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The worker-priests: care as a composition of love and solidarity

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the moral lessons organization studies can draw from the worker-priest movement of the 1940s and 1950s. The first section gives an account of the worker-priests and their organization in France. The second section, drawing on the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, Emmanuel Levinas and Leonardo Boff, identifies in this organization a resonance of care that operates via four techniques: proximity; self-divestment; radical giving; and collective particularity. These techniques establish a synthesis between love and solidarity that aims at bringing justice into the world as care. The article concludes with a discussion of what this account might bring to a critical spirituality of organization that is centered on the precariousness of existence – and its demand for care.

In the 1940s and 1950s, a small number of Catholic priests in France decided to enter factories and mines and docks to find the industrial working class, who they felt had been left behind by the church (see Arnal 1986; Horn 2015; Siefer 1964). This in turn meant leaving behind the traditional organizational model of the parish, 'the basic building block of the Catholic Church' (Horn 2015, 228–229). The parish is, geographically, a simple parcel of territory that falls under the operation of a priest. Historically, these territories would have picked out rural communities, and so the organization of the parish had been conceived outside of urbanization and prior to the emergence of an industrial working class and its concentration in cities. The worker-priests understood that what was appropriate for smaller, more homogenous communities was no longer adequate for organizing a response to the massification and misery of industrialization. Leaving the parish was a radical and experimental departure from the parish as a spatial form of organization to more relational forms of organization that allowed for more direct intervention in the material world. The worker-priests then entered the industrial workplace, not to preach or to convert but as laborers, living the lives and sharing the fates of the workers they toiled with. This created an environment of proximity and an experience of shared fate or precariousness that was vital to overcoming the divide between priest and worker. The worker-priests sought no publicity for this action – and yet the movement caught the attention of the press on both sides of the Atlantic.

The presence of priests in overalls had become controversial on the back of sensational coverage in the French newspapers in the late 1940s (Poulat 1961b; Bell 2008), the church embarrassed by the attention it was receiving – and by the increasing workplace militancy of priests. *Time* picked up on the story, reporting positively about the movement in 1950, then in 1952 on the presence of worker-priests at protests, and in 1953 on the dwindling of the movement in the face of increasing

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condemnation by the Vatican (see Time 1953). By 1959, *Time* was reporting that 'one of the century's most exciting and most debated religious experiments, finally died' (Time 1959), killed off by a papal edict that reinforced the earlier condemnations. Gregor Siefer (1964) argues that what really caught the attention of the international press was that something so obviously decent and laudable had been crushed. Even as late as 1999, in an obituary to Jaques Loew, his actions and those of other worker-priests could be described as 'audacious' (Corley 1999).

This article sets out a spirituality of care and its contribution to the critical spirituality of organization called for by Emma Bell (2008), by returning to her example of the worker-priests to unpick the moral concepts and movements at play. The primary lesson in this regard, it will be shown, is the way that the worker-priest movement was resonant with care as a composition of love and solidarity. The arguments that follow are underpinned by an idea of *ethics as first philosophy* (Peperzak 1995), which motivates an understanding that moral responsibility – or really the orientation of one existence towards that of another – is prior to any ontology or structure. An ethics as first philosophy is then encompassed practically by the question of justice, or, how to ensure organizational fairness while retaining the priority or moral urgency of the existence of the other.

It is argued that the worker-priests found this balance of ethics and justice in their move from the parish to the workplace by combining an ethic of love with a socio-political principle of solidarity. This combination was vital in ensuring that intervention was both spiritual and material. Solidarity meant that the Christian ethic of love would be reinforced by opposition to social injustice, where otherwise it might leave in place that injustice since it would give opportunity for charity. And love meant that the universalist idea of solidarity would be grounded in neighborliness, so that the struggle was never abstracted from the particularity of the relationship with the other person, despite its political organization towards the greater good.

The first section tells the story of the worker-priests, locating the definition of the movement (including the historical context, setting out the spiritual, sociological and organizational motivations for the action, and outlining the organization of the priest's efforts), how they approached class antagonism, and how the movement came to be proscribed by church authorities. This will set out the concrete dimensions of a movement that strove for social justice through acts of care that brought together the Christian ethic of love and a workerist sense of solidarity. The second section provides a conceptual frame – via the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard (2009), Emmanuel Levinas (2007, 2008) and Leonardo Boff (2007) – for understanding the means by which love is composed with solidarity to produce justice as care: by creating proximity with workers; by the self-divestment of status by the priest; by radical giving; and by organizing collective action that retains the intimacy and particularity of love. The article concludes with a recapitulation of the philosophical argument that runs through it, before reflecting on the contribution that an understanding of care as a composition of love and solidarity can make to organization studies. This contribution is articulated via a working through of the conceptual position in tandem with ideas of communitas (Turner 2012) and ecstatic organization (Kenny 2010) in order to reinforce the call for a critical spirituality of organization (Bell 2008).

The worker-priests

The worker-priests were part of the western wave of liberation theology identified by Gerd-Rainer Horn (2015) in the period 1924–1959, which in turn helped inform the material and philosophical dimensions of the later wave of liberation theology in Latin America beginning in the late 1960s. Oscar Arnal makes an explicit claim that these worker-priests effectively originated what we then saw in, for example, Brazil, writing that 'liberation theology was being discovered and practiced in the heart of western industrialized society years before it exploded from the barrios of Latin America' (1986, 89). Horn is more measured in identifying an inspiration from the one to the other, which avoids the danger of appearing to downplay the later movement.

The influence of the worker-priests of the first wave period was not simply trans-Atlantic nor intra-Catholic. Anne Grubb (1961) notes the existence of worker-priests active in the Church of England at the beginning of the 1960s. John Mantle (2000) makes the case that these Anglican ministers who went to work in the industrial towns and cities of Britain were inspired by the French example. Bell (2008) extends this activity into the 1980s, drawing parallels between the worker-priests and the British industrial mission that joined the striking miners. Clearly, the influence did not run only from the industrialized north to the global south. The focus on the worker-priests, then, is justified insofar as this limited and arguably failed action was nonetheless contributory to later phases of liberational intervention in the world of work. That said, despite moving towards the work of the Brazilian liberation theologist Boff in the second section, no claim is made of antecedence or primacy, rather that there is a resonance of care across the waves, captured by the conceptual resources put to work in that section, and that can be located and extended in working practices today.

Definition

There is very little agreement on what it is that picks out a worker-priest. Arnal (1986, 1) suggests that 'worker-priest' has come to be a term that is applied to any clergy member who draws a salary from outside the church – which would include various part-time or non-stipendiary ministers through the years. Arnal (1986, 1) prefers a stricter definition, offering 'those clergy who fulfilled their mandate by engaging in full-time manual labor as a priestly manifestation of the Church's commitment to embrace the working class of their respective nations'. The latter part of this definition hints at a global movement that is tricky in parts to motivate, although there are flickers of the movement in Britain, as has been mentioned, and before this a grounding in Germany, that ought to be noted. When it comes to the worker-priest as discrete movement – and as media sensation – we are talking about approximately 100 mostly French, and some Belgian, mostly Catholic priests, who entered workplaces such as factories and mines and docks to take up the work of the working class, drawing salaries from this work, from the end of the Second World War until the proscription of full time industrial labor by the Vatican in 1954 (Arnal 1986; Siefer 1964; Windass 1967).

Siefer (1964) characterizes the worker-priest movement as the result of a church forced to confront a world turned upside-down by industrialization and to reimagine its traditional modes of operation, its organization and its institutions. As Arnal (1986, 9) observes, the formative years of the worker-priests were shaped by the Depression, by the rise of fascism across Europe and by Nazi occupation in France. The church itself was being forced to come to terms with these events also – including the Catholic Right's collaboration with Nazism (see Horn 2015). And, in a way, the church had already been attempting to co-exist with the historical context that fed into mid-century tumult, taking more initiative to find the victims of the industrial revolution, from roughly the time of the Paris Commune through the inter-war period and up to the formation of the worker-priest movement – including various attempts at activism, outreach and theological and sociological innovation (see Arnal 1986, 15–33). What limited these efforts was that they were still wedded to the structural organization of the parish, fit more for rural village life, which meant that even when priests went in search of the working class, the church was still organized in a way that had not yet adapted to the composition of the industrial working class or its concentration in urban centres.

Arnal (1986, 49) describes a working class who confronted 'daily that their existence was precarious'. The worker-priest movement was then formed in recognition that the church could no longer abstain from 'temporal commitments' and with the understanding 'that a life *in* the world and *with* the world – a world which has changed – has obviously become unavoidable' (Siefer 1964, ix, emphasis in original). This meant leaving the parish and entering the lifeworld of the working class – both the factories and the urban dwellings they inhabited. But this was a task made difficult by the sense that the working class had become a stranger to the church, that clergy had taken to regarding the working class as an object of fear or of charity but never of proximity (Siefer 1964, 144). Arnal (1986, 51) describes a class so brutalized and oppressed by the conditions

of their work and the precariousness of their lives that they had adopted an 'indifference to God', finding any hope instead in socialist humanism.

Defining the movement that set out to find this now desolate class is a task made difficult – as noted by Siefer (1964, xii-xiv) – by the fact that the worker-priests did not constitute a coherent social unit, being instead no more than about 100 men, each with their own idiosyncratic interpretation of the movement, geographically dispersed throughout France (and a few other places) but elevated to the public consciousness as a gestalt thing by a sensationalist press. It is tempting, then, to fall back on individual cases. Henri Perrin, for example, came to this work during the Second World War, when occupying forces took many French laborers to Germany as conscripted labor (see Perrin 1947). Priests had been denied their request to accompany these forced labor details as chaplains, and so some, like Perrin, went instead as laborers. Horn (2015, 271–272) observes that in these forced labor camps a 'significant minority of an entire generation of French priests thus was exposed to the traditions and miseries but also the hopes and camaraderie of blue-collar workers at the point of production'. Perrin was discovered, imprisoned and returned to France – although others in his position were sent instead to concentration camps (Perrin 1964, 29). He returned to Germany at the end of the war to attend to the forced laborers who had now been liberated, and then, in 1948, began work in a factory in the 13th arrondissement in Paris, making insulating material and plastic products, first as a molder then as a turner, bouncing around a few gigs after that before taking on a job constructing the Isère-Arc Dam in 1951 (Perrin 1964, 57, 99, 171). Other priests took up a wide range of manual labor – Francis Laval becoming the only priest-miner (Arnal 1986, 64), Jacques Loew taking up work at the Marseille docks (Windass 1967, 18), Jean Volot taking to the seas as a sailor (Arnal 1986, 80), and so on. There are vivid personal stories here, but it is useful to work across this movement to find some commonality – even if those stories do not interlock in a neat fashion.

To the definition of a worker-priest provided by Arnal we can add from Siefer that this was a 'priest who did not live in a presbytery or monastery, was freed from parochial work by his bishop, lived only by his full-time labor in a factory or other place of work, and was indistinguishable in appearance from an ordinary workman' (1964, 2). These were mostly young men in their mid-20s, mostly from working class backgrounds, some with experience of manual labor before entering the priesthood, some motivated by disillusionment with their seminary years or with parish life, and some, like Perrin, radicalized by experiences as forced laborers or prisoners of war (see Arnal 1986, 61–67). Arnal (1986, 69) surmises that the key requirements of a worker-priest were patience, a long-term view, team-working – and an ability to live in poverty. The priests entered the workplace singly rather than as groups of worker-priests, so that they did not block job opportunities for those in need of employment (Siefer 1964, 173), but met regularly with one another to discuss their progress, in what Arnal (1986, 103–104) describes as a prefiguration of the praxis-reflection-praxis process of liberation theology, and often (although not always) with support of their bishops or cardinals.

Antagonism

At the same time, the church had come to be seen as aloof to the struggles of the working class, more content to condemn working class culture and pursuits, presenting itself in a middle class manner, hoarding immense wealth and monopolizing the spaces that working people could use for recreation and leisure, to the extent that, if the working person was to the church a stranger, the clergy member was to the worker a shirking bourgeois hypocrite (Arnal 1986, 51–52).

Siefer (1964, 141) argues that class antagonism is particularly pronounced between the worker and the priest because, even though the worker lives and works amongst the other classes, and sees how unequal the situation is upfront, and feels the oppression of the one against the other first hand, it is in the church that the worker is told to love their neighbor. A bourgeois institution preaching neighborliness to those oppressed by the bourgeoisie is unsurprisingly up against it.

According to Arnal (1986, 52), the worker-priests concluded that to reach the working class, the church had to put intervention in their oppression before salvation of their souls – or lose their souls for eternity.

Even with the blessing of the church, entrance of the priests into the workplace was not easy – precisely because they were priests. Managers of factories were sceptical that men of religion could use their hands, or averse to the idea, preferring that they attend instead to spiritual matters (Arnal 1986, 77). The class antagonism that pitched priest against worker was also a barrier to entry. With doubt or hostility from both managers and workers, it became necessary in many cases for the priests to take up work without revealing themselves as priests – they 'entered the workplace as ciphers', as Arnal (1986, 86) delicately phrases it – which then reinforced the sense that the priest was now a faceless cog in a machine, and thereby accelerating their identification with the working person, a move further underscored by their abandonment of the dog collar and bourgeois priestly garb in favor of the clothes of the workers (Siefer 1964, 187). But what began as an entry strategy became a philosophy of action; the worker-priest would not pass if they simply occupied the space of the worker – they had to inhabit the life of the working class. This meant dressing as they did, working alongside them and living where they lived. Siefer (1964, 201–203) suggests that the priests living in the same neighborhoods as the workers was vital for hospitality between the groups, a sign that the priest was not sojourning in the misery of others but taking upon himself that hardship. Acceptance was sealed through shared privation, oppression and injustice, by the 'everyday martyrdoms' of redundancies and workplace accidents and industrial diseases, but above all by the 'monotonous toil' of manual labour, without which there could be no solidarity between worker and priest (Arnal 1986, 75, 70). This led the worker-priests to abandon as folly the idea that they could act as industrial chaplains, preaching gospel during work hours and converting the godless industrial workers, and to embark instead on their own 'de-embourgeoisement', to join the working class not only in body but in spirit (Siefer 1964, 52).

The working class already had a movement absent the church – the worker's movement – and so the gospel would struggle to cut through. Far from trying to compete, the word of God versus that of Marx, the priests, motivated by their faith, became then radicalized by their milieu. The priests found manual labor exhausting and dehumanizing, relentless in its pace, that it wrecked their nerves, was marked by neglect, an absence of care, with bosses indifferent to their fate, as if they were reduced to fungible units of labor – in short, they found manual labor to be much like manual laborers found it to be (Arnal 1986, 34). They had entered the workplace at a time of heightened working class militarism and union activity and, according to Arnal (1986, 83–84), were so impressed by the solidarity of the working class that they saw in this solidarity the work of God. Many worker-priests joined unions – André Collonge (1961a, 45) records 95% – most of them the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), and although some were deterred from taking on leadership roles for fear of being seen by the church as politically partisan, others became branch delegates or secretaries, and union activity came to be seen as an extension of the act of witnessing, or, bearing witness to the lives of the working class (Arnal 1986, 82–84). Perrin joined strikes at the dam construction site in 1952, fighting against low pay and perilous conditions (Perrin 1964, 171). Just ten days before the strikes began, he noted in his diary the death of a co-worker, 'buried and suffocated in the sand of a cement mixer', further noting that they spent the rest of day on a go-slow in lieu of any proper time for mourning (Perrin 1964, 180). In total thirteen men died in the construction of the Isère-Arc Dam, although fatal conditions were not merely observed by worker-priests in their places of work; Father Michael Favreau, for example, was crushed to death at the Bordeaux docks in 1951 (Arnal 1986, 82). Radicalized further by the proximity to death and injury, Perrin became the secretary of the strike committee at the dam, and his persecution and dismissal from his job then precipitated further strike action in 1953; the firm lost a tribunal, but Perrin was never reinstated (Perrin 1964, 213).

The union activity of worker-priests created a stigma and then a silence around the wider movement of the worker-priests that makes it difficult to assess their impact. Siefer (1964, 169) is right to

say that any success cannot be measured by numbers of conversions or returns to the church, but by acceptance of the priests in the workplace, since such acceptance is indicative that the priests had successfully overcome class antagonism to reach the working class, and their union activity is further indicative of this acceptance.

Suppression

This union activity was also a contributory factor in the suppression of the movement by the Vatican. As early as 1949, the church mandated that priests should remain under the control of bishops, that their focus ought to be evangelism and not liberation, that they should be separate from the laity, and that they ought to be led by theology and not ideology (Arnal 1986, 141). In 1953, the worker-priests were recalled to their parishes by the bishops and then in 1954 Pope Pius XII condemned the movement and proscribed full-time industrial labor, effectively ending the official activity of the worker-priests – a position reinforced in 1959 when Pope John XXIII reaffirmed that factory work was incompatible with priestly activity (Arnal 1986, 170), and, to some surprise, extended the earlier position by including now part-time labor (Horn 2015, 289). Violet Welton (1961, 20) suggests that the Vatican was motivated by fear that the movement 'was infected with the Communist virus' and Arnal (1986, 141) situates the suppression of the worker-priests within the Catholic church's staunch anti-communist politics of the mid-twentieth century. In late 1953 Perrin (1964, 234) notes in his diary the feeling among the worker-priests that, behind the bishops' concern for the priestly life of the worker-priests, there was in the end only anti-communism and the politics of an institution preserving itself.

Collonge (1961a) argues that it was the worker-priest's trade unionism, and more than this their workerist activism, for example, their participation in strikes, protests and so on, that was their downfall, not because it was communist per se, but because it was lay or secular – because it was activity in a secular world that served the working class materially and not (or supposedly not) spiritually. The argument from Collonge is not that the church is apolitical – it obviously does intervene in politics – but that the politicking is meant to serve the church, and the church simply was not seeing a return on the action in the form of larger congregations or donations and so on. This is reinforced by Horn (2015, 277–287), who reports the concern among church authorities that worker-priests had adapted to secular life rather than convincing the working class to adopt the Catholic way of life. Stanley Windass (1967, 95) adds that there was not only a sense that temporal activity had begun to overwhelm spiritual activity, but genuine concern from the bishops for the priesthood of the worker-priests. The priests had entered a secular world and instead of acting there to serve the spiritual community in the traditional form of the church – simply stayed there.

Permanently, in many cases, as although there had been some genuine concern from figures in the Catholic church that the worker-priests would veer towards Protestantism once they encountered a working class that despised the pomp and wealth of the Catholic church (Collonge 1961b), after their activity had been banned by the Vatican, many worker-priests continued in manual labor outside the church entirely (Poulat 1961a). Horn (2015, 287) records only a quarter of French worker-priests (but all their Belgian counterparts) complying with the bishops and ceasing full time industrial labor. This is symptomatic of the defeat of a movement – but also the remarkable success of de-embourgeoisement. The work of the worker-priests was no longer permissible, but they could not simply cease being who they now were – members of the industrial working class.

Compositions of love and solidarity

Having set out the story of the worker-priests and their movement, it is now necessary to tease out some conceptual lessons that might be put to work towards a critical spirituality of organization. The argument to be developed is that what made the worker-priest movement distinctive – and what set

it apart from the established operating practice of the church – was the way that they brought together an ethic of neighborly or charitable love that was influential in the Christian world with a more political and action-guiding conception of solidarity, which they found in and adapted from the working class movement. This meant that the church was given impetus to act in the world and to address the socio-political conditions beyond the parish, where otherwise it would eschew temporal intervention in favor of spiritual development supplemented by spontaneous acts of charity without political direction.

Four techniques are identified for the successful composition of love with solidarity: the establishment of proximity; self-divestment; radical giving; and collective particularity. These techniques have been drawn from the accounts of the worker-priest's organization and activity summarized in the previous section and their dynamics are explained in terms of the conceptualization of love and solidarity and their composition to come. The bringing together of love and solidarity via these techniques would then aim at bringing justice into the world as care. Establishing this account from the example of the worker-priests should then bring conceptual resources that can be useful for understanding justice and care in organizations regardless of religiosity or the entrance of religious figures into those spaces.

Love

Bell (2008) argues that the worker-priests brought together the Christian ethic with Marxism. It is important to consider the Judeo-Christian idea of love that underpins the former ethic. This is given its fullest existential expression in the work of Kierkegaard and Levinas, who show us that this idea of love can be both transcendent and concrete, offering resources that will better allow us to see how love composes with solidarity by leading the individual out towards the fate of the other.

The same forces of modern industrial society that had necessitated the intervention of the worker-priests have also been identified by sociologists for their transformative effect on love. Early in the twentieth century, Max Weber (1958) described how the charitable love of the Christian ethic had found itself at odds with the spirit of capitalism. An ethic that had aimed for 'a communism of loving brethren' was now undone by the 'unbrotherliness' of the economic sphere and the moral blindness at the heart of a rationalized society (Weber 1958, 330, 333). Weber believed that some relief from rationalization could be found in passionate love but saw that this was also at odds with the brotherly love of a now anachronistic charitable ethic. But passion itself had not escaped the modernizing process, as Anthony Giddens (1992) observes, now domesticated by an idea of romantic love that had risen with industry and that entrenched individualism in a break from bodily community and nature. This romance was not so much passion for another as it was a form of self-realization in search of meaning. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) situate this yearning individual within the existential mire of the death of God and the uprooting of certainties, such that the individual turns to interpersonal love for ground, for security, or, as Niklas Luhmann (1986, 175) puts it, 'to find meaning in the world of someone else'. This desire then encounters the escalation of desire by consumerism, already on the rise at the time of the worker-priests, and encouraging in its establishment modes of individualism, competition and impermanence (see Alexander and Conrad 2023). As Zygmunt Bauman (2020) argues, in these conditions the pursuit of love becomes restless, the lover now peripatetic, unsatiated – and the romance now transactional, fleeting, forever pursued. Love then becomes disenchanted, as Eva Illouz (2018) argues, returning us to Weber, as it yields to economic rationality.

The more enchanted love of the Christian ethic is worth reclaiming – if it can avoid isolated acts of charity and adopt a more systematic distaste for injustice. Kierkegaard (2009) characterizes the Christian ethic as a form of moral or neighborly love that is non-possessive and without preference – and that ultimately participates in the love of God. This non-preferential idea of love is best understood as picking out a bond rather than an object; Kierkegaard (2009, 76) observes that whilst you might

lose a friend or break up with a lover, or grow tired of their faults, you can never lose a neighbor because it is this moral love that has bound you to them in the first place, rather than some quality of the neighbor arousing in you a feeling of love. Your friends or family or partners might change over time, altering the intensity of feeling towards them, but the neighbor – understood, Kierkegaard (2009, 37) tells us, in the way the philosopher would say *the other* – does not change, in the sense that they are beyond category or my intentionality, and so always an awaiting to be found. This is not to flatten out this idea of the other as a mass but to situate it as an outside, such that moral love is a turning outwards, to embrace all equally but specifically, 'loving everyone in particular but no one in partiality' (Kierkegaard 2009, 78). All worldly distinctions between people remain in place, but in loving the neighbor we rise above such distinctions.

But Kierkegaard (2009, 29) is clear, to rise above is not to occupy some rarified realm in the adoption of a fanciful disposition – it is action. Moral love is then a kind of enthusiasm for the plight of the other person, a love that does not satisfy itself with regarding the neighbor but that is put into the world by our going over to them. 'For what is enthusiasm', asks Kierkegaard (2009, 180), 'if it is not simply willing to do and suffer everything?' This love means going over to the other person so fully that we take on their cause, hold them up and in so doing assume their hardship and their suffering on their behalf. As such, we do not transform the other through acts of love but constrain ourselves by doing and suffering everything for them. Love for the neighbor is greater than any hope because it is the work of hoping for others (Kierkegaard 2009, 233). Love's work, then, is a form of self-sacrifice that is constitutive of the possibility of the future – the possibility of the good in the future. More than this, says Kierkegaard (2009, 335), 'he who praises love equalizes all, not in a common poverty nor in a common mediocrity, but in the community of the highest'. In this conception, to love the other is to love God and to love God is to love others. At the heart of this is another embrace, an embrace of a contradiction. The work of love – doing and suffering everything in going over to the other – is to assume God as a co-worker: to work with God is to accept that really you can achieve nothing in comparison to divine power; and yet, if God works with you, you are capable of anything and everything (Kierkegaard 2009, 333).

As Gillian Rose (2011) makes clear, to suffer everything is not a love of suffering but the work of love that is always work because it is never complete – because life is being incomplete. If the work of love is a relationship to God, then it will always transcend what can be contained in a human life. But the transcendence in which this love participates need not presuppose a God; we can understand this moral love, as Levinas does, as a humanism of the other. For Levinas, what it means to be human is found in the response to the other person. The human at the centre of Levinas's humanism is not the sovereign subject or selfish ego but the vulnerable other, the precariousness of the single life (see Levinas 1997). A humanism of the other, then, insofar as it is a break from self-concern in a movement towards the other person, has responsibility at its heart. And responsibility, Levinas (2006, 88) says, is 'the harsh name for what we call love of one's neighbor'. The neighbor who is loved is the other person – who could be a friend or a stranger. Responsibility is the same in either case; each is my neighbor to the extent that they are other to me. What matters here is not familiarity but proximity. Proximity, Levinas (2008, 87) writes, 'is an impossibility to move away without the torsion of a complex, without "alienation" or fault'. This proximity is an encounter with the other that irretrievably binds me in a moral relation. 'Proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship', says Levinas (2008, 46), 'and has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other' or simply 'humanity'.

Even without an idea of God, this account of love as responsibility retains a transcendent dimension. 'Transcendence is passing over to being's *other, otherwise than being*', writes Levinas (2008, 3). If being human means being more than our selfish nature, then it is also an opening on to the beyond – a leap across to the other. But to the extent that it is a going over to the other it is also concrete. For Levinas, the other calls to me from 'a dimension of height, a dimension of transcendence', with a sincerity and frankness that commits me to 'human fraternity', but with a frail authority, from 'an essential destitution' that grounds the encounter in material acts of kindness and

giving (Levinas 2007, 215). That frail authority is a call for help to be met with love. 'To love is to fear for another, to come to the assistance of his frailty', says Levinas (2007, 256). Moral love – responsibility – is material giving at the same time as it is an orientation of being towards its other. It is an act of giving in response to the suffering of the other, a call for help that becomes an 'inescapable obligation' because only the person who encounters it can set aside their own self-concern, to go beyond nature by going towards the other (Levinas 2006, 81). Suffering in this account is not edifying; the suffering of the other is unconscionable, revealing 'the outrage it would be for me to justify my neighbor's suffering' (Levinas 2006, 85). This represents a wholesale rejection of theodicy.

But we do not live in a world where love straightforwardly is given to the neighbor. There are competing demands, decisions to be made, priorities to be given. Levinas is alive to this, to the complexity of a moral world that cannot be reduced to an infinite number of loving relations. Every encounter with another presupposes a third, all the other others that exist in the world, such that at the same time as there is responsibility in the form of love for the neighbor, there is also the question of justice. 'If there were just the two of us in the world', Levinas (2006, 91) reasons, 'there wouldn't be any problem: it is the other who goes before me'. Life is rarely so simple. It is then necessary to have not only love but also institutions and rights and community organizations. Justice will always have to involve more actors than simply the one and the other, and so will always involve social dynamics that demand trade-offs, that assess the claims of this neighbor and that, that strive for the greatest share of good even at the expense of some small good that can exist between two neighbors. It is important that we note two things. The first is that there is love and there is justice but doing the right thing is not synonymous with doing a good thing, since justice can leave in place or even justify some suffering. Responsibility and justice then co-exist but in complex ways that mean that they are irreducible to each other. The second is that any just society or organization or communal action would have to preserve as much of the neighborly dimension of love as possible if it is to be responsibly just. 'Society must be a fraternal community', Levinas (2007, 214) writes, if it is to be 'commensurate with the straightforwardness [of] the primary proximity', which is to say, if it is to allow for the responsibility that exists in the love for the neighbor. If that were the case, we would be able to conclude with Levinas: 'Justice comes from love' (2006, 92).

Solidarity

Returning to the observation of Bell (2008) that what made the worker-priest movement distinctive was the way that it combined Marxist ideas with a Christian ethic, it is important now to look to what these priests felt compelled to add to the idea of transcendental love that underpinned the latter. Clearly, Christian ideas of love had been at large in a world that bore all kinds of injustice and had animated the actions of a church that presided over the miseries of industrialization – and had colluded with the Nazi regime that brought about the slave labor and death camps that had played such a motivating part in the worker-priest movement. As established, it was also a Christian idea of charitable love for the neighbor that rankled with working class congregations given their own experience of hardship met by a lack of neighborliness from wealthier parishioners and clergy. There needs to be some movement of love towards justice, as Levinas begins to articulate. The vehicle for this was solidarity, something the worker-priests discovered and admired once they joined the working class movement. The idea of solidarity they organized around developed its own distinctive quality as a kind of existential presence that ensured the priests shared the same fate as the workers.

As McLaughlin (1961) argues, the worker-priests were not a gimmick to get people to go to church. The purpose was instead, as Welton (1961, 18) puts it, to ensure that priests were 'linked in destiny with the worker'. Perrin's take on this is interesting, as he equates this destiny with a kind of existential precariousness, noting that the priests went looking for insecurity (see Perrin 1964, 119). This idea of a search for something is shared. The worker-priest Joseph Robert

understood that it was not his role to bring something but to find it, not to teach but to learn, not to establish a movement but to find it there in the working class milieu – 'to be with' and 'to live with' the people (Arnal 1986, 112). Through extensive archival and organizational research, Horn (2015, 245, 250, 252) identifies a process of 'cultural immersion' undertaken by the worker-priests, made possible by active participation in the struggles of working class communities – social and political struggles as well as workplace struggles – and underpinned by the rejection of passivity and the demand for integration in the lifeworld of the other.

This rejection of passivity ought to be understood as a refusal to be merely *alongside* others; it is instead to be actively present *with* others. E. R. Wickham (1961, 126) recalls asking Canon Hollande what the worker-priests *did* and what the worker-priests wanted *to achieve* and receiving the following response: 'An irrelevant question! *C'est la présence, c'est la presence!*' For Monsigneur Ancel, it was through work that this presence could be established, such that the priest could properly encounter the worker, because it acted as a sign of membership of a class, that the presence is also a belonging, such that the encounter is between friends, between comrades (see Windass 1967, 118). This is not a presence in the sense of simple material proximity, nor an encounter in some transactional sense, but a kind of *going over to* that opens the priest up to the worker. A sense of this is conveyed again by the worker-priest Robert, who proclaimed: 'I have not preached the gospel to the poor; it is the poor who have preached the gospel to me' (in Arnal 1986, 112). As Ancel frames it, the moral movement came alive in the encounter with the worker, no longer the dead dogma of the scripture, but instead an animated living of values in the triangulation of religious ethic and social milieu (see Windass 1967, 125–127).

What values were valorized in the encounter of priest with worker? According to Windass (1967, 37), the worker-priests discovered the principal value of the working class, namely solidarity, as a shared destiny established through presence and maintained by frankness and sincerity, which was considered closer to the true meaning of the Christian ethic than the bourgeois values in ascendency. More than this, they came to recognize that suffering is useless. The worker-priests left the vale of soul-making, rejecting the idea that any value could come from poverty, determining that value is only to be found in the struggle against it, and rejecting as 'angelism' – an act of heresy akin to a divine bystander problem – any non-participation in workers' struggles or refusal of advocacy for the working class (Arnal 1986, 124). Through work but also workerism the priest would enter a state of permanent charity towards others, which is to say, through the necessity of inhabiting a world of work that was at the same time a manufacture of misery. This entails the rejection of other-worldly asceticism and the adoption instead of in-worldly asceticism.

This asceticism is neither taking flight from the world nor conforming to a world that is changing, but a challenge to the world as it exists, and vital to this was for the priests to accept the sociological point that individual acts of moral charity are ineffective if they leave the social conditions that produce suffering in place (Siefer 1964, 45). This also necessitated an understanding of encounter that recognized that behind every individual worker was a community, such that when the priest finds the worker, they are always already then in an encounter with a third party. And if this is the case, then the priest was then already by moral urgency bound up with the worker movement, which, as Windass (1967, 38) argues, was the community through which solidarity was most effectively mobilized against poverty and suffering, and whose members added the greatest share of moral goodness into the world.

Care

An idea of love that lingers in the Christian ethic but that has been devalued by broad social shifts as society has industrialized and then moved on to consumerism, and been found on its own lacking, has been established. A specific idea of solidarity at work in the movement of the worker-priests, and that would fortify moral love, has also been identified. It is now possible to locate four key techniques for composing love with solidarity, as exemplified by the worker-priests.

First, the worker-priest, by working singly, by living where the workers lived, and working where they work, makes possible a neighborly relation – which can only be between the one and the other. By prioritizing presence over preaching or conversion, the worker-priest has ensured that there is proximity, in the precise sense of an encounter with another that demands responsibility (if we are speaking harshly of love) and that makes it then impossible to walk away from this without fault or alienation. The worker-priest has put themselves in place, but this ought to be understood as a movement towards the other that is not only being-with but also being-for.

Second, the worker-priest, through a position of self-divestment, seeks to overcome class antagonism by disavowing their own status. This ensures that the encounter remains neighborly, such that, whilst stratification and inequality can only be overcome by material action, the gesture of de-embourgeoisement ensures that these worldly conditions do not derail love before it can do this work. The worker-priest is then linked in destiny with the worker, not by transforming the other person but by constraining their own freedom to be-with the worker. More than this, by approaching the worker as a neighbor and not an authority, by entering the destitution of the worker themselves, the worker-priest puts themselves underneath the destitute authority of the worker when their need becomes a call for support and kindness and giving. De-embourgeoisement is an act of self-divestment that makes it possible to go over to the other as first priority.

Third, the worker-priest, by searching for precariousness, when it is life itself that is precarious, existence that is vulnerable, has understood that existence is not only oriented towards the other but must also be a material response to the suffering of the other. Love or responsibility is then an action, an act of taking on the suffering of the worker not only as a shared destiny – as an act of proximate de-embourgeoisement – but also as giving and self-sacrifice. Suffering is not edifying and the only response to it when encountered is to carry the burden and to uplift the one who is suffering. The worker-priest has then effectively radicalized themselves by proximity to the suffering of precarious existence.

Finally, the worker-priest, by joining this moral radicalism to political radicalism, has shown that moral love is about changing the possibility for good in the future. The worker-priest joins the union – and becomes militant with it – because neighborly love is not sufficient on its own to alleviate all the suffering that is baked into the structures and institutions of society. Joining the workers' struggle is an acceptance that behind every worker is a community, behind every other a third, such that some organization of action is required if there is to be a broader social justice. In turn, solidarity must be understood in conjunction with love, such that organized community action continues to make possible the primary straightforwardness of neighborly love as a moral encounter. Otherwise, responsibility for the other would be subordinate to the cause, which would be to justify suffering in the name of a greater good.

To organize for social change in defence of the vulnerable without losing in this organization the love that can only extend towards a single life (and then another and so on infinitely) would be to achieve justice. Let us say finally that if responsibility is the harsh name for love, then the most tender expression of justice is care. In the work of Boff (2007), care is not just an attitude or an act, but a mode of being that composes with attitudes and values to turn actions into righteous actions. Care stands opposed to neglect, which Boff (2007, 2) characterizes as an 'indisposition' towards others, a 'disregard for the destiny' of vulnerable lives. By contrast, care resonates through human dispositions such as hospitality, a sense of fairness, tenderness, love, and solidarity. Without solidarity, love is unfair. Without love, solidarity is irresponsible. Care is precisely a synthesis, or the possibility of a synthesis, between heaven and earth, between the transcendent and the concrete – between love and solidarity. Care resonates through love and solidarity and through this composition of the two is accomplished in the form of justice. In this way care builds on the responsibility of transcendent love, with its orientation to the single life, the vulnerable other, by guiding it to fairness and to togetherness via solidarity. As such, care does not simply resonate; it concretizes – it makes itself felt on the world as the essential expression of being.

For Boff ([2007], 6), it is spirituality rather than religion per se that can resist carelessness. This is a spirituality formed in togetherness, the connection of everything and everyone, because care is at bottom about proximity and about connection. This would be 'a spirituality based on an ethics of responsibility, solidarity and compassion', which is to say, it would be a spirituality of care. It is this spirituality of care – precisely in the composition of love and solidarity – that resonates through the movement of the worker-priests. It resonates across the first wave of liberatory thought and action in Western Europe to the second wave in Latin America. It resonates through the work of Kierkegaard and Levinas and Boff, the latter of whom Horn ([2015], 294) notes was inspired by the first wave, to which the worker-priests contributed the most famous example. And if there are concretizations of care then there are exemplary figures of care; Boff ([2007], 120) names his own exemplars but we can add to them the worker-priests, whose composition of love and solidarity resonated with care and leaves us with an idea of a spirituality of care that would aim at social justice. The worker-priest has achieved this by grounding the transcendental love of the Christian ethic with the solidarity of working class organization, by going out to find a neighbor in a way that bound them to the destiny of the worker and to all workers and that made urgent a pursuit together of social justice, a fairer world of work – a more caring future.

And if the worker-priests are exemplars, then the concluding task to be undertaken is to demonstrate how the conceptual resources derived from this study of their movement can supplement those already useful to organization studies to enable us to understand – and strive for – workplaces organized in the direction of justice as care.

Concluding remarks

Care is the tender expression of justice. The care we have seen at work through the course of this article is precisely a composition of love (as responsibility) and solidarity (as shared destiny). This composition is held together by four identified techniques. The first is the establishment of proximity, or an intimate relation between the one and the other that makes it impossible to walk away without reneging on a responsibility. The second is self-divestment, or the disavowal of status in the service of a neighborly relation. The third is radical giving, or the recognition that asceticism is insufficient if it is not also a form of material giving to those in need. And the final technique is a kind of collective particularity, a movement towards collective forms of action that challenge uncaring structures but that also retain the straightforwardness or intimacy of responsibility between one person and the other. Proximity, self-divestment, radical giving and collective particularity establish a synthesis between love and solidarity that aims at bringing justice into the world as care.

It is tempting to establish a sympathy between this spirituality of care and an idea of communitas. Communitas has received some attention in organization studies recently (see Pöyhönen [2018] for an overview). It offers an idea of togetherness that is not without differentiation between people but that, as Siiri Pöyhönen ([2018]) characterizes it, facilitates the sense that everyone is recognized as equally human. Edith Turner ([2012]) describes communitas as a flame that burns up to establish this togetherness and then dips down to ember, tolerating fair organization into roles and hierarchies, but flickering up again if an organizational space becomes too oppressive. Care is a lot like this. As Boff ([2007], x) accounts, 'care, by the fact that it is essential, can be neither supressed nor discarded. It seeks revenge and always breaks through some of the breaches of life'. Care is tender but not defenceless against the encroachment of neglect – which is at the heart of structural inequality and the major crises we face today (The Care Collective [2020]) – when it will act to establish more just organization.

Where a spirituality of care might add to the contribution of communitas to the study of organizational space is in refining what is shared in humanity such that this idea of togetherness is orientated more explicitly towards justice. Justice as care is a response to the precariousness of the existence of a single life. A shared sense of humanity cannot exist without the sharing or giving

that is adequate to the precariousness of another; without a sense that there is a shared destiny such that the precariousness of life is not unfairly distributed; and without a shared struggle against any avoidable excess – what Sally Mann (2023, 92) calls the 'structural sin' of precariousness. Communitas understood in this way – resonant with care – would sharpen the critical application of this concept to organizations.

A communitas of care would be animated by the composition of love and solidarity. The four techniques of the worker-priests are crucial here. The establishment of proximity as a binding responsibility is needed to hold together any organization differentiated by role or rank, since it establishes a relationship with the most precarious members of that group. Despite the organization of roles and ranks in a hierarchy, self-divestment would then entail a re-orientation of priority away from the needs of those in high position and towards the uplifting of those in most need, such that power was always in the process of being re-routed downwards. This uplifting would then have to be commensurate to the precariousness of that position, which would entail its expression as radical giving, a material investment of time and attention in the fate of the least secure, their advancement or satisfaction or accomplishment of a role in the organization. And if that investment is to be successful then it would have to be supplemented by the collective challenging of structures or policies or practices that would hinder it, without losing sight of the fact that those who experience the precariousness of existence – in the organization or in existing at large – most acutely, might not be raised up by the same means that uplift others.

Staying with precariousness casts light on the contribution of this work on care to a critical spirituality of organization. For Bell (2008), spirituality is a force of resistance rather than of integration or conflict mediation (which an uncaring communitas might tend towards), a force that would overcome domination and oppression by challenging structural inequalities within organizations. Christina Schwabenland (2015) has argued that a critical spirituality of organization would also be furthered by some account of the precariousness of life. This she finds in the work of Judith Butler (2006, 2016), who begins from the position (in part worked up from Levinas) that all life is precarious, such that the only response available is to protect the vulnerable, but further observes that societies are structured according to powerful narratives and institutions that make some lives precious and others disposable, where some vulnerabilities demand care and others are to be trampled over – where some deaths are to be mourned and others go without grieving. A critical spirituality of organization would, for Schwabenland (2015, 73), entail resistance to the erasure of the religious in organizational space in tandem with the re-sacralization of organizational space with spirituality. Schwabenland (2015, 76) suggests this would lead to the 'possibility for transcendence beyond division', which it would – albeit tethered to religiosity. If a spirituality of care might be found through religion but is not exclusive to religion – that is, if, as Boff (2007, 6) says, spirituality is primarily the togetherness of everyone and everything – then this possibility of transcendence could be more broadly understood through Butler's idea of ek-stasis. Kate Kenny (2010) has argued that organizations ought to be understood via ek-stasis as being put in motion by selves that are always moving away from themselves and towards others. Schwabenland (2015) identifies Kenny's contribution here as vital to a critical spirituality of organization. It is, precisely because it shows that the possibility of transcendence is aways latent in an organization as ecstasy, which, as a movement towards the other is an act of responsibility or love, an orientation towards the precariousness of the single life that can be brought to justice when it is joined with solidarity in a composition of care.

The re-sacralization of organizational space is a matter of how much this fundamental ecstasy of being is allowed to flourish as love and how successfully it can be composed with solidarity. Proximity is vital to this task, since a going over to the other person requires an encounter with the precariousness of another existence. It might be, for example, that the caring leadership articulated by Heather Younger (2021), with its emphasis on attentiveness and listening, and on an authentic encounter with the other (who may be a worker in an organization but who is always first of all another person and so always already a locus of responsibility), would provide to the organization the proximity required for this going over. But if ecstasy is a movement, away from oneself and

towards the other, then it can only be understood as a self-divestment, as the urgency to put the other before myself. A conception of leaderless leadership, as described by Munro and Thanem (2020), wherein leadership is really the ecstatic movement of affect and ideas between all members of an organization, would add self-divestment to proximity, as the body of the leader is supplanted in primacy by the collective effort. Where that collective effort is directed makes the difference; self-divestment that leaves in place injustice is not attentive to the proximity of the other. As such, an ecstatic organization is not simply animated by the movement of its occupants but by the way they are moved by the fate of the other to material change, through acts of radical giving, that strengthen the organization by uplifting its members. An ecstatic organization would in this way be constantly moving towards a just organization, at once a relation with all others but also this one in particular, simultaneously a collective and an infinite series of intimate moral encounters, constantly shifting and recalibrating as its members move and are moved, and this movement being understood as care.

To conclude, the movement of the worker-priests was resonant with a spirituality of care that would sharpen an understanding of communitas and contribute to a critical spirituality of organization. In her own analysis of the worker-priests, Bell (2008, 295) argues that a critical spirituality was created by 'a synthetic praxis between Marxism and Christianity' and concludes that religion is not necessarily an instrument of oppression and can instead be a tool of resistance to the inequities of capitalism. This is demonstrably the case. A focus on care, though, allows us to identify a conceptual synthesis or composition that is not subsumed by a proper noun (Christianity or Marxism), which means it is possible to work from underlying concepts (love and solidarity) that have their own particular expression in the case of the worker-priests but that can be brought to bear on a critical spirituality of organization in a way that is more widely applicable.

If a critical spirituality of organization is intended as 'a practice-based morality' (Bell 2008, 295), then identifying these concepts and showing how they are composed together – via proximity, self-divestment, radical giving and collective particularity – can offer a framework to support it. This would be reinforced by recognizing that existing conceptualizations of use to organization studies – such as communitas and ex-stasis – can be morally sharpened if they are turned towards the establishment of justice via care. The accomplishment of actually-existing organizations of ecstatic communitas would be aided by a model of leadership that is not only attentive but leaderless to the extent that it is collective; and by a commitment to achieving the greater good by challenging unjust structures without losing in this political cause the life-size of human need – the precarious existence of the single life. This would be the accomplishment of a critical spirituality of care.

Although Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) would say that care is about mending and maintenance rather than morality, if ethics is first philosophy, then care must be a continuation of moral existence. The example of the worker-priests shows that care is about mending and maintenance because it brings along with it moral love as inseparable from precarious human existence, and puts it in action through its composition with solidarity. The worker-priests are then exemplary figures of care, and this article has sought to show that the critical spirituality of care that resonates through their efforts can be conceptualized in a way that will be valuable to a critical spirituality of organization.

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