

## **The Decalogue and the Spirit of Capitalism, from Max Weber's Perspective**

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**Abstract:** Max Weber argues in his book entitled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that man's disposition from the capitalist society, to make a special effort in his work, has an ethical motivation. He argues that at the basis for the emergence of capitalism, lays the so-called religious doctrine of Divine sovereign election, supported by Luther, Calvin and some other followers of the Reformation. In this paper the author tries to demonstrate that the argument of Weber can be maintained, even if, besides the ethical dimension, there can be other factors who have contributed to the emergence and development of capitalism. The author examines how, the Decalogue – as a summary of the divine law, which is considered a fundamental element of the Protestant ethic, was interpreted by Reformers. It will be shown, how the interpretation of the Decalogue by Protestants could lead to what Weber calls "the spirit of capitalism". There are several arguments in support of this thesis. The Divine law stirs up discontent about the actual state of the believer (Luther), motivating him to look forward for a better position. Then the divine law offers assurance - communicated rationally (Calvinism), through the hard work toward sanctification.

**Keywords:** Protestant Ethic, the Decalogue, the Spirit of Capitalism, Lutheranism, Calvinism, Protestantism

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### **I. Introduction**

In this paper, we will consider Max Weber's hypothesis, formulated in his book: *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*,<sup>1</sup> namely, that the basis of the emergence of capitalism was the Protestant religious doctrine of the divine sovereign election. We will seek to show that Weber's thesis can be maintained, even if besides the protestant ethics, resumed by the Decalogue, there were also some other factors which contributed to the emergence and developments of capitalism.

We will observe that the Reformers interpreted the Decalogue – as a summary of the divine law, which was considered an essential part of Protestant ethics. We will try to show in what manner the interpretation of the Decalogue in the Protestant theology could lead to what Weber called "the spirit of capitalism". Several arguments are presented in support of this thesis. We will evaluate Luther's perspective, which says that the giving of the Divine Law had the purpose of creating dissatisfaction to the believer. This factual status, motivated him to do something in order to become more comfortable in the future. There will be analyzed the main Lutheran confessions of faith, representing Luther's theology. We will consider *The Small Catechism*, *The Large Catechism* and *The Augsburg Confession of Faith*, seeking to discover the relationship between Protestant ethics and the emergence of capitalism.

We will then look at Calvin's perspective of keeping the Law in order to have the assurance of the divine election, through a sustained effort for sanctification. We will consider the interpretation of the Decalogue in his main work: *Institutions of the Christian Religion*. We will concentrate on two Calvinistic confessions of faith, namely: *The Heidelberg Catechism*, which speaks about the role of good deeds, in the articles 90 and 91, and *The Westminster Confession of faith*, where we read that the teaching of Scripture is absolutely necessary for the believer.

In the next lines we will see the role the Decalogue has in the life of a believer, based on the way the divine laws are interpreted by Luther and by Calvin.

### **II. The Divine Law arouses dissatisfaction with the factual status of the believer**

In this section we will deal with the perception of Martin Luther, the initiator of the Reformation, about the Decalogue. We will focus on the main confessions of faith that present the theological basis of Luther and his followers. We will analyze the importance he gave to the Decalogue in the *Small Catechism*, the *Great Catechism* and in the *Augsburg Confession of Faith*. We will try to discover the significance of the Decalogue in Lutheran doctrine, seeking to find the relationship between Protestant ethics and the emergence of capitalism.

#### **A. Luther**

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

We will approach this section concentrating on the two small confessions of faith: *The Small Catechism*, *The Large Catechism*. Then we will evaluate the evolution of the Lutheran Church after Luther, expressed by *The Augsburg Confession of Faith*, which explores the commandments from the Decalogue.

### 1. The Small Catechism

Luther structures the Small Catechism into four main sections: Section 1: The Ten Commandments (Decalogue), Creed, *The Lord's Prayer*, The Mystery of the Holy Baptism, Confession, Altar Mystery, Section 2: Everyday Prayer, Section 3: List of the Responsibilities of the Believer, and Section 4: Christian's Questions and Answers.<sup>2</sup>

As can be seen, the first Protestant confession of faith begins with the Ten Commandments. From the perspective of some theologians, Luther places the Decalogue at the beginning of the Small Catechism, because in its theology, the Law is meant to convince the reader of sin. Theodosius Harnak asserted that the way in which catechism is structured, reveals Luther's intention to convince man of the guilt of his sin. Then follows the "Creed" which shows where salvation is expected, and the Lord's Prayer is the fruit of the new Spirit.<sup>3</sup> From Harnak's perspective the placement of the Decalogue at the beginning, was meant to make the man aware of his guilt, and then to desire the salvation he discovers. in the Creed.

But according to other commentators, placing the Decalogue at the beginning has a pedagogical purpose. For example, Henning Graf Reventlow argues that given the urgency of the situation "in which the message did not reach de intended receivers, forced Luther to inculcate de Decalogue as the ethical basis for dogmatic belief"<sup>4</sup> This view is supported by the fact that Luther introduces this section with the following phrase: "The way the head of the family should explain as simple as possible, the Ten Commandments in his home."<sup>5</sup> Then he continues to present each commandment, with a brief explanation. The expression "his house" could refer to the families of the Lutheran believers, but also to the landowners, who had responsibilities towards those who worked on their estate.

At that time, human society was involved in the land processing, whether it was the land owners or those who worked on the owners' estates. All together they formed an extended family, and the owner of the enlarged house is given the responsibility of dealing with the spiritual problem of those he led. In contrast to the Middle Ages, where only the clergy were responsible for religious instruction, we are witnessing a dramatic change in Protestant theology, which involves lay people in the religious education of the community.<sup>6</sup>

The first pillar on which Luther's ethics is based is the Decalogue. We note that Luther follows the numbering of the Decalogue's orders supported by the Catholic Church,<sup>7</sup> in the sense that he omits what the Eastern Church, and later the Reformation, usually labels as the "second commandment" recorded in Exo 20: 4-6: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Luther, as in Catholicism, divides the Tenth Commandment into two commandments, namely: 9) Do not covet your neighbor's house! 10) Do not covet your neighbor's wife! (Exodus 20:17). But Luther uses the

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2 „Section 1 The Ten Commandments, The Creed, The Lord's Prayer, The Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession, The Sacrament of the Altar, Section 2: Daily Prayers Section 3: Table of Duties, Section 4: Christian Questions with Their Answers”.

See „*The Small Catechism of Luther*, din [http://www.st-ansgars-montreal.ca/WhatIs/Small\\_Catechism.pdf](http://www.st-ansgars-montreal.ca/WhatIs/Small_Catechism.pdf)". Accessed 11.14. 2019.

3 See Henning Graf Reventlow „The Ten Commandments in Luther's Catechisms”, din Henning Graf Reventlow, Yair Hoffman, eds., *The Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, New York, London: T&T Clark, 2011, p. 138.

4 Vezi Henning Graf Reventlow „The Ten Commandments in Luther's Catechisms”, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

5 See the Small Catechism of Luther, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

6 See Henning Graf Reventlow „The Ten Commandments in Luther's Catechisms”, din Henning Graf Reventlow, Yair Hoffman, eds., *The Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, New York, London: T&T Clark, 2011, p. 139.

7 „The Catholic Church follows the tradition of numbering established by St. Augustine — and has been since long before anybody numbered the verses. The Lutheran churches follow the same tradition. The Reformed, I suspect just to be contrary and anti-Catholic, were the ones who “changed” the Ten Commandments, adopting the numbering established by Eastern Christianity.” See <http://lonelypilgrim.com/2013/10/09/st-augustine-on-how-to-divide-the-ten-commandments-did-catholics-change-the-ten-commandments/> Accessed 11.14. 2019.

verses from Exodus 20:4-6 in catechism to warn the believer about the importance of keeping the commandments of Decalogue in general. He highlights the blessings and curses of obeying or disobeying these commandments.<sup>8</sup>

Max Weber observes that Luther emphasizes education in biblical ethics, instruction in the Word of God, exemplifying this idea with the statement found in *the Small Catechism*, where he says that the brothers of faith are those who "continue to be thoroughly changed in the sanctity of the Spirit. .. where the Word of God is taught in purity and where the members live in holiness as children of God following its precepts"<sup>9</sup> Let us not forget that the first pillar of the ethics of small catechism is the Decalogue.

Noteworthy is that the editors of Luther's work, decided to call one of the recently edited volumes: "*Only the Decalogue is eternal*,"<sup>10</sup> intending to emphasize his view of the eternal validity of the divine moral law - summarized in the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament. Luther argues that God's law is necessary to make sin known. Without the knowledge of sin through the Law, Christ, presented by the gospel contained in the New Testament, makes no sense.<sup>11</sup>

The context in which Luther speaks on this subject has to do with his attempt to combat Johann Agricola, who in one of his sermons on October 6, 1537, had stated that God's wrath comes through the Gospel. Man has the responsibility to know the Law in order to be aware of the seriousness of God's sin and anger ("the greatness of their sin, of God's wrath, etc.").<sup>12</sup>

## 2. The Large Catechism

The Large Catechism was published in April 1529.<sup>13</sup> It was written by Luther for the spiritual leaders in the church. In this confession, also, Luther includes: The *Ten Commandments*, along with the main articles of the Lutheran Faith, The Lord's Prayer, information about Baptism and the Sacraments. He offers the following advice to parents regarding this section of the catechism, which again emphasizes the importance of the Decalogue in its theology. The Decalogue, Articles of Faith and Our Father's Prayer "are the most important parts that one should learn, first to repeat them word for word, our children to recite them daily, when they wake up in the morning, when they sit down at the table, and at bedtime. And until they recite, they are offered neither food nor drink."<sup>14</sup>

In the list of the most important aspects of the faith recorded in the Large Catechism, the Decalogue is placed at the beginning. Luther has a negative perspective on the Decalogue only if the commandments are used by the Devil to make us feel guilty, as well as when talking about the Law as a means to salvation.<sup>15</sup>

He argues that the Decalogue is important in the act of confessing sin by the believer, before God and before the pastor. Luther also urges the reader to organize his life according to the commandments ("Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments.").<sup>16</sup> We deduce from this that the Decalogue was of crucial importance in ordering the life of the Lutheran Protestant believer.

Regarding the purpose of placing the Decalogue at the beginning of *the Small Catechism*, the two opinions (Th. Harnak vs. H.G. Reventlow) should not be regarded as mutually exclusive.<sup>17</sup> On the contrary! The

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8 Luther explains: „What does this mean? God threatens to punish all who break these commandments.

Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands". See the *Small Catechism of Luther, op.cit.*, p. 3.

9 See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism, op.cit.*, p. 247.

10 See Holger Sonntag editor and translator, *Only the Decalogue is Eternal: Martin Luther's Antinomian Theses and Disputations*, Minneapolis: Cygnus Series, Lutheran Press, 2008.

11 Holger Sonntag editor and translator, *Only the Decalogue is Eternal, op.cit.*, p. 11-12.

12 Holger Sonntag editor and translator, *Only the Decalogue is Eternal, op.cit.*, p. 34.

13 Holger Sonntag editor and translator, *Only the Decalogue is Eternal, op.cit.*, p. 34.

14 „These are the most necessary parts which one should first learn to repeat word for word, and which our children should be accustomed to recite daily when they arise in the morning, when they sit down to their meals, and when they retire at night; and until they repeat them, they should be given neither food nor drink." - <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-2-preface.php>. Accessed 11.13. 2019.

15 See Patrick O'Hare's, *The Facts About Luther* (Illinois: Tan Books, 1987), 311. "When Luther makes strong statements against the Law, it's always the Law considered as a means of salvation or justification." Vezi <http://beggarsallreformation.blogspot.ro/2010/02/luther-we-must-remove-decalogue-ten.html>. Accessed 11.13. 2019.

16 See *The Small Catechism of Luther, op.cit.*, p. 8.

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See Henning Graf Reventlow „The Ten Commandments in Luther's Catechisms", *op.cit.*, p. 138.

divine law of Decalogue is presented by Luther as having, on the one hand, the role of convincing man of the fallen state. On the other hand, for the members of the Christian community to be informed about this truth, these commandments need to be repeated and repeatedly explained, by the spiritual leader of the community. We noticed that Luther places also the Ten Commandments at the beginning of The Large Catechism, which was addressed to the spiritual leaders of the church. This proves the importance of the Decalogue in Lutheran theology.

This change of method, in religious and ethical training, by involving both the clergy and the family leaders or the leader of an estate, has had positive effects on the Lutheran Protestant religious community, which will be reflected in the life of the respective society in the future. We will specify that Luther's perspective on the role of the Law for the believer, marked the community of faith he led. As for salvation, Lutheranism was largely limiting the Decalogue to the awareness of the fallen state in which man is in the present.

But indirectly, the awareness of the present state in which man is, provoked the descendants of Protestantism (Calvinism), to a continuous effort to place themselves in the future, in a more comfortable position. We will see this in the next section.

## **B. The Lutherans**

### **Augsburg Confession of Faith**

*The Augsburg Confession* is one of the most important documents of the Lutheran Protestant faith.<sup>18</sup> This confession of faith was addressed to His Majesty Carol V, at the Augsburg Diet, in 1530 by certain Lutheran princes and other representatives. you have Lutheranism in different cities. The emperor asked for explanations regarding the Lutheran faith, because he was pursuing the political unity of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>19</sup>

The motto of this confession of faith was taken from Psalm 119:46: "I will speak of thy testimonies before the kings, and will not chew my cheek."

In Article VI, it talks about the New Obedience. The authors of the confession specify in this article that it is required to bare fruit. The believer must bear the fruits commanded by God, even if he does not have to expect for the good deeds to bring him merits in regard to justification. "This faith is bound to bring forth good fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God."<sup>20</sup>

*The Augsburg Confession* was written by Melancthon, who was Luther's close associate. It contains 28 articles of faith.<sup>21</sup> About this confession the Lutheran Church states:

This declaration of faith is often regarded as the core of the confession of Lutheran theology. It was presented by Martin Luther's followers to Emperor Carol V at the Imperial Diet in Augsburg, Germany. This document was intended to be a summary of the main articles of Christian faith as they are understood and taught by the Evangelical Lutheran Churches.<sup>22</sup>

The Augsburg Confession emphasizes the importance of the Decalogue in Article XX.

Article XX: Of Good Works. Our teachers are falsely accused of forbidding Good Works. For their published writings on the Ten Commandments, and others of like import, bear witness that they have taught to good purpose concerning all estates and duties of life, as to what estates of life and what works in every calling are pleasing to God.<sup>23</sup>

Melancthon later wrote "*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*" as a defense against Catholic criticism of the Augsburg confession.<sup>24</sup> The idea of justification by faith does not exclude good deeds. Faith determines the believer to do good deeds, as a sign of his justification. "It is taught on our part that it is necessary to do good works, not that we should trust to merit grace by them, but because it is the will of God."<sup>25</sup>

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18 Philip Melancthon, *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Standard Publications, Incorporated, 2009.

19 <https://www.britannica.com/event/Peace-of-Augsburg>. Accessed 11.14. 2019.

20 <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php>. Accessed 11.13. 2019.

21 <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php>. Accessed 11.13. 2019.

22 <http://www.bisericalutherana.ro/credinta-lutherana>. Accessed 11.13. 2019.

23 <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php>. Accessed 11.13. 2019.

24 <http://www.bisericalutherana.ro/credinta-lutherana>. Accessed 11.13. 2019.

25 <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php>. Accessed 11.13. 2019.

Referring to the *Augsburg Confession*, Weber notes that the idea of divine election - being only partially developed. In Article XVI it is stated that the Gospel does not cancel the civil or economic responsibilities, but on the contrary commands us to regard them as established by God. The believer must listen to authority, as we meet in 1Cor 7:20 "Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called."<sup>26</sup>

Speaking about the evolution of the ethical theory of Lutheranism, Weber noted that in order to establish a relationship between morality and faith, Melancthon first put the idea of repentance. In his opinion, repentance on the basis of the law must precede faith. But good deeds must follow faith. Otherwise we can no longer speak of *justifying faith* - an expression very close to puritanism.

Melancthon argued that man can attain a certain degree of perfection on earth. Initially he said that the justification was given for man to be able to do good deeds. Later Lutheran theologians argued that good works are the fruit of faith. When talking about good deeds, Melancthon and later Lutheran theologians talked about them in relationship to the Law. Decalogue has remained the essential norm that underlies human actions.

Weber noted that the initial Lutheran view of justification by faith had to be abandoned by a church that considered itself an institution offering salvation. But there was no alternative, for fear of losing the dogmatic foundation of *Sola fide!* They did not go in the direction of Calvinism - which by the doctrine of predestination held that good works are a proof of faith. Thus, the methodical evolution of ethics was hindered by the mystical interpretation of the sacraments, associated with the lack of the doctrine of predestination<sup>27</sup>, because

moving this *regeneratio* or at least the beginning of it into baptism, if one accepts the universal character of grace, had to act in the opposite direction to the development of a methodical morality, because it diminished the distance between *status naturalis* and the state of grace, especially under the conditions of the powerful Lutheran underline of the original sin ... all these have determined the non-methodological character of the Lutheran way of life.<sup>28</sup>

We understood that the law remained important to Lutherans. Luther's interpretation of the law makes man aware of the unhappy state he is in and thus motivates him to seek a more favorable position in the future. In this way we can affirm that the interpretation of the law from the Lutheran perspective motivates the man in search of better conditions for him in the future. The law helps the believer to ascertain the state of fact. Luther's followers tried to go a step further by showing that justification by faith is proven by the good deeds that relate to the law. Law would be the means by which man could attain a certain degree of perfection on earth. But Lutheranism essentially retains that function of the law of measuring the factual state of man, which helps him to realize the need for salvation.

### **III. The law brings the assurance of the divine election - rationally communicated**

In the next part of the paper we will evaluate Calvin's observations on the Decalogue, namely, the renumbering of the commandments, and his book called *Institutions of the Christian Religion*. In the last part of the section we will analyze the development of the Reformed Church, keeping in mind the relationship of the community to the laws from the Decalogue, and its consequences for the birth and the development of Capitalism.

#### **A. Calvin**

##### **Renumbering the commandments**

Calvin's interest in Decalogue is also evidenced by the initiative to reorganize the commandments. Calvin changed the numbering of the commandments in the Decalogue, used until then by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church. Thomas B. Dozeman, in his *Exodus* commentary, discusses the problem of organizing the Decalogue commandments, among Jews and in various Christian denominations. He observed that in the Jews Bible, the first commandment is: ("I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." - Exodus 20:2).<sup>29</sup> Prohibition of worship is the second commandment (Exodus 20:3-6). The grouping of commandments on the Two Tables is in two sets of five (Exodus 20: 2-12) and (Exodus 20: 13-17).

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26 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, op.cit., p. 206.

27 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, op.cit., p. 239, nota 104.

28 Max Weber, *Etica protestantă și spiritul capitalismului*, op.cit., 2003, p. 211.

29 Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, from *Erdmans Critical Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing co., 2009, nota 75, , p. 478

The Early Church divided the commandments from the Decalogue differently from the way they were divided by the Jews. The verse in Exodus 20:2 is considered the prologue to the commandments, and the second commandment is the prohibition of worshiping carved faces (Exodus 20: 3-6). So, on the first board we have only three commandments and on the second we have seven commandments. As we observed the Catholic Church organized the Ten Commandments, dividing the commandment about coveting from verse 17 into two commandments: concerning the neighbor's house, and the neighbor's wife.

Calvin makes a different division of commandments. He considers that the text of Exodus 20:3-6 contains two commandments: exclusive worship before Yahweh (v. 3) and prohibition of carved faces (4-6).

But he keeps the number of ten commandments, making the ban on lusting (v.17) a single commandment, as the Jews do. In fact, this division of the commandments in the Decalogue was already encountered in the Orthodox Church.<sup>30</sup>

Calvin keeps five commandments on each of the two tablets, like the Jews: (Exodus 20:3-12) and (Exodus 20:13-17). The problem that we encounter in connection with the division proposed by Calvin is that verse 3 which contains the first commandment is not separated by *Sof pasuq* from verses 4-6, which form the second commandment.<sup>31</sup> However, punctuation marks were introduced later in the text Jewish. We cannot consider them as inspired. At the same time, Calvin's proposal for organizing the Decalogue was practiced by the Eastern Church, being taken over by the Reformed - Calvin's followers, as well as by the Neo-Protestants.

### **Institutions of the Christian Religion**

About the importance of the Decalogue in Calvinist theology, we read in Calvin's main work: *The Institutions of the Christian Religion*. In this book, Calvin says that the role of the Law is to teach us fully about the knowledge of God and man.<sup>32</sup> He makes the following observations at the beginning of the chapter in which he explains the Decalogue.

"1. I BELIEVE it will not be out of place here to introduce the Ten Commandments of the Law, and give a brief exposition of them. In this way it will be made more clear, that the worship which God originally prescribed is still in force (a point to which I have already warned); and then a second point will be confirmed - viz. that the Jews not only learned from the law wherein true piety consisted, but from feeling their inability to observe them they were overawed by the fear of judgments and so drawn, even against their will, towards the Mediator. In giving a summary of what constitutes the true knowledge of God"<sup>33</sup>

He says that even the way they were divided on the two tablets, highlights our responsibility to God (the first tablet) and our responsibility to our fellow citizens (the second board).<sup>34</sup>

Weber noted that the fundamental Calvinist doctrine that upholds the glory of God, required the Church, to bring those condemned to be judged by the Law, was offset by the conviction that it was an insult that someone who was not born again should be received into the House of God, and participate in the sacraments, or even administer them as a servant.

Thus appeared the need to maintain a pure church. It was about that community that proved to be in grace. The changes in the constitution of the Church, arose from the need to make a separation between the regenerated and the non-regenerated, those that could participate to the Eucharist, by the others who were not elected. The aim was to maintain the leadership of the church in the hands of the regenerated. From them, there

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30 <http://www.crestinortodox.ro/rugaciuni/cele-10-porunci-dumnezeiesti-72538.html> . Accessed 11.13. 2019.

31 Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus, op.cit.*, p. 479

32 „1. The Law was committed to writing, in order that it might teach more fully and perfectly that knowledge, both of God and of ourselves, which the law of nature teaches meagrely and obscurely.” Vezi

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/calvin-institutes-christianity/book2/chapter-8.html>. Accessed 11.14. 2019.

33 <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/calvin-institutes-christianity/book2/chapter-8.html>. Accessed 11.14. 2019.

34 „11. Third observation or rule regards the division of the Law into Two Tables: the former comprehending our duty to God; the latter, our duty to our neighbour. The connection between these necessary and inseparable.

12. Division of the Law into Ten Commandments. Various distinctions made with regard to them, but the best distinction that which divides them into Two Tables. Four commandments belong to the First, and six to the Second Table. ” Vezi <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/calvin-institutes-christianity/book2/chapter-8.html>. Accessed 11.14. 2019.

were ordained ministers who were to be blameless.<sup>35</sup>

Weber notes that the well-known Calvinist bibliocracy respected the moral precepts of the Old Testament, which were set at the same level of respect as those of the New Testament. But there was a separation of these generally valid commandments from those laws which were limited by their historical context, being applicable only to Jews, or which were annulled by Christ. For the Calvinist believer, the law was an ideal, though never a rule that could be fully respected. Weber observed that, on the other hand, Luther praised freedom from the bondage of the law as a divine privilege of the believer.<sup>36</sup>

Calvin goes a step further, emphasizing another important role of divine commandments in the Old Testament. On the one hand, the commandments show the fallen state of man which demonstrates the need for salvation through grace, because of man's inability to do something in this sense. In addition to this, Calvinism sees in the Law the criterion of separating the regenerated from the unregenerated.

This new role of the divine commandments produced a continuous effort of the reformed believer for sanctification, to prove the divine election he had. We observe how Calvinist theology communicates to the believer, in a rational way, the message regarding the role of divine law in strengthening personal assurance about the divine election - through the sustained effort for sanctification.

This understanding of the role of the Law has brought positive results to Calvinist communities. Weber argued that for this reason, we can speak of great differences in moral standards between Lutherans and Calvinists, as well as the neo-protestant denominations that embraced Calvinist theology. He noted that in history there was a great difference between the moral standards of the Reformed courts and those of the Lutheran princes, the latter being often accused of degradation caused by drunkenness and vulgarity. In addition, the impotence of the Lutheran clergy, with its emphasis solely on faith, against the ascetic Baptist movement, is well known. Weber argues that striking behavioral differences are due to "in the lesser degree of ascetic penetration of life in Lutheranism as distinguished from Calvinism."<sup>37</sup> In Lutheranism "no impetus was needed for constant and implicit self-control, according to a plan, of one's own life, as had the gloomy doctrine of Calvinism."<sup>38</sup>

## **B. The Reformed The Catechism of Heidelberg**

The catechism was addressed to the electing prince Frederick III, who was based at the Heidelberg Castle, near the Neckar River, and who initiated a major reform in the life of his people and their leaders. It was drafted as a proclamation of the reformed biblical faith, given to the prince in 1559, not long after his investment.<sup>39</sup>

Traditionally it is stated that the authors of the catechism were Caspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus. But after the latest research, it was concluded that Ursinus was the main author of the catechism. Olevianus made no greater contribution than the contribution of the other Heidelberg theologians. The catechism was implemented in the Netherlands, becoming the faith guide of the Reformed. "The Heidelberg Catechism is one of the finest creeds of the Reformation period."<sup>40</sup>

Heidelberg's catechism explains the role of good deeds in Articles 90 and 91, where he talks about the resurrection of the new man, who is able to do the good deeds expected of God.

First, the believer must benefit by the resurrection of the new man, which helps him to perform those good deeds. "90. What does the resurrection of the new man mean? It means to rejoice wholeheartedly in God through Jesus Christ and to live in love and pleasure according to the will of God, doing all good deeds."<sup>41</sup>

The following article explains what the good deeds the believer must do. "91. But what are these good deeds? They are only those that flow from a true faith and are fulfilled according to the Law of God and to His glory; and not those that are based on people's opinions or norms."<sup>42</sup> Later there are presented the Ten

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35 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

36 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

37 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, *op.cit.*, p. 127.

38 Max Weber, *Etica protestantă și spiritul capitalismului*, *op.cit.*, 2003, p. 135.

39 Vezi ghidul realizat de G.I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide*, Philipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1993, p. IX, publicat pe site-ul Westminster Theological Seminary – USA - [https://www.wtsbooks.com/common/pdf\\_links/9780875525518.pdf](https://www.wtsbooks.com/common/pdf_links/9780875525518.pdf)

40 G.I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, *op.cit.*, p.1.

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<http://www.evangelicreformat.org/catehismul-de-la-heidelberg/>. Accessed 11.14. 2019.

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<http://www.evangelicreformat.org/catehismul-de-la-heidelberg/>. Accessed 11.14. 2019.

Commandments, as the divine norm for performing the good deeds.

Even if it was specified that no one can fully fulfill the commandments of the Decalogue, in article 115 of the catechism mentioned, the role of the Decalogue for the believer is explained.

115. Then why does God want us to preach the Ten Commandments with such rigor, if no one in this life can obey them? First of all, that in the course of our life we will become more and more acquainted with the sinful nature, and we will seek more and more the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ; secondly, that we may cease to give ourselves the trouble and ask God to give us the grace of the Holy Spirit to be renewed more and more according to His image until, after this life, we reach the goal of perfection.<sup>43</sup>

As we can see, in the Heidelberg Catechism the two reasons for Calvinist theology are explained in relation to the role of the Decalogue: to highlight the sinful nature and to support the believer in the process of sanctification, through the sustained effort to fulfill the divine commandments.

### **The Westminster Confession of Faith**

*The Westminster Confession of Faith* was composed by the Westminster Assembly in 1647. It is Calvinistic in essence. It was drafted by representatives of the Anglican Church, at the initiative of the English parliament, which in 1643 proposed church leaders to hold a meeting at Westminster Cathedral to clarify certain issues related to worship, doctrines and how to discipline in the church. The representatives of the church - 121 Puritan theologians - met on several occasions, for five years. Different local churches around the world have adopted this confession of faith;<sup>44</sup> essential "for the English and Scottish Presbyterians, but also for some Congregationalists and Baptists (who did not adhere to the Presbyterian understanding of baptism and church organization)."<sup>45</sup>

In chapter I, talking about the Bible, it is stated that God has decided to reveal Himself and His will in writing, in a book, which includes both the Old and New Testaments. That is why the Bible is absolutely necessary for the believer.<sup>46</sup> We observe the importance given to the Old Testament - which includes the Divine Law - for the Calvinist Protestant theology. The text of the Westminster Confession clearly states that Scripture provides all the teaching needed for salvation, even for the uneducated.<sup>47</sup>

Weber points out that *the Westminster Confession of Faith* was later adopted by the Baptist Creeds, who equally support the total depravity of man after the fall. In this context, he recalls chapter IX, which talks about freedom of the will. Here it is stated that because man is in a fallen state, he has lost the entire power of the will for any spiritual good that seeks salvation, being dead in sin. That is why man cannot by his own forces convert.<sup>48</sup>

For this reason, divine intervention was needed to save man. Weber refers to Chapter III, which presents God's eternal decree, by which some people and angels were predestined to eternal life, and others to eternal death, in order to manifest the glory of God. Those predestined for life were chosen before the creation of the world, in accordance with its eternal decree and its unchangeable purpose. God has decided to predestine others to anger because of their sins. The election decree is reinforced, in Weber's opinion, by chapter X of the Westminster Confession, which talks about the efficient call for those predestined for life.<sup>49</sup>

From Weber's perspective, this teaching relieves the believer of the enormous pressure of guilt for sin, and at the same time destroys any belief that the gift of grace received by the believer, to some extent, is due to his cooperation in his own faith or will.<sup>50</sup> For Luther, God's Secret Decree was the basis of the grace experienced by the elect. Although he did not formally abandon this idea, over time, it was increasingly marginalized, because of his position as a church leader, being forced to resolve issues of church policy.<sup>51</sup>

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43 <http://www.evangelicreformat.org/catehismul-de-la-heidelberg/>. Accessed 11.14. 2019.

44 Vezi textul Confesiunii de la Westminster de pe <https://danutm.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/confesiunea-de-la-westminster6.pdf>. Accessed 11.13. 2019.

45 <https://istorieevangelica.ro/tag/confesiunea-de-la-westminster/>

46 (Dumnezeu a hotărât „to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church... which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary;”) <http://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/WCFScriptureProofs.pdf>. Accessed 11.13. 2019.

47 Vezi nota 112 din Weber, p. 244, conform cu Westminster Confesion, Cap.i, nr 7.

48 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, op.cit., p. 99-100.

49 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, op.cit., p. 99.

50 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, op.cit., p. 101-2

51 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, op.cit., p. 102

Weber notes that Lutherans later differ from the Reformed in connection with God's eternal secret Decree. He shows how Melancthon deliberately avoided including this dangerous teaching in the *Augsburg Confession*, as a protection for the founders of the Lutheran church. There is an article of faith in the Augsburg Confession that claims that grace is revocable (*amissibilis*), and that it can be regained by humble repentance, by full trust in God's Word and by sacraments.

If we compare, in Calvin's case the *decretum horrible* is not derived from religious experience, as in Luther's case, but from the logical necessity of its formulation. The interest in upholding this decree concerns only God and not man. God does not exist for man but man for God.<sup>52</sup>

We observe that in Calvinism, logic - reason is the explanation that underlies the divine decree of election. Also, for a Calvinist, the law is regarded as the ideal motivating norm for action. It inhibits Lutheran because it cannot be fulfilled from his point of view. For Weber, the way the Decalogue is placed in Lutheran and Calvinist faith confessions would prove its importance for the two Protestant Christian traditions. In Lutheran catechism, the law is placed at the beginning, in order to arouse the necessary humility. In the Reformed catechism, the law is placed immediately after the Gospel, to fuel the optimism of the believer. The Calvinists accuse the Lutherans of showing a reluctance to the process of sanctification. On the other hand, the Lutherans accuse the Calvinists for proving: a relentless dependence on the law, and arrogance.<sup>53</sup>

### Conclusion

In this article we analyzed how the Reformers interpreted the Decalogue - as a summary of divine law, being considered a fundamental element of Protestant ethics. We sought to show how the interpretation of the Decalogue by Protestants could lead to what Weber calls the "spirit of capitalism."

We dealt with the interpretation of the Decalogue at Martin Luther, analyzing the main confessions of faith that are the basis of Luther's theology and his followers. These are the Little Catechism, the Great Catechism and the Augsburg Confession. Thus, we sought to discover the relationship between Protestant ethics and the emergence of capitalism.

The Small Catechism, the first confession of faith of the Protestants - begins with the Ten Commandments. Luther places the Decalogue at the beginning, because in its theology, the Law is meant to convince the reader of sin. From the perspective of some, the placement of the Decalogue at the beginning would seek to make the man aware of his guilt, and then to desire the salvation he discovers in the Creed.

Luther's exhortation to lay leaders to take care of the moral education of those in their home, highlights a dramatic change in Protestant theology, compared to the Middle Ages, when only the clergy were responsible for the religious instruction of the community. In this way the impact of ethical education becomes more effective in society.

Max Weber observes that Luther emphasizes biblical ethics, instruction in the word of God. The Little Catechism says that in the Church, the Bible is studied and its members live in holiness, following the divine commandments.

Noteworthy is that when analyzing Luther's perspective on the Decalogue, the publishers decided to headline one of the volumes containing his works: "Only the Decalogue is eternal," intending to emphasize his view on the eternal validity of the divine moral law. - summarized in the *Ten Commandments* of the Old Testament. Luther argues that God's law is necessary to make sin known. Without the knowledge of sin through the Law, Christ, presented by the gospel contained in the New Testament, makes no sense.

The Large Catechism was written by Luther for the spiritual leaders in the church. And in this confession of faith Luther includes: The Ten Commandments at the beginning, considering them among the most important aspects of Lutheran theology, along with Articles of Faith and The Lord's Prayer. They should be memorized by children, word for word, and repeated daily, in the morning at noon and in the evening. Parents motivate them to memorize them.

Luther has a negative outlook on the Decalogue only if the commandments are used by the Devil to make us feel guilty, as well as when talking about the Law as a means to salvation.

From his point of view, the Decalogue is important in the act of confessing sin, before God and before the pastor. Luther also urges the readers to organize their lives according to the commandments.

The Augsburg Confession is one of the most important documents of the Lutheran Protestant faith. In Article VI, it talks about the *New Listening*, which implies fruitfulness. The believer must bear the fruits

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52 Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, op.cit., p. 102., Traducerea în română, Weber, p. 114.

53 Vezi nota 95, unde Weber îl amintește pe Mohler, care susține că „the law appears to the Calvinist as an ideal norm of action. It oppresses the Lutheran because it is for him unattainable” - Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, op.cit., p. 238.

commanded by God, even if he does not have to wait for the good deeds to bring him merits in regard to justification.

Melanchthon, who wrote this confession, later wrote the "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," claiming that justification by faith does not exclude good deeds. Faith determines the believer to do good deeds, as a sign of his justification.

Weber observes that, according to Melanchthon, the Gospel does not cancel civil or economic responsibilities, but instead commands us to look upon them as set by God. Good deeds must follow faith. Otherwise we can no longer speak of justifying faith - an expression very close to puritanism. Decalogue has remained the essential norm that underlies human actions.

From the Lutheran perspective, the Law motivates man to wish for a better state for him in the future. The law helps the believer to ascertain the state of fact. Luther's followers tried to go a step further by showing that justification by faith is proven by the good deeds that relate to the law. Law would be the means by which man could attain a certain degree of perfection on earth. But Lutheranism essentially retains that function of the law, namely to measure the factual state of man, which helps him to realize the need for salvation.

Regarding the importance that Calvin attaches to the Decalogue, we noticed that he changed the numbering of the Decalogue commandments used by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church until then. He considers that the text of Exodus 20:3-6 contains two commandments, namely: exclusive worship before Yahweh (v. 3) and prohibition of carved faces (4-6). But he maintains the number of ten commandments, making the ban on lusting (v.17) a single commandment, as the Jews do. Calvin's proposal for organizing the Decalogue was already used in the list of the Eastern Church.

Calvin talks about the role of the Decalogue in his main work: *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In this book, he says that the Law teaches us fully the knowledge of God and man. At the beginning of the chapter that explains the Decalogue, Calvin says that the worship required by God in the Old Testament and summarized in the Decalogue is valid today. The Ten Commandments teach us what true godliness means, and makes us aware of the need for the Mediator because of the inability of man to fully obey them.

Weber noted that Calvinist doctrine required separation between the chosen ones and the others. It was an insult for someone who was unborn again to be welcomed into the Church, to participate in the sacraments, or even to be a servant. The criterion of separation was the observance of the divine commandments. The bibliocracy of the Calvinists, who set the moral precepts of the Old Testament at the same level as those of the New Testament, is well known. For the Calvinist, the law was an ideal, although it can never be fully respected. Calvin is distinguished from Luther who praises freedom from the bondage of the law as a divine privilege of the believer.

The new function of the divine commandments caused the Reformed believer to stand up for sanctification, thus proving the election he has. Calvinist theology communicates to the believer, in a rational way, the certainty of the divine election, through the sustained effort for sanctification. It is not by chance that we are witnessing major differences in moral standards between Lutherans and Calvinists.

Heidelberg's catechism explains the role of good deeds in Articles 90 and 91, where he talks about the resurrection of the new man, who can do the good deeds expected of God. Article 91 states that good deeds are based on the fulfillment of God's Law. The catechism explains the two reasons for Calvinist theology in relation to the role of the Decalogue: to highlight the sinful nature and to support the believer in the process of sanctification, through the sustained effort to fulfill the divine commandments.

*The Westminster Confession of Faith* states that God has decided to reveal Himself and His will in writing, in a book that includes both the Old and New Testaments. That is why the Bible is absolutely necessary for the believer. Weber refers to Chapter III, which presents God's eternal decree, by which some people and angels were predestined to eternal life, and others to eternal death, in order to manifest the glory of God. This teaching frees the believer from the enormous pressure of guilt for sin, and at the same time destroys any belief that the gift of grace received by the believer would be due to some extent to his cooperation in his faith or will.

We observe that in Calvinism, logic explains the divine decree of election. Also, for a Calvinist, the Law is regarded as the ideal motivating norm for action. It inhibits Lutheran because it cannot be fulfilled from his point of view. For Weber, the way the Decalogue is placed in Lutheran and Calvinist faith confessions would prove its importance to the two Protestant Christian traditions. In Lutheran catechism the law is placed at the beginning to arouse the necessary humility. In the Reformed catechism, the law is placed immediately after the Gospel, to fuel the optimism of the believer. The last interpretation motivated the Reformed Christian to a sustained effort in order to fulfill the divine law.

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