



**Doctoral School for Social
Communications**

TÉZISGYŰJTEMÉNY

Turai Gabriella
Medieval Female Mysticism and Weber's
Charismatic Authority
The Case of Angela of Foligno
című Ph.D. értekezéséhez

Témavezető:

Prof. Dr. Dr. Máté-Tóth András
egyetemi tanár

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I. Research background

My interest in medieval female mysticism appeared for the first time when I was working on my major paper in my studies in Italian Philology. In that work I focused on the presence of angels in the works of Hildegard of Bingen, Angela of Foligno, and Brigid of Sweden.

During my studies in the Religious Studies program I developed the concept of mysticism, from an individual one to a social dimensional one thanks to the outstanding contribution of feminist scholars of the 1970s and 80s. In my major paper I already attempted to provide a brief analysis of the mysticism of Hildegard of Bingen, Angela of Foligno, and Brigid of Sweden in the light of Weber's theory of charisma. This was the reason why I decided to continue with Weber's research on the topic. I also felt further research on Weber's theory of charisma is necessary to understand the sociological conceptualization of Max Weber.

The year before I started my doctoral studies in 2014, Angela of Foligno was proclaimed as a saint (in 2013). This gave me new inspiration on the topic of medieval female mysticism. This was also the reason why I have chosen Angela of Foligno and her work as a central point of this analysis. Is Angela a matter of interest in the 21st century? To give an adequate

answer to this question we have to notice the fact Angela is an outstanding Franciscan mystic in the medieval period, secondly she is an emerging figure for contemporary scholarship. She is in the center of research for philologists, theologians, clinical psychologists, historians, and artists, and she is a source of spiritual inspiration and guide for everyday people as well.

Below, I give a short overview of the topic and summary of the whole dissertation.

1.1 Topic marking and abstract

Medieval Female Mysticism and Weber's Charismatic Authority: The Case of Angela of Foligno is the topic of this investigation. The research focuses on three key issues, namely, medieval female mysticism, the role and presence of Angela of Foligno, and charisma – charismatic authority, as Max Weber conceived of it. The research question is the following: is it possible to consider medieval female mysticism – emphasizing the case of Angela of Foligno – as a charismatic authority in a Weberian sense.

To make possible such an investigation of this complex and enormous topic, it has to be narrowed sharply regarding two aspects. On the one hand, regarding mysticism, and on the other hand, Weber's theory of authorities. As far as mysticism as a

concept is concerned, the following authors and their works are considered fundamental in this dissertation: Inge (1938), von Hügel (1908), Butler (1922), Brunner (1924), Peers (1924), Stolz (1936), Zaehner (1957), Pepler (1957), Knowles (1967), Katz (1978), Louth (1981), de Certeau (1982), Bouyer (1986), McGinn (1991), and Sík (1996).

Since the study is written in the domain of social studies aiming to give a sociodimensional model of the interpretation of mysticism, it inevitably requires prior knowledge regarding the relation of mysticism and social dimension (cf. Klaniczay 1994; Máté-Tóth 2007; Loades 2010; McGinn 1996; Katz 2013; Mooney 2007; Ruffing 2001; and Hollywood 2012).

The central figure of the investigation is Angela of Foligno (1248-1309), a medieval Umbrian saint who represents the blossoming female spiritual revival of her time. Medieval female mysticism is a focus of contemporary scholarship and so is the figure of Angela of Foligno. A number of works is taken as the basis of the discussion (Puskely 1990; Schütz 1932; Ijjas 1976; Jörgensen 1938; Menestò 1992; Andreoli 2006; Cervigni 2005; Tar 2005; Thier-Calufetti 1985; Arcangeli 1995; Bassetti-Toscano 2012; Alfonsi 1995; Thorold 1900; Ruh 1990).

The last key issue of the investigation is the Weberian theory of charisma and its impact on societal interaction based on

a strictly text centered analysis of the concept in Weber's entire work. Weber established a theoretical framework to investigate the question of authority based on its legitimacy in modern societies. Based on that very legitimacy he distinguished traditional, legal-rational and charismatic authorities. The present work investigates only the latter, charismatic authorities (Weber 1905; 2002; 1922; 1976; 1951; 1958; 1993; 1994; 2013; Sohm 1912; 1923; 1892; Riesebrodt 1999; Turner 2003; Adair-Toteff 2015; 2016; D'Avray 2010; Mommsen 1974; Schluchter-Solomon 1996).

This dissertation aims to prove through a Weberian analysis of Angela's work, the *Liber*, that Angela is a charismatic leader in the Weberian sense, and her case study can be used as a model for further investigation on the topic. To do so, the work consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the significance and topicality of the project. Chapter 2 introduces the life and context of Angela of Foligno. Chapter 3 outlines Weber's theory of charisma with numerous direct quotations from Weber and their explanations. Chapter 4 addresses the legacy of Weber's theory of charisma, examining the question of authority, therapy and the postmodern condition. Chapter 5 provides the central point of the dissertation in the Weberian analysis of *Liber*. Chapter 6

summarizes the findings of the dissertation and draws the possible conclusions of the project.

Summarizing it, the current dissertation is dedicated to discussing medieval female mysticism as a charismatic authority in a Max Weberian sense, introducing a new social scientific approach in the flourishing field of interpretations. Until fairly recently, scholarship has focused on mysticism especially as an individual experience with the ultimate reality neglecting its social dimension. In this work I argue for a sociodimensional model of the interpretation of mysticism analyzing the figure of Saint Angela of Foligno, the most important Franciscan female mystic.

I think we can arrive at two main benefits through the reflections on the fundamental correlation between medieval mysticism and Weber's understanding of charismatic authority as an alternative to constructive rationality and social power. The first benefit I call diachronic, which means a new approach to medieval mysticism with the sociological tools of Weber's theory. In this way we will be able to consider medieval female mysticism from the prison of modern individualism and open up new spaces for understanding medieval societies as well. However, for a social scientist the second benefit would be more interesting. In the time after the fall of communism and after the

new political and cultural matrix in the whole of Europe, one can observe insecurity concerning modern rationality and democratic power – not only in Central and Eastern Europe. Social sciences could have a chance to contribute to original approaches and visions in searching for new ways of thinking and using power.

II. Methodology

2.1 The method to analyze Weber's charisma and charismatic authority

Not being a scholar trained in sociology, I decided to use an explanatory text analytical method to show and analyze Weber's key terms charisma and charismatic authority. Based on the online version of all Weber's works – provided and accessible through the Library of the University of Vienna – I collected and examined each occurrence of the mentioned terms in Weber's entire works. As a result I received 425 occurrences which helped me to construct a three-dimensional model. This model might seem to be as an already familiar content for those who are experts in the field of sociology, but for me the results of the analysis brought novelty.

Many well-known scholars have already analysed the special term of charisma and charismatic authority in the

Weberian sense, including but not limited to scholars like Wolfgang Mommsen, M. Rainer Lepsius, Talcott Parsons, etc. However, for my own concerns, authors like Stephen P. Turner, Christopher Adair-Toteff, and Martin Riesebrodt played a crucial role, since their analyses encouraged me to introduce my own interpretation of the Weberian theory of charisma.

I examined in Weber's collected works (*Gesamtausgabe von Werke von Max Weber*) the occurrence of the expressions *charisma* and *charismatic authority*. After an in-depth analysis I found specific Weberian keywords connected to charisma. At the base of these striking keywords I distinguished three possible dimensions of interpretation. These dimensions are the following:

- (i) Intensity (high vs. kenotic character)
- (ii) Magical vs. immanent legitimacy
- (iii) Person vs. institution (routinization)

Describing the first dimension, namely, the dimension of 'intensity', I present an excitement based explanation of charisma and charismatic authority. In the spotlight of this dimension there is the overwhelming presence of emotion which cannot be neglected in the analysis of Weber's theory of charisma, albeit this notion has not found a common place among the Weber scholars yet.

In the second dimension called 'magical vs. immanent legitimacy' I attempt to understand and investigate what the source of legitimacy of the Weberian theory of charisma is. The magical legitimacy of the charisma results quite clearly from the fact that charisma originally was an obscure theological term – as the already cited notion by Turner (2003) pointed it out. Weber could not and did not want to deny the fact that charisma was a theological notion, although he also wanted to give a sociological interpretation of the term. This interpretation culminated in the understanding of charisma as a key element and root of immanent legitimacy building.

Finally, in the third dimension called 'person vs. institution' the traditional approach to the Weberian theory of charisma is carried out, dividing it into person oriented and institution oriented interpretations.

2.2 Methods of the analysis of Angela's *Liber*

As a starting point one question needs to be asked. Why is Angela's Book in the center of the present analysis? As far as it has been demonstrated in the literature, Saint Angela of Foligno had only one written work, the book called *Liber*, or, in English translation, the Book. In an overview of the great medieval mystical women authors, Angela's work stands out from among

all the others due to personal and institutional dimensions discussed above. In her work one can observe both the personal and the institutional dimension of charisma in the same place, in the *Liber*. This is the reason why this book became the object of my scholarly interest and made it possible for me to follow a Weberian investigation of charismatic authority.

As a basic method for the analysis of Angela's *Liber* I used explorative content analysis as described in Philip Mayring's¹ methodological work. The main aim is to describe the content of the mentioned text by using systematically collected and analyzed ideas as variables. Furthermore, the text centered analysis aimed to confront the Weberian statements about Angela's *Liber*.

Above all, I analyzed and read all important scientific literature both in the case of Angela of Foligno and Weber's charisma theory.

III. Results

My dissertation – as is clarified in the first chapter on “Significance and topicality of the project” – has aimed to

¹ Mayring, P. (2010). Qualitative inhaltsanalyse. In *Handbuch qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie* (pp. 601-613). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

discuss medieval female mysticism as a charismatic authority in a Max Weberian sense, introducing a new social scientific approach in the flourishing field of interpretations. In this work I have attempted to argue for a sociodimensional model of the interpretation of mysticism pointing out the figure of Angela of Foligno (1248-1309), the greatest Franciscan female mystic.

(1) Regarding the significance of the project, it has been demonstrated that medieval female mysticism is a focus of importance in contemporary scholarship and so is the figure of Angela of Foligno. Another significant issue is the Weberian theory of charisma, which covered the methodological domain of the dissertation. To prove this, I have used various sources during the research, namely, historical, feminist and Weber-related ones, which resulted in a focus shadowed approach. Furthermore, the resulting approach combines the historical one with Weber's theory of charisma, producing a predominantly sociological perspective. Certainly, further research is justified on the topic.

(2) Concerning Weber and his theory of charisma, the most important result to be highlighted is the fact that charismatic authority is an *a posteriori* recognition by the followers. My investigation has been based on a text centered analysis and understanding of the Weberian theory of charisma.

In the first research period, I examined all findings of the term 'charisma' and 'charismatic authority' in Max Weber's life work. I used in the process the German original text and received 425 hits. In the second part of the research period, I analyzed every individual occurrence of the terms 'charisma' and 'charismatic authority', which allowed me to construct a three-dimensional model. These dimensions are the following: (i) intensity (high vs. kenotic character); (ii) magical vs. immanent legitimacy; (iii) person vs. institution (routinization). Recent literature on the theory of charisma (including Weber's biography) is also investigated and constitutes a part of this chapter.

(3) Regarding the analysis of the *Liber*, it has been demonstrated that Angela was a charismatic leader in the Weberian sense. It was also possible to find the person and institution related statements by Weber in Angela's text. The starting hypothesis was verified, medieval female mysticism can be understood as charismatic authority in Weberian sense. Furthermore, Angela's influence has been properly understood by means of Weber's theory of charisma.

Three further outcomes (4-6) follow from the investigation of the entire dissertation.

(4) The first outcome regards Angela: her meaning and effect are more obtainable thanks to the analysis. The second outcome concerns Weber's theory of charisma. Thanks to the analysis of Angela's work, the emotion based dimension, more precisely, the understanding of the magical-erotic dimension of Weberian theory of charisma has increased, from a hidden aspect to a visible one. For further research on Weber, this aspect can be more emphasized and taken into account.

Finally, the last outcome concerns the consistency and dynamics of modern power making in societies.

(5) Through my thesis, the possibility may be presented for the foundation of a new interpretation of power in contemporary societies where the magical-erotic dimension seems to be predominant. How can it be interpreted and who should care? There is a striking phenomenon that we can face in everyday societal life. The world cannot be interpreted anymore exclusively along theories of cold rationality. This aspect has been already reflected in the chapter about Weber's charisma where I stated: the world does not suffer disenchantment as Weber argued at the beginning of his career in *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (Weber, 1905). However, with the refreshing presence of charisma the world is refilled with enchantment again and again.

(6) Obviously, to go into more detail on this topic would be much beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I would like to use one example to cast light on the importance of this finding. This new emotion based approach to understand global geopolitical changes and tendencies is already visible in the work of Daniele Moïsi *The geopolitics of emotion: How cultures of fear, humiliation, and hope are reshaping the world*, mapping the world according to three key emotions: fear, humiliation and hope. To conclude both the dissertation and the outcomes, Moïsi draws in this essay our future task: "the mapping of emotions will become as legitimate and compulsory an exercise as the mapping of geographical realities" (Moïsi 2010:3).

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