

## **Anna Sofia Salonen**

### **Food for the Soul or the Soul for Food? Charitable Food Assistance at the Interface between Food Recipients and Religious Organizations**

Food charity, often carried out by faith-based organizations, is a proliferating activity all over Europe. It raises important questions concerning the role of religious organizations in informal care and volunteer aid. This paper focuses on charitable food assistance particularly at the interface between religious organizations and food recipients. The data consists of over seven months of participant observation in four religiously affiliated food charity venues in a Finnish city and interviews with 25 food charity recipients. The findings demonstrate that in the context under study, food assistance is a charitable sphere where the assistance was provided only within the available resources, which are disengaged from the needs of the food recipients, and within the terms laid down by the charitable giver, which included to varying degrees religious participation. The recipients of food charity have limited opportunities to influence the activity or to do things in a different way, but at the same time they have limited abilities to withdraw from participating in the activity. Negotiations over participation in religious services in the food charity contexts illustrate these constraints, but also point out tacit strategies used by the food recipients to voice their views.

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