INTRODUCTION: CHARISMA AND RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP
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The essays in this volume of the *Journal of Religious Leadership* were presented at the 2010 annual meeting of the Academy of Religious Leadership, April 23-25, in Chicago. The four authors take different approaches to the central theme of that meeting: "Charisma and Religious Leadership." Their presentations provoked lively and creative discussions among the scholars and practitioners gathered around tables in Chicago; these articles offer significant insights for the wider readership of this journal.

Charisma is a complex and contested term in the study of leadership. As the literature reviews by Craig Hendrickson and Doug Tilstra help trace, scholars across the twentieth century have employed the concept in distinct ways, seeing it as an important or even essential trait of leadership, or as a key ingredient in the relationship between leaders and followers, or, alternatively, as a dangerous tool or power that leaders hold over their subjects. As a term, then, *charisma* has both negative and positive valences, and it is used in seemingly contradictory fashions.

It is fitting that the *Journal of Religious Leadership* would devote a special edition to its meanings and applications in scholarly and practical contexts. Although the wider popular and scholarly literatures seldom acknowledge it, charisma is, at base, a theological concept, which now has overlapping secular and religious connotations.

So the concept of charisma offers a constructive terrain for the kind of broad-ranging, creative, critical, and interdisciplinary inquiry that this journal was created

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to do. Four scholars dedicated to theological education and leadership within religious communities of practice are bringing insights from theology, social science, and leadership studies literatures to bear on the question of charisma.

Do we need to agree upon the meaning of charisma in order for it to be a useful category? Some see it as a gift or talent held exclusively by a chosen few—the Martin Luther King, Jrs., the John F. Kennedys and, indeed, the Adolf Hitlers—while others believe that many people have charismatic talents. Charisma can be seen as a product of birth or as something that can be developed or at least enhanced. The quality may contribute to building up trust among a community, or it may, conversely, help undermine team chemistry. It is clear that scholars do not agree upon how charisma functions among leaders and followers. Yet, even to clarify the terms of the discussion about charisma and leadership—whether religious or otherwise—would be a real contribution.

These essays attempt to accomplish that and a whole lot more. Taken together, they also build up a set of normative claims that charisma, when understood properly, can fit into leadership in these ways:

✓ Leadership is a communal practice.
✓ Leadership is an enduring enterprise beyond any one person.
✓ Leadership requires the gifts and talents of peoples from diverse backgrounds.
✓ Leadership involves many roles.

As the authors of the essays in the volume employ them, these statements are normative, and not merely descriptive; that is, they are describing how faithful and effective leadership *should* look, at least within the Christian communities they are principally considering as their context of analysis. In this sense, their work is distinct from the social scientific approach to charisma taken by Max Weber, who in his discussion of the term stated that he was "entirely indifferent" about how to

evaluate it in *moral* terms. It is indeed this normative question woven into these four essays that makes them a significant contribution to the discussion of charisma in theological circles and in leadership studies.

Scholars of leadership rightly cite Weber as the thinker who, in his work *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, introduced charisma as a key concept into the theories of authority, society, and management.[1] Weber, the towering German intellectual who shaped so many fields of social scientific inquiry, recognized that charisma was a religious category. Weber called himself theologically tone-deaf, and his analysis always focused more on the social effects of an idea than on its theological grounding.[2] Thus it is no surprise that he did not grapple with Pauline or other descriptions of spiritual gifts or charisms.

Rob Muthiah's "Charismatic Leadership in the Church: What the Apostle Paul Has To Say to Max Weber" is a foundational article for anyone considering the topic of charisma and religious leadership. Muthiah aptly analyzes Weber's interpretation of charisma; the core of his article contrasts the Weberian account of charisma with what he terms a more expansive account of charisma found in Paul's New Testament writings.

As Muthiah details, the Pauline perspective describes charisma as something that is universal—that is, that comes as a gift of God to every member of the community of faith. These are diverse gifts, and they must be used for the good of the community. A test to be sure that charismatic gifts are genuinely from God is to

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[1] See Weber's chapter, "The Principal Characteristics of Charismatic Authority and Its Relation to Forms of Communal Organization," in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Chapter III, Section IV, ed. Talcott Parsons, trans. A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press and London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1922/1947), 358-363.

[2] Although it is beyond the scope of this introductory essay, I would submit that Weber's descriptive-analytical project, when not mistaken for a normative project, is a tool for understanding not only charisma in leadership, but also the economic and social organization of religious leadership.

see that they contribute to the good of the community and glorify God. These are Pauline norms; this is a Pauline framework. To the extent that Weber's account of charisma can be constrained by these norms, Muthiah wants to claim, his insights can be helpfully appropriated for leadership in the church.[3]

Doug Tilstra's article, "Charismatic Leaders as Team Leaders: An Evaluation Focused on Pastoral Leadership," develops some of Muthiah's points about the communal dimensions and benefits of charismatic leadership. Tilstra brings together two literatures often kept apart: those on charismatic leaders and team leaders, respectively. He draws out some of the tensions that charismatic leaders face when they develop teams; they are able to attract and motivate followers, for instance, but their own egos get in the way of empowering followers to take on responsibility. Tilstra's essay suggests ways in which the charisma literature could be of value to pastoral leaders seeking to organize and empower teams with leaders with genuine responsibilities.

This charisma-and-team leadership model offers a relatively diffuse power structure that has various attractive qualities. Perhaps most important, it would help avoid the kinds of leadership disasters caused when charismatic leaders hold too much power.

A related moral question for understanding charisma is what we could term the "Charisma for what?" question. Leadership is always, at least de facto, about the pursuit of some moral purpose, some end, whether it is identified or not. The "Hitler problem" in leadership asks whether we can call Hitler a leader. He was effective at leading people—charismatically—toward some goal. (He was not fully successful, but he was significantly effective nonetheless.) He was not a morally good leader because his ends were not morally worthy. This volume raises the question of the ends of leadership vis-à-vis charisma.

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[3] In particular, Weber's insight about the power of followers to recognize leaders' power is a theologically rich one—one that Weber identifies but leaves for future scholars to explore in descriptive and normative ways.

In his article, Craig Hendrickson raises that question, and names an end of leadership expressly in his title: "Using Charisma To Shape Interpretive Communities in Multiethnic Congregations." Charisma is a worthy practice of religious leadership if it can help create interpretive contexts, he explains, of missional *praxis*. That is, leadership helps congregations to engage in the world in active ways that challenge all members and welcome marginalized members of the wider community. Hendrickson connects his work to late-twentieth-century leadership theorists on charisma, particularly in order to show ways in which the dependence on the leader and his or her vision can hamper the vitality of a community. His emphasis on leadership transitions is an important one, and a strong connection to the final essay in this volume.

William M. Kondrath offers a valuable anchor essay in "Transitioning from Charismatic Founder to Next Generation." Narrating three fascinating contemporary case studies of leaders and organizations that were, to differing degrees, forward-thinking in their transition planning, Kondrath brings to life the key insights of the other three articles of the volume. Successful constraining or harnessing of charismatic leadership requires thinking not only of individual talents, but also of organizational structures, and their shifts. Various kinds of gifts and roles comprise a community. Leadership must endure over time as people come and go. Kondrath, as the other authors also do, shows the ways in which the talents of the charismatic leader can contribute to a healthy community, but only when the organization as a whole is willing, able, and prepared to adapt.

With the four authors of the volume, I would suggest that as complex and contested as the idea of charisma is, the challenge is to value charisma as an important conceptual element in leadership. These essays are suggestive of a theological understanding of charisma as gift. The challenge, as Rob Muthiah most directly articulates, is to widen the set of gifts beyond the emotional, or the magical, or the personality-driven.

We can also speak of administration, organizational skill, public outreach, social justice work, and other areas of leadership as charismatic gifts. And another element could be adapted from Weber's work—and converted from his descriptive assessment into a moral norm: Followers must recognize and validate charisms if leaders are to be entrusted with power. Charisma is a vital, if still complicated, aspect of leadership, religious and otherwise. It is also an aspect of leadership that involves leaders and followers in their various roles and relationships.