Foreword

The words *leader* and *leadership* carry quite a bit of historical baggage with them. In America, they not only describe people and activities, but they are often used to give a compliment: 'She is a leader!' or 'Now that's leadership!' This is not the case in Italy or Germany, where two twentieth century leaders behaved so badly, that the very words for leader, *duce* and *Führer*, were exiled from both languages. The idea of a leader is a social and historical construction and as such, it is also laden with moral values.

This book unpacks the historical baggage of leadership and in doing so, helps us better understand how we think and feel about leaders today. J. Thomas Wren traces the evolution of the idea of leadership in Western culture and in particular in America. The history of the idea of leadership is intimately tied up with the history of democracy. As Wren argues, both democracy and leadership require people to believe in certain fictions. According to Wren, the main fictions that people need to believe in are: leaders are wise and virtuous, the people are sovereign, and the fiction of leadership itself. He notes that the term *leadership* first shows up in Webster's dictionary in the 1818. The emergence of the concept marked an important change. It represented the decline of deference toward elites and a new model of social relations. The invention of the word leadership signaled a new way of thinking about who should lead.

Wren's account of the invention of leadership is far more than just an interesting story. His analysis has profound implications for the world that we live in today. It shows us why democracy is not simply a matter of setting up the right institutions, voting and picking out the right leaders. It requires a number of internalized beliefs about who we are as human beings, how we think about ourselves in relation to society, the values that we hold, and the way that we think about freedom equality and justice. Such ideas evolve and become embedded in cultures over time. They take on different shapes, depending on the history of a culture. People come to believe these fictions only when they correspond or make sense in the world in which they live. Since these fictions are matters of belief, not matters of knowledge, people internalize them and they become implicit in ideas about leaders and leadership. Wren's history isolates the variables that shape what people need to believe to have a democracy and to select competent and moral leaders, and to be good citizens. These variables help us better understand the difficulties of developing democracies in the Middle East, the chronic problems with leadership in many African nations, and the malaise of leadership and democracy in the U.S. and some other Western nations.

I am delighted to have this book in the New Horizons of Leadership series. It is a book that needed to be written. Without a comprehensive understanding of where our ideas about leadership come from, any analysis of leadership will always seem incomplete.

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