

The Relationship between the Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism

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Abstract: Based on Max Weber's book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,¹ the author of this article evaluates the relationship between the ethic of some of the protestant sects, that came out of the main protestant branches of the Christian Church. There will be analyzed to what extent, the assertion of Weber, that man's determination to make a special effort in his work has an ethical motivation, can be observed also for the protestant sects. The paper tries to show that the religious doctrine of sovereign election motivated Baptist sects, Quakers, and Methodists to a continuous effort to perform good deeds, which besides the assurance of salvation, had positive effects for the development of the Capitalist society. In the new protestant denominations, it is argued that through the personal effort to fulfill the law, the believer receives the witness of the Spirit in support for the divine election – emotionally communicated.

Keywords: Protestant Ethic, the Spirit of Capitalism, Puritans, Quakers, Pietists, Methodists

Introduction

In this article we will try to show, based on Max Weber's thesis, from his book: „The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism,”² that there is a direct relationship between the Protestant ethics, practiced in some new Protestant Sects and the birth of Capitalism. It will be analyzed to what extent Weber's assertion is true, that man's determination to make an extra effort has an ethical motivation behind it.

We will show that the religious doctrine of the sovereign election motivated both Calvinists, but also the newly emerged denominations: Puritans, Baptists, Quakers, Pietists and Methodists, in an ongoing effort to do good deeds, to give them the security of divine choice, and which, had positive effects for the development of the capitalist society.

The new Protestant denominations that emerged, went beyond the traditional perspective of the role of divine law. The law was not important just because it causes dissatisfaction with the believer's diminished spiritual state, causing him to seek a more favorable situation, such as in Lutheranism, or as a means to help the believer receive the certainty of divine choice, as in Calvinism. In the new denominations that emerged, through the personal effort to fulfill the law, the believer receives the testimony of the Spirit regarding the divine choice - communicated emotionally.

The Baptist sects and the role of conscience toward revelation

Weber argues that a special role in the development of capitalism, had the sects derived from puritanism. The Puritans emphasized those parts of the Old Testament that regarded the observance of the Law as a sign of behavior that honors God. Their conception was that after the coming of Christ, only certain portions of the Old Testament law have lost their validity, such as: aspects related to ceremonial law, as well as commandments limited by the historical context, which applied only to Jews. Otherwise the Law remained generally valid as an expression of the natural law.³

According to Weber, a second independent source of capitalism, specific to ascetic Protestantism, apart from Calvinism is the so-called Baptist sects, derived from Puritanism, which, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, conformed to their religious conception to the Calvinist theology, with the specific nuances of these denominations. The selection of these groups was made by Weber analyzing the evolution of the first capitalist countries. He includes Baptists, Mennonites and especially Quakers, in this category. He does not refer in particular to the Baptist movement that has developed in America since the seventeenth century, but to the new Protestant denominations that have changed the practice of child baptism specific to traditional and Protestant historical churches. Anabaptists and Baptists practice adult baptism, while Quakers renounce baptism in water,

¹Weber, Max, trans., Talcott Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1958.

²Max Weber, trad. Lemnij Ihor, *Etica protestantă și spiritul capitalismului*, București: Humanitas, 2003.

³Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 165.

emphasizing baptism with the Holy Spirit.⁴ These religious groups base their ethics on a different pillar than that of traditional Calvinism.⁵

For example, the Baptist doctrine of salvation attached great importance to the role of consciousness vis-à-vis God's revelation to the individual. In the Baptist conception, the conscience is demonstrated by the believer's behavior towards worldly responsibilities. This was of utmost importance for the development of the spirit of capitalism, which had as its fundamental ethical principle: "honesty is the best policy".⁶

Quakers and „the inner light”

Next we will remind the Quakers who appeared in the seventeenth century, separating themselves from the Church of England. Unlike classical Puritans, they emphasized a personal enlightenment of the believer by Christ.

Quakerism arises out of a radical interpretation of Christianity that understands Christ as being a living reality in personal experience, not only in the Bible and Church tradition... Furthermore, Friends believe that not only are we able to know God's will, but that through God's grace we are empowered to do it.⁷

We notice that from the perspective of the Quakers, as in classical Calvinism, grace produces two things: it enlightens the believer in knowing the will of God, but empowers also the believer to fulfill the divine will.

The difference lies in the way the believer receives the testimony of grace; through an emotional experience. This is evidenced by the way public worship services were conducted in the Quaker assembly. Their worship was based on waiting in silence until the Inner Light led the members of the congregation to share their religious concerns with the brothers.⁸

Quakers have been interested in social reforms rather than industrial reforms.

For a religious group more interested in championing social reform than industry, the Quakers have established an impressive roll call of household business names. Barclays and Lloyds banks, Clarks shoes, Bryant & May matches and the biscuit firms Huntley & Palmers and Carrs are just a few of the companies founded by members of the pacifist group.⁹

They have had a special role in the business world, have shown impressive philanthropic acts, fighting for the abolition of slavery, for prison reforms, initiating important projects in the field of social justice. According to some researchers, "Quakers, may be looked at as the fullest expression of the Reformation"¹⁰ They were called "natural capitalists" because they founded banks and financial institutions.

The founder of the Quakers is George Fox, who, in the context of dissatisfaction with the teaching of the Anglican Church, had a new revelation from Jesus Christ. Following this revelation, Fox decided to travel through England, Holland and Barbados to preach the discovery he had received, converting people to his teaching.

In 1650 he was brought before the court represented by Gervase Bennet and Nathaniel Barton, being

⁴Vezi „Max Weber: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,” *Sociology* 318, November 13 – 15, 2002 „Weber appears to be discussing primarily the Anabaptists (rebaptise) and Quakers, and not so much the English groups that formed the Baptist churches that we presently have in North America.” Vezi <http://uregina.ca/~gingrich/318n1302.htm>. Accessed on 09.20.2019.

⁵Weber entitles this section: „The Baptist Sects”. See Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 140.

⁶(„honesty is the best policy”), Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 151.

⁷<http://www.quakermaps.com/info>. Accessed on 11.30.2019 Vezi și <http://quaker.org/legacy/charlestonwv/meeting-the-spirit.html>. Accessed on 09.20.2019.

⁸„Their worship consisted of waiting in silence until the Inner Light led members to share their religious concerns with the brethren.” <http://www.history.com/topics/quakers>. See also Hans Weening, „Meeting the Spirit - An Introduction to Quaker Beliefs and Practices,” in 1995, revised July 1997, from <http://quaker.org/legacy/charlestonwv/meeting-the-spirit.html>. Accessed on 09.20.2019.

⁹http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/8467833.stm

¹⁰<http://www.history.com/topics/quakers>. Accessed on 11.30.2019.

accused of religious blasphemy. Bennet is said to have been the first to call Fox's group "Quakeri" ("shakers"), in the sense that they tremble at the word of God. Fox is said to have referred to the verse in Isaiah 66:2 or Ezra 9: 4.¹¹

George Fox recounts many of his experiences of the revelation received and communicated to others in his autobiography.

As we travelled we came near a very great hill, called Pendle Hill, and I was moved of the Lord to go up to the top of it; which I did with difficulty, it was so very steep and high. When I was come to the top, I saw the sea bordering upon Lancashire. From the top of this hill the Lord let me see in what places he had a great people to be gathered... At night we came to an inn, and declared truth to the man of the house, and wrote a paper to the priests and professors, declaring the day of the Lord, and *that Christ was come to teach people Himself, by His power and Spirit in their hearts*, and to bring people off from all the world's ways and teachers, to His own free teaching, who had bought them, and was the Saviour of all them that believed in Him. The man of the house spread the paper abroad, and was mightily affected with the truth. Here the Lord opened unto me, and let me see a great people in white raiment by a river side, coming to the Lord; and the place that I saw them in was about Wensleydale and Sedbergh... Then I went to Baycliff, where Leonard Fell was convinced, and became a minister of the everlasting gospel. Several others were convinced there, and came into obedience to the truth... I directed them to the Divine Light of Christ, and His Spirit in their hearts, which would let them see all the evil thoughts, words, and actions that they had thought, spoken, and acted; by which Light they might see their sin, and also their Saviour Christ Jesus to save them from their sins.¹²

Weber notes that as far as the revelation is concerned, the Quakers have emphasized the inner testimony of the Spirit as well as the role of consciousness in the relationship with God. They were not strictly limited to the traditional Protestant conception of Scripture as the sole authority in the field of faith. They at the same time eliminated the doctrine of salvation through the church, promoted until then. Thus, Baptist denominations, along with supporters of strict Calvinist theology, have contributed to the elimination of the sacraments as a means to salvation. From the Quaker point of view, *only the inner light that continually feeds the revelation helps the believer to understand even the revelation of God in Scripture*.

Quakers have gone so far as to think that people who have never understood the revelation have the opportunity to see it. Without this divine inner light, the natural man cannot rationally understand things; which is stricter than Calvinism. On the other hand, this power of the new birth, which the believer expects from the Spirit, gives him full power against sin.¹³

The Quakers as followers of the Puritans emphasized the emotional dimension of divine election. They went a step further, coming out of the midst of the Puritans, who had adopted the Calvinist doctrine, adding the inner testimony of the Spirit communicated emotionally, beyond the rational confirmation of the divine election.

Weber observed that in all the sources of that time, without exception, the Puritan sectarians: Baptists, Quakers, Mennonites and others, belong to a special class he calls "small capitalists", which are presented in opposition to the great aristocratic traders and the adventurers in the financial field ("the great merchant aristocracy and the financial adventurers").¹⁴

As for the Mennonites, Frederic William tolerated them in Prussia, because they were irreplaceable in the industry, even though they refused to meet the military traineeship.¹⁵

Methodism and the effort for sanctification

Methodism appeared in the eighteenth century. Regarding the origins, there is unanimity that the

¹¹Joseph Twadell Shipley, *The Origins of English Words: A Discursive Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1984, p. 135. See also http://www.archive.org/stream/quakergreatbrit00holdrich/quakergreatbrit00holdrich_djvu.txt. Accessed on 11.30.2019.

¹²George Fox, *An Autobiography*, CHAPTER VI. A New Era Begins 1651-1652., Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Rufus M. Jones, M.A., Litt. D. Professor of Philosophy in Haverford College from <http://www.streacorssoc.org/gfox/ch06.html> Historical texts > Journal of George Fox > Chapter Six

¹³Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 147.

¹⁴Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 279.

¹⁵Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 44.

Methodism has as parents the two brothers John Wesley and Charles Wesley.¹⁶ The movement developed on the basis of the teachings of John Wesley, who was supported by his brother Charles Wesley and George Whitefield.

John Wesley had a first so-called conversion after reading important devotional books such as: *Imitatio Christi*, by Thomas a Kempis, and Jeremy Taylor's books, *Rules and Exercise of Holy Living* (1650), and *Holy Dying* (1651). After reading these books, he decided to dedicate his life to Christ. John and his brother Charles understood that they cannot be saved without living a life of holiness. In 1727, together with his brother Charles, with George Whitefield and other Oxford colleagues, they organized a Bible study, prayer and fellowship group known as the "Holy Club" at the University of Oxford. They used to partake of the Lord's Supper weekly, fasted regularly, and sought to live a modest life, not in luxury and fun. They used to visit the sick and the prisoners.

They were called Methodists, because they were pursuing, in an organized way, a life of holiness.¹⁷ John had a so-called *second experience of conversion*, when on his journey to America he met a group of Moravians.¹⁸ John Wesley's personal experience has become a staple for Methodist followers. Believers were seeking a second experience of sanctification. Methodism emphasizes the emotional experience of the life of faith. Feelings played an important role in the relationship with God. Evidence that the emotional dimension of spiritual life has been emphasized is also given by John Wesley's concern to encourage Methodist preachers, and believers, in their ministry and in their efforts for sanctification.¹⁹

Methodism after Wesley

Methodism began as a spiritual awakening movement within the Anglican Church. But after Wesley's death, the movement became a Separate Church. The members of this denomination showed a strong missionary spirit, so that the movement spread in both England and the United States. It is estimated that there are currently over 80 million members worldwide, spread out in 138 countries.²⁰

Wesley has distinguished himself from the Calvinist doctrine of election, claiming that salvation is offered to all people. He rejected the idea that salvation is only offered to a select group of people. Not all Methodists have embraced this teaching. Whitefield and his followers preserved the Calvinist theology of divine predestination. But the movement of the Methodists who supported the predestination broke down with Whitefield's death, due to the lack of organization.²¹

Weber noted that although the doctrine of sanctification proposed by Wesley, was announced as a departure from the traditional Calvinist doctrine, in reality we are witnessing a development of it. In the conception of Wesley, the born again, through the divine grace that works in him, can obtain even in this life, sanctification, the consciousness of perfection, in the sense of deliverance from sin.²² Wesley taught his Methodist preachers that moral ability of man is a gift from God.²³ Methodism asserts the importance of divine law in the process of sanctification, contained in both the Old and New Testaments. In the twenty-five articles of the Christian faith, "The Twenty Five Articles of Faith," adopted later by several Methodist groups: AME, AME Zion, CME, and UM Churches, it is claimed that the Bible is the absolute authority on faith. In the confession of faith CM 5 speaks of the unity between the Old and New Testaments, as a basis for Christian teaching.²⁴

Weber notes that Methodists differ from Herrnhuters' doctrine of living without sin, which Zinzendorf condemned.²⁵ Wesley considers the emotional element of the Herrnhutian religion to be mysticism. He considered also that Luther's interpretation of the Law is blasphemous.²⁶

The only case in which Wesley condemned the good deeds, was when it is used only to support the

¹⁶ Kenneth Cracknell, Susan J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 6.

¹⁷ Kenneth Cracknell, Susan J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 9.

¹⁸ Kenneth Cracknell, Susan J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, p. 12.

¹⁹ Nathan O. Hatch, John H. Wigger, *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, Kingswood Books, 2001, p. 121.

²⁰ „The World Methodist Council” from

<https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/about/member-churches/>. Accessed on 11.23.2019.

²¹ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 251, note 159.

²² Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 140.

²³ Emory Stevens Bucke, *The History of American Methodism*, Volume 2, Abingdon Press, 1964, p. 608

²⁴ Vezi Articolele 5 și 6 ale UM Confession 4, în cartea lui Ted Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999, (Rev.ed. 2011).

²⁵ Enoch Pond, *Memoir of Count Zinzendorf: Comprising a Succinct History of the Church of United Brethren*, Boston: Massachusetts Sabath School Society, 1839, p. 90

²⁶ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 251.

doctrine revive the old puritan doctrine, that deeds do not represent the cause, but only the means through which somebody can recognize the state of grace in which he is. This is possible only if they are done for the glory of God. Proper behavior is not enough. It is necessary to have feelings that grace brought in the heart of the believer.²⁷

Methodism and good deeds

Methodism is looking for a double testimony in demonstrating the believer's divine election, namely: the inner feeling experienced and the concern for the fulfillment of the divine law. Weber observes that Wesley himself speaks of the good deeds as a proof of the presence of grace in the life of a believer. In the Declaration of August 9, 1771, he says that somebody who does not perform good deeds, is not an authentic Christian. In support of this assertion he brings the verse from 1 John 3: 9 "Whoever is born of God does not sin, for his seed abides in him; and we cannot keep it, it is possible to be born of God." The behavior of someone is seen as an obvious sign of the new birth.²⁸

Thus, the emotion-based religion entered into an alliance with ascetic ethics, which was formulated by Puritan rationalism. Unlike Calvinism, which held that everything that is emotional is illusory, the assurance of salvation in Methodism is proven by the pure feeling of absolute certainty of forgiveness, derived from the testimony of the spirit. The man born again can attain sanctification through the divine grace that works in him. The believer gains the awareness of his own perfection due to his inner freedom not to sin.²⁹

From Weber's point of view, Methodism combines ascetic ethics with the doctrine of sanctification - emotionally experienced, and which is only possible through a continuous effort toward perfection, as measured by the good deeds dictated by divine law. This mentality will lead to a sustained effort to do good deeds - specific to the capitalist spirit, and which will influence the progress of society.

Conclusion

In this article we have tried to show that we can accept the thesis supported by Max Weber, regarding the existence of a direct relationship between the Protestant ethics, including the new Protestant denominations, and the spirit of capitalism.

In Weber's opinion, a second independent source of Capitalism, specific to ascetic Protestantism, apart from Calvinism, is represented by the so-called Baptist sects, derived from Puritanism. He includes Baptists, Mennonites and especially Quakers in this category. The selection of these groups was made by Weber following the way in which the first capitalist countries evolved. These religious groups base their ethics on a different pillar from that of traditional Calvinism.

The new denominations that emerged, understood that following the personal effort to fulfill the law, the believer receives the testimony of the Spirit regarding the divine election - communicated emotionally.

Because the Anglican Church separated from the Catholic Church, mainly for political reasons, many of its members fought for internal reform within the community. The Puritans were seeking the transformation of society by divine grace, trying to make God's will their own will. The believer will achieve this by living an exemplary life, which will cause others to follow his example. They placed increasing emphasis on the practical dimension of faith, which demonstrates the relationship with divinity.

I have noticed that the baptist doctrine of salvation placed great importance on the role of the conscience of the believer vis-à-vis the revelation of God. And the conscience is demonstrated by the Christian's attitude towards worldly responsibilities. This mentality has contributed to the development of the capitalist spirit, which has the essential ethical principle: "honesty is the best policy".

The Quakers have emphasized the inner testimony of the Spirit as well as the role of consciousness in the relationship with God. From their perspective, grace operates by enlightening the believer in knowing the will of God, and empowering him to fulfill the divine will. The believer receives the testimony of grace through an emotional experience. This is evidenced by the way public worship services were conducted, where those present were waiting in silence until the Inner Light led the members of the congregation to share their religious concerns with the brethren.

The Quakers have played a special role in the business world, fighting for the abolition of slavery, for prison reforms, initiating important projects in the field of social justice. They were called "natural capitalists" because they founded banks and financial institutions.

Pietism appeared in the 17th Century, in Germany, as a reaction against the arid Lutheranism of that time. The Pietist movement emphasized personal faith and the practical experience of the faith, in contrast to the

²⁷Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 141.

²⁸Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 141.

²⁹Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 140.

emphasis placed by the Lutheran Church at that time, on theoretical and doctrinal aspects.

Pietism was indirectly influenced by Calvinist doctrine - through the puritan movement, who claimed that the personal effort to obey the divine law strengthens the assurance of divine election. Philipp Jakob Spener started to be dissatisfied with the piety of the Lutheran Church. He founded the so-called *Collegia Pietatis* (the Pious Assembly), where the Christians gathered for devotional reading of Scripture and for fellowship. These practices became the main features of the Pietist movement.

August Hermann Francke then took over the leadership of the movement, to have a special role in organizing the University of Halle, which would become a prosperous institutional center in Pietism. Here were formed Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, who organized the colonial American Lutheranism, Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravian Church, among the Moravian established on his property in Saxony. The great religious awakenings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in America was influenced by Pietism. This aspect, says Shantz is a forgotten key to American Christianity.

Max Weber noted that German Pietism, promoted by Spener, Franke, and Zinzendorf having common Lutheran roots, it distances us from the doctrine of predestination. But the movement retains that rationality deduced from the doctrine of divine election. With Pietism, the emotion-based religion has made a specific alliance with ascetic ethics marked by Puritan rationalism. Unlike Calvinism which argues that any emotion is illusory, in the sense that the only certainty of forgiveness is that of testimony to the Spirit. Pietism claims that emotional testimony is important. It is well-known the characteristic combination of the Pietists, between an accentuated piety and the business spirit.

Methodism appeared in the eighteenth century, organized by brothers John and Charles Wesley. John Wesley had a so-called *first conversion* after reading some important devotional books, and later had a so-called *second conversion* experience. John Wesley's personal experience has become a pattern for Methodist followers. Believers were seeking a *second experience of sanctification*. We understood that Methodism emphasizes the emotional experience of the life of faith.

Wesley distanced himself from the Calvinist doctrine of election, claiming that salvation is offered to all people, not just to a select group. But Weber noted that although Wesley's doctrine of sanctification seemed a departure from traditional Calvinist doctrine, we are actually witnessing its development. The born again believer, through divine grace, can reach, even in this life, sanctification and the awareness of perfection.

Methodism asserts the presence of a double testimony that the believer pursues, in understanding the divine election: the inner feeling experienced and the concern for the fulfillment of the divine law. The believer's behavior is seen as a clear sign of being born again.

According to Weber, Methodism combines ascetic calvinistic ethics with the doctrine of sanctification - emotionally experienced. This could be attained through a continuous effort toward the perfection, measured by the good deeds dictated by divine law. The sustained effort to do good works has contributed to the development of the capitalist spirit.

Weber observed that in all the sources of that time, without exception, the Puritan sectarians: Baptists, Quakers, Mennonites, Methodists and others, were included in a special class he called: "the little capitalists".

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