Dissertation Title: A Case Study of Charismatic Leadership at The Hope of Bangkok Church Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The study of a case of charismatic leadership at the Hope of Bangkok Church, Thailand in the light and scope of Max Weber’s theory of charismatic authority. The study concluded that Hope of Bangkok Church was established through charisma leadership. However, due to internal economic and political crisis charisma failed to help the church survive.

The Hope of Bangkok Church, founded in 1981 under the leadership of Dr. Kriengsak Chareonwongsak, was a Christian church registered according to Thai Law as a non-political, voluntary, non-profit organization known as the “Hope of Thai People Foundation”. The church disintegrated in 2008 and split up into factions with continuous segregation into other churches. The research indicated that Kriengsak and his leadership team were truly charismatic, as their nature and features comply with Weber’s and other’s experts description of charismatic authority. Moreover, the fact that upon Kriengsak emergence the number of Protestant believers, which were historically low in Thailand, increased dramatically within the country and then overseas. Charismatic leaders are often dissatisfied with the status quo, and we see this in the case of Kriengsak in relation to the church. His ability to administer
alternate ways of functioning is a trait of charismatic authority and consistent with the characteristics stipulated by Weber and other authorities on the subject. These characteristics include both positive and negative aspects. As a positive, his personal commitment resulted in great success as defined by the number of dedicated and obedient followers. However, the negative characteristics of the charismatic nature often manifest, and in Kriengsak’s case it was self-promotion over the institutional mission and the instability cause by changing goals.

Secondly, the research reflects the hypotheses for the disintegration of the church and analyzes these hypotheses in light of Weber’s thought (and that of other scholars who have contributed to the field of organizational behavior and leadership) with references to popular cases of charismatic leaders or institutions. The researcher considered five hypotheses as reasons for the disintegration and by analysis found that all of these hypotheses have contributed in different degrees to the disintegration of the church. These five hypotheses are: (1) lack of accountability in charismatic leadership, including the succeeding administration, (2) the change in creed and mission of the church, (3) psychological makeup and behavior of followers, (4) self-promotional goals of the leader and his personal responsibility, and (5) failure of proper routinization.

The analysis of the above hypothesis showed that the researcher is justified in the position that Hope of Bangkok Church was established based on charisma. However, due to internal economic and political crisis, charisma ultimately failed to help the church survive. The research showed that Hope of Bangkok church was established based on the charisma of its founding leader, and on the charismatic authority in accordance with Weber’s, and other scholars, understanding of the phenomena. The hypothesis also shows a fundamental connection to two main
factors, namely political and economics. And, as such how the leader’s use (or misuse) of the church for political ends created factions on matters related to financial transparency, management, aspect of creed, essential objectives, and the message and nature of the church.