

---

**CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH:  
WHAT THE APOSTLE PAUL HAS TO SAY TO MAX WEBER**  
ROB MUTHIAH

**Abstract:** In the fall of my freshman year at a Christian liberal arts college, I was sitting in the Student Union with a dorm mate, Doug, talking about matters of faith. As we talked, Doug asked me if I was charismatic. I paused, and then hesitantly said that maybe I was a little bit. Only later did I come to realize that we had been talking about two very different concepts. Doug was asking if I did things like speak in tongues and raise my hands in the air during worship services. I was completely unfamiliar with that meaning of the word, and I thought he was referring to a leadership or personality trait. These are two unrelated understandings of *charismatic*—or are they?

In order to explore that question, this paper will begin by looking at how charisma is viewed in the NT. Where did the idea come from? What is its range of meanings? After these questions are addressed, the focus will be turned to the use of charisma in terms of specific grace gifts given by the Holy Spirit. From an examination of scripture, a set of characteristics that the charismata have in common will be set forth.

This examination will provide a basis then to look critically at how the Apostle Paul's understanding of charisma contrasts with Max Weber's understanding of charisma. This analysis raises questions about the use of charisma in Christian leadership, an issue which is taken up in

*Rob Muthiah is associate professor of practical theology and director of field education at Haggard Graduate School of Theology, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California.*

the final section. Criteria which emerge from the nature of the charismata in the NT will be offered as a means of evaluating a Christian leader's use of a personality trait or attribute called charisma.<sup>1</sup>

### The Meaning of Charisma in Scripture

What is the background of the word *charisma* as used in the NT? The Apostle Paul is the first person to extensively use and develop the meaning of charisma. Although the word was already in existence prior to Paul, its use was extremely rare; Paul uses the word more than all previous known usages combined—he uses it sixteen times.

The word is found three times in obscure OT manuscripts. Two of these are deuterocanonical variant readings of the LXX (Ecclus. 7:33; 38:30).<sup>2</sup> In these two instances, the term does not involve God, as it always does in Paul's usage.<sup>3</sup> A third usage of charisma is found in Theodotion's translation of Psalm 31:22.<sup>4</sup> No other usages are found in the biblical material prior to Paul. In the classical Greek literature the word does not appear at all, and in Greek literature from Paul's era, all uses appear to post-date Paul.<sup>5</sup> In the NT, we find one usage outside of the Pauline corpus, in 1 Peter 4:10, which was written later than Paul's letters. This verse is brief and does not develop the idea beyond Paul. So most of our understanding of the biblical meanings of charisma must come from Paul himself. Paul essentially invented the idea of charisma.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Charisma* as used in the NT is often Anglicized as *charism*, but in this paper the transliteration *charisma* shall be used in order to keep at the fore the issue of how the NT usage relates to Weber's usage of *charisma*. *Charismata* is the transliterated plural form of *charisma*.

<sup>2</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 206.

<sup>3</sup> Siegfried Schatzmann, *A Pauline Theology of Charismata* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Schatzmann, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Schatzmann, 3.

For Paul, charisma always carries with it a definite connection to its root, *charis* (grace), and in fact Paul sometimes uses the term as a synonym for *charis* (Rom. 5:15-16). The general meaning of charisma is “a gift of grace from God.” Sometimes the gift is understood broadly to mean the expansive grace of God given to us (2 Cor. 9:15), though often it is given more specific nuances. Charisma can also be connected to a state of existence: the gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23). Charisma can refer to the gift of special election or privileges granted to the people of Israel (Rom. 11:29), and it can be a general gift of mutual edification (Rom. 1:11). Finally, charisma is used to refer to the specific gifts given to believers for meeting the needs of the community (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4-31, Eph. 4:7-12).<sup>6</sup> These are often referred to as “spiritual gifts.” We will focus now on how charisma is used in this last sense.

### **Trinitarian Structure of Charisma in the New Testament**

#### *Referenced to God the Father*

For Paul, charismata must above all else be understood in relation to the Father’s grace (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:7, 12:6).<sup>7</sup> They are gifts that flow from the Father’s grace and they are gifts that carry the Father’s grace into the life of the community. Charisma always carries

---

<sup>6</sup> Paul also uses several other words which mean *gift*. In Rom. 5:15-17, where he twice uses *charisma*, he also twice uses *dorea* to mean *gift*. The words are used synonymously. In Eph. 4:8 the word *doma* is used for *gift*, probably reflecting the LXX version of the psalm being quoted. Again, the meaning is synonymous with *charisma*. See Robert J. Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 94. *Pneumatikos* is another word used by Paul in a way that overlaps with *charisma*. While it is most often used adjectively to mean *spiritual*, Paul occasionally uses it to mean *spiritual gift* (1 Cor. 12:1; 14:1, 37). The reason Paul at times uses *pneumatikos* is significant and shall be discussed below.

<sup>7</sup> In the passages where he deals with charisma, Paul does not use “Father” language specifically, but it is evident that Paul is referring to the first person of the Trinity because he will also speak of the Spirit and/or of Jesus in ways that point to a differentiation (e.g., Rom. 5:15,16; 1 Cor. 12:4-6).

with it this stated or implied link to the first person of the Trinity.

### *Christological*

Christ himself is present in the charismata. The charismata together form the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12: 27; cf. Rom. 12:4, 5), and in every part of his body Christ is present and acting.<sup>8</sup> The Christological nature of the charismata is also seen in their form of expression. Christ is praised and acknowledged as Lord when the gift being exercised comes from God rather than from pagan idols (1 Cor. 12:1-3). Christ is present in, acts through, and is the ultimate focus of the charismata. Charisma is Christological.

### *Pneumatological*

The charismata are also pneumatological. The Spirit is the mediator of Christ's presence in the charismata. While some passages on charisma make no explicit connection between charisma and the Spirit (Rom. 12, Eph. 4; 1 Peter 4), the pneumatological nature of charisma is clearly set forth in 1 Cor. 12-14, which Fee claims is the largest section of Spirit material in the Pauline letters.<sup>9</sup> Here the gifts are tied directly to the Spirit. In fact, Paul begins by using a synonym which emphasizes the connection of the gifts to the Spirit: *pneumatikon* ("spiritual gifts" in v. 1). Fee argues that Paul switches between *pneumatikon* and charismata depending on whether Paul wants to emphasize that the gift comes from the Spirit or to emphasize the manifestations of God's grace.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Käsemann affirms the Christological nature of the charismata when he declares that Christ is "present in his gifts and in the ministries attesting those gifts and made possible by those gifts." Quoted in Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 228.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 146.

<sup>10</sup> Fee, 153.

While Paul connects the gifts to the Holy Spirit, he also distinguishes what he means from other popular conceptions of spiritual gifts. Banks points out that *pneumatikon* was a common Greek word and was used often in relation to Hellenistic religions where there was great interest in “spiritual gifts” of ecstatic utterances and healings.<sup>11</sup> Paul himself uses the word in several other places (e.g., Rom. 1:11, 1 Cor. 14:1, 37). But Paul’s intent in 1 Cor. 12:1 seems to be to pick up a word in common usage and then to take its meaning in a different direction. He begins his extended treatment of gifts in 1 Cor. 12 by saying “now concerning *pneumatikon*” and thus begins with a term with which the Corinthians would have been familiar. But then Paul offers a critique of *pneumatikon* as practiced by pagans. The pagans’ use of gifts leads them to idols and their gifts of utterance curse Jesus (v. 2, 3a) rather than praise Jesus (v. 3b). To heighten the contrast between those gifts and the gifts given by the Spirit to believers, Paul switches now (v. 4) to the use of *charismata*, a word which, as we have seen, was rare and so allowed Paul to define its content without having to concern himself at every turn with the meanings that could carry forward if he used *pneumatikon* (though, as noted above, he is not completely averse to using *pneumatikon* as a synonym for *charismata*). Thus, not only did Paul connect charisma to the Spirit; he also re-defined the Corinthian understanding of spiritual gifts over and against the way *pneumatikon* were popularly understood.

In 1 Cor. 12 the Spirit is described as the giver of the *charismata* (v. 11) and the *charismata* are manifestations of the Spirit (v. 7). The Spirit freely distributes *charismata* when and where the Spirit so chooses (v. 11). While the distribution of *charismata* has an interactional aspect to it as seen by the fact that we are instructed to strive for them (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1), the weight must still fall on the fact that the Spirit is the one who distributes these gifts. No person or church can decide which gifts the Spirit

---

<sup>11</sup> Banks, 106.

will bestow upon whom. Nor can any person or church decide *when* the Spirit will bestow a charisma. In Volf's view, "this clearly reveals that the church lives from a dynamic not deriving from itself....It is not the church that 'organizes' its life, but rather the Holy Spirit."<sup>12</sup>

The pneumatological nature of charismata is also evidenced in their "diachronic plurality," a phrase Volf uses to mean that various charismata can replace one another over time. Volf claims, "over the history of the congregation and of its individual members, the charismata with which these members serve in the congregation can...change."<sup>13</sup> The idea that one's charismata can change emerges from 1 Cor. 12:31 and 1 Cor. 14:1, both of which indicate that we can receive charismata we do not yet have.<sup>14</sup> A person might be given the charisma of hospitality, and then, a few years down the road, as the Spirit sees fit, this charisma might be replaced with the charisma of teaching. The fluidity of the Spirit's work in relation to charismata is described by Küng in this way: "although each member of the community, in all places and at all times, will receive his own special call [equated with charisma], there is no way of knowing in advance what ministries of God in the freedom of his grace will see fit to call upon in specific places at specific times."<sup>15</sup> The Spirit who freely grants charismata is free to do so when, where, and in any order or combination as the Spirit sees fit.

Charisma is pneumatological; through the Spirit, Christ is present in the charismata, and by the Spirit the work of Christ is carried out through them.

---

<sup>12</sup> Volf, 232.

<sup>13</sup> Volf, 233.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 11:29 at first glance might seem to contradict this idea with the statement that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." However, the gifts referred to in this passage are not the charismata of the Spirit distributed to various individuals, but the charismata of the covenants which God made with the people of Israel. While the covenantal type of charisma is irrevocable, irrevocability as such is nowhere applied to the specific charismata given to individuals for building up the community.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Küng, *The Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1976), 504.

## Characteristics of Charisma in the New Testament

### *Universal*

The charismata are universally distributed by the Spirit to all believers. There is no such thing as a Christian who has not been gifted by the Spirit (though not all believers choose to *exercise* their gifts). While the Spirit never grants *less* than one gift to a believer (1 Cor. 12:7, 11b; Eph. 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10), the Spirit may grant *more* than one gift at a time to a person, something Volf refers to as the “synchronic plurality” of the charismata.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, while a person *might* have more than one gift, *no* person has *all* the gifts. As Volf puts it, such a situation “would lead to the hypertrophy of this one member of the body of Christ and to a fateful atrophy of all other members.”<sup>17</sup> Charismata are distributed to *all* the people of God and so *all* the people of God have things to contribute to the body.<sup>18</sup>

### *Diverse*

The charismata are diverse. Paul seeks to emphasize this diversity to the Corinthian church, whose understanding of the gifts had narrowed to a focus on the charisma of tongues (1 Cor. 12-14). Paul wants them to see that the charismata are much more diverse than this. He states that “there are varieties of gifts” (1 Cor. 12:4) and then continues to pile up synonymous phrases by stating that “there are varieties of services” (v.5) and “varieties of activities” (v.6). He wants to lift up clearly the beautiful diversity of gifts bestowed by the Spirit. The

---

<sup>16</sup> Volf, 233.

<sup>17</sup> Volf, 230.

<sup>18</sup> This was a significant emphasis of Vatican II, as seen in the following representative statement: “From the reception of these charisms, even the most ordinary ones, there arises for each of the faithful the right and duty of exercising them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the development of the Church. . . .” Austin Flannery, ed., “*Apostolicam Actuositatem*,” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 3.

several lists of gifts also point to this diversity, as the charismata listed are of a wide assortment.

The diversity of charismata likely goes even beyond what is listed in these passages because these lists were not intended to be exhaustive. Paul seems to have tailored his lists to the contexts he was addressing.<sup>19</sup> He did not set out to provide a systematic treatment or cataloging of the charismata. In support of this claim is the fact that no two of these lists are identical.

Wonderful variety exists among the charismata; this variety means that the people of the church are called to differentiated activities. Because of their differing charismata, the members of the church are not identical in their functions; rather, their giftings and their correlated functions are diverse.

### *United*

While Paul wants to emphasize the diversity of gifts, he does so while also showing how they are united. The diversity of the charismata does not result in disconnectedness or individualism. The charismata all tie to “the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:4), “the same Lord” (v. 5), and “the same God” (v. 6). The trinitarian language here hints at how the diversity of the charismata exists simultaneously with their unity in ways that correspond to the simultaneous diversity and unity within the Godhead.

The unity of the diverse gifts is further developed by Paul through his use of the body metaphor. All the diverse parts are united because they are all part of one body, the body of Christ. He points to the diversity by saying, “the body does not consist of one member but of many” (1 Cor. 12:14), and then he ties this diversity into a unity by saying: “there are many members, yet one body” (v. 20; cf. vv. 26, 27). The unity in diversity is highlighted in v. 27 where Paul writes, “now you are the body of Christ [unity] and individually [diversity] members of it [unity].”

---

<sup>19</sup> Banks, 95; Dunn, 256; Fee, 886.

*Communal*

Paul shows the communal nature of the charismata by using the body metaphor to describe how believers should relate (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27). Each charisma serves the community in a unique way and therefore is needed by the other charismata or body parts. Ears, eyes, hands, and feet all have different characteristics, abilities, and purposes while at the same time they rely on each other to function well. They are interdependent. They require a communal context in order to function properly.

An attempt to use a charisma independently from the others with which a community has been gifted is a failure to live into the NT vision of the body of Christ. It is not just a matter of what a person does with her gifts individually, but what she does with her gifts in relation to the giftings of others in the community. They should function interdependently. Because no one person has all the gifts, the full expression of the charismata requires the mutual activity of the entire community. Volf notes that “the church is not a club of universally gifted and for that reason self-sufficient charismatics, but rather a community of men and women whom the Spirit of God has endowed in a certain way for service to each other and to the world in anticipation of God’s new creation.”<sup>20</sup> The use of a charisma can be evaluated in part by the extent to which it functions interdependently with, rather than independently from, other charismata.

Not only is the *way* they function communal, but also their *purpose* is communal. The charismata are to be used for the purpose of building up the community. Paul points out that they are given “for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7), or to put it another way, “for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). They are to be used for the benefit of the community rather than for personal benefit. They have an outward orientation to them.

Extending this “building” language, a number of theologians have described charismata as the building

---

<sup>20</sup> Volf, 231.

blocks of the community. This is true in that the charismata are an organizing principle of community. The use of a building block metaphor calls for qualification, though, for this reason: building blocks exist before the building itself exists. It is my view, however, that charismata and the community emerge *together*. Moltmann refers to this as a “genetic connection” by which he means that the two grow up concurrently; they exist simultaneously.<sup>21</sup> Charismata do not precede community, nor does community precede the charismata. These gifts are not what they are prior to their connection to community and the community does not exist prior to these gifts. Moltmann states, “It is not the facticity that decides what a charism is; it is the modality.”<sup>22</sup> They are not charismata until they are put in use for the benefit of the community. A leader or anyone else who tries to use a charisma in a way that precedes or supersedes community has turned it into something else.

Paul speaks of one small exception to this norm of communal orientation when he talks about speaking in tongues. Paul is most interested that this charisma of ecstatic utterance be used in the context of community in tandem with the charisma of interpretation so that the whole community might be edified. If the charisma of interpretation is not present, then the charisma of tongues does not build up the community (1 Cor. 14:2, 28-29). Paul notes, though, that if the charisma of interpretation is not present, the charisma of tongues may still be exercised as long as it is done in private (14:28). Such a use can have value for the individual’s communion with God, but Paul is much more interested in how it can be used for the *community’s* communion with God.

### *Equal Value*

---

<sup>21</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 305.

<sup>22</sup> Moltmann, 297.

Whether there is a hierarchy among the charismata or an equality to their value has been a subject of great debate. Without entering fully into this debate, several reasons for viewing the charismata as of equal value shall be set forth here. The Corinthian church was valuing some gifts (speaking in tongues) over others and Paul was intent on challenging this elevation of one gift over the others. The thrust of Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 12-14 is to warn *against* trying to establish a hierarchy among the charismata. As John Howard Yoder states, "this warning is not marginal; it is the point of the passage....Paul's whole concern is that it be recognized that *all* these many gifts have the same source, and that all are (each in its place) of the same value."<sup>23</sup>

Paul's numbering of some of the gifts in 1 Cor. 12:28 and his exhortation to "strive for the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31) have commonly been taken to mean that a hierarchy of gifts exists. This interpretation must be challenged, though. For one, it does not fit with the emphasis of the whole section, which is on the diversity of the gifts, rather than on a ranking of some over others. The idea of a hierarchy of gifts is also challenged by the fact that in 1 Cor. 12, as Fee notes, Paul fails "to include five of the nine items from the first list in the second one, and of the four he does include, the first three are in reverse order."<sup>24</sup> Thus Paul couldn't have meant his lists to be a prioritizing of the gifts.<sup>25</sup>

If the charismata are not hierarchical, how should we understand Paul's exhortation to "strive for the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31)? Fee argues that, based on the context in Corinth Paul is addressing, the "greater gifts" should be understood as those which more directly benefit others before self, in contrast with the uninterpreted gift of tongues which primarily benefits the

---

<sup>23</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ: Paul's Vision of Universal Ministry* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1987), 10.

<sup>24</sup> Fee, 195.

<sup>25</sup> A more complete set of arguments for a non-hierarchical view of the charismata may be found in Fee, 195-197.

individual.<sup>26</sup> Paul states that “one who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up” (1 Cor. 14:5). And if no one is available to interpret, then those with the charisma of tongues should be silent and reserve its use for their own personal worship of God (1 Cor. 14:27-28). So in this exceptional sense there is a ranking: a charisma, when used for personal benefit only (a valid use according to Paul), is of less value to the community than the others. We must keep in mind, though, that Paul’s dominant view is that *all* the charismata are intended for the good of the whole community (1 Cor. 12:7). Equality of value must not be taken to mean that all the gifts function in the same way. The uniqueness or distinctiveness of each charisma is maintained. That they are of equal value does not mean they can be swapped out for one another as one nail from a bin could be swapped out for any other nail in the bin. Functional differentiation remains.

The equal value of the various charismata means that those with one particular charisma may not use it as a basis for ruling over or claiming privilege over others. Moltmann argues that where this aspect of Paul’s vision is lost, hierarchy and passivity set in.<sup>27</sup> In relation to leadership, the equality of value among the charismata does not call for the elimination of leadership in a community, but rather it calls for a mode of leadership which does not elevate the leader over others and which is exercised interdependently with the other charismata.

### *Eschatological*

The prophets promised that the Spirit would be poured out in the last days (e.g., Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28) and in the book of Acts the outpouring of the Spirit is taken as a sign of the final in-breaking of God’s kingdom (Acts 2:1-21). The charismata are manifestations of this eschatological outpouring of the Spirit. They are

---

<sup>26</sup> Fee, 196.

<sup>27</sup> Moltmann, 299.

evidence that this outpouring is happening, and they are the modalities by which the eschatological community emerges.<sup>28</sup>

### *Bounded by Love*

In the midst of his extended discussion of the charismata (1 Cor. 12-14), Paul inserts a whole chapter on love (1 Cor. 13). Love here is not seen as one of the charismata, but rather, as something that must accompany all charismatic expressions. The charismata, when rightly used, are to serve as the means by which love is enacted. The charisma of speaking in tongues has no value if it is not done in love (v. 1). Prophetic utterance likewise has no value if it is not done in love (v. 2a). The same is true for the gifts of wisdom, miraculous deeds, and generosity (vv. 2b, 3). All uses of charismata are ethically shaped by the description here of love: “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (vv. 4-7). Again, as stated above, it is the modality, not the facticity, that decides what a charisma is; and that modality must be characterized by love.

## **Charisma and Natural Abilities**

A question that many have wrestled with is the relationship between charismata and natural abilities. Are they the same? Do they overlap? Are they completely different? While we can make some theological headway in answering these questions, we must note that Paul does not address the relation of charismata and natural abilities—it is not a question he seems to be interested in.

James Dunn claims the two are completely different categories—charismata must not be confused with human talent or natural ability.<sup>29</sup> Others, such as René

---

<sup>28</sup> Moltmann, 294; Volf, 235.

<sup>29</sup> Dunn, 255.

Laurentin, have argued for the complete naturalness of the charismata—they are in fact exactly identical with natural abilities.<sup>30</sup>

A third perspective is that the two often overlap but are not identical. Natural talents, like charismata, are given graciously by God, as is the whole created order. Natural talents can rightly be understood as charismata when they are used in ways that express God's grace. A charism expresses God's grace when it is used non-possessively (which at least implicitly acknowledges it as a gift) and at the same time conveys or imparts God's grace to others. Natural talents remain natural talents even when they do not recall or manifest God's grace, but then they no longer qualify as charismata. This view, which I take to be the strongest of the range of perspectives, honors the connection between the charismata and God's grace and also works in conjunction with the assertion above that the lists of charismata are not exhaustive. Gifts and abilities not mentioned by Paul may be identified and properly understood as charismata when the recipients use their gifts, talents, or abilities in ways that link to God's grace. Moltmann makes a similar claim when he says, "In principle every human potentiality and capacity can become charismatic through a person's call, if only they are used in Christ."<sup>31</sup>

Having developed a theological understanding of charismata, we are now ready to look at how Paul's charisma compares to Weber's charisma.

### **Paul versus Max**

As did Paul, Max Weber picked up a term that was not in common use at the time and gave it a unique meaning. By the time Weber wrote in the early twentieth century, charisma was hardly used in theological discourse and was not used at all in the social sciences

---

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Schatzmann, 73. In this section (pp. 73-77), Schatzmann provides a useful overview of a range of positions on this issue.

<sup>31</sup> Moltmann, 297.

or in popular culture.<sup>32</sup> Weber's writings changed this dramatically.

Weber was conscious of the religious connection as he developed his idea of charisma. He knew he was drawing on Pauline language and he appropriated religious phrases to describe charisma. For example, he claimed that charisma "constitutes a 'call' in the most emphatic sense of the word, a 'mission' or a 'spiritual duty.'"<sup>33</sup> Yet what Weber meant by charisma has almost no overlap with scriptural uses of charisma, just as the word *mouse* when applied to a little rodent has almost no overlap of meaning with the word *mouse* when applied to a piece of computer hardware.

Central to Weber's understanding of charisma is that it is a form of authority.<sup>34</sup> In fact, he uses the phrase "charismatic authority" interchangeably with "charisma." We have here a dramatic difference from the way charisma is used in scripture. Nowhere in scripture are the charismata directly linked to authority. Paul never ties his own authority to the idea of charisma and Paul never grants authority to others based solely on their charismata. In Paul's vision, authority is not absent; rather, it is widely distributed. To the extent that authority emerges from the charismata, it is shared by all, since charismata are granted to all. In describing Paul's perspective, Schatzmann puts it this way:

"none of the charismata were particularly authority-oriented. It seems to be part of the significance of the Pauline metaphor of the body that charismatic functioning of the community of faith meant the equalization of concern and respect for the differing exercises of gifts. Authority was

---

<sup>32</sup> John Potts, *A History of Charisma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 107.

<sup>33</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press 1947), 362.

<sup>34</sup> Potts, 106.

not eliminated thereby, but its focus shifted from the few to the whole.”<sup>35</sup>

Along the same lines, Moltmann points out that when Paul talks about the charismata, Paul “avoids all the words expressing conditions of rule. He does not talk about ‘holy rule’ (hierarchy) but chooses the expression *diakonia*.”<sup>36</sup> So whereas for Weber authority is *central* to an understanding of charisma, authority is not at all central to Paul’s discussion of charisma.

Authority and charisma can be paired within a Pauline understanding, but in a constrained way. The nature of the charismata requires that authority be exercised in a mutual and non-dominating way. With the communal dimension of the charismata referred to earlier in mind, Schatzmann states that “clearly there is no room for authoritarianism or manipulation where charismata and authority are submitted to community.”<sup>37</sup> Pauline charisma has nothing to do with control and domination. Weber, however, talks about charisma *specifically* in terms of domination. He sees charisma as one of the three types of legitimate domination.<sup>38</sup> The ways Paul and Weber relate their words to authority differ sharply. Paul links charisma to non-domination while Weber links it directly to domination. A second major contrast between Paul and Weber has to do with the way in which gifts are connected to a source. For Paul, the charismata are always tied to God as their source. Weber also speaks of charisma as having divine origin,<sup>39</sup> but this divine origin is not at all significant in the development of Weber’s conception. Rather than being considered in terms of its *source*, Weber sees charisma as having value because it is

---

<sup>35</sup> Schatzmann, 96. For fuller treatment, see Schatzmann’s chapter entitled “Charismata as Expression of Authority,” 94-100.

<sup>36</sup> Moltmann, 295.

<sup>37</sup> Schatzmann, 99.

<sup>38</sup> His other two types of legitimate domination are legal authority (based on rationality) and traditional authority. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff et al. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 215-254.

<sup>39</sup> Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 359.

validated by its *subjects*. He states, “It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma.”<sup>40</sup> The charismata used within the body of believers are also validated by the community, but this is in a secondary sense; their primary validation is based on their issuing source: God. In light of the manner in which the charismata are used and the fruit produced by the charismata, the community confirms that God is the source of the charismata. Paul and Weber differ at another related point as well: to the extent that charisma in a Pauline sense is validated by the community, it is a *mutual* form of validation, not a one-way validation by those *under* (followers) of those *over* (leaders), as Weber sets it up.

A third contrast is seen in relation to who has these gifts. As we have seen, Paul describes charismata as distributed to *all* within the social entity which is the body of Christ. The charismata are not reserved for a select few. Weber, though, sees charisma as something which in fact only a few have, and by virtue of having charisma these few are “set apart from ordinary men.”<sup>41</sup> Weber in no way sees charisma as something which all have.

This point ties to a fourth contrast. Paul’s focus is on the social body. He understands charisma in terms of a communal blessing. For Paul, charisma is not a possession to be used for self-advancement or self-glorification. It is to be used for the good of the community. From a Pauline perspective, we cannot properly talk about “personal charisma” in the sense of it belonging to an individual. For Weber, the focus is more individualistic. He is certainly interested in broader social constructs, but Weber’s conception of charisma gives primary attention to the power of the charismatically endowed *individual*.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 359.

<sup>41</sup> Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 358.

<sup>42</sup> Potts, 107.

A fifth contrast is seen when we note that Paul's category of charisma is broad and includes gifts often considered supernatural as well as those often considered ordinary (he himself seems uninterested in dividing the charismata into these categories). For example, he refers to the charisma of prophetic utterance in the same sentence where he refers to the charisma of being generous (Rom. 12:6-8). Weber conceives of charisma as always being extraordinary or supernatural. By definition, it is not of the everyday or the mundane. He states, "Charismatic authority is...specifically outside the realm of everyday routine and the profane sphere."<sup>43</sup> This aligns with his notion that charisma is not commonly possessed—only a few have this supernatural gift.

A sixth point of contrast: for Paul, ethical content is essential in defining the charismata. They are to be used for building up the community and they are always to be normed by love. These two characteristics are essential to a proper understanding of charismata. Weber's charisma lacks such ethical content. Charisma can be used for good or for evil. Weber comes close to giving it ethical content when he states that it is the *duty* of the possessor of charisma to use it,<sup>44</sup> but he does not continue on to develop the acceptable means by which this duty may be carried out or the acceptable ends upon which this duty might ethically be focused. In fact, he states, "How the quality in question would be ultimately judged from any ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is naturally entirely indifferent for the purposes of definition."<sup>45</sup> This is a stark difference from the idea Paul develops. The notion of considering charisma in a way detached from the way it is exercised is completely foreign to Paul. With Paul's theology in mind, Moltmann notes, "It is not the gift itself that is important, but its

---

<sup>43</sup> Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 361.

<sup>44</sup> Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 359.

<sup>45</sup> Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 359.

use.”<sup>46</sup> A Pauline understanding of charisma must always include ethical content.

These contrasts confirm that while Weber picks up a word used by Paul, the meaning Weber gives to the word is drastically different from what Paul meant. The two uses are often confused and conflated because of the name they have in common. But though their name is the same, the two concepts are radically different. Nonetheless, the two can be put in positive relationship, which we shall see as we conclude.

### **Charisma and the Church Today**

Within the church today, what are we to make of these two very different ideas, the Pauline idea of charisma and the idea of charisma which descends to us from Weber?<sup>47</sup> Can charisma, as a personality trait of an individual, be constructively used by leaders in the church today? Yes. Not only can charisma be used, it can even qualify as a charisma in the Pauline sense if its use falls within the characteristics of the charismata set forth above. The following norms, derived from the characteristics of the Pauline charismata, provide a means for evaluating the appropriateness of using charisma in Christian leadership. The ways in which Christian leaders use their charisma must meet all these norming criteria:

#### **1. The trinitarian norm:**

Does a leader exercise his/her charisma in relation to God's grace?

Does a leader's use of charisma build up the body of Christ (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:7) and glorify rather than curse Jesus (1 Cor. 12:3)?

---

<sup>46</sup> Moltmann, 297.

<sup>47</sup> Although the meanings descended from Weber might not be recognizable to Weber himself, many of the contrasts with charisma as set forth above remain the same. A good treatment of the shifts in meaning since Weber can be found in the sections entitled "'Charisma' after Weber" and "Criticisms and modifications of Weberian charisma" in Potts, 126-136. It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop a definition of charisma in terms of a leadership trait, to contend for whether it is innate or developed, or to explore the arguments about whether or not it even exists.

Does a leader use his/her charisma in ways that reflect its nature as a gift from the Spirit?

**2. The communal norm:**

Does a leader's use of charisma build up individuals within the community and the community as a whole?

Is a leader's use of charisma intended to bring unity rather than division in the community?

Is a leader's charisma used interdependently with the gifts of others?

Is a leader's charisma used in a way that honors other gifts equally, rather than in a dominating way?

**3. The love norm:**

Is a leader's use of charisma marked by the characteristics of Christian love, e.g., as described in 1 Cor. 11-14?

When a leader's charisma meets these criteria, it is a grace gift from God to a community as embodied in and exercised by that leader. When a leader's charisma is used in ways that meet these norming criteria, then it can properly be understood in terms of Paul's conception of charisma. In the end, while Paul's idea of charisma and Weber's idea of charisma are of two different natures, Weberian charisma can be used within the framework of Pauline charisma for the glory of God and the benefit of the community.