



Beyond Our Lights and Shadows: Charism and Institution in the Church

Judith A. Merkle

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"Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying of hands by the council of elders" (1Tim. 4:14). Members of the church today can comprehend Paul's sentiment to Timothy. While not all ordained, all baptized Christians have experienced the laying on of hands in baptism. They have been touched by that mysterious mix of charism, initiated into the Body of Christ through the Holy Spirit, as well as launched into life with Christ through the institution of the Church with all its concreteness, ambiguity, sinfulness and goodness. Through the lens of Christian theology, along with the sociology of Max Weber in his study of charism and institution in modern society, Judith A. Merkle analyzes the interaction and tautness between the concept of powerful grace through baptism and the institution in the life of the modern church.

Weber asserts that freedom and creativity in modern society only become manifest within social relations. Since these highly valued modern experiences do not exist outside the institutional framework, they exist in tension with the constrictive and creative aspects of the institution. Judith A. Merkle offers the reader perspective on this contemporary experience in the church.

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