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## **Mourning the Dead, Following the Living**

**Kyle B. T. Lambelet**

### Abstract

In this paper I take up the ambivalence we rightly feel toward leaders by examining the relationship between charismatic authority and moral exemplarity. Drawing on the social theory of Max Weber, and in dialogue with a case study of an anti-militarism movement called the SOA (School of Americas) Watch, I demonstrate that through a “politics of sacrifice” leaders synchronize their own stories with those of communally recognized exemplars and act in ways that evidence a solidarity in the suffering of those exemplars thereby generating their charismatic authority. While performing crucial strategic, motivational, and pedagogical roles, this charisma also introduces problematic temptations to authoritarianism that short-circuit the practical reasoning that exemplars supposedly help to form. In the end this leaves our sense of ambivalence intact. What is needed, I argue, are practices of critique that reopen the distance between leader and follower and thus allow the possibility of practical reason.

### Keywords

Charisma; exemplarity; Max Weber; practical reason; politics of sacrifice; School of the Americas Watch; womanist theology; social movements; theology of suffering

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Leadership, especially charismatic leadership, is a tricky subject for late modern students of progressive social movements. For social movement theorists, cracking the “black box of leadership” raises fundamental problems about the relationship between structure and agency, political processes and political strategy (Ganz 2000; Nepstad and Bob 2006; Morris and Staggenborg 2007). For democrats, leadership surfaces a tension between commitments against domination in all its forms and the need for clear visions that transcend the status quo (Ransby 2003; Shapiro 2008, 35–49). For ethicists, leadership raises questions of moral exemplarity and the possibilities and limits of leaders as models of moral excellence (Stout 2004, 162–79; Zagzebski 2013). In each case, we are ambivalent about charismatic leaders: they at once attract and repel us.

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I think this ambivalence is right. On the one hand, we admire, even revere, those leaders who capture our imaginations and motivate us toward a more just, more peaceful, more equitable society. We have our pantheon of saints, whether radical reformers like Gandhi, King, and Dorothy Day or more militant revolutionaries like Che, Malcolm, and Kwame Ture. These figures play an indispensable epistemic role in our moral formation. As Aristotle rightly noted, “regarding practical wisdom, we shall get at the truth by considering who are the persons we credit with it” (Aristotle 2009, 105 [1140a]). On the other hand, we resist the leadership of exemplars: as we learn more about such figures we find they are not all that we hoped, that they betrayed the values we esteemed in them, or that their lives, while truly exemplary, simply cannot be a rubric for our own. Charismatic leaders evince an authoritarianism, whether sneaking or overt, that short-circuits the very practical wisdom that Aristotle argued they can provide. We need leaders, pedagogically and motivationally, but we disdain their charisma when it becomes an *idol* that self-referentially returns to the leader rather than an *icon* that points beyond to the ideas, values, and practices of our cause.

In the following paper, I take up the ambivalence I think we rightly feel toward leaders by examining the relationship between charismatic authority and moral exemplarity. I hope to tease open the black box of leadership to look at one way leaders generate authority, namely drawing on the lives of the exemplary dead. More specifically, I argue that by synchronizing their own stories with those of communally recognized exemplars and, then, by acting in ways that evidence a solidarity in the suffering of those exemplars, leaders generate their charismatic authority. This is what I will call the “politics of sacrifice,” a politics that provides a transmission belt whereby moral exemplarity is carried and transformed into charismatic leadership. In performing a politics of sacrifice by engaging in high risk activism and narrating that activism in relation to the exemplary dead, leaders generate their charismatic authority. While performing crucial strategic, motivational, and pedagogical roles, this charisma also introduces problematic temptations to authoritarianism that short circuit the practical reasoning that exemplars supposedly help to form. In the end this leaves our sense of ambivalence intact. What we need are practices of critique that reopen the distance between leader and follower and thus allow the possibility of practical reason.

I make my argument in three steps. First, I explore the relationship of charisma and exemplarity in theory, and then, second, look at a specific case of leadership in the movement to close the School of the Americas/ Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (or

SOA/WHINSEC), a military training facility in Columbus, Georgia. I conclude by showing how political theological critique can open the possibility for practical reasoning, especially when applied to the politics of sacrifice.

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## 1. Max Weber on Exemplarity and Charisma

Charisma is a rather more familiar term than exemplarity.<sup>1</sup> As sociologist of religion Martin Riesebrodt has noted, the term charisma is “probably one of the more popular concepts” derived from sociology (1999, 1). It is also one of the more misunderstood. We talk about athletes, politicians, and other public figures as “charismatic,” noting their personal charm, ability to lead others, way with words. This notion of charisma, as an inherent psychological trait of certain persons, is at odds with the classical sociological usage. Rather than a personality trait, Max Weber used the term to refer to the social dynamics of authority that groups place upon particular leaders. Weber developed a three-fold typology to explain the generation of what he called “legitimate domination”: rational, traditional, and charismatic.<sup>2</sup> Rational authority is generated through legal and bureaucratic systematization according to the logic of scientific and technocratic effectiveness. Traditional authority is generated from the force of habit—this is the way it has always been, this is the way it always shall be. Charismatic authority, in Weber’s famous articulation, is generated by “devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him” (2013, 215). For Weber, charismatic authority was vested in followers’ belief in the exemplarity and supernatural, miraculous capacity of the leader.

Thus, there are two apparently contradictory aspects of Weber’s account of charismatic authority.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, charismatics generate their

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authority through an apparent supernatural, miraculous, or magical power. Weber, the social scientist of disenchantment, remained agnostic on the reality of these capacities. What was important was not the charismatic leader’s actual inherent capacity, but her ability to secure

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<sup>1</sup> Though I read the book after I had drafted this essay, I have learned much from Vincent Lloyd’s account in *In Defense of Charisma* (2018), especially his useful distinction between authoritarian and democratic charisma.

<sup>2</sup> As with other ideal types of Weber’s, the suggestion is not that these three pure ideals adequately capture any one empirical case, but rather that they are heuristics by which to understand the social phenomena of authority. Weber, of course, was quite mindful of this liability and remarked, “the usefulness of the above classification can only be judged by its results in promoting systematic analysis.” And later, “the idea that the whole of concrete historical reality can be exhausted in the conceptual scheme about to be developed is as far from the author’s thoughts as anything could be” (Weber 2013, 216). Furthermore, we would be wise to interrogate whether any form of domination is rightly named “legitimate.” Weber’s much critiqued, as well as maligned and misunderstood, advocacy of a value-free social science can mislead us on this point. In my account, authority, domination, and legitimacy are irreducibly value laden concepts that require the tools of normative analysis. It is beyond the scope of this essay to resolve the apparent contradictions in Weber’s thought. However, I do not read him as excusing domination, though the terms of his analysis allow this interpretation.

<sup>3</sup> Riesebrodt (1999) argues that these contradictory aspects—the exemplary developed more in Weber’s political sociology and the magical in his sociology of religion—are not adequately systematized and are in the end problematic. I would argue, however, that Weber is more right than Riesebrodt allows, and that the function of charisma and exemplarity in the empirical case that follows in section 2 bears this out.

certain goods for her followers.<sup>4</sup> Inherent capacity or not, the attribution of magical power creates distance between the charismatic and the follower: it is a special ability that the leader has and the follower does not. On the other hand, charismatic leaders generate their authority by serving as exemplars in the sense that they are objects of mimesis, of imitation. These two aspects, one which creates distance between leader and follower and the other which brings them closer together, seem contradictory.

These two aspects are not actually contradictory, however, if we keep in mind that Weber was drawing upon the work of German theologian and jurist Rudolph Sohm. Though Weber can be justly attributed as popularizing the concept of charisma, he was not its modern originator. Rather, it was Sohm who used the concept of charisma, which he drew from historical critical readings of the New Testament and particularly the Pauline epistles, to explain the social organization of the church in his *Kirchenrecht* (1970). Drawing on the New Testament's account of charisma, it made sense to keep the grace-filled status of the leader and her exemplarity together. This is, of course, fundamental to Christological accounts of the Christ as exemplar and an issue I will take up momentarily in considering the politics of sacrifice.

For social theorists, the question that Weber's appropriation of Sohm's theological concept raises is whether the classical theorist's concept is truly sociological or not.<sup>5</sup> David Norman Smith (1998) and Paul Joosse (2014) defend a social constructionist reading of Weber's theory by counterposing him to Sohm. While Weber drew from Sohm and admitted his debt, he radically altered Sohm's concept generalizing it beyond the single case of early Christianity and including morally ambiguous characters in the category such as the berserker and warrior priest. Peter Haley (1980) agrees with this description of Weber's change but laments the loss of theology in a process of secularization.

I want to propose a different tack. I think Weber was right to generalize the concept of charisma and to argue that it is principally socially constructed. Social theorists lose vital analytical tools, however, when they cut off this theological genealogy. A social constructionist account of charismatic leadership does not get us off the hook from doing the work of

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political theology.<sup>6</sup> Rather than having Sohm stand in for theology specifically and religious analysis more generally and thereby rejecting both, Weber invites us to consider the normative force of exemplarity and its manifestation within charismatic authority. This analysis is sociological, yes, but it requires *Verstehen* [understanding], which when analyzing movements animated by religious sources and norms requires deploying the analytical tools of political theology. I explore those tools more fully in the third section of this essay. Taking up political theology, of course, takes us beyond a Weberian analysis. The argument here does not rise or fall

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<sup>4</sup> As Weber argued, "if his leadership fails to benefit his followers, it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear" (2013, 242).

<sup>5</sup> See Vásquez (2013) for a critique of these more general worries as they shape sociological discourse and a call for greater epistemic reflexivity that acknowledges the co-construction of the concepts of sociology and religion.

<sup>6</sup> I use political theology here in a generic sense to mean theological analysis of the dynamics of power or politics. The term itself is contested, however. In its genealogy it has come to prominence in the Anglophone world after the publication of translations of German political theorist Carl Schmitt's works (2005; 2007), but it is currently used to describe a wide variety of scholarly projects from liberation theologies and critiques of civil religion to historical retrievals of classic figures focused on questions of sovereignty, power and agency. I use political theology in this wide sense (see Lloyd and True 2016).

with on its fidelity to Weber. However, I do wish to suggest that Weber identified a key dynamic of charisma, namely its relationship to exemplarity and supernatural capacity, and will argue that one way to bring a normative critique of charisma is through political theological analysis. But before turning there, we need to explore these dynamics in action. In particular, we will need to analyze the normatively ambivalent role of sacrifice in the generation of charismatic authority and how it coordinates the two aspects of charisma: mimesis and magic.

## 2. Narratives of Sacrifice and the Transference of Authority

In order to accomplish this analysis, I turn now from theory to a specific case, namely that of activist and former priest Roy Bourgeois. Bourgeois is the co-founder of SOA Watch, one of the longest running nonviolent movements currently active in the United States.<sup>7</sup> The movement is particularly appropriate for analyzing the transference of moral exemplarity of the dead to the charismatic authority of the living because it emerged initially in response to the brutal assassinations of the six Jesuit professors at the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) in San Salvador in 1989.<sup>8</sup> Importantly for our purposes, Bourgeois tells his own story and the story of the emergence of the movement in synchronization with the exemplary dead. I do not have space to develop my account of the exemplary dead fully here, but let me merely define them as those persons identified by the movement collective as having both lived lives which display the commitments of the movement—to solidarity, to nonviolence, to justice—and died

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deaths which display the injustice of the United States-Latin American military system.

Bourgeois's self-narration is a key mechanism of the transfer of authority from the dead to the living: each plot point in the hagiographic stories of the martyrs is punctuated by his response. His stump speech, one I have heard a number of times during my research on this movement, is thrilling to hear. It has helped that Bourgeois is a raconteur from Litcher, Louisiana, well formed in the storytelling traditions of Cajun country. But Bourgeois's capacity to narrate his own life in biographical synchronization with that of the exemplary dead is a skill that was developed in college classrooms, church halls, and living rooms across the United States as he traveled to recruit participants into SOA Watch activism.<sup>9</sup>

The highlights of the story connect the listener to a much bigger narrative about the themes and personas of the SOA Watch. Bourgeois was a Navy Lieutenant in Vietnam who received a Purple Heart for his service. While in the military, he grew disillusioned with the United States's role in Southeast Asia, was mentored by a Navy chaplain, and decided to join the priesthood. Following his military service, seminary, and ordination as a Maryknoll priest, he spent five years in Bolivia where he reports, "the poor, my teachers, introduced me to their 'theology of liberation' and a God who empowers and gives hope to the poor" (2013, 5). After becoming involved in political struggles against President Hugo Banzer—the dictator who was

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<sup>7</sup> I develop this case further in my forthcoming book *¡Presente!* (2020).

<sup>8</sup> For more on the movement to close the SOA Watch see Lisa Gill's *The School of the Americas* (2004) and Sharon Erickson Nepstad's *Convictions of the Soul* (2004). For more on the Jesuits assassinated at the UCA, see Robert Lassalle-Klein's *Blood and Ink* (2014).

<sup>9</sup> The narrative reconstruction is drawn from a number of sources including a personal interview with Bourgeois (2015), a recorded interview (Bourgeois 2006), Bourgeois's memoir (2013) and a journalistic biography (Hodge and Cooper 2004).

supported by the United States and trained at the SOA—Bourgeois was denied reentry to Bolivia. He then turned his attention to El Salvador where, in 1980, Oscar Romero and four North American churchwomen were killed. For Bourgeois, these events, especially the assassinations of the churchwomen, “brought El Salvador close to us because they were our own” (Bourgeois 2006). In response, in 1983 Bourgeois and two conspirators climbed the tall pines outside of the barracks where Salvadoran soldiers slept at Fort Benning and played a recording of Romero’s last Sunday homily where he called on the military to “*Cese la represión* [Stop the repression!].” Arrested, he spent eighteen months in prison, some of that time in solitary confinement.

In Bourgeois’s telling, all of these events are background that prepared him for his later response when the six Jesuits were murdered at the UCA.

When I read that report [from Rep. Moakley’s Congressional Investigation], it got a lot of, a lot of coverage, I decided to return to Ft. Benning to investigate the school. I went down with the support of my Maryknoll community; didn’t have to convince them really because we work in Latin America and [. . .] know firsthand the brutality of the military. We thought it was important

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to investigate this School of the Americas that we knew very little about. I found this apartment right outside of the main gate that became the SOA Watch, School of the Americas Watch. We didn’t have a movement back then of course we just had a few kindred spirits coming into town. [These were] friends who I called: ‘come down, we got work to do here.’ (Bourgeois 2006)

Building on these early intuitions, Bourgeois narrates the emergence of a movement—though making clear that he had “no vision of starting a movement” (Bourgeois 2015). And it was the exemplary dead, according to Bourgeois, that gave vision and direction to their early actions. In his 1997 trial statement he declared to the judge:

We go to prison empowered by the martyrs, the victims of the graduates of the School of the Americas, those thugs that we bring here to train . . . We go to prison empowered by people like Jean Donovan, Dorothy Kazel, my friends, Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, missionary women from the United States who have been raped and killed by graduates of the School of the Americas. (SOA Watch 1998, 7–8)

Similar to the protection and healing that Christians of late antiquity gained through petition of the saints (Brown 1981), Bourgeois claims the supernatural empowerment and aid of the Salvadoran martyrs in his declaration to the judge.

At each point of Bourgeois’s narrative, there is a dialectic between the major events of concern for SOA Watch participants and Bourgeois’s actions. Romero and the four churchwomen were killed; Bourgeois climbed a tree outside the barracks at Fort Benning and played Romero’s final Sunday homily. The Jesuits were assassinated; Bourgeois read the congressional report and led a motley crew of activists and friends to investigate the School. The one-year anniversary of the Jesuits came around; Bourgeois held the first SOA Watch action at Fort Benning. By narrating his story in this way, Bourgeois positions himself as the rightful

inheritor of the moral authority of the exemplary dead.

Bourgeois is not alone in this narrative act. His biographers James Hodge and Linda Cooper also participate in this transference of moral to charismatic authority through their hagiographic portrait of Bourgeois in *Disturbing the Peace*.<sup>10</sup> Like his own self-narration, Hodge and Cooper situate Bourgeois as carrying on the legacy of the martyrs, and weave together his own story with the story of the movement.<sup>11</sup>

Other members of the movement participate in this transference as well. For example, retired United Methodist missionary, pastor, and army

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veteran Charles Butler testified at his trial for civil disobedience at Fort Benning that:

Father Roy Bourgeois is the one who pretty much single-handedly in the beginning, realizing the terrible suffering of the six Jesuit priests that were killed, and so he began to protest the presence of the School of the Americas. But a movement begun with one person about 10 years ago began to grow. (Knapke 2000, 21)

Beyond attributing the early growth of the movement to Bourgeois, in his sentencing statement, Butler suggested that it was Bourgeois whose voice was the instrument of God's call on his life. After learning of United States involvement in human rights violations during missionary work in Central America, he became frustrated and disillusioned. Butler testified that "Amid this turmoil I heard a prophetic voice. It was the voice of Father Roy Bourgeois: 'You are called to be a voice for the voiceless.' God spoke to me at a deep, inner place of my soul" (Knapke 2000, 34). According to Butler, God spoke to him through Bourgeois's invocation of Romero's call to be a voice for the voiceless. While the point of Butler's story was not to instantiate Bourgeois's charismatic authority, his testimony (both in the legal and theological sense) reveals the transference at work.

While Bourgeois is the clearest example of an SOA Watch leader drawing on the moral exemplarity of the dead in order to instantiate his charismatic authority, the dynamics are not without ambiguity. For example, savvy members of the SOA Watch network recognize the authoritarian dangers of charismatic leadership and have made clear that Bourgeois is not that kind of leader. Bill Quigley, law professor and one of the members of the SOA Watch legal collective, said of Bourgeois that "he's beaten the cult of personality. So many movements are known only by their leaders...[Bourgeois] has gotten himself out of the way. It shows the breadth and strength of the movement" (Hodge and Cooper 2004, 197). Quigley's observation that Bourgeois has "gotten himself out of the way" was echoed by younger members of the staff collective, one of whom told me,

Many organizations suffer from "Founders Syndrome" where they can't change, they can't shift focus. That's not us. Roy is very hands off and lets us chart our course. This is a great step forward to shift focus, a lot of organizations can't do that. (Lambelet 2016)

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<sup>10</sup> It should be no surprise, therefore, that the foreword is penned by Catholic actor and celebrity Martin Sheen.

<sup>11</sup> Thus, the appropriately chosen subtitle for their work is "The Story of Father Roy Bourgeois and the Movement to Close the School of the Americas."

Referring to the shift of SOA Watch's annual mobilization site from Ft. Benning to the United States/Mexico border, the young activist expressed her sense that SOA Watch was not unduly wedded to Bourgeois's charismatic authority in a way that prevented flexibility and change.

Yet others, like former SOA Watch staff Lisa Sullivan, credit Bourgeois's prophetic leadership with the success of the movement. "I . . . think whether we like it or not . . . there's been this really brilliant, inspired person, who's

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Roy, who kind of gets these ideas" (Sullivan 2016). In particular, Sullivan credited Bourgeois with the "crazy" idea that they could organize Latin American heads of state and get them to refuse to send their troops to the SOA/WHINSEC. While noting Bourgeois's charismatic creativity, Sullivan was also careful to acknowledge that he was anything but controlling. Without such bold, visionary action, Sullivan suggested that, "you can get kind of just bogged down." From Sullivan and Quigley we can see the ambiguities of charisma at work. Even those who wish to emphasize Bourgeois's evasion of the cult of personality do so in ways that only reinstate the aura of his charisma.

Bourgeois is not the only leader who draws upon these dynamics. Younger leaders use similar strategies of testimony and narrative to instantiate their authority. And, even at the most rudimentary level, you can see the dynamics at work in the most common question I received as a participant-observer in SOA Watch activism: how many years have you been down here? It is a question that asks about my commitment and the legitimacy of my presence. When I can respond, "I've been coming since 2005," I generally am granted some credibility. Through longstanding commitment, I show that I am not merely on activist tourism but am willing to make the sacrifices necessary to attend the annual vigil and participate year after year.

From Bourgeois to marginal movement figures like myself, the politics of sacrifice plays a pivotal role in the generation of charismatic authority. This politics has two related but distinct aspects. First, there is biographical synchronization in which movement leaders associate their own stories with the lives of the exemplary dead.<sup>12</sup> Each plot point in the narrative displays the connection between the leader and the dead. This biographical synchronization is then complemented through a mimesis of sacrifice. Just like the dead, the living take on hardship that evidences their commitment to the struggle for justice. Together these two dynamics—biographical synchronization and sacrificial mimesis—add up to a politics of sacrifice that generates charismatic legitimacy.

More pointedly, I would argue that the two aspects of Weber's theory of charisma, magic and mimesis, are held together through this politics of sacrifice. On the one hand, movement leaders create distance between themselves and their followers through high-risk activism. Here Weber's category of magic or supernatural capacity comes to the fore. It is not accidental that activists in their first action on the base gathered blood from the site of the Jesuits' assassination, mixed it with their own, and sprinkled it on the "SOA Hall of Fame" (Hodge and Cooper 2004, 136). The blood acted as a propitiation, utilized in an action that attempted to expiate the

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<sup>12</sup> What I am calling biographical synchronization has affinity with Marshall Ganz's (2011) account of public narrative in which change leaders tell simultaneously a story of self, story of us, and story of now.

sins of United States militarism in Latin America. While not “magic” conventionally conceived, the sacrificial politics of these leaders is functionally equivalent to supernatural acts of power in that it is accomplished by only a select few. Not every SOA Watch participant occupies a subject position that would allow them to responsibly engage in such high-risk actions. Prisoners of conscience have a special authority in the movement because they do what others hesitate to do, submitting themselves to significant risks of legal consequences, imprisonment, or fines and violence (sometimes excessive) by law enforcement.

These risks are always qualified by the fact that they pale in comparison to the suffering endured by Latin American partners. As Shirley Way put it as she prepared for her prison sentence, “the price is very small indeed in comparison with the costs my fellow human beings have had to and continue to bear at the hands of graduates of the School of the Americas/ Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation” (Lamb 2004, 20). SOA Watch co-founder and anti-war activist Kathy Kelly described in detail her experience of being roughed up and “hogtied” by police after she refused to be treated with disrespect. Reflecting on the experience, she said, “this morning’s aches and pains along with the memory of being hogtied, give me a glimpse into the abuses we protest by coming to Fort Benning, GA” (Lamb 2004, 15). Activists’ sacrifices for the cause and their submission to imprisonment and abuse at the hands of law enforcement both evidence their commitment and perform solidarity. They create distance between others in the movement insofar as others are unwilling to undergo such an *askesis*, at times for very legitimate reasons. This magical distance is not the miraculous provision of the saints, though it draws at times explicitly on their contagion. But it does operate within an economy of sacrifice in which benefits are thereby gained for followers and participants.

The magical sacrifice that Prisoners of conscience perform also inspires mimesis. In a passage thick with the dynamics of exemplarity, authority, and sacrifice I have been tracking, John Dear, priest, anti-war activist, and SOA Watch supporter, narrates the last days of the four churchwomen killed in El Salvador in 1980:

On November 29th, as Dorothy Day died at the Catholic Worker house in New York City, Ita and Maura flew to Managua, Nicaragua, for a four-day conference of Maryknollers working in Central America. On the night before their return to El Salvador, Ita shared with the group a passage from the writings of Oscar Romero: ‘Christ invites us not to fear persecution because, believe me, brothers and sisters, those who are committed to the poor must risk the same fate as the poor, and in El Salvador, we know what the fate of the poor signifies: to disappear, to be tortured, to be captive, and to be found dead by the side of the road.’ Jean and Dorothy drove out to the airport to meet Ita and Maura that evening after their flight from Managua. The four women were last seen alive driving out of the airport down the main road. (1987)

Citing Ita Ford, who was citing Romero, in the wake of the death of Dorothy Day, Dear situates the sacrifices of Ford and her colleagues within the venerable narratives of these other saints of nonviolent struggle.

But Dear’s point is not merely to extol the saintliness of Ford and Donovan. Rather, it is

to motivate readers to follow in the martyrs' footsteps. In the conclusion of the pamphlet, Dear notes that following in the legacy of the four churchwomen killed in El Salvador thousands gather annually at the gates of Fort Benning to call for the closing of the SOA and a new foreign policy. He concludes,

The meaning of Jean [Donovan]'s life and death, as well as all the other martyrs, is not just in their sacrifices and their witness, but in their call to follow in their footsteps, to enter into the life of the poor, to struggle for justice with the poor, to stand with the poor, to defend the poor, to speak out for the poor, and to become one with them. Just as Jesus called Jean to walk the road of peace, Jean now calls us, in Jesus' name, to become God's instruments of justice and peace. (1987)

Dear, like other movement leaders, uses the sacrifices of exemplars to call other movement participants into high-risk activism. Additionally, Dear uses his own sacrifices in the pattern of the martyrs to generate his authority in the movement.

The dynamics of charismatic authority thus draw upon moral exemplarity through the politics of sacrifice. By engaging in high-risk activism, movement leaders synchronize their own lives with the exemplars, generate their authority, and call on others to follow in their footsteps. In their high-risk activism, they both attract followers for their courage and willingness to put their bodies on the line and distance themselves from followers for whom such risk is imprudent. But does solidarity require such sacrifice? This is a particularly perilous line of thinking, especially when an obligation to sacrifice is generalized to all movement participants regardless of station. The tendency of authoritarian charismatics is to foreshorten the practical reasoning that exemplars can aid. Rather than looking to the exemplary dead for guidance in moral deliberation, asking how the dead might respond to novel circumstances, charismatics become authoritative interpreters of the dead, telling followers what the dead demand.

Some movement participants, particularly people of color and those directly impacted by the violence of United States-Latin American militarism, have critiqued movement leaders for using the politics of sacrifice to authorize their voices. One such critic, Darren Parker, admonished so-called Prisoners of conscience: "don't wear your jail time like a fucking badge" (Parker 2004). Leaders in their charisma silence other voices sometimes explicitly through censure, critique, and marginalization, but more often they silence others implicitly simply by the amplified power of their own speech and presence (Freeman 1972). Exemplars play an indispensable

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role pedagogically and motivationally in generating movement activism. Yet authoritarian charisma needs to be critiqued and deposed.

### **3. Theologically Depositing Authoritarian Charisma**

I have suggested that our intuitive response of ambivalence to charismatic leadership is trustworthy: we are attracted to them in part because they embody something of moral excellence that is worthy of our admiration, but we are repelled by them because they make demands that are not universally possible or right in application. This is the dialectic of magic and mimesis,

attraction and repellant, that Weber identified. This dialectic is generated by the politics of sacrifice that operates as the transmission belt upon which the conversion from moral exemplarity to charismatic authority is often made.

The politics of sacrifice is a key component of the moral authority of both dead exemplars and living leaders in the SOA Watch movement. The sacrifices of exemplars demonstrate the contours of an excellent life lived for others while also revealing the injustice of a system of legalized military violence which brutally takes the lives of such admirable persons. The sacrifices of leaders hold together the repellant-attraction, magic-mimesis dialectic of charisma, both inspiring followers while keeping them at arm's length. Jail time and abuse at the hands of authorities is inspirational while also keeping these forms of high-risk activism out of reach for many SOA Watch participants.

But the politics of sacrifice can also fund authoritarian charisma. Calling on the exemplary dead as moral guides requires the exercise of practical reasoning as followers consider how to bring their moral insights to bear in new contexts. Rather than supporting the moral deliberation of followers, however, authoritarian charisma can short-circuit practical reason as the charismatic becomes the sole interpreter of the dead and tells followers what they ought to do. The gap between the living and the dead is foreclosed. How can the productive gap that allows for practical reasoning be reopened?

While it would be possible to identify external norms by which to critique charisma, such as an opposition to domination, another productive approach is an immanent critique that deposes the politics of sacrifice theologically. As I indicated in my earlier appropriation of Weber, political theology can be a critical tool in understanding and deposing the politics of sacrifice. The shape of the politics of sacrifice utilized by SOA Watch is Christological; it is made intelligible by its relation to the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, I conclude by drawing upon some of the most incisive critiques of sacrifice in Christian theology and ethics—namely those of womanists and Black liberationists—to show the dangers, limits, and chastened possibilities of a politics of sacrifice. Such

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a critique reopens the possibility of practical reason by restoring the gap between exemplars and devotees, charismatics and followers.

While sacrifice has long been a central problematic of Christian theology, feminist and womanist theologians and ethicists have rightly critiqued the ways in which the valorization of sacrifice can legitimize violence.<sup>13</sup> In her now classic essay “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption,” Delores Williams identifies surrogacy, the act of standing in for another, as a fundamental problem in Christian accounts of Jesus’s salvific role. Williams demonstrates how Black women have been coerced into positions of surrogacy. The result of these forms of surrogacy is not only that black women’s roles and social identities have hardened into negative stereotypes but also that those stereotypes have been blessed by Christian theology in which Jesus is imaged as the ultimate surrogate (Williams 1991).

Using the experience of Black women as a socio-historical lens by which to read and critique Christian theology, Williams historicizes and rejects classical accounts of atonement. Whether *Christus Victor*, juridical, or humanist models of atonement, all portray Jesus’s sacrifice

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<sup>13</sup> To use the language of peace studies scholarship, the christological valorization of suffering operates as cultural violence which renders the suffering of marginalized persons natural, invisible and justified (Galtung 1990).

on the cross as the means of redemption.<sup>14</sup> Jesus stands in for humanity, thus giving surrogacy “an aura of the sacred” (Williams 1991, 9). Williams asks, “If black women accept this image of redemption, can they not also passively accept the exploitation surrogacy brings?” (1991, 9). Williams concludes that Black women cannot accept this image of redemption, for “to do so is to make their exploitation sacred. To do so is to glorify sin” (1991, 13). Williams’s alternative is to focus on the liberatory aspects of Jesus’s life and teaching. This, rather than surrogate suffering, is what is atoning. Williams rejects categorically that suffering should be understood as sacrifice—literally making (*-fice*) holy (*sacri-*). Rather, surrogate suffering is defilement; it is against the intentions of God.

What does Christ’s suffering and death mean for those who wish to follow Jesus of Nazareth? If Christ is the paradigm, the exemplar of exemplars, does this mean that sacrifice is an essential part of discipleship? Applying Williams’s critique to SOA Watch leaders, we can ask further: what does this critique mean for the politics of sacrifice that generates charismatic authority? Williams had in mind Black women as a class, not solidarity activists—many of whom come not from the margins but the class of masters. Yet her concerns should lead us to interrogate the dynamics of the politics of sacrifice. We should be mindfully critical of the ways in which valorizing surrogacy can justify violence against marginalized

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people. This violence is subtle but can occur even within the movement itself. As privileged, white North Americans encounter their complicity in systems of legalized violence, they often want to “do something.” Engaging in high-risk activism in support of the aims of SOA Watch can be one way to expiate the guilt that privileged activists feel.<sup>15</sup> But this can be a very paternalistic performance of solidarity, particularly insofar as their suffering serves to amplify the voices of activists who are not directly impacted by the legalized violence of the United States-Latin American military system. Activists can operate with a messiah complex in which their sacrifices are the means of the salvation of the movement. Activists should be wary of equating the voluntary sacrifice that comes from a place of privilege with the coerced suffering that is imposed upon Latin American peoples.

Williams, however, does not have the last word on sacrifice. While Black theologian James Cone accepts the power of Williams’s critique, namely that the surrogate suffering of the cross can and often does underwrite the suffering of Black women, he is not willing, as Williams is, to do away with positive significance of the cross altogether. Rather, siding with M. Shawn Copeland (1993), JoAnne Terrell (2006), and Jacqueline Grant (1989) among others, Cone argues that the cross and the suffering that accompanies it ought to remain a fundamental part of Christian theology, specifically Black liberation theology. The reception of the cross for Cone is rooted in paradox. It is both a symbol of death and life, execution and liberation, despair and hope. Rooted in the reality of Black people’s struggle for justice, Cone concludes: “The cross is the burden we must bear in order to attain freedom” (2011, 151).

For Cone, as for Copeland (1993) and others, suffering is a brute fact that accompanies struggle against unjust structures. Whereas Williams rejects attempts to make theological meaning of the cross in anything other than a negative register, Cone and Copeland see a positive

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<sup>14</sup> For these three models in digest, see Aulén (2003).

<sup>15</sup> Historian and activist Clare Land (2015) tracks these same desires to help and the latent paternalism of this motivation among non-indigenous solidarity activists in Australia.

possibility. Copeland, for instance, lingers with Black women's testimonies not only in the experience of suffering but also in the meaning-making of that suffering. In Black women's suffering, Copeland finds resources for resistance: memory, wit, sass, and courage. These resources provide an outline for a theology of suffering from a womanist perspective, a theology that remembers, resists, and redeems. Copeland concludes: "Black women invite God to partner with them in the redemption of Black people. They make meaning of their suffering" (1993, 124).

While Williams's critique of surrogacy might preclude the positive use of the politics of sacrifice altogether, Cone and Copeland suggest that suffering is an expected outcome of the struggle against unjust structures. Those who resist should anticipate repression as they work for freedom.

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Many SOA Watch activists—not just privileged, white, United States citizens—make heroic sacrifices in the struggle against the violence of the US-Latin American military system. While the dynamics of privilege are certainly operative, there are other dynamics at work as well. As Copeland notes, suffering is a brute fact of human life, and, as Cone argues, if we look at the cross of Jesus as a lynching tree, we can see sacrifice as part of the struggle for freedom against the powers of violence and death. But can the politics of sacrifice be rightly used in the service of effective political struggle? Can the exemplary dead be a moral resource by which living activists discern their call in their own place and time?

In order to rightly make use of a politics of sacrifice, activists need critical tools like the political theological critique I have just surveyed. Such tools open up the possibility of practical reason that honors the paradoxical nature of sacrifice. When the paradox is broken, as with an authoritarian charismatic who interprets the demands of the dead, the tension is no longer productive.

Arguably, any account of exemplarity must be accompanied by an account of practical reason that allows us to move from the excellence of the life of another to the embodiment of that excellence in our own life. The historical gap between ourselves and the dead invites, even requires, this practical reasoning. How might we live into the legacy of the exemplars in our own time and context? The question assumes that the actions of the exemplar cannot serve as mere blueprint even if they offer a rubric to our discernment. This gap is narrowed with charismatic leaders. When a leader becomes the interpreter of exemplarity, the leader's requests take on an authority that can circumvent the need for critical discernment of the goods at stake and what actions those goods demand. If we are to make a right use of the politics of sacrifice that generate the charisma of leaders who draw on the exemplary dead, we will have to reopen the gap and exercise the virtue of practical reason. Political theological critique of the politics of sacrifice, and how it serves to convert the exemplarity of the dead to the charisma of the living, can help us reopen that gap and begin such deliberation. Without it, I fear, icons will quickly harden into idols.

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