

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism Study Guide

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism by Max Weber

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Contents

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1: Religious Affiliation and Social Stratification.....	4
Chapter 2: The Spirit of Capitalism.....	6
Chapter 3: Luther's Conception of the Calling.....	9
Chapter 4: the Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism.....	11
Chapter 5: Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism.....	16
Characters.....	19
Objects/Places.....	22
Themes.....	24
Style.....	26
Quotes.....	28
Topics for Discussion.....	30



Plot Summary

"The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" by Max Weber, presents the thesis that success of modern capitalism can be attributed to the spirit of capitalism that was borne of the ethics and practices of Protestant asceticism. While the premise initially seems wild and far-fetched, the author is ultimately able to illustrate that his theory has credence and is logical and rational.

In most developed countries, business leaders and owners are Protestant. This book was written in 1904 and so some of the arguments may or may not be relevant in modern times. Leaders in capitalism generally came from wealth and had advanced educations. History shows that the majority of the populations of the most economically developed sectors of the sixteenth century adapted to one of the Protestant religions.

The Catholic religion was seen as lax and overly indulgent of the sinner. This assessment led to the Reformation and the rise of Calvinism, which proved to be much more controlling than Catholicism. Prior to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Catholicism was the predominant religion in Europe. It embraced high ideals and other worldliness and was not concerned with materialism or acquisition. There was a lack of ambition among many skilled Catholics who were satisfied to remain in the same status throughout their careers, which was quite a departure from the emerging Protestants who chose to parlay their skills into management and administrative positions.

The rising middle class accepted the overbearing Calvinistic practices and even embraced them. Protestant movements believed that it was God's will that man answer a "calling," which was the worldly role that God preordained for each man. Answering the call was done so only for the glory of God. It was God's will, according to these movements, that man work hard in his calling, not participate in any unlawful or immoral practices and take care of the acquisitions that came his way as a result of his work, including wealth. This mindset set the stage for the "spirit of capitalism," which translated as the traits, characteristics, and practices that were necessary for modern business to be successful.

From Lutheranism and the Reformation through the emerging ascetic movements of Protestantism including Calvinism, Pietism, Methodism, and the Baptist Sects, Weber provides profiles of each of these religions and illustrates how the traits of hard work, work ethic, morality and above all answering the "calling" for God's glory formed the building blocks of modern capitalism. Although Weber makes a strong connection between Protestant asceticism and the spirit of capitalism, he notes that the most advanced economy on earth, the United States, has stripped the pursuit of success and wealth of its religious and ethical meaning and extends a word of caution about a spiritless future.



Chapter 1: Religious Affiliation and Social Stratification

Chapter 1: Religious Affiliation and Social Stratification Summary and Analysis

In most developed countries, the vast majority of business leaders and owners of capital are Protestant. This extends beyond instances where the religious difference coincides with nationality as in Eastern Germany between Germans and Poles. It also remained popular whenever capitalism was free to alter the population for its needs and occupational structure. Leadership in capitalism involves having wealth, advanced education, and usually both. Personal wealth often originates from inheritance. Historically speaking, the most economically highly developed sectors of the sixteenth century tended to adapt to Protestantism and Protestant tenets.

The Reformation did not translate to the elimination of the Church's control over life; rather, it represented the substitution of a new form of control. The Catholic Church in the fifteenth century was considered lax in that it was accused of being guilty of "punishing the heretic, but indulgent to the sinner," (4) and was the religion of the wealthy and advanced people. The rise of Calvinism in parts of Europe in the sixteenth century presented a religion that was much more controlling than Catholicism. The reformers felt that there was too little religious control in developed areas. The rising bourgeois middle classes not only accepted the overbearing personal control by the church, they embraced it.

The main reason for an individual's control of capital in developed countries is inherited wealth. Higher education is also a factor. The percentage of Catholics among the graduates of higher education in Bavaria and Hungary and other areas lags behind that of Protestants. A lower percentage of Catholic students opt to not pursue studies that would prepare them for business careers. As far as skill and craftsmanship, Catholics generally opted to stay within their craft as opposed to Protestants who were interested in using their craft to advance in industry and catapult them into administrative positions. Protestants have advanced during times of religious prosecution while Catholics historically have not. Protestants have shown the ability to develop and advance whether they are the majority or minority and whether or not they were victims of religious persecution. Are these factors the result of some intrinsic element inherent in the religions themselves?

Catholicism embraces high ideas and other-worldliness thus reducing the importance or need for earthly successes. Catholics feel that materialism results from the "secularization of all ideals through Protestantism" (p. 7). Catholics prefer to be safe and have less material wealth as opposed to an exciting life of risk that could lead to wealth. An old proverb capsulizes this sentiment: Eat well or sleep well. Modernity has blurred this early difference between the two religions. There is a large representation of the



most spiritual forms of Christian piety among the commercial ranks. Some of the greatest capitalistic entrepreneurs—Cecil Rhodes, for example—have come from clergymen's families.

In the French Huguenot Church, it was typical to find monks and businessmen alike among the converted especially during the persecution. Austria directly imported many of their craftsmen, regardless of religious affiliations. Frederick the I of Prussia considered the Mennonites indispensable to success in industry and tolerated their refusal to participate in the military. In essence, the spirit of hard work and success has traditionally been associated with Protestantism. An association has always been made between piety and success. Montesquieu said that the English had the most success in three important areas: religiousness, business, and liberty. Did these ingredients comprise the secret formula for ultimate success and salvation?



Chapter 2: The Spirit of Capitalism

Chapter 2: The Spirit of Capitalism Summary and Analysis

For the purposes of this discussion, "spirit of capitalism" will have a specific definition although there are others that could be formulated from other pieces of historical data. To be clear, there is more than one definition of "spirit of capitalism;" therefore, the definition used here is merely a provisional definition. The author turns to Benjamin Franklin for the provisional definition of spirit of capitalism that is necessary for the main topic. He chose Franklin's definition because it is presented in almost classical purity and is free from preconceptions and any relationship to religion.

Franklin wrote that "time is money" (p. 14). When a man is idle, he is throwing money away. Credit is money left in another's hand; money creates interest. Money makes money. A person who pays his debts on time can be sure that he can borrow when the need arises. A man's behavior and reputation in a society is also a consideration for borrowing money. Those who pay their debts off before they are due also raises their ability to borrow. Living within your means and saving a portion of your earnings enhances your credit worthiness.

The foregoing is the provisional definition of the spirit of capitalism that will be the basis for the in-depth investigation into religion and capitalism. Franklin's litany of economic "dos" describes not only good business practices but fundamental ethics as well. Forms of capitalism existed in other cultures including in China and India and even in the Middle Ages. The major difference between those systems and modern Western Capitalism is that the former lacked ethos.

Man is dominated by the drive to make money. There is a similar feeling associated with making money and with certain religious ideas. Franklin, who was reared by a strict Calvinist father, quoted the Bible, "Seest though a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings" (Prov. Xxii. 29, p.19). Earning money is seen as virtuous in modern economies. Leaders in business are pillars of society and often pillars of their churches.

This mindset has appeared in eras before capitalism even existed. Modern man is born into a capitalistic society and is forced to play by its rules. A man who does not comply, will be cast aside and live outside the economy, lost and without a job. In modern society, it is truly survival of the economic fittest. Capitalism in early America was far less developed in the southern colonies than in New England. Ironically, the New England colonies were founded in the main by preachers and seminarians while the southern colonies were established by capitalists looking to make money.

Capitalism is not on a par with greed or avarice which has existed through the ages. Again, such human traits are without ethics. Moreover, capitalism does not function with the labor of those who practice undisciplined behavior and does not condone the



unscrupulous businessman. Historically, there have always been ruthless acquisitions, piracy and unrestrained trade that functioned with crafty double-dealing depending upon the trade partner.

To further clarify the definition of the provisional definition of the spirit of capitalism, the case of laborers is cited. Harvesting is a labor that is most productive when it is accomplished with great dispatch. Since profit depends on the weather, completing the work before bad weather strikes is essential. To increase labor intensity, an incentive is given to the laborers by offering a higher per-piece rate.

Sometimes this practice has had unexpected results. Some per-piece workers produce less because they can do the same amount of work they formerly did for more money. They apparently were not interested in making more but making more money for less work. The former is an example of the concept of traditionalism in which a man inherently does not want to earn more money as much as he wants to live in the way he has been accustomed to. The opposite tact has been used, i.e., reducing earnings to increase labor intensity so the laborer earns as much as he formerly did. People had to work harder to make as much as they formerly did with a higher wage. According to Pieter de la Court and Calvinism, people only work because they are poor.

For capitalism to develop, a surplus of labor in the population must be available. Low wages are not effective when highly skilled laborers and expensive machinery are necessary. In order to be profitable, a company with expensive equipment must hire laborers of a higher quality because they must have a sense of responsibility in order to adequately maintain their equipment. Skilled laborers perform at a high level irregardless of wage. This sense of responsibility comes from a long process of education and tradition.

Young female workers in Germany were found to be unwilling to give up methods of work they had been raised with. They were seen as unwilling to adapt or to use their intellect. With such unmovable workers, even higher wages have no effect. Girls who had a strong religious background were found to be more willing to learn new methods. Business men learned that the best chance of negating traditionalism was by hiring those workers with a religious upbringing.

The two main drivers of economic activity are the satisfaction of needs and acquisition. It translates to those who earn enough to meet their personal needs versus those who see no limit to their earnings. Generally, the term "spirit of modern capitalism" describes the attitude which seeks profit in a rational and systematic manner. At the beginning of modern economics, it has more often than not been the rising industrial middle classes who adopted this attitude versus the monied aristocracy.

The revolution against traditionalism is still being waged. Until about the middle of the past century, (Note: this book was written in 1904) life was easy and leisurely. Peasants made cloth from their own raw materials and sold it to wholesalers. Middlemen placed orders for large quantities from wholesales and orders were passed onto the peasants. People only worked five or six hours a day and there was a congeniality among all

levels of the cycle, even among competitors. That all changed when the wholesalers began to hire peasants and work them harder and went directly to the end-users to pursue customers on a more aggressive basis. The formerly leisurely state was destroyed in the competitive struggle and fortunes were made and reinvested in the businesses.

The spirit of modern capitalism was taking a foothold. More important to the revolt against traditionalism was not an influx of money; rather, it was this new mindset—the spirit of capitalism. Its entry wasn't all smooth - there was mistrust, indignation, and even hatred. The great benefactors of this transition were those who worked hard and were devoted to their business. The ability to liberate oneself from common tradition has been one of the marks of a successful businessman. During this economic transformation, there is little evidence of a relationship to religion. In fact, some successful business leaders were even hostile to organized religion. The desire for power and ego were also intertwined in the admixture of the development and advance capitalism.

The economic struggle for existence rejects the interference of religion as much as it does that from the state. However, religion was looming in early capitalistic societies. There was an underlying fear that salvation could be at risk if their business activities collided with church dogma - so much so that some wealthy individuals left large fortunes to churches. Even those indifferent to religion often played it safe by making large donations to churches.

It can be concluded that the development of the spirit of capitalism is part of the progression of rationalism in general. Protestantism was be part of that process due to its rationalistic philosophy. Rationalism is a historical concept which can be interpreted in many different ways and from many different directions. The purpose of this investigation is to learn which form of this spirit remains one of the most fundamental elements of our capitalistic culture.



Chapter 3: Luther's Conception of the Calling

Chapter 3: Luther's Conception of the Calling Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 3, the German word "Beruf" is translated in English as a "calling." Through the ages, the Catholic Church and other people of classic antiquity had no history with the concept of a person having a "calling" in life. It has predominantly been a part of Protestantism. In Luther's translation of the Bible, it first appeared in Jesus Sirach. After that, the concept gained popularity and became a part of the religious consciousness of Protestantism. Prior to that, it was virtually non-existent in religious writings other than in those of a German mystic who apparently had a great influence on Luther.

It was considered that the highest station in life was the fulfillment of duty to worldly affairs which gave such activity a religious significance and conceptualized the "calling." The concept was developed by Luther during the Reformation's first decade. The "calling" grew in importance against the Catholic monastic life which Luther saw as selfish and shirking worldly duties. To Luther, the fulfillment of worldly duties was a calling and in the eyes of God all callings were equal in importance. This moral justification of worldly duties was an important result of the Reformation and set the stage for the capitalistic spirit. The concept of a Godly calling was in stark contrast to Pascal who abhorred worldly activity and characterized it as "vanity or low cunning" (p. 41).

Luther would reject any connection between his concept of worldly responsibility to that of the spirit of capitalism as framed by Benjamin Franklin. In 1650, Cromwell declared that if abuses by the "professions" hurt the poor, the entire commonwealth suffered. That statement is one that is relevant in modern American politics as seen in the demonstrations against a rigged system that allows one percent of the populace to garner most of the wealth.

Luther derived his idea of a calling from his traditionalist interpretation of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. However, Jesus' prayer was, "Give us our daily bread," which in no way supports an aggressive presence in the world of economics. Traditionalists were waiting for the second-coming of the Lord and until that time, worked hard so they wouldn't be a burden to their brothers or an object of charity.

Based on Cor. vii, the pursuit of means beyond that which is essential is a fall from grace and is gained at the detriment of others and should be considered reprehensible. Luther was an adherent of providence and that strong belief led to an increased traditionalist interpretation. Luther's interpretation was that a man's calling was by God's divine. Thus, worldly duties were not subordinate to spiritual ones.



Although Luther is associated with the Reformation, its long-term success would not have been possible without Calvinism, which believes that man must accept his role in life as a task. It is not suggested that Calvinism or any of the Puritan sects have promoted what is defined here as the spirit of capitalism. The pursuit of worldly goods would not be considered an ethical value to any of the puritanical movements. These sects were not concerned with reformation or social reform where their only objective was salvation. However, such rigid, narrow ideology still had historic impact. For these purposes, their influence is important only in its impact on the Reformation. The Reformation is only important in this investigation as it relates to how the religious forces impacted the expansion of the spirit of capitalism and what aspects of our capitalistic culture was derived from them. By identifying these factors, a clearer picture of how religion has influenced modern culture will emerge.



Chapter 4: the Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism

Chapter 4: the Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism Summary and Analysis

There are four principal forms of ascetic Protestantism: 1) Calvinism; 2) Pietism; 3) Methodism; and 4) the sects of the Baptist movement. Methodism appeared in the middle of the 18th century but was not intended to form a new church, only to awaken spiritualism within the Church of England. Pietism split from Calvinism in England and remained loosely associated with orthodoxy until it became part of Lutheranism in the 17th century. Calvinism and Baptism were initially far apart in doctrine; however, in the latter part of the 17th century grew closer together. These movements were collectively referred to as Puritanism. The characteristics associated with the spirit of capitalism can be found in all the various denominations.

For the purposes of this work, it would seem best to focus on the moral practices of these movements, however, that is not the case. The religious dogma of these movements have all left their traces in the culture. The influences of church discipline, pastoral work and preaching cannot be discounted nor can the psychological influence of the religious beliefs and practices. Each of these movements will be delved into in their most ideal and perfect state.

It was Calvinism that led to the greatest political and cultural conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the most highly developed countries of England, the Netherlands, and France. Its most dogmatic doctrine was predestination. This belief caused the irrevocable schism in the English Church under James I when the Crown differed with the Puritans on this point. This tenet was described in the Westminster Confession of 1647 which was repeated in the creeds of both the Baptists and Independents. The Confession references man's free will, God's eternal decree, effectual calling and providence. In the section about providence, the confession indicates that God withholds his grace from the wicked and evil.

The doctrine of predestination may have developed from two sources. First, it is the Christian certainty that grace is a gift and is not earned by deeds or through faith. While the predominance of the doctrine of predestination faded over time for Luther, it was just the opposite for Calvin. His belief in the doctrine stemmed from the logical consistency of religious thought. The focus was on God, not on man as evidenced by this statement, "God does not exist for men, but men for the sake of God" (p. 59).

Calvin believed that very few men were destined for eternal life. Men who were damned had no more right to complain about their fate than did animals - it was God's will. Thinking that man could do good deeds to change God's chosen destiny was tantamount to believing that God's decrees were subject to change and that he was



initially wrong. It is a complete contradiction of God's infallibility. Man's destiny had been preordained and could not be changed by his deeds, by prayer or by the intervention of a priest. Some adherents took the doctrine literally to the grave of their loved ones. Many chose not have a burial ceremony for their departed so that no hope of salvation for the dead could creep into the mind of his survivors for if it did it would be a sin against God. Sensual and emotional behavior was not condoned because they could create a false sense of salvation. Nothing compromising could be shared with another—God should be one's only confidant. This belief is what led Calvin to abandon private confession. "The means to a periodical discharge of the emotional sense of sin was done away with" (p. 63).

The dogmatism of Calvinism is best captured in John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" which was the most widely-read book in Puritanical literature. The protagonist, Christian makes a pilgrimage of salvation, leaving behind his sobbing wife and children. Only when he is safe does he think about his family. Calvinism rips the ties with which a person is bound to the world. There is only one purpose for the world and it has nothing to do with man. The world exists only for the glorification of God who ordains that social behavior be tailored after his Commandments. Man is called to perform a mundane role in his community. It is not for his glory or achievement. Brotherly love is only important as it serves and relates to God. The angst that some underwent trying to figure out the purpose of life was not an issue for Calvinists.

The Calvinist doctrine of predestination originated from the belief that only a handful of people are chosen to be blessed with salvation. Calvin himself was certain that he was an elected individual. There was a caution for adherents not to try to determine who was saved and who was not. There could be no force used to learn God's secrets. Pastoral advice to a follower was to hold the absolute belief that he was a chosen one and to combat the Devil's temptations at all turns. Lutheranism promised grace if the sinner trusted God and was penitent. To attain this self-confidence, devotion to worldly pursuits was recommended to eliminate religious doubt and thus assure one's salvation.

The Lutheran religion believes that God is absorbed into the soul of the believer. Once God was thus absorbed, He could work his good through the believer. Luther believed that man must remain humble and simplistic in order to be forgiven for sin. Lutheranism adhered to the belief that man was a vessel that received God while Calvinism supported the tenet that the believer was a tool of God's will. Calvinists believed in the simple tenet that "God helps those who help themselves" (p. 69). The Calvinist, in essence, created his own certainty that he would have salvation, although very few actually would. Unlike Catholicism which believed that good works accumulates over time as credit toward salvation, the Calvinism believed in a consistent self-control whether the individual was ultimately saved or damned.

The Christian of the Middle Ages lived ethically but his good deeds did not represent a life-time of devotion. The Catholic held that the absolution of the Church made up for his imperfection and sin. It was the Catholic priest who held the key to salvation through his ordained position and relationship with God. The priest was able to forgive sin in the name of God. The Calvinist could not hope for such forgiveness and ease of



consciousness and his thoughts had to be constantly focused on salvation. This was the fundamental conflict between Catholicism and the Reformed faith.

Christian asceticism, or self-denial, is comprised of many different elements. Some forms have been freed from irrational self-torture and liberated man from his dependence on nature and from the power of his involuntary impulses. The intention of asceticism was for man to lead an intelligent existence the most important aspect of which was to destroy spontaneous enjoyment and function in an orderly manner. The holier a man was the further away he was from ordinary life.

Calvinism believed in the virtue of proving one's faith in worldly terms. It also engendered a judgmental mindset in its movement—sinners should be hated as enemies of God. The intensity of this belief varied and resulted in the formation of sects one of which was the Calvinistic Baptists. Calvinism itself relied heavily on the Old Testament which supported its rejection of mysticism and emotionalism. The Presbyterians were the strictest adherents to Calvinistic principals. Other sects emerged that believed in the doctrine of predestination. This doctrine prevented a slide into a belief in salvation through good works. In Lutheranism, grace could always be regained through contrition but contained no endorsement of the most important emergence from ascetic Protestantism - an ordering of the moral life. The psychological impact of Calvinistic predestination was powerful.

The concept of predestination marked the beginning of the ascetic movement referred to as Pietism. Through the ages there have been revivals of asceticism which generally spawned renewed interest in the doctrine of predestination. As proof that predestination was valid, it was shown that chosen ones were often less schooled in religion than those who were more informed but were damned. The knowledge of theology did not provide a proof of faith. Adherents of Pietism strove to live free of earthly temptation and under the dictates of God's will. Their intensified asceticism led to enjoyment in the community of God. This last tenet had a connection to Lutheranism and was at odds with Calvinism. In fact, the decisive characteristic of Pietism was its desire to enjoy salvation, or the prospect thereof, in this world. The goal of Pietism to separate the chosen led to a life that mimicked a monastic one. This stricter ascetic practice provided a more solid basis for the ethic of the calling.

The German Pietism that developed from Lutheranism did not embrace the doctrine of predestination. Pietism meant, in simplistic terms, the interjection of controlled conduct into non-Calvinistic denominations. Philipp Jakob Spener combined Lutheran ideas with Calvin's tenet of "intention of doing honour to God" (p. 83). His beliefs also embraced a Calvinistic mien in that the chosen could reach Christian perfection but adopted Luther's fragile ties between faith and good deeds. Pietism asserted two important tenets for the purposes of this study: 1) the development of one's own state of grace was a sign of grace and 2) that God worked through those who achieved a state of grace.

The doctrine of Terminism altered the doctrine of predestination by its belief that all men had the opportunity to be saved but grace was only offered once. If that moment was bypassed by the individual, there was not another chance to earn grace. August



Francke's movement believed that grace could only be achieved through prior repentance. An element that was common among most Pietist pastors was the outright rejection of the private confessional. Nicklaus Zinzendorf vacillated in his beliefs but followed the Puritanical tenet that man could not know his own state of grace but could be judged by others based on his conduct. He also attempted to turn his movement toward the Lutheran interpretation of good works and he embraced a child-like belief in one's faith as a sign of grace.

The Brotherhood movement advocated an active Christian missionary life which was considered a calling. The Brotherhood evolved not only as a missionary entity but also as a business enterprise placing its members squarely into the worldly realm. German Pietism emerged as weaker than Calvinism due to its lack of solid identity from its flirting with Lutheranism and its own emotional characteristics. Although there were other distinguishing traits in the Piety movements, the most outstanding was its emphasis on and advocacy of emotionalism.

The desire to combine emotion with an ascetic type of religion that rejected the dogmatism of Calvinism led to the establishment of the Anglo-American movement that paralleled European Pietism known as Methodism. The name itself reveals its intention to attain grace through a methodical approach. It was related to German Pietism in that it advocated emotionalism specifically within the act of conversion. Feeling was encouraged especially in one's journey to seek salvation. As a complete departure from Calvinism, this movement held the principle that a convert's emotional reaction to being saved was proof of his being forgiven for his sins and therefore had attained salvation and that sin no longer has a hold over him.

In his Declaration of August 9, 1771, John Wesley declared that work was a condition of grace and those who did not perform good works were not among the true believers. Methodism awakened a renewed belief for the doctrine of grace and the chosen. But there were conflicts within the movement and its flimsy foundation was similar to Pietism in its uncertainty and vacillation. With its origin being in England, it took on some of the characteristics of English Puritanism. Unlike the emotionalism espoused by Zinzendorf, the emotion realized after conversion compelled the believer to seek perfection. In other words, achieving grace was not the end of the believer's journey in faith, it was just the beginning. Methodism did not add anything fresh to the concept of the calling.

Pietism and Methodism were both considered secondary movements. The Baptist movement and the resultant sects were examples of independent ascetic Protestant movements. The Baptists, Mennonites and the Quakers were all off-shoots of the main Baptist movement that emerged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Without exception, these new sects abandoned Calvinistic doctrine. The commonality between the sects was that they were believers. They rejected the Calvinistic belief that a church is only created for the glory of God. Likewise, they distanced themselves from the Lutheran and Catholic doctrines that the church was a vehicle for salvation.

These new sects were simple believers of the reborn who congregated together to worship and glory in the Lord. Good deeds were deemed not necessary for salvation.



The gift of grace was there for the taking. And it was on an individual and private basis that a person was saved. There were no chosen or select people—salvation was offered to one and all. The Mennonites wanted a church that was blameless. The born-again were in the community of Christ and, like Christ, had been called by God.

The "true" church believed that the Holy Spirit was ever present and for those who cared to listen, God spoke to them on a daily basis. The Quakers believed in the presence of the Holy Spirit which abandoned the Bible as the sole authority. The Holy Spirit was there to guide and direct the believers beyond what was written in the Bible. The Quakers eventually relinquished the Baptism ritual and Communion. The Baptist denominations believed that the constant presence of God in one's soul was necessary to understand the message of the Bible which was to be taken literally and sometimes resulted in radical interpretations.

The Baptist communities strove for the blameless behavior of their congregates. An unconditional submission to God and a repudiation of worldly issues or materials were also part of what it took to become a member. The moment of silence before a Quaker service was the time allowed for the spirit to descend. Although early founders of the Baptist movement espoused the rejection of worldly goods, the lives of the believers were not those of martyrs. They owned property and wealth. The monastic life had been deemed unbiblical and the movement believed in salvation by works as did Luther and the Catholics. As in every movement, there were radical off-shoots. The Dunckards condemned education and anything that was not crucial to life.

It was the Baptist doctrine of salvation that placed the emphasis on the conscience as the means of spiritual revelation that helped create traits and behavior that led to the development of the spirit of capitalism. Within these sects, there was an emphasis on honesty. Benjamin Franklin said it best, "Honesty is the best policy" (p. 98). The Baptists sects were concerned with helping its members by offering guidance and spiritual support. However, the Calvinistic State Churches were overbearing in their ecclesiastical supervision of the individual by waging what could best be described as inquisitions. Such practices had the exact counter-effect than what was intended and drove people away from the religion.

While the state and private business can develop industries, their success could not be achieved without the spirit of capitalism. The Christian movement left the monastery and ventured out into the world. The following chapter will attempt to understand the link between the Puritan concept of "a calling" to the modern market place.



Chapter 5: Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism

Chapter 5: Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism Summary and Analysis

To understand the link between the religion of ascetic Protestantism and economics, it is necessary to look to the writings of ministerial practice. Centuries ago, the cultural status of a Christian was dependent upon several factors: his ability to take communion, the pastor and the preaching of the church. For modern man, it is difficult to understand how matters of religion could be an important factor in economics. But it was those foregoing elements that formed a nation's cultural foundation.

The writings of Richard Baxter on Puritanism provide superior reference material because of his status of a writer as well as his practicality. Although Baxter was a Presbyterian, over time he distanced himself from Calvinism. His focus was on living the moral life with the guidance of the Church. Baxter's "Christian Directory" is the most complete work of Puritan ethics. Other reference material for this chapter includes Spener's "Theologische Bedenken," for insight into German Pietism and Barclay's "Apology" that represents the Quaker influence.

Baxter focuses on wealth and its inherent danger and temptation. Baxter argues more vigorously against wealth than did Calvin who saw no harm to the effectiveness of wealthy clergy. The condemnation of acquiring wealth was a common theme among Puritan writings. The Puritanical view on working was based on the fear that the idle man was vulnerable to evil and temptation. Wasting time was one of the most vile of sins. Too much relaxation, too much sleep and too much luxury that allowed idle time were all preached against. God was pleased when man performed his calling according to His will.

Baxter's writings are filled with admonitions against idleness and on the importance of hard work, both of mind and body. Although sexual intercourse was allowed within marriage, it was only to occur as willed by God and for his glory, evidenced by statements such as "Be fruitful and multiply" (p. 105). Those who were deemed lazy or did not work obviously suffered from a lack of grace. The wealthy were not exempt from work. Even though a rich man need not work to survive, he still had to adhere to God's will that he labor. Every man of every station of life had a calling which he had to answer. Answering this calling was for the Glory of God.

Thomas Aquinas opined that the division of labor in a society was due to the divine scheme of things. Luther also adhered to a man's station in life as God's will. To the Puritan, the division of labor served the common good. To Baxter a calling was essential in that it took the confusion and idleness away from men who were open to taking irregular labor which did not satisfy God's will.



To the Quakers, a man's calling was proof of his state of grace. God did not call for labor alone but for "rational" labor in a specific calling. Answering to more than one calling was acceptable if it was for the common good or one's own grace. The benefit of a calling was measured in its positive impact on the community. Private profitability was not frowned upon; in fact, it was encouraged. If God showed the way for a man to lawfully gain more, he complied with God's will by taking it. The labor to become rich, however, had to be for God's glory not for the man. Wealth was only unethical if it allowed for leisure time which would lead to temptation. There was no virtue in being poor no more than there was in being unhealthy. Begging by the able-bodied was a sin and a affront to the concept of brotherly love.

The Quakers referenced the a passage in the Book of Job in the Old Testament which refers to a man being blessed in grace but also in the material sense. The Old Testament was able to provide a powerful spirit of self-righteousness a common trait of asceticism. Puritanism combined the ethics of the rational organization of capital and labor. The Puritans saw themselves as the chosen people. Even Baxter thanked God that he was born in England so he could be part of the true church.

Referring again to the basic Puritan idea of the calling and the admonition of the enjoyment of life, idleness and the impulsive enjoyment of life led away from a man's calling and from his religion. Puritanism was not opposed to knowledge and education. On the contrary, no new country had ever produced as many graduates as New England in its first year of establishment. The religions embraced knowledge as a value. However, there was objection to the study of fine arts and anything that could be categorized as mystical or magical. The Puritans admonished Christmas festivities and the theater. Anything that was not for the Glory of God was rejected.

There was also a strong belief that a man had a duty to his possessions. It was a great responsibility and the more possessions a man had the greater the burden, where the rich have more responsibility to the world than does the poor man. It was man's duty to maintain his possessions in pristine condition for the glory of God and, in fact, increasing the amount of his possessions was also for God's glory. This mindset set the stage and was the ethical foundation for the spirit of capitalism.

According to Protestant asceticism, the enjoyment of possessions was prohibited. The struggle was not against having possessions; rather, it was against an irrational use of wealth that would not serve God's glory. They approved the rational use of wealth for the betterment of the community. The pursuit of worldly goods driven by avarice was condemned; however, the acquisition of wealth in one's calling was a sign of God's blessing. The highest level of asceticism was considered to be the continuous work in one's calling which eventually evolved into the spirit of capitalism. Puritanism favored the development of a rational economic society.

John Wesley struck a cautionary note when he warned that the increase of wealth could lead to pride and anger and materialism. But Wesley was not against the accumulation of wealth. Although his advice was to be frugal and save he also encouraged people to grow wealthy from their savings. There was no issue with gaining wealth as long as it



was not used in an evil or illegal way. In fact, a man who became wealthy was fulfilling his duty, his calling. The unequal distribution of wealth was a result of Divine Providence. God looked kindly upon the poor who were faithful in their labors. Laborers were seen as answering their particular calling just as business men and leaders were answering theirs. Although the Puritans rejected any connection with large-scale capitalism, they viewed their own business ventures with pride.

A basic aspect of the spirit of modern capitalism was the "rational conduct on the basis of the idea of the calling was born from the spirit of Christian asceticism" (p. 123). The Puritan's goal was to work in a calling. However, in modern times, the idea of a calling is fading away. In the country that has the highest developed economy, the United States, wealth is pursued for wealth's sake and any religious or ethical meaning has been abandoned. Modern man is not capable of applying religious significance to the national culture and is unaware that capitalism was based squarely on religious morality.



Characters

Benjamin Franklin

Author Max Weber uses the words of Benjamin Franklin to provide what he considers the best provisional description of the "spirit of capitalism" for the purposes of what he refers to as his investigation, his argument that the Protestant ethic led to successful capitalism. Weber chose Franklin's economic fundamentals because they were presented in an almost classical purity and were free from preconceptions and religious references.

Franklin cautioned his readers to remember that time is money. If a man is idle, he is not making money—in fact he's losing money. Credit is also money. If a man borrows money, the lender is able to use his money to make money. Franklin also describes the steps for a person to become credit worthy. A person who pays his debts on time or early, raises his reputation among the lending community. A man's general behavior and reputation also factors into his credit reputation. Living within one's means and saving a portion of earnings is also a positive practice for those who want to boost their credit rating.

Weber points out that Franklin's advice was not limited to merely economics. His advice presented the ethics necessary to live a good and moral life. Franklin's formula for a successful life and career focused on above all else, honesty. In fact, he coined the phrase, "Honesty is the best policy."

Martin Luther

Martin Luther was one of the leaders of the Reformation which began in Europe in the sixteenth century. Prior to the Reformation, the predominant religion in Europe was Catholicism. Luther, like other leaders of the Reformation, saw the Catholic Church as lax and too forgiving of sinners. Indeed, even the monks, who to many were living an ascetic life and giving up much personal enjoyment, were seen by Luther as self-centered and lazy and shirking their duties. Luther was one of the Protestant leaders who supported the concept of God's calling which meant that God had predetermined a specific calling or work for every man on earth. It was to God's glory that a man answered his calling and toiled hard at his calling.

To achieve the highest spiritual station on earth, it was considered by Reformation movements that the fulfillment of the duties and responsibilities of one's calling was essential to attain a state of grace. Luther interpreted the doctrine from his translation of the Bible, appearing first in Jesus Sirach. The doctrine took hold and became a popular and accepted part of Protestantism. The original concept apparently originated with a German mystic who reportedly had a great influence on young Luther.



Although the premise of this book, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," is that the Protestant asceticism and the doctrine of the calling merged and evolved into the spirit of capitalism, Luther would have never dreamed of that possibility nor would he have supported it.

Jean Calvin

Jean Calvin was one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation that began in the sixteenth century in Europe. Calvin's doctrines were considered by many to be harsh and radical.

John Wesley

John Wesley was a leader in the Methodist movement. It was his contention that work was a condition of grace and that those who did not perform good works were not true believers.

John Bunyan

John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" captured the essence of Calvinism. His protagonist was so focused on his own salvation that he "forgot" about his wife and children.

Richard Baxter

The writings of Richard Baxter were among the most outstanding in all of Puritan literature. He wrote the "Christian Directory" which is the most complete work on Puritan ethics.

Philipp Jakob Spener

Philipp Jakob Spener was known as the father of Pietism and combined Lutheran ideas with Calvin's tenet of "intention of doing honour to God."

Nicklaus Zinzendorf

Nicklaus Zinzendorf was a leader of the Moravian church and followed the Puritanical doctrine that man could be judged by other men on his state of grace. He believed a child-like belief in God was a blessing from God.



Robert Barclay

Robert Barclay's was a Quaker and wrote one of the most compelling and extensive works on the Quaker religion.

August Francke

August Francke was a Lutheran and German religious scholar during the time of the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the seventeenth century.



Objects/Places

The Reformation

The Protestant Reformation took place in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. The movement was in response to religious leaders who felt the dominant Christian religion of Catholicism was weak and too forgiving of sinners.

Catholicism

Catholicism was the dominant Christian religion in Europe prior to the Reformation. Catholicism was focused on high ideas and non-worldly matters unlike the Protestants who believed in God's desire that people work hard on earth.

Lutheranism

Lutheranism was one of the emerging movements of the Protestant Reformation. The religion was established by German scholar and leader, Martin Luther.

Calvinism

Calvinism was one of the emerging Protestant religions that resulted from the sixteenth century Reformation in Europe. Jean Calvin, a French cleric, established the religion which was one of the most dogmatic of the movements and believed in the doctrines of predestination and election.

Pietism

The emerging concept of predestination—that some men were destined to be saved and some were not—marked the beginning of the ascetic movement known as Pietism. The goal of Pietism was to live separately from non-believers and enjoy the communion of God.

Methodism

John Wesley was one of the religious leaders who established the Anglo-American movement known as Methodism. The movement accepted "emotionalism" of some of the Baptist sects but rejected the dogmatism of Calvinism.



The Quaker Movement

The Quaker movement emerged as a major religion from the Protestant Reformation. Quakers believed in the presence of God and the Holy Spirit to the point that they depended on His personal guidance over the lessons of the Bible.

The Baptist Sects

The Baptist Sects were movements that emerged from the Protestant Reformation. They included the Baptists, the Mennonites and the Quakers.

Pilgrim's Progress

"Pilgrim's Progress" was written by John Bunyan and captured the essence of Calvinism. The protagonist is so wrapped up in his own salvation, that he leaves behind his weeping wife and children.

The Christian Directory

The "Christian Directory" was written by Richard Baxter and is considered the most complete work on Puritan ethics.



Themes

Asceticism

Asceticism is the practice of self-denial for the purpose of achieving a higher status, especially as it relates to morals and religion. The concept of Christian asceticism which, emerged during the Reformation of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, laid the groundwork for what later became the spirit of capitalism which was one of the essential factors that has made modern-day capitalism successful and even possible.

During its early development, Protestant asceticism was a tenet that called for the orderly functioning and intelligence existence of man and the rejection of spontaneous enjoyment. The farther away man was from ordinary life, the closer he was to God. The most important and lasting achievement of asceticism was the church's support of man's living a rational, orderly and moral life.

The Catholic Church was the predominant religion on Europe prior to the Reformation which was launched in the sixteenth century. One of the most radical concepts, as compared to Catholicism, from the Reformation movements was the doctrine of predestination which was an intensified off-shoot of asceticism. Followers of Pietism focused on living lives free of temptation and subservient to God's will.

The Protestant movements came to believe in "callings." It was their contention that it was God's will that every individual had a calling or a specific function on earth. In order to answer that call and to fulfill one's worldly duties, it satisfied God and was to his glory. God wanted man to work hard at his calling and be responsible and self-reliant. There was a natural compatibility between the two doctrines: working hard was a form of self-denial. Eventually, these characteristics blended and developed into the spirit of capitalism.

Spirit of Capitalism

The main thesis of "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," is that the success of modern capitalism stems from the "spirit of capitalism" that was borne in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe after the Reformation. Protestant movements began to emerge when Catholicism was viewed by some as too lax and liberal in its treatment of sinners.

The doubts and complaints about the Catholic religion, which was the dominant religion in Europe at the time, created fertile ground for the Reformation and the stringent and dogmatic religions such as Calvinism that emerged in answer to what was perceived as the failure of Catholicism. The stricter more controlling supervision of congregates through Protestant asceticism called for man to work hard, be honest and be moral - all for the glory of God.



From the traits and characteristics that were fostered in the Protestant movements, emerged a superior work ethic. God was apparently pleased with the success of man in worldly matters according to these new religions. He did not offer any admonition against wealth - only that it was used for good. God also wanted all men to work and work hard - even rich men who didn't need the money to survive.

It was from these characteristics that the "spirit of capitalism" is born, which would become an essential part of the foundation for the success and perpetuation of modern business.

The Calling

One of the starkest contrasts between Catholicism and the emerging Protestant movements after the Reformation was the concept of a calling. The predominant religion in Europe prior to the sixteenth century Reformation was Catholicism. No where in the history of the Catholic Church was the concept of a "calling" supported. However, it became a major element of Protestantism. It was thought that the highest status a person could achieve in life was to fulfill his worldly duties which lent a religious significance to his work. The work that was preordained for each man was for the Glory of God and was termed a person's "calling."

The emergence of the concept of a calling was one of the important results of the Reformation and ultimately led to the development of traits and characteristics that would fuel the spirit of capitalism. The work ethic and practices that were ingrained in the early followers of the Puritanical movements later were important to the success of capitalism. It was studied conclusion of Protestant leaders that God was only satisfied if man worked hard, was honest in his business dealings, followed the law and was took scrupulous care of the acquisitions, including wealth that he earned fulfilling his worldly duties. This was his calling since God did not reject the accumulation of wealth as long as it was used to glorify him and help the community.

From that foundation, the Protestant families passed down a legacy of working hard, accumulating wealth, and becoming community leaders. When this book was written which was in 1904, the majority of the leaders and owners in business were Protestants. A sense of community was borne in tandem with the concept of working hard at one's calling. A great sense of responsibility and self-reliance was a by-product of answering to one's calling. The Protestants were waiting for the second coming of Christ but would work hard until that time so they wouldn't be a burden on their brothers.

Style

Perspective

"The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" by Max Weber is written in the third-person narrative. It is one of the most famous as well as controversial works of modern social studies. The work was first published as a two-part article with Weber as one of the editors. As stated, the book was controversial and created quite an uproar in some circles. Weber had done his homework and believed in his findings and willingly participated in open debates to defend the assertions in the piece.

Weber wrote the book at a crossroads in his career and at a time he was recovering from a debilitating illness. His illness was so severe that he had to abandon his work for nearly four years. The first work that Weber wrote after his recovery, was "The Protestant Ethic." Weber went on to write many other challenging works many of which were inspired from the historical school of economics. Weber's background in history and economy made him uniquely qualified to write this book which focused on the history of the spirit of capitalism that was spawned by religious practices and which ultimately proved to be an integral part of modern economics.

Weber was certainly a scholar and qualified to take on the challenge of researching, drawing conclusions and writing on such a complicated subject. The work involved an in-depth grasp of sixteenth and seventeenth century history as well as the history of the Reformation. In addition to religion, Weber was versed in history, economics, philosophy, and jurisprudence.

Tone

"The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" by Max Weber is a scholarly work that does not take sides and appears to have no biases. The work is based on literally hundreds of references and resources. The subject matter is a very complex and involved one and it is obvious that Weber took great care to support every assertion he makes. He does draw conclusions but not through assumptions but obviously only through meticulous research and references from multiple sources. Weber begins with a thesis and sets out to prove it. However, he is careful to present every involved factor in this discussion.

The book was originally written in German and in 1904 so the tone reflects, at times, another time and culture. However, the arguments are presented in a rational and logical manner and much of the material that is included as well as many of the assertions that Weber makes are amazingly applicable to modern economics although the book was written over 100 years ago. Since the subject involves religion, it is a work that is likely to evoke an emotional and personal reaction from the reader. This point is

underscored in the introduction where the book is touted as "one of the most renowned and controversial works of modern social science" (vii).

Structure

"The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" by Max Weber is separated into two main parts. Part I, The Problem, contains three chapters which describe religions and social structure; the spirit of capitalism; and, the concept of the calling. Part II, The Practical Ethics of the Ascetic Branches of Protestantism" contains a break down of the four religious foundations of asceticism and includes profiles of Calvinism; Pietism; Methodism; and, The Baptist Sects. The practices and ethics of these movements eventually became an important part of modern business.

The first part of the book presents the basic question/premise of the book. Weber asserts that the teachings and tenets of the Protestant religions fostered the traits and characteristics that greatly impacted modern day capitalism. It is his contention that the spirit of capitalism, which is the ethic that is essential for capitalism to be successful, originated from Protestant asceticism. The second part of the book describes the various puritanical religions that inadvertently created the traits and characteristics that ultimately formed the foundation for modern capitalism. In the closing chapter, Weber connects the two elements that at first blush seem unlikely to have any relationship at all.

An introduction by Anthony Giddens, a translator's preface (the work was originally written in German) and the author's introduction precede the first part. After the concluding chapter, there is an extensive "Notes" section and an "Index."



Quotes

"The emancipation from economic traditionalism appears, no doubt, to be a factor which would greatly strengthen the tendency to doubt the sanctity of the religious tradition, as of all traditional authorities" (Chapter 1, p. 4).

"Montesquieu says of the English that they 'had progressed the farthest of all peoples of the world in three important things: in piety, in commerce, and in freedom'" (Chapter 1, p. 11).

"For centuries it was an article of faith, that low wages were productive, i.e. that they increased the material results of labor so that. . . the people only work because and so long as they are poor" (Chapter 2, p. 24).

"The people filled with the spirit of capitalism today tend to be indifferent, if not hostile, to the Church. The thought of the pious boredom of paradise has little attraction for their active natures; religion appears to them as a means of drawing people away from labor in this world" (Chapter 2, p. 32).

"The monastic life is not only quite devoid of value as a means of justification before God, but he [Luther] also looks upon its renunciation of the duties of this world as the product of selfishness, withdrawing from temporal obligations. (Chapter 3, p. 41)

"Be pleased to reform the abuses of all professions: and if there be anyone that makes many poor to make a few rich, that suits not a commonwealth" (Chapter 3, p. 42)

"'Though I may be sent to Hell for it, such a God will never command my respect,'" was Milton's well-known opinion of the doctrine [of predestination]" (Chapter 4, p. 58).

"The combination of an emotional but still ascetic type of religion with increasing indifference to or repudiation of the dogmatic basis of Calvinistic asceticism is characteristic also of the Anglo-American movement corresponding to Continental Pietism, namely Methodism" (Chapter 4, p. 89).

"The man of action is always ruthless; no one has a conscience but an observer" (Chapter 4, p. 99).

"Christian asceticism, at first fleeing from the world into solitude...now it strode into the market-place of life, slammed the door of the monastery behind it, and understood to

penetrate just that daily routine of life with its methodicalness, to fashion it into a life in the world, but neither or nor for this world" (Chapter 4, p. 101).

"The Puritan wanted to work in a calling. . .when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order" (Chapter 4, p. 123).

"The rosy blush of its laughing heir, the Enlightenment, seems also to be irretrievably fading, and the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs" (Chapter 5, p. 124).



Topics for Discussion

For the purposes of his work, how did the author define the spirit of capitalism? What famous American did the author look to for the best description of the term and what was that description?

How does the author draw a connection between the Puritanical religions and modern day capitalism? Would most people of modern times see or understand the connection? Why or why not?

What were the fundamental differences between Luther and Calvin? Which religious figure was considered radical and dogmatic and why? What aspects of the Catholic Church was adapted by one or both of these men?

Why did Calvin reject the private confession? How was Calvinism depicted in John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress?"

What beliefs did the Quakers have? Why didn't they look at the Bible as the only source of God's will? What Christian rituals did the Quakers abandon?

How did Methodist leader John Wesley defend the wealthy? How was wealth in general dealt with by the Puritanical sects? What modern movement of 2011 is relevant to the issue of the wealthy and the poor?

What are the four principal forms of ascetic Protestantism? Provide a brief description of each of these movements.