

Article

Charisma, Medieval and Modern

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Abstract: Popularized by the mass media, Max Weber’s sociological concept of *charisma* now has a demotic meaning far from what Weber had in mind. Weberian charismatic leaders have followers, not fans, although, exceptionally, fans mutate into followers. This essay aims to trace some of the dimensions of Weberian charismatic religious leadership in comparative perspective, medieval and modern. Examples include: preachers, “double charisma,” professors, “collective charisma,” religious radicals, the economy of charisma, transgressive sexuality, demagogues, living saints.¹

Keywords: charisma; Weber; medieval; leaders; followers; fans; saints

1. Introduction: The Heroic Individual and Max Weber’s Charisma

Heroic figures have peopled the western imagination from Homeric and Virgilian epics to the *Chanson de Roland* and beyond. Thomas Carlyle’s celebrated lectures of 1840 were devoted to *Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, which surveyed religious, literary, and political heroes. Carlyle’s thesis that “Universal History is at bottom the History of Great Men” has long ceased to be persuasive, although variants of the idea have persisted ([1], pp. 1, 12). One example is Sidney Hook’s protagonist in *The Hero in History* (1943)—the “event-making individual” ([2], p. 229). But does historical significance determine heroic status?

¹ Several scholars have helped me revise drafts of my essay; I am their grateful beneficiary: Donald Bloxham, Samuel Cohn, Jr, David d’Avray, Ian Wei, Peter Kaufman. I also wish to thank the colleagues who provided me with references or gave me materials: Judith Green, Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, Jill Stephenson, Anthony Goodman.

Perhaps the most influential twentieth-century permutation of the idea of the heroic individual was that of the charismatic leader. According to Max Weber (b.1864, d.1920), whose name has become virtually synonymous with charisma, charismatic authority was granted to certain extraordinary individuals whose personal qualities, heroic or saintly, marked them out as unlike other men ([3], pp. 332, 399). Once a charismatic leader has been recognized, his followers were expected to adhere to patterns of behavior or rules of conduct which he laid down ([4], p. 328).²

1.1. Popular “Charisma” and Celebrity Culture

But if Max Weber knew the fate of the word “charisma,” how do we imagine he would respond? Probably not with a wry smile. More likely, he would display the same immensely serious, glacial expression he composed for his photograph—an intellectual’s frown surmounting a piercing German professorial stare ([5], frontispiece, pp. 52, 245–49). This could well have been Weber’s reaction to the popularization of his key concept. Its extended usage after his death is largely the work of the mass media. A founding father and patron saint of sociology, Weber plucked the word “charisma” from Rudolf Sohm’s Christian context, half-secularized it, and granted it right of entry into the academic world³ ([5], pp. 52, 246; [6]). But popular culture is no respecter of academic niceties. Whatever it wants, it takes.

Consequently, charismatics are no longer thought of as Weberian inspirational leaders, whether religious or political ([7], p. 732), although calling politicians “charismatic” presents problems of its own ([8], p. 147).⁴ On the contrary, since the 1960s “charisma” has become a label attached to pop musicians, movie stars, sporting heroes, TV personalities, “reality” show victims, glamorous models, and, on occasion, notorious rogues. A whiff of scandal does them no harm, especially if it kindles media interest. Escapees from the common fate—anonymity—these “charismatics” are easily seen as exceptional. Repeated media exposure enhances their marketability, while close-ups foster pseudo-familiarity, even intimacy, between them and their fans. Some date “celebrity culture” to the advent of the movies; others insist that its origins can be traced back to the eighteenth ([9], pp. 9–19) and nineteenth centuries ([10], pp. 95–114; [11] p. 75; [12], chapters 8–9.). Indeed, “celebrity” in its modern sense of being talked about, famous, was applied to individuals by Dr. Johnson, who applied it to himself (1751) ([13], p. 1019).

1.2. Weberian and Popular “Charisma”: Followers and Fans

Yet there are crucial distinctions as well as parallels between Weberian and popular conceptions of charisma. Unlike Weber’s charismatic leaders, today’s popular “charismatics” have fans rather than followers, even though fanship occasionally mutates into followership. For instance, when the popular actor Ronald Reagan entered politics, his Hollywood fans seemingly metamorphosed into political followers. Reagan won two elections: Governor of California and President of the United States. Then,

² The male gender is used because Weber did not seem to envisage females as typical charismatic leaders.

³ Weber always acknowledged a debt to Rudolf Sohm; but whereas Sohm anchored charisma in the New Testament, Weber universalized it.

⁴ Robert C. Tucker believes that Weber’s “very great merit [was] to take this category [charisma] out of the historical world of religion and apply it to political life.”

too, the movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger became Governor of California. Not so long ago, Bob Geldof [14] and Bono (Paul David Hewson) [15] endorsed the televised Live Aid appeal (1985), prompting their myriad fans to follow them, embrace their cause, and create a movement which precipitated an outpouring of generosity.

A good many medieval Christian charismatic leaders installed their disciples in the new religious institutions, monasteries or confraternities, which they had either founded or promoted. Norbert of Xanten, for example, founded the house of Prémontré (1121) as well as the Premonstratensian canons ([16], p. 117). Contemporary Christian televangelists, in what looks like a modern attempt at institution building, try to persuade their viewers to donate funds to exchange fanship for followership by becoming part of the congregation of their new megachurch, or by enrolling in their new faith university. Instances include: Oral Roberts (university); Jerry Falwell (university); Joel Osteen (megachurch) ([17], p. 2; [18], p. 91ff.; [19], p. 483; [20], p. 122). Here the structural parallels, medieval and modern, seem to reflect a common desire for permanence. Whenever pop stars bathe in the glory of fan clubs, adulation, not moral prescription, holds sway. Notional obligations may be imposed—such as attending pop concerts, purchasing albums, snapping up ghost-written memoirs—all morally unburdensome. Fans crave entertainment; not the seriousness of purpose expected and demanded by the followers of Weberian charismatic leaders.

Nevertheless, the social behavior of fans and followers can approximate each other, particularly in their vociferous ejaculations of collective enthusiasm ([21], I, pp. 26–27). A further similarity is that both Weberian charismatic leaders and popular “charismatics” satisfy a need for community. Whether it is in collectively inhibiting the star-quality of the celebrity or participating in the God-given mission of the religious leader, fans and followers can be said to belong to communities of belief. Yet there is an important distinction between the respective communities. Fans belong to “loose-knit or “virtual communities” mediated through the mass media; their relationship with their favorite celebrity is therefore “remote” and of “imagined intimacy.” On the other hand, followers can enjoy a “direct, interpersonal” and even “face-to-face” relationship with their charismatic leader ([10], pp. 95–114; [22], pp. 393–97). An unfortunate consequence for fans and followers alike, however, is the risk of manipulation and exploitation.

1.3. Weber's Concept of Charisma

Here Max Weber's theory of charisma will be re-examined in comparative perspective, focussing on charismatic religious figures, medieval and modern. Given that Weber, while not ignoring historical particularity, based his broader sociological insights on patterns in comparative history—coherent phenomena in different epochs and regions—such an approach seems appropriate. Weber was attracted to the study of comparative history from an early age. At sixteen he was writing essays such as “Observations on the Ethnic Indo-European Nations” ([23], pp. 46–47). Historical specificity on a broad cross-cultural canvas underpinned Weber's sociological theory.

Nor is it inappropriate to look at Weberian ideas in a medieval setting, for Weber, that most historically-minded of sociologists, had more than a passing acquaintance with the medieval period. His first academic monograph was *The History of Commercial Partnerships in the Middle Ages* (1889). ([24], pp. 4–5). As H. Stuart Hughes comments, “Weber [’s] whole intellectual life was

suffused with historical thinking” ([25], p. 293). Therefore, it seems altogether Weberian to discuss charisma in comparative medieval-modern historical perspective [26]. History and theory will thereby be allowed to rub shoulders, however abrasively.

Weber’s charisma is a particular gift, reserved for a special type of leader, but not necessarily a religious leader. Weber argues that a charismatic leader emerges during a time of crisis, dislocation, or disorientation (“a devotion born of distress and enthusiasm”). He gains adherents not because of his noble birth or high office, but by virtue of his extraordinary personal qualities, his “gift of grace” or charisma (which in the Middle Ages was often expressed through his divine mission, the compelling Great Cause which he embodied). Certain characteristic signs—miracles or revelations or prophecies—yield charismatic recognition which is a prerequisite for his followers to pledge complete devotion to their leader. Ultimately, therefore, charisma is a matter of perception. It is in the eye of the beholder. Sociologists “must abstain from value judgments” even in cases of apparent fakery.⁵

Possessing the distinctive signs, the nascent charismatic leader, attracts—better, captivates, overwhelms, enthralls—his followers, who recognize his authority, and submit to it. To Weber, Jesus’s belief in his own charismatic powers, based on his ability to work miracles, exorcise demons, and preach so effectively, led to his assuming the role of messiah ([29], p. 271; [30], pp. 32–34, 84, 190–96).

One possible outcome of charismatic recognition, therefore, may be a messianic vocation. As with Jesus, too, the charismatic leader’s most committed disciples then become the nucleus or core group of his adherents, his Apostles. The charismatic leader next chooses one disciple as his successor, and confers his authority on him. So, it was believed, Jesus chose Peter to govern his church. At this stage, a charismatic community is institutionalized, rationalized, and eventually bureaucratized.

In his critique of pure Weber, Edward Shils comments about attenuated, dispersed forms of charisma pervading institutions ([31], ll, pp. 127–34, 256–75). But there is a danger that by paying overmuch attention to institutionlized charisma and to the ideas and program of the charismatic leader, charisma itself is depersonalized. Without the individual charismatic leader, his ideas are merely ideas. David d’Avray makes the valid point that the acceptance of the leader’s ideas and program has much to do with “the intensity” of the leader’s “convictions” and, one might add, the strength of their expression ([32], p. 106; [33]).⁶ Self-belief must be communicated to potential followers. Rhetoric, as always, is a powerful tool.

Weber taught that charismatic authority is inherently unstable. It is precarious, depending, as it does, upon continued success. Consequently, it is relatively short-lived ([5], pp. 248–50). One commentator suggests that “the modern sporting hero” exemplifies this, because if he fails time after time, “his following” deserts him ([34], p. 84). But a Weberian leader has followers, not an inchoate following; and, thanks to his charismatic authority, rather than to momentary celebrity, he can lead his followers up or down his chosen path; that is, until his followers choose not to follow him ([35], p. 337). There have been attempts to apply Weber to contemporary situations [36], as well as several attempts to marry Weber and Freud; rarely, in my opinion, a happy marriage ([37]; [38], pp. 5–23; [39], p. 4).

⁵ For this clarification I am indebted to D. L. d’Avray’s comments, citing ([27], p. 140). A translation of the relevant passages appears in ([28], I, p. 359).

⁶ This essay was in draft when d’Avray’s books were published.

In contradistinction to personal charisma, there is also a Weberian charisma of another sort—charisma of office (*Amtscharisma*) ([5], pp. 295–99; [35], p. 337). This is the charisma arising from a recognized prestigious status, either traditional or official. In a medieval context, it could be the aura of the throne, whether episcopal, papal or royal, as opposed to the peculiar qualities of the incumbent seated thereon.

1.4. “Double Charisma”: Bernard of Clairvaux

Weber appears to disregard what might be called “double charisma” which occurs when charisma of office is coupled with, and reinforces—by helping to legitimize—personal charisma. The fusion is complete when an official status is so absorbed into an individual’s persona as to become a personal attribute. The two are then indivisible.

An excellent medieval illustration is Bernard of Clairvaux (1091–1153, can. 1174), the founding abbot of Clairvaux and the leading light of the Cistercian order, the pre-eminent monastic order of its time. When Pope Eugenius III, his former pupil and a fellow Cistercian, summoned the second crusade, Bernard became its foremost official spokesman, both in France and Germany. Preaching the crusade to great crowds in Germany in 1146–47, he reputedly performed many miracle cures, all faithfully recorded by members of his entourage ([40], pp. 54–75, 61, n. 22).

After that crusade’s failure, the Council of Chartres (1150), eager to mount a new crusade, chose him, he wrote, “almost as the leader and prince of the army.” To choose Bernard, an old, sick monk, as overall commander of a crusading army certainly ran counter to conventional wisdom. The project came to nothing, perhaps owing to Cistercian objections ([41], pp. 311–20, 317). Clearly, what was wanted at Chartres was Bernard’s God-given charismatic leadership, not his military prowess. When Bernard preached in Germany, ostensibly to recruit crusaders, he managed to persuade thirty or more would-be crusaders to enter his beloved Cistercian order. Bernard’s charismatic authority was as much personal as it was institutional ([42], pp. 22, 35).

Finding a comparable modern instance is problematic. Perhaps a good candidate would be Pope John XXIII (1958–63), the pope of the Second Vatican Council, whose unaffected simplicity and good humor “brought a wind of change to his office” ([43], 320–22).

2. Charisma as Performance

2.1. Medieval Preachers of Popular Crusades

Charisma is public: it must be made manifest. So how best to manifest it, if not in performance? An unofficial crusade preacher like Peter the Hermit, addressing vast open-air crowds in 1096, and firing hordes of peasants with sufficient enthusiasm to put their lives at risk and follow him on the first crusade, was himself a performer. Barefoot, dressed in the simple, identifiable garb of a hermit, carrying his God-given proof of legitimacy—a celestial letter endorsing the crusade—he was acclaimed a holy man ([44]; [45], pp. 79–107). Hairs were pulled from his mule as relics. He was, reports Guibert of Nogent, endowed with an “amazing authority” (*mira auctoritate*) ([46], p. 121; [47], pp. 47–48). Although his “amazing authority” was undermined by the losses suffered by his troops and Peter’s attempted flight from the crusader encampment at Antioch (1098), the crusade commanders

subsequently let him assume a prominent role in the processions and liturgies preceding the crusader victories at Jerusalem and Ascalon (1099) ([48], p. 71). The probable lifespan of Peter's charismatic authority was three years.

For charismatic medieval preachers, appearance mattered, but not personal attractiveness. Rather, it was conformity to a specific type of holy man. Jacob, known as the Master of Hungary, was the most conspicuous preacher of another popular crusade, that of the *pastores* or Shepherds's Crusade (1251). He was described as having "a large beard, as if he were a man of penitence, with a pale, thin face" and bare feet. The focus of the crowd's attention was held in his clasped hands, displayed but not actually revealed. What it was, he claimed, was a legitimating parchment from the Virgin [49]. Anticlerical riots and attacks on the Jews followed in the wake of the *pastores*. During violent disturbances at Bourges or near it, Jacob was set upon and killed. His charismatic longevity probably lasted no more than four months, from mid-April perhaps to July, 1251 ([49], IX, pp. 2–5).

2.2. Renaissance Preachers and the Burning of the Vanities

Medieval preachers used words to establish and consolidate their charisma, but the charismatic performances of some Renaissance preachers were not confined to words. Theatrical flair reinforced their charismatic status as well as winning them followers for moral crusades. Without any doubt the most spectacular event they staged was the burning of the vanities. Heaped up in a conspicuous pile in a town centre, sometimes placed within a specially constructed wooden "castle," were dice, playing cards, wigs, cosmetics, masks, books of love spells, and other such tokens of immorality. The pyre was lit; and up in smoke went individual and communal sinfulness ([50], pp. 62–76).

Counted among the most celebrated Renaissance burners of the vanities was the charismatic Franciscan preacher San Bernardino da Siena (d. 1444), in Florence (1424) and Perugia (1425). He was of emaciated, ascetic appearance and prominently exhibited as a focal point for the auditors of his sermons what became his iconographic attribute—an emblem of the name of Jesus. He also interacted with his audience in ways other than audio-visual. During a sermon against sodomites, he invited his listeners, whenever they encountered one, to spit hard. Everybody did so. The sound, said the scribe, was like thunder ([51], p. 6; [52], p. 150; [53], pp. 154–55). Another Franciscan burner of the vanities was the Beato Bernardino da Feltre ([50], pp. 71–72; [54], pp. 475–78). Strengthened by their charismatic performances, the words of these moral crusaders were drafted into puritanical civic legislation ([55], pp. 265–93). Law was thus made the repository of charisma.

Among modern charismatic preachers were the revivalists of the Great Awakening which swept parts of Great Britain and colonial America in the 1730s and 1740s. The young George Whitefield, having drawn large crowds in Britain, arrived in Philadelphia in 1739 and returned to England in 1741. In common with medieval and modern charismatic preachers, his reputation preceded him. Spiritual rebirth was his aim. The means were: advance publicity; daily open-air preaching; moving from location to location; apparently spontaneous sermons; novelty; a dramatic style. Crowds of unprecedented size were reported ([56], pp. 90–100, 112–16). Similarly, when Dwight Moody and his musical accompanist Ira Sankey brought American evangelical revivalism to major British cities, exciting vast crowds, from 1873 to 1875, "no revival in modern times has been marked with such immediate and varied results" (to quote a contemporary enthusiast ([57], p. 1). Charismatic preachers,

medieval and modern, sought converts, preferably on the spot—to the crusades, moral crusades, or evangelical rebirth. Converts followed Whom their preacher followed.

3. Professorial Charisma?

For both medieval and modern preachers, obtaining and ratifying charisma was a performing art. But can charisma of a kind speak from the lectern as well as from the pulpit? Today's "charismatic professors" are a case in point. Among them are popular university lecturers, especially those espousing burning social issues and clever, opinionated, televisual historians. Among the most prominent "charismatic professors" are public intellectuals like the late Edward Said and Noam Chomsky, respected academics, unafraid of mobilizing public opinion in support of their political causes. Their intellectual fans can be said to be their followers.

University teachers possess a certain authority, due to their status, which, when coupled with the appropriate personal attributes, manage to sway their students. Weber, on the contrary, would have none of it. In a speech given at the University of Munich in 1918, he addressed his "fellow students," declaring that they were wrong to demand "qualities of leadership" from their teachers. Robustly, Weber declaimed that their scholarly qualities, however excellent, were not the qualities of leaders ([5], p. 150).

Despite Weber's ringing declaration, William Clark attempts to define "professorial charisma" in his *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*—and does so by invoking Weber. For Clark, the cult of academic personality stems from a Romantic belief in individual genius plus the insertion of Weberian charisma in a setting of Weberian rational authority ([58], pp. 16, 516, n.21).

According to Clark, before the birth of the modern research university in Protestant Germany (c.1770s–1830s), traditional universities had an aversion to charismatic professors ([58], pp. 3–4, 17). Yet Clark does admit that charismatic masters did lecture at medieval universities, and these were likely to be men who broke the philosophical-theological rules of the game ([58], p. 18). The penalty? The teachings of the Paris *magistri* Amalric of Bène (d. c.1206) ([59], III, pp. 347–52). and Siger of Brabant (d. c.1284) ([60], p. 249; [61], p. 481) were condemned as heretical. Clark does concede that modern academic charisma did spring from a traditional theme, the compelling spiritual or cultic leadership of a teacher ([58], p. 15). An extreme example is the charismatic Amalric of Bène. His former students, among them parish priests, created a sect, the Amalricians. A few years after their teacher's death, four were imprisoned, and ten were burned at the stake ([59], III, pp. 347–52). The warrior-prince of early scholasticism, Peter Abelard (c.1079–c.1142), was the medieval charismatic teacher, whose skill in disputation brought him fame ([58], p. 75). Accused of heresy in 1140, Abelard was forced to flee from the monastery of St. Denis where he had sought shelter. In his *Historia calamitatum*, Abelard "found a refuge in the wilderness" where soon "students began to gather... from all parts" ([62], p. 88). There, at his hermitage of the Paraclete, Abelard, the charismatic professor, found followers in a literal sense ([63], pp. 204–5, 238–40, 317–24).

4. “Collective Charisma”

4.1. Medieval

At first “collective charisma” appears to fly in the face of Weberian individual charismatic leadership. Yet Weber opens the door for it, when he remarks that “the pneumatic manifestations of charisma among women” are signs of “specifically religious exaltation” ([29], p. 104). Now exaltation was especially manifested during medieval revivals of the laity, male and female, from which individual charismatic leadership sometimes emerged ([64], pp. 147–76). Examples include: Durand of Le Puy, founder of the *Caputiati* (1182), a peace militia; Stephen of Cloyes, leader of the French Children’s Crusade (1212); Nicholas of Cologne, leader of the German Children’s Crusade (1212) ([65], pp. 61, 62, 65–77, 102–06); and Jacob, the Master of Hungary, leader of the *pastores* (1251) ([66], IV, pp. 1093–94). That collective enthusiasm could engender personal charisma was something Weber appreciated.

Conversely, there were occasions of collective fervor when apparently leaderless troops of enthusiasts radiated a charisma which electrified crowds of spectators. The revival of the flagellants (1260–61) began in Perugia, where it was linked with Raniero Fasani. But after the movement dispersed, what mattered was the public spectacle of the flagellants. Spellbound onlookers, transfixed by self-inflicted humiliation, joined the movement and took it to the next town ([67], VIII, pp. 227–67). During the Black Death (1349), troops of flagellants described as “headless” processed through German towns ([68], pp. 3–36, 8, 9, n.15, 16). Then (1374), parts of the Low Countries and the Rhineland witnessed the so-called “dancing mania.” These troops of dancers—really leapers—were also, seemingly, acephalic ([69], pp. 339–55; [70], pp. 335–77). The adherence of spectators testifies to the charisma of these “headless” bands of medieval enthusiasts. Most medieval revivals were of short duration, corresponding to the lifespan of their charismatic power. Only relatively few, like the flagellants of 1260 or the *Bianchi* of 1399, became institutionalized as local confraternities [71]. Nevertheless, these revivals demonstrate the collective charisma of dramatic ritual performances.

4.2. Modern

Pentecostalism is their contemporary embodiment, exemplifying Weber’s “pneumatic manifestations of charisma.” “Classical Pentecostalism” dates back to the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles (1906). The charismatic renewal movement of the '60s and '70s, swept “Neo-Pentecostalism” into the mainstream Protestant churches, as well as into Catholicism. Its crucial manifestation was *glossolalia*, a liturgical performance in which individuals or indeed the entire congregation engaged ([72], pp. 405–25; [73], pp. 31–36; [74] XI, pp. 229–35; [75], pp. 428–34). As of 1985, Pentecostals were counted as the largest single family of American-born sects ([76], p. 139). So, as a religious phenomenon, collective charisma was medieval, just as it is modern.

5. Religious Radicals

5.1. *‘Radicalization from Within’ or ‘Challenge from Without’?*

Weber sees charismatic domination as no less than a revolutionary force. ([5], p. 250). During the medieval centuries the religious equivalent to revolution was heresy. Some scholars prefer to speak of deviance, schism, and dissent rather than heresy. Certainly from the time of Pope Innocent III’s (1198–1216) “counter-attack” the Church perceived heretics as rebels ([77], pp. 99–108). Valdes of Lyon (fl. c. 1176–c. 1205) was the founder of the Waldensian brethren, who, despite Inquisitors and Christian armies, managed to survive ([78], pp. 51, 196). Valdes was a wealthy cloth merchant who renounced his wealth, embraced apostolic poverty, and commenced preaching using vernacular translations of the Gospels. His followers also wanted to preach. The papacy insisted that the local clergy must first grant permission before Valdes and his uneducated followers were allowed to preach. The archbishop of Lyon refused to overturn a clerical monopoly. So the heresy of the Waldensians began as disobedience to clerical authority ([77], pp. 70–85; [78]; [79], pp. 12–14, 17–20, 30–31, 44, 59). The story, told and re-told, of Valdes’s dramatic conversion to poverty won him followers. The charisma of Valdes was the charisma of the grand gesture.

As everyone knows, the truly revolutionary break in medieval Christendom occurred at the close of the Middle Ages with Jan Hus and Martin Luther, who, unlike Valdes, were both churchmen. Hence to accommodate medieval charismatic religious leaders who were clerics, a slight refinement to Weber’s idea of the charismatic as revolutionary is called for. Put succinctly by Douglas Barnes, citing Peter Berger: “a charismatic leader who occupies an institutional office may attempt to change the religion by a ‘radicalization from within rather than a challenge from without.’” ([80], p. 6; [81], pp. 940–50).

Yet with later Protestant sect formation what began as ‘radicalization from within’ often ended in ‘a challenge from without.’ Here the U.S. experience is significant. “The sectarian spirit in American Christianity”—with many sects evolving into denominations, then churches—testifies to ongoing disputes over scriptural interpretations, fundamental spiritual values, and personal revelations ([82], pp. 11–24).

5.2. *Medieval Radicals from Within*

In sharp contrast, in the medieval church there were repeated examples of ‘radicalization from within’ among clerical leaders who were forceful advocates of religious reform, but never hereticated, never mounted ‘a challenge from without.’ Castigating their less zealous colleagues, they aroused controversy in spite of (or because of) their clerical status. Among the best known of them were the *Wanderprediger*, the wandering eremitical preachers of northern France from roughly the 1050s to the 1120s. The majority founded new religious communities. Their appearance was distinctive: black cloak, long hair, untrimmed beard, thin-faced, barefoot ([83]; [84], pp. 1–45; [85]). Crowds flocked to hear them preach.

Vitalis of Savigny (d.1122) was an eminent eremitical preacher, monastic founder and reformer. Vitalis “was a man who had studied deeply... and spared neither rich nor poor in his public sermons” ([86], pp. 330–33). He was also a peacemaker. Instead of urging ex-prostitutes to enter the cloister, as other preachers would do, Vitalis preferred finding them husbands ([83], pp. 85–88). As

outspoken critics of lax monks and clerics, Vitalis, along with other *Wanderprediger*, was accused of Pharisaism ([87], pp. 14–15). But their route to reform was via the authority of a pre-existing divinely legitimated order. To these men, radical reform implied a return to traditional monastic asceticism, which clashed with the perceived abuses of contemporary monastic life, as reflected in their relatively more comfortable standard of living. This was the temptation presented by the newly reborn urban economy ([88], p. 70).

6. Charisma: the Economic Dimension

6.1. Weber's Idea of the Economics of Charisma

Max Weber did not ignore the economic implications of charisma. What is unexpected, however, is that Weber constructed his theory of the economics of charisma on medieval foundations. He defines the charismatic economy by what it is not. Using St. Francis as an example, he maintains that the charismatic economy prohibits the use of money ([5], p. 247). It is seemingly paradoxical, but perhaps understandable, that the medieval charismatic rejection of the money economy occurred precisely at the time in which what Lopez called “the commerical revolution of the Middle Ages” took off [89]. Medieval charismatic rejection of the money economy can thus be seen as fundamentally reactionary.

In his stimulating thesis which launched a thousand arguments, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–5), Weber invokes the name of the “young St. Francis... [whose] life was modelled directly on that of the Apostles” ([90], pp. 136–37, 146). For Weber, Francis of Assisi (1181–1226; canonized 1228) and the Order of Friars Minor which he founded, epitomized the economy of charisma.

6.2. The Franciscan Economy of Charisma

Francis not only espoused poverty, he embodied it. Thomas of Spalato's eye-witness account of Francis preaching before a large crowd in the main square of Bologna in 1222 describes him as “wearing a ragged habit; his whole person seemed insignificant; he did not have an attractive face.” Yet “men and women flocked to him,” trying to touch him” or “tear off a piece of his poor habit” ([91], pp. 1601–2). But his charisma was recognized well before 1222.

Francis's father Pietro Bernardone was a prosperous cloth merchant; so, like Valdes, Francis reaped the benefits of the money economy. Unlike Valdes, Francis's conversion to poverty was a gradual process (1204?–1208?) ([91], pp. xi–xii).⁷ The best known incident of his conversion was his public repudiation of his father's wealth precisely at the moment when his father was preparing to disinherit him. He stripped naked and handed back his clothes to his father. The officiating bishop of Assisi, Guido, hastily wrapped him in his robe ([91], p. 241; [92], pp. 4–9; [93]). By 1261, the archbishop of Pisa could hail St. Francis of Assisi as not only a wealthy merchant, but also as the patron saint of merchants ([88], pp. 216–17)! Francis thus renounced his father and the idea of money simultaneously. When a priest read from the book of Matthew (10: 7–10), in which Jesus instructs the Apostles to go and preach, taking with them neither gold, nor silver, his conversion to Lady Poverty was complete.

⁷ These dates are by no means universally accepted. Alternative dates for Francis's conversion to poverty are suggested in [92], pp. 4–9.

Within a couple of years, Francis had eleven companions. To the Franciscans, the charismatic economy meant begging for alms, but never for money. A candidate for the order “should sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor.” ([91], pp. 31–32). To cite Malcolm Lambert: “the poverty of Christ was the key idea of the whole Franciscan movement” ([94], p. 59).

Pope Innocent III, after interviewing Francis, ultimately approved his order (1209) ([92], pp. 18–19, 51). What might have appeared to be a group of radical religious dissidents was incorporated within the church. The rapid expansion of the Franciscan order throughout Christendom was phenomenal, but Francis had neither the taste, nor the talent, for managing an ever-expanding religious order. So, in a perfect demonstration of the Weberian theory of charismatic succession, Francis chose his friend Peter Catani as his successor; then he abdicated. The minister-general, closely supervised by the Franciscans’s cardinal-protector in Rome, now had control of the order ([92], pp. 50–51, 95–101).

As the order grew rapidly, so did its problems, chief among them the ideal of apostolic poverty, for Franciscanism imposed both individual and collective poverty. Despite the awkward fact that they needed them, Franciscans could own no buildings. Solution: a legal fiction. The church acquired the necessary property. The order had the use of it. Donations from wealthy townspeople, nobles, and kings were put into the building of spacious preaching churches ([88], pp. 164, 203–6).

Poverty continued to be a contentious and divisive issue for the Franciscans, their glory and their burden. The rigorists were uncompromising, but if the order was to serve the needs of the papacy and the church, accommodations were obligatory. Major crises occurred in 1322–23 when Pope John XXII removed any pretence that the Franciscans were not owners of property. He then ruled that the belief of the Spiritual Franciscans in the absolute poverty of Christ was heretical ([95], pp. 275–77). Nevertheless, the heretical Fraticelli, who persevered in the doctrines of the Spirituals, were not violently suppressed until the mid-fifteenth century ([96], pp. 241–72, 585–86).

Increasingly eroded and remote from reality, Francis’s pristine vision of the economy of charisma ultimately proved unworkable. Weber would have known the fate of Franciscan economic utopianism, but whether he would have considered what was once Francis’s band of brothers “a charismatic community” (*Gemeinde*) when it had become a religious order, subject to a written constitution (*regula*), with a defined structure of officialdom is unlikely ([97], vol. 1, p. 243). Monasticism was how the church was able to contain charismatic personalities within a structure governed by canon law.

6.3. The Weberian Economy of Charisma: Two New Sects

No such constraints inhibited the charismatic founders of two recent, short-lived Protestant sects: Jim Jones’ People’s Temple and David Koresh’s Branch Davidians. Often termed cults ([98], p. xi, chapters 7–8; [76], pp. 186–87)⁸, both sects would qualify as Weberian charismatic communities bound together by the emotional tie between the leader and his followers. If so, were their economies economies of charisma?

Jim Jones (1931–78) was the founder and leader of the People’s Temple in Indiana, then in San Francisco. Ultimately, he transplanted his followers to a new settlement, Jonestown in Guyana. Of his charismatic leadership, there can be no doubt. On November 18, 1978, he led his Jonestown followers,

⁸ Tabor argues against the demonization of cults [98], while Stark and Bainbridge uphold the distinction between religious sects and cults, particularly in regard to Jim Jones’s People’s Temple [76].

913 of them, to their death. Some were murdered, but Jones persuaded the overwhelming majority to commit suicide. He died alongside them ([99], p. 271ff, 288; [100], p. 571).⁹

During his charismatic career, Jones was a faith healer; a spellbinding preacher of thermonuclear apocalypse; a messiah; and a sexual manipulator of both his female and male adherents. He proclaimed himself a living incarnation of Buddha, Jesus, and Lenin. Towards the end he communicated paranoid fears about impending U.S. government intervention ([99], pp. 110–134; [100], pp. 280–81, 94–5; [101], pp. 3–20; [102], pp. 21–34). Jeannie Mills, a defector from Jonestown, recalls: “We surrounded him with this aura of power.” ([103], pp. 165–73). Jones demanded and received total control ([104], pp. 174–82). He always presided over meetings, and his will prevailed ([99], pp. 96–98). Jim Jones’s version of the Weberian economy of charisma operated, both at the People’s Temple in San Francisco and at Jonestown in Guyana. Before there was any hint of socialism, the ideology of the People’s Temple was broadcast as apostolic, Christian communalism. In return for donating their income, welfare benefits, and savings, to their church-commune, Jones’s followers would have all their needs met ([100], pp. 133, 255; [99], pp. 77–80). After Jonestown perished, the holdings of the People’s Temple were estimated at \$11 million ([99], pp. 89–90; [100], p. 324). Although professedly collectivist, Jones’s economy of charisma, unlike that of the early Franciscans, by no means spurned the money economy.

After visiting the Holy Land, in 1990, Vernon Howell (1959–1993) became David Koresh ([105], pp. 93, 97). His new name traced his messianic lineage from King David and King Cyrus (Hebrew: Koresh) who freed the Jews from their Babylonian captivity. The home of the Branch Davidians, Koresh’s religious community, was Mt. Carmel near Waco. An independent sect, they deviated from, but were theologically anchored in Seventh Day Adventist biblical prophecy ([106], pp. 43–72).

On April 19, 1993, when Mt. Carmel was stormed and burned to the ground, David Koresh, their charismatic leader, died together with most of the Branch Davidians, 74 of them. This was the final act in a controversial siege by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) and the FBI ([107], pp. xiii–xviii).¹⁰ Whoever bears the ultimate responsibility for the catastrophic fate of the Branch Davidians, the sect’s apocalypticism definitely played a part.

For apocalypticism was at the heart of David Koresh’s message and his charisma. At first glance two converts, Derek Lovelock, a siege survivor and Alisa Shaw, who later defected, were unimpressed by his appearance (and gave a very similar description)—he was rather short, unshaven, and dressed in jeans, a t-shirt, and a leather jacket. Lovelock later felt he was in the presence of a messenger of God ([108], p. 345; [105], p. 97). The key to Koresh’s charisma was his claim that he alone could unravel the hidden meaning of the *Book of Revelation*’s Seven Seals ([98], pp. 160–63). His God-given ability attracted converts to Mt. Carmel. One affirmed that David, the Messiah, knew what would happen on the Last Days ([106], Paul Fatta, p. 57). And happen it did.

Whether or not the economy of the Branch Davidians qualifies as an economy of charisma is debatable. One writer argues that Mt. Carmel was never a true commune, because all goods were not held in common, although no one paid rent or board ([105], p. 49). But more and more, say scholars,

⁹ Reiterman’s is a thorough, journalistic account based on many interviews with Jonestown defectors [100].

¹⁰ Also see Reavis [105], pp. 268–75, who gives the number of the dead as 76, p.13; but his date for Howell’s name change, 1989, p. 15, gives rise to doubts.

the residents of Mt. Carmel devoted their funds, labor, and zeal to the community ([109], pp. 5–56, 62, 67). In sum, without abandoning the money economy, David Koresh's followers drew nearer to adopting a Weberian economy of charisma.

7. Charisma and Transgressive Sexuality

7.1. Modern Sects: People's Temple and Mt. Carmel

Ceaseless revelations about the sexual escapades of celebrities flow from the media's obsession with "charisma." To the star-struck, the fame (and fortune?) of the star prove irresistibly attractive. Overlooked, however, is the possible link between Weberian charismatic leaders and sexuality. That such a link does exist is shown by the sexual behavior of our two modern charismatic religious leaders, Jim Jones and David Koresh.

To Jones, having sexual relations with his followers demonstrated his charismatic authority. He is quoted as saying, "As long as I have power... women will always want me." ([103], p. 167). He also let it be known that his sexual appetites—unmarried women as well as the wives of his closest disciples—were not confined to women. Gossip about Jones's sexual prowess added to his charisma ([99], p. 112).

Like Jones's, David Koresh's sexual relationships were a consequence of charisma, but Koresh's liaisons were justified theologically. His followers were instructed that according to the *Book of Revelation* he and his "spiritual wives" were called upon to procreate a new branch of the House of David ([106], p. 59). Women married to his disciples were not excluded. Jones and Koresh had legal spouses. Jim Jones was a sexual opportunist, while Koresh's transgressed normative sexual boundaries through what might be called charismatic antinomianism. In effect, both men were religious legislators who rewrote society's moral rule book. Weber believes charismatic leaders could do just that ([5], p. 250).

7.2. Robert of Arbrissel, Medieval Wandering Preacher

A medieval instance—not so much transgressive, as of provocative sexual behavior—was one of the most celebrated *Wanderprediger*, Robert of Arbrissel (c.1045–1116). His sympathy for the plight of discarded wives and concubines, and daughters fleeing arranged marriages has preoccupied modern scholars ([110], pp. 175–84). He travelled with a mixed troop of male and female adherents, former prostitutes among them—enthusiasts (or "groupies" in the language of rock-stardom) who first listened to his sermons, then followed him from place to place. Arbrissel settled the most committed of his followers at his monastic foundation, Fontevrault, which became the mother house of a number of dependent monasteries. Not long before his death he chose a female successor as abbess over his mixed monastic congregation [111].

After the death of his father, a married parish priest, Robert assumed his role ([112], pp. 1140–60). During his studies at Paris, he came into contact with the ideas of Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), which stressed the separate identities of the clergy and the laity; condemned simony; and fulminated against nicolaitanism. Robert tirelessly advocated Gregorian reforms. Wherever he preached, men and women of all social classes came to hear him. He unashamedly visited brothels, most famously in Rouen, to warm his bare feet, and to preach chastity to the women, who at first mistook him for a client. A number of his fellow clerics clearly disapproved ([112], p. 1152).

His earliest hagiographer, Baudri of Dol, writing c.1118, says that while a student at Angers, Robert took to wearing an iron tunic next to his skin to avoid temptation of the flesh ([113], pp. 10–12). In letter (c.1098) addressed to Arbrissel, but meant to be circulated, Marbode, Bishop of Rennes, rebukes him for his truly scandalous inclination “to love greatly cohabitation with women... in the name of new religious practice.” Even if you avoid bodily fornication, he admonishes him, your soul will not remain chaste ([114], pp. 92–100).

Equally censorious, Abbot Geoffrey of Vendôme, similarly circulates a letter to Robert (c.1107.) He has heard that Robert permits certain of his female followers to live with him, and to sleep with him. Attempting to curb his lust, he tortures himself “in a new kind of martyrdom” destined to fail. Such *novum et inauditum* behavior results in scandal ([115], pp. 103–5; [116], p. 111, n. 68).

However shocking Robert’s behavior, it was neither “a new religious practice,” nor “a new kind of martyrdom.” Known as *syneisaktism*, *subhospitio*, *subintroductae*, and spiritual marriage, it was practised in the early church and in Celtic monasticism. Male and female hermits would live and sleep together without having sexual intercourse. Although Nicaea (325) and other early church councils condemned the practice, those engaging in it believed it would vanquish sexual temptation ([116], pp. 32–33, [85], pp. 26, 68; [117], p. 1319). Denis de Rougement comments that when Tristan and Iseult slept with the drawn sword between them, it merely heightened their desire ([118], p. 49).

Arbrissel’s behavior had been deemed provocative during his lifetime. For his “mad audacity” (the judgment of a sympathetic scholar) ([111], p. 239), Robert of Arbrissel paid the penalty, albeit posthumously. The nuns of Fontevault made two attempts in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries to have him canonized and both failed. Abbot Geoffrey of Vendôme’s letter was cited in evidence against him. Such evidence of provocative behavior helped to put an end to his canonization process, several centuries later ([119], pp. 361–77; [120], IV, pp. 142–43).

8. Charismatic Politico-Religious Demagogues

8.1. Weber, Value-Judgments and Demagogues

Aware of the problem of value-judgments in the social sciences, Weber holds that, generally speaking, the idea of charisma should remain ‘value-neutral’ ([5], p. 245; [25], pp. 295, 307–8). It was a difficult balancing act to maintain, especially because Weber extended the idea of charisma from the sociology of religion to political domination ([3], pp. 393–94). With demagogues and demagoguery he implicitly takes negative popular usage for granted, and by so doing undermines his aspiration for a ‘value-neutral’ social science. In his lecture “Politics as a Vocation” (1918) Weber makes the bold assertion that however distasteful the term “demagogue” may be, demagogues have typically risen to the leadership of western democracies ever since Pericles became the demagogue of Athens ([5], p. 96).

According to Weber, the democratization of the masses (*Massendemokratisierung*) and demagoguery were part of the same process, ([4], pp. 387–88) Political leaders do not hesitate to employ unscrupulous demagogic means to woo their followers ([121], II, pp. 1094, 1100; [122], III, p. 1449). Weber strongly implies that the successful demagogue would be a charismatic figure, who “could readily become a dictator” ([4], p. 74). Implicitly, demagoguery was one outcome of charisma. Not necessarily, however; for Weber characterizes the pre-exilic Hebrew prophets as “world-political

demagogues.” Yet, because they lacked disciples and community support, could they have been charismatic leaders? ([123], pp. xx–xxi, 275, 279).

8.2. A Renaissance Politico-Religious Demagogue: Savonarola

On the other hand, when Weber notes that the Renaissance humanists were unequal to “the demagoguery of priests and preachers,” he was identifying a charismatic hybrid, at once political and religious, with partisan followers ([29], pp. 133–34). Most likely he was alluding to the Dominican preacher, Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), whose demagogic leadership in Florence combined both roles. Weber probably learned about Savonarola from Jacob Burckhardt’s classic *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860). While Burckhardt exaggerates the treasures lost in Savonarola’s burning of the vanities (1497), he recognizes his commanding pulpit eloquence ([124], II, pp. 452, 462, 457–58). For Burckhardt, Savonarola was a charismatic demagogue.

Committed to “the myth of Florence,” Savonarola gave voice to the providential destiny of his adopted city ([125], pp. 27–66), an outlook he shared with the city’s humanists and Neoplatonic philosophers, including Marsilio Ficino, that is, until he renounced him ([126], pp. 80–81, 102–8, 139–44). Shortly before Savonarola’s execution, Ficino wrote to the College of Cardinals, vilifying him as a hypocrite who deceived even learned Florentines (like himself?). To Ficino, Savonarola was the Antichrist ([127], pp. 282–83).

Prior of the Observant Dominicans of San Marco, Savonarola began his apocalyptic preaching four years before the invasion of the French King Charles VIII in 1494. No longer a prophet scorned, Savonarola gained much credit, when Charles left Florence unharmed ([125], pp. 137–42). His sermons were now infused with millennial optimism. Florence would become the new Jerusalem. People would repent; and the corrupt Church would be reformed ([128], pp. 183–275). He rose to political prominence, intervening via the pulpit in the constitutional debates of the Signoria ([129], pp. 382–400). He exploited the new medium of the printed word by publishing his sermons in the vernacular ([130], pp. 87–89). His defense of republican liberty polarized Florence ([129], p. 394). Never the ruler of Florence, Savonarola and his followers, the *Piagnoni* or “the weepers,” acted almost like a political party ([130], pp. 77, 83–84, 103–108).

His enemy, Pope Alexander VI, excommunicated him. Florence deserted him. He was tortured and executed on May 23, 1498, hanged, then thrown onto the flames. Nevertheless, the *Piagnoni* revered his memory for decades. Calls for Savonarola’s beatification continue ([126], n.112).

8.3. A Modern Politico-Religious Demagogue: Father Coughlin

Savonarola had medieval predecessors, such as the Dominican John of Vicenza, the celebrated charismatic preacher of the Lombard peace movement of 1233, known as the Great Hallelujah [131]. Of his modern successors, a conspicuous example is the American parish priest Charles Edward Coughlin (1891–1979), who commanded the airwaves during the Great Depression. To Wallace Stegner, Father Coughlin had “a voice made for promises” ([132], pp. 232–57). To his devoted listeners, he was the radio priest. To his biographer, he was the father of hate radio [133].

Coughlin began broadcasting sermons on Christian themes in 1926, soon shifting to politics and economics tinted with Christian morals, attacking communism and socialism ([134], pp. 150–52).

The Wall Street crash was caused by international bankers and “the ideas of ‘Karl Marx, a Hebrew.’” ([133], pp. 34–35). Coughlin’s sermons were transmitted on nearly thirty stations. *Fortune* magazine considered him probably “the biggest thing that ever happened to radio” ([135], p. 119). He founded a political party to oppose FDR, staging a huge political rally in Chicago before the election of 1936. His campaign manager, Philip C. Johnson, said that listening to Coughlin’s speech was like listening to Hitler ([133], p. 76). His Union Party collapsed at the polls.

The Nation believed that Father Coughlin was a perfect illustration of a demagogue at work ([135], p. 113). He became “a flagrant apologist” and “open admirer” of Franco, Salazar, Mussolini, and Hitler ([136], p. 130). His broadcasts were blatantly antisemitic. He published the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* ([133], p. 149). In 1938 he summoned “platoons” of his Christian front, sworn to fight (Jewish) Communism, to bait and attack Jews ([133], pp. 188–89; [134], p. 152). Then came Pearl Harbor. His archbishop ordered him to keep silent or be defrocked. He obeyed. In 1966, he retired as parish priest ([133], p. 269).

Charisma fueled the demagogic authority of Savonarola and Coughlin. Allowing for their different epochs, their careers were comparable. Clerical status (*Amtscharisma*) lent their politics credibility and legitimacy. Both demagogic careers had a relatively short life span. Coughlin’s ascendancy lasted perhaps 8–10 years, Savonarola’s about 5. Savonarola was executed. Coughlin’s ended his career peacefully, his reputation tarnished. Both men retained their supporters.

Weber knew that communication, whether in performance or by other means, was the key to demagoguery ([5], p. 96). Both Savonarola and Coughlin were not only adept pulpit orators, but also utilized new media to diffuse their messages; printing, for one; radio, for the other. Neither held elective office. Both had constituencies swayed by apprehension, expectation, or anger. For Florentines: invasion and conquest. For American workers: unemployment and poverty. Long-held beliefs could be tapped into: Florence’s glorious destiny; American populism and antisemitism. Following WWI, Germans wanted a *Führer*, a hope Weber shared—but for a charismatic leader in the mold of Caesar, not Hitler ([3], pp. 400–4). Weber was spared fascist Europe.

9. The Charisma of Living Saints

9.1. Weber: Living Saints as “Religious Virtuosi”

When Weber turns to the cult of saints, he limits it to two contexts: personal devotion and the veneration of merchants and craftsmen towards their patron, for veneration was the key to the religion of the masses ([29], p. 104). But Weber never associates charisma with dead saints. Living saints are another matter.

Weber terms them “religious virtuosi.” According to Weber, popular sanctification was achievable, if demonstrated through religiously inspired ethical conduct. A reputation for sanctity could be gained in much the same way as those possessing “magical charisma” ([2], p. 163). For the medievalist, “magical charisma” presents no difficulty. Medieval saints were obliged to perform miracles, during their lifetime, and/or after their death.

When exceptional individuals in modern, secular society demonstrate religiously inspired ethical conduct, they can also acquire a popular reputation for sanctity. Of these secular living saints who meet the conditions of Weberian charismatic “virtuosi,” four are outstanding.

9.2. Modern Living Saints

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), a leader in India’s struggle for independence, was a Hindu, whose personal asceticism, opposition to untouchability, and espousal of non-violence, gained him followers in the wider world. He was assassinated for his beliefs [137,138]. As was Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–68), a fearless campaigner in the movement for civil rights in the U.S. with many followers in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. A Baptist minister, King’s advocacy of non-violence was inspired by Gandhi ([139], pp. 171–210; [140]). Probably the twentieth-century’s most revered secular saint, Nelson Mandela (b.1918), a member of the Wesleyan church, led the African National Congress. Freed from long imprisonment without bitterness and with extraordinary generosity of spirit, he guided South Africa out of apartheid and served as its first black president ([141], pp. 15, 196, 219). The beatified Catholic nun, Mother Teresa (1910–97), founded a religious order, the Missionaries of Charity. Through her singleminded care for the truly wretched in the slums of Calcutta, she was applauded by the world’s secular media as epitomizing human compassion ([142], pp. 8, 15, 25).

9.3. Medieval Living Saints: Catherine of Siena

Like their modern counterparts, medieval living saints were recognized by their self-defining acts. *Fama sanctitatis*, a reputation for sanctity, depended upon both *virtus moram*, conspicuous ethical behavior, and *virtus signorum*, miracles ([143], pp. 5–8, 17, 30). Stereotypical attributes of sainthood were well-known. The past, however, was not a crushing weight. The typologies of sainthood continued to evolve ([144], pp. 121–69). From the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, charismatic female living saints became renowned for their asceticism, miracle-working, and prophetic powers, as well as for acts of personal and civic virtue. Dominican tertiaries were prominent exponents of the “mixed life,” active and contemplative. Although they came to live in religious communities, they were not vowed to claustration, which meant they were visible in churches and elsewhere ([145], pp. 2–16, 93).

Their trail-blazer was St. Catherine of Siena (1347–80, can. 1461). She became a Dominican tertiary when she was about sixteen ([146], p. 46). Her hagiographer and confessor was Raymond of Capua, who, after her death, was made Master General of the Dominican Order. He details Catherine’s visions, public ecstasies, superhuman fasting, mystical experiences, miracles (e.g. receiving Christ’s invisible stigmata and his invisible bridal ring), and her spiritual writings ([147], pp. 69–78, 99–101, 164–96). As her ascetic practices and spiritual experiences became public knowledge, so her *fama sanctitatis* grew. Miraculous cures were attributed to her. People implored her to spare them from the plague ([145], pp. 19–20, 95, 99–102, 246–48). Unusually for a female religious, she intervened in the affairs of church and state, urging Pope Gregory XI to return from Avignon to Rome, which he did in 1377 ([146], pp. 114–16; [148], pp. 153–200). Strenuously but vainly, she promoted Gregory’s crusade as a way of uniting Christendom, converting the Muslims, and removing the *condottieri* from Christian Europe ([149], pp. 601–22; [150], pp. 120–24) Her *fama sanctitatis* culminated in her canonization.

9.4. Medieval Living Saints: Colomba da Rieti

An “astonishing brood of new Catherines” followed in her footsteps ([143], pp. 1–27). Perhaps the most notable was the Dominican tertiary Beata Colomba da Rieti (1467–1501; beatified 1713), “commonly known as ‘the second Catherine.’” A Dominican tertiary at nineteen, she left her parental home, and came to Perugia in 1488 ([145], pp. 252–53; [152], pp. 219–313). The Perugian chronicler Francesco Matarazzo (d.1518) records that “people gave her the name of saint.” They “saw her walk openly in the town and speak and hold discourse and reveal secret things.” Before long “the rulers of our city built a fair monastery” for her (1490) ([153], pp. 3–4). Between 1490 and 1501, 41 sisters took the habit at Colomba’s monastery, St. Catherine of Siena. She was prioress from 1497 to 1500 ([154], pp. 110–59). One year before the plague struck Perugia in 1494, the civic authorities stated that the prayers of saintly Sister Colomba were of the greatest utility to its citizens ([155], pp. 305–6; [156], pp. 132, n.1, 140–43).

The coming of the plague saw the apogee of Colomba’s *fama* as a living saint and protectress of Perugia. She urged the civic authorities to hold processions; and to have a processional plague banner (*gonfalone*) made ([156], pp. 142–43). They consented. Giannicola di Paolo was commissioned to make the banner (1494). At the foot of the *gonfalone*, between the towering figures of Saints Dominic and Catherine of Siena, there stood a clearly recognizable Beata Colomba, along with her Dominican sisters, and the townspeople. ([157], pp. 61–74, figure 2a and b). Occupying a central position at the foot of the *gonfalone*, Colomba’s exalted civic and spiritual status was visible to all.

The years of Colomba in Perugia, 1488–1501, correspond to the period of Baglioni dominance in the city ([158], pp. 13–33). The Baglioni were Colomba’s loyal supporters ([159], pp. 96, 102–9, 191). So Colomba da Rieti was not simply a “saint of the city... but at the same time a prophetess who put her charisma at the service of political power” ([159], pp. 89–108). The close relationship between the Baglioni and their holy sibyl was obvious to the people of Perugia; equally obvious was her intercession on behalf of her city ([160], pp. 161–75). Modern and medieval, charismatic living saints were Weber’s “religious virtuosi”.

10. Concluding Remarks

In its inflated non-Weberian sense, “charisma” is now so all-encompassing as to be virtually meaningless, except for suggesting a personality cult. Weber’s charisma, on the other hand, retains its academic utility. In this instance, the juxtaposition of analogous phenomena, medieval and modern, occurring in different circumstances, centuries apart, can be reckoned a test case for Weberian charisma. Allowances made for alterations and discrepancies, Weber’s charisma, on the whole, seems to have passed the test.

Hence Weber’s ideas can still offer a potentially fruitful perspective, providing they are not treated slavishly. Historical specificity, which Weber valued, must not be lost. Donald Bloxham’s note of caution is sensible: “[C]omparative history... is concerned equally with similarities and differences” ([161], p. 319). Weber’s sociological perspective lay, for the most part, in similarities. Ignoring differences lends itself to the charge of methodological essentialism, a charge that Weber would have denied ([3], p. 103). He stressed broad patterns, not laws, and pledged his allegiance to

historical empiricism. Naturally, Weber was aware that perceptions and varieties of charisma changed over time and across cultures. There is also the paradox of Weber, a sociologist, putting charismatic individuals at the center of his thought ([3], pp. 396–97). One can speculate on influences—the legacy of Romanticism, the Nietzschean *übermensch*, Stefan George ([3], p. 394). Influence, however, is not the measure of validity.

Finally, there remains the question of the *Führer* and the demagogue. Sidney Hook's "event-making individual," the ostensible protagonist of *The Hero in History*, proves to be an anti-hero, a threat to democratic societies ([2], pp. 229–45). Perhaps a survey of the comparative historical impact of various, typologically selected, charismatic leaders would be useful. Secondly, can there be a posthumous charisma? In *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, Geoffrey Cubitt declares that our understanding of the idea of the heroic hinges upon reputation, acquired either during a lifetime or posthumously ([162], p. 3). Could the medieval cult of saints and its prerequisite reputation for sanctity, *fama sanctitatis*, be an illustration? Increasingly, it became a necessary first step in carrying forward the medieval canonization process ([144], pp. 50, 63, 81, 377, 561). To be sure, a culturally maintained reputation, whether bestowed positively or negatively, potentially outlives death. What insures social memory is commemoration—institutional veneration, whether political or religious [163]. What, then, of the abiding memory of Weberian charismatic leadership? Does charisma have an afterlife?

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