastoral activity. The presence of volunteers is significant in areas related to education: movements such as scouting, or the parish activity: catechesis and even chaplaincy, not to mention helping migrants or elderly people (CR France).

Despite different historical and political configurations, in Germany, volunteers participate also in wide range of religious activity, especially in the liturgy. Country experts point put the presence of volunteers not only in the catechesis and social work areas, but also in the liturgy, and list such forms of Catholic volunteers: ministers, lectors, Eucharistic assistants and even God’s Word Office (CR Germany). In Switzerland, volunteers “are involved almost everywhere, except specific Church services (e.g. sacristans)” but there “is a consensual distinguish between volunteering and services which are remunerated by parish councils” (CR Switzerland).

Besides, in English-speaking European countries and societies, the engagement of volunteers is very complex. In Scotland, despite the fact that “often advancing in age and not always enjoying the desired level of formation for the tasks entrusted to them” and that “many parishes would note a difficulty in finding young people to volunteer, which is linked to the generally-low level of young people attending Mass”, the activity of volunteers is not limited to social

work. “We depend on volunteers for every aspect of pastoral work and almost all parishes enjoy a reasonable number of volunteers” (CR Scotland). In the Republic of Ireland, Catholics labelled as ‘volunteers’ operate within Catholic forms of “social work; they work with migrants, care of the elderly, and there is good evidence of volunteering as part of pastoral work” (CR Ireland) despite the fact there is no tradition of volunteers in catechesis in Ireland.

In Central and Eastern part of Europe – despite different historical configuration of the Church and society and state relationships – the scope of volunteering forms of activity within Catholic organizations, is also very extended. In Lithuania, “we have lot of volunteers when they are called to short-term volunteering and less long term volunteers” (CR Lithuania). In Slovakia, Catholic volunteers operate within “University pastoral centres, Missions centres among Romani people, Youth movements, Pre-matrimonial courses, partially in social work. For example, many volunteers are serving during National Youth Meeting (e.g. Prešov 26–29 July 2018). Some institutions or congregations (e.g. Caritas, Salesians) have a special programme for missionary volunteers (lay people). After finishing this program/formation, volunteers can go do missionary work (for couple of months, for 1 year, or 2 years)” (CR Slovakia). However, catechists at schools and the majority of social service workers in Caritas are reimbursed professionals in Slovakia. In Slovenia, “volunteering is well developed in the field of youth ministry, pastoral care in preparation for confirmation, musical groups, assistance to the elderly and families in difficulty as well as at the level of parish Caritas” (CR Slovenia). In Belarus, “volunteering is particularly present when undertaking and organizing pastoral campaigns – youth days, celebrations in sanctuaries, etc. Also, volunteers help priests in activities concerning care for the elderly in organizing The Day Of The Sick, etc.; in some parishes, volunteers work in catechesis and work social” (CR Belarus). In Bulgaria, “at the parish level, especially in pastoral work, parish priests organize various initiatives involving volunteers representing all age groups. In the life of the Church in Bulgaria, all those who give their concrete contribution to the life of the parish do it as voluntary work: catechists, the choir, the sacristans, participation in social actions (for example volunteers who help the Sisters of Mother Teresa), the support of the parishioners in need. Moreover, diocesan and national meetings for young people, volunteers, catechists and others are an element that helps motivation and formation to volunteer work” (CR Bulgaria). According to our data in Greece, Moldova and Ukraine volunteering is also present in all spheres of pastoral activity.

Such an extended understanding of volunteer work within Church activity triggers the important question concerning the border line between religious and non-religious forms of volunteering. Our reports highlight that it is not possible to draw the border line between the two fields, as according to our experts, 'Catholic volunteering' represents also an opportunity for evangelization. Non-Catholic persons who volunteer in Catholic organizations, especially young people, come to Catholic organizations searching for spirituality. "There are non-Catholics who engage in volunteering within Catholic organizations. Those young people usually are searching for their spirituality, supporting Catholic values (helping others, supporting others, loving your family and friends) and following their example, looking for like-minded people, wanting to feel useful for others, to gain new, valuable skills and personal qualities, to try themselves in different situations" (CR Lithuania). Some experts claim that volunteering is, *per se*, a form of evangelization. "In our secularized society, the actors of evangelization are the people transformed by the encounter with God who incites hope and charity. Catholic volunteering is already in itself a form of evangelization in this sense that it represents an act of love" (CR Belgium); "The need for a coherence between faith and life, between the words of the Gospel and everyday life makes the link between evangelization and commitment natural" (CR Italy). Others point out that volunteering is not naturally evangelization. "Evangelization from the point of view of volunteering work is not a priority, but it is not excluded that some volunteer activity may lead to a more profound life of faith" (CR Hungary). "The risk of transforming the Catholic volunteer into a social worker is high" (CR Moldova). Others claim that there is even an advantage in evangelization through volunteering. "Catholic volunteering probably offers more opportunities for deepening the faith life of the volunteers rather than directly evangelising" (CR Scotland).

Although, particularly in Western countries, 'Catholic volunteering' attracts older people, it represents a very important part of youth ministry. "Youth ministry in Slovenia has incorporated volunteering as a founding element" (CR Slovenia). Many Western countries offer well-organized volunteering programs for youth in these countries. Some experts indicate challenges for youth pastoral ministry in relations to volunteering. For example, in Spain: "We believe that youth ministry in recent decades has suffered, in general, a drift on the one hand, excessively 'sacramentalist' which has guided it to receive the sacrament of Confirmation and that, in some dioceses, has made it happen immediately after of the First Communion, with result in disappearance

of Youth Ministry. On the other hand, it has had a very doctrinal drift with a small dimension of socio-charitable pastoral” (CR Spain). “The role of liturgy and sacramentality seems important to re-establish in pastoral youth ministry” (CR Switzerland).

In some cases, it is pointed out that the practical link between volunteering and faith is too weak. “One might hope for a greater link between faith and volunteering. Some religious orders that carry out important services in the community (e.g. provision of soup kitchens), observe that often people that volunteer for this service might not have any formal link to faith or the Church. They also note that few religious vocations emerge from among their volunteers” (CR Ireland).

3. Link between faith and volunteering

According to experts, the relationship between volunteering and faith is also complex. Especially in countries where religion is pluralised, volunteering delivers an opportunity for ecumenism. Some experts indicate that commitment to volunteering corresponds with commitment to religious community and is implied by Catholic ethics. “The promotion of volunteering is based on the link between personal and community faith and acceptance of the suffering person, image of Christ” (CR Italy). In this light, the promotion of volunteering expresses also the commitment to Catholic community. “The primary motivation for volunteering in an ecclesial context is to contribute to the mission and to experience ‘something’ within the Church. Volunteering should be supplied with a new spirit to give it durability. More meaningful recognition of the work of the volunteers could foster their trust and their belonging to the Church. A new missionary impulse could stem from their motivation” (CR Belgium). “The majority of volunteering in the Church arises from a clear Christian commitment in favour of the poor and an identification with the preferential option of Jesus in favour of the poor” (CR Spain). “We believe that by engaging in volunteering service a young person will be able to feel the essence of being a part of community and find his way to trust God. Also, this could help him to realize the sense to his activities, feel needed and find his own place in Catholic Church” (CR Lithuania).

Volunteering also causes specific formative effects and contributes even to personal and spiritual fulfilment. Catholic volunteering in comparison to secular

forms, is “more oriented to personal development” (CR Poland). “Being a volunteer is a ‘gift, service or call’ as volunteering is at the heart of the commitment of Christians (...) To be a volunteer in the Church is to answer a call related to a specific need of the Church, it is a service for the Church. The volunteer responds to his vocation as baptized, he takes part in the mission of the Church, he is at the service of the ecclesial community” (CR France). It means that volunteering positively contributes to the social role of the Church: “This increases the recognition of the Catholic Church and its institutions and the impact of their activity on social assistance” (CR Hungary). Faith is also an important motivation for volunteering. That is why it is often mentioned that volunteering has theological foundations. In some European countries, it is stated that volunteering represents a form of apostolate or even ‘as implementation of the Gospel’.

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However, while non-Catholic volunteering is more oriented to meeting people and experiencing joy (CR Germany), Catholic motivations for volunteering are much more theological: “love for the Church and, Christian charity” (CR Albania). Becoming a volunteer is a way of responding to Evangelical ‘new

commandment' of love and charity and "personal sanctification" (CR Ukraine). Sharing faith is also a factor organizing charitable and *pro bono* volunteering activities of the believers. Especially in Eastern and Central Europe, the specificity of Catholic volunteering in comparison to 'secular' forms consists in the fact that Catholics do not expect any forms of remuneration while volunteering (eg. CR Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia). Volunteering is also a 'space' for prayer and spiritual activity (CR Bosnia and Herzegovina).

This impact of a religion on social life may be classified as direct or indirect, as believers may involve themselves in services-delivering activities collectively or individually, and – as has already been mentioned – their social engagement may be openly bound with manifestation of faith or separated from it. "The motive to volunteer in an ecclesiastical environment is of course connected with the religious conviction of the volunteer. In voluntary work in an ecclesiastical environment, more attention will be paid to questions of faith and belief than in general voluntary work" (CR Netherlands).

4. Institutional approach to volunteering

According to the experts who conducted the research, in Western countries, volunteering is well-institutionalized. State and public programs stimulate the growth of volunteering. On the other hand, there is a risk of 'mercantilization' of volunteering, which means detaching volunteering from spontaneous activity and subordinating to programs and individual career path. Volunteering was stimulated by the financial crisis in 2007 and recently by refugees' crisis. An ageing society is emphasizing the role of informal volunteering. Volunteering in Europe is also a platform for international cooperation. 'Old democracies' stimulate the development of volunteering in 'new democratic' countries.

In some countries such as Portugal, Slovenia, Germany and France, special ecclesiastical documents on volunteering were published. In countries such as Poland, Ukraine, Switzerland, Spain, there are no published documents, but volunteering is mentioned by individual bishops. In other countries, the Catholic Church refers to volunteering by supporting practical initiatives. There are still some countries which do not refer directly to volunteering. Western countries 'export' good practices to 'new democracies': "In the Communism time volunteering was compulsory. Nowadays, thanks to the good example of many

volunteers who came (and still come) from abroad, especially from Italy, many have learned the meaning and value of volunteering” (CR Albania).

According to the panel experts, Church authorities are characterized by a strong positive attitude towards volunteering. Volunteering is also well appreciated within Catholic Church. Furthermore, in recent years, volunteering in Europe is dynamically increasing. Such a positive trend is observed not only in ‘old democracies’, but also in ‘Post-Communism countries’. “Profound changes in volunteering. Despite increasing individualism and indifference, generally volunteering grows” (CR France). “Recent changes worth mentioning might be the growth in the numbers of young people volunteering” (CR Scotland).

There are also some symptoms of the past tensions and ideological conflicts between the Catholic Church and some official politics concerning volunteering in the Post-Communist countries. “People are more open to volunteering. Before political change in 1989 voluntary work was obligatory (e.g. ‘Communist Saturdays’). Recently, the number of volunteers is increasing, but it is much lower than in Western European countries. There are governmental initiatives to promote volunteering, such as Volunteering Council, including also delegates from Churches and charitable organizations (eg Caritas Maltese)” (CR Hungary). “We can see that the volunteer’s number is increasing year by year. Every year, we see more people concerned and involved in specific projects or causes” (CR Portugal).

The institutional attitude of the Catholic Church towards volunteering results also from the political transformation in Eastern and Central Europe: “Volunteering was inaugurated in 1992 when Slovenia was transformed from totalitarianism to democracy. In the socialism period the organized volunteering within the Church was not allowed. The number of volunteers, NGOs and time dedicated to volunteer is growing” (CR Slovenia). “Volunteering in Lithuania is expanding. Volunteering is achieving more and more interest not only among young people but among adults as well. After the adoption of Law on Volunteering in 2011, it has led to the broader and deeper interest of a society in understanding of benefits which volunteer work brings to the nation, country and a person himself. There is a growing interest in volunteering among students and volunteering is awarded in education” (CR Lithuania). “There is a great enthusiasm to voluntary work in the public sphere. Various “community gardens” are creating. Many volunteers are participating in developments projects. A Day of voluntary work is organized in civil society (or Week of volunteering) by civil institutions, or by NGOs” (CR Slovakia). “Despite the lack of state support / interest, volunteering is developing and growing in Bulgaria” (CR Bulgaria).

“Voluntary attitudes are proliferating. Especially in urban regions, at schools and universities” (CR Moldova).

The impact of political context on volunteering activity and religious motivations, is very evident in the Ukraine. The exceptional situation of the Ukraine consists in the fact that volunteer activities of Catholics contributes to military operations. “Volunteering has been no more than slightly developed in comparison to other countries. In 2010 Ukraine was characterized by the lowest rate of volunteering in the world (5%). Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the war in the Donetsk Basin area has the situation a lot. Revolution of Dignity on the Maidan was strongly supported by volunteers. The inhabitants of Kyiv have shown the example of a wonderful self-organization to achieve their main goal which was to change Ukraine and make it a European state. After the Revolution and at the beginning of military aggression in the eastern part of the Ukrainian state, we are witnessing the extraordinary growth of the voluntary movement. Almost half of Ukrainian volunteers began to participate in volunteer projects in the period 2013–2014. The most important result of the Revolution, apart from the understanding of the need for the construction of a state based on law was the growing consciousness of the volunteering as integral part of a civil society. It will not be an exaggeration to say that thanks to the volunteers, in 2014, our country has managed to defend its independence, has stopped the Russian invasion in the East Ukrainian, renewed its military forces with a spirit of fortress and courage.” (CR Ukraine).

In some Central Eastern Europe countries experts highlight the need for institutional and legislative background for Catholic volunteering: “The number of volunteers has increased, young people are eager to volunteer. There is a need of legal status of volunteering” (CR Belarus). “In the last decade, there has been an evident increase in the number of volunteer activities, organized or self-initiated actions. People are more sensitive to the needs of others and express them by volunteering and engagement. The volunteering laws partially define voluntary commitments both volunteer organizers and volunteers themselves. There are also difficulties in enforcing the law and meeting the legal framework (volunteer application, health insurance costs and the like)” (CR Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The opposite situation takes place in Western-Europe. Especially in ‘old democracies’ volunteering is being transformed into more project oriented and casual (drop-in) engagement. In these countries volunteering is also shaped by the increasing professionalization. “General voluntary work in the

Netherlands has not changed in recent years. The number of Catholic volunteers working in Catholic parishes declines annually by approximately 0.1 percentage point” (CR Netherlands). “It is difficult to get new volunteers in some organisations” (CR Ireland). Also the problem of bureaucratization “the move amongst many large non-Catholic charities to use professional fund-raisers, often impacting on the perceived trustworthiness of the charities. Safeguarding protocols and Health & Safety Regulations have also changed the scenario and atmosphere around volunteering” (CR Scotland).

5. Conclusions

The relation between volunteering and religious values is to be referred not only to the general position of faith-based and religious organizations in the public sphere, but also to the embeddedness of religious life in the society. Just taking into account all societal aspects, we may see how complex the relation between religion and volunteering is. In fact, both categories are social *per se*. Tendencies were observed with respect to not including religion-oriented volunteering in voluntary studies, and research may indicate three main reasons. Firstly, researchers may face significant difficulties in order to successfully cover the world of social activities organized in parishes and congregations when they use tools and networks for collecting data adequate for the ‘pure secular’ world. Secondly, a reductionist approach in volunteering research may reflect ideologically-rooted secular tendency to treat religion as a matter of private life of people. In such an approach, religious practices are shifted from the public sphere to the private sphere, but societal and community-based expressions of religious life are also ignored. Thirdly, we also observed a tendency in religious institutions and entities to keep social activities of the believers inside the church-related world.

We tried to discuss all interpretative aspects of the Catholic volunteering and illustrate our reflection by using data from panel expert research among representatives of 29 Catholic Bishops Conferences across Europe. From a critical realist perspective, religious activity invokes reality and shapes the everyday social life of believers: indirectly and directly.⁵ Even personal, fully private

⁵ D. Porpora, M.S. Archer, A. Collier (eds.), *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God*, London 2004, Routledge.

religious practices as different forms of individual praying, worship or meditations, have an impact on social behaviour of the believers through shaping their attitude towards family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues from workplaces etc. Such an impact of religion on social life may be classified as being indirect (or hidden). But religious life cannot be reduced to individual practices. Some important aspects of religious life are social *per se*. Religious beliefs are manifested through social activities. Attending Holy Mass or visiting a mosque is religious, but also social behaviour. Believers of all main religions (with maybe one important exception of Buddhism, which is more individually-oriented) tend to organize religious practices within vital communities: to create a sphere for praying together, sharing common values, and undertaking collective action. Such community-based religious and religious-oriented practices shape social life in a direct way. Religious community-based events are just a part of social life. It has to be added that the necessity of bridging religious practices *sensu stricte* with social activities is announced in religious moral teaching.⁶ What is more, religions cover a mission of proclaiming their Good News (as it is called in Christianity) to non-believers, which implies activity in the public sphere, not only in the private one.

Catholic volunteering emerges at each of four levels as *self*, the *person*, the *agent* and the *actor*. Human beings are ‘stratified’, meaning that their identity emerges in the interplay between social structure and agency, which represent different properties and powers or – expressing it more precisely – “independent properties, capable of exerting autonomous influences.”⁷ Catholic activity emerges in the relational interplay between personal religious experience and both religious and social institutions. The specificity of Catholic volunteering is reflexively shaped as religious identity and a person’s commitment to religious communities that refers to theological concepts, symbols and material traits as a religious cultural heritage. “The efficacy of this mediatory mechanism is entirely activity-dependent; that is reliant upon what agents make of these contexts.”⁸ This sort of religious experience as human concern is vested in certain projects (career, family, community, club or church). Catholics invest themselves

⁶ A. Collier, *On Christian Belief. A Defence of a Cognitive Conception of Religious Belief in a Christian Context*, London 2013, Routledge.

⁷ M.S. Archer, *Realist Social Theory*, Cambridge 1995, Cambridge University Press, p. 6.

⁸ M.S. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*, Cambridge 2000, Cambridge University Press, pp. 268–269.

in these social projects that “are susceptible of emotionality, in relation to society’s normative evaluation of our performance in these roles.”⁹ Catholic activity emerges in relationship to the institutionalized Catholic norms and is provided always within the social context. From the perspective of Catholic Church, ‘Catholic volunteering’ represents a very important aspect of Catholic life in Europe, because it accumulates not only dynamic social forces, but also relates to religious experience and every day so-called lived religion. The distinctiveness of ‘Catholic volunteering’ results from the Catholic identity, Catholic doctrine and Catholic moral principles. It includes also the context of the Catholic Church as institutions incorporating, in a particular way, trust.

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⁹ M.S. Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511488733), Cambridge 2000, Cambridge University Press, p. 219.