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PROTESTANTISM AND THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STATE

Abstract

The article analyses the religious basis of the different attitudes towards the modern welfare state and state social assistance systems in countries that have been influenced by different Christian denominations, especially Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed (Calvinist, Presbyterian) Christianity. The article looks at early forms of poor relief in Lutheran cities at the beginning of the Reformation and their theological basis in Martin Luther's writings. The article then looks at the different ways in which social assistance to the poor was organised in areas under Reformed influence and in Catholic areas. The article shows that the Christian obligation to support the poor underpins modern social assistance, but that it has played out in very different ways in societies according to the relative predominance of Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Protestant religious heritages, and that these patterns can be seen today in variations in social assistance and welfare-to-work policies in OECD countries. The article shows that reference to the social doctrines and poor relief systems of historically significant Christian denominations can help to answer a number of otherwise puzzling cross-national differences in poverty policy. These include different beliefs and attitudes within Christian denominations, such as their understanding of salvation, their concepts of work and non-work (begging), their understanding of state-church relations and their understanding of the state in general.

Key words: Welfare state; social assistance; Catholicism; Calvinism; Lutheranism; Martin Luther; Religion and Politics; poverty; theology; ethics

EVANGELISCHES CHRISTENTUM UND DER SOZIALSTAAT

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel analysiert die religiösen Grundlagen der unterschiedlichen Einstellungen gegenüber dem modernen Wohlfahrtsstaat und staatlichen Wohlfahrtssystemen in Ländern, die von verschiedenen christlichen Konfessionen, insbesondere dem katholischen, lutherischen und reformierten (calvinistischen, presbyterianischen) Christentum, beeinflusst wurden. Der Artikel befasst sich mit frühen Formen der Armenfürsorge in lutherischen Städten zu Beginn der Reformation und ihrer theologischen Grundlage in den Schriften Martin Luthers. Anschließend werden die unterschiedlichen Organisationsformen der Sozialhilfe für die Armen in Gebieten unter reformiertem Einfluss und in katholischen Gebieten untersucht. Der Artikel zeigt, dass die christliche Verpflichtung zur Unterstützung der Armen die Grundlage der modernen Sozialhilfe und des modernen Sozialstaates bildet, dass sie sich jedoch in den Gesellschaften je nach dem relativen Vorherrschen des katholischen, lutherischen und reformierten protestantischen Erbes auf sehr unterschiedliche Weise ausgewirkt hat und dass diese Muster heute in den OECD-Ländern in unterschiedlichen Sozialhilfe- und Wohlfahrtsmaßnahmen zu beobachten sind. Der Artikel zeigt, dass der Verweis auf die Soziallehren und die Systeme der Armenfürsorge historisch bedeutender christlicher Konfessionen dazu beitragen kann, eine Reihe von ansonsten rätselhaften länderübergreifenden Unterschieden in der Armutspolitik zu erklären. Dazu gehören unterschiedliche Überzeugungen und Einstellungen innerhalb christlicher Konfessionen, wie z. B. ihr Verständnis von Erlösung, ihre Vorstellungen von Arbeit und Nichtarbeit (Betteln), ihr Verständnis der Beziehungen zwischen Staat und Kirche und ihr Verständnis des Staates im Allgemeinen.

Schlüsselwörter: Sozialstaat; Wohlfahrtsstaat; Armenfürsorge; Katholizismus; Luthertum; Calvinismus; Religion und Politik; Staat und Kirche; Armut; Theologie; Ethik

Preliminary remarks

In a paper on the contribution of Protestantism to the idea of the social responsibility of the state, it is impossible to avoid taking a look at the Reformation in 16th century Western (Roman) Christendom. It is also necessary to clarify in advance what is meant by the social responsibility of the state. Talk of the social responsibility of the state seems to be taken for granted nowadays. But this is not at all self-evident. And it is also debatable what exactly is meant by this.

The following reflection has three parts. First, the concept of responsibility in respect to the state will be addressed. Then, second, the contribution of Protestant Christianity to the social responsibility of the State will be considered. And, third, some denominational differences within Christianity on the state's social responsibility and the modern social state are described and reflected.

1. Responsibility

The ambiguity of the responsibility of the state already begins with the term "responsibility". According to Hans Jonas, traditionally talk of the state's responsibility is not unproblematic. In his work "The Imperative of Responsibility" (cf. Jonas, [1979]1988) published in 1979, he points out, that responsibility is traditionally understood in personal terms. According to Jonas, the condition of responsibility is "causal power" (Jonas, [1979]1988: 172) – which certainly belongs to a state. The traditional understanding then is, that the perpetrator "must answer for his deed: he is held responsible for its consequences and, if necessary, held liable" (Jonas, [1979]1988: 172). This applies to both legal and moral responsibility. But, in such an understanding, who answers when the state is responsible? Its representatives and representative bodies? We all know of enough cases in which people's lives are harmed as a consequence of state orders (including laws) or also as a consequence of state inactivity. Corresponding legal disputes often end unsatisfactorily for the injured parties. In the end, no one was responsible, but everyone did their duty and acted according to a set of rules. Occasionally, states are also held liable, but this does not usually happen. A state is a transpersonal entity that cannot assume responsibility as such. Usually, only the persons who represent a state are held responsible.

In order to move away from this unsatisfactory personal understanding of responsibility, Hans Jonas followed – or rather developed – another concept of responsibility, which is not about "what is done", but about "the determination of what is to be done" (Jonas, [1979]1988: 174). But Jonas is also concerned with the acting "I". For him, however, responsibility is not about "my behaviour and its consequences", but about "the *cause that lays claim to my actions*" (Jonas, [1979]1988: 174). Responsibility then obliges us to "deeds that are not intended for any other purpose" (Jonas, [1979]1988: 174). "The 'for what' lies beyond me, but within the sphere of my power, dependent on it or threatened by it. It opposes it with its right to

exist from what it is or can be, and through the moral will takes power into its obligation. The thing becomes mine because the power is mine and has a causal contribution to this very thing” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 175).

For Hans Jonas, this concept of responsibility forms the basis of the “ethics of responsibility for the future that is due today”, which he formulated in 1979. He calls this a “substantial, purpose-bound concept of responsibility” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 175). Jonas can then apply this concept of responsibility to the actions of the state and its representatives. As an example, he cites a tax official to demonstrate his thesis “that the should be of the thing is the first thing in responsibility, insofar as the ultimate object of responsibility beyond the direct one, i.e. the actual ‘matter’, is the preservation of the fiduciary relationships on which society and the coexistence of people are based”. Jonas sees this as a “substantive, inherently obligatory good”. And so “the unfaithful civil servant, who can only be directly accused of a breach of duty, is also indirectly irresponsible” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 179).

Hans Jonas also applies this concept of responsibility to the responsibility of politicians, which is a self-chosen responsibility. “The paradigmatic case is the politician who strives for power in order to gain responsibility, and for supreme power for the purpose of supreme responsibility” (180) – mixed with the pursuit of personal incentives and rewards. According to Jonas, such a politician is an example of “a unique prerogative of human spontaneity: unasked, ‘without need’, without mandate and without agreement ... the aspirant applies for power in order to be able to burden himself with responsibility. The object of responsibility is the *res publica*, the public cause, which in a republic is latently the cause of all” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 181). In contrast to a responsibility stemming from natural relations – Jonas has parental responsibility in mind here – which is very concrete and intimate, political responsibility is characterized by “extreme artificiality” and is exercised “through the medium and at the distance of organizational instrumentalities”. “If the statesman also includes the legislator, then here the most abstract form of responsibility, the one most distant from the real object, stands in contrast to the most concrete, to one closest to it [i.e. parental responsibility]” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 183).

According to Hans Jonas, both forms of future-oriented responsibility are primarily the responsibility of people for people. To define this more precisely, he points to some common characteristics of parental and state responsibility. In the first place, he mentions the characteristic of “totality” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 189). This is followed by the characteristic of

“continuity” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 196f) and the characteristic of “future” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 197f).

By totality, Jonas means “that these responsibilities encompass the total being of their objects, that is, all aspects of it, from bare existence to the highest interests.” Parental responsibility and care have the whole being of the children in view, indeed, their best being. According to Jonas, Aristotle sees this as the *ratio essendi* of the state: “that it came into existence so that human life is possible, and continues in existence so that good life is possible. And so, this is also the concern of the true statesman” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 190). “The archaic ruler liked to be regarded as the ‘father’ of his subjects ..., and therein lies something of incapacitation that does not belong to the essence of the political. But the symbol retains a certain right even in enlightened republics, wherever the head of government leads and does not merely carry out the will of the majority. ... Even if only power is sought, this objectively entails responsibility. Its scope brings it into the analogy of parental responsibility: again, it ranges from physical existence to the highest interests, from security to fullness of existence, from good behaviour to happiness” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 190).

For Hans Jonas, in the constellation of parental and state responsibility, it is very important that these two spheres of responsibility are in a symmetrical relationship to each other with regard to their quality of totality. He sees the danger of the state’s power shrinking the private sphere and eliminating the difference between it and the public sphere. “The ‘statesman’ would then have to take care of *everything*” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 192). He states that “the history of the political shows an increasing shift in the distribution of competences in favour of the state, i.e. the growing transfer of parental responsibility to it: so that the modern state, be it capitalist or socialist, liberal or authoritarian, egalitarian-democratic or elitist, becomes more and more ‘paternalistic’ in effect” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 192).

Parental and state responsibility then also require the quality of continuity: their exercise must not be interrupted. What is important for Hans Jonas is the quality of the future. “Above all, however, it is the *future* with which responsibility for a life, be it individual or communal, has to do beyond its immediate present” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 197). This is where we come to Hans Jonas’ actual contribution to an ethics of responsibility. For responsibility in the present for the future does not only extend to the next day. The horizon is much broader. However, since the future cannot really be foreseen, the first principle for Hans Jonas is that all statecraft today is responsible

“for the possibility of future statecraft” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 214). Beyond the totality of present responsibility, “the possibility of responsible action must continue to exist in the future” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 215). In addition, for Jonas, political responsibility always has to do first and foremost with our neighbours and their needs of the moment, but at the same time, foresight is part of it. Foresight concerns those who are far away now and those who will be far away in the future. Political responsibility must take into account the living conditions of the geographically distant and the most distant, as well as the living conditions of future generations. Of course, this applies above all when reflecting on the consequences of current political action with regard to these two horizons, but also beyond this, insofar as their ability to take responsibility and their well-being must be part of our own political responsibility. Hans Jonas was well received with regard to the problem of the consequences of technology: With all new technologies, their consequences for the future must be analysed and assessed. Since – as with all questions about the future – it is rarely possible to be certain about this, Jonas cites the principle of caution. If the future consequences of new technologies are unclear, they should be avoided.

The idea of the state’s social responsibility is in line with Hans Jonas’ concept of responsibility, primarily due to the quality of totality. However, this is then limited by parental responsibility. Unlike political responsibility, this has a concrete goal: adulthood: “the independence of the individual, which essentially includes the ability to take responsibility” (Jonas, [1979]1988: 199). In the sense of a symmetrical relationship between parental and political responsibility, it must also be possible to live the corresponding adulthood. State responsibility must guarantee the independence and self-responsibility of individuals and also their co-responsibility in political responsibility.

Social responsibility of the state then means the welfare state taking responsibility for the education of its younger citizens and supporting parents and guardians in fulfilling their parental responsibility. It is also the responsibility of the welfare state to ensure that economic and social conditions are peaceful and satisfactory for all citizens, so that the physical and emotional needs of every citizen are adequately met. It is also the responsibility of the welfare state to ensure that its citizens can live their own sociality and organize themselves freely as a society.

The totality of political responsibility must to a certain extent take a step back and guarantee and enable parental or family responsibility as well as the self-responsibility and political co-responsibility of its adult citizens.

2. Protestant impulses of the Reformation to the state's social responsibility

If we now take a look at the Reformation of Western Christianity in the 16th century and thus at the first impulses of Protestantism for the development of the state's social responsibility, then beforehand a methodological preliminary remark is necessary. For of course the political and social conditions in the 16th century have been different from those of the present day. The modern welfare state was not yet in sight. As we talk about the significance of a history 500 years back for today, there is no direct line of influence. The world of this old time was very different from the world today. Only in a wide perspective looking back into history we can identify ideas, structures and developments, which contributed to the shaping of our world of today. Then we talk about a very specific kind of significance and influence, which the Reformation had on preparing and shaping the modern world of today. In the newest research in history we find the concept of "preadaptive advances". This term names progresses in societies before they become realized in society and before they really contribute to the formation of societies. "Preadaptive Advances" are ideas which contribute to the imagination of people in a society, so that people can imagine new arrangements in society, culture and politics, which open up the possibility that they can be realized. Only later when we have real progresses in society we can analyze these "preadaptive advances" and their influence on the formation of societies. The concept of "preadaptive advances" may be helpful to describe the significance and influence of the Reformation on the formation of modern societies and the modern social state. The cultural influence and effect of the Reformation is not such, that it changed politics, culture and societies immediately, but it is rather – to use a picture – like a stone, which is thrown in the water and then creates more and more circles expanding in the water. With this in mind, we can point out a few impulses from Protestantism that emerged during the Reformation for the totality of political responsibility thematized by Hans Jonas.

As early as 1520, in his writing "An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation von des christlichen Standes Besserung: To the Christian Nobility of

the German Nation concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate”, Martin Luther called upon the political leaders of his time to put an end to various abuses in the area of religion – abuses that also had considerable social consequences. In essence, his aim was to politically facilitate the new freedom of the Christian that he propagated, so that Christians could live up to their own responsibility for their faith in the area of religion.

Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel has in Luther’s tradition seen in Christianity the most developed, the highest form of religion. He understood Christianity to be the religion of truth and freedom. Within Christianity he understood Protestant Christianity to be the most developed form of religion. Because for Hegel in Protestantism Christianity is consequently the religion of freedom (respective liberty). The religious characteristics of freedom in Protestantism Hegel identified with the concentration on the principle of subjectivity, and on faith and pleasure as form of experiencing the Divine. These characteristics of Protestantism can be seen in the inwardness and spirituality of Protestant piety, in the acquisition of all religious objects by the individual, which principally is immediate to God, and in the democratic access to the religious sources through translations of the bible and an improved competence to read. But this inward side of Protestant Christianity has consequences in politics and society. In the time of the Reformation we can identify a strong improvement of the education of the population and a high appreciation of the secular realms of family and profession respective work. In Hegel’s interpretation Protestant Christianity is especially the religion of freedom, because it started with the modern differentiation of religion and politics. A consequence of the differentiation of politics and religion is an even stronger differentiation within society, creating – besides the differentiation of the religious community (church) and the state – the civil economy, the positive law and its institutions and the secular education with science and art.

To come back to Luther: His reform writing to the nobility of his time also had concrete financial consequences, insofar as the financial transfers of Christians in the German lands to the Roman church system seemed to him to be completely disproportionate and downright exploitative. In this context, Luther also addressed the princes on their social responsibility for their own citizens. To give one example: In Luther’s opinion, begging should be abolished. Instead, every city should provide for the poor among its population and turn away foreign beggars, including pilgrims and monks. To do this, it would have to be determined who is suffering and needs help. With

regard to the mendicant orders, Luther also did not consider begging to be necessary, as it was usually used to build large churches and monasteries, which Luther did not consider necessary and, in his opinion, did not fit in with the monks' vow of poverty: "He who has chosen poverty ought not to be rich. If he wants to be rich, let him put his hand to the plow and seek his fortune from the land." (Luther, [1520] 1966: 190)

Luther also urged the princes to reform the universities. Among the faculties, Luther singled out the lawyers and theologians: spiritual law and especially papal legal decisions should no longer be taught; secular law was in his opinion in need of reform, but far better than spiritual law. Theology should concentrate on its own field, i.e. the study of the Bible, and not give priority to scholasticism.

Luther then recommended a whole series of reforms to social life to the princes. He advised them to put a stop to luxury in clothing and meals as well as to the interest business. This was also intended to end the economic dominance of the Fuggers.

Luther's suggestions led, for example, to the Wittenberg Reform Ordinance in January 1522, which also stipulated that church and monastery property should be converted into common property. The common chest was introduced for these properties, which was to be used to provide social welfare for the poor and weak. This served as a model for many Protestant towns to set up such communal castes themselves - a kind of state storehouse for grain and other food for the poor and needy.

From some sociologists, like Max Weber and others, Protestant Christianity is praised because of its emphasis on labor, putting forward a kind of labor ethos, and considered to be the spiritual basis of capitalism. Indeed, Protestant Christianity emphasized very much human labour. This was a result of the new theological and spiritual understanding of Christianity in the Reformation. From the Ancient church on the binding of a person to God in true faith was considered to be exclusive and therefore prior to her civil and cultural obligations. The most extreme expression of this priority of people's obligation to God was chastity, which from a civil perspective is perceived to be egoistic. It is perceived as dropping out from the obligation to the family, but as well to the society, in refusing to contribute to the recruitment of families and societies. But to live in chastity was not possible for most Christians, but only for monks and nuns and – in the late Roman tradition – as well for priests. The form of life of monks and nuns and priests became a kind of model for a perfect Christian life as these people

seem to dedicate their lives to God only – different from all other people, who had first to follow their obligations to their families and their societies, and then could also dedicate a bit of their life to religion and God. Monks and nuns could as well live according to further counsels of the Bible for a perfect Christian life, like living in poverty and in obedience to spiritual superiors - following for example Matthew 19:1ff. (chastity), Matthew 19:16ff. (poverty) and Matthew 20:26 (obedience).

The Reformation redefined and substituted these ideals of monastic life, which functioned as a model and general orientation for every ordinary Christian who wanted to strive for perfection. Chastity was replaced by marriage and family; poverty was replaced by professional labor, diligence and property in civil society; obedience was replaced by appreciation and acknowledgment of the laws based on freedom and justice.

Consequently, Protestant Christians highly affirmed the life in a secular state strictly based on just laws. In the modern world therefore striving for an active participation in the political, civil and economic orders became an expression of the spirituality of Protestant Christians and their theology. This included the dedication of Protestant Christians to professional labor, which is done in the ethos, to do the work perfectly and which is considered to be part of the Christians obligation to love the neighbor. Love of the neighbour may also result in special acts of charity, but mainly it is realized in high standard professional work.¹

At the same time the Reformation emphasized the priority of the individual person to the community a person exists in. The individual person could understand herself in direct communication with God despite all church

¹ In the *Augsburg Confession* from 1530 (Art. 16 on “Civil Affairs”) we find a critique of the opinion that only or especially in a monastic life a perfect Christian life can be realized. With such an understanding, the monastic life functions as an orientation for every ordinary Christian life. In the “Apology” (“Defense”) of the Augsburg Confession, Article 16 on “Political Order”, the critique of this orientation of a Christian life at the ideals of perfection of monastic life is intensified. “The monks diffused many pernicious opinions in the Church. They called a community of property the polity of the Gospel; they said that not to hold property, not to vindicate one’s self at law [not to have wife and child], were evangelical counsels. These opinions greatly obscure the Gospel and the spiritual kingdom ..., and are dangerous to the commonwealth. For the Gospel does not destroy the State or the family [buying, selling, and other civil regulations], but much rather approves them, and bids us obey them as a divine ordinance, not only on account of punishment, but also on account of conscience” (The Defense of the Augsburg Confession, Art. 16, see: http://bookofconcord.org/defense_15_politicalorder.php).

mediation in word and sacrament. But for them the church organization or holy people or wise teachers became less important. Correspondingly the individual was as well responsible in the civil life in family and society: the individual person was considered to be responsible by him- and herself for his and her own life, but as well for his and her family and for the society he and she belonged to.

Coming to the thesis, that the Reformation prepared the religious ground for modern capitalism, it first has to be seen, that this thesis is mainly related to the Reformation in Switzerland, especially to John Calvin in Geneva and his followers. But in fact, this thesis can not be proven. If we look at Martin Luther, things are actually the opposite. In the judgement of Karl Marx in the 19th century, Martin Luther was a lighthouse of critical social thinking in the 16th century. For a long time, the Marxist judgement about Martin Luther was characterized by Friedrich Engels positive attitude to Thomas Müntzer, who was considered as an early revolutionary, with his revolutionary agitation and his fighting in the Peasants' revolt in 1524/25. Engels saw a parallel between the failure of the Peasants' revolt in the 16th century and the failure of the German revolution in 1848. He constructed a parallelism between the Müntzer–Luther relationship and his own 19th century polemics against rival socialist reformers from his more radical stance of revolution. Engels called his contemporary rivals on the left “lackeys of the princes” – Luther was called that as well by him –, because they were hesitant regarding revolutionary violence. Like Luther they were blamed to call the authorities down on revolutionizing workers to avoid violence. So Engels raised up an idealized Thomas Müntzer as the revolutionary alternative in order to challenge Martin Luther's high status in the German tradition. In Müntzer's writings Engels found the revolutionary alternative to simple reform. So, Engels simply took over Müntzer's very one-sided portrait of Luther: Luther, who had taken a good initiative, but was not consequent and in the end went on the side of the German princes and state authorities to stop the (violent) revolution of those who had – in Müntzer's and Engels' opinion – taken his Reformation message very seriously and consequent.

In 1524 Martin Luther had published a text on “Trade and Usury”, criticizing heavily the economic situation of his time, calling the princes to stop all this injustice. Karl Marx quoted this text of Luther extensively in his famous writing “The Capital”.² In Luther's understanding the state had the

² Luther wrote in “Trade and Usury”: “I have already said that Christians are rare people on earth. This is why the world needs a strict, harsh temporal government which will

divinely sanctioned legal monopoly on the means of violence to require economic justice, regulate the market, and outlaw usury – precisely to prevent the injustice from developing. Actually it was Luther’s same belief in the divine institution of political sovereignty to forbid usury and regulate trade that led him also to exhort the princes to put down the Peasants’ revolt, which happened to occur in 1524–25.

Karl Marx claimed to have found in Luther a predecessor in the analysis of capitalism. Luther had lifelong preached against usury. The new question of his time of economic justice was a theme for Luther all of his life and was an important part of his program of reform for church and society. Marx was impressed by Luther’s “naive onslaught against usury” (Marx, 1964: 407). Luther is among the first to bear witness against the transformation of money into capital that was going on before his eyes. As capital money was becoming a commodity, a thing, which can itself be bought and sold and so becomes a treasury of political power. Money as capital can change the future. So money is transformed from its use as a legally regulated medium of exchange of products and services into a product, that serves capital accumulation for purposes of power to shape the future apart from government’s traditional supervision – for Luther it challenged God’s commandments. In seeing this transformation, in the understanding of Karl Marx Luther has been digging deeper than others. According to Luther the accumulation of capital (the “creation of wealth”) is gained through the theft of labor value; with the effect that those with capital continually accumulate by exploiting those without capital by putting them in debt, where usurious interest becomes the perfect instrument for the progressive appropriation of labor value. Taking up Luther’s dictum, that “whoever takes more than he gives is a usurer”, Marx shows the implications of Luther’s analysis and shows that this corresponds to his own social theory in the “Capital”. Luther saw as well, that mercantile capitalism exploits less developed societies, promoting unjust luxury at home and pauperization abroad. Luther as well analyzed that this new economy is not ethically or religiously neutral, but actively recruits people to the love of the mammon and away from Christian

compel and constrain the wicked to refrain from theft and robbery, and to return what they borrow (although a Christian ought neither to demand nor expect it). This is necessary in order that the world may not become a desert, peace vanish, and men’s trade and society be utterly destroyed; all of which would happen if we were to rule the world according to the gospel, rather than driving and compelling the wicked by laws and the use of force to do and to allow what is right” (Luther, 1962: 257).

solidarity. He as well blames the alleged virtues of the new economy as pure propaganda. And Marx highlights as well, that Luther already critically detected the system of monopolia in the trade companies and corporations of his time.

On the level of motivation to capitalism, the Luther presented by Marx sees behind the appearances of productivity and wealth creation a motivating love of power, far from innocent, crystallizing in a new cultural ideal: the ambition to get rich. In Luther's Christian perspective, this desire is perverse. It is the sin of greed making society over into structures of malice and injustice. Marx did not share Luther's theological thought. But in respect to his analysis of the society and economy of his time, Marx saw in Luther a very early social critic, which opened the way to the modern world, Marx was writing and fighting for.

We have now to reflect the political and social consequences of the Reformation in the 16th century and its impulses for the development of the social responsibility of the state. No uniform line can be identified in Protestantism – or in Western European Christianity as a whole. In countries that were shaped by the Lutheran Reformation, the social responsibility of the state developed very differently from countries that were shaped by Reformed Christianity – just as, incidentally, social responsibility in countries that were shaped by Catholicism also developed very differently.

3. Denominational Differences on the state's social responsibility and the modern social state

The starting point for all Christian denominations is the central message of the Bible that Christian communities have a moral responsibility to support the poor. In modern Europe after the Reformation, this was implemented differently by the denominational churches, also with regard to the social responsibility of the state.

Fortunately, we have on this subject an excellent study by Sigrun Kahl of the German *Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies*, which she published in 2005 on “The Religious Roots of Modern Poverty Policy: Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed Protestant Traditions Compared” (Kahl, 2005: 91-126).

This study examines how support for the poor was and is implemented in Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed Christianity. Sigrun Kahl shows that the Christian obligation to support the poor “underlies modern social

assistance, but that it has played out in very different ways in societies according to the relative predominance of Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed Protestant religious heritages and that these patterns can be seen today in variations in social assistance and welfare-to-work policies in OECD countries” (Kahl, 2005: 91). The study aims to show “that reference to the social doctrines and poor relief systems of historically significant Christian denominations can help to answer a series of otherwise perplexing cross-national differences in poverty policy” (Kahl, 2005: 91).

Modern welfare states want to ensure that no impoverished citizen is left without help and support. To this end, almost all OECD (*Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development*) countries have set up a national and tax-financed safety net and a social welfare system. The study does, however, draw attention to major differences in how the social protection of citizens is implemented in individual countries. In 2005 (the year of the publication of Sigrun Kahl’s study), for example, Italy, Spain and Greece lacked such uniform and comprehensive state social security. France had only established such a system at the beginning of the 1990s. Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Germany, on the other hand, have each had a single comprehensive state social assistance program for some time. In France, the USA, Great Britain and Ireland (among others), on the other hand, there is no nationally uniform comprehensive social assistance program, but rather a large number of categorically very different support systems with many different social assistance offers. In Great Britain and the USA, individuals are considered responsible for their own poverty and the way out of poverty, whereas in the Scandinavian countries or in Germany this is seen as a state responsibility. The observations that countries with different Christian denominational traditions also take different approaches to supporting the poor in their societies could easily be multiplied.

The history of the welfare state is usually told as the history of increasing state responsibility for covering the most important social risks of life, namely through social security. Social security replaces the traditional – mostly religious – welfare of the poor, indeed builds on it. Only recently has the influence of religion – in Europe: of the Christian churches - been addressed in the literature on the development of the welfare state. Most of the attention in this literature is focused on Catholicism. However, at least three different religious or denominational concepts of support for the poor can be observed in Europe since the Reformation: a Catholic, a Lutheran and a Calvinist one. These were institutionalized in the countries in which

one of these denominations dominated. These concepts proved to be very stable and effective. They continue to shape the concepts for supporting the poor in the respective countries to this day.

In her study, Sigrun Kahl shows how various themes and motives intertwine in the establishment of forms of support for the poor and social welfare. For the Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist traditions of supporting the poor, for example, their understanding of salvation is relevant, as are their conceptions of work and non-work (begging), as well as their conception of state–church relations and their understanding of the state in general.

Even in post-Reformation Catholicism, believers were promised salvation not only because of their faith, but also because of their works of love for the poor. Unlike in Protestant areas, begging was not forbidden in Catholic areas and was accepted as normal; indeed, it was seen as an occasion for good works of love. Alms were only considered meritorious if they were given personally. By contrast, in Protestant areas, especially Lutheran ones, care for the poor was to a certain extent secularized: it became a state task. In Catholic countries, there was resistance to the transfer of charity from the church and believers to the state. In countries where poor relief was secularized and regulated by law, this was accompanied by two measures: the able-bodied poor were forced to work and the vagrants were expelled. All other poor were supported by the state (Lutheran) or by the Christian congregations (Reformed).

In Catholicism, the rich did have a moral obligation to do good deeds for the poor. However, the poor had no right to demand help. The Catholic hospital system was a mediator of both interests: it assured the donors salvation and guaranteed that the alms reached those in need. “In the tradition of Catholic *Caritas* and according to what came to be called the subsidiarity principle in the 20th century, helping the poor was a responsibility of the local Christian community and should arise from compassion rather than legal force through the state” (Kahl, 2005: 101).

In Lutheran Christianity, faith alone saved people and good works of love were irrelevant for salvation. It was also irrelevant for a person’s salvation what work they did. There was no work that was meritorious for salvation (such as being a priest or a nurse). Every work was equally good and important if it was done properly. The work of a poor person was just as important as the work of a wealthy craftsman. However, all these works were irrelevant to salvation. As mentioned earlier, Luther saw the support of the poor as a responsibility of princes and cities – i.e. the state – from the very beginning

of the Reformation. In addition, he had a highly positive understanding of work. For him, work was an intrinsically positive human activity that also pleased God. Moreover, he no longer regarded poverty and work as equal alternatives, but now saw work as a way to end poverty. As a consequence, poverty was equated with non-work and laziness. Work (i.e. *all* work) was also given moral and spiritual value through the concept of a profession – the vocation to a permanent competent activity.

In Lutheran doctrine, both the donor and the beggar lost their status compared to the Catholic view. They were all sinners. Even a generous donation could not save a person from this – just as a poor person was not justified simply because he or she lived in poverty. Luther rejected individual almsgiving. And beggars who were physically able to work were discredited. The state was supposed to protect society from them. On the other hand, the state should ensure that the truly needy received all the help they required. This last aspect led to the fact that, over time, such help could be demanded from the needy on the basis of legal entitlements under corresponding state laws.

This is another important aspect of the Lutheran concept of supporting the poor: it is realized in a uniform, egalitarian system of state social welfare based on legal rights. Luther advocated a ban on begging. At the same time, he considered the state and church authorities responsible for establishing a system to support the poor. The poor were to be registered and supported from the common chest, which was financed by weekly collections from the population and in church services. One effect of this was that the hospitals no longer had to look after the poor, but could concentrate on the sick and weak. Support for the poor, in turn, was concentrated on the truly needy (and honest and morally upright needy). The physically able-bodied poor should work. According to Luther, “it is not fitting that one man should live in idleness on another’s labor” (Luther, [1520] 1966: 190).

One implication of this system of state and church social welfare was a bureaucratic process of formal verification of need and entitlement. If the criteria were met, there was an entitlement to support according to need, number of children, lifestyle and household management.

With regard to the working poor, the Lutheran view that they should work was supplemented by the state’s responsibility to ensure that they also had the opportunity to work. Due to the positive view of work, the state had the responsibility to provide work for the poor and thus offer them the

opportunity not only to lead a contented and fulfilled life, but also to serve their fellow human beings with their work.

It is significant that the Lutheran system of poor relief was very soon secularized and centralized – not against the church, but with its support. “In Lutheran countries, responsibility of the state for poor relief was unquestioned and the secularization of social welfare was a smooth process. The common chest developed into poor taxes, to be collected and delivered by lay administrators” (Kahl, 205: 105). Each poor family was looked after by a poor relief official – who had to look after 15 to 20 families. “Lutheran countries were the pioneers of welfare legislation, starting in the late 19th century with the introduction of social insurance in Germany, which was motivated by Bismarck’s explicitly Lutheran notion of state activity” (Kahl, 205: 105f).

Interestingly, Catholics vehemently criticized this concept. They considered the Lutheran system to be too individualistic and at the same time irresponsible towards the poor. They saw state assistance for the poor and social insurance as jeopardizing the Christian duty to do good works of love, and they considered this to be a religious rather than a political matter.

Calvinist Protestantism intensified Luther’s understanding of work. Calvin made work an absolute duty. Work was of spiritual importance for its own sake and the best way to please God. Calvin also changed the conditions of work compared to Luther. In Lutheran Christianity, a sinner could always be sure of divine mercy if he humbly believed and trusted in Christ. In Calvinism, sinning was irreversible, as salvation had already been decided by divine predestination. However, there was complete uncertainty about this. Therefore, according to Calvin, only systematic and permanent self-discipline gave certainty about grace. The most reliable means of feeling this certainty was industrious, rational and disciplined work. It was no longer the poor and beggar who was close to God (as in Catholicism), but now the working person was seen as closest to God. Those who did not work were condemned, whether they were rich or poor. With the Calvinist work ethic, which aimed for perfection in everything one did, Calvinism stood in sharp contrast to the traditional slovenliness of the Catholic understanding of work. Thus, two theological concepts became relevant in Calvinism with regard to the poor: the doctrine of predestination and the work ethic in combination with individual responsibility. “The most certain mark of election was proving one’s faith in a worldly activity, and success in a worldly occupation and wealth became an absolute sign that one was saved by God

from the start, while poverty became the certain sign of damnation” (Kahl, 205: 107).

“The Calvinist creation of the Protestant work ethos and the strict and systematic requirements about what constitutes a life that increases the glory of God (e.g. personal responsibility, individualism, discipline, and asceticism) made poverty appear to be the punishment for laziness and sinful behavior. Good works were a necessary but not a sufficient sign of being chosen. Unlike the Catholic, the Calvinist could not buy his salvation by accumulating good works because only systematic self-control and restless work ensured salvation” (Kahl, 205: 107).

It is also important to note here that the doctrine of predestination meant that the political and ecclesiastical community had no positive responsibility for the poor. “Calvinist moralism implicated that the poor needed to be punished and corrected” (Kahl, 205: 107). Beggars and the poor were forced to work. One instrument for this view was the workhouses. The first of these – the Bridewell – was built in London in 1555. The workhouse was invented by reformed social reformers. A workhouse was intended to house poor people, especially beggars, and thus remove them from the public eye. At the same time, the labour of these people was used – later also for manufacturing production. You could also say that they were put to work. In return, they were provided for and supported. Work education was intended to help the poor escape poverty.

Like Catholicism, Calvinism also opposed the Lutheran concept of centralized and uniform state aid for the poor. Catholicism rejected this because it anonymized the donor–recipient relationship and did not guarantee that the truly needy received the alms. Calvinist Protestantism rejected the Lutheran concept because it saw it as making individuals poor. In the Lutheran concept of poor relief, the Reformed saw no incentive for the poor to adopt a working attitude and improve themselves in order to get out of poverty. It also made it impossible for the authorities to control the behaviour and living conditions of the poor.

According to the Calvinist view, public support for the poor should be limited to the absolute minimum. The Calvinist approach created two classes of work: work as a vocation for the elect and work as punishment and toil for the poor. Luther, on the other hand, had taught that all work was of equal value to God. According to the Reformed view, the state should largely stay out of caring for the poor. For Calvin, caring for the poor was a task for the church. “Church and private charities retained a key role in

the administration of poor relief. Private charity was part of proving and displaying election” (Kahl, 205: 110). This understanding still characterizes poor relief in Anglo-Saxon countries today.

The picture that emerges with regard to the support structure and generosity is that “Catholic and Reformed Protestant social assistance is fragmented and ungenerous, with different benefits for different groups of the poor. Lutheran social assistance is unitary and generous, with one uniform social assistance program” (Kahl, 205: 112). With regard to the relationship between social assistance and social insurance, “the Lutheran welfare states started early, and the Catholic and Reformed Protestant welfare states were late” (Kahl, 205: 112). The picture is different if we look only at state social assistance: “the Reformed Protestant states were early, the Lutheran states introduced social assistance late, while the Catholic states launched it very late or not at all” (Kahl, 205: 112).

At some point during the 20th century, most welfare states replaced welfare for the poor with modern social assistance programs. Nevertheless, the Christian denominational traditions regarding the support of the poor remain present in the various countries and continue to contribute to the profile of the respective state concepts of social insurance and social welfare.

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