

# CHAPTER III THE WORLD RELIGIONS AND THEIR ETHICS

## 1. Max Weber's Introduction

### Basic Literature

Max Weber «The Social Psychology of World Religions» in: Gerth & Mills (transl. & ed.) *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology* Oxford University Press 1958, pp. 267-301

Max Weber «Einleitung» in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I*, Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1920, pp. 237-275

The «Introduction» is fundamental for the understanding of Weber's «Economic Ethics of World Religions»; it provides some basic interrelated concepts and a method of comparing religions in their socio-economic context, as socially relevant as well as socially conditioned.<sup>22</sup> Weber remarks at the outset that by «world religions» he understands those systems of life-regulation which have had a large multitude of adherents, such as the Confucian, the Hindu, the Buddhist and the Christian religious ethic, and also ancient Judaism because of its historic significance for the modern economic ethic of the Occident. Later in this text Weber discusses salvation religions (which promise the release from suffering), and it will be-

---

22 H. Kippenberg (1995) has suggested that in the newly developing discipline of the history of religions Weber found ideas which, in contrast to the ideas of the Enlightenment, saw religion as an independent phenomenon, having its own value and right to exist and the possibility to follow «the laws of its own» (ES: 341), not those of the economy. This allowed him to suggest that a historic process in the religious development of the Occident led to the foundation of modern rational culture as well as to different kinds of rationalization in other cultures. From scholars in the history of religions (Max Müller, C.P. Tiele, Troeltsch) Weber may also have taken many of the concepts which he used in his essays on the world religions, for instance the distinction between nature religions, civilizational religions, and salvation religions, the distinction between a personal and an impersonal god, the idea that there are levels and directions in religious development, and the suggestion that the experience of the irrationality of the world is the driving force of salvational conceptions and of theodicies (FMW: 123).

come possible to say that Confucianism and Islam are world religions or civilizational religions, whereas Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity are also salvation religions. All world religions, however, have this in common, that they have broken out of magical world views and developed a conduct of life, oriented by a coherent and systematized set of values, that their adherents follow duties and ritual and do not live with tabu-like norms or magical coercion, or that they distinguish between what is and what ought to be.<sup>23</sup>

Weber mentions two kinds of religious ethics: on the one hand, there are ritualistic and legalistic ethics which lead to stereotypes of ethical behaviour, and on the other hand, there is the ethic of conviction which systematizes the religious requirements and leads to a distinction between morals and law. It results in a coherent conduct of life, the constancy of one's inner relations to ultimate values and the formation of a personality.

When Weber talks of the economic ethic of a religion, he does not refer to the ethical theories of theological compendia, but he points to the practical motivations for action, founded in the psychological and pragmatic contexts of religions. Economic ethics are not simply «functions» of a form of economic organization; rather it may be possible to say that among the determinants of an economic ethic is the religious influence on the conduct of life, combined, however, with the constellations of interests and the respective personality formation. It is true, moreover, that externally similar forms of economic organization may be compatible with very different economic ethics.

---

23 A more extensive distinction between magic and religion is provided by Weber in *Economy and Society*. He stresses that the magical world view consists of a complex of heterogeneous oracles, prescriptions and prohibitions which cannot be unified or systematized (ES: 437). «Magical ethics» can be seen as benefit calculating coercion of a god or spirit so that the distinction between the two oppositions useful/harmful and good/bad is blurred. The religious world view, on the other hand, particularly the world view of the so-called axial religions characterized by Karl Jaspers (1949), is dualistic; it assumes that behind the real things and events there is something else, of which real events are only symptoms or symbols, and it presupposes the concept of a radically other world, meaningfully ordered, coherent and systematized (ES: 451), and a tension between this world and that other world. It also includes a system of norms, so that not coercive magic, but a conduct of life according to these norms can influence the fate of humans. But, even when the religious world view turns away from magic, it is rare that magic is completely eliminated.

In the following essays, Weber writes, it will be attempted to uncover the conduct of life of the social strata which have most strongly influenced the practical ethics of their respective religions: Confucianism was the status ethic of secular-rational prebendaries, the mandarins, earlier Hinduism was borne by the hereditary caste of the Brahmins, Buddhism was propagated by world-renouncing monks, post-Exile Judaism was the religion of a pariah-people and Christianity that of urban artisans, citizens of the quite singular occidental city. However, in spite of these social influences, religious ethics received their stamp primarily from religious sources. Even Nietzsche's theory of resentment of the disadvantaged and of the «slave revolt in morals» does not change this fact although his references to suffering have, according to Weber, some justification.

Suffering was originally considered to be a symptom of the wrath of a god, for the fortunate is seldom satisfied with the fact of being fortunate: he also wants to know that he has a right to his good fortune. Thus, religion was often used to legitimate the good fortune of the propertied, the mighty, the victorious or the healthy. But before, on the other hand, the religious glorification of suffering could arise, it was necessary to realize that certain forms of abstinence and of chastisement could awaken or further the charisma of ecstatic or visionary states that were considered as holy. It was assumed that certain kinds of suffering provoked through chastisement are avenues to the attainment of superhuman powers. To this must be added the development of cults of salvation which took a new position in the face of individual suffering. While the primeval cults of political associations left all individual interests out of consideration, there developed within or besides them myths of a saviour (and hence a rational view of the world) who promised salvation from suffering for individuals qua individuals, particularly among the less favoured strata. In many cases, some kind of theodicy of suffering has originated from the hope for salvation, and such rational theodicies provided individual suffering with a positive valuation.

The need for an ethical interpretation of the meaning of suffering and of the distribution of good and bad fortunes among humans furthered a growing rationalization of the conceptions of the world; the experience of the meaninglessness of the world led the religious development on the path of rationalization or of an inner logic which systematized the explanations. Among the many explanations of suffering and injustice which one encounters, only three gave rationally satisfactory answers: the Indian doctrine of karma, Zoroastrian dualism and the predestination decree of the

protestant *deus absconditus* (the God whose reasons for his decisions are inaccessible and thus hidden to the human mind).

The theodicies of suffering may indeed sometimes be coloured by resentment; but the distrust of wealth and power which as a rule exists in genuine religions of salvation, must be explained by the fact that those strata which are satiated and favoured in this world, have generally only a small urge to be saved and are less «devout». Moreover, the development of a rational economic ethic in the lower strata has the following reason: while the sense of dignity of the higher strata tends to feed on their actual or assumed being, the sense of dignity of the lower strata is often nourished by the belief that they have a special mission or that they follow an ethical imperative. The source of the power of ethical prophecies among the socially disadvantaged strata lies in this fact.

Salvational goods, even when they are understood as «otherworldly», have a this-worldly character. The Puritan *certitudo salutis* (feeling certain of one's salvation), the Indian's *bhakti* (fervent love in the possession of God), the *radenie* (joyful ecstasy) of the Khlysts in Russia were sought because of their psychic extraordinariness. Even if the rationalized religions imputed a metaphysical meaning to these goals, the salvational good was for the devout a psychological state in the here and now. One can distinguish between religious and profane states only by referring to the extraordinary character of the religious states.

The kinds of salvational goods that are sought after by religions have varied according to the social strata which were foremost in adopting them. The business classes (merchants and artisans) have often been the exponents of practical rationalism while a more theoretical rationalism has been advanced by intellectuals. It has always been the work of intellectuals and priests to sublimate orgy into sacrament and to transform unformed and irrational religious beliefs into a rational system of thought concerning salvation. It depended on these rational systems of religious thought or world views, be they Confucian, Indian, Islamic or Calvinist, from what and for what one wished to be saved, what in the actual world appeared to be particularly meaningless and to what kind of salvation one aspired. Even if material or ideal interests determine men's conduct, these

rationally constructed world images have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which human action has been pushed (FMW: 280).<sup>24</sup>

Hierocracies have sought to monopolize the administration of religious goods of salvation in the form of sacramental or institutional grace; political bureaucracies have generally been suspicious of individual pursuits of salvation and have insisted on social obligations and on the ritualistic character of religion; peasants have generally been inclined towards magic.

Bourgeois strata are the most ambiguous with regard to the religious options they have chosen, yet elective affinities or mutual attractions between these strata and certain special types of religion stand out. Because of the nature of their way of life which is detached from economic bonds to nature and because their whole existence is based upon technological and economic calculations, there existed the possibility that a tendency towards an ethical and rational conduct of life might develop, particularly if a prophecy provided a religious basis for it.

Weber distinguishes, on the one hand, exemplary prophecy which points out the ideal of a contemplative life-style, of being a vessel of the divine, by exemplary living<sup>25</sup> and, on the other hand, emissary prophecy which addresses demands of an ethical and ascetic character to the world in the name of a god and where the individual regards himself as an instrument of this god. The active asceticism propagated by emissary prophecy has often been the preferred religious attitude of bourgeois strata – in opposition to the contemplative mysticism of exemplary prophecy which was preferred by intellectuals. Moreover, emissary prophecy and asceticism have had a profound elective affinity to the conception of a supra-mundane personal god of creation, in contrast to the impersonal and immanent supreme being of exemplary prophecy. The first conception has dominated the Near-Eastern regions and the Occident, the second one has dominated Indian and Chinese religiosity.<sup>26</sup>

---

24 Weber thought that interests are blind, and no continuous rationalization can proceed from them, as adventurer or booty capitalism have often shown. Images of the world, articulated by ideas, must discipline and lead the interests in the sense of a methodical and in this sense rational conduct of life. All societies have faced this situation, but they have found different solutions.

25 Another aspect of exemplary prophecy, according to Weber, is the Socratic dialogue in which the opponent is led *ad absurdum* by rational arguments (RI: 225).

26 Peter Berger has developed the contrast between a transcendent god and asceticism on the one hand and an immanent god and mysticism on the other hand in

The rational elements of a religion, its «doctrine», e.g. the Indian doctrine of karma or the Calvinist concept of predestination, have their inner logic (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*), and the rational pragmatism of salvation which flows from them, for instance from the nature of the conception of God (transcendent or immanent), has often had far-reaching results for the fashioning of a practical conduct of life. The mystic Meister Eckhart, for instance, could not realize the pantheist experience of the mystic without sacrificing some of the decisive elements of the Occidental belief in a transcendent God, and the Muslim mystic al-Hallaj was executed in Baghdad in 922 for his formula «I am truth», implying identification with God.

It may therefore be said that, on the one hand, the nature of the desired salvational goods has been strongly influenced by the external interests and the conduct of life of the ruling strata but that, on the other hand, the direction of the conduct of life, in so far as it was methodically rationalized, was profoundly determined by religious values of the doctrinal system and its inner logic.

In this context it is important to point to the fact that men have unequal religious qualifications: heroic or virtuoso religiosity is opposed to mass religiosity, the religiosity of those who are religiously «unmusical». The hierocratic and official authority of a church which organizes the masses, fights principally against all virtuoso-religion and its autonomous development: the religiosity of the Ulema stood against that of the Dervishes in Islam, the early Christian bishops against the pneumatics, the Russian state church against the sects, the Confucian officials against Buddhist and Taoist pursuits of salvation. Religious virtuosi have often seen themselves compelled to adjust to everyday religiosity in order to maintain ideal or material mass-patronage. The nature of their concessions has been of primary significance for the way in which religion has influenced everyday life. In most parts of the Orient, the religious virtuosi allowed the masses to remain entangled in magical traditions while in the Occident they have undertaken to ethically rationalize the life of the masses.

Clearly also the peculiar nature of the virtuoso-religiosity has been of decisive importance: wherever it was of a contemplative or orgiastic-ecstatic character, there has been no bridge between it and everyday life, because no psychological motives for innerworldly economic action could

---

more detail. He calls it the opposition between Jerusalem and Benares. P. Berger *The Heretical Imperative* London: Collins 1980

be derived from it. Contemplative and ecstatic religions are rather hostile to economic life, and where they are dominant, a deep abyss separates the way of life of the «laymen» from that of the virtuosi. While the virtuoso might be a *directeur de l'âme* (spiritual guide) of the «laymen» – as the Buddhist bhikku or the Russian starets – the influence would be in merely ritualist and conventional particulars, for action in this world remained in principle religiously insignificant.

Things were very different where the religious virtuosi attempted to mould the world according to the will of a god. In this case, the salvational goods were not of a contemplative character, like a *unio mystica*, nor were the means of salvation of a magical or sacramental kind, for these means tend to devalue action in this world as insignificant and they do not link salvation to practical and everyday events. Thus, two things were achieved: the disenchantment of the world and the turning away of the path of salvation from a contemplative «flight from the world» towards an active fashioning of the world. Apart from small rationalist sects which are found all over the world, this has happened mainly in Occidental Protestantism. Why did this happen?

Partly it was the influence of the stratum that was decisive for this religion, i.e., the bourgeois stratum, partly, however, it was the conception of a supra-mundane God and the specificity of the method of salvation. Where the religious virtuoso saw himself as an instrument of God, under the necessity to prove himself or his ethical qualifications before God, he might reject the world as it is (in the sense that he despised the values of dignity or beauty or worldly power), but he would not flee from the world, as in the case of contemplative mysticism. He remained oriented towards the world in a more specific and thoroughgoing sense than did the naive «affirmation of the world» of unbroken humanity in Antiquity or in lay-Catholicism. Thus, the Occidental sects of religious virtuosi have fermented the methodical inworldly rationalization of conduct, including economic conduct. Between the polar opposites of world-fleeing contemplation and world-dominating asceticism, however, one finds the most varied transitions and combinations.

On the whole it can be said that, with regard to salvation religions Weber uses in the «Introduction» four criteria for their characterization. 1. Their concept of God (transcendent or immanent), 2. their method of salvation (world fleeing contemplation of world dominating asceticism), 3. their salvational goods (knowledge of the world or knowledge of personal destiny) and 4. the carrier strata of these religions (intellectuals/monks or

bourgeois strata). The characterization of the other world religions is more pale: Confucianism, based on a stratum of secular prebendaries and with the concept of an impersonal eternal order, pursues «cultural» qualifications or the ideal of a «cultivated» man, and Islam, a warrior religion with a transcendent God.

The «Introduction» concludes with some methodological comments. The world religions which are to be discussed here, are not simply types which represent stages of development. Neither a systematic typology of religion nor a purely historical work is intended. The essays are typological in the sense that they consider what is typically important in connection with the great contrasts of the economic mentalities of the world; the world religions are presented in greater logical consistency and unity than has ever been the case in their actual development in order to underscore the differences of those features which have been decisive for the practical way of life. These features interest Weber primarily from a definite point of view, namely their relationship to economic rationalism, i.e., that type of rationalism which, since the sixteenth century, has come to dominate the Occident.

It must be underscored here that «rationalism» may mean very different things. The systematic rationalization of a conception of the world by means of abstract concepts is very different from the methodical-rational attainment of a given practical end by means of precise calculation and adequate means. And even the rationalization of the conduct of life, which is of particular interest here, can assume enormously different forms: Confucianism is «rational» in the sense of the absence of all metaphysics and almost all residues of religious anchorage; the artistic ideal of the Renaissance was «rational» in the sense of a belief in a valid canon; the Indian practice of yoga and certain aspects of later Buddhism are «rational» in the sense of methodicalness; finally, all practical ethics which are systematically oriented to fixed goals of salvation, are «rational» in the sense of methodical conduct and also in the sense that they distinguish between valid norms and the empirically given reality. It is this last type of rationalization process which will play a major role in the following presentations.

The ethics of individual religions are presented more systematically than they have ever been in their actual development. The presentations do not claim to offer a well-rounded picture of world religions in the same sense as monographs do.



Finally, some terminological peculiarities which recur in the following presentations and which concern the external conditions under which economic ethics develop, should be clarified. All ruling authority, political or religious, can be considered as a variation of three ideal types constructed on the basis of the legitimacy which the ruling authority claims to have.

1. «Charisma» should be understood to refer to an extraordinary quality of a person, be it actual or only presumed. The magician, the prophet, the demagogue may have it. Charismatic rule does not follow general norms and in this sense it is irrational. It is revolutionary as it does not feel bound to the existing order.
2. «Traditionalism» is the belief in the everyday routine as an inviolable norm. Its most important type is patriarchalism, the authority of the father, the senior of the household, the lord of servants and officials and, as a variety of patriarchalism, the patrimonial lord, the sovereign over his subjects. Central norms are considered sacred, but there is also an area of arbitrariness where the lord makes decisions in terms of personal considerations.

Throughout history only charismatic leaders were able to integrate new laws into the sacred tradition and custom, but, as charismatic periods never lasted very long, the charismatic leaders and the staff supporting them (disciples, apostles, military followers) soon succumbed to routinization. The followers soon depended on their leader for maintenance through income in kind, usufruct of land, appointments, or more generally prebends, and felt entitled to them. In this way the leader's prerogatives became patrimonial in nature.

But often there developed a struggle between the patrimonial leader and the erstwhile followers who as a status group felt to have a right to their prebends and privileges. If the struggle was decided in favour of the ruler so that he could attach to himself a staff of officials who depended solely on him, he acquired administrative means and finances of his own and gradually expropriated the privilege holding groups. The new stratum of officials was often composed of literate clerics, in the Middle East of slaves and clients, of secularized literati in China and of jurists in the modern Occident. It must be noted that the triumph of princely power has often resulted in the introduction of a rational administration which, however, could take two forms: substantive and formal rationalization. The former is utilitarian, the patrimonial leader bestows social blessings upon his subjects; the latter appears when trained jurists carry out a rule of general laws applying to all citizens.

The «triumph of formalist juristic rationalism» (FMW: 299) leads to the third category besides charismatic and traditional authority: legal authority.

3. Legal authority is based on rationally established rules (enactments, agreements), in turn resting upon a rationally enacted constitution. Officials hold their power as trustees of an impersonal *Anstalt* (compulsory institution)<sup>27</sup> and this is not only true in regard to the state but also in regard to the hierocratic association, the church. In fact, legal authority based on formal rationalization gave birth to the modern occidental «state» as well as to the Church as an institution. In its purest form it is bureaucratic rule and implies an impersonal bond of the office holder to the duty of office, the obligation to work *sine ira et studio* (neither with anger nor with affection) according to rationally established norms and regulations.

Weber did not claim that all empirical structures of domination must correspond to one of these ideal types. On the contrary, most are in a state of transition between several of these types so that he often felt compelled to form new expressions like «patrimonial bureaucracy» which point to its hybrid status. But Weber felt that his concepts are useful for orientation.

## 2. Confucianism and Taoism

### *Basic Literature*

Max Weber *The Religion of China* New York / London: MacMillan 1951

Max Weber *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I* Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1920 pp. 276 - 536

Wolfgang Schluchter *Rationalism, Religion and Domination* (Chapter III, Confucianism and Taoism), University of California Press 1989

Weber begins with an historical analysis of the Chinese monetary system, the fluctuating availability of monetary metal and the difficulties with paper money, and he then immediately points out that, although a strong in-

---

27 Weber defined *Anstalt* as an organization which imposes, within a specified sphere of operations, its order on all action conforming with certain criteria – as opposed to an organization which claims authority only over voluntary members (ES: 52). For a slightly different explanation of Weber's use of this legal term, *vide* footnote 85 in the section on Occidental Christianity.

crease of wealth in precious metals can be detected since the 16th century, this did not stimulate a capitalist development. Nor was capitalist development stimulated when, after the pacification of the empire under the Qing and after the edict of 1713, the controls of occupational choice and the barriers to free mobility were eliminated and an astounding population increase occurred (from 50-60 million people in the middle of the 17th century to 350-400 million at the end of the 19th century). While the intensity of Chinese acquisitiveness at all times cannot be doubted, and while it is certain that entrepreneurial communities, small-capitalist in nature and organized as communal workshops (*ergasteria*), did exist, large private capitalist factories can scarcely be traced in Chinese history. It is Weber's central problem, then, to explain why, despite apparently many favourable conditions, not the slightest beginnings of capitalist development did appear. He finds the reasons in the structure of the Chinese state and in the interests which supported it, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in the intellectual and religious circumstances.

### The Patrimonial Domination

Weber's distinction between the time of the Warring States and the united empire is fundamental for his understanding of China. The competition of the Warring States (before 221 A.D.) for political power caused their leaders to initiate rational economic policies as well as a rational administration and organization of the army; but the elimination of political competition after the creation of the world empire put an end to the rationalization in administration and in economic policies. Moreover, during the period when the Warring Kingdoms competed for political power, there existed a capitalism of moneylenders and purveyors, and under the Han dynasty, there are said to have lived multimillionaires in mining and trade, but the political unification in the world empire, like the unified *orbis terrarum* of Imperial Rome, resulted in a regression of this capitalism. Finally, the unified empire eliminated the competition of the intellectual doctrines and imposed a unified orthodox doctrine: Confucianism. It is noteworthy that Weber's evaluation of the smothering effects of the unified Chinese patri-

monial empire is closely related to his understanding of the development in the Roman empire.<sup>28</sup>

This unified empire – characterized mainly by its bureaucracy – prevented, according to Weber, all industrial capitalist development. It is a patrimonial bureaucracy we are dealing with here, to be distinguished from modern bureaucracy. While modern bureaucracy means the purposefully rational organization with a staff of specialized officials trained in the law who apply the law and the decrees without respect of persons, patrimonial-bureaucratic organization does not distinguish between office and person, between legal procedure and administrative procedure, between formal law and material justice. In China, incidentally, the relationship of the official to the patrimonial and caesaro-papistic emperor was one of personal subjection.<sup>29</sup>

---

28 Weber's «Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum» of 1909 in *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften (Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations - SAC)* is important for the understanding of his essay on China, for the study of the social conditions of the Roman empire first called his attention to the smothering effects of a large bureaucracy for capitalism. Certainly, in ancient Rome there was no modern capitalism, but only tax farming, slave labour and political capitalism, but while republican Rome had favoured these kinds of capitalism, the increasing bureaucracy during the Monarchy obstructed all sources of profit, according to him.

29 G. Hamilton in «Patriarchalism in Imperial China and Western Europe» (*Theory and Society* vol 13, no.3 (1984), p. 393 sqq.) has argued that Weber generated some of his concepts, such as patrimonialism and charisma, from an analysis of Western history. For instance, patriarchalism is based on the *patria potestas* in Roman law, the fathers's authority over the household which demands piety toward tradition and to the master (ES: 1008) who can exercise personal discretion. State justice stopped at the threshold of the household. Patrimonialism, according to Weber, is a variety of patriarchalism and refers to the ruler's authority over the state. In China, on the other hand, there is *xiao*, filial piety or rather faithfulness to the duties of one's position in life: not only the duties toward one's father but towards all persons to whom one is related. It implies a denial of individual desires and, as Hamilton writes, a negation of personal magic which Weber calls charisma. Not personal loyalty towards one's father or relatives or to the emperor is required, but loyalty to one's rôle. *Patria potestas* and *xiao* cannot be equated as the first is related to power and the second to an order created by a relationship of roles, and therefore the concepts of patriarchalism and patrimonialism are inadequate for the analysis of China, according to Hamilton, as they are not useful in developing a genuine understanding of Chinese history (ibid. 419).

Although this seems to be a serious challenge to Weber's use of terminology, it must nevertheless not be forgotten that a «genuine» or «true» understanding of China or of anything else was not in Weber's intentions. In fact, he considered this

Appointment to office in the bureaucracy was generally reserved to the literati-class whose members had qualified themselves in the official examinations. Such positions were treated as non-hereditary prebends, offered on the basis of individual qualifications.

The officialdom as a whole had good reasons for the traditionalism which characterized it. While it is true that their prebends were not individually appropriated, they were, nevertheless, appropriated by the whole stratum of removable literati. Therefore, the literati opposed collectively all interventions which conflicted with their interests. They were able to prevent the refeudalisation of the administration by the nobility as well as the introduction of oriental sultanism by the imperial eunuchs; they were in a position to thwart the creation of an expert officialdom in the 11<sup>th</sup> century because it would have threatened their prebendary interests.

The administration of this patrimonial bureaucracy was not intensive at all so that in the villages the power of the sibs was able to blossom: the sibs supported the self-sufficiency of the households, thereby reducing the necessity of a market. The professional organizations, merchant and craft guilds, were in fact autonomous, but the cities had less guarantees of self-government than the villages, and they were therefore unable to create the legal foundations for capitalist «enterprise» which can already be found in the commercial law of the Italian cities of the Renaissance. The character of the patrimonial form of state which upheld a sacred tradition alongside a realm of prerogative and favouritism impeded the development of industrial capitalism, for it lacked a rational and calculable administration and law enforcement.

### The Spirit of Confucianism

In this patrimonial structure there lived the «spirit» of Confucianism. It was acquired during the course of the literary-Confucian education and during the preparation for the official examinations and expressed in the conduct of life of the officials and the literati. In fact, patrimonialism was

---

impossible. His comparative sociology produces questions from a specific perspective, pointing the investigation in a particular direction within a thought-out research program. The cultural sciences consist, according to him, in a constant process of reshaping our concepts by means of which we seek to grasp reality (CMW: 133/4).

the form of state fundamental to the Confucian spirit. The spirit of a life-long «pennalism» was instilled by unceasing study of the old classics combined with grace and dignity in the sense of a ceremonially ordered court-style, and the examinations leading to official positions tested whether the candidates possessed the ways of thought suitable to a cultured man. This education towards the ideal of a «cultured man» was in accordance with the material and ideal interests of a literary officialdom.

The idea of (religious) salvation was completely absent from the Confucian «spirit». Abhorring orgiastic and any kind of ecstatic behaviour, the Confucian literatus desired only to be saved from the undignified barbarism of social rudeness to a virtuous life. His god was an unpersonal power, no supra-mundane lord creator made ethical demands on him; magic, although he did not doubt its existence, appeared to him without significance for salvation, but he did not try to systematically transform the magical popular cults.

For this Confucian «spirit» economic income represented the «little path»; it viewed specialized professional training as a conditioning in philistinism for, as it was said, «a cultured man is not a tool», nor is he a means for a specified useful purpose. Thus, specialized training in any field, be it law or economics for administrative purposes, as in modern Western societies, was not the desired outcome of the Chinese education process. Rather, the examinations tested whether or not the candidate's mind was thoroughly steeped in literature and whether or not he possessed the ways of thought suitable to a cultured man (RC: 121). One could not achieve anything in the world, not even in the most influential position, without the virtue derived from this kind of education – nor, it is true, without influential position. And therefore the Confucian literatus coveted such a position, not profit.

## Heterodoxies

Weber then asks whether perhaps the non-classical popular religion, particularly Taoism, a heterodoxy which was not rejected by Confucianists<sup>30</sup>, has been the source of a differently oriented methodical way of life. Again

---

30 As opposed to sects which are in an inner conflict with the socio-political system, heterodoxies are not directly connected with it because of exterior circumstances, but do not reject it in principle. Heterodoxies can sometimes turn into congrega-

he uses a comparison with classical antiquity. While in ancient Greece the cult of the Homeric gods was recognized as an official institution and the teaching of the philosophers an optional private matter, quite the opposite relationship between popular cult and philosophical teaching was found in China: here the Confucian teachings had been canonized by a caesaro-papistic regime while the popular cults were suspiciously tolerated and viewed as a private affair. On the other hand, there existed officially unauthorized cults, often of a soteriological kind, in the Roman Empire; but while here the development led to an alliance between one of these soteriological communities, i.e. Christendom, and the state, Chinese history followed a different course.

While it seemed for a time as if Buddhism in China might play a role similar to Christianity's role in the West, the interests of the Confucian bureaucracy prevented such a development. The Chinese adoption of Buddhism, the effect which it had on the conduct of life and the kind of individualism which was introduced by it, will be touched upon in the section on Hinduism and Buddhism.

Among the popular religions Weber discusses mainly Taoist mysticism which, although it minimized action, did not lead to the conclusion of the absolute rejection of the world, for it did not reject in principle the ideal of the educated literatus and gentleman. It is a paradox, a lack of inner consequence in Lao-tse's system,<sup>31</sup> that he does not completely reject inner-worldly action. As, moreover, a supra-mundane personal god was lacking, the possibility to develop an asceticist ethic which contrasts God and creature was precluded. All religiously motivated, active antagonism to the world was lacking, and lacking was also, finally, a vocational ethic which could only have sprung from an asceticist ethic of laymen, originating from a tension between God's will and the conditions of the world. Taoism did not have its own «ethos»: magic, not conduct of life, was decisive for man's fate.

---

tional religion as in the case of Judaism, early Buddhist monachism or Russian Old Believers.

- 31 A lack of inner consequence or an inner contradiction in religious systems (not only in Taoism, but also, for instance, in Jainism) has generally led, according to Weber, to a reduction of intensity of innerworldly or otherworldly activity because clear tracks for the conduct of life (as in Puritanism or Hinduism) in the pursuit of interests were not provided.

The toleration of magic within the Chinese conception of the world in general and its positive cultivation by Taoism was particularly stressed by Weber. Astrology, pharmacology, geomancy, etc. transformed the world into a magic garden the fruits of which were enjoyed by the masses of the people. There was no path leading from Taoism to a rational method of life, be it inner – or other worldly, but Taoist magic necessarily became one of the most serious obstacles to such a development.

## Conclusion

The Confucian bureaucracy largely succeeded in confining sect formation to occasional flare-ups, for the specific aspect of sectarianism that the value and worth of the personality are guaranteed and legitimated not by blood ties or publicly authorized degree, but by being a member of and by proving oneself in a circle of specifically qualified associates, was particularly odious to the caesaro-papistic state. The formation of religious communities for the laymen – a sociologically decisive fact – was lacking, and for this reason magic has never been displaced by a great prophecy of salvation.

It is of decisive importance that the patrimonial structure of state, and the Confucian spirit which lived in it, were not opposed by strong and independent forces, that no divine or human authority entered into competition with them:

Not the power of a citizenry which has been of such a fundamental importance in the Occident. The city in China lacked political autonomy: it was not a *polis* in the sense of Antiquity, nor was it a «commune» with political liberties of its own. Rather, it was the seat of a mandarin, without privileges of self-government or a charter. A citizenry in the Occidental sense could not develop here (RC: 13);

No estate of jurists and no formal jurisprudence, as it was developed in Roman law, nor a doctrine of natural law, for this would have presupposed a tension between philosophical or religious postulates and the «world» (RC: 148);

No ethical and asceticist religion which might have been able to shatter the fetters of the sibs (RC: 237);



No science in the Occidental sense, for the power of the *logos*, of defining and reasoning, as well as a systematic and naturalist thought failed to mature (RC: 150);<sup>32</sup>

No independent hierocracy which, as in the Occidental Middle Ages, could have produced a tension between the *sacerdotium* (priesthood) and the *regnum* (political authority) (RC: 142);

And finally no socially powerful prophecy and no salvation religion conducive to an ethic of conviction and a methodical way of life and being able to shatter the fetters of the sibs. (RC: 95).

Therefore, Weber believed, the «strong cage»<sup>33</sup> of prebendary interests, the cause of the ossification of the Chinese state, could only be shattered by military conquest of the country or by a successful military or religious revolution.

Such strong and independent forces did exist in the Occident and produced revolutions of major importance for the destiny of Western culture: the development of independent cities in Italy in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Netherland revolution in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the «glorious revolution» and bill of rights in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and finally the American and French revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They did not, however, exist in

32 N. Sivin («Chinesische Wissenschaft. Ein Vergleich der Ansätze von Max Weber und Joseph Needham.» in: Wolfgang Schluchter (ed.) *Max Webers Studie über Konfuzianismus und Taoismus*, Frankfurt a. M. 1983) wrote, with regard to the sciences in China, that contrary to the picture that Weber drew of them the sciences were sophisticated enough for us to be able to evaluate them at the same level as their contemporary European counterparts until the seventeenth century (Sivin: 354). However, the level of scientific achievements and sophistication in China, to which the monumental work of J. Needham draws attention, was not Weber's major concern when he wrote about Chinese sciences. He rather wanted to draw attention to the fact that the Chinese sciences were not systematic and were not an independent force which could compete with the bureaucratic attitude towards life (RC: 151). And this interpretation seems to be accepted by Sivin when he writes that the Chinese sciences were not integrated by anything corresponding to the *scientia* of the West, that there was no science in China but only sciences. It should be added that the continued existence of magic, although it was devalued by the higher strata, may have had some influence on Chinese scientific development. Magic does not include the awareness that its concepts or actions may be erroneous or falsified or submitted to critique as it is expected in the West. *Vide*: R. Horton «African Traditional Thought and Western Science» in: *Rationality*, Oxford: Blackwell 1979 pp. 131-171.

33 The use of the expression «strong cage of prebendary interests» (RC: 61) seems like a weak echo of the «iron cage» (PE: 123) of modern Western civilization.

China, and, therefore, no elements of the specifically modern rationalism were standing in competition with the patrimonial bureaucracy.

### The Result: Puritanism versus Confucianism

In a chapter entitled *Result* Weber compares the rationalism of Confucianism with that of Protestantism. To judge the level of rationalization of a religion, he says, there are two interrelated yardsticks. One is the degree to which the religion has discarded magic, the other is the degree to which it has systematized the relationship between God and the world and therewith man's ethical relationship to the world (theodicy or, in Asia, cosmody).

China did not divest itself of magic for the Confucian ethic never penetrated the masses; it was in fact one of the basic tendencies of Confucianism to preserve this magic garden, while, on the other hand, a complete disenchantment of the world was carried through by Protestantism. With regard to the systematization of religion, Weber mentioned that naïve stand of Confucianism towards things of this world, as opposed to Protestantism's grandiose tension towards the world.

It is the fate of every religion which upholds ethical imperatives, to find itself at some point in a state of tension with the irrationalities of the world. At what points these tensions will set in, will depend on the respective salvational goals and on the paths or means of salvation, and the degree of religious devaluation of the world is not identical with the degree of its rejection in actual practice, for the world may be rejected as salvational goal but at the same time accepted as means of salvation.

Confucianism reduced the religious devaluation of the world as well as its practical rejection to an absolute minimum: all tensions between the imperatives of a supra-mundane God and a creatural world were absent<sup>34</sup>.

---

34 Thomas Metzger in *Escape from Predicament, Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture* 1977 considered the denial of the existence of any transcendental tension to be a major error in Weber's interpretation of China. Particularly the Neo-Confucian tradition which was not treated by Weber in any detail, contained, as Metzger tried to show, the awareness of tension between the cosmic ideal and the worldly reality (a tendency towards transcendence of the status quo), as well as the realization that all attempts of the Confucian sage in his search for perfection and to overcome that tension are inadequate. By having demonstrated that there was «tension» in Neo-Confucianism, Metzger believed that he had also

This ethic of unconditional affirmation of and adjustment to the world presupposed the continued existence of magical religion while, at the same time, every form of salvation religion and of congregational religion was eliminated and every prophecy of a supra-mundane God who raises ethical demands, was absent.

A true prophecy, says Weber, creates and systematically orients conduct toward one internal measure of value. Confucianism, however, favoured adjustment to the conditions of the world, it did not require a systematic unity of conduct which in the Westerner's mind is associated with the idea of personality (RC: 235), but rather a combination of useful particular traits: not an inner- but an outer-directed personality.

The duties of a Confucian always stressed the piety toward concrete people, never toward a sacred cause or an idea. They tied him to his sib members, not to functional tasks or enterprises. In contrast, the ethical religions like Protestantism shattered the fetters of the sib and established communities founded solely on their common ethical way of life.

As opposed to the adjustment to the world of Confucianism there is, according to Weber, the rejection of the world of Puritanism, a rejection which did not lead to a flight from the world but rather to rationalization of the world. The world was rejected by the Puritans as a goal of salvation but it was a means of proving one's self in successful enterprise.

While, on the whole, China produced different kinds of capitalism (politically oriented capitalism etc.), it did not develop modern capitalism out of its own sources.<sup>35</sup> Weber reminds us that neither acquisitiveness nor

---

shown that there has been continuity in China between tradition and modernity because tension belongs to modernity. Weber's interpretation, on the other hand, would imply that there has been a complete break with the Chinese tradition since the Communist revolution. Metzger's standpoint seems to imply a modified Protestant ethic thesis: the researcher tries to find tension within a religion or culture and, if he succeeds, this indicates why that culture is or was able to modernize (although not necessarily able to produce modern capitalism from within itself).

35 This does not mean, of course, that China or the Chinese would not be able to adopt capitalism from the outside. Weber wrote one hundred years ago that the Chinese "in all probability would be quite capable, probably more capable than the Japanese, of assimilating capitalism" (RC: 248), for he distinguished clearly between invention and diffusion. Gordon Redding (1993) has described the «spirit» in successful overseas Chinese family businesses as based on paternalism, networking and filial piety, not on individualism. The ideas of the key actors are clearly linked to cultural (Confucian) sources while they live within a Western-influenced economic structure with legal, financial and commercial institutions. It

high esteem for wealth nor utilitarian rationalism have any connection as yet with modern capitalism. Rationalism was embodied in the Confucian as well as in the Protestant «spirit». But while Confucian rationalism meant rational adjustment to the world, Protestant rationalism meant rational mastery of the world.

In comparison with the Occident, there were many conditions which externally favoured the origin of capitalism in China. On the other hand, many circumstances which hindered capitalism in China, similarly existed in the Occident. Therefore, according to Weber, we have to conclude that the mentality, i.e. the «Confucian spirit» had effects strongly counteractive to capitalist development.

### 3. Intermediate Reflection: Religious Rejections of the World and their Levels and Directions

#### Basic Literature

«Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions» in *From Max Weber* (translated and edited by H.H. Gerth & C.Wright Mills) Oxford & New York: Galaxy 1958, pp. 323-354

«Zwischenbetrachtung» in Max Weber *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I*, Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 1920 pp. 536-573

India which will be considered next, is, in contrast to China, the cradle of the most world-denying forms of religious ethics. Before turning to her religions it must first be clarified in a schematic way which are the motives from which world-denying religious ethics have originated and in which directions they have developed.

The constructed schematic picture will indicate conflicting life-orders in an ideal-typical way. The theoretically constructed types of life-orders are prepared with a rational consistency which is rarely found in reality. To this extent, the construction will be ideal-typical in order to facilitate a clear general view and a precise terminology. But it is also true, as Weber insists, that rationality, in the sense of logical or teleological «consistency» of an intellectual or ethical attitude, has some kind of power over

---

may be asked whether the authoritarian capitalism of present-day China, lacking an impartial bureaucracy which has no clear idea of acting *sine ira et studio*, would increase its stability by revitalising the Confucian spirit.

man<sup>36</sup> (FMW: 324): religious interpretations of the world and ethics of religions created by intellectuals have been strongly exposed to the imperative of consistency even if they integrated points of view which could not be rationally deduced. Thus, the presentation of the otherwise multifarious reality will be facilitated by the idealtypical construction of the internally most consistent forms of ethical conduct that can be deduced from the given conditions.

Above all, these lines are intended as a contribution to a typology and sociology of rationalism. The argument proceeds from the most rational forms reality can assume, and then asks to what extent certain rational conclusions, pertaining to the conduct of life, were drawn or why they were not drawn.

Weber returns to the conception of a supra-mundane God (as in the *Introduction*) and notes that this conception, in spite of its affinity to emissary prophecy, did not operate alone in the production of an ascetic religious ethic (in opposition to a contemplative and mystical quest), but that this was possible only in conjunction with the nature of the religious promises and the paths of salvation which they determined. In this context, the polar concepts «asceticism» and «mysticism» need to be clarified.

Both asceticism (action in conformity with the demands of God; the actor considers himself as God's tool) and mysticism (the individual considers himself not as a tool but as a «vessel»<sup>37</sup> which is in contemplative possession of the divine; action in the world appears as endangering the other-worldly religious state) are forms of world rejection. Asceticism contrasts radically with mysticism if asceticism operates within the world and tries to master the world (inner-worldly asceticism) and if mysticism draws the

---

36 This is a theme which Weber alluded to on several occasions. In the *Protestant Ethic* (PE: 56) Weber had already mentioned that in order to understand the specific importance and influence of religious ideas, one has to study their most consistent and logical forms. In the replies to his critics (AC: 113) he wrote: the style of life of the ascetic communities in confessionally mixed regions rubbed off on the style of life of the other denominations; an assimilation to the most consistent expressions of Protestant asceticism almost always took place.

Even in the field of legal doctrine one can, according to Weber (ES: 789), discover the power of pure logic on legal practice.

37 The poet Rainer Maria Rilke whom Weber regarded highly and about whom he commented in 1910 in a letter to his sister Lili, calling him a mystic (MWG II, 6: 615), wrote in 1899 in the collection of poems entitled *Stundenbuch* (Book of Hours):

full conclusion of fleeing from the world (world-fleeing mysticism). The contrast is tempered, however, if the ascetic confines himself to overcoming the creaturely wickedness in his own nature and enhances his active redemptory accomplishments to the point of avoiding any action in the world (world-fleeing asceticism) or if the contemplative mystic does not draw the conclusion that he should flee from the world (inner-worldly mysticism). But always, even when the mystic accommodates to the orders of the world, he resists the temptation to take the ways of the world seriously. Like Lao-tse, he proves himself against his action in the world and not, like the inner-worldly ascetic, through his actions. Moreover, Judaism and Islam with their transcendent god developed mysticism but hardly any asceticism. Quite obviously, the concept of a transcendent god, in spite of its affinity to active asceticism, did not operate alone but rather in conjunction with other circumstances, particularly the religious promises and the paths of salvation which they determined.

After these remarks on the polar concepts of asceticism and mysticism Weber considers the tensions existing between religion and what he terms the other orders of life. A methodical conduct of life which may form the germ of either asceticism or mysticism, originally grows out of magical preconditions. The magician has been the historical precursor of the prophet. But while it is true that the prophets legitimized themselves through the possession of a magical charisma, it was the substance of their prophecy to direct their followers' conduct of life to the pursuit of a salvational good. This has been particularly so in the case of «salvation religions» that promised deliverance from suffering to their adherents. The more inward, the more principled the essence of suffering was conceived, the more it was important to attain a permanent state which would guarantee salvation.

Such religions have lived in a permanent state of tension in relation to the world and its orders. The tension has been the greater, the more rational the ethic has been and the more the original ritualism was sublimated towards a «religion of conviction». Equally, the further the rationalization

---

What will you do, God, if death takes me,  
I am your vessel, if Time brakes me,  
I am your drink, if curdling cakes me,  
You 'll lose all meaning losing me.

Perhaps Weber found here the image of the mystic as a vessel or jug of God?

and sublimation of the possession of «worldly» goods proceeded, the stronger has the tension on the part of religion become, for this development made conscious in the minds of the individuals the inner logic (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*) of the religious and worldly spheres and the consequences of these different inner logics. This is a typical result of the conscious endeavour towards rationality. Weber now considers a series of these recurring tensions.

To begin with, there was the tension between salvation religion and the traditional sib. For it was taken for granted in the prophetic religions of salvation that brothers in the faith should, in the last analysis, be closer to each other than to their relatives in the community into which they were born. Shattering the magical ties and the exclusiveness of the sibs, they created a new community characterized by a religious ethic of brotherliness. The original distinction between in-group and out-group morality was transferred to the religious community and the members were required to help the poor and the sick of the community; but, the more rational the idea of salvation became and the more it was sublimated into an ethic of conviction, the more the barriers of faith and even the existence of hatred were conceived as the result of suffering and of the imperfections of empirical reality. Therefore, the ethical demand has tended towards an objectless acosmism<sup>38</sup> of love, a universalist brotherliness which broke all barriers of societal associations and often also the barriers of one's own religious community. The more consistently the demands of this religious brotherliness have been carried through, the sharper they clashed with the orders and values of the world. This clash became the wider the more the values of the world have been rationalized according to their own inner logic.

This became particularly obvious in the economic sphere. A rational economy is a functional organization, depending on monetary calculations. Money is the most abstract and «impersonal» element in human life. The modern rational capitalist economy, therefore, is not accessible to a religious ethic of brotherliness, and the salvation religions have always watched the impersonal economic activity with profound suspicion for, as

---

38 In philosophy the term «acosmistic» is used for a system of thought which denies the existence of a cosmos outside of God or the divine. Weber uses the term to designate mystical world rejection and generally any religiosity which rejects the possibility to have an active and formative effect on the world and which, while disregarding reality and social orders, obeys the rule of brotherly love.

mentioned in Weber's «Protestant Ethic», *deo placere non potest* (it cannot please God).

The most radical rejection of individual economic property can be found in the world-fleeing asceticism of monks. And yet, the paradox of all rational asceticism which often creates the very wealth it rejects, has made monks in all ages stumble: monasteries everywhere became the very *loci* of rational economic activity.

There are, according to Weber, only two consistent avenues for escaping the tension between salvation religion and the economic sphere in a principled and inward manner: the Puritan vocational ethic which renounces all universal love, serves God's incomprehensible and positive will and accepts the depersonalization of the economic cosmos as God-willed. In truth, this standpoint of unbrotherliness was no longer a genuine salvation religion. The other consistent avenue is the mystic acosmism of love, the giving to anybody who accidentally comes one's way, the objectless devotion to anybody, not for the person's sake but for devotion's sake.

Thirdly, there developed tension between the religious ethic of brotherliness and the political sphere. While the religion turned to a God of love and demanded an ethic of brotherliness, the bureaucratic state proceeded without regard to the person, *sine ira et studio* (without either hatred or love) and thus conflicted with the religious demands. Moreover, every state's absolute end is to safeguard itself, if necessary by the appeal to naked force, – indeed, the state is an association that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force –, and accepting the responsibility for any possible injustice,<sup>39</sup> contrary to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount not to resist evil.

And as force generally breeds more force, the «reasons of state» tend to follow the tracks of their inner logic. The more matter-of-fact and the more effective politics is, the less brotherly it will appear to a rationalized ethic of brotherliness.

---

39 The translation of this passage in FMW: 334 is quite flawed. It suggests that there might sometimes be injustice if the state does not intervene by force. Weber, on the contrary, suggests that there might be injustice in any case, but that the politician, as he pursues an ethic of responsibility and not an ethic of conviction, has to shoulder any possible injustice resulting from his actions. On the distinction between the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of conviction *vide* Weber's «Politics as a Vocation» in FMW: 77-128, particularly p. 120.



There are only two solutions of the tension between religion and politics: 1. The Puritan belief that the commandments of God should be imposed by force on the creaturely world in the interest of God's cause, and 2. the mystic's radical acosmistic brotherliness which, with the maxim «then turn the other cheek» of the Sermon on the Mount, withdraws from the pragma of violence which no political action can escape. Some compromise solutions, however, may be of interest as types. Lutheranism, for instance, has rejected the right to active resistance against any secular coercion in matters of faith and has known only passive resistance in this matter. It also accepted obedience to secular authority, even if it had given the order for war – and it thus accepted its ethical autonomy. Luther's religiosity was, like all mystic search for salvation, apolitical or anti-political, but he stopped short of drawing the full conclusion: he did not infer consistently the radically diabolic character of the world.

The use of religious organizations for the political domestication of the masses or for the religious consecration of the legitimacy of those in power were, of course, forms of the relativization of religious values and of their inner logic. The most important type of these relative forms has been the «organic» social ethic, whose conception of vocational work has been the most important contrast to the idea of the calling, as found in inner-worldly asceticism. The organic social ethic rejects the idea that salvation should be accessible only to some and not to all and it attempts to synthesize the inequality of charismatic qualifications with the secular social strata into a cosmos of God-ordained services. It thus comprehends the world as an at least relatively rational cosmos, but it also represents, from the point of view of the acosmistic ethic of brotherliness, an accommodation to the interests of the privileged strata and, on the other hand, from the point of view of innerworldly asceticism, a lack of a rational-methodical conduct of life.

While the organic social ethic is eminently conservative, a virtuoso religiosity may have revolutionary consequences. Inner-worldly asceticism, whenever it opposes a divine «natural law» to a given political order, leads to Puritan revolutions and to the obligation to crusade. In the case of the mystic, on the other hand, when the possession of God turns into possession by God and when eschatological expectations of an acosmistic and brotherly millennium appear, this may lead to chiliastic anomism.

Also every other rational action (apart from economic and political action) carries within itself a profound tension. It results from the question whether the value of an action lies in the action *per se* or whether it should

be determined by its success. The attitude, resulting from an ethic of conviction, «to do right and to leave the success to God» will, because of the inner logic of the world, prove irrational in its effects – as has been shown theoretically in the *Bhagavadgita*, a part of an Indian epos.

Fourthly, there is tension between the ethic of religious brotherliness and the spheres of esthetic and erotic life. Magical religiosity (with its idols or ecstatic dances) stands in an intimate relation to the esthetic sphere, but for the religious ethic of brotherliness art as a carrier of magical effects is suspect. Salvation religions have stressed meaning and have devalued form, and they have completely rejected art, when it takes over the value of this-worldly salvation. In religion's eyes, such inner-worldly salvation is no more than irresponsible indulgence and secret lovelessness.

Besides, in our intellectualistic age men tend to avoid moral judgements or to transform them into judgements of taste («in poor taste» instead of «reprehensible») – and this may very well be regarded by salvation religions as a very base form of unbrotherliness.

On the whole, universalist mass religions have always entered alliances with art, but genuine virtuoso religions have clearly shown their reservations.

Also sexual love was very often part of magic orgiasticism, but most prophetic religions have regulated it in favour of marriage and they thus expressed the contrast between a rational conduct of life, on the one hand, and magical orgiasticism and all sorts of irrational ecstasies, on the other. But when, later, sexuality was sublimated into «eroticism», it appeared as an escape from the mechanisms of rationalization, as equivalent to the «having» of the mystic, and extramarital sexual life appeared as the only tie which still linked man with the natural fountain of life.

A principled ethic of brotherliness is radically opposed to this kind of innerworldly salvation. Inner-worldly and rational asceticism can accept only the rationally regulated marriage, best demonstrated perhaps in the Quaker ethic of William Penn<sup>40</sup> which underscores the ethical responsibil-

---

40 Weber here mentions the letters of William Penn to his wife. It is perhaps noteworthy that Weber more than once quoted letters of famous men to close female friends: for instance the letters of the German poet Goethe to Frau v. Stein (*Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, CMW: 154 sqq); and the letters of Abélard to Héloïse (RC: 168). The three volumes of Weber's *Collected Essays in the Sociology of Religion* were dedicated to three women close to him: his wife Marianne as well as Mina Tobler and Else Jaffé-Richthofen.

ity for one another and which rejects all eroticism as idolatry of the worst kind.

Finally, the tension is greatest and most principled where the religion of salvation faces the sphere of intellectual knowledge. Wherever rational empirical knowledge has disenchanting the world, it unavoidably meets the claim of the ethical postulate that the world is a somehow meaningfully organized cosmos. As the empirical as well as the mathematically oriented view of the world rejects all questions which inquire about the «meaning» of inner-worldly occurrences, they tend to push religion from the rational into the irrational realm. Although religions again and again have tried to justify and to rationalize their dogmas, the fundamental inner tension which at some point demands the «sacrifice of the intellect», proclaiming *credo non quod sed quia absurdum* (I believe – not what is absurd but because it is absurd), could not be resolved. For salvation religion does not claim to offer intellectual knowledge, it offers an ultimate stand towards the world by virtue of a direct grasp of its «meaning».

The directions of world rejection and of the striving for salvation which have been discussed so far, depended on the question which spheres of the «world» had been rationalized or had been left to their inner logic (the tribal, economic, political, aesthetic, erotic or intellectual sphere). Proceeding from the religious claim that the course of the world is somehow meaningful, Weber now tries to construct a theory of the degrees of world rejection. The claim emerged first in the context of the customary problem of unjust suffering, but it then progressed to an ever-increasing devaluation of the world. For not only unjust suffering, but the existence of suffering as such soon appeared to be irrational: the world itself was conceived as imperfect. That an imperfect world may not be eternal, appeared reasonable; but then this transitoriness devalued the highest inner-worldly goods so that the whole empirical world was rejected. Even the most highly cherished cultural values were indicted for they run counter, as has been seen, to the demand for brotherliness, they are characterized by the unbrotherly charisma of the mind and of taste and the impersonality of the economic cosmos.

Furthermore, something will adhere to the possession of cultural values which is bound to depreciate them with still greater finality: their meaninglessness. The inner-worldly perfection and cultivation of self is meaningless because death is meaningless when viewed from the inner-worldly standpoint. The man of culture cannot die «satiated with life» like the peasant, for, just as his cultural values, his perfectibility in principle pro-

gresses indefinitely; and the more differentiated the cultural values become, the more it appears unlikely that he has achieved a meaningful selection at the moment of his death. Thus culture or the striving for it cannot have an inner-worldly meaning. Even all intellectual and mystical attempts at salvation in the face of these tensions succumb in the end to the reign of unbrotherliness, because their charisma is not accessible to everybody and also, because under the social conditions of rational and vocational work only the economically independent strata can afford to lead the life of a Buddha or a Jesus.

The various ethics of salvation choose different points of departure for their world-rejection on this purely rationally constructed scale. Besides other circumstances, a rational element, the respective theodicy, does play its part. Among the three consistent types of theodicy there is, to begin with, Zoroastrian dualism which maintains the coexistence of the powers of light and darkness. Its consistent form which involves renouncing the omnipotence of a god, has been given up by most mass religions and has been replaced by a less consistent form in which the god of light finally triumphs over the god of darkness. While this conception restores God's sovereignty, it willy-nilly sacrifices some of the divine love because it admits a (subordinate) power of darkness, sin and hell's punishments.

In that case, only renunciation of God's love and benevolence, as in the Puritan dogma of predestination, is consistent. Man's acknowledged incapacity to understand the ways of God means that he renounces any accessibility to a meaning of the world. Outside of a circle of virtuosi the belief in this consistent dogma has not been permanently endured.

The third form of consistent theodicy was peculiar to the religiosity of Indian intellectuals and world renouncers. It stands out by virtue of its combination of strict world-rejection with an organic social ethic, of contemplation with an inner-worldly vocational ethic. It is to this Indian religiosity that Weber now turns.

#### 4. *Hinduism and Buddhism*

##### *Basic Literature:*

Max Weber, *The Religion of India. The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, New York: The Free Press 1958

Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie II*, Tübingen 1921

Wolfgang Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination* University of California Press 1989 Chapter IV Hinduism and Buddhism: World Flight and Organic Relativism)

Wolfgang Schluchter (Hg.), *Max Webers Studie über Hinduismus und Buddhismus*, Frankfurt a.M. 1984

The structure of Weber's essay on «Hinduism and Buddhism» is quite similar to that on «Confucianism and Taoism». After some introductory comments regarding the fact that India has always been a land of trade, that the princes pursued rational financial policies, that the political capitalism of tax farming and state contracting was well known and that Indians had cultivated rational science in some areas (including mathematics), Weber nevertheless notes that modern capitalism did not develop indigenously but is an imported product. This raises the question as to whether Indian religiosity, as one factor among many, may have been responsible for the absence of modern capitalism. In order to answer this question, Weber first analyzes the Indian social system and then the «spirit» which lived in it.

### The Hindu Social System

While in China the patrimonial bureaucracy was the dominating social structure, the shell (Gehäuse) in which the Confucian spirit lived, in India everything revolved around the caste system in which, in turn, there lived the Indian spirit. But what is a caste? Weber approached the notion by comparing it with other social forms. In contrast to a tribe, a caste is without a fixed territory nor does it form a political body. Moreover, the admissible kinds of occupation of caste members are strictly limited. This leads to a comparison of the caste with merchant and craft guilds. Here it must be stressed that membership in a caste is hereditary and that the «spirit» of the caste system was totally different from that of the guilds. The Occidental medieval city rested on the fraternization of the guilds and of the citizenry. Since Paul's letter to the Galatians (II, 12 sqq.) Christians had shattered, according to Weber, the voluntary ghetto of the Jews, the ritual barriers against commensality at the Holy Communion. This had been the hour of conception for the Occidental citizenry. The Indian caste order, on the other hand, excluded the possibility of commensality as well as the *connubium* (marriage between members of different castes). There-

fore, the possibility that town dwellers became citizens in the medieval Western sense did not exist and the corporate character of the city was unknown (ES: 1228). Nevertheless, castes are, according to Weber, status groups, if status implies a quality of social honour or a lack of it, and expresses itself through a specific conduct of life – even if the status differences of the castes are easily transposed into the magico-religious sphere.

And how were the castes combined into a caste system? Weber starts from the classical brahmanical theory which divides the system into four varnas (categories), the brahmins (representing the sacerdotal status), the ksatriyas (representing the political power), the vaishyas (representing commerce and trade) and the shudras (servile occupations), and thus establishes a hierarchical<sup>41</sup> succession of ranks; but he leaves no doubt that the relative ranks between concrete castes were always and everywhere disputed. The concrete system was not established once and for all but was continuously submitted to change in the various local and political situations. Considered over a longer time period, its importance seems to have increased.

Kings naturally belonged to the ksatriyas. Their administration was patrimonial-bureaucratic, the responsibilities of the administrators (often the kings' relatives) were fluid. The kings often claimed monopolies in trade, and tax farming arrangements evolved into prebends and not fiefs. A prebendalization of the patrimonial state occurred (RI: 67-71).

Weber sees the origin of the caste system in the importance of the magical lineage charisma, reinforced by the existence of several races (RI: 126). This social situation favoured a division of labour based on the concept of guest peoples – with an external resemblance to the helots of the Spartan state in ancient Greece. The brahmins were in a position – without any formal organization and although they depended on the political pow-

---

41 The meaning of «hierarchy» with regard to India has received a modified and more nuanced interpretation by Louis Dumont in his *Homo Hierarchicus*. It does not consist of units of successive orders or of a ladder of command as in a modern army or in modern bureaucracy. Rather, it here implies a holistic and relational view which gives everything its value and characteristics in relation to the englobing whole. Thus, this view valorizes the social whole and subordinates the human individual or the individual group. The opposition between brahmin and ksatriya, for instance, is a hierarchical one in which the brahmin is superior to the ksatriya although he depends on him materially, because the religious sphere is englobing the political sphere, or, put differently: brahmins are superior because they are inferior only at an inferior level.

er of the kshatriyas – to occupy an eminent place in this system. Partially, this may have been the result of the fact that the great Hinduistic patrimonial empires found support of their legitimacy among the brahmins, partially also because the patrimonial rules supported the caste system in order to limit the power of the guilds, and finally because the Islamic conquest since the tenth century reduced the political power of the ksatriyas and thus implicitly supported the position of the brahmins. For all these reasons the caste system slowly became dominant.

### The Hindu Spirit

The system had, according to Weber, a traditionalistic and anti-rational effect in the economic sphere – not because ritual caste antagonisms made the development of large enterprises impossible or because of other related difficulties, but because of the «spirit» which lived in the whole system (RI: 112).

Hinduism is generally a very tolerant religion with regard to dogma and teachings, but it stresses the ritual duties (*dharma*) of the castes. No Hindu rejects the two central doctrines: *samsara* (the transmigration of souls) and *karma* (the doctrine of compensation for one's actions), according to which the human fate and one's position within the caste system is determined by the fulfillment of ritual and ethical duties in one's previous life. This karma doctrine was, according to Weber, the most consistent theodicy ever produced in historical times. It promised the highest premium for the fulfillment of one's caste duties: rebirth in a higher caste, perhaps even as a king or as a god.

This brilliant combination of ritual caste duties and caste legitimacy with the karma doctrine was the product of rational ethical thought and not of economic conditions (RI: 131); and only the wedding of this thought product with the real social order by means of the promise of rebirth gave this order the irresistible power over thought and hope of the people. The devout Hindu, even if he was not conscious of this grandiose context, was a captive in this intellectual and social cage (RI: 121). Action according to the caste dharma had salvational significance. In the context of these concepts, however, ideas of progress or revolution were inconceivable; work was prescribed by tradition and the rationalization of economic life an impossibility.

## Orthodox and Heterodox Salvation Teachings

If one wants to understand the brahmins, a comparison with the intellectuals of other cultures is unavoidable, in particular with the intellectuals of the Greek *polis* and with the Confucian mandarins.

In contrast to the intellectuals of the *polis*, the brahmins were tied to ritual and magic. On the other hand, both mandarins and brahmins were a status group of genteel literati whose charisma rested on «knowledge»; both rejected all types of orgiasticism and all irrational forms of salvation. But in China we find a stratum of officials and candidates for office, whereas careers in office were not typical for the brahmins who could be princely chaplains, teachers, jurists, priests and sometimes even farmers. The Chinese patrimonial bureaucracy did not recognize other autonomous forces whereas the Indian brahmins stood independently beside the political rulers.

The brahmins had their own duties (*svadharma*), different from those of the political rulers; both followed the inner law (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*) of their respective castes. There was no universally valid ethic, no natural law, no natural equality of human beings, no concept of radical evil, no concept of the state (RI: 144). Only the caste dharma existed, the inner law of the respective castes. It was the dharma of the brahmin to perform sacrifices and other priestly activities and it was the dharma of the kshatriya to conduct wars for the sake of pure power and, if necessary, by cunning and fraud, which led to an astonishing Machiavellianism unheard of in the Occident (RI: 146). The same can be said about other areas of life: in contrast to the rejection of specialization in Confucianism, Hinduism accepted the special knowledge and inner laws of all spheres of life: the conduct of war and administration became specialized fields of knowledge and there existed a rational science in mathematics and grammar.

The seemingly so consistent and well-rounded picture of caste society and karma theodicy in which the goal of salvation of each person is a better rebirth and in which the means of salvation is action in conformity with one's caste dharma is, however, relativized by Weber by the observation that the «wheel» of recurrent rebirths and deaths must appear meaningless to the human being. The question arose how one can avoid or escape the transitoriness of life.

Therefore, besides the conduct of life according to one's caste dharma, there was the alternative of the conduct of life of the *sramana*, the world renouncer who, leaving the holistic social order by renouncing his existing



rôle in society (as a member of a caste, family etc.) and sometimes living alone in the wilderness, tried to achieve salvation from the wheel of rebirths as an outworldly individual. Ritual and virtuous actions within the caste order might improve the rebirth chances, but true salvation could only be achieved by world fleeing asceticism or contemplation (RI: 152). The *sramana* relativized the innerworldly goals of salvation by his radical rejection of the world, the desire to be saved from the world itself – and this not only because suffering devalues all creatures but because of an aversion to the world's meaningless turns and changes.

This state of affairs, full of inner consistency, was by no means universal, for the belief in fate or in an all-powerful god – both not logically compatible with the karma theodicy – can also be found. But the juxtaposition of caste dharma and the striving for otherworldly salvation produced a tension, said Weber, which was the root of orthodox as well as heterodox solutions.

One such solution can be found in the Bhagavadgita, a religious poem inserted in the Mahabharata epos and of almost canonical significance for orthodox Hindus. The question is asked in what sense actions according to the caste dharma can have salvational significance, and the originality of the Bhagavadgita can be found in the answer that the man of knowledge should keep an inner distance from his innerworldly duties, that he should act in the world according to his dharma, but without ever seeking success and the fruits of his actions. This indifferent attitude towards innerworldly conduct represents, according to Weber, the crown of classical ethics of Indian intellectuals (RI: 185), although he does not attribute to it a complete inner consistency<sup>42</sup> for there remained the question of the relative significance of action in the world while disregarding the results. In this inner-worldly mysticism (as opposed to world fleeing mysticism) both paths of salvation, right knowledge and right action, seem to be of equal rank. In any case, the fulfillment of the caste dharma was, according to the Bhagavadgita, rigidly traditionalistic as an activity in the world but not of the world (RI: 326).

Another response was Jainism which originated among intellectual kshatriyas at the time of the development of cities. It rejected the ritualistic

---

42 According to Weber, there are only two consistent solutions to the tensions between salvation religion on the one hand and the political and economic sphere on the other: the Puritan ethic and the acosmism of the mystic. All other solutions are compromises and relativisations.

commandments and teachings of Hinduism's holy books, the Vedas, Just like in orthodox Hinduism, knowledge was the supreme means of salvation, but the path to salvation was asceticism to a much higher degree than in other sects (RI: 195). Jainism produced the typical dualistic organization of Hindu sects: a community of monks as the nucleus and the laity under the religious domination of the monks. This laity had to take special vows to fulfill obligatory duties and thus had the typical character of a sect into which one is especially received.

At the top of all ascetic rules was ahimsa (prohibition of the killing of living beings) which largely excluded the Jainas from many occupations, particularly agriculture as ploughing endangers the life of worms and insects (RI: 199). This was followed by satya (to be free from falsehood) and, even for the laity, by aparigraha (to be free from worldly attachments or the limitation of possessions). While the acquisition of wealth was not forbidden, the attachment to riches was frowned upon – in a way similar to the Protestant ethic<sup>43</sup> in the Occident (RI: 200). Furthermore, all deception and dishonest gain was prohibited. Only traders and bankers could truly practice ahimsa. The compulsory saving, familiar from ascetic Protestantism, worked also among the Jainas as they used accumulated possessions for investment rather than consumption, but they remained confined to commercial capitalism and banking and did not create indus-

---

43 It has been a recurring tendency to compare Jainism with Protestantism (already G. Bühler in *Deutsche Revue* 1894, vol. 19. 4, p. 223 sqq. drew a parallel between the Jainist organization and the Free Kirk of Scotland, later Glasenapp 1964: 331, and finally B. Nevashkar in *Capitalists without Capitalism. The Jainas of India and the Quakers in the West*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood 1991). In general, recent scholarship does confirm, while adding new aspects, Weber's interpretation of Jainism. Jainas believe that existing karma needs to be destroyed by the observance of austerities, *tapas*, (vows of fasting, giving up any attachment to the body etc.), and that they alone are expected to work out their salvation: no amount of intercession by others or even higher beings is helpful. A lonely individualism, similar to that of the Puritans, may be the result. But, on the other hand, there is the distinction between monks (*sadhu*, *swami*) and lay people (the rules prescribed to these two groups differing not in kind but in degree) which does not exist in the Protestant sects; the caste system is not absent, there is idol worship among at least some sub-sects, and the philosophical doctrine of *syādvāda* (the theory of the relativity of truths according to which contradictory statements may be true at the same time) seems to relativize the requirement of truthfulness itself. It might be mentioned in passing that, according to Weber, also the Parsis (of Zoroastrian origin) are prosperous as businessmen because of their adherence to the rigid injunction to be honest (ES:556).

trial organizations – perhaps because of the barriers set up by the patrimonial character of kingship.

Weber believed that the teaching of the Jainas contained an inner contradiction, for their highest goal was an inner habitus of tranquillity – as with all Indian soteriologies of intellectuals - (RI: 204), the path to its attainment, however, was detachment from the world and self-denial through mortification; but such asceticism does not easily lead to a feeling of security and tranquillity. In spite of the separation of monks and lay adherents, there was no separate goal of salvation for the lay community. Magic was never completely cast off, and the anxious control of ritual correctness prevented an inner rationalization and a coherent method of contemplative mysticism or active asceticism. After the Hindu Restoration Jainism did not escape the fate of Hinduization and the caste order took hold among them.

### Ancient Buddhism

Early Buddhism, to which Weber then turned, is described systematically with regard to the points important to him, and as a coherent system of thought, even if at its beginning it may not have had such a rational consistency (RI: 206). Just as Jainism, it originated during a time of urban development and, as a soteriology of cultivated intellectuals, it was the product of positively privileged status groups. Kshatriyas, brahmins and rich citizens were its adherents, and the Buddha, himself a kshatriya, was in Weber's view, an exemplary prophet<sup>44</sup> and not, like Mohammed or Jeremia, an emissary or ethical prophet. Ancient Buddhism represents the polar opposite of Confucianism and of Islam: it was an apolitical and even anti-political religious theory of salvation of intellectually schooled mendicant monks.

The goal of salvation was, as with all Indian intellectual soteriologies, internal peace; all means of salvation which were not directly related to this goal were eradicated – as for instance the ascetic characteristics of Jainism and all philosophical speculation. Buddhism did not doubt the common Indian karma theodicy and the belief which followed from it that

---

44 India seems to be characterized by exemplary prophecy until the time of Mahatma Gandhi. This kind of prophecy does not lead to any revolution (which would be contrary to the caste spirit) but at the most to passive resistance ( ES: 447).

salvation is the solely personal act of the single human being («be a lamp unto yourself», as the Buddha said). But it rejected the belief that there is a soul as a lasting unit. There is in Buddhist teaching no immortal soul and no God who gives commandments. Buddhist precepts are recommendations. Human beings consist of many factors or elements which all are impermanent. What appears to be a personality is simply a bundle of different factors which have combined into an apparent whole and which after the individual's death will combine into a new individual, just as if a light might pass from one lamp to another: nothing substantial passes from the former to the latter.<sup>45</sup> What constitutes the individual is the will to exist, the «thirst» for life and actions, pleasure and power, producing new karma, illness and death. «Thirst» and acting, even good deeds, are obstacles to salvation, contemplation and inner enlightenment lead to bliss in the here and now. The person who has achieved this goal, the *arhat*, is free from fear and desire and has attained *nirvana*. There is no bridge between the arhat ideal and the world of rational action (RI: 213). In later Buddhist philosophy (*Prajnaparamita*) even *samsara* and *nirvana* are only conceptual constructions. There is a metaphor of crossing a river where Buddha's teachings are the raft which one does not need any more after the crossing so that the distinction between *samsara* and *nirvana* becomes meaningless.<sup>46</sup> Neither is a reasonable object of desire and the sensible Buddhist will therefore desire nothing, said Vasubandhu (between 300 and 500 A.D.).

Salvation is thus an absolutely personal achievement and no one can help; there is no grace and no prayer. There is a certain contradiction in the fact that the Buddha who was quite aloof from forming a church or a community gave life to an order of monks, although the organization of this order was minimized intentionally and with great consistency. The monastic rules (quite different from the Benedictine *ora et labora*, namely pray and work) did not include work and they lacked what has been developed in Occidental monasticism: a rational conduct of life (except with regard to a systematization of meditation and contemplation). A rational economic ethic could hardly develop in this sort of religious order (RI: 216); there was only an ethic of non-action and of contemplation which

45 This metaphor is given in the *Milinda Panha* (*Milinda's Questions* 71.16), an old Buddhist text, translated by I. B. Horner

46 Heinrich Zimmer *Philosophies of India* Princeton University Press 1951, p. 474 sqq.

alone was thought to provide salvation. Salvation by work was considered heretical.

Anyone who offered alms to the wandering monks could be considered as a member of the laity. The Buddhist lay ethic, an insufficiency ethic of the weak, as Weber called it, as they did not seek complete salvation, contained the prohibition against the killing of living beings (*ahimsa*) and promised innerworldly goods: riches and better rebirth chances. Any attempt to form a methodical lay ethic was lacking for any sort of religious premium for a specific economic behaviour was absent (RI: 219). Because of the lack of any kind of planned influence on the conduct of the laity there developed ritualism and hagiolatry. The acquisition of wealth was not forbidden, for wealth did not imply wrong, but it was thought to lead to the temptation to succumb to «thirst».

The Buddhist «acosmism of love», as Weber called it, was cool and egocentric. Just as in Jainism and in Puritanism the own salvation (*certitudo salutis*) was at the center of all preoccupations, not that of one's neighbour or the love of one's enemy. Buddhist altruism was not active brotherliness but just a step to the final goal: the stoic equanimity of the one who has achieved knowledge. If it is asked why ancient Buddhism became a missionary religion, the motive can be found in the material interests of the monks to increase the number of providers of food, of the lay population.

Ancient Buddhism had been the most consistent of the soteriologies of Indian intellectuals. Its inner consistency (and exterior weakness) had lain in the fact that it reserved salvation to the monks and hardly bothered about the laity. There was lacking what Jainism had produced, an organization of the laity. Soon after the expedition of Alexander, the patrimonialism of «world-reigning» kings (*cakravartin*) replaced the ancient petty kingdoms. Under the great king Ashoka the beginnings of Buddhist political theory emerged, particularly the ideal of the welfare state, welfare being understood as the increase of the chances of salvation and of charities, but not as rational economic welfare<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, the religious needs of the literate officials and petty bourgeois who did not wish to attain *nirvana*

---

47 The translation in RI: 242 is plainly incorrect; *vide* the original German text in GARS II, p.262 which states clearly that Ashoka's policy was *not* meant to be rational economic welfare.

With regard to Buddhist political theory the *Anguttara Nikaya* 4. 70 of the Buddhist Pali Canon states that if kings are without virtue, then officials will be with-

needed to be satisfied, and the patrimonial ruler Ashoka saw in Buddhism – originally a religion of intellectuals - an instrument to domesticate the masses.<sup>48</sup> As soon as Buddhism became a popular religion, it transformed itself into a saviour religion with hopes for the world beyond guaranteed by deeds of mercy and purely magical motives (ES: 628).

#### Buddhism elsewhere in Asia

Wherever Buddhism was diffused in the Orient, it considered the gods of the respective cultures as subordinate to the Buddha and it generally underwent some striking transformations. For emotional mass religiosity there are generally but two possible soteriologies: magic or a saviour (RI: 237). The necessary adaptation process produced the Mahayana version of Buddhism (as opposed to the earlier Hinayana). The idea of the Bodhisattva who, instead of entering *nirvana*, becomes a helper in need for life here and now, was developed. There also appeared, besides the world-fleeing mysticism of early Buddhism an inner-worldly mysticism, the idea of a world-indifferent life which proves itself within and against the world – a Buddhist version of the ideas of the Bhagavadgita (RI: 253). But a rational inner-worldly conduct of life was not to be established on the basis of the Mahayana. Miraculous and magical interventions of the Bodhisattvas predominated, and the world remained a magic garden.

The Buddhism of Ceylon developed from the ancient Buddhist orthodoxy. Monastic landlordism was supported by kingship based upon a magnificent irrigation system and the requisite bureaucracy. Buddhist lay rules were not very demanding, belief in demons and magic art dominated

---

out virtue, and then also citizens and peasants will be without virtue. And then it will not rain, seeds will grow poorly and humans will get ill.

- 48 In an interesting article, the indologist Heinz Bechert has given an evaluation of Weber's view of Buddhism. According to him, Weber's assessment of primitive Buddhism was surprisingly correct, and also still pertinent is Weber's description of the factors that caused the transformation of the old soteriology for intellectuals into a religion of the masses. But Weber's treatment of the later development of Buddhism in India was unsatisfactory. Among Bechert's critiques is Weber's comparison between the Indian emperor Ashoka and the Byzantine rulers and Weber's overlooking of the graded character of the Buddhist ethic regarding monks and laymen. (Heinz Bechert «Max Weber and the Sociology of Buddhism» in: *Internationales Asienforum* vol. 22 (1991) no.3-4, pp. 181-195).

their life. In the outlying Indian territories of Burma and Siam the Hinayana may well be co-responsible for the inferior technical and economic development which it tolerated at best. The monasteries were not places of rational work and the absence of castes in these territories had a negative effect on the lay population, for, although they do not lead to modern rational development, castes do at least motivate a traditional loyalty to one's vocation.

Mahayana Buddhism spread in China where it encountered the Confucian stratum of literati. The policies of the Chinese government towards Buddhism wavered between support, toleration, quota regulations, confiscation of temple treasures and violent persecutions. Buddhism here was of a rather plebeian character, the monks belonged to the non-literary strata, the monasteries were places of irrational ascetism, and meditation and pagodas were apotropaic means to defend against demons. Any beginnings of a systematic ethical rationalization of conduct of the laity were out of the question (RI: 268) <sup>49</sup>

---

49 These affirmations are too short and sweeping, for Weber practically ignored the rich Chinese Buddhist tradition. While it is true that the Chinese nobility and literate families did not embrace the ways of the Indian renouncers and begging monks, they were impressed by the reinterpretation of Buddhism by the life style of Vimalakirti, a rich aristocrat who denied himself no luxury, «who wore the white robe of the layman, but lived according to the rules of monks, who lived in a house, but kept away from the world of desires» (E. Lamotte *L'enseignement de Vimalakirti*, Louvain 1962 p. 127). It also appears that Buddhism brought a universal ethic to the prevailing familism and particularism of the indigenous traditions, according to A. F. Wright in: *Buddhism in Chinese History*, Stanford University Press 1959, p. 75. Li (order) was now interpreted as the transcendental absolute as opposed to the empirical data of experience. Wang An-Shih, a minister of the Sung dynasty who wrote Buddhist poems, tried to raise the condition of the farmers and undertook various economic experiments. Contrary to the Confucian tradition, he believed that the literati should also have specialized knowledge in ancient and modern laws and political economy. (Williamson, H. R. *Wang An Shih*, London: Arthur Probsthain 1935, vol. 2, p. 331).

There have also been numerous rebellions and secret organizations of Buddhist inspiration, such as the White Lotus and the Maitreya Society who had millenarian or chiliastic hopes and envisaged a new world order. Finally, there was the T'ai P'ing rebellion in the nineteenth century which built on these millenarian hopes but also borrowed from Protestant Christian ideas. Thus, Chinese Buddhism produced to a certain extent the «tension» in the form of millenarian and messianic ideas and of ethical prophecies which Weber denied to Confucianism. Building on these traditions modernization, at least in the form of socialism, could be introduced into China.

## Excursus: Japan

From China, Buddhism was introduced to Japan and encountered a non-Buddhist state cult (Shinto). Although Japan was a country of some interest even in Weber's time, he dealt with it only briefly, perhaps because he thought that Buddhism (and Confucianism) did not have a serious influence on the important aspects of the «spirit» of the Japanese conduct of life in the economic context, for the Japanese spirit, according to him, was in its main outlines not produced by religious factors but by the feudal character of the political and social structure (RI: 271).<sup>50</sup> Japanese feudalism did not represent a complete feudal system and ended in the quasi-patrimonial regime of the Tokugawa: the granting of land to the daimyos resulted in an administrative office for them rather than in a fief in the Occidental sense (ES: 1075). Since the Tokugawa regime Buddhist monks belonged more and more to the non-literate strata. Only the Shin sect can be compared to Protestantism in the Occident, but, for the same reasons as Lutheranism, did not produce rational innerworldly asceticism.

The concept of the city as an autonomous seat of jurisdiction was absent in Japan – as it was in India and China (ES: 1227/8). The samurai, entitled to bear arms and to hold fiefs or rather military prebends, were personally free whereas merchants had no political rights. A people among whom a stratum of professional warriors played a decisive rôle could not attain a rational economic ethic on their own (RI: 275), but the feudal rela-

---

50 In an influential book Robert Bellah has tried to show that, on the contrary, Japanese religions – several Buddhist sects – and bushido, the moral code of the samurai, have furthered economic rationalisation by stressing diligence, frugality and, in general, the work ethic (R. Bellah *Tokugawa Religion* New York 1957/1985). These were functional equivalents of the Protestant ethic. This view has been questioned by a Japanese author (Maruyama Masao) on the basis that the magical elements of religion (particularly in Shinto) prevent a complete rationalisation. Another Japanese author (Morishima Michio *Why has Japan succeeded? Western Technology and the Japanese Ethos*. Cambridge 1982) was interested in the effects of Confucianism on East-Asian development, but he distinguished two kinds of Confucianism: Chinese Confucianism which expects loyalty to family and clan, and Japanese Confucianism, especially since the Meiji reforms, which stresses kokutai, loyalty to the state and to the tenno (emperor).

It should not be forgotten, though, that the religious or «inner» factors of the development of the capitalistic system, are, according of Weber, insufficient for an explanation ; they must be seen in connection with the «exterior» factors, in particular the legal and political system.



tionships based on contractual legal obligations offered a basis for the development of an individualism in the Occidental sense.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, as a result of the Meiji reforms, the administration of «fiefs» could be replaced by a bureaucratic administration, and Japan was easily able to take over capitalism as an artifact from the outside, although it had been unable to create it out of its own spirit.

### Later Indian Developments

Turning back to India proper one notes that during the first millennium of our era Buddhism was pressed back and was finally almost completely eliminated. The princes strengthened their ties with the brahmanical intellectual strata and the caste organization. Hindu sects with an organized professional monkdome supported the slowly commencing restauration which was based on the non-literary plebeian strata. The Vedanta commentator Shankara initiated a monastic reform with the intention of fighting the heterodox Buddhist and Jainist monastic orders. Each monk and each lay person who belonged to a sect now had his guru (spiritual teacher). Thus, besides the caste order and its anchorage in the *samsara* and *karma* doctrine which the sects did not question, the veneration of gurus, almost living saviours, played an important rôle. Indian intellectuals up to this time had ignored the orgiastic, ecstatic and magical parts of popular religion, but now slowly an adaptation process took place: the cults of the old fertility gods Shiva and Vishnu were transformed according to orthodox ideas of vegetarianism and sexual abstinency.

Shivaism tried to free the old phallus (linga) cults of their sexual-orgiastic character and to create a ritualistic and ascetic temple cult. But the simple linga worshipper hardly knew Shiva and the meat and sexual orgies continued. Therefore, the insertion of the non-classical linga cult into the classical ritual was difficult and the split between orgiastic and ascetic orientation continued. These latent difficulties were particularly evident in the Lingayat sect. The Lingayats rejected the caste order and had doubts with

---

51 According to Tu Wei-Ming, the Western concept of individualism (the lonely self) does not exist in Confucianism ; rather, the self is a center of relationships («The Confucian Dimension in the East Asian Development Model» in: Josef Kreiner, ed. *The Impact of Traditional Thought in Present-Day Japan*. Munich 1996, pp. 31-48).

regard to the samsara dogma; they developed some rational and almost puritan characteristics, but they remained unbendingly ritualistic. The means of salvation of the intellectuals was meditation about the linga, the popular soteriology was magical and sacramental and obedience to a guru was stressed. For these reasons the rational characteristics of the Lingayats were unable to efface their traditional ritualism.

While Shivaism addressed itself to Brahmins as well as to peasants, Vishnuism found followers among the middle strata. It tempered and replaced orgiasticism by a passionate devotion to a saviour. Not sacred knowledge or ritual was at the forefront, but *bhakti*, the passionate god-centred devotion or belief in a redeemer and his grace. It was an inactive attitude of life, typical of pure belief-religiosity, including Lutheranism (RI: 384, n.36).<sup>52</sup> The Vallabhacarin in particular, were a merchant and banker sect<sup>53</sup> who did not seek salvation in the intellectual traditions of India, in asceticism or contemplation, but in refined sublimated orgies<sup>54</sup> under the strong influence of gurus. The means and goals of salvation were graded and not ethically rational. It is evident in this sect, concludes Weber, that ascetic religiosity does not, as is often maintained, develop out of the inner nature of bourgeois capitalism – quite the contrary. Sects which considered innerworldly action as a path to salvation, nevertheless considered meditation as the higher path and disinterested action as superior.

- 
- 52 Belief, according to Weber, is not an acknowledgement of facts or teachings, but the religious reliance, the faithful obedience and the orientation of one's whole life to a God or saviour (RI: 187). Weber also mentions Augustine, according to whom the assertion of intellectual propositions is the lowest level of faith (ES: 566). Weber thus uses the term in its older sense, as described by Wilfred Cantwell Smith in *Faith and Belief* (1979): In old English the word believe meant to be loyal and faithful. Shakespeare and Hobbes differentiated between belief and opinion. But since the nineteenth century the word to believe simply meant «to have an opinion» regardless whether the opinion was correct or false.
- 53 The term sect must be used with caution, as sects born from within the caste system are quite different from the Western notion of sect which Weber opposed to concept of church (*vide* Dumont, 1967, p. 349).
- 54 But *vide*: Jürgen Lütt «The Doctrine of the Vallabhacarya Sect and the Economic Performance of its Followers» *International Sociology* 2 (3) 1987

One of the Vishnuit sects, the Kabir Panthi<sup>55</sup>, was strongly pacifistic, comparable to the Quakers, but their non-ascetic character and their obedience towards Gurus made an innerworldly autonomous conduct of life of the occidental kind impossible.

But the dogma of the unchangeability of the world order remained common to all orthodox and heterodox Hindu thinking and it is quite evident that a community dominated by inner powers of this sort could not out of its own arrive at the spirit of capitalism. It was even relatively difficult to take over the economic and technically finished form as an artifact<sup>56</sup> even if the Indian worker may be highly diligent. It never occurred to a Hindu to see in the success of his economic professional integrity a sign of his state of grace or to undertake the rational reconstruction of the world as a realization of God's will (RI: 326). The masses of the contemporary Hindus know nothing about salvation; they have this-worldly interests – wealth and perhaps better rebirth chances. The religion of the intellectuals may have some indirect effects on their conduct of life, but not in the sense of innerworldly methodical rationality.

### A Retrospective View on the Asian Cultural World

Asia was in principle the land of the free competition of religions and of tolerance<sup>57</sup>. There were both orthodox and heterodox religious forms. In

---

55 Kabir (1440-1518) was a mystic poet who combined Hindu bhakti and Islamic Sufism. Weber did not mention Sikhism, founded by one of Kabir's disciples, Guru Nanak. As the term Sikh, derived from a Sanskrit term for disciple, already suggests, the Sikhs had Gurus. They retained the Indian ideas of transmigration and karma, but at the same time they were monotheistic and forbade the representation of God in pictures. They practised commensality, at least «at the kitchen of the guru», and their caste structure was less rigid than among Hindus. At the beginning, their syncretic tendencies were encouraged by the tolerant Moghul ruler Akbar, but when persecutions set in under subsequent emperors, the brotherhood of Khalisa was founded: soldier-saints with a spartan code of conduct. It is this syncretism of Indian and Islamic ideas which may well have made a consistent innerworldly conduct of life difficult.

56 The English translation in RI: 325 regarding the take-over of capitalism in India is incorrect and misleading. *Vide* the German original in GARS II, p. 359

57 Critics of Weber's PE essay had pointed out that tolerance had a paramount rôle for the economic development of the Occident. Weber's mention of tolerance in Asia (India & China) which had not in any way furthered a capitalistic develop-

China, the upper social strata which rejected any kind of salvation religion stood against the folk soteriology of the masses; and at the same time the same religion dispensed different forms of goods of salvation to different social strata. Everywhere in Asia one finds a gulf between the literarily educated and the non-literary masses. For the educated intellectuals of Asia literary knowledge and mystical gnosis were the absolute path to the highest good whereas the masses tended toward a saviour religiosity and indeed a hagiolatry of living saviours or gurus (RI: 335). This charismatic phenomenon was, beside the unbroken character of magic and the power of the sib, the main characteristic of the Asian social order. The world remained an «enchanted garden» (*Zaubergarten*), in which one revered or coerced the spirits.

While it is true that the circles of literary strata attempted to sublimate the orgiasticism and saviour belief of the masses – with limited success – they only rarely succeeded in braking the grasp of magic. Not the rational miracle but magic remained at the centre of mass religiosity.<sup>58</sup> This most highly anti-rational world of magic affected everyday economics, and there was no way to a rational inner-worldly conduct of life. Where the inner-worldly ethic was systematically specialized, as in the Indian caste ethic, it was simultaneously traditional and ritually stereotyped.

The unrestricted lust for gain, the «acquisitive drive» of tradesmen and artisans in Asia is probably unequalled in the rest of the world. Capitalism existed among all Asian religions, but not modern capitalism and not the capitalist spirit, for Asian religions were lacking in precisely that which was decisive for the economics of the Occident: the temperance of this lust for gain and its immersion into a system of a rational innerworldly ethic as produced by Occidental Protestantism (RI: 337), thus creating the religious motivation for seeking salvation through immersion in one's

---

ment, is an implicit rejection of his critics. Tolerance, he wrote, may be able to populate a country and to import foreign professionals, but Weber is rather interested in the question who might benefit from the tolerance. Only if Jews or ascetic Christian denominations benefitted from it, the result was the spread of the spirit of capitalism (AC: 66 & 100)

58 The «miracle» implies, according to Weber, a kind of belief in a rational guidance of the world or in a divine gift of grace and is therefore more innerly motivated than «magic» which is bereft of all meaning, is irrational and produced by pure arbitrariness (RI: 335/6). The English translation regarding the distinction between miracle and magic in RI: 335 is garbled and meaningless. Please see the German original in GARS II: 370.

worldly vocation. On the level of the privileged strata in Asia the patterns of life showed feudal characteristics in Japan, were patrimonial-bureaucratic in China, and were a mixture of knightly, patrimonial and intellectualistic traits in India, whereas in the Occident the creation of a rational inner-worldly ethic was bound up with the appearance of thinkers and prophets who lived in a social context which was foreign to Asian culture: the political burghers of the city without whom neither Judaism nor the development of Christianity are conceivable (RI: 338). The inner order of the real world remained concealed to the high-ranking intellectuals of Asia because it was of no interest to them. Their life was oriented to the imitation of exemplary prophets. To the plebeian strata, on the other hand, no ethical prophecy appeared to rationally form their conduct of life.

## 5. *Ancient Judaism*

### *Basic Literature*

Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* New York: The Free Press 1952

Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* III Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1920

Wolfgang Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination*, University of California Press 1989 Chapter V: Ancient Judaism: Origins of World Mastery, pp 163-204)

Wolfgang Schluchter, *Max Webers Studie über das antike Judentum* Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1981

Max Weber's essays on the economic ethics of world religions may be considered as analyses of an epoch of world history which the German philosopher Karl Jaspers later called the axial time<sup>59</sup>. Approximately between the years 800 BC and 300 BC there lived in China Confucius and Lao tse, in India the Buddha and in Persia Zoroaster, in Greece there lived Socrates and Plato, and prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah appeared in Palastine. Weber's essays may be read as the result of an effort to describe the world images which were formed during the axial time and which de-

---

59 Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* München: Piper 1949. Instead of using the concept of axial time, more recent scholars often talk of axial civilizations and include Akhenaton (*vide* Jan Assmann, 1992, p. 290) and Mohammed in the line of religious founders who initiated an axiological turn and systematised practical action to a conduct of life, thus producing a personality.

terminated the tracks along which the great cultural traditions were pushed forward by the dynamic of interests. In this way Weber thought to be able to seize the specificity of the Occidental evolution.

In this context Weber attributes a crucial position to ancient Judaism. Because of its rational religious ethic of innerworldly action, free of magic, it was worlds apart from the paths of salvation offered by Asian religions; at the same time it was a crucial contributor of Western development. Only hellenic intellectual culture, Roman law, the Catholic Church resting on the Roman concept of office, and Protestantism equal ancient Judaism, according to Weber (AJ: 5), in world-historical significance. But Weber then asks why, in spite of all, Judaism nevertheless did not contribute to the development of the modern capitalistic mentality.

Weber's analysis comprises the time of the confederacy of peasants and herdsmen before the year 1000 BC, the time of kingship of the city-based culture until the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (597/587 BC), the consequences of the Babylonian exile for the development of the religion, and some hints about the time of the hierocracy after the return from Babylon. In general, Weber discovers a great independence of intellectual culture in ancient Israel, and he observes that rarely entirely new religious conceptions have originated in the respective centers of rational cultures, not in Babylon, Rome, or London, but in Jerusalem, in the late Roman province of Africa, in Geneva or in New England. For humans who are distant from the great culture centers have not yet unlearned how to face the course of the world with questions of their own (AJ: 206).

### The Transcendent God, the berith, and the Prophets

Israel's god was a god of heaven, just as originally in China. But while China became a pacified world empire and its heavenly god an impersonal and order-forming power, Israel remained a politically endangered small state and Jahweh a transcendent personal creator and war god, conceived as a partner of a covenant (berith) between himself and the Israelitic tribes, a god of political events, a superhuman and yet comprehensible personal master whom one must obey and whose positive commandments are to be followed. The supporters of Jahweh opposed the sexual-orgiastic character of the Baal-cults and the kind of religiosity influenced by them; they also opposed any kind of magic as it was considered impossible to coerce Jahweh by magic. The representatives of this turn against orgiasticism

and magic were mainly levitic priests, bearers of the knowledge of Yahweh's commandments, to be found in the Thora, mainly in Exodus 20, 2-17 and Deuteronomium 5, 6-18.

Weber sees the difference between magic and religion tentatively in the fact that magic contains bans in the form of tabus, but no duties and no law, that it delivers oracles and concrete maxims of wisdom, but no sermon and no rational law and coherent register of commandments like the decalogue. While elsewhere one may find magic spells, in Israel one finds miracles, for the miracle is, as opposed to magic spells, a more rational construct, sprung from meaningful, understandable intentions of the god-head. According to Weber, Israel was not an irrational magic garden like India, but it was penetrated by the idea of a fundamentally understandable god who directs the fate of his people, and by the idea of a rational providence (AJ: 223). And while for instance in Egypt there were magical substitutes for the fulfillment of the commandments (for the use of a scarabaeus allowed the dead to hide their sins before the judge of the dead), in Israel this kind of magic was absent and the ethical commandments had greater practical impact. Their relatively extensive rational systematization was the product of the work of the Levitic priests.

Moreover, all promises of Yahweh were tied to the good behaviour of the people who as an association of free compatriots were jointly responsible for keeping the commandments of the god of the covenant; all had to fear the vengeance of God if they tolerated a violation of God's commandments in their midst.

In this constellation there appeared the phenomenon of prophecy, a kind of demagogy to a certain extent, which would have been impossible without the precarious situation of Israel in the world-political situation between Egypt and Babylon. The question which these prophets/demagogues asked was not as in Athens: how does one become a good citizen, but rather: how does one fulfill Yahweh's commandments. For the obedience to these commandments was the special duty of Israel because of the berith. In the mind of the prophets Yahweh was the god of the political union, an acting god, not the god of an eternal order. Moreover, since the prophet Amos he was not only the originator of all possible good, but also of doom.

Prophets never claimed the right to be worshipped in the manner of hagiolatry. And when they were «seized» by the spirit of Yahweh, this was not the tranquil euphoria or mystic union of the god-possessed, as in India, but a stormy demand. Their concept of God directed the interpretation

which the Jewish prophets gave to their ecstatic experiences and determined the selection of such psychic states which might qualify as truly prophetic (AJ: 313). Because of this a priori of the Jewish concept of god the prophets could not be mystics. Their god was understandable by man and he was a ruler of whom one desired to know how to obtain his grace.

The prophets never raised the question of the «meaning» of the world and especially of life. Yahweh's being and his decisions contained nothing beyond understanding, and even world events were considered by the prophets to be rational in character. There was much economy of psychic resources in the fact that all rumination about the meaning of the cosmos was precluded and that only conduct according to the commandments of God behoved man (AJ:317). Essential for the prophets was the central religious mentality, the faith in Yahweh's omnipotence. Obedience and humility were the ensuing virtues, an abject submission to God's counsels which would have been shocking to the Greek hero's sense of dignity and which, according to Weber, can develop only in the neighbourhood of world monarchies.

### Pariah People, Pariah Ethics, and Pariah Capitalism

Why did this mentality not lead to innerworldly action on the basis of an ethic of conviction and to a modern bourgeois conduct of life? Weber provides two connected reasons. The first reason can be found in the fact that the Jews, living either in the neighbourhood of or within large monarchies, became a pariah people <sup>60</sup>, a guest people who were ritually separated, formally or de facto, from their social surroundings (food restrictions and the interdiction of the connubium with outsiders). This ritual separation of the Jewish community had its beginnings during the Babylonian exile and was

---

60 A lively discussion has taken place about Weber's thesis that the Jews lived in a voluntary ghetto as a pariah people, a thesis which Weber derived from a comparison with India's outcastes. Critics have advanced the argument that the Jews expected a complete upheaval of the social organization of the world – contrary to the situation in India where the caste system was considered as permanent and unchanging. Whatever one may think of the well-foundedness of this concept, it serves Weber to describe a background against which he characterizes the Pauline mission as liberating the Christians from the ritual segregation which was at the root of the Jewish pariah position. *Vide* ES: 622 and also W. Schluchter, *Handlung, Ordnung und Kultur* Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck) 2005, p. 55



further developed after the return from exile by the priestly hierarchy under the Persian protectorate: prohibition against mixed marriages, commensality, observance of the Sabbath. It was mostly self-imposed, but the term pariah also seems to refer to the politically and legally precarious situation of the Jews as a guest people within their non-Jewish environment.

But why did an increasingly bourgeois community – for the observance of the ritual was made extremely difficult for the peasants – voluntarily adopt a pariah-situation? The answer can be found in the prediction of the prophets, namely that the social order of the world will be turned upside down by Yahweh and that a glorious future awaits those who patiently endure in their pariah-situation. These were political predictions about the future of this world. Deutero-Isaiah in particular (Isaiah 40-55) has produced, on the basis of the pariah situation in Babylon, the only serious theodicy of ancient Judaism, an apotheosis of suffering, misery and humiliation and the patient enduring in it, a plebeian view according to which only the wretched, the poor and the powerless are good.<sup>61</sup> The situation of the pariah people was here elevated to the highest station of religious worth and honour before God. In this way the religious Jew proved himself; his piety showed itself in the endurance of his pariah situation, not in rational domination of the world, and not in rational economic activity.

The second reason was found by Weber in what he called a pariah ethic. With regard to the legends of the patriarchs (which, however, were written down much later) Weber refers to this pariah ethic (AJ: 50), a certain pacifism and lack of heroism and a rather questionable commercial ethic (a play to outwit each other goes on between Jacob and his father-in-law); as well as the passing off of their beautiful wives as desirable sisters and surrendering them to their prospective protectors - Gen. 12.13; Gen. 20.2; Gen. 26.7. Moreover and more in relation to economic activity, the separation of economic in-group and out-group morality was decisive for the religious evaluation of commercial activity. The dualism of the economic ethic precluded the possibility that, as in Puritanism, rational economic activity was ever seen in a positive religious light, for if a form of behaviour, e.g. interest taking, was strictly forbidden towards brothers in belief, but was considered as an adiaphoron (neither good nor bad) in rela-

---

61 Weber was probably inspired by Nietzsche's *Antichrist*, a critique of Christianity in which Nietzsche described a mutation of all values in the sense of an overthrow of aristocratic values and a religion based on the resentment of the masses.

tion to outsiders, the possibility of proving oneself religiously through innerworldly asceticism became unavailable.<sup>62</sup> In contrast to this attitude the Baptists and Quakers had pointed with pride to the fact that precisely in economic relationships with the godless they had substituted legality, honesty and fairness for falseness and unreliability. In the Jewish economic ethic, however, there was no soteriological motive whatever for ethically rationalizing out-group economic relations. Even the (traditionalistic) high esteem for religiously pursuing one's daily work by Jesus Sirach could not alter this fact. Economic activity could not become, as in Puritanism, an area of ethical and religious proof.

On the whole, as Weber wrote, the legally and factually precarious position of the Jews hardly permitted continuous, systematic and rationalized industrial enterprise with fixed capital (ES: 614), and the pariah ethic implied a non-rational economic attitude. No trace can be found of an appreciation of economic activity as a virtue (AJ: 254); the area of proving one's piety lay in a quite different region from that of rationally mastering the world or the economy. The pariah capitalism which resulted from this situation consisted of state provisioning, trade, and money lending, but not of industrial production or manufacturing. And although pious Jews did not reject colonial capitalism, tax farming or political capitalism, as Weber pointed out, the East European regions where Jews had been at home for a long time, failed to develop specific traits of modern capitalism (AJ: 345).

Weber's Judaism thesis contains an inner tension: on the one hand, the Jewish conception of a transcendent and acting God conducted to innerworldly action, based on an ethic of conviction; on the other hand, the religious prophecies and the paths of salvation connected to them tended to stress the obligation to endure in the given situation. In this can be seen the Janus-like position which Weber attributes to Judaism within the history of the Occident. The Jewish conduct of life was an important historical precondition of the spirit of capitalism, but it did not contain the possibili-

---

62 With regard to the dual ethic, Freddy Raphael in «Max Weber and Ancient Judaism» (*Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 18.1, 1973) has pointed out that at least Joseph Caro's code (sixteenth century), an authority on Jewish tradition, formally forbid the exploitation of Gentiles by usury and that at least in some cases strict legality was required towards outsiders while supplementary solidarity was expected towards one's own people.

ty to demonstrate one's ethical merit by means of modern business activity (ES: 616).<sup>63</sup>

### Supplement: The Pharisees

Since Maccabean times a significant change took place which left a definitive imprint on Judaism. The motive for the rise of the movement of the Hasidim and then mainly of the Pharisees was a reaction against Hellenism. The Pharisees gave their movement the form of an order or of a «brotherhood» whose members lived in the most rigid Levitical purity. The charisma of the hereditary priests was devalued in favour of personal religious qualifications based on conduct and education.

It was decisive that the Pharisees segregated themselves not only from the Hellenes but also from the less ritually observant Jews, the «country-people» with whom they avoided connubium and commensality. We are faced here with an inter-local sect of like-minded persons. The rise of the Jewish diaspora since Maccabean times and the unshakability of its communities was the work of this brotherhood. The community of the «chaber», and not any more the hereditary charisma of the priests now became the bearer of the religion.

The Pharisees created the synagoge, the central institution of late Judaism which for the Diaspora Jew replaced the priestly cult in the Temple of Jerusalem, and they introduced instruction in the religious law which became foundational for Judaism. Above all, one now consulted the teach-

---

63 As W. Schluchter (2005: 83) has suggested, this passage in the section on the sociology of religion in ES was Weber's response to W. Sombart's thesis in *Der Bourgeois* (1913) that Judaism equals Puritanism in its effect on the spirit of modern capitalism. According to Weber, Judaism and Puritanism (and worldly wisdom teachings of philosophers, economists and others) have different potentials of efficiency. For pious Jews many economic transactions were at best permissible on the basis of a lax interpretations of their religious code, or they might be ethically indifferent so that success might be a sign that one had done nothing objectionable or that one had acted appropriately in non-economic contexts. The pious Puritan, however, could demonstrate his religious merit precisely in his economic activity, based on absolutely reliable business practices (ibid.). «Not the doctrinal teachings in general develop a life-changing force, but religious beliefs which are able to set sanctions of a non-economic character on the fulfillment of a particular conduct of life.» (PE: 145 – footnote).

er learned in the law rather than the priest if one was in external or inner difficulty or doubt.

Philosophical speculation was rejected as Hellenistic and practical rationalism or common sense, characteristic of petty bourgeois strata and their economic interests, was favoured. There was also, for practical reasons, some accommodation to the prevailing mass beliefs of plebeian strata, for instance to the messianic hope in the resurrection of the dead which the high-ranking Sadducees (priestly sibs) absolutely repudiated.

The final dominance of the Pharisees began with the second fall of the Temple: then all Judaism became Pharisaic. This was also the time of the rise to dominance of the rabbis.

The rabbis were not at the beginning an exclusive organization: people simply consulted those who legitimized themselves through charismatic knowledge of the law. They were plebeian intellectuals who gave advice and counsel while also holding down a secular occupation (*vide* the Pauline «if any would not work, neither should he eat» ), for there was a rigid prohibition against teaching the law for compensation. The rabbis were no magicians<sup>64</sup> or mystagogues (as their Indian counterparts); their activity and influence was based on teaching and writing only. With the idea of charismatic prophecy<sup>65</sup> the learned rabbis lived in a state of tension, as is characteristic of any scripturally learned men who are ritualistically oriented to a law book. Finally, they were no bearers of an esoteric salvation doctrine, a gnosis, for any gnostic pursuit of salvation devalues the law and the ritualistically and ethically correct conduct. The Jewish rabbi dispensed neither sacramental grace, nor was he a charismatic helper in need. His special religious gift was knowledge. His personal authority rested in serving as a model by leading an exemplary life. He taught the law and he gave *responsa* in the manner of the Roman jurists.

There were expectations of a Messiah for the Jewish people and they imparted a tremendous pathos to the piety of the Jews (the difference from

---

64 Magic had no place in post-prophetic Israel; the idea that one may coerce a transcendent God through magic was completely eliminated. But, according to Weber, magic continued to exist in two forms: exorcism and healing. In these particular cases not the coercion of God but of demons was involved. In any case, these activities did not belong to the normal activities of the rabbis.

65 The teaching of the closure of the prophetic age led to the assumption that the holy spirit had vanished from the world and that all that remains is the spirit required for the correct interpretation of the sacred law.

all Indian cyclic saviour religions rests precisely in the presence of such expectations of a last day), but for the individual Jew only the law and its fulfillment came into consideration. But «world rejection» or world devaluation followed in no way.

Pharisaic Judaism was also far from rejecting wealth or from thinking that its enjoyment endangers salvation although the unbrotherly exploitation of economic power as shattering the old neighborhood ethic was condemned. Stipulations against usury and in favour of debtors and slaves were casuistically elaborated. But any point of departure for an economically oriented methodic of innerworldly asceticism was lacking. The dominant attitude of the Talmud thus differs greatly from the Ebionic<sup>66</sup> hatred of wealth in the Gospel of Luke (AJ: 403).

The Pharisees did not demand a separation from economic and innerworldly life, but this was not the case of Essenism, a Pharisaic sect. They segregated themselves from the less pure not only by excluding connubium and commensality but all contact (AJ: 406). The fear of ritualistic defilement was extremely intensified, secular enjoyments were considered objectionable and copulation was restricted to Wednesdays. The commandment not to steal was intensified to the effect that no economic gain was permissible. They therefore shunned trade and the possession of money. They preached to «love one's enemy» and they lived by a *disciplina arcani*<sup>67</sup>. The motive for the way of life of the Essenes can probably be found in their secret teaching, consisting apparently of an allegorical re-interpretation of Jewish holy books. With regard to rituals, the rejection of the animal sacrifice was characteristic.

The organization and religious conduct of the Essenes have often been compared to original Christian practice: they knew the baptism, the love-meal (agape), the support of the poor, they had a strongly pacifistic ethic and they estimated the hopes for salvation of the poor higher than the hopes for the rich.<sup>68</sup>

---

66 The Ebionites were a Jewish-Christian sect which stressed poverty and common property.

67 The obligation to keep one's doctrine secret from outsiders. *Disciplina arcani* was also practiced by Shiite Muslim sects (e.g. the Druzes in case of danger) and some Russian sects.

68 By centering on the Essenes rather than on the Sadducees, Weber seems interested in the influence of rabbinic-talmudic Judaism on later Jewish developments in the Middle Ages and on its closeness to ancient Christianity (*vide*: E. Otto in his «Einleitung» to MWG I / 21-1, p. 140).

The Pharisaic purity ritualism resulted in higher ritual barriers against both outsiders and other Jews (AJ: 415). The Essenes segregated themselves by avoiding connubium and commensality and all contacts with other Jews, the Pharisaic brotherhood segregated itself from the «country people», those influenced by the Jerusalem priesthood segregated themselves from the Samaritans. Thus, there emerged a caste-like structure of the old Yahweh believers whereas towards the outside world Jewry increasingly assumed the type of a ritualistically segregated guest people, a pariah situation which was voluntarily created and not one suffered under the pressure of external rejection. While antisemitism did indeed exist, it was the negative attitude of the Jews themselves – the refusal of the connubium, of commensality and of any sort of fraternization even in business life – which was decisive for the mutual relations with the outside world.

## 6. Islam

### *Basic Literature:*

Toby E. Huff & Wolfgang Schluchter (eds), *Max Weber and Islam* New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers 1999

Wolfgang Schluchter, *Max Webers Sicht des Islams* Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1987

Max Weber, *Economy and Society* University of California Press 1978

Max Weber never published an essay on Islam. But it is possible, by drawing together his comments on it in his *Economy and Society*, particularly in the chapters on the sociology of law, of domination and of religion, to arrive at a relatively clear outline of what he might have written on the economic ethics of Islam, at least with regard to early Islam. W. Schluchter has tried this and this chapter has been inspired by his effort.

The structure of Weber's analysis would certainly have been similar to that which he employed in all other cases: it would have been divided into two parts, the institutional factors (also called by him the exterior form) and the motivational factors (the interior spirit). With regard to the Occident Weber made this distinction between institutional and motivational factors when he said that there are political and legal as well as attitudinal presuppositions for the development of modern capitalism, or, in his words, «only the Occident knows the state in the modern sense ..., only the Occident knows rational law, made by jurists and rationally applied,

and only in the Occident is found the concept of citizen, because only in the Occident does the city exist in the specific sense of the word... Finally, Western civilization is distinguished from every other by a rational ethos for the conduct of life» (GEH: 313).

### Islamic Patrimonial Domination

Islam was the latest product of Near Eastern monotheism after Judaism and Christianity, the other two «religions of the book». At the very beginning it may have developed in pietistic urban conventicles, but it then rapidly transformed itself into a warrior religion with a strong status emphasis, a religion of masters, as Weber wrote (ES: 624).

As opposed to the Jewish prophets and to Jesus, Mohammed was a religious and a political leader, he was not just a proclaimer of Truth, but also the rightful ruler. In Mecca and Medina he established the *umma* (the religious and political community) in place of the rule of Arabic families and tribes. As in all cases of charismatic leadership, the question of succession posed a problem, and the history of Islam was decisively influenced, as Weber notes, by the fact that one branch, the Shia, recognized the hereditary charisma of Ali's (Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law) family and descendents, while the other branch, the Sunna, was based on tradition and *ijma* (consensus). The astonishing thrust of the new Islamic movement which within a few dozen years spread from the Arabian peninsula and was able to conquer large parts of the Middle East and North Africa, and later India and beyond, may be related to the connection of religion and politics: there were ideal and material interests which resulted in the «elevation of the believers through the subjugation of the unbelievers to their political authority and economic domination» (ES: 474). But not only the conversion of unbelievers was at stake, writes Weber; the primary purpose was revenue or the payment of tribute by the members of other religions.

Non-believers not only were conquered, they also had to be administered, and soon, under the Abassids (750 – 1258), the caliphate separated from the sultanate, dividing spiritual and worldly tasks, but both subject to the same religious law (sharia). A caesaro-papist solution was never at-

tempted, but in Shiite Islam short-term theocratic solutions have sometimes appeared.<sup>69</sup>

Weber characterizes the kind of patrimonial domination in traditional Islamic countries as sultanism and prebendal feudalism. Contrary to Western medieval fief-based feudalism which was at least an approximation of a rule based on law (ES: 1082) and in which the feudal relation resulted from an exchange of a *beneficium* (fief) and a *homagium* (the promise of loyalty, particularly in war) by way of a free contract, leading to a conduct of life based on fealty and honour as opposed to filial piety, one finds in Islamic states armies of purchased slaves (Janissaries) and military fiscal prebendalism. This was so, with some modifications, not only during the Abassid, but also during the Mamluk and Ottoman dynasties.

Weber writes that already the Abassids bought militarily trained Turkish slaves who were totally tied to the ruler's domination (ES: 1015). By creating an elite troop of purchased slaves, the central power now had at its disposal an instrument that freed it from dependency of the quarreling Arab tribes. Prebendal fiscal feudalism then developed when slave generals began to function as tax collectors and then as tax farmers in specific areas. A consequence was the legal insecurity of the tax paying population in face of the arbitrariness of the troops, and this, in turn, particularly since the period of the Seljuks, paralyzed commerce (ES: 1016).

The two institutions, the military slave system and the military (tax farming) prebends increased the possibility of arbitrary discretion and lessened the calculability of the administrative/legal processes. One of the consequences, according to Weber (ES 1096), was an artificial immobilization of wealth by means of religious foundations (waqfs) in order to evade its arbitrary seizure. In a more general way Weber claimed that the patrimonial state lacks the political and procedural predictability and the trustworthiness and objectivity of the legal order which is indispensable for capitalist development as it is provided by modern bureaucratic administration (ES: 1095).

---

69 In the Shia tradition, as for instance in Persia, an entrusted imam (a qualified theologian who replaced the hidden imam, a descendent of Ali) was to uphold Allah's command as the true interpreter of the Koran. In times of crisis there was the hope that a Mahdi, a messianic deliverer, will fill the earth with justice and equity. Weber called such messianic or chiliastic hopes which scorn every thought of a rational order in the world, irrational (ES: 550).



The second point of comparison was that between the medieval Northern European city and the oriental city. Weber asked why the oriental city tends to obstruct rather than favour the development of rational capitalism although it also had merchant and artisan guilds with autonomous statutes.

Weber distinguished cities according to which stratum rules in them (patrician or rentier city versus plebeian or producer city) and also with regard to the question of whether they have political, administrative, military and legal autonomy and autocephaly, legitimated only by the principle of the corporate urban commune. The city as an autonomous corporate commune in which the fraternity of the burghers stood above the solidarity of tribes and guilds existed only in the Occident while in the Islamic world the prerogatives of patrimonial rule were never broken and the traditional statuses of lord and subject were never replaced with membership status in the city commune.

Mecca, for instance, was a kind of clan city (ES: 1231), with divisions according to tribes and clans as the basis of military organization. Although the city was a location of powerful economic interests, it was not a communal organization. The *umma*, the religious community, was too weak to cause a break with tribal and clan bonds because the legal institution which might have been able to do this, the concept of the corporation, was lacking. The central organization of military prebendalism prevented it.

As neither the city nor the church developed as independent corporate bodies in the Orient, there were no counterforces to challenge Islamic patrimonialism; the heterogeneity or structural pluralism of the West was lacking and thus one of the prerequisites for the development of rational industrial capitalism.

Finally Weber pointed out that in the Occident, in contrast to Islamic countries, a technically and juristically schooled administration was available because of a clear dualism of sacred and secular law and because these laws were able to develop according to their own inner logic (ES: 828). Why could trained specialists at a culturally dominant level only be found in the West? Weber provided two reasons. On the one hand, the development of secular law was able to take the Roman and Germanic legal traditions as guides and was closely connected to the development of the medieval occidental city and, on the other hand, the West had organs of rational sacred law making in the Church Councils and the papal powers of jurisdiction.

Islamic law (sharia) is sacred law, the product of four major law schools (ES: 820); it was developed by theological jurists (mufti) who must be distinguished from judges (qadi) whose decisions were often based on personal discretion. Since the so-called closing of the gates of *ijtihad* (the accepted view – since the tenth century – that independent interpretation of the law is no longer necessary nor advisable) it was stereotyped and opposed secularization (ES: 820). On the other hand, as religious rules were not comprehensive, there were certain administrative institutions governed by human profane law although this law was considered to be of an inferior kind.

Islamic sacred law also was an impediment to the establishment of a unified legal system because its realm of validity was limited to Muslims (ES: 821) while the particular laws of the subjugated people continued to exist. Originally the Shiites, perhaps under Zoroastrian influence in Persia, even tried to prohibit as unclean all economic intercourse with unbelievers who followed different laws, but various legal fictions prevented this outcome. The dominance of sacred law was, moreover, a decisive impediment to the establishment of a predictable legal procedure, for it did not allow for a formal juridical systematization. Neither the spiritual nor the the worldly jurisdiction developed an abstract logic in legal thinking, both were oriented toward concrete and law-transcendent fairness and appropriateness (ES: 823). The reason for this can be found in the fact that legal interpretation of sacred law became stereotyped since the introduction of the theory of the closing of the gates of *ijtihad* in the tenth century and that profane law was dominated by sacred law and the gulf between sacred and profane law could be overcome only by circumventing strategies and doubtful casuistry, i.e. in an opportunistic manner (ES: 821/2). Therefore, in typological terms, Islamic justice was for Weber a theocratic qadi-justice (ES: 1116) because of its spirit of material justice based on extra-legal postulates which prevented a logical systematization of law in terms of formal juridical concepts and procedures.

Patrimonial governments lack the political and procedural predictability which is indispensable to capitalist development (ES: 1095), and it is therefore not surprising that capitalistic industrialization was impeded by

the religiously determined structure of the Islamic empires, their officialdom and their particular kind of jurisprudence.<sup>70</sup>

### The «Spirit» of Islam

Weber's view of the «spirit» of Islam can best be approached if one starts from the observation that there are a number of aspects in which Islam and Calvinistic Protestantism are not different. In both of them there is one transcendent God who is omnipotent and omniscient and the gulf between this God and human beings is unbridgeable. Moreover, in both religions the rôle of mediators between God and humans is significantly reduced: Mohammed was simply an ethical prophet and the Jesus of the Calvinists died only for those whom God had chosen. The idea of a church as an institution of grace and salvation is foreign to both religions.

But these are external aspects which did not prevent two very different outcomes: the spirit of traditionalism in Islam and the spirit of rational capitalism in the West. These different outcomes are largely related to the idea of proof of being chosen by God in Calvinism and to the interpretation of providence.

In Islam, original sin and the idea that human beings are incapable of being good is absent. Moreover, while Calvinism demanded of its believers not single good works but a systematic conduct of work and life in or-

---

70 Interesting is the description of the Mughal government as patrimonial-bureaucratic, based on the *A'in-i Akbari* (Regulations of Akbar by Abu al-Fazl) and the remarkable congruence between these regulations and Max Weber's ideal type of patrimonial-bureaucratic domination. *Vide*: Stephen Blake «The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals» in: *Journal of Asian Studies* 39, no. 1 (1979), pp 77-94. In these regulations the emperor Akbar (1542-1605) is depicted as a «perfect man», a Sufi phrase which describes a person who enjoys a special and intimate relationship with God (more on Sufism below), the emperor's household as the central element of government, members of the army as reporting directly to the emperor, the administration as a loosely structured group of men controlled by the imperial household, and travel as a significant part of the emperor's activities. There were no clear-cut lines of authority, officials (who often received prebends) were rotated from post to post and were not allowed to specialize in either civil or military matters (the mansabdari system). The urban organization (capital cities, provincial headquarters) revolved around the resources and requirements of imperial and noble households which dominated not only political but also economic activity as the central institutions of production, exchange, and consumption.

der to prove that one is chosen by God, in Islam no one is considered incapable of being good or of fulfilling Allah's commandments, and the final judgement functions according to the principles of bookkeeping. The fulfillment of one's duty is the real foundation of salvation (the five pillars: repetition of the creed, prayer, almsgiving, the fast during Ramadan, and pilgrimage) and not, as in Calvinism, a mere indication of grace. Allah guides those who show themselves open to his revelations and follow his positive commands. Therefore, the ethical concept of salvation is really alien to Islam so that Islam cannot be considered as a religion of salvation (ES: 625). The original bearers of the religion, people of knightly status, had no sense for concepts such as sin, humility and redemption (ES: 472).

This leads to Weber's comments on the concept of providence in Islam. It knew nothing of Calvin's «double decree» and did not attribute to Allah the predestination of some people to hell and of others to everlasting life (ES: 574). Not original sin and saving grace for those who are chosen, but offence and just punishment are the focus of thought. One's fate in the beyond is secured by observing the five pillars of Islamic faith, and Allah guides the faithful who are in distress; it is not linked to the idea of proof. Rather, in Islam providence is related to one's fate not in the world beyond, but in this world; it is predetermination, as Weber writes (PE 227, n. 36) rather than predestination. The Islamic doctrine of providence is thus not developed as consistently and coherently as its Calvinistic counterpart, for it simply juxtaposes two lines of thought: the absolute power of Allah and the self-determination and responsibility of man.

Therefore, the most important thing in Calvinism, the search of the believer for proof of his election, played no part in Islam. Only the fearlessness of the warrior could result because the time of his death was predetermined and needed not worry him, but not any rationalization of life as there was no religious reward for it. The Islamic doctrine thus leads to fearlessness in battle and war (ES: 574/5), but daily life remained unsystematic, utilitarian and even fatalistic (*kismet*); in extraordinary situations it unifies and disciplines, in everyday life, however, it loses its influence.

The economic ethic was feudal<sup>71</sup>, and the most pious enriched themselves by military booty. The rôle played by wealth was diametrically opposed to that played in Puritanism. Muslims took pleasure in luxury (luxurious raiments, perfume etc.). Weber quotes the traditional saying that when God blesses a man with property, he likes to see the signs thereof visible upon him (ES: 624). The Koran rejects every kind of monasticism, though not all ascetism (e.g. fasting). Avoidance of certain unclean foods, of wine, and of gambling is required – which had consequences for speculative business.

### Sufism and Conclusion

Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Sufism with its orders of dervishes, originally from Persian and Indian sources, penetrated the petty-bourgeois strata almost

---

71 Bryan Turner (*Weber and Islam*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1974) wrote that Islam was an urban religion of merchants and state officials, and that many of its key concepts reflect the urban life of a mercantile society in opposition to the values of the desert and of the warrior. When Weber attempted to show that Islam was a religion of warriors and produced an ethic which is incompatible with the spirit of capitalism, he was, according to Turner, hopelessly incorrect (ibid. p. 2). Islam may well have experienced a permanent division between the ruling institutions (sultanate, military, legal experts), the merchants, and the tribal desert dwellers, each group with its own ethic ; Ibn Khaldun may then have been correct when he described how beduin tribesmen with their tribal loyalty (*asabiyya*) from time to time plundered and took control of the cities where such *asabiyya* did not exist, and how they then acquired the culture of the cities and watered down their loyalty and group feeling.

But Turner's reference to an article by Goitein in the *Journal of World History* («The Rise of the Near-Eastern Bourgeoisie in Early Islamic Times», vol 3, (1957), pp. 583-604), with comments on Muhammad Shaibani's *On Earning* hardly supports Turner's argument. Shaibani (died 804) tried to show that striving for a decent living and even for luxuries was not opposed by Islam but regarded as permissible, lawful, and even desirable. But the arguments advanced are ambivalent. There are sayings extolling poverty and sentences in canonical collections urging man to strive for a prosperous living. There seem to have been no social prejudices against business, although it was natural, according to Goitein, that the honoured and more lucrative posts in the administration and army attracted the more enterprising brains. In any case, the striving for and showing of luxuries was not part of the Protestant ethic, nor can the permission or the advice to acquire wealth in any way be compared with the psychological sanctions which Protestantism set on diligent work.

everywhere<sup>72</sup>, from Tunisia to Indonesia, but it was even further from developing innerworldly ascetism as it followed orgiastic, pneumatic and mystical paths and was essentially irrational and otherworldly (FMW: 269 & ES: 626). The Sufis conceded the legitimacy of the sharia and of kalam (rational theology), but they also claimed intuitive insight which can be expressed for instance in poetry (e.g. Rumi). Although the principles of Islam do not recognize an intermediary between Allah and the individual believer, the Sufi orders expected absolute devotion to their respective *pir* (leader). They also required poverty, although often in a metaphorical sense, namely poverty as non-attachment. Both irrational Sufism and the official traditionalistic ethic directed the conduct of life of Muslims into paths whose effect was opposite to the methodical control of life found among Puritans in the Occident (ES: 626). There were also diversions from any methodical control of life by the advent of cults of local saints and by magic, tolerated by the consensus of the community.

On the whole, Islam did provide the motivation of a status group of warriors for world conquest and for innerworldly action, but its economic mentality, particularly to the extent that merchant strata later moved to the forefront, was traditional and world-adjusted. As a warrior religion it was tied to the concept of holy war (jihad) and to the division of the world into the house of Islam and the house of war (dar al-Islam, dar al-Harb), but Islam lacked, according to Weber, all promises of a messianic realm (ES: 626)<sup>73</sup>, at least to the extent in which they were linked with meticulous fidelity to the law, as in Judaism. More importantly, Islam did not provide a force to transform the conduct of life from within because it lacked the Calvinistic idea of proof. The ideal personality type of this religion was not the literatus (as in China), nor the ritualistic priest (as in Hinduism), nor the wandering monk (as in Buddhism), but the world conquering warrior.

---

72 An exception may have been the Mevlevi order which penetrated the higher strata of the Osmanic empire, as Annemarie Schimmel (*Sufismus*, Müncher: Beck 2000) writes.

73 But *vide* footnote 69.

## 7. Christianity

### a. Ancient Christianity

#### *Basic Literature:*

Max Weber, *Economy and Society* University of California Press 1978

Wolfgang Schluchter, *Rationalism, Religion, and Domination* University of California Press 1989 Chapter VI Ancient Christianity: Origins of World Mastery

Wolfgang Schluchter, *Max Webers Sicht des antiken Christentums* Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1985

Max Weber. *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations* London: NLB 1976

### The Roman Monarchic-Bureaucratic Empire

Max Weber characterized the Roman economy during the time of the principate as coastal, urban, and based on slave labour. There were no factories in the modern sense (no industrial enterprises which deserve this name because of their size, their continuous existence and their division of labour), although there existed the so-called *ergasteria* (work shops), an undifferentiated accumulation of slave workers.

Weber asked whether a capitalist economy existed in Antiquity to any culturally relevant degree (SAC: 48). In order to answer this question, he had to define the term «capitalist». If we want to talk of capitalism, he said, the enterprise needs a market-oriented basis in a double sense: the products must be sold in the market place, and the means of production must have been bought in the market place for the purpose of economic profit. From this point of view, an enterprise consisting of purchased slaves is a capitalist enterprise, for the slaves were normal market objects which could be bought and sold. But, of course, it was not a modern capitalist enterprise based on free labour.

Capitalism in Antiquity was not modern rational capitalism, not only because of the use of slaves, but also because capital was used in a different way from today: not in modern factories or enterprises, but by means of tax farming, mining, plantations and *ergasteria*. Capitalistically used slave property had certain peculiarities. The use of slaves increased the amount of invested capital (as compared to free labour), implied greater risks and largely prevented specialisation and the division of labour. Most importantly, though, it depended on regular new supplies to the slave market by means of military conquests.

During the time of the *polis* (the city as an institution in republican Rome, but also in ancient Greece) which had been based on the *synoikismos* (confraternization and commensality of the urban clans), and when free arms bearing citizens who equipped themselves constituted the military power, capitalism had seen its strongest development. At that time, militarism affected all aspects of social life, in fact, the *polis* was essentially founded for military purposes (SAC: 346) so that ancient capitalism was based on the exploitation for private profit of the political conquests (SAC: 364). But during the time of the principate and later, the monarchy in Rome slowly plugged all sources of profit because it became more and more bureaucratized<sup>74</sup> and relied more and more on liturgical services (supplying its needs by holding specified groups responsible for public tasks). The most important obstacles to capitalism in the Roman empire were therefore political and organizational. Only in passing does Weber consider the possibility that the peoples' mentality may have played a rôle as an obstacle to capitalism as he mentions the contempt of trade and tradesmen by the leisured upper classes and the fact that businessmen were not sustained by any ethical motivation of working in business (SAC: 67).

As soon as Rome declined and the wars of conquest ceased, the regular supply to the slave market dried up. This and the suffocating presence of the bureaucracy which tended to make subjects out of citizens, led to the gradual disappearance of economic trade, the rejection of urban coastal communities in favour of large interior estates, and a barter economy. Civilization became rural until much later during the Middle Ages the city with new characteristics came to life again.

### The Spirit of Ancient Christianity

As in the case of Islam, Max Weber had completed all the preparatory work for an essay on Christianity<sup>75</sup> when his death intervened. Neverthe-

---

74 Weber also writes that in the liturgy state created by Diocletian, capitalism found no anchorage (SAC: 364). The regulation of the tax system curbed the arbitrary power of the tax farmers ; the tax collecting system was «nationalized» and tax farmers were transformed into state officials.

75 This is mentioned by his wife Marianne Weber in her foreword to vol. III of his *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (GARS) Tübingen 1920



less, there are at least some indications in his published work which can lead to a short outline of his views on ancient, Eastern–Orthodox and Occidental Christianity. This outline has again been partially inspired by Schluchter’s work.

Weber believed that the earliest communities of ancient Christianity were strongly urban, to the extent that the word for countryman, *paganus*, acquired the meaning of heathen. Weber also thought, although the evidence is not strong, that ancient Christianity was characteristically a religion of artisans and wandering journeymen, both slave and free (ES: 481). In fact, Christianity did not originally reject slavery as is confirmed in Paul’s letter to Timothy 1.6.<sup>76</sup> This was a world-rejecting religion and, although the acquisition of money was not forbidden, and Jesus nowhere explicitly stated that preoccupation with wealth leads to unbrotherliness, this notion was at the heart of the matter: the attachment to Mammon constituted one of the most difficult impediments to salvation (ES: 632).

It appears that Weber would have wanted to trace the development of the Jesus movement from within Judaism, particularly in its Pharisaic version, into a distinct and independent religion. He saw the first step in this direction in a sublimation of the Jewish law, i.e. in a revolution of ideas which stressed inner conviction and integrity or the fulfillment of the inner sense of the commandments rather than outwardly correct behaviour and the rational study of sacred law, and which combined this inner conviction with a non-rational attitude of unlimited trust in God (ES: 567). According to Weber, only those who were willing to sacrifice even their own intellect for this relationship of trust were considered to be true disciples of Jesus.

In fact, an inner anti-intellectualism belonged, according to Weber, to the constitutive conditions of ancient Christianity, taking stands against the legalistic scholarship of Judaism as well as against ancient philosophy (ES: 512) and affirming that the «poor in spirit» rather than philosophers and scholars are exemplary Christians. Weber also points in this regard to the formula *credo quia absurdum* («I believe because it is absurd», a formula often attributed to Tertullian) which may refer to a belief in truth which is superior to reason but perhaps also antagonistic to reason. Even

---

76 Slavery was justified by natural law theory in its relative form: slavery and political subordination had to be accepted after the Fall as remedies for man’s wickedness. Slaves were not even accepted as members of monastic congregations, just as in ancient Buddhist times they were not accepted in the *sangha* (the order of monks).

the position of Athanasius (Jesus as being of the same substance as God the Father – an absurd view from a rational point of view, according to Weber) against Arius was for Weber (FMW: 351) an attempt to protect the faith against the intellect or a sacrifice of the intellect.<sup>77</sup> The virtuosi of the law in Judaism are replaced by the virtuosi of belief, and Christianity's fundamental quality as a religion of belief (*pistis*) is opposed by Weber to the religiosity of (gnostic) knowledge of Asian salvation religions and to intellectualism in all its forms (ES: 512).<sup>78</sup>

A second step came with Paul who, as Weber conceived him, methodically undertook missions with the goal of organizing congregations on a permanent basis. He went beyond Judaism not only on the level of ideas, but also institutionally. One event, related in his letter to the Galatians II, 12/13, was, according to Weber, of epochal importance (RI: 37): Paul reproaches Peter for having eaten in Antioch with the gentiles and for having withdrawn and separated himself from them afterwards under the influence of the Jerusalemites. As this reproach of dissimulation was not effaced, it points to the shattering by Paul of the ritual barriers against commensalism which the Jews had imposed, the destruction of their voluntary ghetto; and it points to the universalism of Paul's mission which cut across nations, ethnic and status groups so that Christians of Jewish and gentile origins could participate together in the Eucharist. This event of Antioch was also, Weber believed, the hour of conception of the Occidental city even though it only began to flourish more than a thousand years later.

Already the Judaism of the Pharisees was a congregational religion, centered around the synagogues and based on legal and ritualistic principles, but the new Christian congregations since Paul can rather be understood as pneumatic and charismatic congregations. They were tied together, as Weber stated, by the overwhelming importance of the charismatic gifts of the «spirit» and by the expectation of the Second Coming (ES:

---

77 The idea that Athanasius tried to open a chasm between Greek philosophy and Christian belief (by proposing the doctrine of homousia) in order to avoid the complete Hellenization and secularization of religion and to limit rational thought had already been proposed by A. Harnack in 1889 (*Dogmengeschichte*, Tübingen 1991, p.178/9).

78 Weber could also have quoted Celsus, an educated Roman, who criticized the Christians for believing without reason (*ἀλόγως πιστεύουσιν*) and for inventing dogmas without being able to justify them. *Vide* Wilhelm Nestle «Die Haupteinwände des antiken Denkens gegen das Christentum» in *Archiv für Religionswissenschaften* 37 (1941) p. 72

634). The character of their life was otherworldly and there appeared to exist a total indifference among early Christians to social, political and economic problems, combined, however, with an attitude of *caritas* towards all and sometimes even with an objectless «acosmism of benevolence and love» (FMW: 330). Weber even talks of the radical rejection of the world in ancient Christianity as opposed to ancient Judaism which he describes as world-adjusted (ES: 633).

But these charismatic-pneumatic congregations which had overcome ethnic and national boundaries and in which the Jewish ritualism and legalism had become sublimated into an ethic of conviction, were not a church, yet.

Four features characterize the emergence of a church, according to Weber (ES: 1164): 1. The rise of a professional priesthood; 2. claims of universal (not just ethnic or national) domination; 3. dogma and rites must have been rationalized and recorded in holy scriptures; and, most importantly, 4. all these features must be realized in such a way that the charisma is separated from person or persons and becomes linked to the institution and particularly to the office. The last feature does not just describe routinization which is the fate of all charismatic domination everywhere, but depersonalization of charisma, i.e. the transfer of charismatic qualities of the original person or persons to social institutions. Office charisma, the belief in the specific state of grace of a social institution, was Weber's example of this phenomenon (ES: 1139), and this is what was developed after the period of the Jesus movement and Pauline Christianity in ancient Christianity.

At its final point of development in the Middle Ages the Christian Church was the first rational bureaucracy in world history, based on rational Roman law and the practical rationalism of the Roman aristocracy which rejected all forms of ecstasy. In order to arrive there, the Church not only followed the path of routinization, but it also received its inner stability from the depersonalization of the original Christian charisma: the ordination combined with the office and its *character indelibilis* and not any more the personal charismatic qualifications and life style of the priest determined the effectiveness of his distribution of divine grace and of the sacraments; the office was separated from the personal worthiness of the office holder although some, e.g. the Donatists, the first specific sect, strongly objected to this development (ES: 560).

The power of miracles that had emanated from Jesus had become institutionalized. It was realized every time a lay person was dispensed a sacra-

ment by a priest: Weber saw the Church as a kind of trust fund of eternal goods of salvation (ES: 1164).

Weber judged, as he had mentioned in his essay on China, the level of rationalization of religions by two yardsticks: 1. The degree to which religion has discarded magic and 2. the degree to which it systematizes man's relationship to the world. While there may have been in ancient Christianity an increase of rationalization in regard to the interpretation of God's commandments, compared to the legal casuistry of ancient Judaism, there was a setback with regard to the disenchantment of the world. Ancient Christianity did not maintain the anti-magical stance of Judaism, for Weber saw in the Christian sacraments an at least partially magical quality. Only Protestantism much later revoked this magical power of the sacraments.

## b. Eastern Orthodox Christianity

### *Basic Literature:*

Max Weber, *Economy and Society* University of California Press 1978

Andreas Buss, «The Economic Ethics of Russian-Orthodox Christianity», Part 1 & 2 in: *International Sociology* vol. 4 (no. 3 & 4) 1989

Andreas Buss, *Max Weber and Asia* München: Weltforum 1985 (Chapter 5: The Petrification of Western Science and Culture and Max Weber's Interest in Russia)

Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* New York: Scribner's 1974

Weber's essays about the other world religions were written for the purpose of understanding aspects of Western civilization. His interest in Eastern Orthodox Christianity and particularly in its Russian expression, however, was also guided by his desire to find solutions and alternatives to the historical and political situation of his day. He studied the Russian language, wrote articles about the Russian revolution of 1905, and planned to write a book about Leo Tolstoy. He believed that in the characters of Russian fiction, e.g. Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* or Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, one finds represented antique Christian ideas which seem to have been lost in the Occident. Weber even started to look at Western civilization through the eyes of the Russian Slavophiles (Khomyakov, Kireevsky) who had pointed to and criticized the West's lonely individuals in an atomized society, its Roman heritage, the rationalism of its jurisprudence, and its social contract theories. According to the Slavophiles, the creation

of the Western state as well as of the Occidental Church was the work of jurists, - a view, which Weber accepted.<sup>79</sup> His views of Russian-Orthodox Christianity will be summarized here.

### The Patrimonial State

Russia has been an inland area of strongly agricultural character where the yield was comparatively poor, but it also had a network of navigable waterways which facilitated trade. Since the Normans invaded Russia and made Kiev their headquarters in their trade with Constantinople around the tenth century, traders have sailed on the Russian rivers, and the city of Novgorod in the North-West was in close contact with the Hanseatic league.

But the rulers of Moscow who slowly expanded their power considered their country with the eyes of landlords as their property (*votchina*). The administration of the developing state evolved out of the patriarchal administration of the rulers' private domain into a patrimonial administration (ES: 1013). After the collapse of the Byzantine empire in 1453, the Muscovite princes increasingly thought of themselves as the defenders of Orthodox Christianity and began to adopt the title of tsar (Caesar); at the same time, though, they continued to consider themselves as the owners of the state and all the land, and the political administration as their private affair. The slowly growing patrimonial bureaucracy operated in purely personal submission to the ruler so that it served only him and not impersonal purposes. Russian feudalism did not develop a tradition of contractual agreement between the boyars (nobles) and the patrimonial ruler, and therefore had no vassals in the Occidental sense.

The population was easily divided into four groups: the nobility, the monastic and clerical estate, the peasantry and the urban population. They all were treated differently in regard to taxes, legal matters and military service. The old nobility, the boyars, slowly saw their freedoms reduced by the princes of Moscow so that their properties became tied to services to the ruler. Moreover, a service nobility (*dворянство*) was created and received service fiefs (*помест'е*) which could not be sold or bequeathed. In

---

79 Andreas Buss *The Russian-Orthodox Tradition and Modernity* Leiden: Brill 2003 p. 122

fact, the concept of the sacredness of private property (allodial property) did hardly exist; property was generally tied to services, at least until 1785 (Catherine II). The system of *mestnichestvo* which determined social ranking forced the nobility to enter the patrimonial bureaucracy for the sake of preserving social status and career chances. The *chin* (rank) within the patrimonial bureaucracy later became the official basis of social prestige, and all opportunities for economic advancement depended upon office holding. Because the officials were often moved between the various branches of the administration (military, judiciary, diplomacy), modern specialized knowledge was generally lacking. Weber underlined (ES: 1068) that one fundamental feature of medieval Western nobility could not develop in Russia: an internalised conduct of life and a common social honour as it was created by the occidental knighthood. Economic interests and the desire of advancement propelled the nobles in Russia, not an inner standard of self-assertion based on fealty and a contractual relationship between a vassal and his king. This was a prebendal feudalism as it tends to develop under patrimonial domination.

Cities in the occidental sense with liberties and autonomous status have not existed in Russia or, as in the case of Novgorod, were soon subjected to the tsar. There were no guilds in Russia before they were created by the government in the eighteenth century according to the level of income of merchants and traders. But even the richest merchants made every effort to be raised into the nobility and into the public service rather than to invest and to expand their business, for every financial loss could result in the descent into a lower guild. Thus, there was no status solidarity among the citizens. Well into the middle of the nineteenth century there was virtually no commercial credit or banking nor a rational concept of corporation as it was produced in Western commercial law. The situation of the merchants was often precarious and they had to fear the nobles and even the Tsar who sometimes seized hold of their commodities.

During the Middle Ages the Russian peasants were free, but since the sixteenth century the bonds of serfdom gradually deprived them of their freedom of movement and tied them to the land, to the jurisdiction of the *dvorianstvo* (office nobility), and to their *mir* (village community). Russian law, as Max Weber has noted (ES: 725), recognized liturgical collective liability and the corresponding collective rights of the compulsory organizations, e.g. the village communities. Peasants as well as the merchant guilds owed the state a variety of obligations in money or labour, and they were jointly (as village community or as a guild) accountable for the ser-

vices imposed on their group. The system of liturgies, as Weber called this system of the satisfaction of state needs (ES: 1097), was applied comprehensively by many patrimonial-bureaucratic empires of Antiquity, and everywhere it reduced private capital formation<sup>80</sup> as it discouraged the most successful and entrepreneurial of the respective group who were expected to contribute more. The retention of the *mir* after the emancipation of the serfs inhibited the emergence of a vigorous farming class, because the enterprising members of the *mir* had to share the financial burdens with the incapable and unwilling ones.

On the whole, it may be said that the patrimonial state blocked the development of commercial capitalism (but not of political capitalism) because of the lack of a rationally calculable functioning of administration and jurisdiction, and because of the lack of a clear separation between them.

### The Orthodox Church

When in 988 Prince Vladimir of Kiev was converted to the Christian faith of Byzantium, the classical conception of the emperor as *rex-sacerdos* (king and priest), a caesaro-papistic ruler, continued to survive. In Constantinople a strong state and an old civilization englobed the Church. Russian rulers since the beginning, and later the tsars, adopted the caesaro-papistic conception of the ruler, totally different from what was to develop in the Western Christian tradition since the *dictatus papae* of Pope Gregory VII who claimed that the state was simply the political branch of the Church.

Moreover, a deadly conflict had developed between two kinds of monasticism in Russia: on the one hand the so-called hermitage monasticism which turned away from politics and church hierarchy and pursued missionary activities in northern Russia and Siberia, and, on the other hand, the cenobitic monasticism which was friendly towards the state and upheld the principle of monastic land-holding. The cenobitic Josephite monks prevailed with the help of the Moscovite princes (ES: 513) and this led to the petrification of religious life and to the idea that the Russian tsars

---

80 The notion of liturgy is derived from a Greek verb (*leiturgeo*) which means that someone administers a public office and defrays the costs connected to it out of his own pocket.

(after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 to the Turks) should rule all Orthodox people as well as the Orthodox Church which became totally dependent on the state. The resulting caesaro-papism eliminated all possibility that Eastern canon law would develop further by means of conciliar legislation and would influence economic and political life. Later, under Peter the Great, even the patriarchate of the Church was abolished and became a branch of the patrimonial bureaucracy (ES: 830/1). Weber wrote that «magic- ritual forces were controlled most thoroughly in the ancient polis, rather well by the feudal powers in Japan and the patrimonial ones in China, and reasonably well by the bureaucratic state in Byzantium and Russia» (ES: 1161).

While in the West the dualism of emperorship and papacy during the Middle Ages developed as a form of status plurality and also strengthened other status positions (nobility, cities), any tension between state and church was lacking in Russia and no autonomous nobility or independent bourgeoisie could develop either.

Monasticism in the Eastern-Orthodox tradition was connected with the official church in a particular way. While in the West monasticism was subdivided into functionally different monastic orders which were active as the «auxiliary troops» of the Church in missionary work, hospital work, education, or even as orders of knights, and while in this way, as Weber said (ES: 1167), the monks left the monastic cell and tried to dominate the world, the Eastern Church in principle facilitated the complete separation of the monk from the «world» and his complete abandonment to prayer and contemplation. But a compromise was achieved already by a decision of the Trullan Council in 691 that only monks can become bishops (while the ordinary priests of the Orthodox Church had to be married). This relationship between Church and monasticism was, according to Weber, inconsistent (because of the mechanical combination of personal charisma and office charisma) and could be explained only because the development of an independent hierocracy had been deflected by caesaro-papism.

### The «Spirit» of the Orthodox Church

The «spirit» which lived within this patrimonially governed church was composed of magical, ritual and mystical aspects. In reference to magical ideas, Weber mentioned the veneration of icons and that the fear of giving serious affront to two dozen saints by omitting in one year the days sacred



to them has hindered the reception of the Gregorian calendar until the beginning of the twentieth century (ES: 405). In general, Weber believed, peasants much more than urban artisans try to coerce their gods by magical means. But there also existed, among the religious elites, a kind of antique mysticism which considered the rites of the Church as guides and direction to mystical experience and which revealed itself in the fact that the highest authority which decides who belongs to the Church and which religious teachings are dogmatically correct is the church as a communal group united in love, the *consensus ecclesiae* (ASS: 466), – and not the Pope as in the Catholic Church, nor the Scriptures, as in the Lutheran Church.<sup>81</sup> The mystical vision of God, moreover, was not a heterodox movement, but it was central.

Mysticism, in Weber's terminology, is set in opposition to asceticism. He connected asceticism with activity proving one's religious merit in the world; in mysticism he saw passive contemplation and quiet repose in God.<sup>82</sup> The ascetic affirms rational activity within the world as God's instrument, the mystic regards action within the world as a temptation against which he must maintain his state of grace as God's vessel. Activities of the mystic within the world are minimized and are characterized by a distinctive «brokenness», because success in the world has no significance with respect to salvation (ES: 549) and because of an inner conviction of the senselessness of this politically, socially and artistically formed life. The consequence is a relative indifference towards the world.

Eastern Christianity did not adopt the Western idea of a legal relationship between God and the human being (which was developed since Anselm of Canterbury and also appears in the doctrine of justification by

---

81 According to A. Khomyakov's epistemology, the possession of truth is not a function of individual consciousness ; truth is inaccessible to individual thinkers who have only partial knowledge or rationality. Only *sobornost'* (togetherness of people united in faith) makes true understanding possible (*vide*: Buss 2003: 122). Khomyakov was a leading figure among the Slavophiles.

82 Mysticism and asceticism have also been linked by Weber to the concept of the divine – be it the concept of a transcendent and omnipotent god in Western religious traditions, be it that of an impersonal immanent order as in the great religions of Asia. The concept of a transcendent god leads to asceticism and to seeing oneself as an instrument of God while mystics see themselves as passive vessels of immanent divinity. But there is no necessary correlation as can be seen in the Russian-Orthodox tradition which, in spite of its mystical tendencies conceived God as transcendent and is in this respect internally «broken» (ES: 551).

faith in parts of Protestant theology). Orthodox Christians are convinced that sinful actions imply only a diminution of their goodness and not a violation of their legal relationship with God; they are convinced that they themselves can become similar to God and attain *theosis*.

An economic ethic in the narrow sense of the term which might have settled the question of the «just price» and of the justification of interest taking was not developed because of the Orthodox indifference towards the world. The highest psychological premia were not placed on vocational activity within the world but on contemplation and on the ascetic life style of monasticism which was considered to be the perfection of human life. There was no religious motivation for a rational and methodical reorganization of the world or for capitalistic gain in the pursuit of a vocation. No inner motivation led out of the spiritual conditions of the Orthodox Church to a reorganization of political and economic life. The proof of one's own value was produced against the «world» and worldly activities, not in and by them.

No Renaissance, no Humanism, no Protestantism have opposed the «spirit» of Orthodoxy. Even a development of science out of its own roots did not take place, partially because the rational form of a systematic theology (the *Summae* of Thomas Aquinas) was not developed; and a formally rational law did not appear because Orthodox canon law remained stifled under the caesaro-papistic government. There were no strong and independent institutional or spiritual powers, no city bourgeoisie, no independent nobility or hierarchy and no ethical prophecy which could brake open the strong cage of the patrimonial state.

## Russian Old Believers

In the seventeenth century, when the Patriarch Nikon, supported by Tsar Alexis, had introduced several liturgical reforms, a schism (*raskol*) split the Russian Church in two. It appeared about seemingly trivial questions, but, in the opinion of the Old Believers, as they were called, a religious ceremony, incorrectly performed, has no effect and no value before God. This insistence on correct ritual implied a fundamental difference from Western Protestantism which had little interest in what it considered to be mere exterior forms.

About the same time there was in Russia an eschatological mood, the expectation of the arrival of the Antichrist whose significance for the

*raskol* should not be underestimated. The Old Believers who broke with the official Church and with the state – for the official Church was closely tied to the state and to the ruler, the tsar, considered by them as the Antichrist – now faced many further decisions concerning not only the ritual but also their conduct of life. A Church Council excommunicated them, their leader Avvakum was burned at the stake, many of them fled into the uninhabited woods, they were excluded from elective offices and there were waves of mass suicide. Nevertheless, the number of Old Believers increased in the subsequent centuries and in general they became also more prosperous than the members of the official church. There was a preference for hiring Old Believers as industrial labourers because of their honesty and their temperance, and they also enjoyed the reputation of being the most honest businessmen. But, although they were considered to be honest, frugal, industrious and thrifty, it can in no way be said that the connection which Max Weber saw between ascetic Calvinism and the development of modern capitalism can also be observed in the case of the Old Believers.

A practical problem of the Old Believers resulted from the fact that no bishop had joined the schism and that therefore no new priests could be ordained. One part of the Old Believers, the priestists (*popovtsy*), decided to accept priests ordained by the official church, the others, the so-called priestless (*bezpopovtsy*), arrived at the view that some sacraments (the sacrament of marriage in particular) were not accessible any more and that they had to remain unmarried. Here is an example of the fact that religious positions can have other sources than the social conditions of the strata which support them, namely the inner consistency of logic which, against the requirements of interests and tradition, leads to certain consequences.

To the extent that the influence of the priests diminished, the Old Believers developed the character of a congregational religion, i.e. a religion which was influenced to a large extent by the laity. Weber talks of congregational religion when the laity has been organized permanently in such a manner that they can actively participate and make their influence felt – as opposed to a parish which is a mere administrative unit and delimits the jurisdiction of priests (ES: 455).<sup>83</sup> This refers not only to the *bezpopovtsy* but also to the *popovtsy*, for they subjected the priests who deserted from

---

83 Rational ethical congregational religions have combined frequently in the past and in a striking manner, according to Weber, with capital rationally employed in a productive enterprise for the acquisition of profit (ES: 479).

the official church and came to them to a humiliating procedure and treated them more as employees than as religious shepherds. Therefore, there was more self-responsibility and their conduct of life became more methodical and systematic. Nevertheless, the Old Believers, in contrast to ascetic Protestantism, kept the magical and ritualistic aspects of Orthodox Christianity and the world remained for them a magic garden.

The Vyg monastery near the White Sea, founded by a group of priestless Old Believers, where the severe northern climate often destroyed entire crops of grain, became a religious and cultural center. It followed strict norms of congregational discipline, the general assembly decided on questions of dogma and of ritual and about political questions. They put an emphasis on the benefits of hard work and on basic education, indispensable to read the Scriptures. The more or less passive resistance of the Vyg inhabitants towards the tsarist government can be characterized as pariah-ethical. Their attitude towards the world was not world-domination, nor world-indifference, but rather an attitude of world-endurance, combined with passive resistance.

The situation of the Old Believers was relieved under Catherine II who repealed many discriminating laws. Now, Old Believers took charge of most of the economic activities in the areas of the middle and lower Volga and of the state-owned iron foundries in the Urals. The Theodosians, an ascetic branch of the priestless Old Believers, founded during a plague epidemic in Moscow a cemetery combined with a home for the aged and a hospital; soon, some chapels and shops were added and the activities extended into the commercial field. But the Theodosians remained hostile to private property, sex and marriage and kept away from everything connected with the state as belonging to the Antichrist. While according to Weber the Puritans had a world-dominating attitude, it was the tendency of the Theodosians to strengthen the personality ideal of the world-renouncing monk.

In the nineteenth century, there were Old Believers among the richest merchants in Moscow, but Weber's opinion about them was full of nuances. The inner-worldly asceticism which can be noticed in the life-style of most Old Believers, was broken by traditionalism, ritualism and magical influences in the search for salvation. Thriftiness in the patriarchal household and insistence on hard work amounts to worldly wisdom and to literary theory (as for instance in the old *Domostroï*), in any case not to be compared with the religious motives of the ascetic Protestants who sought the proof of their own value in their inner-worldly calling. Nevertheless,

the increase of personal responsibility, produced by the development of congregational religion, moreover their solidary mutual help contributed to the economic success of the Old Believers. It goes without saying, that the persecutions by the government and the official Church as well as the exclusion from public life furthered individualism and commercial abilities as in the case of many other minorities (Jews, Parsis, Copts).

### The Russian Sects

Russian sects, in contrast to the Orthodox Church and the Old Believers, had little interest in ritual and magical means of salvation.

The Khlysty, who are usually considered to be the root of Russian sectarianism, believed in the repeated reincarnation of Christ in living human beings. Salvation for them consisted in the liberation of the soul from the body, and this was possible, according to them, at least temporarily, by ecstatic contemplation of the Spirit of God, the so-called *radenie*, during a religious-ecstatic dance. In order to prepare for the *radenie* the ascetic suppression of all physical urges and desires was required, including fasting and the avoidance of sexual relations even with one's own wife.

This was perhaps an attempt to turn monastic asceticism into the required life-style of everyone and thus a parallel to Western Protestantism, but Western Protestantism was inner-wordly and resulted in the attitude of world domination while the attitude of the Khlysty was world-fleeing, or at least world indifferent. For religious reasons, but also because of the persecutions by the tsarist government they upheld a strict *disciplina arcani* (they kept their beliefs and practices secret; officially they continued to belong to the Orthodox Church, but they disdained its practices and met in private locations). Their congregational discipline may help to explain their honesty and industriousness, but their world-fleeing asceticism and their ecstatic dances as means of salvation could not produce a rational conduct of life in the world, although their thrifty life-style produced relatively well-ordered economic conditions.

Occasionally, some Khlysty may have had sexual relations after their ecstatic dances. The foundation of the Skoptsy sect by K. Selivanov reflected the desire to eliminate such possibilities (ES: 602). Selivanov castrated himself and considered castration as the only means of salvation. His followers, the Skoptsy (castrated), were an essentially ascetic sect in which castration was the highest means of salvation (ES: 540) and which

in any case did not allow sexual relations, the consumption of meat, alcohol, gaiety and aimless strolls. Like the Khlysty, they followed the *disciplina arcana* in the belief that religious achievements lose their value if they are made known to other people. At the same time, their secrecy protected them from prosecutions. There was an icy individualism which followed from the separation of the castrated from all societal life and produced an impersonal conduct of life similar to ascetic Protestantism, even in the political and economic field. They did not worship icons and they had only contempt for the sacraments of the Orthodox Church.

In their emphasis on asceticism, in contrast to the mysticism of the Orthodox Church, the Skoptsy were less inclined to consider themselves as vessels of the divine Spirit, but rather as tools in the plan of the world in which Christ and Selivanov had a central position: they considered it to be their task to increase and complete the number of Skoptsy so that the Millennium of the Skoptsy may be created.

They lived mainly in urban centers and were active in commerce, industry and banking. Their striving for wealth was motivated in part by the financial possibility to bribe the officials in order to deflect the sometimes intense persecutions. But there were also inner motives: a cold individualism and an unbrotherly calculating attitude in human relations; further the rejection of all sacramental means of salvation and the ascetic life-style connected with it – and all this reinforced by their strict congregational discipline. Max Weber writes that the rational-ascetic Russian sects (not all sects) had economic features similar to those of ascetic Protestantism and that the Skoptsy produced the most extreme combination of business qualification with ethical world rejection (PE: 2: 154 & 321).

In the Ukraine there appeared in the eighteenth century the so-called «Spiritual Christianity», mainly composed of the sects of the Dukhobors and the Molokans. They rejected the traditional forms of the Orthodox ritual as well as fasting, icons and priesthood. Decisive for them was the gnostic opposition between spirit and matter. Only the inner spirit really exists, they said, and the body is but a temporary prison. The goal of salvation is to restore God's image in man and to break the material bonds. They rejected all government authority, refused military service and lived on the basis of common property.

The communities of the Dukhobors achieved considerable economic prosperity, and their religion must be mentioned among the reasons for this: the rejection of icons and of ritual as magical means of salvation as

well as the control of their life produced by their congregational discipline.

The Molokans who split off from the Dukhobors were the most numerous sect in the nineteenth century and were considered by the government as particularly harmful. They taught that the sacrament of baptism is performed whenever someone leads a Christian life without sins. Thus baptism, instead of being a single ritual act, was for them a continuous conduct of life, expressed in sobriety, honesty and industriousness. They also taught that worldly authority and human laws are only meant for the «children of the world», but not for «Spiritual Christians»; they therefore rejected serfdom, military service and the taking of oaths. Russian authorities have written that they were richer, in spite of the persecutions, than the Orthodox population and even the Dukhobors.

The Stundists, also mentioned by Weber, - the movement seems to have originated among German colonists - had particularly strong anti-ritualistic tendencies, rejected fasting, icons and priesthood, and were industrious and thrifty. They upheld private property but often opposed commerce and the use of money.

## Result

The Orthodox religion offered several different forms of salvation according to the different social strata. The peasant masses with their magical world-views contrasted with the personality ideal of the monk with his mystical world view. The Old Believers and sects were unable to free themselves from the caesaro-papistic patrimonial state and this led to passive apolitism and sometimes to pariah-ethics. Weber also mentioned the specific character of the Russian natural law which is based on the concept of community and not of society (ASS: 467). The religion of both Old Believers and sectarians was generally congregational and lay people played an important rôle as intellectuals and administrators. The ecclesiastical discipline was, however, hampered, in the case of the Old Believers, by traditionalism and ritualism. The rejection of religious rites, icons and sacraments by many sects, i.e. the rejection of magical positions, led to the necessity for the sect members to attain the *certitudo salutis* by their own efforts without a mediator, it led to a more rational conduct of life, possible also in the economic sphere. This was the case particularly among the Skoptsy and among the Molokans. Russian sectarians also abolished the

distinction between monastic ethics and lay ethics, but without the consequence of the Protestant Ethic in the Western sense.

### c. Occidental Christianity

#### *Basic Literature:*

Max Weber, *Economy and Society* University of California Press 1978

Wolfgang Schluchter, *Paradoxes of Modernity* Stanford University Press 1996 Chapter 4: The Emergence of Modernity: Max Weber on Western Christianity pp. 179-243

Wolfgang Schluchter (Hg.), *Max Webers Sicht des okzidentalen Christentums* Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1988

Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution* Harvard University Press 1983

Finally, Weber had the intention to set his Protestant ethic studies in the general framework of Occidental Christianity as a whole and to answer the question as to what constitutes the distinctive economic, social, and legal characteristics of the singularity of the development of the Occident. Of course, as he had done in his essays on India and China, he would have considered the institutional and legal characteristics and transformations as well as the motivational characteristics and finally their interconnections (the degree of affinity between the institutions and the inner motivational forces).

### The Institutional and Legal Transformations

The institutional and legal transformations which interested Weber, as they produced the external historical preconditions of modern capitalism, took place from the eleventh to the thirteenth century: the so-called Papal Revolution (Weber did not use this more recent term) with the Investiture Struggle and the development of canon law, Western feudalism, and the rise of the Occidental city.

The reasons for the transformation of the outworldly situation of ancient Christianity to a more inwardly situation of later occidental Christianity have not been described by Weber in any detail, but a study by



Louis Dumont will complete the view.<sup>84</sup> While in early Christianity the individual as a value was conceived as outworldly, as apart from the given social and political organization (and similar to the religious renouncers or *sannyasins* in India), the conversion of Constantine and then of the Roman Empire to Christianity forced upon the Church a closer relation to the State. The first clear but still traditional result was Pope Gelasius' formula (around the year 500) about the relationship between the pope's *auctoritas* (authority) and the king's or emperor's *potestas* (power). But a dramatic change occurred in the eighth century when a Frankish king was given the rôle of protector of the Roman Church by a pope and when Charlemagne was crowned as emperor in Rome by another pope in the year 800. The popes thus broke their ties with Constantinople and claimed superior political power in the western part of the Roman Empire, not only *auctoritas* but also *potestas*.

This claim was then based on the forged so-called Donation of Constantine (the *Donatio Constantini*, on the basis of which the popes also claimed sovereign political authority in a part of Italy), and later justified in the theory of the two swords. A significant ideological change occurred here, for the *sacerdotium* (the spiritual function) claimed to rule in worldly matters. The Church now became «inworldly», according to Dumont, and the difference between spiritual and temporal power became one of degree and not of kind. Conversely, the previously outworldly individual became more inworldly, for since the Church pretended to rule the world this meant that the Christian individual was now committed to the world and this was going to lead to the the formation of the modern individualist ideology (the ideology which makes us believe that we are autonomous individuals). The unified culture (*Einheitskultur*) of the Middle Age, as Troeltsch has characterized it, started to break up. Weber did not deny the existence of a unified culture based on the teachings of the Church, but he was more interested in the organizational diversity which was developing under the unifying canopy. The final stage will later be found in Calvin who suggested that the task of the individual is to work for God's glory in the world rather than taking refuge from it, and with whom the Church becomes a society of inworldly individuals and a mere instrument of discipline.

---

84 Louis Dumont «A Modified View of Our Origins. The Christian Beginnings of Modern Individualism» in: *Religion* (1982) 12, pp. 1-27

While previously, just as in Eastern-Orthodox countries, there had been a tradition of caesaro-papistic domination, the Papal Revolution in the West – soon after the schism between Rome and Constantinople or between Eastern and Western Christianity – put an end to it and even attempted to impose a theocracy (Gregory VII in his *Dictatus Papae* of 1075, and then Innocent III), the pope claiming not only religious but also political superiority over the emperor in secular matters, including the authority to depose and to excommunicate emperor or king. Ultimately though, the Investiture Struggle resulted in a tension-filled dualism between the religious and the political domain in the Concordat of Worms of 1122, a pact with the force of international law between the ecclesiastical and the secular authority.

The result was a clear dualism of jurisdictions, a separation of ecclesiastical and secular authority, and the systematization of canon law which became the first modern Western legal system and also, as Weber mentioned, one of the guides of secular law on its road to rationality. The Occidental Christian Church created for itself organs of rational law-making in the Councils, in its bureaucracy, and in the papal powers of jurisdiction which no other of the great religions did ever possess (ES: 792). The term «corporation» may be used in this context: in Roman law, the state was considered to be a corporation, and so were municipalities, with the right to own property and to conclude contracts; guilds of craftsmen and traders, churches and monasteries were also corporations and could act as juristic persons to the extent that these privileges were granted by imperial authority. But the canon law added a completely new idea: the whole Church, the Church Universal, became a corporation, independent of emperors and kings and able to create new positive written law for its members by rational enactments of church councils and synods.

Weber considered the medieval Catholic Church as the first rational bureaucracy in world history and he added that it took the form of a compulsory institution <sup>85</sup>, an *Anstalt*. Its canon law was a coherent ecclesiastical

---

85 Weber distinguished between corporation and institution/compulsory organization (*Anstalt*). In both cases there is a legal distinction between the whole and its members, but while the corporation is simply a fixed group of persons who can be replaced in prescribed ways, an *Anstalt* imposes, within a specifiable sphere of operations, its order (with relative success) on all action conforming with certain criteria (ES: 52); it has mainly administrative organs, rationally established rules and generally obligatory membership, although the members have no influence on the

law which, although quite independent, markedly influenced the development of the secular corporation in the Middle Ages (ES: 714/5). Although the legal concept of the institution (*Anstalt*) was not fully developed before the modern period, as Weber admitted, he thought that it was bound to arise in some manner when the original charisma of the early Church leaders disappeared and the new official bureaucracy of the bishops needed technical legitimation for the exercise of ecclesiastical rights of property – for in Antiquity religious properties like temple assets or church buildings belonged to the *polis* (ES: 714).

Weber also considered the Gregorian reforms as a decisive step in the development of the Western Church as an institution of sacramental grace (ES: 560) in which the ultimate religious value is pure obedience to the Church which can provide absolution, and not the fulfillment of concrete ethical duties, not even the supererogatory duties of the monks. The Church was a hierocratic organization, an organization which claimed the monopoly of enforcing its order through psychic coercion by distributing or denying religious goods (ES: 54) – as opposed to the State which enforces its order by exercising the monopoly of physical coercion.

In fact, Gregory's reforms also addressed themselves to the monastic orders and introduced important reforms for them. Asceticism and monasticism no longer were ends in themselves, to be lived outside the «world», but they became means which served the general aims of the Church. Monks became the «auxiliary troops» of the Pope with well-defined roles; they were integrated into the bureaucratic ecclesiastical organization, subject to a specific discipline, living according to the *consilia evangelica* and removed from everyday life by the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience (ES: 1168). But even the mendicant monks, in contrast to Buddhist monks or even the monks of early Christianity, were forced into the service of the Church and compelled to serve rational purposes (preaching, systematic charity, education etc.). Anchorites were not even mentioned in the canon law of the Catholic Church. The principle was: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside of the Church there is no salvation).

Moreover, for Weber the monastic communities of the Occident were the first rationally administered manorial organizations and the occidental

---

administration (ES: 707). Weber considered the Church to be an *Anstalt*, although he admitted that the transition between corporation and *Anstalt* is gradual and fluid. It should be noted that in *Economy and Society* the term is variously translated as institution or as compulsory organization.

monk the first vocational man (ES: 1169). While in other religious traditions the monk is a mendicant or itinerant and represents the prototype of an anti-economic seeker of salvation, in Occidental monasticism labour as an ascetic means of salvation and as an economic instrument – the Benedictine formula *ora et labora* (pray and work) may serve as an example – was developed far more consistently (ES: 1170). The Cistercians with their rational organization of agriculture and their well-known achievements in colonization, can be said to have organized some of the first rational enterprises (ES: 1182). Only ascetic Protestantism made the additional step of transferring rational ascetism into the world. But while the monks were able to develop an ethically systematized method of life, according to Weber, they were still dependent on the institutional sacramental grace of the Church and thus somehow midway between Catholic laity and the future ascetic Protestants.

The state in the modern sense did not exist yet, but there were emerging secular legal systems in England under Henry II, and on the Continent Roman law started to take hold under the emperor Frederick Barbarossa. And there were secular legal subsystems. One aspect of the socio-political structure which Weber would certainly have considered was the rise of Occidental feudalism, based on fiefs and not, as for instance in the Islamic tradition, on prebends.<sup>86</sup> This feudalism was not only a marginal case of patrimonialism, it was at the same time a routinized charismatic relationship, related to its military origins and to an education which favoured the individual heroic battle between warriors and a mentality based on honour. Rather contradictory elements were merged: strictly personal fealty between lord and vassal, contractual stipulations of rights and duties and finally a depersonalization of the personal relationship by virtue of a rent-providing fief (ES 1074). This Occidental feudalism led, according to Weber, to a unified code of conduct, based on an ethic of honour, clearly different from a religious ethic based on salvation. This conduct of life implied the complete opposite of a rational economic mentality and was, ac-

---

86 The prebend (benefice) is a lifelong remuneration for services within a patrimonial regime, the prebend-holder a rentier or usufructuary with official duties. In contrast, the free vassal who has a fief stands outside any patrimonial subordination and is subject to a code of duties and of honour. As opposed to dignity which pertains to the individual regardless of his position in society, honour implies that identity is essentially linked to institutional roles and dishonour implies a loss of face in the community (*vide* also Peter Berger 1973).

According to Weber, the source of a certain «nonchalance» in business affairs, but it was an innerworldly conduct of life nevertheless.

Apart from this conduct of life based on honour, feudalism also produced, because of the fief-holder's position through a bilateral contract with his lord, the idea of the contractual character of political power which, in comparison to pure patrimonial domination, introduced an approximation of a state ruled by law (*Rechtsstaat*; ES: 1082), of property rights and individual rights. In England this led to the Magna Carta (1215). The idea of a social contract, an idea which led to modern constitutionalism, is here anticipated in a primitive fashion.

And finally, there was the rise of the Occidental city which, according to Weber, had, in universal-historical terms, a special position if compared to Asian cities or the cities of Antiquity. While the hereditary caste structure in India, with its ritual separation of the occupations, precluded the emergence of the confraternization of the burghers into a city corporation, and while in fact in all Asian cities the kin group associations ruled out the existence of a city «commune», the Occidental medieval city was not only a seat of trade and crafts and their respective guilds, but it was also a sworn confraternity with its own charter (ES: 1248). Its citizens were subject to a special autonomous law, and they could be considered as a distinct «estate» with its own privileges and with the legal status of citizenship. The city was an autonomous, autocephalous and anti-feudal corporation. It imposed its own statutes, levied taxes and launched economic policies of its own, but it did not apply ecclesiastical law or perform sacred rites; its task was to maintain peace and justice, for the bearers of private enterprise, the citizens, needed peace for their affairs, whereas the citizens of the antique polis needed wars for their political capitalism. The city was economically oriented, the citizen was a *homo economicus*, whereas in Antiquity the citizen of the *polis* (city) was a *homo politicus* (ES: 1354). Weber reminds his readers of the Christian preconditions of the fraternization of the city burghers: the events in Antioch and the elimination of all ritual and kinship barriers, as described in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.<sup>87</sup>

In the cities, particularly in Italy, there also developed new legal principles in mercantile law which allowed the legal separation and the separation for accounting purposes of private and business spheres, of the house-

---

87 Described in more detail in the section on ancient Christianity above.

hold and of the «firm», as Weber had noted <sup>88</sup>: the *commenda*, a kind of joint stock company for a single venture, and a variation of it, the *societas maris*. Unlimited partnerships and the domestic system (GEH: 153) developed early, but more and more, continuous capitalist acquisition was performed in a separate enterprise. The identity of household and office fell apart, business assets and private property were separated. The advantage of these arrangements was that the liability of the partners was limited to the amount of their initial investment and it implied limited joint liability. The partnerships were corporations and therefore juristic persons. Bonds, stock certificates, bills of exchange, and the beginnings of bankruptcy law followed. This fundamentally important development was a characteristic feature of the Occident; it characterizes the qualitative uniqueness of the development of modern capitalism (ES: 379). Certainly, the medieval city was a historical interlude, but, though not the only significant antecedent developmental stage, it can be linked as one of the crucial factors with the rise of modern capitalism and the modern state (ES: 1323).

### The «Spirit» of Traditionalism and the Puritan Sects

The economic ethics of the Middle Ages and even of the Renaissance were largely based on the «spirit» of traditionalism so that an inner affinity between commercial activity and the innermost core of the personality was lacking (AC: 117). The devout Catholic, as he went about his economic affairs, found himself continually behaving in a manner that transgressed papal injunctions. His economic behaviour could be permissible only on the basis of a lax probabilistic morality (ES: 615). *Homo mercator deo placere vix potest* (merchants can hardly please God) was a formula of the Corpus Iuris Canonici (canon law). Economic activity was not considered as immoral, but as morally neutral or indifferent. The Latin formula implied, in fact, a high degree of concession on the part of the Catholic doctrine to the financial powers in the Italian cities: they were allowed to make a profit, but this did not provide any hope of salvation.

---

88 In: *Geschichte der Handelsgesellschaften im Mittelalter* 1889, now translated as *The History of Commercial Partnerships in the Middle Ages* (2003). The theory of corporations which developed slowly distinguishes between the property, liabilities and assets of the corporation and those of individual members.

The history of the prohibition of interest taking is rather complicated. The Christian Church, including the popes, took interest without any scruples in the early Middle Ages, but as in all salvation religions, there was hostility towards the power of capital which is impersonal and not amenable to ethical control, as Weber explained. However, there was also accommodation to practical needs as can be seen in the canonical distinction between interest and usury (shameful profit). Persecution of usurious lending arose as a concomitant of the incipient development of actual capitalist instruments; it was the result of a struggle in principle of ethical rationalization and the rationalization in the domain of economics (ES: 584). In any case, officially the prohibition of interest was not abolished until the nineteenth century (PE: 151, n. 29). The accommodation was possible because the Catholic Church remained a sacramental institution of grace. «Quite realistically the Church recognized that man was not a clearly defined unity to be judged one way or the other, but that his moral life was normally subject to conflicting motives and his action contradictory. Of course it required as an ideal a fundamental change of life. But the Church weakened this requirement for the average person by one of its most important means of power and education, the sacrament of absolution, the function of which was connected with the deepest roots of Catholic religiosity» (PE: 70). Institutional grace was provided by purely magical sacraments because the institution was deemed to control the accumulation of grace producing supererogatory achievements of its officials or of monks (ES: 560).

In general, Catholic traditionalism implied a non-methodological sequence of single actions. The Catholic knew that he could obtain absolution from his sins in the confession, for the Church gave grace to the just and the unjust. The veneration of the saints, according to Weber, led practically to polytheism, and even the Holy Communion contained magical aspects. Only the monks surpassed the lay ethics with supererogatory works and achieved a methodical (though outworldly) way of life.

But if economic traditionalism was to be broken, the toleration of economic acquisition was not enough, nor was worldly or economic wisdom sufficient. Only Protestantism in the sixteenth century eliminated all sacramental and institutional grace and insisted on the proof of one's salvation by innerworldly asceticism which led to a deep moralization of life, or to a life-transforming power from within. The Protestants did not think that any priest or church could help them to acquire the *certitudo salutis* (the psychological certainty to be saved); not simple good works or institution-

al grace with regard to sins committed did suffice any more, but one was required to conduct one's whole life in a systematic and methodical way. A revolution in mentality took place, as the Protestants took a stance against the enjoyment of life. Not economic but religious premia (the prospect of salvation) were expected by an ascetic life style and the rational tempering of the greed for gain in one's profession. Moreover, the organizational structure of the sects which augmented social control and compelled the members to prove themselves among their peers added to the inner motivation a further pressure from the outside.

The systematization of canon law, the new ideas in mercantile law, the feudal contract and the rise of the ideal of the citizen all added to the legalization of life <sup>89</sup>, and Weber did indeed write that the rationalization of law and the increasing calculability of the functioning of the legal process constituted one of the most important conditions for the existence of the capitalistic enterprise (ES: 883) – but by no means the only one. Only when in the sixteenth century the social form of the sect became dominant in parts of Western Europe and North America<sup>90</sup> and when the Protestant ethic was added to the above-mentioned legal developments so that one can talk of a bourgeois conduct of life, different from the seignorial-feudal conduct of life or the modes of conduct of peasants or the Faustian life of full and beautiful humanity, only then a development of «unbroken consistency» could set in which could take advantage of the legal ideas and institutions discussed earlier and would lead to modern capitalism. Thus, Weber could say that «in the last resort the factors which produced (modern) capitalism were the rational permanent enterprise, rational ac-

---

89 Even the relationship of man to God became a sort of legally definable relationship so that salvation could be settled by a legal process – a theory later developed by Anselm of Canterbury (ES: 553).

90 According to Troeltsch (1911), Christianity has created three social forms: the church, an organization administering the means of salvation ; the voluntary sect of committed believers ; and mysticism which denies the validity of any social order or formation of the world. Weber accepted this classification of the three types of religious forms (ASS: 462 sqq). The existence of these three social forms was the consequence of the influence of Stoicism on early Christian thought, distinguishing the idea of a perfect natural law (the ideal of mankind ruled by reason, which led to the formation of sects) from relative natural law (which recognizes the diversity of status and the existence of irrational passion, as in the church), while mysticism denies any natural order on principle because of the meaninglessness of political and social life (predominant in Orthodox regions).



counting, rational technology and rational law, but again not these alone. Necessary complementary factors were the rational spirit, the rationalization of the conduct of life in general, and a rationalistic economic ethic» (GEH: 354).

Of course, when Weber wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century, he thought that the spirit of religious asceticism had escaped from the «iron cage», and he saw only mechanized petrification and the «last men» in a godless and prophetless age.

### The Characteristics of Modern Western Capitalism

The resulting modern Western capitalism can be characterized by three complexes of criteria:

1. The modern capitalist enterprise, based on
  - a) formally free and specialized labour, based on machine production
  - b) the legal separation from the household (including separate accounting procedures)
  - c) a disconnection of the capital of the enterprise from the wealth of the individual owners (possibility of joint stock companies)
  - d) freedom of contract
2. A capitalist economic order, including
  - a) the openness of the markets for labour, capital and land
  - b) a formally rational and predictable legal system and public administration
  - c) the modern state (*Anstaltsstaat*)
  - d) rational technology

Weber considered these two complexes of criteria as the conditions for obtaining a maximum of formal rationality of capital accounting (ES: 161/2). To this, however, must be added

3. The spirit of capitalism – a rationally moderated pursuit of profit for the purpose of proving oneself in one's vocation.

The causal connexion between religious ethics and capitalism will be further analysed in Chapter IV and the connexions between different kinds of legal systems and capitalism in Chapter V.