

del Pinal, Eric Hoenes , Marc Roscoe Loustau , and Kristin Norget , ed. *Mediating Catholicism: Religion and Media in Global Catholic Imaginaries*. London,: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. *New Directions in the Anthropology of Christianity*. *New Directions in the Anthropology of Christianity*. Bloomsbury Collections. Web. 10 Mar. 2025. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350228214>.

Accessed from: www.bloomsburycollections.com

Accessed on: Sun Mar 09 2025 21:55:03 Eastern Daylight Saving Time

Copyright © Hillary Kaell. All rights reserved. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

A Touch of Love: On Words, Things, and the Global Aspirations of US Catholics

Hillary Kaell

This chapter is about love. More specifically, it has to do with the multiple entextualizations of the word “love” that I noticed during my research on child sponsorship plans. Each year in the United States, millions of donors use sponsorship as a platform through which to support a child abroad. Such programs generally cost between 30 and 50 dollars a month, and include the opportunity to exchange letters, photos, and small gifts. Entextualization is baked into the process. It refers to how texts are made available for circulation in new contexts, often through the interaction of multiple forms of media (Eisenlohr 2010). In this case, I am interested in how one fragment text—the word “love”—circulates through a variety of sites including theological statements, sponsorship organizations’ YouTube videos, figures of speech in American English, and homemade Christmas cards.

Theories of entextualization are one facet of the turn in media studies away from earlier assumptions that spoken language was “the most ‘immaterial’ of all media” (Eisenlohr 2011: 267) and, by extension, that “materiality” referred to everything else (Gershon and Manning 2014: 540). As anthropologists of evangelical Protestantism have noted, it is more fruitful to consider words and things as coextensive media (Coleman 2000; Keane 2003). Doing so requires defining “mediation” broadly, along with David Morgan (2013: 351), as “any practice of communication that intermingles the body with the world around it such that modes of embodiment become the measure of what people claim to know or feel as true.” What I consider in this chapter is how a word or concept, such as love, can become the vector for that intermingling, and how its power is related to material things, including bodies, and electronic media.

I explore this theme in the context of Unbound, the largest Catholic sponsorship organization in the United States. My larger project on sponsorship spanned more than six years and covered a variety of Christian organizations; my work on Unbound was mainly concentrated from 2014 to 2016 when I conducted fieldwork in its offices in Kansas City and with sponsors who live there and near Albany, New York.¹ In what follows, I focus on how the organization's founders and current staff discuss and entextualize love, especially in their attempt to shape a theology of sponsorship for US donors. From a Catholic perspective, it is not very surprising that Unbound has adopted the language of love. Indeed, love is a native term in contemporary Catholicism, as is the idea that love takes embodied form.² As I note below, Unbound's founders adopted the child sponsorship model in the early 1980s from Protestant organizations that also emphasized love. While they kept the word's association with humanitarianism and the Christian Gospels, Unbound redefined sponsorship as a distinctly Catholic endeavor in part by entextualizing love within Roman Catholic social teaching.

In anthropological work, there has already been some attention to Catholic love as “a theological principle or ontological premise” (Mayblin 2012: 246). Anthropologists have shown how, for Catholic laypeople, human love—that is, for family and friends—may seem to channel divinity (Moore 2015) or appear as flawed, even impossible, compared to a perfect relationship with God (Lebner 2012). They have interrogated how aspirations for societal love may promote civic volunteerism (Muehlebach 2013b: 509). Theologians have also examined Roman Catholic love talk in personalist, Thomistic, and Augustinian thought. The first set of anthropological studies inspires my focus on informal, culturally rooted lay theologies; the second set of theological ones inspires my emphasis on love that exceeds particular, face-to-face relations in service of what sponsorship organizations often call “the world” or “one human family” (to quote Unbound's Statement of Core Values). This kind of love sutures, more or less successfully, the “irreconcilable tension between universalism and localism” that is inherent in the Catholic Church (Napolitano 2016: 69; Norget 2017: 189).

At a basic level, my primary questions are twofold: What *is* love in Unbound's theology of sponsorship? And how is it conceived as circulating even when the bodies of sponsors do not? In what ways do some people's bodies and actions become visible to others as channels for love? To answer these questions I examine the context for Unbound's views on love, its relation to family, motherhood, and material objects, as well as the organization's use of certain media to distinguish itself as lay Catholic. Of importance throughout is how the word love's capacity to bundle qualities, and therefore entextualize across many forms of media,

helps give Unbound a certain flexibility in terms of organization identity as it balances between being Catholic yet distinct from the institutional Church, being humanitarian yet divinely guided, or being voluntary yet authoritative. To begin, however, let us turn to a brief discussion of the love I have in mind and the contexts in which it emerged.

Embodying the “Journey from Power to Love”

When I met Unbound’s new CEO Scott Wasserman in July 2014, we were in the cafeteria eating rice and beans. Inspired by its beginnings as an intentional community, Unbound still offers its staff a free daily lunch featuring the simple food that founders Bob Hentzen and Jerry Tolle ate in Latin America as missionary priests in the 1950s and 1960s.³ Both men left the priesthood in the early 1970s and returned to home to Kansas City where, with help from three of Hentzen’s siblings, they co-founded the Christian Foundation for Children in 1981. It was the first major organization to promote child sponsorship by and for US Catholics. Today, it is called Unbound and has about 300,000 sponsors, nearly all of whom are US Catholics.

Hentzen and Tolle, who served with the Christian Brothers and Jesuits respectively, embraced the “preferential option for the poor,” a phrase first used in 1968 by the superior general of the Jesuits and adopted by Liberation Theologians in Latin America. As we ate our rice and beans, Wasserman told me that although Unbound does not use that language any more—it sounds too Catholic and obscure for unchurched sponsors—they still abide by the principle, as interpreted over the years by Hentzen in particular.⁴ For Unbound, it means trying to nudge sponsors on “the journey from power to love”—the title of a song Hentzen composed and often performed—where “power” refers to having money and “love” refers to solidarity and mutual respect. Hentzen characterized this journey as something that exceeds logic or human agency. In a quasi-mystical moment, the comparatively wealthy American individual connects God to humanity and becomes flooded with a feeling of loving connectedness. In the song’s best known lines, Hentzen described his experience in Latin America: “Then it happened, oh, Lord. I fell in love with your people, I could not leave.”⁵ Later Wasserman clarified for me: “We want our sponsors to feel that they aren’t just financial contributors, they are members of a prophetic community of compassion in which people... bridge national, cultural and economic divides.”⁶

I never met Hentzen, who steered the organization as President until his death in 2013 at age seventy-seven, but his spirit lingered everywhere in Unbound's offices during my fieldwork. Unbound employees characterized him as an idealized "worker-priest" who personified social justice (Schneider 1991: 188; Muehlebach 2013a: 454). They told me multiple times how Hentzen was born on a humble Kansas farm in the throes of the Depression (1936, to be exact) and grew up in a family of fourteen. He was educated in local schools before joining the Christian Brothers in 1953, after which he taught in Colombia and Guatemala until 1970 when he left the order. After three more years in Guatemala, he returned to Kansas with his new wife, Cristina, to work in the nonprofit sector. In Unbound's portrayals of Hentzen during the second half of his life—as president of the organization he co-founded—he is no longer the farm boy, but he is still a humble servant who embodies the figure of traveling pilgrim and apostle (of love, not the evangel). During my time there, the corporate office displayed photos of Hentzen on his epic 4,000-mile overland pilgrimage from Kansas to Guatemala in 1996 and his 8,000-mile pilgrimage from Guatemala to Chile in 2009. One large image was an artful collage where his body was composed of hundreds of photos of sponsored children (Figure 5.1). Another zoomed in on his tattered shoes, which Unbound also used for his online obituary. "When asked why he walked," reads the obituary, "he said it was simple: 'I walk because I love them.'" In YouTube videos from 2009, Hentzen himself elaborates:

The most vulnerable people in this world feel isolated. The first message, then, in this walk is that you are not alone. We are walking with you. We are the group that not only walks, we are the group that really relates to the poor... There have been some close calls [along the road]. Our greatest vulnerability out there on the road has been our smallness, our flesh and bones versus a 4,000 pound piece of steel flying down the highway at break-neck speed. But to submit to the dangers of the open road is a tremendous statement.⁸

Hentzen's actions were epic, but also comprehensible in Catholic terms. The pilgrim uses his body as an instrument through which to mediate and cultivate humility, piety, and reparative sacrifice. His actions embody humanitarian metaphors—"We are walking with you," "It is a journey from power to love," and "Walk the road to the heart of God... [as] pilgrims on this earth together," to quote some of Hentzen's songs. Metaphor becomes cramps, blisters, and breeze-ruffled hair. Love is mediated through the body: the pleasure, sweat, and pressure of touch as Hentzen embraced the families of sponsored children along his route



Figure 5.1 A collage at Unbound's office depicting Hentzen as a pilgrim, walking hand-in-hand with a child. The collage is made up of the faces of sponsored children in Latin America (photo by author).

(mediated twice over for US people at home through videos and photos). The walk, as the video explicitly states, also embodied Unbound's inverted model of power by showing how even its president uses his feet—the humblest form of transportation.

Though Hentzen's status as a former priest is unstated, it is hard to ignore. His life, available to audiences through YouTube and photographs, is one of sacrifice, spirituality, moderation, and even privation—he is gaunt yet calm and cheerful, wearing out his shoes on the trek. The mediatization of the pilgrimage highlights this priestly aura, whether or not it was evident to people during the walk itself. What I mean is that the camera's lens focuses on Hentzen; literally, it often sharpens the focus on him in contrast to the blurry mass of people behind him. Even without this sharpening and blurring effect, the videos and photos often show him walking or standing slightly in front of the (usually local) groups that walk together or in pairs as they accompany him for portions of the journey. It is hard not to see the priest leading his flock. His touch, as he meets laypeople on

the route, is not a priestly blessing since he no longer has the power to transfigure bread and wine into body and blood. Yet it remains a marked act of corporeal immediacy, which implies the transmission of blessings—the friendship and funds that come with Unbound sponsorship. Indeed, my sense is that Hentzen’s epic pilgrimages were powerful precisely because they were events featuring a layman who nevertheless retained the power of priestly authority. Hentzen was both much greater than the average Unbound donor, and one of them—the son of Midwestern farmers who loved regular folk—emblemized through home-movie style videos from the road.

The quote from the video, noted above, underlines how Hentzen’s love-walk also embodies human beings’ shared “smallness” in face of literal machines (cars and trucks) and metaphorical machines, like unjust political and economic systems that seem to flatten humble people in their wake. Hentzen’s kind of love echoes mid-century US Catholic social teaching: the worker-focused personalism of Dorothy Day and the intensely embodied pacifism of Thomas Merton—the two Catholics Pope Francis singled out as “representatives of the American people” in his 2015 address to Congress. I don’t know if Hentzen cited these famous contemporaries, but he certainly spread the love-talk that, for the US Catholic left, seemed to hail a new Catholicism in the mid-twentieth century, as I elaborate below.⁹ Hentzen, and his sponsorship organization, circulated love-talk to a wide swathe of charitably minded US Catholics, many of whom were older, Midwestern, less political, and more devotional.

Hentzen’s pilgrimage as a form of *embodied mediation* introduces one of my key questions: How does Unbound view love’s trajectory for sponsors who, in contrast with Hentzen, are not physically present with those they purport to serve? “Bob’s office was on the road, and the homes of the families were his boardroom,” was how Unbound’s director of US outreach put it rather poetically in a *National Catholic Reporter* obituary (Fincher 2013). Hentzen moved back and forth across national borders in the Americas all of his adult life. His and Tolle’s vision for their organization, which Unbound promotes today, is that US sponsors learn to “walk alongside” the people they support so “a relationship would blossom across international boundaries, and people would simply learn to love one another, even at a distance, and be committed to help each other as brothers and sisters” (Hatrup 2019).¹⁰ But whereas Hentzen actually walked and developed relationships with people far away, these hopes for Unbound sponsors rest entirely in the mediated and imaginative sphere. According to Unbound, fewer than 1 percent of sponsors meet the child they support. Their average age is fifty-five and, if my fifty-two interviews are any indication, relatively few

have traveled outside the United States and even fewer have traveled beyond a few locations in North America and Western Europe. So how is love mediated through these comparatively stationary US Catholic bodies?

Making Love: A Backstory

Before returning to this question, let us consider how love came to circulate so freely, and so often, in sponsorship media. Child sponsorship was first introduced to raise money for Protestant missions in the early nineteenth century. Love language came directly from the Gospels; “love thy neighbor” was a major theological premise upon which Protestants justified expending resources on foreign missions. However, love talk had another source too: child sponsorship was linked to a rising trend in “sentimentalism” among White middle-class Americans, which celebrated the moral worth of pious emotions, especially during motherhood (Kaell 2020). “The cult of motherhood,” as historians dub it, integrated mother love as fundamental to the paternalistic family unit (cf. Muehlebach 2013a: 465), and therefore a basic building block of society as a whole.

According to this view, good Christian families circulated love through “reciprocal sentiments” between unequal parties, such as men and women or parents and children. For example, a mother nurtured her child in faith while her own heart was also “enlarged” in love for God by observing the child’s simplicity and responsiveness (Corrigan 2002: 174–5, 292; Stoler 2002: 81). Scholars, many of whom use mediation as a theoretical apparatus, have tracked the rise of these social norms in mid-nineteenth-century US Protestantism and, by the 1870s, in US Catholicism (Alvarez 2016: 9). Bourgeois American ideals melded easily with a Catholic devotional culture that already celebrated Mary as loving mother (McDannell 1986). Put in these terms, the link between godly love (*agape*) and mother love was less an inherent feature of “Christian cultures” (Mayblin 2012: 248) than it was a reflection of emergent properties within particular modern, class-based societies.

Through sponsorship, American donors were told they could circulate their love much further than their own family or even nation. In that respect, sponsorship was typical of a class of nineteenth-century charitable activities that linked Christian sentimentalism to humanitarian aspirations. This introduces another entextualization of love with a slightly different valence. Humanitarianism is rooted in early modern European moral philosophy (Fassin

2011) that viewed all people as sharing basic traits through their relation to a single Creator. As a result, it was assumed that an individual could examine his or her conscience to intuit natural laws that governed the self and, extrapolating, humanity as a whole (Poovey 1998: xv, 148–9). While Catholic thinkers at the time had a complicated relationship to individual conscience, they also viewed inherent regularities in human nature as reflecting the work of one Creator (Napolitano 2016) and, in the Thomistic tradition, understood this nature as regulated by a *caritatis ordo* (order of love). According to this “ordered” view of love, it was natural that a Christian would feel emotions within her family as the most vital, since these structured her primary experiences. From family love one should then nurture a wider love that could sustain feelings of connection within the global Catholic church and fuel one’s duty to support foreign missions (Pope 1991).

Versions of these ideas are the conceptual bedrock in every US Christian sponsorship organization I have studied, and they long predate Unbound’s founding in the early 1980s. From the start, Hentzen and Tolle were undoubtedly aware that love language saturated the media produced by Protestant (and non-Christian) sponsorship organizations. Throughout the 1980s, Unbound staffers filed and kept clippings from advertising campaigns by Protestant organizations World Vision, Compassion, and Christian Children’s Fund. Hentzen and Tolle even toured Compassion in 1980 as the model for their soon-to-be program. At Unbound, then, love was used (and likely successful with sponsors) because of its long association with gendered sentimentalism, American humanitarianism, and Christian missions. But for Unbound’s founders, and perhaps its sponsors, love also evoked trends within mid-twentieth-century US Catholicism.

At the time of Unbound’s founding, God had become much more “likely to be defined [by Catholics] as infinite *agape*—a forgiving, loving father/mother type” (Mayblin 2014: S271n.1). As noted briefly above, love talk was especially prominent on the Catholic left, notably in the Catholic social teaching that served as Hentzen’s and Tolle’s earliest inspiration for Unbound. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All* was a key articulation of these ideas at the time Unbound launched its sponsorship plan. The USCCB elevates love to a central premise; the word appears seventy-seven times in its ninety-six pages. At base, it argues that “love is made real through effective action” and defines economic justice as both “a manifestation of love and a condition for love to grow.” Two kinds of love are made manifest when people act for justice: divine love and human love. The first is God’s “creative love,” referring to the Creator’s design for humanity to flourish

materially and spiritually. The second is each person's love for God, which should then become love for God's (human) creation in fulfillment of God's design. This "dual command of love that is at the basis of all Christian morality," writes the USCCB (1986: 11, 14). It is only by linking human and divine love that economic action becomes truly generative as the basis for more love "to grow."

In order to reify love through the economic action of transferring money from North to South America, Unbound's founders chose a tool—one-to-one child sponsorship—that was highly individualized. Sponsorship grew enormously in the 1970s and 1980s, not least because it appealed to a broadly American sensibility at the time that viewed effective humanitarianism as an opportunity for personal growth in both donor and recipient. For Unbound's early staff, however, it was axiomatic that their donors learn to see one-to-one sponsorship through the lens of Catholic social teaching that said every person is always, inherently social. It is almost certainly why Hentzen emphasized walking with others during his pilgrimage (a journey that otherwise could be mistaken for an individualistic quest for personal growth). This focus on human connection brings us to another key mid-twentieth-century Catholic concept related to Christian bodies, and the love and redemption that could be shared between them.

"Mystical body of Christ" refers to the union of believers through their common connection to Christ, as embodied in the central ritual of ingesting Christ's body in the Eucharist. In 1943, Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* popularized the term and tied it to the institutional Church, stating that "the mystical Body of Christ... is the Catholic Church." However, the concept broadened in the atmosphere surrounding the Second Vatican Council. The Vatican did not forgo the idea that believers were mystically joined through the Eucharist as administered by a priest, but it also described various degrees by which all "people of good will" could be related to the Church. Under the influence of Hentzen (and likely Tolle), this idea became critical to Unbound, which defines its sponsors as "people of good will" who are joined through love to become a unified, even prophetic, community.¹¹ In this formulation, the Eucharist is no longer the (only) mediating ritual through which love travels; Unbound sponsors also create channels for love's circulation by giving money and, ideally, exchanging letters.¹² In ideal terms, sponsorship integrates economic action and spiritual connection, with love as the impulse. On its website, Unbound's Statement of Beliefs reads, "When we [sponsors]... love as equals, we are doing more than alleviating material poverty. We are also creating the bonds of lasting peace and unity among [diverse] people."

In my conversations with Unbound staff, they often expressed concern that sponsors mistook their loving connection to others as arising *ex-nihilo* from their own actions; that view could move the sponsor back into an individualistic and prideful conception of their own self-worth. Instead, they wanted sponsors to view loving connections with their “sponsored friend” as a direct outcome of each party’s *already existing* link to God. The importance Unbound places on this ordering of love seems to draw on two main ideas in Catholic social teaching. The first one, which we have seen articulated by the USCCB, states that it is only through the full integration of human/divine love that economic action can become a generative basis for more love to grow. Redefining the popular metaphor in American English that the “economy grows,” Unbound wants its sponsors to understand that growth can only occur when love comes from within, but also from beyond, the human. Another aspect relates to human dignity. One of Unbound’s four core values is “Recognizing the God-given dignity of each person is essential to sincere, lasting, loving relationships.” In other words, any loving relation is predicated upon a gift that God gives each human being; it is crucial for Unbound that US sponsors not view their monetary donations, no matter how loving, as conferring dignity upon recipients. Rather, God’s love for humanity gives each individual dignity, which then opens the possibility for loving human relationships. Again, the order of love is crucial.

Mary Geiss, the Sponsor Experience team leader, was one of many staff members, including CEO Scott Wasserman, who emphasized to me that it is often a slow process as Unbound tries to move US sponsors (and the children or elders they support) toward understanding their growing relationship as a facet of God’s broader love.¹³ Unbound communicates this idea to donors in a variety of ways. For example, I was with Mary and her team as they discussed a recent revision of the first letter Unbound sends to each new donor. Just two paragraphs long, the letter read in part, “With time your relationship [with the child] will grow and together you will experience hope and God’s love.” The team noted that the wording had been carefully chosen since they viewed it as a key opportunity to begin the process of framing sponsorship for donors. Using the future tense (“you will experience . . .”), Unbound portrays God’s love as preexisting, waiting to be experienced by sponsors as they grow to love the child they support. This type of subtle phrasing repeats throughout Unbound’s materials, including its online Statement of Beliefs, which reads in part: “We provide the opportunity for the sponsor and sponsored friend

to *make* a real connection... This connection... *reveals* the bonds that tie us together as one human family.” I have added italics to emphasize the shift I am describing: humans “make” connections through their love-labors whereas a unifying global bond (implying God’s love) is not made, but revealed.

A final point about the Sponsor Experience team’s introductory letter: it uses the word “love” twice. It does so in the sentence already discussed (“you will experience hope and God’s love”) and at the end: “God bless you for your love and generosity.” This doubling of the word “love”—“God’s love” and “your love”—is typical of sponsorship media in all the Christian organizations I studied. My sense is that it relates to what I noted about duality: it recalls that love has different qualities. God’s is a perfect and all-encompassing love that, according to papal encyclicals, is not “derived from anything that is” (Mayblin 2012: 247). Human love is, by contrast, a never-perfect proposition that may therefore constitute but also break social bonds—particularly if it operates outside God’s blessing. Furthermore, the last sentence—“God bless you for your love and generosity”—returns to the importance of effective economic action as a manifestation of human love. When the sponsor receives this first letter she has yet to actually communicate with the child she will support; that kind of love-relation will grow over time, the letter says. The love for which Unbound is thankful therefore refers to actions the sponsor has already taken, namely sending 40 dollars. In short, by doubling love language, Unbound frames love as a future promise of relationship and a current economic action. In its theology of sponsorship, sending money manifests God’s already existing love, which dwells within the donor, while also creating conditions for expansive relations with the child and, ultimately, global “bonds of lasting peace and unity.”

Family and Motherhood in Unbound’s Love Theology

Protestant and Catholic sponsorship programs conceptualize and deploy the word “love” similarly, as noted, but in my experience the Catholic teachings that structure Unbound’s theology do reveal themselves in certain ways. I have mentioned Hentzen as an embodiment of the selfless, loving pilgrim-priest. Compare this persona to the effusive, explosive, charismatic leadership of World Vision’s founder, evangelical pastor Bob Pierce. He is the most famous Christian advocate of sponsorship, thanks to his friendship with evangelist Billy Graham

and because World Vision became the world's largest sponsorship organization. As a result, it and Pierce have served as the subject of a number of studies over the years (Whaites 1999; Bornstein 2005; King 2019). Though Hentzen has received no such academic attention, the two men were contemporaries.¹⁴ Pierce also began his global work in the late 1940s and 1950s, was peripatetic, and central to his organization. However, his image revolved around new technologies, fast travel, and preaching crusades; it is hard to imagine Hentzen's pilgrim-priest being legible to World Vision's audience.

Another difference concerns how Catholicism views love as "planted by God into the heart and mind of every human person" (Muehlebach 2013a: 454). At Unbound, love talk is strongly linked to God the Father. By contrast, evangelical organizations like World Vision or Compassion link it more directly to Jesus, as the immanent person in the Trinity. Their workers and sponsors are encouraged to view themselves as Jesus's "hand and feet"—the instruments by which loving touch moves through the world and makes development work Christian (Bornstein 2005: 31, 44).

A final difference relates to motherhood. The contrast is subtle since all the sponsorship organizations I studied assumed the typical sponsor is a woman and, likely, a mother. Recall that in sponsorship's loose theology of global connection, derived from its nineteenth-century roots, Christian mothers were seen as the most responsive and capable vessels for fusing human love with God's love and sending it out into the world. Historically, sponsorship promoted the idea that there was an inherent contrast between the Christian and "pagan" mother. The latter was portrayed as unable to mediate love correctly: they could neither circulate moral (Christian) emotion *to* their children nor absorb moral inspiration *from* their children. Without this circuit of human emotion, God's love could find no entry point. Christian mothers were required to step in and charitably "adopt" a child abroad.

By the time Unbound was founded in the 1980s, this idea (at least in explicit terms) had fallen completely out of fashion in liberal Christian circles. Unbound retained the idea that mother-love was the basis from which the demographically typical sponsor—a white American woman—could magnify her love by joining it to God's. This concept was so deeply rooted in the 1980s as to be effectively inextricable from the American perception of, and attraction for, child sponsorship. Yet from the start Unbound also sought to communicate a different vision to its sponsors regarding mothers abroad. It has done so, in part, by elevating *caritatis ordo* to an unspoken organizing principle. Unbound emphasizes that it is natural, and also right, that sponsors feel more strongly about their own children than "their" sponsored children. It views correctly

ordering human love in this fashion as, in fact, necessary for rejecting charitable paternalism because it also recognizes that parents abroad have primacy and agency in their children's lives. Unbound impresses upon its sponsors that they should consider the child abroad as "my sponsored friend" and not "my child," as other organizations so often put it.

What this *caritatis ordo* retains, however, are the gendered implications of nineteenth-century sentimentalism: families are still understood as the central conduit for love, with mothers as the ultimate mediators of this flow of Christian emotion. Even more than its Protestant counterparts, Unbound emphasizes how families abroad, and especially mothers, are inherently hard-working and sacrificing. Its five-point mission statement reads:

We believe in strong families.

We believe in the wisdom of mothers.

We believe in the power of friendships.

We believe in the dignity of all human beings ("to exchange and love as equals").

We believe in hope.

The mother abroad is viewed as a counterpart to the "typical" US sponsor, who statistically speaking is generally a mother too; Unbound staff call this sponsor "Patricia," "Beth," or "Susan" around the office (Figure 5.2). On both ends of the sponsorship exchange, mothers are expected to manage their feelings—suppressing some, cultivating others—to mediate love through their bodies and actions, which offers an access point to God's love that covers the world. Ideally, both sides, including the US mother, labor and sacrifice for the love they circulate.

In his work on Muslim devotional practices, Patrick Eisenlohr notes that objects and technologies designated as "media" have a "tendency to vanish in the act of mediation" (2011: 267; Gershon and Manning 2014: 540). This oscillation between the obscure and the apparent applies here too, insofar as the word "love" in sponsorship-related media alternates between designating mundane and marked feelings. Often it is barely noticed and colloquial (a sponsor loves an aspect of the program or a child loves playing a game). At other times, it designates the complex human-God love relation discussed above ("We can send our love around the world!"). In bundling these multiple qualities, love shifts its "value, utility, and relevance across contexts" (Keane 2003: 414). I believe this rhetorical capacity is important since it helps position Unbound in multiple ways: as simultaneously Catholic and not Catholic, authoritatively sacred and "secular" (lay-led, humanitarian), religious and American, divinely guided and

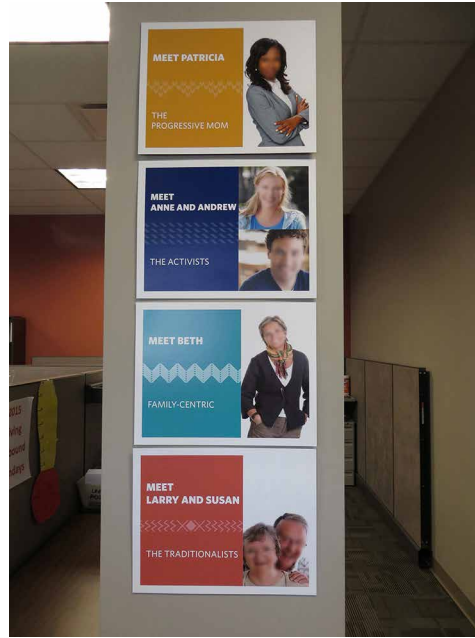


Figure 5.2 Unbound’s prototypical sponsors, as displayed in its offices in 2014. Staff used these profiles as a tool to craft new policies and messaging. “Patricia” and “Anne and Andrew” represented markets they hoped to grow, while “Beth” and “Larry and Susan” typified their base supporters. Regardless, sponsorship is pictured as driven primarily by mothers (or mothers-to-be, in the case of “Anne”) (photo by author).

voluntary. It therefore may be important that, apart from a couple times on Unbound’s blog, I never heard anyone use the theological term *agape*, which would necessarily pull love and its global projects into a more institutionally Catholic frame. As I note below, it is essential for Unbound, and most of the sponsors I got to know, that the work is tinged with the sacred, especially the “sacred” sphere of motherhood, without being mistaken for the institutional Roman Church.

Coextensive Media: Words and the Stuff of Love

Sponsorship’s love talk elides much of what is actually moving abroad, namely money and consumer objects. Rhetorically speaking, love’s bundled qualities are useful in this respect too. Sponsorship organizations often use the word as a

euphemism for money; for example, “God bless you for your love” in Unbound’s first letter or “your love makes a difference” printed next to the box where one ticks off the amount to be debited from a bank account each month. Love sacralizes money-gifts and envelops sponsors’ charitable actions within positive affective registers rather than negative ones, such as guilt.

Many of the sponsors I met hoped that giving their “love” (money) to a person faraway might disrupt the troubling cycle of materialism to which they felt that they and their families, along with all Americans, were prone. On Unbound’s blog, this goal is theologized by defining love as a form of “self-emptying,” or *kenosis*. It refers to the intense humbling—even debasement—that God chose to undergo through Jesus’s crucifixion. In Catholicism, by filling oneself with the Eucharist a believer “self-empties” in imitation of Christ and can give in love for others. In Unbound’s theology, giving up material attachments is also a form of self-emptying that creates room to be filled up with God’s love. Once God is present—sufficiently inhibiting the negative impulses of guilt, greed, and materialism—Americans are able send their “love” (money) through Unbound, which provides the hope and security necessary for Catholic people elsewhere to also empty themselves to God’s love (Hoopes 2015; Hornbeck 2015).

In this schema, too many material things can weigh one down and block love’s flow outwards. And yet sponsors who told me that *materialism* is a problem also said that *material things* can serve the important purpose of mediating their love from afar—especially since, unlike Hentzen, their own bodies never act as mediators on the move. Sponsors’ practice of sending physical gifts has been severely curtailed over the last two or so decades; all major sponsorship organizations, including Unbound, strongly discourage it, due to rising postal costs, complicated logistics, and ethical questions about buying abroad what could be gotten locally. Because sponsorship organizations know that donors want to send material stuff, they do allow flat gifts in letters, such as stickers, hair ribbons, and craft supplies.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, Catholic sponsors also send objects like saint cards and medallions; the Catholic children they support send similar items back. At least some children did so even when they were sponsored through an evangelical organization: sorting letters in Compassion’s mailroom in Colorado Springs, I came across one where a Nicaraguan boy enclosed a Blessed Virgin prayer card. I wondered what the evangelical recipients in Ohio would make of it as I resealed the envelope and sent it on.

Various anthropological studies confirm that the physical manipulation of gift-objects is one of the most powerful ways to mediate love across distances.

People who make humanitarian handcrafts may picture their global trajectory as they paste, cut, and sew, creating a particularly “evocative form of making virtual and enchanted connectivities” (Malkki 2015: 124). Anderson Blanton’s study of Appalachian Pentecostals sharpens this idea of virtual/enchanted connectivities in more explicitly Christian terms. The faith healers with whom he works use objects, such as scraps of cloth, as a “point of contact” with the holy. A preacher in one location prays over it, infuses it with Spirit, and can then mail it to believers, for whom it retains efficacious power (Coleman 2000: 170–1, 177; Blanton 2015: 53–62; Coleman 2009: 420). Catholic concepts differ, of course, but at a basic level they also view objects as points of contact. In obvious terms, a priest’s touch blesses objects (everyday objects or the Eucharist). But in Unbound’s lay theology, the emphasis is more often on a single object that is multiply touched.

For example, in September 2015 I clicked open Unbound’s biweekly e-newsletter, which was already promoting the holiday season. Titled, “Journey of a Christmas Card,” it featured text and photos tracing the trajectory of the cards that sponsors receive. The journey begins with the card’s creation by a child “with love,” followed by the loving labor of in-country staff, postal workers, and elderly volunteers at Unbound’s Kansas City headquarters: “Some are small, active hands filled with crayons and glue sticks. Some are large hands, calloused from lifting palettes filled with letters onto trucks. And some are gentle, wrinkled hands that have known many blessings and seek now to pass them on. Each hand adds its own loving touch, and the final one is that of the sponsor.”¹⁶ Organizations often downplay this chain of mediation to create a sense of one-to-one communication between child and sponsor. In this case, however, Unbound chooses to emphasize the “loving touch” of hands that have known gratitude or blessings, and that pass them on by manipulating the same object: it makes the card into a point of contact that mediates spiritual power. In more Catholic terms, it evokes a Eucharistic communion between “people of goodwill” whose embodied ritualizations (manipulating a shared object in this case, rather than ingesting a wafer) connect them in the Body of Christ. Through these “chains” of persons and objects, grace becomes partible and distributable in ways that exceed the intentionality of the discrete individuals involved (Mayblin, Norget, and Napolitano 2017: 21).

In mid-twentieth-century iterations of Catholic humanitarianism, blood was often the substance that mediated such bonds. Catholics told each other about the links between the suffering Christ, the Church’s suffering missionaries bleeding as they died (in Communist places, especially), and the pennies that donors “bled” in sacrifice (Kaell 2019: 284). By contrast,

Unbound's post-conciliar love talk makes touch the mediating force and, moreover, the touch of one layperson to another. Also notable are the "active hands" abroad. Whereas its evangelical counterpart, Compassion, positions the child as a subject who self-transforms to reach his spiritual and economic "potential," Unbound usually portrays the child embedded within a community that is already moral and unflaggingly hardworking. It is an overarching vision of Catholics elsewhere—especially Catholic *mothers* elsewhere—as aspiring, active workers who, if given a chance, will become "artisans of their destiny,"¹⁷ which Unbound interprets to mean the moral lodestar of economically secure family units.

In her work with Brazilian lay Catholics, Maya Mayblin notes (2012: 249) that mother love is at one moment viewed as "literally continuous with . . . divine [love]; a mother's hands are the hands of God." Then the next moment it is "merely metaphorical . . . mother's hands are like the hands of God." Mayblin's point is helpful in thinking about how Unbound treats human love generally (of which mother love is the exemplar) as it circulates via sponsorship's various forms. One moment love seems to be mediated *through* gift-objects and at other moments love is the gift itself. Sponsors are also reminded not to confuse their gift-objects with love, lest they fail to empty their egos (*kenosis*) to become mediating vessels for God's love: Americans may easily become paternalistic, patronizing givers, Unbound warns.

The unstable set of relations between gift-objects, loving touch, and self-emptying *kenosis* may help explain a deviation between Catholic and evangelical sponsors that Unbound staff had noticed and wanted to address. Whereas Compassion benefits from sponsors promoting the program through word-of-mouth, a significant minority of Unbound sponsors kept quiet about their charitable work. The reason, I believe, speaks to subtle differences in theologies of love. No sponsor I met told me that they wanted to benefit from sponsorship by telling others about their work. After all, US Christians define materialism, in part, as seeking personal pleasure or social status; as noted, they hope sponsorship will break the cycle of materialism, not feed it (Muehlebach 2013b: 517; Cf. Rudnykyj and Osella 2017: 18). Yet evangelical organizations, like Compassion, have emic language for "witness" as a form of loving sacrifice: it may feel awkward to tell people about Jesus or about one's charitable giving, it tells its donors, but you must make this social sacrifice to further God's work. By contrast, Unbound's theology of loving sacrifice generally emphasizes *kenosis* (or humility) as the channel through which Americans mediate God's love. It may lead some Unbound sponsors to be more reticent to discuss their charitable

activities. As one woman told me, “It would be a self-promotion. It wouldn’t be right.” To promote the self risks blocking the very mechanism of self-emptying through which human love can be joined with God’s love to flow across the world.

Organizational, Not Institutional

An even more significant difference between Unbound and Compassion concerns unmitigated growth. The evangelical organizations I studied tended to view it as a sign of God’s favor. As Simon Coleman (2000, 2009) has pointed out in other contexts, this ethic arises out of a theology that says evangelism is always on the move because God is infinite. Unbound, by contrast, tailors its growth according to needs in its field sites and, as a result, its sponsor base has remained largely stable since 2006. I believe this nongrowth (or lesser growth) model reflects a Catholic sensibility. It assumes, first, that the people it serves are already moral, hardworking, and do not need to be born again, which staves off some of the urgency of its more evangelical counterparts. Second, and importantly, growth may seem less imperative since Unbound views itself as one piece of a larger puzzle: one entity working within the framework of the global Catholic Church.

Unbound’s relation to the Church is a crucial issue, for the organization and its sponsors. On the one hand, Unbound explicitly disrupts “institutional” Church by always emphasizing its local (Midwestern American) and lay character. It emphatically does not want to be mistaken for “the Church.” Yet it is also unmistakably a Catholic organization. It harnesses the authority of the institutionalized sacred sphere—most notably, in how its method of publicizing the program is still almost entirely through volunteer priests who discuss the program during their homilies and encourage parishioners to sign up (Figure 5.3). It also retains former priests in its directorship, including many key positions.¹⁸ Unbound typifies a particularly Catholic problem related to authority and power (also see chapters in this volume by Loustau and Dugan). None of the Protestant organizations I studied had to navigate comparable difficulties vis-à-vis their pastor-founders’ denominations. None of the Protestant organizations were both reliant on a particular Christian institution and also made continual efforts to distance themselves from it.

In speaking with Unbound sponsors, I found significant distrust—or certainly ambivalence—about the institutional Church, especially in its dealings with children. Some sponsors made oblique references to the child abuse scandals; it had been a decade since the *Boston Globe* exposé, and the international extent

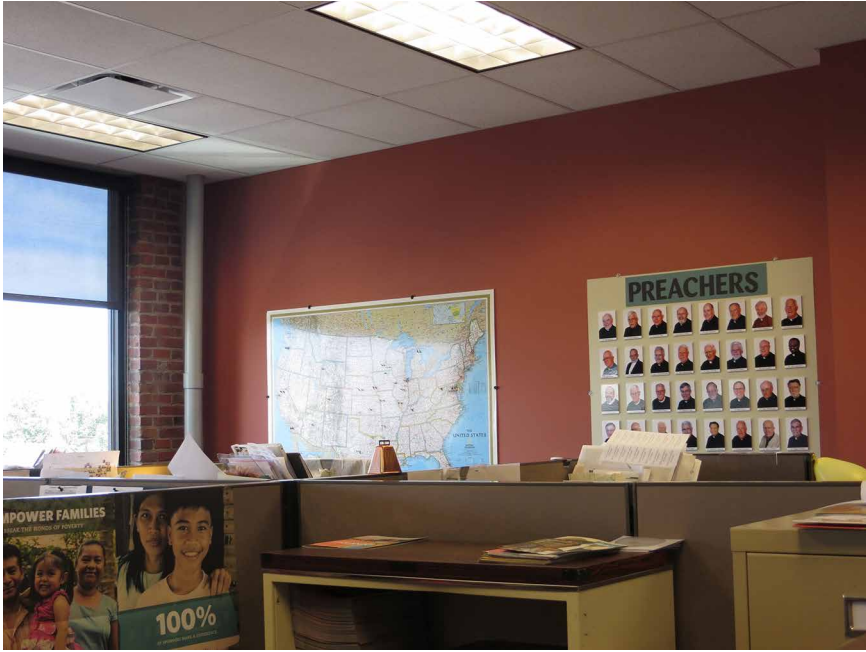


Figure 5.3 Poster of the team of priests who volunteer to promote the program, which has been Unbound’s main promotional method since the 1990s. The poster, which featured in several locations around Unbound’s offices, is a reminder of the continued role of “institutional” Catholic authority in the organization (photo by author).

of the problem was now common knowledge. Many more sponsors explicitly discussed what they viewed as the institutional Church’s distasteful history of missionary work, including when children were removed or estranged from their families. Yet few sponsors rejected *contemporary* missionary work as such—in fact, most of them told me they supported missionary priests who raised funds in their parishes. The difference lay in how the focus was on the “humanitarian” side, which they felt was separate from what they condemned as a historically authoritarian disregard for local cultures. It was highly important to Unbound and its sponsors that its layperson-to-layperson model of development not be confused with this missionary past (though Unbound’s initial spread in the 1980s and 1990s was through missionary priests and the institutions they served).

At the same time, Unbound sponsors told me that one reason they trusted the organization was precisely because a priest had come to their parish to promote it. “A priest isn’t going to lie to you knowingly,” one sponsor told me as we listened to a guest homilist promote the program in her parish, “He’s not profiting . . . not trying to sell you something like you see on TV [in sponsorship

advertisements].” Many Unbound sponsors told me something similar when I asked them point-blank in our interviews if they would choose a Catholic organization over a nonreligious one, if the programming, audit reports, and all other factors were equal. Over and over, they told me they would still choose the Catholic one: it was a question of *trust*. Thus by and large Unbound sponsors felt ambivalent about Catholic “institutional” power, even while they trusted Catholic “organizational” power—a delicate balance that seems rather in keeping with other facets of their lives. After all, sponsors were among those US Catholics who chose to still attend institutional churches (since that is where Unbound publicizes its program) and stay involved in parish life. Yet they also generally defined Catholicism’s “real” core, for themselves and others, as rooted in their own experiences of love, security, and family. Unbound’s sponsorship program put Catholic development projects into the same terms.

Media technologies play an interesting role with respect to the thin line between institutional and organizational power. The internet, and especially social media, can democratize laypeople’s participation and promote their creative power and yet, as Norget (2017: 191) shows at the Guadalupe pilgrimage, Rome increasingly uses the same technologies to control and reroute messages and experiences. To some degree the same can be said of child sponsorship organizations, which have always used new media to stoke sponsors’ feelings of global connectedness, while also rerouting and controlling those mechanisms. In the internet age, for example, organizations have tried to suppress contact between children and sponsors outside of their mediated systems by creating their own internal email programs and social media networks. This strategy will likely crumble as more older Americans join Facebook and other social media sites and as sponsored children have better access to the internet and cheap smartphones.

While new media technologies are therefore fraught in certain ways, they are also full of promise. Sponsorship organizations mobilize them to expand their base and, more generally, to spread their theologies of connection into places not usually occupied by Christian entities. For example, during my time at Unbound’s office the team was piloting a new idea: photo exhibits in cafés with accompanying QR codes and videos. The first one, housed in a trendy café in Kansas City, featured images of musicians from Unbound field sites. A café goer could work on her laptop, surrounded by these images on the walls, and set her tablet or phone to hear relevant music recorded in situ or see the photos come “to life” through video (Figure 5.4). The idea was to attract new (and younger) sponsors. But at a larger level, Barclay Martin, Unbound’s New Channels



Figure 5.4 Barclay Martin, Unbound’s Coordinator of New Channels in 2014, demonstrates how café goers can access interactive videos as they sit amid the photo display (photo by author).

Coordinator and the youthful curator of the exhibit, explained it as producing an ambient (Engelke 2012) experience of sacred/secular uplift through feelings of connectedness. For him, the possibility of creating a sensory connection with people faraway held its own rewards, whether it resulted in new sponsors per se.

This kind of ambient messaging promotes theologies of connection well beyond the churches that gave rise to them. In this respect, Unbound’s use of participatory media in public spaces (brick-and-mortar and virtual) is similar to its Protestant counterparts. But I believe it has an added benefit too. For Catholic organizations, such media widens, and even creates, a viable space in which (lay-led) projects thrive alongside, but not exactly within, the (Roman) institution. Social media’s democratic, personalized ethos can suture new “people of God” through participatory theologies and ritual-like experiences, such as circulating along the walls of a café to gaze at images of human bodies in motion and let soaring music fill the senses through one’s smartphone earbuds. If one knows something about Catholicism, it is hard not to feel an echo of the Stations of the Cross. Thus new media might carve out ways of doing “Catholicism” (of the most ambient sort) that support and reinforce lay Catholic organizing.

A Note about Blockage and Concluding Thoughts

Mediation is as much about blockage as it is about transmission and connection. Indeed, the role of mediation in bridging the gaps between divine plan and human action (Tomlinson 2010: 743, 755), God's Kingdom here and to come (Haynes 2013), or what is heard and believed (Harding 2000) has long been important to anthropologists of Christianity. Such gaps—and therefore the necessity of mediation—take on particular intensity for people who do not travel but are engaged in global projects. Sponsors encounter various challenges as they try to keep love on the move.

In June 2015, for example, I spoke with Genevieve, an informatics analyst and mother of four in her early fifties. She attends Mass infrequently and views her Catholicism as best expressed through her volunteer and charitable commitments, such as sponsorship with Unbound. She was one of the first people I met who impressed upon me that love's trajectory could be blocked, even when the money was forthcoming. We were sitting in Unbound's offices surrounded by the organization's media publicity—images of happy children and Hentzen's pilgrimage—when I asked her if she thought of sponsorship as a relationship. “Not quite,” she told me and paused. “And part of it [pause] is because, I kind of went through a time in my life where I was kind of depressed so it was hard for me.” She could not properly love herself or those close to her, even her own family. As a result, she continued,

I had this block about being able to write back or communicate and I even called the [Unbound] offices one time and said, I'm really bad about being able to communicate or write them letters... and I don't know what to do about it and it was around Christmas time and they were like well, we can send the Christmas gift for you... and I thought good. We'll just do that... I even went to the point where [I asked the telephone operator], do you want me to stop sponsoring? Because I'm not good at this.

Genevieve felt she could not muster the love from within herself that is the imagined wellspring for the love that travels into the world; that is, the “natural” *caritatis ordo* (order of love). Without her own capacity to love, God's love could find no way to circulate and the chain of mediation seemed to break down. Genevieve thought it might be better to give up sponsorship altogether, though she had a steady job and the regular payments were never an issue. Upon hearing Genevieve's problem, the Unbound operator responded in a way that accords with the organization's theology of connection: by sending a gift-object, Unbound could fill the gap to circulate love—or at least a semblance of it. The

operator probably hoped that Genevieve would soon come to feel love again and resume her place within the chain of connection.

To create a properly robust anthropology of Catholicism, we must find ways to include the many people who populate the Church's "lapsed peripheries." How does Catholicism encircle doubt and indifference within its embrace? (Mayblin, Norget, and Napolitano 2017: 19). Genevieve gives us a sense of how Catholics on the "periphery" of Roman Catholic ritualization—she only sporadically attends Mass and ingests the Eucharist—may still trust Catholic organizations, such as Unbound, to make space for embodied forms of ritualization that create global connection. That she called Unbound and voiced her dilemma, and then repeated it to me, underscores the seriousness with which she takes the goal of meditating love between strangers (herself and the child). It reminds us that, although Unbound largely avoids formalized concepts like the Body of Christ, the organization's love-talk, and its relation to gift-objects, is an important vector for a lay-centered theology of connection that draws deeply upon Roman Catholic forms.

Hentzen's own body is one of those forms: on epic pilgrimages, his traveling body mediated love and priestly authority, which is then remediated for Unbound's sponsors through technologies like photographs and YouTube videos. In one sense, Hentzen's pilgrimages were typical of older ways the Church understood itself as corporeal and immediate. Though he was no longer a priest, it is hard not to see Hentzen's touch as imbued with the authority of his former status. One thinks of Eucharistic connection as he is shown breaking bread with laypeople on the road or grasping their hands as they approach him.

Hentzen's status as former priest and cosmopolitan traveler, read alongside Genevieve's worry about blockage, cuts to the heart of Unbound's promise that it circulates love between laypeople who never actually meet. The problem is not unrelated to what is already debated within the Catholic Church regarding older corporeal forms (notably, the Eucharist) and their possible conveyance through new media (notably, the internet). Namely, what is the relation between *communication* and *transmission*? One merely tells; the other promises to substantively *cross* divides. How is the latter possible when corporeal presence is not? How does love move?

At Unbound, I argue that part of the response rests on the entexualization of love—the circulation of this text fragment via multiple mediated forms. In fact, it links communication to transmission. Love talk circulates in Unbound's communication to sponsors: videos of Hentzen, for example, or didactic articles about *kenosis* on social media. But it is also the central mode of

transmission: sponsors are encouraged to come to know their bodies, and the things they touch, as vectors through which love crosses divides. Just as importantly, love's multiple entextualizations oscillate between the mundane and the marked. The same word refers to everyday situations in nonreligious contexts, while also denoting a central theological concept in the progressive, post-Vatican II Catholicism that gave rise to Unbound. Through this oscillation, love-talk helps co-constitute "secular" and "sacred" media. As secular media multiplies love across various forms and platforms, it spreads and authenticates Unbound's interpretation of Catholic social teaching. Love-talk is thus essential to keeping Unbound a Catholic organization, able to walk a fine line between claiming authority as (lay) Catholic, yet avoiding too close an association with the institutional Roman Church.

Notes

- 1 I draw on fieldwork conducted at intervals from 2014 to 2016 at Unbound's Kansas City headquarters and among sponsors, including fifty-two conversational interviews with sponsors in upstate New York and Missouri. Unbound sent out letters on my behalf and sponsors self-selected by getting in touch with me. I conducted interviews during my visits to their region, with follow-up by email or phone.
- 2 I do not want to overstate Catholic uniqueness though. Simon Coleman (2017: 279) notes that "a key research question may be whether and how a Catholic-inspired landscape of global movement compares, interacts, interleaves, and indeed contrasts with Pentecostal and evangelical patterns." My body of work tries to accomplish this task, including in this project, which included evangelicals and Catholics. Ultimately, I found significant agreement among US sponsors. In other words, studying a shared Christian activity (e.g., one form of charity) within a local/national context may reveal significant similarities, more so than if one was to extrapolate generalized "Catholic" or "Protestant" attributes.
- 3 Hentzen and Tolle first set up their organizational headquarters as a quasi-retreat center for the spiritual renewal of staff and volunteers. Some staff lived on-site and everyone joined in daily meals, prayers, and volunteerism for the sponsorship program and at Christ House, the organization's former soup kitchen in Kansas City.
- 4 Hentzen and Tolle first founded the organization with help from Hentzen's siblings Jim, Bud, and Nadine. Jim died in 1993 and Tolle died in 1995, just as the organization was beginning to grow. Bud and Nadine became nonvoting members

- of the board, while Hentzen took on the Presidency, which he held until his death. His vision and leadership were utterly central.
- 5 The importance of these particular lyrics is evident from how they feature in Unbound publications, including Hentzen's obituaries. Here I quote from Paco Wertin, repeating the lyrics in Fincher (2013).
 - 6 Scott Wasserman, President and CEO, July 29, 2015. Though perhaps not intentional, this language echoes the USCCB (1986: xi, 11).
 - 7 "Bob Hentzen Remembered as Humble Servant," *Unbound website*, October 12, 2013. Available online: <https://www.unbound.org/Stories/2013/October/Bob-Hentzen-remembered-as-humble-servant>.
 - 8 "Unbound," *Unbound Video*, February 17, 2014. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_Vz1pDiPJA.
 - 9 Merton (*Seven Storey Mountain*) and Day (*The Long Loneliness*) both based their memoirs on Augustine's *Confessions*, which explains the focus on love. Augustine also inspired Thomas Aquinas's writings on love's "order," mentioned below. The premise of sponsorship overlaps with Day's thought, in particular, insofar as her Worker Movement focused on loving the poor and, fostering a deep suspicion of state-led programs, viewed individual actions as the most radical form of societal intervention. While Hentzen and Tolle were likely not as pessimistic about the state, they too saw individualized giving as fundamental to reinvigorating the People of God. On Day, these insights thanks to Jeffrey Burns, *Pers. Comm.*, August 22, 2019.
 - 10 This wording is almost certainly from Unbound's publicity team.
 - 11 "Prophetic" from Scott Wasserman's interview, cited above. "People of good will" features on Unbound's website and I often heard the phrase in Unbound staff meetings and my conversations with employees. Multiple types of relatedness appear in the encyclical *Lumen Gentium* (1964, sec. 13) and "men of good will" prefaces the encyclicals *Pacem in Terris* (1963) and *Populorum Progressio* (1967). Most influential for Unbound, at least during my research, was Pope Francis's use of "people of good will" in *Laudato Si* (2015). I also imagine that Hentzen and Tolle may have been influenced by USCCB pronouncements in the 1980s, just as their organization was expanding. For example, the US bishops wrote (1986: 84, 89), "Communion with God, sharing God's life, involves a mutual bonding with all on this globe. Jesus taught us to love God and one another and that the concept of neighbor is without limit. We know that we are called to be members of a new covenant of love... Love implies concern for all—especially the poor—and a continued search for those social and economic structures that permit everyone to share in a [global] community that is a part of a redeemed creation."
 - 12 I say "ideally" because fewer than half of Unbound sponsors actually exchange letters, although the organization considers it essential to the program.

- 13 This was a central theme in my interview with CEO Scott Wasserman and something the Sponsor Experience team also discussed on the occasions I was able to join their meetings.
- 14 Pierce was twenty years older than Hentzen; however, the organizational structure of Catholic ministry (i.e., Hentzen was sent to Latin America through his order) meant that both of them began their global work in the same period. Pierce was in his mid-thirties when Youth for Christ first sent him on one of its China crusades.
- 15 At Unbound, sponsors can occasionally send money via the organization for particular “big ticket” items, such as a pair of glasses or a new stove. Mary Geisz, Director of Sponsor Experience, Personal Interview, July 28, 2015.
- 16 “The Journey of a Christmas Card,” *Unbound blog*, September 28, 2015. Available online: <https://www.unbound.org/Stories/2015/September/ChristmasCardJourney>.
- 17 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 190. It is a direct quote and reference to *Populorum Progressio* (1967), sec. 65. Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (2016) post-dated my research but it has almost certainly become a touchstone for Unbound.
- 18 The first interim director after Hentzen’s death was also a former priest, Paco Wertin, who remains an important figure in the organization. Furthermore, Unbound’s promotional team is still almost exclusively made up of retired priests who volunteer to promote sponsorship when they give guest homilies.