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THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PRACTICES CONSIDERED AS BEING PART OF THE CHURCH'S DIAKONIA IN ITALY

Simona Beretta

CONTACT INFORMATION

Dr. Mathias Nebel, Director Caritas in Veritate Foundation
CP 28, CH-1292 Chambésy. Contact@fciv.org

www.fciv.org

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Prof. Simona Beretta¹

Università Cattolica di Milano

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Journeying: our life is a journey, and when we stop moving, things go wrong. ... Building. Building the Church. We speak of stones: stones are solid; but living stones, stones anointed by the Holy Spirit. ... Thirdly, professing. We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong. We may become a charitable NGO, but not the Church, the Bride of the Lord.

Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome, March 14, 2013

Abstract

My contribution is based on three basic sources: 1) Some information (scattered and incomplete) about the action of the Italian Church, from the Italian Bishops Conference to Parish communities to movements, in terms of serving the needs of our times; 2) Highlights on how diaconia is understood and communicated, with special reference to Italian Bishops' official documents and magisterial interventions; 3) My personal assessment of what it means for the Catholic Church to serve, with some explicit reference to the Italian situation (a plural, high-income, yet declining society).

My main conclusions can be summarized as follows: 1) As an economist, I am very much interested in exploring the root determinants of effective and efficient service. Basically, I find an impressive correlation between 'sanctity' of life and effective and efficient service. This evidence is too clear not to be taken seriously, from an empirical point of view. 2) Culture, charity and evangelization are integral part of the Church's diaconia. There is a difference between organizing excellent charitable initiatives and participating in the diaconia of the Church. The second is a 'movement' (journeying, building and professing, as in Pope Francis' words 3) My personal perspective is the following: as an economist, I am becoming more and more aware of the centrality of the immaterial dimension in shaping material reality. Perceptions, beliefs and motivations make the difference between decline and development; hope is the driver of true progress. Hence, the Church really serves when She credibly announces that Christian hope does not fail. Only love is credible, and only love can engage "the whole breadth of reason". I am convinced that engaging a serious dialogue on the 'place of God' in our societies is both necessary and potentially generative of a 'good life in common'.

¹ Professore ordinario di Politica Economica presso la Facoltà di Scienze Politiche della Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore dal 2001, dove insegna discipline economico-internazionali (Politiche Economiche Internazionali; Economia Applicata alla Finanza per lo Sviluppo).



1. Some historical and current information on the social presence of the Italian Church's, with special reference to the service to the poor and marginalized

Social diakonia, in Italy, finds its roots in the catholic social movements of the XIX and XX century. The most ancient lay Catholic association, *Azione Cattolica*, was founded by Mario Fani and Giovanni Acquaderni in 1867; charity was at the heart of the educational mission of the association, generating a variety of initiatives (cooperatives, mutual funds, saving banks, insurances...) organized within the *Opera dei Congressi*. Internal tensions between 'intransigents' and 'innovators' brought to the conclusion of the Opera in 1905. The *Unione Popolare* was subsequently founded (1906-1922); under the direction of blessed Giuseppe Toniolo, the tradition of the Italian Catholic Social Weeks was started (Pistoia, 1907). With on and off periods², the Italian Catholic Social Weeks are still celebrated (next Week in September 2013, Torino³) In 1919, the *Partito Popolare* was founded, don Luigi Sturzo being the Secretary. In 1921 the *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore* was founded by Father Agostino Gemelli, together with a group of lay Catholic intellectuals (Ludovico Necchi, Francesco Olgiati, Armida Barelli and Ernesto Lombardo); the university gained official state recognition as an independent university in 1924, before the Concordat (*Patti Lateranensi*) were signed in 1929.

After the Second World war (1950-60), many new lay association active in the social sphere were created (ACLI and *Coldiretti* being among the largest ones), contributing to the diffused social presence and visibility of Catholic social initiatives in Italy.

In 1966 the Italian Bishop Conference created the Commission for labor, later National Office for Social Problems and Work (1975). In 1992, with the publication "*Evangelizzare il sociale*"⁴ two areas were explicitly added, "economics" and "politics"; in 200, the areas "justice and peace" and "custody of creation" were also included in the activities. The Office⁵ is also currently dealing with "justice and peace" and "custody of creation" issues. The main task of the Office is facilitating networking among dioceses and other ecclesial associations and promoting a deeper understanding of social issues, with the support of consultants. Among the most significant social initiatives on work issues, we find Solidarity Day, May 1 - St. Joseph the Worker, *Progetto Policoro* (more will be said about it below); much attention is devoted to reconnecting work and celebration⁶. On economic and political issues, besides the already mentioned Italian Social Weeks, the Office connects the network of diocesan Schools of social doctrine/socio-political education. On justice and peace and environmental issues, we find celebration/education initiatives such as Thanksgiving day, the Day for the custody of creation, the Inter-diocesan network on lifestyles⁷.

² For a historical perspective on this initiative, see PREZIOSI, E., *Tra storia e future. Cento anni di Settimane sociali dei cattolici italiani*, Roma, Editrice Ave, 2010

³ The latest Social Week has been held in Reggio Calabria, 2010, titled: "Catholics in present day Italy: an Agenda of hope for the future of the country". The proceedings are available in: COMITATO SCIENTIFICO E ORGANIZZATORE DELLE SETTIMANE SOCIALI DEI CATTOLICI ITALIANI (ed.), *Cattolici nell'Italia di oggi. Un'agenda di speranza per il futuro del paese*, Reggio Calabria – 14-17 ottobre 2010, *Atti della 46ª Settimana Sociale dei Cattolici Italiani*, Bologna, EDB, 2012. The next Social Week is to be held in Torino, September 2013 on "Family: hope and future for Italy". See <http://www.settimanesociali.it/>.

⁴ http://www.chiesacattolica.it/cci_new_v3/allegati/17102/Evangelizzare%20il%20sociale.pdf

⁵ http://www.chiesacattolica.it/cci_new_v3/s2magazine/index1.jsp?idPagina=28

⁶ The 2012 VII World Meeting of Families held in Milano was also titled "the Family: work and celebration".

<http://www.family2012.com/en/>

⁷ A detailed summary document can be found in the recent document "*Finalità e competenze*" by Mons. A. Casile, http://www.chiesacattolica.it/pls/cci_new_v3/v3_s2ew_consultazione.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=110.



It's worth mentioning that Italy has long been characterized by a very vital and diffused civil society, with diffused popular socio-economic initiatives aimed at realizing a more just and participated society and for providing education, assistance and caring for the poor and disadvantaged. These initiatives were born both in the Italian 'socialist' tradition and in the Catholic tradition. The two streams proved vital also after 1968, when there was a flourishing of new initiatives, for supporting both internal and international projects aimed at improving the lot of the poor⁸. In particular, Italy has been blessed by the surge of a number of Catholic associations and movements, each with fascinating individual histories and different charisms, rooted in the Christian faith: *Focolari*⁹ (1943), *Comunione e Liberazione*¹⁰ (1954), *Sant'Egidio*¹¹ (1968), *Movimento Cristiano Lavoratori*¹² (1970-71), *Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII*¹³ (1973), to name only a few. Each of these movements has particular features, but they all are characterized by a variety of social activities, especially in favor of the poor and the marginalized.

After the closing down of the Christian Democratic Party (*Democrazia Cristiana*) 'inter-classist' experience, Christian individuals and groups elected a variety of political experiences as their choice; hence the Christian political diaspora is a matter of fact nowadays. As in other European country, the role of religious perspectives in the political sphere is one hottest topics of political discussion in the country.

The anniversary of Constantine's Edict (313-2013) has been an interesting occasion for focusing on what is a healthy 'lay' approach to serving the common good. Politics as the highest form of charity (John XXIII, Paul VI) is a powerful statement that remains to be both understood and practiced beyond rhetoric images and wishful thinking. Rather, it demands a strong investment in 'cultural charity'. Since the conclusion of the Third National Ecclesial Conference held in Palermo (1995), titled *Il Vangelo della Carità per una nuova società in Italia* (the Gospel of Charity for a new society in Italy), the Italian Catholic Church has been developing the so-called "*Progetto culturale*"¹⁴ (Cultural Project). Within it, the socio-political dimension has been tackled with a view of communicating a number of 'report-proposals' on the most significant socio-political challenges the Italian society is facing (education, demography, work are the topics of the three published report-proposals)¹⁵.

It is fair to say that there remains a significant gap between the cultural and the political dimension of the catholic presence in Italy. An amazing amount of effective and efficient social work is realized with explicit reference to its Christian and catholic roots; yet, the political incidence of these initiative is very low. Individual organizations – especially the larger and long established – tend to succeed in accessing public support in order to increment their social initiatives; but the prevailing political 'culture' (in the

⁸ More information (still quite incomplete) can be found by referring to the network on Italian NGOs <http://www.ongitaliane.org/>, involving 250 NGOs for international cooperation. There is also an association of about 80 Italian entities, active in voluntary activities and solidarity: <http://www.forumterzosettore.it/>

⁹ <http://www.focolare.org/>

¹⁰ <http://it.clononline.org/>

¹¹ <http://www.santegidio.org/>

¹² <http://www.mcl.it/>

¹³ <http://www.apg23.org/>

¹⁴ <http://www.progettoculturale.it/>. The *Progetto culturale* includes a very wide set of initiatives; the most prominent from the socio-political point of view are the three volumes of the series *Rapporto-proposta* (report-proposal), which have been quite widely discussed in Italy. The first one concerns the 'education challenge' (2009); the second the demographical change (2011), and the most recent one deals with the issue of work (2013): COMITATO PER IL PROGETTO CULTURALE DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA (ed.), *La sfida educativa*, Bari, Laterza, 2009; COMITATO PER IL PROGETTO CULTURALE DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA (ed.), *Il cambiamento demografico*, Bari, Laterza, 2011; COMITATO PER IL PROGETTO CULTURALE DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA (ed.), *Per il lavoro*, Bari, Laterza, 2013.

¹⁵ http://www.progettoculturale.it/progetto_culturale/documentazione/00030109_I_nostri_volumi.html.



country, but it is fair to say even among Italian Catholics) seems unable to recognize the intrinsically ‘public’ nature of these initiatives. In common language, ‘catholic’ initiatives are labeled as ‘private’ initiatives, even when they provide services that are usually taken to be part of ‘welfare state’ services (education, health care, assistance and so on), provision is granted by not-for-profit organizations and access to ‘catholic’ services is fully open to all citizens (and often they are especially meant to meet the needs of the many ‘non-citizens’ that live in Italy)¹⁶.

As an attempt to help different Catholic social initiatives mature a common political language, intensify dialogue with each other and possibly cooperate with each other in the public sphere, the Italian Bishops Conference promoted the organization of a ‘table’, called *Retinopera*¹⁷, which at present includes eighteen associations – including all the most prominent in social activities. Being mainly a space for discussion, the ‘table’ has proved viable although not really productive of common social initiatives; which does not come as a surprise, since *Retinopera* is by and large a top-down initiative.

A more ‘political’ initiative has been labeled “*Gruppo di Todi*” (Todi group), from the place where the first meeting was held; the Group includes many of the same associations that form *Retinopera*, plus a number of politicians and intellectuals. A “*Forum delle persone e delle associazioni di ispirazione cattolica nel mondo del lavoro*”¹⁸ (Forum of persons and work associations of Christian inspiration) was also created; you can find on its website some documents, including a manifesto signed by a subset of the “Todi group” titled “*La buona politica per tornare a crescere*” (Good politics for resuming growth)¹⁹. The public activities of the Todi Group are at present ‘frozen’, as preparing the electoral lists for the recent Italian election (February 24-25, 2013) proved too tense an experience and no consensus was reached. The path treaded raised nonetheless much interest in the catholic milieu, especially for its being realized from bottom-up. Among the early appraisals of the Todi initiative, I would like to mention the contributions published in the September 2012 issue of “*Iustitia*”, the quarterly Journal of Christian Law Professionals, which focused on “Catholics and Political Engagement today”²⁰.

Leaving the strictly political dimensions aside, I would like to go back to the more traditional forms of diakonia as mentioned above. At the local level, we can find an amazing, extensive network of Church activities in service of the poor in most dioceses and many parishes, often animated by *Caritas Italiana*²¹, San Vincenzo Conferences²² and various movements. It is often the case that individual

¹⁶ A recent referendum held in the Municipality of Bologna – which luckily did not reach the *quorum* – was meant to withdraw financial support to ‘private’ nursery schools (the Italian school legislation actually uses the correct expression: *scuole paritarie*). *Paritarie* school accommodate 21% of total children in Bologna, and receive 2,9% of the Municipal budget. The cost of one child in the Municipal crèches is 6.900 Euro; the support for each child in a *paritaria* is 445 euro; that is, *paritarie* permit very significant saving of Municipal resources. Withdrawing funds from *paritarie* to support municipal schools would end up accommodating 150 children out of the 1736 currently enrolled in *paritarie* (<http://www.tempi.it/bologna-vota-b-come-bambini-storia-di-un-referendum-idiota-ma-pericoloso>) . while the referendum did not meet the *quorum*, the choice of withdrawing financial support for *paritarie* received more votes - a clear sign of the high degree of confusion and the widely diffused aversion to faith based initiatives.

¹⁷ <http://www.retinopera.it/actions/home.do>

¹⁸ <http://www.forumlab.org/>

¹⁹ <http://www.forumlab.org/manifesto/>

²⁰ There is also a short comment I wrote on the Todi experience: S. BERETTA, « Libertà e solidarietà: a quali condizioni l’agire economico serve il bene di tutti», *Iustitia*, n.3, 2012, pp. 359-364.

²¹ A very brief quantitative assessment of the role of Caritas in Italy can be found in:

http://www.caritasitaliana.it/materiali/Pubblicazioni/Libri_2012/rapportoannuale_2011/depliant_rapportoannuale2011.pdf and

http://www.caritasitaliana.it/materiali/Pubblicazioni/libri_2011/rapportoannuale_2010/rapportoannuale2010_depliant.pdf

²² <http://www.sanvincenzoitalia.it/>



parishes create a ONLUS (*Organizzazione Non Lucrativa Di Utilità Sociale*, that is a not-for-profit, public service organization) in order to provide a legal personality to some special initiative (shelters, foster homes, rehab initiatives, crèches, and so on).

Some of these initiatives that are created in very poor parishes can be financially supported by the “8 per mille” funds. They represent a fraction of general taxation which is destined by law to a (small) number of specified merit institutions/organizations, which are included in a list provided by the Government; taxpayers can choose, by ticking a box in their annual income tax statement, the organization to which the 8 per thousand of their income taxes should be destined. This list includes also the Italian Catholic Church, and much effort is put in providing detailed information on how these funds are used²³, for supporting extremely poor parishes, for funding social initiative in Italy, for international development projects²⁴.

But a lot more is going on in the Church’s social activity than what is supported by “8 per mille”, which is totally self-financed. Even a quantitative assessment is very hard. A recent booklet by Giuseppe Rusconi²⁵ offers the most systematic reconstruction I am aware of concerning the social diakonia of the Italian Church. Unsurprisingly, Rusconi highlights in his conclusion the extreme difficulty he had to face in acquiring statistical data; but, unrelenting as a ‘mastiff’ (his own words), he finally could provide reliable estimations on how much State financial resources are saved thank to the services provided by catholic institutions. Rusconi’s list includes ‘*oratori*’ (educational space for youth – including sports facilities) provided by parishes; other charitable initiatives; soup kitchens and ‘*banco alimentare*’ (that is, direct food supply to needy families); solidarity funds; schooling and professional training; hospital services; rehab communities; initiatives for fighting usury; initiatives for migrants; preservation of cultural heritage; post-earthquakes solidarity funds; ‘*prestiti della speranza*’ (micro-loans to families in distress and for youth self employment). He could not include estimations for social care and support (for children and families, homeless, migrants, elderly people, detainees and so on²⁶), as nation-wide data were not reliable.

His prudential estimation of the difference between the monetary equivalent of benefits provided to the Italian community and costs covered by public funding sums to the impressive amount of eleven billions Euro – almost half of this amount being related to educational and professional training²⁷. In other words, this a prudential estimate of the savings for the State budget due to provision of basic social services by the Italian Church. Besides measuring the money-equivalent of the substitute services provided by the Church, Rusconi highlights the distinctiveness of the grassroots social presence of the

²³ <http://www.8xmille.it/>

²⁴ One of the most impressive figure you can read, in my view, is the ratio of indirect costs (office work) to direct disbursements for oversee development projects. It is well known that international institutions’ ratio is often above $\frac{1}{2}$; for very effective NGOs, the ratio may be much lower, around 15%. For “8 per mille”, the ratio is 1%; high level external expertise is provided on a voluntary basis. See M. ROCCA, «Il Comitato per gli interventi caritativi a favore del terzo mondo – Conferenza Episcopale Italiana», in PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE , *Giustizia e globalizzazione dalla Mater et magistra alla Caritas in veritate, Atti del Congresso Internazionale nel 50º Anniversario della Mater et magistra*, Roma, 6-18 Maggio 2011, Città del Vaticano, Tipografia Vaticana, 2011, pp. 942-948. For background material, see also: http://www.chiesacattolica.it/cci_new/PagineCCI/AllegatiArt/22/libro.pdf

²⁵ RUSCONI, G., *L’impegno. Come la Chiesa italiana accompagna la società nella vita di ogni giorno*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino Editore, 2013.

²⁶ The recent visit of Pope Francis to Lampedusa (July 8th, 2013) forced the media to see the amazing silent and very effective work of small catholic communities in dealing with the most urgent human needs posed by trans-Mediterranean migrations from Sub Saharan Africa.

²⁷ RUSCONI, cit, p.137.



Church: parishes are so near to the people to effectively become an antenna which can detect ‘invisible’ poverty and emerging forms of social distress, and intervene to face it.

All said, personal proximity remains indispensable for effective and efficient diakonia. “There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable” (*Deus caritas est*, 28). In my opinion, it is virtually impossible to provide an overall assessment on the quality of these Church initiatives, that in fact cover the continuum between simply being a sort of ‘catholic bureaucracy’, to truly incarnating charity in action.

As an economist, I am very interested in exploring the systematic features of the Church’s service which tend to be connected to the substantive quality of its service. Everybody would like service – and especially service to the poor – to be effective and efficient; while these two analytical categories do not exhaust all desirable features of service activities, they nonetheless remain prominent criteria for assessing the quality of service. Both macro data (say, the comparison of how much it costs to provide a crèche in a state-run institution and in a so-called ‘private’ one) and anecdotic evidence seem to point in the same direction, that is: effectiveness and efficiency seem not to mechanically derive from the purely organizational dimension of services; rather, the quality of organization seems to heavily depend on personal attitudes of people involved, especially their loving attitude and gratuitousness²⁸. This general statement applies to business organizations as well; it is common experience that offices or service providers which are very similar in their formal organization may offer widely diverging performances in terms of meeting the needs of service receivers. I see, in this, a clear exemplification of the *actual* role of gratuitousness in making the practical difference between effectiveness and non-effectiveness of action in ‘normal’ economic and social life (*Caritas in veritate*, 36).

While is practically impossible for me to provide adequate empirical evidence based on unbiased sample data coverage, I am quite confident in summarizing the overall impression I get in encountering Church’s service activities. The summary is the following: there is an impressive correlation between ‘sanctity’ of life of those who serve in catholic social initiatives (at all levels) and the provision of effective and efficient service. This evidence is too clear not to be taken seriously, from an empirical point of view.

With the expression ‘sanctity’ – I am not a theologian, I apologize for possibly being unclear (hope not heretic!) – I would like to express the following: living one’s life as a vocation, feeling gratitude for having been actually saved and responding to these sentiments by gratuitously circulating the same ‘good’ one has received. The kind of gratuitousness that produces effective and efficient diakonia, then, is actually rooted in gratitude and driven and sustained by hope²⁹. Christians have indeed the most

²⁸ Although it may seem cheap talk, I am really convinced that we can provide ‘hard’ economic evidence that love matters. I am currently involved in two applied research projects which deal with love and economic effectiveness of social initiatives. A ‘macro’ research is titled “Love matters for policy making”, and it is aimed at singling out the reasons why countries which develop their national health policies to stop TB on the basis of community-based partnerships tend to exhibit a very high cost effectiveness with respect to countries adopting more traditional bureaucratic policies. The second, more ‘micro’ research, is titled “Can love defeat addiction?” and it consists in comparing the long run effectiveness of rehab for addicted people experiencing life in love-based communities (as compared to rule-based communities and standard chemical treatment).

²⁹ I tried elaborating the ‘triangular’ relation between development, gratitude and hope in BERETTA, S., «Development driven by hope and gratuitousness: the innovative economics of Benedict XVI», in *Explorations in the theology of Benedict XVI*, J.C. CAVADINI (ed.), South Bend, In., University of Notre Dame Press, 2012: 187-211.



reasonable reasons to be grateful; and to live in hope. This is more or less what I mean by ‘sanctity’ – I am not referring to people living ‘unblemished’ lives, but constantly tending to participate in the living relation with Truth and Love.

I would like to provide here only three examples of Church’s diakonia in Italy; in my opinion, they are worth learning about not because they are ‘unblemished’, which is impossible to human organizations; but because their unquestionable effectiveness and efficiency raises the question about why they stand out so clearly. The three examples below have been chosen because of their ‘external’ observable characteristics, namely because they exhibit unusual levels of effectiveness and efficiency. Yet, once they are looked ‘from within’, one can easily discover that the emphasis of their own narrative is *not* so much on efficiency and effectiveness; it is not about ‘doing’ things ‘well’, but rather about the ultimate reasons for doing good things.

My first example of effective social initiative is *Banco alimentare*, a relatively young Foundation that in a few years got the attention of otherwise uninterested media, involved a large share of the Italian population and generated analogous forms of solidarity initiatives³⁰ (*Banco Farmaceutico* and *Banco Informatico* were also created; moreover, the initiative was ‘contagious’ as similar collections of food have been subsequently locally organized, as it is the case for the Banco Alimentare di Roma³¹). Since 1989, the *Fondazione Banco Alimentare Onlus* has been collecting the production surplus of the agro-food industrial chain and has been redistributing it to over 8000 charity organizations engaged in offering alimentary help to the poor and the outcast all over Italy³². The *Banco Alimentare* network collects foodstuffs which are still very good for consumption but, having lost commercial value due to their short shelf life, would be destined to destruction. Preserved from destruction, foodstuffs recover users’ value for those who have too little. The main supplying sources of the *Banco Alimentare* network are food industries, organized large-scale retail trades, and collective catering services; the European Union also provides substantial amounts of food to be devoted to specific programmes for helping the poor.

The *Banco Alimentare* activity is made possible by over 1500 volunteers providing daily backing; they personally visit needy individuals, in view of sharing a stable friendship with them. Since 1997 *Banco Alimentare* has been organizing the National Food Collection Day on the last Saturday of November of each year³³. During this day, in a vast network of supermarkets in the whole country, 110,000 volunteers give part of their time allowing the realization of this initiative, and around 5,000,000 consumers buy food for those who cannot afford it. This appointment has become an important national moment, involving civil society at large, raising the awareness of the problem of poverty by inviting to a concrete gratuitous gesture of sharing with those who live in poverty. *Banco Alimentare* is more than effective mass communication and sophisticated logistics; education of local volunteers and mass communication explicitly highlight the non-material meaning of what is done, as summarised in the banner of the National Food Collection Day: “Share the needs to share the meaning of life”.

³⁰ <http://www.bancoalimentare.it/> ; <http://www.bancoalimentare.it/it/italian-food-bank-banco-alimentare-about-us>

³¹ RUSCONI, cit., p.35.

³² More data available on the website http://issuu.com/fondazionebancoalimentare/docs/dati2012_rba

³³ <http://www.bancoalimentare.it/colletta-alimentare-2012/>



A second example of unusual creativity, effectiveness and efficiency is *Casa Famiglia Rosetta*³⁴, the centre of an articulated NGO structure. This initiative grew out of a simple loving act: the founder, Fr. Vincenzo Sorce – a talented scholar in Theology, authors of many theology books – answering "yes" to a very personal invitation to share suffering in friendship with a severely ill young man; and from there, journeying and building and professing. Established in Caltanissetta (Sicily) in the 1980s, the network of *Casa Famiglia Rosetta* offers reception, care, rehabilitation and social inclusion programs to people with physical and/or mental disabilities, people with alcohol, drug abuse and gambling dependence issues, at-risk minors or minors living in dysfunctional families, elderly people, people affected by AIDS, and women in need. The most significant indicator of success is that former guests of Casa Rosetta's homes are in fact the promoters of many new initiatives. Since 1995 the Association has also been active in Brazil and since 2005 in Tanzania; it is recognized as an Organization with Consultative Status with the United Nations ECOSOC. The Association has also established the *Alessia* Foundation – Euro-Mediterranean Institute for Training, Research, Therapy and Development of Social Policies. Since March 2009, the Association has been engaged as an NGO specialized in the field of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS issues in the TREATNET Project of the United Nations Office for Drug and Crime (UNODC).

These accomplishments are here mentioned not so much to impress – though they are impressive; but in order to illustrate a significant economic point about effectiveness and efficiency of the service provided. A drug rehabilitation treatment that is able to generate so many 'generative' people – people who embrace their newly conquered life as a vocation – is a powerful empirical evidence which shows the effectiveness of a method³⁵ of sustainably rehabilitating people; a method where love and forgiveness permeate community life. *Casa Rosetta*'s experience illustrates that gratuitousness is a powerful driver of human, economic, and socio-economic development. A complex organization grew out of gratitude for receiving a personal vocation; receiving and circulating love and forgiveness in daily life was the path to social creativity, up to active involvement with local, national and international public institutions, up to actually contributing improving their practices. This experience is also significant of the creativity of love even in objectively difficult socio-economic situations. The "Casa Rosetta" experience grew out of no pre-existing material means; it happened in Caltanissetta province, Sicily; that is, one of the most problematic southern Italian regions with massive unemployment, especially youth unemployment; mafia problems; often inefficient and ineffective public services.

In a sort of *crescendo*, the third example refers to an initiative which was started in Italy's southern regions as well: the already mentioned *Progetto Policoro*³⁶. "There is no magic formula for creating jobs. We need to invest in the intelligence and in the heart of people" (Fr. Mario Operti). Facing the dramatic employment situation in the southern regions of Italy, *Progetto Policoro* was started in 1995 as an educational experience fostering self-reliance, reciprocity and solidarity among youth. Mons. Angelo Casile, who has been coaching *Progetto Policoro* from its beginning, summarises it in three steps: one, evangelize life; two, educate to work; three, express entrepreneurship³⁷. In practice, Church offices and

³⁴ <http://www.casarosetta.it/home/default.asp>. The story of this initiative is told in SORCE, V., *Il coraggio di osare. Un prete dal tempio alla strada*, Cinisello Balsamo, Edizioni Paoline, 1995; reprinted Caltanissetta, Edizioni Solidarietà, 2013.

³⁵ In a visit to one of Casa Rosetta's locations, I was really taken by a text written in paint on a stone, held by the branches of an old olive tree at the entrance of the community's vegetable garden cultivated by people in re-hab. It says: "Quel che è amato cresce" – all that is loved, it grows.

³⁶ <http://www.progettopolicoro.it/progettopolicoro/s2magazine/index1.jsp?idPagina=2>

³⁷ A vivid presentation of Policoro can be found in the presentation: [Evangelizzare la vita. Educare al lavoro. Esprimere impresa. http://prezi.com/ygbczkkmqwk/progetto-policoro/?utm_source=website&utm_medium=prezi_landing_related_solr&utm_campaign=prezi_landing_related_author](http://prezi.com/ygbczkkmqwk/progetto-policoro/?utm_source=website&utm_medium=prezi_landing_related_solr&utm_campaign=prezi_landing_related_author).



associations work together in a given local situation in order to support sustainable economic initiatives there, and to promote inter-regional cooperation as needed. Over the years³⁸, *Policoro* represented an opportunity for real transformation (job creation; cooperatives, also engaged in cultivating former mafia lands; microcredit; all of the above make it possible for young people to have families and children there³⁹, and not be displaced in order to earn a living – and this sort of settlement represents an indispensable material condition for sustainable social development in depressed, aging regions). The reasonable hope of local economic development also helps eradicating passive attitudes, public welfare-seeking behaviours, expectations to have the right to be taken care of, and ultimately mafia culture. Remarkably, during the recent crisis the *Policoro* initiative has spread to most Italian regions in order to support youth self-employment.

To sum up: the three initiatives briefly mentioned above have in common the mark of an unusual positive performance, in terms of effectively providing viable solutions to seemingly intractable problems in a very cost-effective way, that would be inexplicable on the basis of pre-existing economic resources and/or favorable material conditions. The fact that these solutions ‘work’ is a sign an inner dynamism, non-material in essence, that is explicitly named in each case: to be seriously engaged in sharing ‘the meaning of life’ – and not simply providing material help. Furthermore, the three examples have other aspects in common: first, they share a recent (largely post-1968) origin; second, their founder/initiator/coach is still present in person, or is vividly kept in the memory of those who participate. This is to confirm that the horizon of meaning and motivation matters, and that being grateful for having encountered a meaningful experience drives gratuitous engagement and enthusiasm – the non-material resources that can make the difference in living diakonia, facing day by day the ‘new things’ that reality brings, and restlessly trying to address unpredictable needs and sorrows. Even the most formally perfect organization could never be effective and efficient in absence of gratuitousness and enthusiasm; today’s efficient routines are bound to become tomorrow’s ineffective or even cumbersome procedures, as needs change.

The three proposed examples are no more than the iceberg’s top of many good things that are realized in the Italian Catholic Church; and much more is obviously realized in other milieus. At the same time, it is unquestionable that (within and without the Church) you can observe a number of situations which sharply contrast with the above. I am referring to charitable initiatives that remain active in a sort of inertial way, often supported by large, complex, minutely structured organizations, routinely providing material support to many disadvantaged people. Despite their doing ‘good’, they also create non trivial problems. As a result of the prevalence of a bureaucratic or technocratic penchant in their operation, different initiatives – even belonging to the same catholic milieu – may end up competing with each other, sometimes in quite unfriendly ways; as a consequence, their outreach and effectiveness obviously suffer. In these cases, it is very likely that managing the organizational dimension of the initiative exacts too important a price in terms of human resources; furthermore, bureaucratic management tends to be more costly, as for the organization’s viability it may be necessary to pursue

At present 115 Italian dioceses are involved; hundreds of cooperatives have been created, providing sustainable jobs for and thousands of young people, women, former prisoners. Agriculture, crafts and services – especially tourism – represent the main fields of activity.

³⁸ Cfr. AA.Vv., *Quindici anni di Progetto Policoro. Gli animatori e i gesti concreti*, Roma, Ecra-Editioni del Credito Cooperativo, 2010.

³⁹ See CASILE, A., «Il Progetto Policoro», in PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Giustizia e globalizzazione (cit)*, Città del Vaticano, 2011, pp. 933-935.



effectiveness and efficiency through using extrinsic motivations. In the economists' language, extrinsic motivations refer to either money or other material rewards; while they often contribute to the organization's survival, they seldom make the difference in terms of outreach and effectiveness. In facts, non-material, intrinsic motivations tend to play a much stronger role, even in business organizations.

In the particular case of Church's diakonia, intrinsic motivations are explicitly related to the inner quest for ultimate meaning by the part of people involved in the service initiative; to the contagiousness of faith and hope, to the trustworthy expectation of reciprocal support in facing both the material challenges and the deeper personal questions.

Since no human action can be undertaken without adequate motivation (by the fact of choosing an action whatsoever, we are affirming it is worthy to us), existing charitable initiatives – both within and without the Church – live out of individual generosity, enthusiasm, friendship, and/or strongly felt socio-political engagement. These non-material, intrinsic motivations are stronger than purely extrinsic ones, and the social engagement deriving from them may be very effective and efficient. These charitable initiatives are admirable; but unfortunately they tend to be fragile.

When the primary objective of a given charitable initiative lays in its social outcome, and not in announcing that we love each other out of our receiving Christ's love here and now, initiatives may flourish for sometime; but they rest on the inner strength of initiators, which may falter for too many reasons. However, when sharing in Christ's love is explicitly set at the heart of a charitable initiatives, and this is the focus of Christian education of promoters, participants, and beneficiaries, diakonia tends to occur as a vital form of communication of love. Human fragility remains (*Caritas in veritate* 34), but it is always possible to start anew. 'Loving' initiatives which are deeply rooted in God's gratuitous love enjoy a sort of freedom (in changing, in trying other ways, even in withdrawing from an impossible task) that purely human organizations cannot imagine. This seems to me the reason why initiatives where 'sanctity' matters do not seem to suffer in terms of outreach, effectiveness and efficiency even in presence of a possibly transient, tentative, imperfect organization.

In summary: observing a better outcome for those initiatives where outcome is not set as 'the' priority may seem paradoxical; but it is not so paradoxical after all.

2. Highlights on diakonia taken from Italian Bishops' official documents and magisterial interventions

Official documents and magisterial interventions seem to be fully aware of the need to educationally support the complex, variegated world of the Church's social initiatives broadly defined. Here, I will briefly summarize only two sets of sources. The first set of documents are a very narrow selection of magisterial interventions, by the Bishop of Rome (both the current and the former), and by my own Bishop, in the Ambrosean tradition. They include two messages, to respectively *Caritas internationalis* (B XVI 2011) and *Caritas ambrosiana* (Scola, 2012). They both explicitly highlight the dimension of 'receiving' from God the love expressed in service, and underline the educational dimension as being at the core of Church diakonia.. The second set of documents is institutional in kind, as it includes the core message and documents produced by the Italian National Office for Social Problems and Work, concerning its own role at the national level, and the role of local initiatives of 'social pastoral'.



Given the central role of the *Caritas* initiatives in the life of most Italian dioceses, I thought it could be useful to revisit two important messages addressed to this particular ecclesial structure. In his message to *Caritas internationalis* (2011)⁴⁰, Benedict XVI reaffirms God as the source of charity and warns that, if this is forgotten, charitable initiatives risk falling prey of an ideological approach. Interestingly, Benedict XVI has been keen on indicating the technocratic temptation as the ideology of globalization (*Caritas in Veritate* 14, 70). “Only on the basis of a daily commitment to accept and to live fully the love of God can one promote the dignity of each and every human being. In my first Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, I reaffirmed how critical the witness of charity is for the Church in our day. Through such witness, seen in the daily lives of her members, the Church reaches out to millions of persons and makes it possible for them to recognize and sense the love of God, who is always close to every man and woman in need. For us Christians, God himself is the source of charity; and charity is understood not merely as generic benevolence but as self-giving, even to the sacrifice of one’s life for others in imitation of the example of Jesus Christ. The Church prolongs Christ’s saving mission in time and space: she wishes to reach out to every human being, moved by a concern that every individual come to know that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (cf. *Rom 8:35*). ... Without a transcendent foundation, without a reference to God the Creator, without an appreciation of our eternal destiny, we risk falling prey to harmful ideologies”

The Message is also quite explicit about the political dimension inevitably attached to social initiatives: “In the political sphere - and in all those areas directly affecting the lives of the poor - the faithful, especially the laity, enjoy broad freedom of activity. No one can claim to speak “officially” in the name of the entire lay faithful, or of all Catholics, in matters freely open to discussion (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 43; 88). On the other hand, all Catholics, and indeed all men and women, are called to act with purified consciences and generous hearts in resolutely promoting those values which I have often referred to as “non-negotiable”⁴¹.

In his message to *Caritas ambosiana*, Angelo Scola recalls an important legacy of Vatican II, namely that “the Church is communion and the locus of education to charity (...) God’s love always precedes us. This love is reflected in ‘communion’ as the *a priori* of Christian life, and of all its expression and actions. ‘A priori communion’ is the first form of charity we are called, especially within the Christian community.”⁴². As a consequence, we need to contrast individualisms often observed in charitable

⁴⁰ BENEDICT XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Participants in the General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis*, Clementine Hall, Vatican City, 27 May 2011.

⁴¹ A thorough exploration of the socio-political dimension of the Church’s presence in Italy goes well beyond the scope of this paper and definitely beyond my ability; still, I would simply like to recall two pontifical interventions that stand out for their significance for Church’s diaconia. In chronological order, John Paul II to the Italian Parliament, in 2002 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20021114_italian-parliament_it.html; and Benedict XVI to the National Conference of the Italian Church in Verona, in 2006 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20061019_convegno-verona_it.html. Within this perspective, Italian Catholics – which at the same time are politically represented by politicians who are scattered and divided in virtually all political parties and seldom exhibit a common perspective on most issues, and yet remain, at the grassroots level one of the most powerful divers of social protection and social innovation in Italy – may gain very much from reciprocal recognition, and perception of political opponents not as political enemies, but simply as opponents. I found good reading CREPALDI, G., *Il cattolico in politica. Manuale per la ripresa*, Siena, Cantagalli, 2010.

⁴² “La Giornata diocesana della Caritas ... ci invita a fermare la nostra attenzione su una importante eredità del Concilio Vaticano II, del cui inizio ricorre il cinquantesimo: la Chiesa come comunione e luogo di educazione alla carità. La Chiesa scaturisce dalla comunione del Padre, del Figlio e dello Spirito Santo ed è il frutto storico e visibile della comunione di Dio con gli uomini. Infatti, come insegnava il Concilio «Dio volle santificare e salvare gli uomini non individualmente e senza alcun legame tra loro, ma volle costituire di loro un popolo, che lo riconoscesse secondo la verità e lo servisse nella santità» (Lumen



initiatives, overcoming the temptation to believe that we do not need each other⁴³; from this, there follows a specific task for Caritas, namely to educate to “charity as the law of life”, fostering collaboration in the Christian communities and treading common path⁴⁴.

As to the institutional dimension of social diakonia in the Italian Church, the National Office for Social Problems and Work of the Italian Bishops Conference indicates evangelization and education as the first priorities for its action⁴⁵. Giving priority to evangelization and education in the social dimension of the Church’s presence reflects the general orientations of the Italian Catholic Church for the decennium: “*Educare alla vita buona del Vangelo*”⁴⁶, that is educating to the ‘good life’ of the Gospel. This education is centered on the vital relation between faith and daily life, and on living life as a vocation. As to the second priority – only apparently organizational, the National Office’s document speaks of conjugating the many areas of interest of the office within the unitary perspective of integral human development, as following and witnessing the Truth of Jesus is our “first contribution to the complex problems of contemporary society”. After mentioning the connection between work and celebration as its third point, the document comes back to the need for education: “to work, to the social dimension, to justice, to peace, to custody of creation”. In encountering the truth of Jesus, each person can experience her own truth; hence, there comes the need to educate to the prevalence of ‘being’ over ‘doing’⁴⁷. As a final point, the document recalls *Redemptor hominis* 13: God inhabits our ordinary lives; hence, the focus of social action is making it possible to encounter, and let our brothers encounter, Christ (*Caritas in veritate* 1).

As a culmination, I would like to recall Pope Francis’ words during the ‘*Missa pro ecclesia*’, on March 14, 2013⁴⁸. There is a difference between organizing charitable initiatives and participating in the diakonia of the Church. The second is in fact a ‘movement’ involving journeying, building and professing. “Journeying: our life is a journey, and when we stop moving, things go wrong. ... Building. Building the Church. We speak of stones: stones are solid; but living stones, stones anointed by the Holy Spirit. ... Thirdly, professing. We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong. We may become a charitable⁴⁹ NGO, but not the Church, the Bride of the

Gentium, n. 9). Nella Chiesa, quindi, impariamo che l’amore del Padre ci precede sempre. Di questo è riflesso la “comunione” come *a priori* della vita cristiana e di ogni sua forma di espressione e di ogni sua azione. Questa “comunione a priori” è la prima forma di carità che siamo chiamati a vivere innanzitutto all’interno della comunità cristiana”. A. SCOLA, *Al servizio di un nuovo volto di Chiesa*, Messaggio del Cardinale Arcivescovo per la Giornata Diocesana Caritas 2012, 11 novembre 2012.

⁴³ “Questo richiede a noi tutti cercare di contrastare gli individualismi, purtroppo presenti anche nelle realtà caritative. Siamo chiamati a vincere la tentazione di pensare di non aver bisogno degli altri”, Scola, *ibidem*.

⁴⁴ “In questa logica di comunione uno specifico ruolo educativo è affidato a Caritas. Si tratta ... del compito di educare alla carità come legge della vita. A questo proposito sarà di grande importanza che i laici impegnati nelle Caritas delle nostre comunità favoriscano la collaborazione tra le varie realtà, coltivando l’importanza del camminare insieme”. Scola, *ibidem*.

⁴⁵ http://www.chiesacattolica.it/cci_new_v3/allegati/17102/Evangelizzare%20il%20sociale.pdf.

⁴⁶ CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA, *Educare alla vita buona del Vangelo*, Orientamenti pastorali dell’Episcopato italiano per il decennio 2010-2020, Roma, October 4, 2010,

http://www.chiesacattolica.it/documenti/2010/10/00015206_educare_alla_vita_buona_del_vangelo_orien.html

⁴⁷ The document explicitly mentions that this prevalence is not always visible in actual pastoral attitudes, that rather tend to rely on praxes that are disconnected from evangelization and cultural education on the different areas of the ‘social’ pastoral mentioned above.

⁴⁸ FRANCIS, *Homily, Missa pro Ecclesia* with the Cardinals Electors, Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, 14 March 2013, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130314_omelia-cardinali_en.html

⁴⁹ I cannot help recalling Pope Francis’ actual spoken words, much commented in the press: “... una ONG pietosa”.

“Pietosa” is a double-edged word in Italian, as it both means “that gives pity”, and also “that deserves pity”. The expression “pietosa” has been purged from the Italian written version of the homily, which uses the word “assistenziale”; but I must say that hearing the original word made a strong, unmistakable impression. The theme of the Church risking becoming an



Lord. ... When we journey without the Cross, when we build without the Cross, when we profess Christ without the Cross, we are not disciples of the Lord, we are worldly: we may be bishops, priests, cardinal, popes, but not disciples of the Lord".

3. Catholic Church diakonia in a plural, high income, and declining society. Some personal considerations.

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Especially in our plural, high income societies, there is a narrow ridge in between decline (economic, social and cultural decline, as they tend to go together with the economic dimension usually coming last!) and development (most urgent, helping the poor and disadvantaged in exiting poverty in a sustainable way). Our societies do not lack opportunities or resources. Plurality is itself a resource⁵⁰, as the objectively high level of education, knowledge, technology diffusion, financial resources, and production of goods and services provide precious resources our societies can enjoy, and that could be much more evenly distributed to the benefit of many (including some that fiercely oppose such distribution). Choosing which side of the ridge – development or decline – we want to take is up to us, and our choice seems to be most significantly related to the non-material dimensions of our existence. It depends on which concrete hopes can drive and sustain, here and now, our decisions and actions.

The field of economic research I have been most intrigued with is exploring human decision under 'strong', or 'deep' uncertainty – the kind of decision that needs to engage "the whole breadth of reason". To summarize what I think it takes to express a truly effective and efficient diakonia in today's Italy, I would mention two expressions: one is gratuitousness, and the second is awareness of reciprocal belonging⁵¹.

My personal perspective is the following: as an economist, I am aware of the centrality of the immaterial dimension in shaping the material reality. Perceptions, beliefs and motivations make the difference between decline and development. The Church really serves when She credibly announces that Christian hope does not fail. In lay words, Christian hope is a very reasonable hope. This cannot be simply stated;

NGO keeps recurring in Pope Francis' speeches, as in his speech to Latin American Bishops at Aparecida during the 2013 JMJ.

⁵⁰ Just to mention a trivial indicator, the plurality of entrepreneurial forms is an important asset (during the crisis, the non-profit sector has been experiencing an increase in the number of job positions); similarly, foreign residents – especially from non-EU countries - have been very active in terms of net creation of new enterprises over the crisis years.

⁵¹ One of the persons I learnt most from, Don Giussani, has been using the term "gratuitousness" for many years. Some excerpts of an intervention of his on gratuitousness in work, in social initiatives and in politics, spoken in 1987, still detain an impressive force: *"How can a human being remain in a positive attitude, within a ultimate optimism (since we cannot act if we are not optimistic). The answer is: not alone, but involving others. Establishing and operational friendship (cohabitation or company or movement): that is, a more abundant association of energies founded on mutual recognition. This company is the more reliable the more stable and permanent is the reason why it was born. A friendship based on economic interest is lasting as long as it is useful. On the contrary a company, or a movement that are born out of the intuition that the aim of that enterprise exceeds the same terms of that enterprise; that it represents the attempt to respond to a higher calling, in sum, a movement that is born out of the perception of the same heart we have in common and which defines us as human being, that movement establish a true belonging"* ... *"Well organized calculations cannot create the highest phenomenon of human expression, namely the reality of a people ... among us a people is born for a gratuitousness that imitates, or tries to imitate, the overabundance and the grace that Christ brought by coming and remaining among us. The extreme convenience of life, in facts, is gratuitousness as it penetrates within our calculations"*. Luigi Giussani, Intervento alla Assemblea della Democrazia Cristiana Lombarda, Assago, 6 Febbraio 1987, reprinted in GIUSSANI, L., *L'Io, il potere e le opere*, Marietti, Milano, 2000.



it has to be self-evident to mind and heart. This is a task for “the whole breadth of reason”⁵², that can access Truth since Truth is actually searching for us, and this sets us free. In particular, engaging a serious dialogue on the ‘place of God’ in our societies (CV 4) is both necessary and potentially generative of a ‘good life in common’⁵³.

Exiting the Italian crisis demand from us an élan of freedom, acting in view of what is good and valuable, even knowing that no single act of ours will be perfect. Not being perfect is the whole idea of being Christian, after all: Jesus had to give His life to save us, as we cannot save ourselves by the perfection of our deeds. In all our economic, social and political action, we are wounded (CV 34); hence we need support and correction and forgiveness. This is the greatness of the Church’s experience, where gratuitousness, permanent education and forgiveness can be experienced as gifts we receive, that tend to overflow and permeate our (always imperfect) actions.

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⁵² I shared my enthusiasm for this expression, which is very inviting for any researcher, with my colleague Mario A. Maggioni. A tentative step of our common work is BERETTA S., MAGGIONI, M. A., *The Whole Breadth of Reason. Rethinking Economics and Politics*, ASSET Summer School 2011, Venezia, Marcianum Press, 2012.

⁵³ SCOLA, A., *Non dimentichiamoci di Dio. Libertà di fedi, di culture e politica*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2013.

