Hartmut Lehmann / Jean Martin Ouédraogo (Hg.)

Max Webers Religionssoziologie in interkultureller Perspektive

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Inhalt

Max Weber on Calvinism, Society, and the State

A Critical Appraisal in Light of Recent Historical Research

by

Philip Benedict

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism represents Weber's most extensive and most celebrated exploration of Calvinism's world historical significance. So well known, in fact, is its diagnosis of the faith's allegedly pivotal contribution to economic rationalization and the rise of modern capitalism, and so vast is the literature explaining, attacking, and defending its controversial theses, that it has entirely overshadowed the brief, scattered comments about Calvinism's relationship to political and social developments in *Economy and Society*.

Weber never abandoned the central arguments first set out in *The Protestant Ethic* in 1904, preparing a new edition of the work shortly before his death and incorporating its essence into his discussion of the economic ethics of world religions in *Economy and Society*. But the vast scope of *Economy and Society* compelled him to revisit Calvinism in several additional contexts as he worked intermittently on this opus over the last decade of his life. Ironically, its brief remarks about Calvinism, society, and the state today not only appear far fresher and more suggestive than *The Protestant Ethic*, whose novelty has been worn away by a century's worth of repetition and debate. They also seem to hold up better in the light of current historical knowledge, if only because they have not been subjected to such intense and continuing scrutiny.

Few economic historians now accord religion significant importance in their accounts of the growth of the modern economy, and few historians of the continental Reformation assert that Calvinism possessed uniquely rationalizing features with significant economic consequences; the massive scholarship since Weber's death on both economic and religious history has too powerfully challenged the central theses of *The Protestant Ethic* to allow them to do so.[1] By contrast, Weber's brief remarks on Calvinism, society,

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[1] One prominent economic historian who continues to advocate a Weberian view of Protes-

and the state in *Economy and Society* cast useful light on the often conflict-ridden re-negotiation of the respective authority of magistrates and ministers that accompanied the Reformation in every country where a Reformed church came to be established. While undoubtedly requiring modification in certain details, they offer some bold theses about the relationship between Calvinism and the bourgeoisie and between sects and political democracy. Finally, they remind us how much richer and more stimulating Weber's actual writings are than the watered-down commonplaces that tend to be linked with his name, such as the old Whig thesis that Calvinism promoted democracy by justifying resistance to absolutist governments and providing lay church-members an apprenticeship in successful self-government – a view that one prominent historical sociologist identifies as the "standard sociological account" of the origins of liberal democracy "derived from Weber and Durkheim".[2]

Weber's remarks on Calvinism, society and the state in *Economy and Society* cluster around three themes. The first concerns relations between church and state, or, in Weber's language, between "political and hierocratic domination". If this problem was at least partly suggested to Weber by the debates in his lifetime about the proper relationship between throne and altar in his *Kaiserreich*, his treatment of it displayed his remarkable capacity to view matters at an extraordinarily high level of abstraction and to forge a new conceptual vocabulary adequate to the task of writing comparative historical sociology on a global scale. "The antagonism of political and magic charisma is primeval," he argued[3], for it derives ultimately from two different sources of social authority and power found in virtually every society.

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tantism's contribution to economic growth is David Landes. See David Landes, The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor. New York 1998. Far more typical are the assessments of C. H. Wilson, The Historical Study of Economic Growth and Decline in Early Modern History, in: The Cambridge Economic History vol. 5 The Economic Organization of Early Modern Europe. Cambridge 1977 pp. 14–15; and Jan de Vries/ Ad van de Woude, The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Ducth Economy 1500–1815. Cambridge 1997 pp. 165–172. There is no full account of the recent scholarly fortunes of the "Weber thesis" in the fields of economic history and Reformation studies, but see Philip Benedict, The Historiography of Continental Calvinism, in: Weber's Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts. Ed. Hartmut Lehmann/ Guenther Roth. Cambridge 1993 pp. 305–325 and Benedict, Faith, Fortune and Social Structure in Seventeenth-Century Montpellier, in: Past & Present 152. 1996 pp. 46-78, reprinted in: The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots, 1600-1685. Ed. Id. Aldershot, 2001 pp. 121-149.

[2] David Zaret, Religion and the Rise of Liberal-Democratic Ideology in 17th-Century England, in: American Sociological Review 54. 1989 pp. 163–167.

[3] This and all subsequent quotations from Weber come from Economy and Society. 2 volumes. Ed. Guenther Roth/ Claus Wittich. Berkeley 1978 [henceforth E&S] here p. 1173.

Just how the tension between these two forms of domination played themselves out in any given historical situation depended upon the power constellation of the groups involved and upon historical accidents. Two conditions or reigning principles promoted priestly power: (1.) systems of clerical education that made the priesthood possessors of specialized skills that gave them restricted access to the sacred or control over the proclamation of the religious message; and (2.) the principle that God must be obeyed rather than man, "the most ancient check on all political power, the most effective one up to the great Puritan Revolution and the declarations of the Rights of Man".[4] Both of these were found in Calvinism, which, like Catholicism but unlike Lutheranism, believed that church government rested on divine ordinance. The Reformation nonetheless emerged in a world with secular rulers who exercised a measure of *cura religionis* and of secular courts that had long been wary of their ecclesiastical counterparts and rivals. This created rivalry and mistrust between magistrates and ministers. At the same time, powerful mutual interests promoted compromise between them; ministers found magistrates useful for repressing heretical challenges to their power, while magistrates found that "hierocracy is the incomparable means of domesticating the subject".[5] The interplay of these various forces created different outcomes according to the circumstances governing the emergence of each national Reformed church.

"For Calvinism the Biblical theocracy, in the presbyterian form, was divinely ordained. However, it could establish a theocracy only for a limited time and only in limited areas: in Geneva and New England, and increasingly among the Huguenots, and in the Netherlands."[6]

The same section of *Economy and Society* that explores relations between political and religious authorities also offers some broad generalizations about the social location of Calvinism and the social preconditions of hierocratic domination. While maintaining that "religious rationalization has its own dynamics, which economic conditions merely channel; above all it is linked to the emergence of priestly education, Weber also argued for a consistent elective affinity between priesthood and petty-bourgeois strata".

"In the long run, ascetic Protestantism in the broadest sense of the term (Calvinist and Baptist Puritans, Mennonites, Methodists and Pietists) drew the core of its following from the middling and lower ranks of the bourgeoisie, just as the unshakable re-

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[4] E&S p. 1175.
[5] Ibid. p. 1176.
[6] Ibid. p. 1175.

ligious law-consciousness of Judaism began only with its urban entrenchment and depended on it."[7]

This did not mean that religious movements have typically been class movements throughout their life course. The Huguenot cause in France and Calvinism in Scotland were initially led by nobles, and the rural gentry drove the "Puritan Revolution"; religious causes cut vertically through society in their initial periods of enthusiastic devotion. In the long run, however, the eschatological expectations that initially accompany such movements fade, horizontal stratification replaces vertical divisions, and the elective affinity Weber identified asserts itself. Thus, he argues, the Huguenot and Scottish nobility later stopped fighting for Calvinism, and the further development of ascetic Protestantism became a bourgeois cause.[8] Here Weber links "ascetic Protestantism" tightly to the class that nineteenth-century historiography characteristically depicted as the great carrier of modernity, the rising bourgeoisie.

After sections on the economic consequences of different forms of hierocracy that return to the themes of *The Protestant Ethic, Economy and Society* then takes up the political implications of different religions in a short section on "Sect, Church, and Democracy". The key affinity that Weber discerns in this section between democracy and early modern religious organization is not between Calvinism and democracy, but between sectarian groups and democracy. "Pure sects" encourage lay preaching, insist upon "direct democratic administration" by the congregation, and treat the clerical officials as servants of the congregation.[9] Calvinism nonetheless enters the picture, since Calvinism "resembles the sects by virtue of its aristocratic charismatic principle of predestination and the degradation of office charisma".[10] Just as Weber discerned a link between sects and political democracy, so he also accorded them a central role in the emergence of modern ideas of freedom of conscience.

"The pure sect must advocate 'tolerance' and 'separation of church and state' for several reasons: because it is in fact *not* a universalist redemptory institution for the repression of sin and can bear political as little as hierocratic reglementation; because no official power can distribute grace to unqualified persons and, hence, all use of political force in religious matters must appear senseless or outright diabolical; because the sect is simply not concerned with outsiders. [...] Consistent sects have al-

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[7] Ibid. p. 1180.
[8] Ibid. p. 1180.
[9] Ibid. p. 1208.
[10] Ibid. p. 1205.

ways taken this position and have been the most genuine advocates of 'freedom of conscience.'"[11]

Among these bold generalizations, Weber's discussion of the relations between political and hierocratic domination in the various lands where Reformed churches became established strikes me as at once the most plausible in light of current knowledge and the most valuable for what it offers specialists in the subject today. The intense re-negotiation of the boundaries between magisterial and clerical authority that accompanied the institutionalization of the Reformation, and the trend toward the reassertion of clericalism in its aftermath are both phenomena to which recent Reformation historiography has begun to call attention, but which are not as yet well understood or thoroughly explored. Here Weber's ideas seem especially good to think with.

One of the most difficult problems for the historian of early modern Calvinism concerns the source of the exceptional authority that certain theologians including Calvin himself were able to wield at various times and places. Calvin was not the first Reformation theologian to espy a mandate for certain ecclesiastical institutions in the Bible, but a major part of his particular achievement lies in his success in becoming the first reformer to win the establishment of an independent system of consistorial ecclesiastical discipline, this after nearly two decades of repeated confrontations with the Genevan magistrates. An outsider to Geneva, his power derived strictly from the authority conveyed upon him as a systematic theologian and interpreter of the sacred texts. That was no small power, however, in a newly independent and politically vulnerable town that saw its preservation as residing in cleaving tightly to God's word and where there were few educated lawyers or other laymen to stand up to Calvin's formidable learning. The most astute student of Calvin's political theology, Harro Höpfl, has convincingly discerned in the successive revisions of the *Institutes* a steady escalation of the claims made for the autonomy and power of the church and its ministers, and in light of his work it does not seem excessive to see Calvin, that child of the milieu of the ecclesiastical courts, as one of the great prophets of the neo-clericalism that historians have recently begun to discern emerging within Protestantism as the sixteenth century advanced.[12] Calvin himself had no doubt that the technicians of political and hierocratic power were locked in mutual antago-

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[11] Ibid. p. 1208.

[12] Harro Höpfl, The Christian Polity of John Calvin. Cambridge 1982; on Protestant neo-clericalism: Lorna Jane Abray, The People's Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy, and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500–1598. Ithaca 1985; Susan C. Karant-Nunn, Neoclericalism and Anticlericalism in Saxony, 1555–1675, in: Journal of Interdisciplinary History 24. 1994 pp. 615–637.

nism. "If you ever have to deal with jurists", he wrote his pupil and fellow warrior in the struggle for autonomous systems of ecclesiastical discipline, Caspar Olevianus, "you should know that almost everywhere these people are the opponents of Christ's ministers, because they do not believe that they can hold on to their status in places where ecclesiastical authority is firmly established."[13] Calvin and those later Calvinist ministers who defended the need for autonomous systems of ecclesiastical discipline within the church were thus indeed apostles of hierocratic power, and their ability to promote that power derived from their stature as systematic theologians, a stature that was particularly great where educated technicians of governmental authority were few.

Weber viewed "the presbyterian form" as "Calvinism's" characteristic theory of theocracy. Some terminological clarification is required here. As Weber himself knew, Calvinism is not strictly identical with the Reformed tradition, that second great wing of the magisterial Reformation that developed in rivalry with the Lutheran tradition from the first decades of the Reformation onward, with the initial point of division coming over the theology of the eucharist. Calvin was just one of a number of prominent spokesmen of Reformed theology, and his views differed from those of the other leading Reformed theologians of the first generations on several important issues, most notably those of predestination and the proper organization of church discipline. Over the subsequent generations, disciples went beyond the master in the precision with which they spelled out the order of predestination or the forms of church organization said to be divinely ordained by Scripture. The views of these disciples were what ultimately came to be considered characteristic of "Calvinism" as that word was most commonly used in the seventeenth century and beyond, but the term denoted different specific positions in different contexts – high predestinarian doctrine in some instances, Puritan practical piety in others, an insistence on an autonomous system of church discipline in yet others, and the advocacy of a presbyterian-synodal form of church organization in still others again. Each was a distinctive theological or devotional option not always found bundled with the remaining three. It can thus be misleading to suggest that all Calvinists were presbyterians. It is certainly accurate, however, to define presbyterianism as an ecclesiology that enhanced clerical power and autonomy. It claimed divine sanction not simply for the sort of independent parochial morals boards whose establishment in Geneva was Calvin's greatest political triumph, but

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[13] Quoted in KARIN MAAG, Seminary or University? The Genevan Academy and Reformed Higher Education, 1560–1620. Aldershot 1995 p. 24.

an entire interlocking system of church councils running from these parish consistories through local and provincial councils to national synods. Working in concert, these bodies shared authority for determining the bounds of orthodoxy, defined the church's rules of discipline, and validated the credentials of ministerial candidates. Where such a system came to be established, it enhanced the authority and autonomy of the church and its ministers, although it must be remembered that the term "minister" in the ecclesiology of both Calvin and the great majority of later Calvinists encompassed lay elders and deacons as well as full-time specialists in the proclamation of the word, and that most presbyterial-synodally organized churches worked out compromises with the secular authorities that allowed the magistrates to summon national synods, sit in certain church councils, and/or play a role in ministerial appointments. In the hands of its more extreme Scottish exponents, presbyterianism was an ideology of intense clericalism, marked by a deep mistrust of the participation of lay elders in higher ecclesiastical gatherings and a visceral rejection of any princely interference in the running of the church. Even where the doctrine was less rigid, it tended to receive its greatest support from the clergy and ecclesiastical assemblies whose authority it enhanced.[14]

If most presbyterially organized Reformed churches worked out arrangements that shared the running of the church with the secular authorities, this is because, in the complex and at times even apparently contradictory understanding of the relations between secular and ecclesiastical government in both Calvin and most later Calvinists, the ecclesiastical government was at once independent of secular government and yet also "conjoined". On the one hand, church and state each had their own domain. The church oversaw the realm of the spirit and guided individuals toward eternal salvation. The state oversaw outward behavior and formed individuals for humanity and citizenship. Christ was the only king within the church; the secular powers were ordained of God to rule over the temporal realm. On the other hand, the secular authorities were obligated to use the powers they had received from God to protect His church and uphold His laws. Calvin and his successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza, at once sought throughout their work to define the separate spheres of secular and ecclesiastical government and to ensure a measure of collaboration between them, both by urging the secular authori-

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[14] See especially here David George Mullan, Episcopacy in Scotland: The History of an Idea 1560–1638. Edinburgh 1986; Callum G. Brown, Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707. Edinburgh 1997 ch. 1; Ulrich Pfister, Reformierte Sittenzucht zwischen kommunaler und territorialer Organisation: Graubünden, 16.–18. Jahrhundert, in: Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 87. 1996 pp. 287–333.

ties to lend their support to many decisions made by the Genevan company of pastors and by seeking to impress upon them the utility of consulting with the ministers who, as the most skilled interpreters of scriptural prophecy, held the key to a fundamental source of political wisdom. As Weber correctly saw, one important reason why Calvin and Beza turned to the magistrates for support was that they could punish those who advanced interpretations of Christian doctrine at odds with theirs. Additional reasons that pushed the reformers to seek the political support of the magistrates included their desire to see those who insulted them punished and their concern to have additional suasion brought to bear on those who refused to seek reconciliation with the church after being suspended from communion by the organs of ecclesiastical discipline.[15] At the same time, all of the early Protestant reformers recognized that the creation of a reformed state church could only occur with the support of the political authorities. Weber's claim that rulers for their part appreciated hierocracy as "the incomparable means of domesticating the subjects" meanwhile anticipates the substantial volume of recent German social-historical writing about the long Reformation era that argues that "confessionalization" fostered the growth of state power in Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist regions alike through its reinforcement of ecclesiastical moral control and consequently of social discipline.[16] In my judgement, the evidence suggests less enthusiasm for the creation of systems of ecclesiastical discipline among magistrates and less of a focus within church discipline on those sins whose eradication would most fully promote the power of the state than this historiography would predict.[17] The literature on confessionalization is nonetheless an instance where the continuing influence of Weber's ideas may be discerned.

A harsh grader might mark Weber down for details of his sketch of the places where hierocratic power came to be strong within the Calvinist world. Recent work on church-state relations in the independent Dutch Republic has shown how tightly the republican regents circumscribed the autonomy

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15 Höpfl, Christian Polity (see note 11); Eugène Choisy, La théocratie à Genève au temps de Calvin. Geneva 1897; Tadutaka Maruyama, The Ecclesiology of Theorodore Beza. Geneva 1978.

16 The literature on confessionalization is now vast. For a succinct introduction, see Heinz Schilling, Confessional Europe, in: Handbook of European History 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation 2. Ed. Thomas A. Brady Jr./ Heiko Oberman/ James D. Tracy. Leiden 1994–95 ch. 21.

17 Evidence in support of this view is presented in Benedict, Christ's Churches Purely Reformed – A Social History of Calvinism. New Haven 2002. See also the trenchant critique of Heinrich Richard Schmidt, Sozialdisziplinierung? Ein Plädoyer für das Ende des Etatismus in der Konfessionalisierungforschung, in: Historische Zeitung 265. 1997 pp. 639–682.

of the Reformed church and how infrequently they heeded the efforts of the *predikanten* to mold laws and policies.[18] In France, the Reformed church was more thoroughly autonomous yet even weaker in terms of political influence because of its minority status, except in those cities controlled politically by the Huguenots during the era from 1561 to 1629, where the relationship between magistrates and ministers in these towns remains poorly understood. (It is interesting to note that in one such town, Nîmes, the city's lawyers obtained legislation forbidding the consistory from discouraging lawsuits through its peace-making efforts, a further illustration of the tension Weber's ideas would predict between lawyers and ministers, although at the same time a sign of the limits of hierocratic power here. In little Pont de Camares, where lawyers and consuls were presumably less powerful, the minister wielded considerable influence over issues of taxation and social behavior in the late sixteenth century.)[19] The Reformed territory other than New England or later-sixteenth-century Geneva where ministerial power was probably strongest in the early modern period was Scotland, where from John Knox through the turmoil of the Covenanters ministers wielded exceptional influence over both local and national politics. While one might criticize Weber for this error of detail, however, his larger point that the outcome of the struggle between political and hierocratic power in any given region depended upon the power constellation of the groups involved and the force of historical accident clearly is borne out by the historical record. The extent of ministerial power in Scotland clearly relates to both the relative underdevelopment of the country's secular law courts prior to the Reformation and to the historical accident that the crown was unable to assert authority over the Reformed church after a revolutionary reformation imposed the new faith on the country because the ruling queen never embraced the faith. The limits on ministerial power in the Netherlands can similarly be linked to the historically contingent fact that the Dutch Revolt only triumphed in regions where the Reformed cause was numerically weak and civic traditions were proud and well developed.

Weber's bold linkage of Calvinism with the middling and lower strata of the bourgeoisie over the long term has rarely been directly cited in recent ex-

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[18] Alastair Duke, Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries. London, 1990 ch. 11; Joke Spaans, Haarlem na de Reformatie: Stedelijke Cultuur en Kerkelijk Leven, 1577–1620. The Hague 1989.

[19] Léon Ménard, Histoire civile, ecclesiastique et littéraire de la ville de Nismes 4. Paris, 1750–58 p. 365; Frank Delteil, Institutions et vie de l'église réformée de Pont-de-Camarès, in: Les églises et leurs institutions au XVIe siècle. Ed. Michel Peronnet. Montpellier 1978 pp. 96–106.

aminations of the cause's sociology, but a good deal of recent work speaks to this claim. In Calvinism's initial phase of rapid growth in France, Scotland, and the Netherlands, the cause indeed attracted noblemen as well as burghers, as Weber asserted, especially in France and Scotland. It did not cut equally across all groups in society, for it drew more adepts among the aristocracy, town-dwellers above the level of day-laborers and agricultural workers, and rural artisans than it did among the mass of country-folk or the substantial numbers of vine-dressers and market gardeners who lived in many sixteenth-century towns.[20] The sociological evolution of various Reformed communities over the subsequent generations has been less well studied, but from what we know about this in both France and Eastern Europe, it appears that the upper ranks of the aristocracy indeed fell away from the cause. The lesser nobility, however, remained quite loyal in both France and Hungary, suggesting that there was no necessary antithesis between aristocratic lifestyles and the ethics of later Calvinism. Most of the defection of the high aristocracy, it appears, should be linked to the desire for preferment at courts that rewarded Catholic subjects over Protestant ones.[21] Meanwhile, English historians have vigorously debated the thesis that Puritanism was the faith of the middling sort of people. This work has underlined the importance of the Puritan gentry through at least the first two thirds of the seventeenth century and found no consistent correlation between economic or social status and membership in the subculture of the godly among those below gentry status. Again, it is true, few gentlemen were open Dissenters in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Again, this is probably attributable to the political penalties attached to refusal to communicate with the established church.[22] Although aspects of this question still could benefit

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[20] The sociology of early Calvinism has been particularly intensely studied for France. A convenient summary of this work may be found in: Arlette Jouanna et al., Histoire et dictionnaire des guerres de religion. Paris 1998 pp. 44–50. For the Netherlands see Guido Marnef, Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commerical Metropolis. Baltimore 1996; Henk van Nierop, The Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands: Between Church and King, and Protestantism and Privileges, in: Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands, 1555–1585. Ed. Philip Benedict et al. Amsterdam 1999 pp. 87–91. For Scotland: Michael Lynch, Edinburgh and the Reformation. Edinburgh 1981; Ian Cowan, The Scottish Reformation: Church and Society in Sixteenth Century Scotland. London 1982.

[21] Benedict, Christ's Churches and Society (see note 17) ch. 11; Id., Faith and Fortunes (see note 1) ch. 1; Daniel Ligou, Le Protestantisme en France de 1598 à 1715. Paris 1968 ch. 11.

[22] J.T. Cliffe, The Puritan Gentry. London 1984, and Id., The Puritan Gentry Besieged, 1650–1700. London 1993; Nicholas Tyacke, Popular Puritan Mentaity in Late Elizabethan England, in: The English Commonwealth 1547–1640. Ed. Peter Clark et al. Leicester 1979 pp. 77–92; The World of Rural Dissenters. Ed. Margaret Spufford. Cambridge 1995; Michael

from more study, the thrust of recent research suggests that Weber's claim for an elective affinity between ascetic Calvinism and the bourgeoisie has less remaining mileage in it than his insight on the previous page that "religious rationalization has its own dynamics, which economic conditions merely channel".[23]

As for Weber's assessment of the religious origins of different features of modern liberal democracy, a kernel of truth may be discerned in his claim that Calvinism resembled the sects "by virtue of its aristocratic charismatic principle of predestination and the degradation of office charisma".[24] Under certain distinctive circumstances that only appeared in England, the increased emphasis on predestination within mature Calvinism gave rise to the conviction that the predestined could be distinguished from the reprobate here on earth. This engendered the congregationalist principle that only this aristocracy of faith was deserving of full church membership. A shift followed in congregationalist circles from a church type of ecclesiastical organization to something closer to a sect, where only a fraction of the church was admitted to full church membership, although the rest of the community was not excluded from regular Sunday worship services. Where this occurred, the aristocratic system of local church government by a minister and lay elders that was standard in Reformed churches of a Calvinist mold - Calvin himself applied the term "aristocratic" to this kind of church government - gave way to the participation of all full church members in key questions of discipline and decision-making, hence to a more democratic church. This is such a distinctive case, however, that it seems perilous to attribute too much importance to it within the larger saga of the gradual emergence of modern democracy in the West, even if one is willing to admit that there was normally a transference of attitudes from the sphere of church government to that of secular authority. To do so, one would have to associate the rise and triumph of democracy strictly with the English and American cases, and in England largely with the Independent cause during the Civil War and with the later Congregationalists and Baptists. One of the ways in which the history of European state-formation has shifted most clearly since 1900 is that England and America no longer occupy as central a place in the story of the growth of representative government and political democracy as they once did. In view of this shift, his larger claim that the sects and sect-type Calvinist churches made a fundamental contribution to the rise of democracy by giving

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Watts, The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution. Oxford 1978 pp. 346–366.

[23] E&S p. 1179.

[24] Ibid. p. 1205.

members a greater voice in church government no longer commands the same persuasiveness. Just as most economic historians no longer pay much attention to religious factors in their examinations of the growth of modern capitalism, so too do the most persuasive recent macro-sociological accounts of the origins of dictatorship and democracy focus on very different factors.[25]

Of all of *Economy and Society*'s bold generalizations about the religious history of early modern Europe examined here, Weber's final claim that the sects played a central role in the emergence of modern ideas of freedom of conscience looks the least satisfactory in light of recent research. The past generations have probably transformed our understanding of Anabaptism, the purest illustration of the sect type of religious organization in early modern Europe, more than any other feature of the post-Reformation religious landscape. It is now clear that many of the currents within this movement only rejected the appeal to political authority and embraced a self-image as a suffering remnant set apart from the world after attempts to win over the entire community or its leaders to their views failed. Once they did so, they retreated into self-enclosure and rarely intervened in public debates. They did not actively champion religious toleration or freedom of conscience. The positive valorization of "freedom of conscience" understood in the modern sense of the phrase only emerged gradually over the course of the Reformation upheavals out of many intersecting strands of thought, some tied to Luther's transformation of the concept, others tied to politico-legal modes of thought of Catholic as well as Protestant provenance. If any one religious current may be identified with consistent advocacy of freedom of conscience as the phrase is now understood, it would be that of those partisans of a spiritual, anti-confessional Christianity whose thought often developed as a critique precisely of the re-emergence of hierocratic elements within the Reformed tradition – the tradition of Sebastian Castellio, Jacob Acontius, Dirck Coornheert, and the early Dutch Remonstrants.[26] It is also now evident that the modern Western valorization of tolerance as something positive – an attitude that must be distinguished from the simple acceptance of several reli-

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[25] See e.g. Brian M. Downing, The Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe. Princeton 1992; Thomas Ertman, Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Cambridge 1997.

[26] Troeltsch recognized the importance of this spiritualistic current in the history of freedom of conscience. "A l'origine des droits de l'homme, on ne trouve donc pas le protestantisme de stricte confession, mais les sectes [...] ainsi que le spiritualisme.", in: Protestantisme et modernité. Ed. de Launay. Paris 1991 p. 87.

gions within one community as a necessary evil or because of the belief that multiple gods can be concurrently worshiped – did not take shape until about 1700, when arguments developed in a range of very different contexts suddenly coalesced to cast intolerance as a social evil.[27] Weber's discussion of the themes of toleration and liberty of conscience betrays more of a debt to now discredited features of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Whig and liberal historiography than any of the other of his remarks examined here.

In an age when historical research burrows ever more deeply into ever narrower fields of specialization and works of synthesis rely on teams of specialists rather than a single author, the sheer scope of Weber's intellectual project, the originality of the terms he developed to make sense of it, and his boldness in formulating mid-range generalizations all make reading his work at once stimulating and humbling. Some of his observations that touch upon the history of Calvinism in *Economy and Society* now seem dated or misleading, especially where they seek to link developments of the Reformation era directly to features of the modern political landscape or tie religious attitudes to a single class. They nonetheless contain provocative insights about the sources of ministerial power and the relations between magistrates and ministers that speak to central yet still inadequately understood and conceptualized features of Reformation history. In reading Weber, one senses somebody who declared himself to be "*unmusikalisch*" in matters religious grappling to understand the mystery of the considerable power religious leaders have exercised in numerous times and places and arriving at some arresting insights on the matter. His thinking about religion and society started from a number of commonplaces derived from the broader liberal and Protestant historiography of the preceding century, but he rarely remained satisfied with those commonplaces in their most conventional form. With time he appears gradually to have enriched and deepened his historical understanding of early modern Western religion, both through further study of it directly and, no less importantly, through his efforts to develop a new conceptual vocabulary adequate to the task of writing a comparative universal history. The relevant portions of *Economy and Society* still merit reading by historians of European religion, even if they have never attained the notoriety of *The Protestant Ethic*.

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[27] Throughout this paragraph I am summarizing a vast literature on the history of Anabaptism and the "rise of toleration". On the transformations of the concept of toleration around 1700, see especially W. H. Huseman, The Expression of the Idea of Toleration in French during the Sixteenth Century, in: Sixteenth Century Journal 15. 1984 pp. 293–310; Edward Peters, Inquisition. Berkeley 1989 esp. p. 156.