

# The Protestant Ethic in Hungary

The Puritan Ethic and its Influence





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# I. The problem of the Protestant ethic

## 1. The problems of Weber's theory in case of Hungary

Despite the fact that Calvinists made up a majority<sup>1</sup> of Hungarian society at the end of 16<sup>th</sup> century, Hungary has generally not been included in the debate that has ensued from Weber's thesis, despite his reference to the Hungarian denominational statistics at the beginning of his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>2</sup>

Although it seems clear that Protestantism, and Calvinism in particular, has played an important role in the formation of the Hungarian nation and Hungarian national identity since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was also important in the political modernisation of the country at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* had already been translated into Hungarian by 1923,<sup>3</sup> seven years before the English edition. It is surprising that Weber's thesis has not been examined in the context of Hungary, a predominantly Reformed country at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Hungarians were more interested in the relationship between Calvin and capitalism but were less concerned with such problems of the Protestant ethic as the transvaluation of values and the roles of the calling ethic, rationalisation, and self-discipline in modern capitalism. However, the strong Protestant (mainly Calvinist) presence in Hungary but the weakness of capitalism here was an issue in the debate about Weber's thesis. It was also rather clear that Weber could not find an answer to this counter argument<sup>4</sup> The case of Hungarian Calvinism has been raised sporadically in the international literature,<sup>5</sup>

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1 At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the estimated rate of the protestants in Hungary is between 50–70 percent. See K. Petre, *Papok és nemesek. Magyar művelődéstörténeti tanulmányok a reformációval kezdődő másfél évszázadból* (Budapest: Ráday Gyűjtemény, 1995).

2 See for example St. K. Sanderson/A. Seth/K. R. Proctor, "Testing the Protestant Ethic Thesis with Quantitative Historical Data: A Research", *Social Forces*, 89, 3 (Mar. 2011) 905–11.

3 M. Weber, M., *A protestáns etika és a kapitalizmus szellemre*, translated by József Nagy (Budapest: Franklin-társulat, 1923); K. Zs. Nagy, "Max Weber protestáns etikájának recepciója a magyar református teológiában a második világháború előtt", in P. Berta (ed.): *Ethno-lore. A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Néprajzi Kutatóintézetének Évkönyve*. XXVI. (Budapest: MTA Néprajzi Kutatóintézet, 2009) XXVI, 239–61.

4 K.H. Fischer, "Kritische Beiträge zu Professor Max Webers Abhandlung 'Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus'", in J. Winckelmann (ed.), *Max Weber: Die protestantische Ethik II. Kritiken und Antikritiken* (Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1972) 11–26.

5 See W.S. Hudson, "The Weber Thesis Re-examined", *Church History* 30 (1961) 88–99.

J. Delacroix/F. Nielsen, "The Beloved Myth: Protestantism and the Rise of Industrial Capitalism in Nineteenth Century Europe", *Social Forces* 80, 2 (Dec. 2001) 509–53; G.S. Smith, "The Spirit

but Julianne Brandt<sup>6</sup> is perhaps the only non-Hungarian who has studied this story deeply.

Weber's reception was not unproblematic in Hungary during the socialist era. After the political changes in 1989 there was some reflection on the problem of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism,<sup>7</sup> but the mainstream was more interested in the history of Protestant piety literature.<sup>8</sup> The dominant discourse focused partly on the role of Protestantism in the Hungarian identity and in the rise of proto-nationalism,<sup>9</sup> partly on post-modern literary issues,<sup>10</sup> and partly on the cultural anthropology.<sup>11</sup>

The case of Hungary raises interesting questions for *The Protestant Ethic*: if there really was a relationship between Protestantism, or more precisely between the Puritan ethic, and the spirit of capitalism, what are its Hungarian bearings? Does Hungarian history support, contradict, or perhaps suggest a modification of Weber's assumptions? The majority of the population in Hungary was Protestant at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Despite Protestant dominance in 16<sup>th</sup> century Hungary and the strong presence of Protestants in the country even after the Counter-Reformation, economic and political modernisation started only in 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Protestant nobility played a major role in political modernisation, although the same cannot be said for economic modernisation.

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of Capitalism Revisited: Calvinists in the Industrial Revolution", *Journal of Presbyterian History* (1962–1985) 59, 4 (Winter 1981) 481–97; T. Dickson/H. McLachlan, "Scottish Capitalism and Weber's Protestant Ethic Thesis", *Sociology* 17, 4 (Nov. 1983) 560–8; G. Marshall, "The Dark Side of the Weber Thesis: The Case of Scotland", *The British Journal of Sociology* 31, 3, Special Issue. Aspects of Weberian Scholarship (Sep. 1980) 419–40.

6 J. Brandt, "Neue Literatur zu Sonderfomen der ungarische Protestantismus", *Südostforschungen* 57 (1998) 277–86.

7 See Gy. Kovács, *Protestantizmus és kapitalizmus: magyar gazdaság- és eszmetörténeti tanulságok* (Szeged: Ethelbert Stauffer Teológiai Kutató Intézet, 2011).

8 See K. Médea, *Istendicsőtés élettel és énekkel. A református spiritualitás forrásai* (Budapest: Kálvin János Kiadó, 2012) 264; É. Petrócz, *Fél-szentek és fél-poéták*. Budapest (Budapest: Balassi, 2002); G. Kecskeméti, *Prédikáció, retorika, irodalomtörténet* (Budapest: Universitas, 1998).

9 See L.J. Győri, "Református identitás és magyar irodalom", in *Református identitás és magyar irodalom* (Budapest: Kálvin Kiadó, 2015); Sz. Sziráki, *Nemzeti identitás és biblikus látásmód a XVII. század végéi Erdélyben*, PhD thesis (Budapest: PPKE, 2010).

10 See Zs. Tóth, *A koronatanú: Bethlen Miklós Az Élete leírása magától és a XVII. századi puritanizmus* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2007); Zs. Tóth, "EGOizmus. Az énreprezentáció mint én-performancia (self-fashioning) Bethlen Miklós emlékiratában", *Egyháztörténeti Szemle* 4, 2 (2003) 57–85; Zs. Tóth, *The portrait of a young man as a survivor: Mihály Cserei* (Budapest: CEU, 2007).

11 R. Kiss, *Egyház és közösség* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2012); R. Kiss, "Irányvonalak a református vallási néprajzi és mentalitástarténeti kutatások rendszerváltás utáni történetéből", in *A burgonyától a szilvafáig* (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Néprajzi Tanszék, 2012) 180–243.

Overall, in Hungary the Calvinists seem to have played a smaller role in economic modernisation than Catholics.

The presence of the spirit of capitalism as Weber described it is not obvious in Hungary, or at least has not been documented. Even if it did exist, it probably faded away.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber referred to some Hungarian statistics from this period, which showed a similar picture to the German data in his interpretation. In line with Offenbacher's work, Weber suggested that Hungarian Protestants of his age had a similar ethic and spirit to the Germans. (Some years later in 1907, in answer to his critics, he denied that the Protestant ethic had had the same effects on Hungary as on England.)<sup>12</sup>

Following the line of thought of his former student, Offenbacher<sup>13</sup> – who attempted to support Weber's observations on the denominational differences in the Elba region – Weber suggested that the Hungarian protestants had a similar ethic to that which he described in his ideal type. Like Offenbacher, Weber was primarily referring to the educational attitudes of the denominations. Weber's theory suggests that the Protestants were more educated than the Catholics and Lutherans (since the Protestant ethic was actually a 17<sup>th</sup> century Calvinist-Puritan ethic). A higher proportion of Protestants graduated in natural sciences and were more industrialised and more active in trade.<sup>14</sup>

However, the statistics of that age do not support this assertion. For instance, according to Béla Bartha,<sup>15</sup> in the 1880s 870 Roman Catholics, 620 Greek Catholics, 684 Greek Orthodox, 814 Calvinists, 987 Lutherans, 802 Unitarians and 798 Jews enrolled into schools out of 1000 school-aged children.

The religious distribution of students at grammar schools, schools specialised in natural sciences and girls' high schools in 1913 was:

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12 "It would be as absurd to think that Calvinism should have created capitalist forms of enterprise in a country with the geographic and cultural conditions of Hungary during the time of its periodic subjugation by the Turks as that it could have made coal seams form in the soil of Holland. In point of fact, Calvinism did have an effect in Hungary in its own way, although this was in a different field". Chalcraft, D.J./Harrington, A. (ed.), *The Protestant Ethic Debate. Max Weber's Replies to his Critics, 1907-1910* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001) 34.

13 M. Offenbacher, *Konfession und soziale Schichtung. Ein Studie über die wirtschaftliche Lage der Katholiken und Protestanten in Baden* (Tübingen–Leipzig: Mohr, 1900).

14 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London – New York: Routledge, 2005) 5. "With reference to the subsequent discussion it may further be noted as characteristic that in Hungary those affiliated with the Reformed Church exceed even the average Protestant record of attendance at secondary schools". M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 124.

15 B. Bartha, *Statisztikai tanulmányok a magyar protestantizmusról* (Budapest: Protestáns Szemle Különnyomtat, 1890).

	Roman Catholic	Greek Catholic	Reformed	Lutheran	Jewish	Other
Grammar schools	45.0	5.0	15.6	80.9	19.0	60.5
Science grammar schools	43.9	00.8	60.8	90.4	35.3	30.8
Girls' high schools	38.8	0.8	15.9	8.9	34.0	1.5
National rate	62.8	2.2	21.4	6.4	6.2	1.0

Examining the employment totals of the population or the numbers of owners of industrial plants with more than 20 people in 1930, the picture is the same. (See Table 1. and 2.)

	Roman Catholic	Reformed	Lutheran	Jewish	Other
Industrial entrepreneurs	33.4	6.6	7.5	51.3	0.2
National rate	64.9	20.9	6.1	5.1	3.0
Rate	0.5	0.3	1.2	10.0	0.07

Even without going into details of the denomination distributions, it is obvious that the statistics of Hungary do not prove the correlations presumed by Weber.<sup>16</sup> Weber drew his conclusions from education, the type of education, and from the ownership of capital on the extent to which particular denominations were affected by the spirit of capitalism. According to Weber, the higher rate of Protestants in technical schools and in the hard sciences showed the relationship of the spirit of capitalism to the Protestant ethic. According to the statistics, however, members of the Reformed Church – the major bearers of the Protestant ethic – were underrepresented even in the hard sciences.

I do not consider that this statistic disproves everything; I only intended to show the difficulties related to the education indicator and generally indicate that Weber's theory is problematic. The persuasive power of these statistics is questionable even according to Weber's theory – although he used them, nonetheless. Weber writes:

“Still less, naturally, do we maintain: that a conscious acceptance of these ethical maxims on the part of the individuals, entrepreneurs or laborers in modern capitalistic enterprises, is a condition of the further existence of present-day capitalism. The capitalistic economy of the present day is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which

<sup>16</sup> See J. Brandt, “Zum reformierten Konzept der Arbeit in Ungarn im 19. Jahrhundert”, *Hungarian Studies*, 18, 1 (Oct. 2004) 39–62; J. Brandt, Felekezetiség és modern nemzet a 19. századi Magyarországon, in *Felekezeti társadalom – felekezeti műveltség* (Budapest: Hajnal István Kör – Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület, 2013) 9–26.

he must live. It forces the individual, in so far as he is involved in the system of market relationships, to conform to capitalistic rules of action. Thus, the capitalism of today, which has come to dominate economic life, educates, and selects the economic subjects which it needs through a process of economic survival of the fittest".<sup>17</sup>

According to this logic, in today's capitalism there is no need for the spirit of capitalism and the effect of the protestant ethic. They do not exist any longer. Weber worded it even more clearly at the end of the essay:

"Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history. Today the spirit of religious asceticism – whether finally, who knows? – has escaped from the cage. But victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer. The rosy blush of its laughing heir, the Enlightenment, seems also to be irretrievably fading, and the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs. Where the fulfilment of the calling cannot directly be related to the highest spiritual and cultural values, or when, on the other hand, it need not be felt simply as economic compulsion, the individual generally abandons the attempt to justify it at all".<sup>18</sup>

Weber's opinion can clearly be seen from these two passages: there is no need for the calling, ethic, or asceticism in today's capitalism, and they have already evaporated from capitalist society which having come to dominate the world is able to operate without this ethic and without the spirit of capitalism. Here he seems to agree with Thomas Carlyle's romantic criticism of modern capitalism.<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that Bell famously differed on this, arguing that the lack of this ethic is precisely the reason for the cultural crisis of today's capitalism: the calling and work ethic have faded and hedonism has come to the fore instead, which is not able to operate the economy, factories or institutions.<sup>20</sup> The above quotations seem to show that for Weber the existence of the spirit of capitalism and the Protestant ethic are not necessary in the capitalism of today. He seems to be at least ambiguous about this presence of the spirit of capitalism in his age. However, the statistics of today on this are not conclusive. That is why I have argued that the statistics for Weber are only illustrative and not evidence. If the spirit of capitalism

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17 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 19.

18 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 287.

19 See "It is by tangible, material considerations that we are guided, not by inward and spiritual". Carlyle, "Signs of the Time", in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (New York: Belford, Clarke and Co. 1900) 78.

20 D. Bell, *Cultural Contradiction of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

and the calling ethic had already dissipated from the capitalism of Weber's age, then the denominational statistics of Weber's age cannot prove anything about the connection between the spirit of capitalism and the Protestant ethic. Therefore, in using the above statistics I wish only to draw attention to the problematic aspects of Weber's theory.

The Hungarian situation highlights the importance of the historical and social context. This does not deviate greatly from Weber, since he also emphasised these in his works. It would be a misreading to ascribe to him a greater attention to religion than to the historical-social factors.

There are several possible reasons why the Hungarian situation does not conform to Weber's thesis.

1) Hungarian Protestantism, more precisely Puritanism, was different from its English counterpart. The reason for this difference might be the different features of English and Hungarian society, which pushed the religious movement in different directions. By this I mean interests in a broad sense, not only economic interests but also religious and political interests.

It is obvious that in one context certain elements of a religious movement will prevail while others fade away, while in another context different outcomes are possible. (This was evident in the case of the English Puritanism.)

If social development had a much greater role in the creation of the spirit of capitalism, then this spirit can be less attributed to Protestantism.

2) Another possibility stems from the fact that Weber did not describe the process through which the Protestant ethic transformed into the spirit of capitalism. He was content with the account that they included the same elements, and so consequently they were bound to each other. However, he only presumed the psychological and social process of the transformation.

Thus, it is possible that the Protestant ethic did not become the spirit of capitalism through a self-evident process, which *had to* occur. The question is what role the social-cultural-economic heritage, conflicts, and processes of a given region played in this transformation.

It is possible that even though the Protestant ethic was present in Hungary, it could not transform into the spirit of capitalism due to an unfavourable environment. Here and in the next case the issue is the historic change of social conditions. Although favourable factors were able to create and nurture the Protestant ethic in the 16–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, it is probable that the transformation of the Protestant ethic was hindered by the Catholic revival in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the establishment of the Baroque state, the social-political consequences of the consolidation of Hungary in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the different mode of Hungarian economic development.

3) A third possibility can also be explained by the above. This possibility is that the same Protestant ethic which was present in England and Germany also

emerged in Hungary, and the spirit of capitalism appeared there too. Thus, the former transformed into the latter, but then faded away due to unfavourable environmental conditions, or rather it was unable to spread and grow. It is also possible that both the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism continued to exist in isolation without spreading to the wider society and transforming it. This cultural isolation would have made it impossible for the spirit of capitalism to reform the country in its own image. Due to the possibility of such an isolation my empirical research not only had to prove the existence of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism but also their prevalence.

- 4) The possibilities listed so far limit Weber theory's as it has spread to the social sciences. According to the mainstream interpretation, Weber unequivocally accorded special importance to religion over all other social factors.<sup>21</sup> The fourth possibility is that this version of his theory is wrong; it simply does not correspond to the real historical situation. Such a Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism might not have existed in England at all, or even if they did exist there may have been no relationship between them as Weber envisaged (i. e. the latter did not develop from the former).

This outcome is possible because not even Weber was able to prove the historical relationship between the two phenomena. Before his essay was published it was already a widely accepted view that there was a relationship between Protestantism (and heresy in general) and financial success. Weber added to this intellectual tradition not by proving the relationship empirically but by explaining it in a new way. He was able to do so because in mostly protestant Germany, Baxter was a really popular, widely read author at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> At that time his works appeared quite often in German, and he was definitely very popular in Weber's Protestant civil environment. This

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21 Obviously, this interpretation is mistaken. There are numberless examples where Weber formed this thesis in a more balanced way: "For we are merely attempting to clarify the part which religious forces have played in forming the developing web of our specifically worldly modern culture, in the complex interaction of innumerable different historical factors ... On the other hand, however, we have no intention whatever of maintaining such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism (in the provisional sense of the term explained above) could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation, or even that capitalism as an economic system is a creation of the Reformation. In itself, the fact that certain important forms of capitalistic business organisation are known to be considerably older than the Reformation is a sufficient refutation of such a claim. On the contrary, we only wish to ascertain whether and to what extent religious forces have taken part in the qualitative formation and the quantitative expansion of that spirit over the world". M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 49.

22 Baxter was in print in German speaking countries through the 19<sup>th</sup> century: R. Baxter, *Die ewige Ruhe der Heiligen* (Leipzig: Theophil Georgi, 1733; Berlin, 1838, 1840, 1856, 1863, 1867, 1873, 1890, 1959).

Baxter-renaissance in Germany does not, however, mean that Baxter was equally popular in 17–18<sup>th</sup> century England, and it does not mean that the spirit of capitalism – which was clearly strong in the Germany of that age – developed from Baxter's ethics.

5) It is a further possibility that in Hungary, due to the local development of religion and society, religiosity was at a lower level than in England. Hungarian believers were less interested in the different aspects of religion, thus the activity directing normative effect of the religion could have been much weaker than in England. Consequently, it may be conceivable that the Protestant ethic might be found, but since religion in general had a weaker influence on the behaviour of Hungarians, the Protestant ethic did not manage to substantially influence the majority of the believers' way of thinking and activities either. Weber seems to share the dominant modernist prejudice that premodern peoples were much more religious, and that religion governed their lives much more than today. He wrote: "The magical and religious forces, and the ethical ideas of duty based upon them, have in the past always been among the most important formative influences on conduct".<sup>23</sup>

The present book wishes to address the transformative capacity of religion and the lessons of the Hungarian Puritans in the context of the Protestant ethic debate. To achieve this aim I will proceed as follows:

First of all, I will present the clear and simplified patterns: the ideal types of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism to apply them for the Hungarian sources.

Then, I will look for the elements of the Protestant ethic ideal type in the printed books of the Hungarian Puritans. Weber analysed the Protestant ethic not among Protestants in general but among English neo-Calvinists in particular, focusing especially on the works of Richard Baxter. His ideal type of the Protestant ethic was based on Baxter's book, although it is clear that, however significant the preacher was, he did not belong to the mainstream of Protestantism – and hence was not characteristic of it. Yet the ideal type of the Protestant ethic may have actually been the most widespread among the Puritans, as Weber also stated. Weber stated that the Protestant ethic was strongest in Puritanism, and was also strong in pietism, baptism and Methodism.

It is reasonable to suppose that in the Hungarian Baptist, orthodox Calvinist, and Lutheran denominations this ethic could be found to a lesser degree, or more weakly than among the Puritans. If elements of the Protestant ethic were present it is more likely to have been among Puritans in Hungary. Therefore, I use the

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23 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* XXIX.

books labelled by the relevant Hungarian historical works as Puritan. Without clear membership and identity, the boundary of the Hungarian Puritan movement can be debated, but there is a rather general consent among Hungarian historians about this labelling. For example, Bayly's *Praxis Pietatis* translated by Pál Medgyesi is generally regarded as Puritan work in the Hungarian context.

Before starting to examine Hungarian Puritanism, I had to make an important decision. From the historic-sociological point of view, religious literature may have had an influence on people's thinking and activities. These books, besides sermons, include catechisms, advice, and conduct books, such as Baxter's books. Contemplations, consultative papers, and theological tracts fall outside the scope of my interest because these were read only by a close circle. For studying religious history this kind of literature is important, but this is not the focus of this study. In any case, Hungarian Puritans produced mainly practical theology, that is, conduct books and sermons.

Ideally it would be better to choose the most popular publications within this genre, but sources from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on which works were the most popular are not available. I can only judge the popularity of some books on the frequency of their publication. Bayly's *Praxis Pietatis* by Pál Medgyesi and the *Keskeny út* [The Narrow Way] by Imre Pápai Páriz are likely to have been renowned in that the former was published nine times, and the latter seven times in that century alone. Even though examining more works than these is necessary to gain a sufficient overview of Puritanism in Hungary, these have to be considered particularly studiously.

The *Praxis Pietatis* raises a new problem. How do we judge translations? There are a great number of translations from English in the Hungarian Puritan literature, including advice books, and books that were compiled from several authors. The task with the latter works is somewhat easier. Although they originally had English authors, we can consider them part of Hungarian Puritan literature because they are works in and of themselves, and the style of compilation was characteristic of Hungarian Puritanism. The same could be said about translations like the *Praxis Pietatis*.

There might be more serious objections to the translations of William Perkins, William Ames, etc., in that these translations do not characterise Hungarian Puritanism but its English variant. The solution to this dilemma is similar, however. The choice of which works or sections were translated into Hungarian reveals the character of Hungarian Puritanism in and of itself. I can state this because these translations fit the pattern of other Hungarian Puritan works. In content they do not differ markedly. What is noticeable regarding the translations is that there are a higher proportion of translations of advice books than in originally Hungarian Puritan literature. As such, it seems that there was a demand for this type of books. The two most popular books, *Praxis Pietatis* and *Keskeny út* [The Narrow Way],

were advice books, the demand for which the Hungarian Puritans could not satisfy themselves, so they turned to English translations. Thus, there is no need to distinguish between the translations, adaptations, “selected” works and original Hungarian Puritan works.

However, serious scholarly research should not be satisfied with only analysing certain representative texts, even if they are enough to illustrate an ideal type. I am not only interested in whether the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism emerged in Hungary, but also in how much they were spread and how much they characterised people’s way of thinking and daily life. I will thus analyse the *most widely-available* texts which aimed to directly influence people’s thinking and activity (preaching, conduct books, books of advice), as well as personal documents that are direct evidence of individuals or certain groups’ thoughts and activities (letters, diaries). As this last type of source may only throw light on the literate people of the age, I will also include visitation records of the Reformed Church of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which contain extensive information about the life of common people.

Finally, I’ll try to assess the intensity of religious interest among Hungarian Reformed people to esteem the transforming capacity of Puritan (or Calvinist) ideas. Whether or not the Protestant ethic was present in the Hungarian religious literature and to what extent is only one aspect of this research. The other side is how strong this way of thinking was in people’s minds and how much it influenced their lives. It is easier to answer the first question; the latter is more difficult, because few personal resources have remained due to the passage of time, whereas the majority of the religious literature is still available. Besides this, the existing personal documents give a picture of only a certain layer. Where literacy did not exist – for instance among the petite bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie in the countryside – such documents did not even exist.

It was due to this difficulty and the problems of comprehensively processing such documents that Weber, and many other scholars, examined only certain representative books and persons. This is enough to create an ideal type, but not to examine its heuristical relevance. This does not mean that the books examined so far ought to be dismissed, but we do have to go further. I consider an overview of the religious literature to be only an initial phase, but the elaboration of some trends is necessary.

The aim of this book is not to falsify or verify Weber. I hope to simplify these ideal types for empirical research, but empirical research as such cannot refute or support any ideal type. By definition an ideal type does not exist in reality. Nevertheless, even if one accepts that an ideal type can exist only as a hermeneutic device, it can still be expected to help to understand historical experience. There-

fore, the confrontation of an ideal type with historical experience is not irrelevant.<sup>24</sup>

My aim, besides a historian's interest to understand the character of the Puritan ideas in Hungary, is to contribute to the debate on the motivating and transforming effects of ideas. The Calvinist theology just like the Puritan ideas obviously did not emerge in Hungary, they were imported. These examples of cultural diffusion may point to inherent issues of the transforming capacity of ideas, like the selective reception and reinterpretation of borrowed ideas, and their motivating force coming from their intensity.

## 2. The two ideal types

Weber's theory of the Protestant ethic includes actually two ideal types: the spirit of capitalism and the Protestant ethic. However, instead of tracing the historical relationship between the two ideal types, he demonstrated the structural similarities between them. Weber was satisfied with saying that "the essential elements of the attitude which was there called the spirit of capitalism are the same as what we have just shown to be the content of the Puritan worldly asceticism".<sup>25</sup> As we have seen in Weber's theory, the statistical relationship by itself is only illustrative. Besides this he uses historical evidence (the Puritans appeared in New England earlier, then the Puritan areas became more capitalist than the southern Anglican areas) as well as geographical evidence. The geographical evidence is twofold: in German areas with a mixture of religions, according to Weber, the Protestant areas became capitalist first, while in Europe the Protestant countries were the first. Weber did not, however, provide evidence as to how the Protestant ethic transformed into the spirit of capitalism, nor did he even describe this transformation. He simply wrote that the spirit of capitalism is without "the religious basis, which by Franklin's time had died away".<sup>26</sup> Examining the content of these two ideal types will be instructive when deciding what aspects of the history of Hungarian Protestantism to investigate.

For Weber, Capitalism is essentially the fulfilment of demand by goods produced through enterprises. The aim in capitalism is to obtain the greatest possible profit that is continuously renewed, through "free" wage work and the rational organisation of production. Modern capitalism is characterised by rational operation, where rationality means calculation, preparing balances, and the planning of risk and

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24 J. Delacroix/F. Nielsen "The Beloved Myth: Protestantism and the Rise of Industrial Capitalism in Nineteenth Century Europe", *Social Forces* 80, 2 (Dec. 2001) 509–53.

25 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 123.

26 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 123.

profit. This rational operation is complemented by the spirit of capitalism, although this is not the same as the eternal and ubiquitous pure desire for profit in the form of predatory capitalism, long-distance trade, state publicans and monopolies.<sup>27</sup>

“The impulse to acquisition, pursuit of gain, of money, of the greatest possible amount of money, has in itself nothing to do with capitalism. This impulse exists and has existed among waiters, physicians, coachmen, artists, prostitutes, dishonest officials, soldiers, nobles, crusaders, gamblers, and beggars. One may say that it has been common to all sorts and conditions of men at all times and in all countries of the earth, wherever the objective possibility of it is or has been given. It should be taught in the kindergarten of cultural history that this naïve idea of capitalism must be given up once and for all. Unlimited greed for gain is not in the least identical with capitalism and is still less its spirit. Capitalism may even be identical with the restraint, or at least a rational tempering, of this irrational impulse. But capitalism is identical with the pursuit of profit, and forever renewed profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise”<sup>28</sup>

Venture capitalism was not modern at all according to Weber, it exists everywhere, so its emergence was not really interesting to him. It does not help to understand the emergence of modern – that is Anglo-Saxon – capitalism.<sup>29</sup> According to Weber’s ideal type, the spirit of capitalism is the mind that seeks legal profit professionally, regularly and rationally. Weber found a prime example of this in two advice books by Benjamin Franklin.<sup>30</sup>

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27 M. Weber, *General Economic History* (New York: Collier Books, 1961).

28 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* XXXII.

29 “Capitalistic acquisition as an adventure has been at home in all types of economic society which have known trade with the use of money and which have offered it opportunities, through *commenda*, farming of taxes, State loans, financing of wars, ducal courts and office-holders. Likewise, the inner attitude of the adventurer, which laughs at all ethical limitations, has been universal. Absolute and conscious ruthlessness in acquisition has often stood in the closest connection with the strictest conformity to tradition”. M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 22.

30 Even if Weber promised a definition of the spirit of capitalism, he never described it, although he used an implicit definition, illustrated by Benjamin Franklin. See B. Franklin, “Necessary Hints to Those that Would Be Rich” (1736) and “Advice to a Young Tradesman” (1748), in *The Works of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904) II *Letters and Misc. Writings 1735–1753*.

“Remember that Time is Money. He that can earn Ten Shillings a Day by his Labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that Day, tho’ he spends but Sixpence during his Diversion or Idleness, ought not to reckon That the only Expence; he has really spent or rather thrown away Five Shillings besides.

Remember that Credit is Money. If a Man lets his Money lie in my Hands after it is due, he gives me the Interest, or so much as I can make of it during that Time. This amounts to a considerable Sum where a Man has good and large Credit, and makes good Use of it.

The ideal type based on Franklin's text includes three elements. First, one's calling. This was, as Weber put it, "above all the idea of a duty of the individual toward the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end in itself"<sup>31</sup> Weber went on to say "one's duty in a calling, is what is most characteristic of the social ethic of capitalistic culture, and is in a sense the fundamental basis of it. It is an obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, no matter in what it consists, in particular no matter whether it appears on the surface as a utilisation of his personal powers, or only of his material possessions (as capital)"<sup>32</sup> The ethic of a calling meant carrying out certain tasks and duties in an impersonal way, subordinated to a cause (for Protestants the glory of God.) The continuous making of money, the increase and extension of enterprise, is a

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Remember that Money is of a prolific generating Nature. Money can beget Money, and its Offspring can beget more, and so on. Five Shillings turn'd, is Six: Turn'd again, 'tis Seven and Three Pence; and so on 'til it becomes an Hundred Pound. The more there is of it, the more it produces every Turning, so that the Profits rise quicker and quicker. He that kills a breeding Sow, destroys all her Offspring to the thousandth Generation. He that murders a Crown, destroys all it might have produc'd, even Scores of Pounds.

Remember that Six Pounds a Year is but a Groat a Day. For this little Sum (which may be daily wasted either in Time or Expence unperceiv'd) a Man of Credit may on his own Security have the constant Possession and Use of an Hundred Pounds. So much in Stock briskly turn'd by an industrious Man, produces great Advantage ...

The most trifling Actions that affect a Man's Credit, are to be regarded. The Sound of your Hammer at Five in the Morning or Nine at Night, heard by a Creditor, makes him easy Six Months longer. But if he sees you at a Billiard Table, or hears your Voice in a Tavern, when you should be at Work, he sends for his Money the next Day. Finer Cloaths than he or his Wife wears, or greater Expence in any particular than he affords himself, shocks his Pride, and he duns you to humble you. Creditors are a kind of People, that have the sharpest Eyes and Ears, as well as the best Memories of any in the World ...

Beware of thinking all your own that you possess, and of living accordingly. 'Tis a Mistake that many People who have Credit fall into. To prevent this, keep an exact Account for some Time of both your Expences and your Incomes. If you take the Pains at first to mention Particulars, it will have this good Effect; you will discover how wonderfully small trifling Expences mount up to large Sums, and will discern what might have been, and may for the future be saved, without occasioning any great Inconvenience.

In short, the Way to Wealth, if you desire it, is as plain as the Way to Market. It depends chiefly on two Words, Industry and Frugality; i. e. Waste neither Time nor Money, but make the best Use of both. He that gets all he can honestly, and saves all he gets (necessary Expences excepted) will certainly become Rich; If that Being who governs the World, to whom all should look for a Blessing on their honest Endeavours, doth not in his wise Providence otherwise determine".

Although Dickson and McLahlan have challenged Weber's interpretation of Franklin, their study seems to support him. (T. Dickson/H.V. McLachlan, "In Search of 'The Spirit of Capitalism': Weber's Misinterpretation of Franklin", *Sociology* 23 (1989) 81–9.

31 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 17.

32 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 19.

moral obligation in the spirit of capitalism. It is important to note that in Weber's ideal type making money is a moral obligation rather than serving the individual's hedonism or his enjoyment of consumption. Weber was later to change his mind, describing the capitalist ethic of his age pessimistically as based on ambition and the narrow-minded pursuit of profit.<sup>33</sup>

The second element of the ideal type is the ascetic lifestyle, the *Bürgergeist*, which complements the calling. This involves a rational life based on self-discipline, a systematic lifestyle, and following the rules. The spirit of capitalism is characterised by time management, a regular lifestyle ("Time is money"), saving, honesty, diligence, and temperance in everything.<sup>34</sup> A capitalist living in this way "gets nothing out of his wealth for himself, except the irrational sense of having done his job well".<sup>35</sup> These two elements – the calling ethic and the self-disciplined lifestyle – in the ideal type fuse together into a special world-transforming form of individualism, which aims to rationally transform the world, making regular and rational money making a moral obligation for the entrepreneur. Asceticism and the calling ethic make one's whole life rationally disciplined in the interest of the spirit of capitalism and economic activity, which is considered an objective in itself.<sup>36</sup>

The third element of the ideal type of the spirit of capitalism is the moral obligation to follow the calling ethic and asceticism. The entrepreneur was forced to carry out his calling and maintain his asceticism by recommended moral force conceived as an ideal. This part of the ideal type is less developed by Weber. This was probably, his biographers tend to imply, because the morally obligatory character of this ideal type was more evident in Weber's family relations than in capitalist literature. He did not provide historical evidence for the existence of the spirit of capitalism

33 M. Weber, *General Economic* 270.

34 This type of behaviour makes the man credible and accepted in business life. That is why it is useful if he behaves like this and gains a "symbolic capital" through this behaviour, which is difficult to obtain but easy to forfeit. The necessity of this kind of symbolic capital was mentioned by Weber also in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, but especially in his essay of *The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1094).

35 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 33.

36 Asceticism was the counterpoint of Sombart's emphasis on luxury. Luxury, a deadly sin in Medieval Christian moral thinking, lost its moral relevance in Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988), and it became the source of republican anxiety in the 18th century for those who considered simplicity as the bulwark of republican virtues. Sombart, in his *Der Moderne Kapitalismus* (Berlin: Die vorkapitalistische Wirtschaft, 1969) argued that luxury helped the emergence of capitalism. This mentality characterised the captains of capitalism, but not asceticism. After the publication of Weber's essays on Protestant ethic where asceticism was emphasised, Sombart dedicated a whole volume to the connection between luxury and capitalism. (*Luxus und Kapitalismus*. München: Duncker und Humblot, 1913.) This debate on the role of luxury (consumption) and asceticism re-emerged in Bell's *Cultural Contradiction of Capitalism*, where Bell accepted Weber's assumption concerning the importance of asceticism.