

IV. THE ISLAMIC ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

A) THE ISLAMIC ETHIC

There is no question that Weber is weakest when interpreting the dominant ethic of Islam. It will be my task not only to show that this is the case, but to also show that there is a strong case to be made for the crucial importance of Islam as a prophetic, this-worldly, and salvation-oriented religion with positive implications of the activities of commerce and the rise of a merchant class in the early period of the Islamic civilization. Weber did not have access to factual information about the religious doctrines of Islam. In my view, to understand the relationship between Islam and rational capitalism one must start by seriously examining its doctrines and by attempting to reconstruct early Islam in its own terms.

Following Weber's methodology, I will attempt to describe the religious dogma of Islam and the ethical requirements they entail on the Muslim faithful. In particular, I will consider the Islamic doctrines of God's transcendence and predestination for they, according to Weber, play the crucial role in generating the Calvinistic ethical attitude of "inner-worldly asceticism."

Having its roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Islam's conception of God is monotheistic which admits to God no other gods, companions or partners. The doctrine of God's transcendence is fundamental to the Islamic faith. Accordingly, God in His creation of our world has separated Himself from it in

such a way that none of his creatures has access to him or his knowledge:⁷⁷

No vision can grasp him but his grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension yet is acquainted with all things.

Not only is God transcendent but he is also omnipotent and omniscient in such a way that our world does not exist independently of him:⁷⁸

Seest thou not that God doth know (all) that is in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret consultation between three, but he makes the fourth among them.

The relation between the Muslim and his creator is direct and personal, requiring no intermediary. Similar to Calvinism, Islam rejects the use of all visual, magical and musical aids in worshipping God.

Earlier, we showed how Weber attributed fatalistic and mystical tendencies to the Islamic doctrine of predestination. In fact, Weber asserted that Islam never possessed a "complete" doctrine of predestination. The Islamic doctrine of predestination is similar to and different from that of Calvinism but it is central to the belief of any Muslim.

As in Calvinism, Islam separates celestial affairs, which are attributes of God, from human temporal matters and Islam insists on the faithful's acting within the temporal realm.⁷⁹ The decree of the divine rests concealed from man who has no

influence on this decree. But Islam postulates no predetermined decree by God on the salvation of the individual. In other words, it is man's duty to never despair after a failure but to rather try again and again.⁸⁰ Even with respect to the most important concern of all--salvation--Islam contends that it is the individual who ultimately determines his own fate through his actions in this world:⁸¹

Every man's fate we have fastened on his own neck: on the day of Judgment we shall bring out for him a scroll which he will see spread open. . .

For the Calvinist faithful, the tension produced by God's unknown decree created in him the urge to prove his salvation by mastering the world just as God would. On the other hand, Islam assigns no predetermined decree to God with regards to one's salvation. Islam clearly establishes that the only way to attain salvation is by earning this salvation through mastery of one's own world:⁸²

O ye who believe shall I lead you to a bargain that will save you from a grievous penalty?; That ye believe in God and his apostle, and that ye strive (your utmost) in the cause of ALLAH, with your property and your person...

The Calvinist masters his world on behalf of God because of the tension produced in him due to God's unknown decree regarding his salvation. Islam, on the other hand, establishes clearly that man is God's representative in this world, i.e., the master

acting on God's behalf in this world:⁸³

It is He who hath made you (His) agents,
inheritors of the earth: he hath raised you
in ranks.

In many verses of the Quran, the holy book of Islam, we find it stated plainly and definitely that, all that is found on earth and sea has been created by God for the benefit of man both spiritually and materially.⁸⁴

A natural question arises at this point. Putting the question in Weber's own terms: Is the Muslim who is acting on behalf of God, this-worldly oriented or other-worldly oriented? Earlier, Weber had established that the Calvinist outlook is this-worldly since no spiritual or ritual behavior can alter God's unknown decree concerning his salvation. Of course, the Calvinist, in his material pursuits, is to be morally guided, honest, trustworthy and credible, as goes Franklin's advice.

For the Muslim, his attitude in this world is characterized by both this-worldly and other-worldly orientations. The Arabic term referring to this outlook is "Falah," a comprehensive term denoting the combined welfare and success of this life, as well as that of the other life, and salvation in it:⁸⁵

Rightly pursued, the same way of life leads
to the welfare of the two spans of life,
there being no conflict in the genuine
interest of the worldly life and the
hereafter.

The Muslim's attitude is this-worldly in the sense that his salvation is a function of what he does in this world. This world gives him his chance to prove his salvation by earning it. The ultimate effect of his behavior is other-worldly. That is to say the Muslim is other-worldly because he seeks other-worldly ends, namely his Falah. To achieve Falah, one's social, personal, and economic activities must be morally guided. Of particular importance to our discussion is the material component or economic aspect of this-worldliness to which I will now turn the discussion.

Because a Muslim's Falah (salvation) ultimately rests on his own behavior, his ethical posture and relationship with God, many, including Weber, have attributed an attitude of world-rejection and strict mysticism to Islam. After all, living a spiritual life and renouncing this-worldly materialism sounds like a sure way to attain the blessings and pleasures of the Lord.

Fortunately, Islam takes a very strong stand against fatalism and world-rejection:⁸⁶

Material well-being is an essential constituent of Falah. . .that Islam encourages productive efforts is a fact beyond all doubts. On occasions--and they are numerous--Islam pronounces productivity almost a duty.

Strict asceticism, passivity towards material well-being and world rejection are strongly discouraged by God:

But monasticism they invented. We ordained
it not for them.⁸⁷

Say: Who hath forbidden the adornment of
ALLAH which he hath brought forth for his
bondsmen, and the good thing of his
providing.⁸⁸

In fact, Islam looks upon diligence in lawful callings,
especially economic ones, with great importance. The Quran
repeatedly stresses the fact that all natural resources have been
created by God with the purpose of providing man with unlimited
possibilities for satisfying his wants:

And we have given you power in the earth and
appointed for you therein a livelihood.⁸⁹

He it is who has made earth subservient unto
you so walk in the paths thereof and eat of
his providence.⁹⁰

Time and again Islam exhorts man to strive to earn his
livelihood, and to exert himself in the production and exchange
of useful goods:

And when the prayer is ended, then disperse
in the land and seek of ALLAH's bounty.⁹¹

And others travel in the land in search of ALLAH's
bounty.⁹²

But if striving to make a living, to accumulate wealth,
is not only allowed but also encouraged, what stand does Islam
take regarding the fruits of one's "mundane calling?" The

Calvinist ethical posture toward his wealth was one of guarding against any tendencies for spontaneous enjoyment and luxurious extravagance. Islam takes a very similar stand that is emphasized in the Quranic scriptures:

And eat and drink, but be not prodigal, lo! He loveth not the prodigals.⁹³

And squander not (thy wealth) in wantonness.
Lo! The squanderers were ever brothers of
the devil.⁹⁴

The Quran uses very strong language in condemning the role of the luxurious classes in history. A Muslim should neither be strictly ascetic nor excessively indulgent. Within limits he is free to supply himself with necessities, comforts and luxuries. After that limit, consumption will turn into extravagance and it should be stopped.

An important ethical posture attributed to Calvinism was individualism. Because the Calvinist is aware of God's decree which implied that any of his family members and friends may be among the damned, he maintains an individualistic attitude toward them. Islam calls for unity and cooperation among the faithful because it serves the interest of all to collectively work to attain salvation. This cooperation is emphasized in all aspects of Muslim life: the social, spiritual and economic.

Still, "the populism of the Shari'ah (Islamic law)" was also, like Calvinism, individualistic; it emphasized private initiative, not state intervention, as have some forms of

populism. Marshal Hodgson further notes:⁹⁵

But it was exceptionally systematic in its individualism. The Shani'ah (Islamic law) emphasized individual and equal social responsibility for all things... It disallowed any cooperative institutions which would limit an individual's responsibility.

Al-Maududi argues that in the view of Islam, it is the individual whose role is crucial not the society. "The individual is not meant to serve society, it is society which should ultimately serve the individual."⁹⁶

B) THE RISE OF THE BOURGEOISIE IN EARLY ISLAMIC TIMES

Although my selection of scriptural evidence has been selective and brief, I believe I have made my point clear. The Islamic scriptures (Quran) contain an ethic which I, like many others, find very compatible with that of Calvinism.⁹⁷ In Weber's terms, this ethic can be described as ethical-rational in that it called for a balanced spiritual and material life; inner-worldly ascetic in that it deplored excessive indulgence in luxuries, and activist in that it regarded diligence in worldly calling as a duty. This ethic was even specific with respect to the encouragement of business activities. The major difference which I see between the Islamic ethic and the Protestant is that while in Calvinism the ethical posture was an indirect consequence of the religious dogma, in Islam the ethical posture was directly ordered.

Still, much of my treatment is theoretical. With no rational capitalism in Muslim societies, I do not have a phenomenon whose genesis I can trace back to the working of the Islamic ethic, as Weber sought to explain modern capitalism which had developed in front of his eyes. Yet, I claim that the Islamic ethic did have a lot of practical implications. In particular, I argue that the Islamic ethic is responsible for the rise of the bourgeois class in the early era of the Muslim civilization. This class developed slowly during the first one hundred and fifty years of the Muslim era and asserted itself as the most important socio-economic factor during the fourth century of Muslim dynasties. It is to this merchant class that I will turn the discussion. Representative biographies of Muslims from this period will be the main source of information.

The original setting of prophet Mohamed's prophecy was seventh century Mecca, a religious and commercial center at the intersection of desert caravan routes.⁹⁸ The period preceding the prophet's call to Islam appears to have been one of great prosperity due to the increase in the volume of trade resulting from the diversion of trade routes to the desert and away from fields of battle between the Roman and Persian empires. Prior to this time, the main source of social organization within the city was still tribal and kinship based. As a result of this trade expansion, class formations and interest groups began to

emerge which cut across kinship lines.⁹⁹

The rich merchants were exploiting and oppressing the weak and poor kin. These merchants also formed associations to protect their interests. The weaker and smaller merchants formed counter-associations of their own. The prophet and many of his followers were members of these smaller associations.¹⁰⁰ The Meccan milieu, then, of prophet Mohamed and his followers was a business milieu. It is not surprising, therefore, that the language of the Quran is rich with commercial terminology--particularly that described in the previous section which encourages trade. Even when the prophet and his followers migrated to Medina they continued to engage in trade. "Pilgrimage to Mecca was seen as an opportunity to do business: this practice has continued through the present date."¹⁰¹

Following the call to Islam by the prophet, his message contained many ethical teachings with relevance to trade and commerce. In a fashion similar to that in the development of Calvin's morality in the life of early European entrepreneurs, the message of the prophet gave ethical significance to merchant life as well as outlining a proper orientation in doing business. The message sanctioned honest gain through trade, prohibited unfair trade practices in the market place and alerted Muslims to the plight of the poor and needy.¹⁰²

Of particular importance to us is the orientation of prophet Mohamed and his followers to material pursuits in this world. My

claim is that their attitude reflects a this-worldly outlook that encouraged diligence in lawful callings and striving for material well-being.

One of the main ethical maxims the prophet has emphasized is one's obligation to earn a livelihood. He was reported to have said to his companions:

To strive to earn a livelihood through right means is an obligation after the main duty (prayer). 103

Bread earned by one's own labor is the best of all earnings. 104

Once the prophet learned that some of his companions, upon seeing a young man eagerly taking away his share in the booty, had remarked that same eagerness shown in the cause of ALLAH would do more good to the man. The prophet told his companions:

Look here, if he is striving to earn for his parents or one of them, he is striving in the cause of ALLAH. If he is striving for his own self, then too he is striving in the cause of ALLAH. 105

In particular, the prophet had encouraged a positive attitude toward wealth. Wealth was regarded as a positive asset for a good man of the right conduct. The prophet had said: "Wealth rightly acquired is a good thing for the righteous man."¹⁰⁶ The prophet is reported to have exhorted his followers on the subjects of trade, farming, horticulture, animal husbandry, and other forms of productive activities. Economic

activities pursued with proper moral standards and for proper ends were highly regarded. Weber would have been shocked to hear the prophet associate honest callings with salvation as clearly as it sounds in this saying:

The honest, truthful Muslim trader shall have his rise with martyrs on the day of Judgement. 107

During his life prophet Mohamed took a strict stand against world-rejection and extreme asceticism.

Be not strict to yourselves lest strictness be imposed upon you. For a people practised hardships upon themselves and, as a consequence of their policy, ALLAH, also became hard toward them. 108

But he also warned against extravagant expenditure and willful squandering of wealth beyond the limits and requirements of a reasonable standard of life:

Eat, drink, give alms and wear, short of indulgence into extravagance and ostentations. 109

The regime of the first Islamic state did survive the death of the prophet. Four Caliphs (successors) followed his leadership not only politically but also in terms of the orientation towards life that he left behind. "Abu Bekr, the first caliph, was a cloth merchant, Othman, the third, a very well-to-do importer of cereals."¹¹⁰ All of the caliphs were reported to have engaged in petty trade on occasions when they were commanders of the faithful. They justified this by saying

that they did not want to live on the treasury of Islam but preferred to pursue honest trade for meager income. Such was their "inner-worldly asceticism" during the time when Islam witnessed the greatest territorial expansion.

Once, the Caliph Omar, the second caliph, saw a group of pious men sitting with downcast heads. These, he was told, were the Mutawakkilun, people trusting in God and hence renouncing any material pursuits. "No," said the caliph, making a pun, "these are the Muta'akkilun (those who eat up other people's money). You had better lift up your heads and earn your own livelihood."¹¹¹

Clearly Weber was mistaken in accusing early Islam of being a warrior religion. Early Islam was a triumph of Meccan merchants over tribal anarchy.¹¹² In the first century of its history Islamic leadership came from the merchant class of Mecca. Indeed as Bryan Turner has asserted:¹¹³

The counterpart of Weber's one-sided emphasis is Islam as a faith of tradesmen and merchants who were doing well. In its moral sternness, its emphasis on law and order and on individual responsibility--it was suited to the same sort of needs as was Calvinism in a smaller area.

The trading classes of the Muslim empire in Umayyads and early Abbasid towns drew on the traditions of their predecessors and elaborated on them. During this period not only did the entrepreneurs movement control most of the economic life but also

influenced greatly Islamic religious learning--that it was from their ranks that the scholars and judges were recruited. For instance, Abu Hanifa (d. 770), the famous jurist and founder of the Hanafite School of Law, was a cloth merchant in Baghdad. It should not surprise us, therefore, that Muslim religious literature during this period echoes the views of this bourgeois class.

Shaibani (d. 804), a well-known jurist in Baghdad was the author of a book "on earning" in which he argued that:¹¹⁵

the vigorous striving of the Muslim trading people for a decent living was not only not opposed to by Islam but was actually regarded by it as a religious duty.

Shaibani was representative of a group of writers who gave special attention to the notion of duty. At the time the rising merchant class did not just contend with the fact that Islam was not opposed to its activities, it had to also justify its growing power by regarding its activities as religious callings:¹¹⁶

Thus, there grew up a popular tradition to the effect that the honest merchant was more pleasing to ALLAH than government service.

A most important part of Shaibani's book are those sections in which he deals with the question of whether the true Muslim should work only in order to keep his body and soul together or whether the acquisition of luxuries was lawful. In general, he

security. Given this doctrine, it was natural that artisans and craftsmen were prominent among the adherents of Sufi schools.

With the increasing spread and popularity of Sufism during the ninth century and after, and with the increasing acceptance it found among the bourgeois class, particular schools of Sufism developed which ruled favorably on trade and wealth acquisition and which gave religious and ascetic significance to such activity. One of those schools was Sulamiya which postulated that the "amassing of capital" is not in conflict with the trust in God, if it is done "for him and in him" with the intention of serving God, i.e., to increase his glory.¹²¹

The modern idea that good service done for others in business or trade is in itself sanctioned is by no means new to Islamic theology. "The best man is he who is the most useful to other people," says the prophet.¹²² The adherents of this school, Sulamiya, were for the most part wealthy traders. Saami Zubida has remarked that: "paradoxically, these mystic pietists seem to come close to the Protestant ethic in their combination of asceticism with business activity as a duty and a virtue."¹²³ Sulami (d. 1021), the founder of this order, was concerned with formulating worldly pursuits in religious terms:¹²⁴

When you leave your house for the market, do so with the intention of satisfying the wants of a Muslim; if, in addition you make a profit, regard this as a favor granted to you by God.

seemed to rule positively on indulgence on luxury, particularly in dress and in the possession and enjoyment of slave girls.

Shaibani quotes a saying attributed to the prophet: "When ALLAH gives riches to a man, he wants it to be seen on him."¹¹⁷

Indeed, the luxury on which most Muslims spent consistently throughout this era was their dress.¹¹⁸ With regards to slave girls, the twenty years proceeding the death of the prophet was a period of great territorial expansion and an unlimited supply of this "commodity" was available.¹¹⁹ It was natural for some people to make use of it. However, "extravagant expenditure on buildings was so widely resented that Muslim religious literature censured even excessive spending of money on mosques."¹²⁰ Many historians attribute this to the great suffering inflicted on the middle and lower classes by forced labor and by unnecessary waste of public funds on costly buildings.

Religious opinion, however, was not always in agreement on the question of asceticism versus luxury during this period. Early Sufi movements were naturally opposed to luxurious indulgence and acquisition of wealth. Both were held to be in conflict with trust in God. Sufism in its early development favored renunciation of worldly possessions and pursuits. So far I have echoed Weber's own remarks on the movement--but not quite. Sufism did enjoin its adherents to pursue hard physical labor as one path of asceticism. Indeed, economic independence and prosperity are one way to attain spiritual freedom and inner

In view of the continued popularity of Sufism among the urban populations, including merchants and traders, during the Islamic middle ages, one can assume that there was no real conflict between Sufi devotion and wealth acquisition.

With this survey of representative opinions on the subject from the second century to the fourth century of the Islamic era, I feel compelled to conclude that Islam as a whole took a positive attitude towards economic entrepreneurial activity. This view was reflected in the rise of the early merchant class, who to a great extent possessed some traces of the spirit of capitalism which Weber outlines in his famous thesis. Of course rationality manifested in exact calculation and double-entry bookkeeping could be assumed to have characterized the activities of this class. But many other important components of the spirit, including diligence in wealth accumulation and delaying spontaneous enjoyment can be found both in the theology of Islam and in the life of the early Muslims. I have also shown that certain religious views, particularly those of the Sufis, were not always attuned to the same perspective. But the orthodox religious views were clearly favorable to economic activity of the Weberian style. So much so that prominent theologians and jurists were recruited from the business classes.¹²⁵

C) ISLAM AND RATIONAL CAPITALISM

At this stage a crucial question concerning the arguments made thus far presents itself. That which I have discussed so far is an account of the rise of a powerful merchant class which dominated the socio-economic life of early Islam. However, this class, history informs us, unlike its European counterpart never developed the basis for political organization and autonomy. The question to be answered is raised by S.D. Goitein:¹²⁶

We wonder, therefore, why the Middle Eastern bourgeoisie of the Middle Ages as a whole did not strive to gain political power and to take over the state? Why did the well-to-do bourgeoisie in all Islamic countries leave the leadership of the state in the hands of barbarian soldiers?

Many Western observers, including Max Weber, have attributed the the Middle East bourgeoisies' failure to gain political power to the passive implications of Islamic religious doctrines in regards to political action.¹²⁷ However plausible this may sound, it does not fairly answer the question. Because, in fact, the Islamic religious doctrines for political action are not passive. The Iranian revolution is a good contemporary example of the political manifestation of Islam.

In order for any religious doctrines with political implications to have any practical consequences, certain environmental conditions must be present. In other words, only by looking at the political opportunities historically available

to the Muslim class of merchants, and the position of the bourgeoisie in relation to the ruling class, can we assess their failure to establish political domination.¹²⁸ Before doing so, we need to define the relevance of the political environment to political action.

Any successful economic action based on some rational calculation, whether explicit or implicit, takes into account calculations over an extended period of time; weighing different opportunities, exploring different courses of action, and planning future actions. A man can only engage in rational calculation when the environment in which he lives is fairly predictable and controllable. We, therefore, cannot expect a merchant whose well-being is consistently at the mercy of military adventurers to develop a rational approach. The only activity one can expect of him is worrying about his life, or at best an unstable business activity. What I am asserting by this observation is the fact that political activism, like economic activism, requires certain conditions in the environment favorable to its occurrence. Putting this point in the context of our paper, we can see why the entrepreneurial class of early Islam did not fare as successfully as their European counterparts.

"In the West, the rise of an independent business class coincided with the formation of the nation state."¹²⁹ The process of forming these states was under "absolute monarchies"

which significantly restricted the activities of feudal classes and brought them under their rule. Eventually, the turmoil produced states that were highly centralized.¹³⁰ For our purposes, this centralization is tantamount with the predictability and controllability of the political and economic environment. Such an environment is by all means suitable for the emergence of autonomous entrepreneurial classes in the style of Western European cities of the Middle Ages and after.

Interestingly enough, the entrepreneurial classes became not only economically and socially dominant but also politically. The entrepreneurial community were active agents in bringing about this centralization. Remember that Western feudalism is domination by the few who are skilled at war. The entrepreneurs were very much independent of the government. In fact, when the government did not provide protection of person or property, the early merchant classes acted together in self-protecting armed brotherhoods.

Instead, the Western entrepreneurial class appeared on the historical stage when the environment favored their emergence. "It was a time when there was an established and oppressive political authority and yet it was a time when a centralized authority was emerging."¹³² Because they rallied around this centralizing force, the emergent regime looked with great acceptance upon the entrepreneurial interest and economic activities.

We may ask about the historical scene in which the Muslim entrepreneurial class appeared. As Weber argued earlier during the Abbasid dynasty the Islamic state was a highly centralized bureaucratic-military state under patrimonial rule. The Abbasids did for some time provide conditions which were highly favorable for the expansion of trade and commerce. The state provided facilities for protection and transport to much of the Muslim territories. S.D. Goltein reports special privileges provided to Muslim traders:¹³³

While on passing any custom's station--the subject of a foreign state 10 percent of the value of the merchandise transported by him, and a non-Muslim subject of the Arab state 5 percent, a Muslim merchant had to give only 2.5 percent. . .

Indeed, as we alluded to earlier, the merchant class enjoyed considerable influence over the direction of economic activity. We also indicated that many of those merchants were high-ranking government officials and bureaucrats, including in some instances enjoying the patronage and friendship of the Caliph.

Unfortunately, patrimonialism did not provide conditions conducive to collective political activism on the part of the merchant class, no predictability or controllability concerning the political environment was ever consistently established under the Abbasids. Indeed, as Weber indicated the relationship between the merchant community and the rulers was dominated by favoritism. The merchant's wealth and sometimes even his life

was dependent on the political mode of the time. Moreover, in periods of economic difficulty, confiscation of a merchant's wealth was common practice. In fact, the Abbasid administration established a department of confiscation to accomplish this task.¹³⁴

Because of the great expansion of the Islamic empire, there was an increasing need to maintain unity and order, especially in the face of rising religious sectarianists and political regionalists. The need for control in addition curbing the growth of any autonomous political groupings whether merchants or not. Not only did the merchant class lack political opportunity because of state control but also because of being heavily absorbed in the bureaucracy of the state. Indeed, under patrimonialism, the ruler is heavily dependent for his survival on the extent to which he can repress any political movements that can represent a threat.

The lack of opportunity for political activism for the merchants was even more complicated by the fact that they grew in cities that were central to the state ruler, Baghdad was the capital of the Islamic state. In Western Europe, the bourgeoisie developed in cities that represent the focus of power and interest of feudal authorities who were more concerned with military matters. In this respect the Western bourgeoisie could "develop institutional bases of class power in the cities without too much opposition or interference from the military ruling

classes."¹³⁵ It only took building up these bases before they were able to become active participants in the process of centralization in a manner that protected their interests, in fact, built their interests in the system.

It was indeed the historical scene in which both classes of bourgeoisie, the European and the Middle Eastern, that determined the extent to which they became politically active. Western European bourgeoisie emerged as a class in a feudal society in the process of becoming politically centralized, contributing to this process and planting their interests in its structure. On the other hand, the early Islamic bourgeoisie appeared at a time when the State was systematically curbing the growth of any autonomous political organizations, by recruiting potential activists in its growing bureaucracy and suppressing the activities of others.

V. CONCLUSION

Central to our discussion in this paper has been the question: Why did not rational capitalism as an economic order rise in Muslim societies of the Middle East between the seventh and tenth centuries? The fact that all aspects of early Muslim societies were dominated by religion made it necessary to investigate the role Islam has played in directing the economic life of early Muslim society. Given this setup it was natural that we examine our concerns in the light of Max Weber's studies on the development of rational capitalism, particularly his thesis in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.

In the first part of this paper we presented the Protestant ethic thesis which postulated that national capitalism as an economic order is a complex of institution, economics and ethics. The thesis traced a peculiarly Western ethical orientation to economic activity, the spirit of capitalism, to the religious reformation doctrines of Calvinism. It was this spirit in conjunction with other prerequisites--autonomous cities, free labor, rational law and an organized entrepreneurial class--that gave rise to national capitalism.

The Protestant ethic thesis was applied by Weber to early Muslim society in order to examine the influence the religious ethic has had on the conduct of economic activity, what kind of spirit it gave rise to. Because early Muslim society lacked other institutional requirements of national capitalism, Weber's

analysis had to take into account the political and social environment of early Islam. Weber concluded that Islam lacked a this-worldly ethic that could have given rise to the spirit of capitalism. In addition, the political structure of Muslim dynasties (patrimonial) inhibited the development of autonomous cities, rational law, and an organized business class. To him, Muslim society lacked all the ethical, political and economic requirements of national capitalism.

In the third part of this paper I argued that much of Weber's analysis of the Islamic ethic was factually incorrect, both theoretically and historically. I have demonstrated that Islam's religious teachings were to a great extent compatible with Calvinism and thus could conceivably give rise to a spirit analogous to the spirit of capitalism. I substantiated this claim by drawing upon selected biographies showing the orientation of early Muslims to economic activity. In fact, I argued that the first century of Islam can be regarded as a triumph of a merchant class that dominated most of the economic and political life. Thus, one institutional prerequisite of national capitalism, this-worldly ethic, was present.

However, Muslim society lacked much of the other necessary requirements: autonomous cities, free labor, and a politically active business class. We argued, in agreement with Weber, that the political structure of early Islamic dynasties, patrimonialism, especially during the Abbasid era, curbed the

potential of political growth of the existing merchant class, and subverted the development of autonomous cities in the style of Western Europe. Thus, it was to a large degree the political structure of Muslim society which failed the requirements of national capitalism.

A number of important observations about our analysis are worth noting. First, any historical examination concerning the working of an ideology or religion, including Islam, must take into account the prevailing political and social conditions in the society examined. In our analysis we see how "naive" it is to attribute the failure of the development of rational capitalism to the Islamic ethic. Even though Islam contained an ethic positively tailored to economic activity, the political structure of society curbed any political growth of the rising merchant class and the independence of commercial cities. This observation is particularly relevant to Islamic movements of our age which often postulate a direct causal relationship between religious beliefs and reality. The Islamic ethic will not significantly promote economic development unless political institutions are willing to accept and even promote the necessary changes.¹³⁶

Secondly, an ethical orientation conducive to economic growth is by all means a priority because economic growth in Muslim societies will greatly depend on the quality of human capital. Economic change begins and ends with Man.¹³⁷ Having a

stock of human capital that highly values diligence in work; and treats professions and crafts as ethically binding activities would likely enhance the success of any development plan.

Earlier we interpreted the spirit of capitalism as functionally equivalent to what we call today saving and investment. No two people would disagree on the need for increased saving and investment within our undeveloped Muslim economies. Ironically, a functional ethical orientation could also help in these needs. Earlier we saw how the spirit of capitalism was in a modern framework concerned with promoting the act of saving and investment which Weber himself saw as causes of economic growth in the West.

Finally, the crucial point to come out of this essay is that if the current resurgence of Islam is to have any practical positive implications, the early history of Muslim society must be fully studied and comprehended. Until this task is accomplished our goals and dreams may not be necessarily attainable.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Gianfranco Poggi, Calvinism and The Spirit of Capitalism
(Amherst, 1983), p. 27.
- 2 Reinhard Bendix, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait
(New York, 1960), p. 50.
- 3 Max Weber, General Economic History (London, 1923),
pp. 275-8, 352-4.
- 4 Poggi, p. 36.
- 5 Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of
Capitalism (London, 1923), p. 55.
- 6 Poggi, p. 39.
- 7 Weber, The Protestant Ethic, pp. 47f.
- 8 Gordon Marshal, In Search of the Spirit of Capitalism
(New York, 1982), p. 18.
- 9 Weber, The Protestant Ethic, p. 54.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 53f.
- 11 Poggi, p. 41.
- 12 Ibid., p. 44.
- 13 Ibid., p. 46.
- 14 Weber, General Economic History, pp. 355f.
- 15 Marshal, p. 44.
- 16 Poggi, p. 45.
- 17 Marshal, p. 64.
- 18 Bendix, p. 50.

- 19 Poggi, p. 53.
- 20 Weber, The Protestant Ethic, p. 117.
- 21 Ibid., p. 36.
- 22 Ibid., p. 61.
- 23 Poggi, p. 55.
- 24 Marshal, p. 72.
- 25 Poggi, p. 62.
- 26 Ibid., p. 63.
- 27 Weber, The Protestant Ethic, pp. 104-5.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 232f66.
- 29 Ibid., p. 65.
- 30 Ibid., p. 118.
- 31 Ibid., p. 123.
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