

The Industrial Christian - Spiritual Self-Understanding in Economies of Scale

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JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH

It remains a common assumption that the Protestant Reformation unleashed upon western society the essential spiritual and physical ingredients for the present consumer-driven industrial reality. Early sociology pointed to Calvinism's desire to seek proof of one's election through one's labour. This, it is argued, has been the chief motive force for the aggressive development seen in capitalism through to an industrial economy. In turn, American Protestantism tends to assume this pedigree in its appropriation of means by which Christian life and the purpose of the church can employ the presuppositions and vocabulary of industrial organization and psychology. A tantalizing exception, written *in passim* by Dr. Hermann Sasse in a letter to pastors ("On the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit") hints briefly at an alternate interpretation. The present study is to delve more deeply into Dr. Sasse's observation. From it, the present author suggests that even in the church, self-understanding has been actually transformed away from a genuinely individual consciousness and conscience. Critical analysis of industrialization has focused on vocation, but not comprehensively with its influence upon doctrine and practice within the Church apart from very recent elements of business used in the life of a congregation.

OBJECTIVES

The objective is to provide a critical tool by which to evaluate historical assumptions about the structure of the church and the Christian's place in it. Such a tool should be able to inform exegesis and pastoral practice to ensure that a Christian's or church's ethos is not alloyed. (cf. 1 John 4 1-3).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology might best be described as interdisciplinary. It will include a reappraisal of the "assumed" works on the subject, particularly Weber and Tawney. It will also analyze the tools developed to derive meaning and value to an individual in the wake of industrialization's deformation of vocation. This will be by discussing the nature of both industrial psychology and organizational theories as substitutionary attempts to find transcendent value in a framework devoid of same. These attempts have refracted classical conclusions about the self and the church. Along with revivalist and mass conversion movements, as well as the Church Growth movement, an historical-grammatical analysis of various proof texts which in their application betray an industrial understanding of the Christian soul. A review of the church fathers' interpretations of these same texts will highlight the differences between pre-industrial and industrial exegesis.

DISCUSSION OR RESULTS / OUTLOOK

Christian conceptions of the self are less influential on western civilization than is generally assumed. Sociologists Max Weber and R. H. Tawney have variously (and famously) argued that the "Protestant work ethic" was directly responsible for the development of capitalism in the west, including, presumably, industrial capitalism. The ambition, it is argued, which has led to industrial scales of production and consumption is related to the individual drive to prove through capitalist enterprise one's election to grace, after later Calvinism. While modern American Protestantism has developed doctrine reflective of an Arminian understanding of grace and salvation, it has retained the notion that the industry of capitalism is reflective of Christian motivation. Modern business theory is perceived to be interchangeable with the organization of the church, since it is assumed to come from this pedigree.

In fact, there is far greater evidence to suggest that while capitalism may have been justified by such doctrine, it is industrialization, not capitalism *per se* which is the primary motive force affecting the western consciousness. Industrialism promises betterment not for the individual but for the aggregate to which the individual must conform. The benefits for those in an industrial framework can only be material, since transcendent accountability leads to a critical disinterest with respect to what is produced as well as what is consumed. Because industrial society has tried to discover substitutionary benefits for the soul, the Church has been influenced by this in a way which has shifted the focus of salvation from a question of eternal accountability to one of largely material benefit. Because of this, salvation is simply the product being consumed. Understandings of one's relationship with God, the place of and purpose of the Scriptures, and the purpose of the church must always relate to a tangible objective subjecting the individual to the aggregate in order to achieve this. The tools which sought to bring a materialistic form of meaning in the wake of industrialism, namely psychology and organizational theory, have been employed to reduce the Christian's self-understanding similarly. The present relationship of the individual Christian to Christ in his or her congregation is discussed by most in a way which betrays this industrial influence, having destroyed both the integrity of the redeemed individual, and the essential mystery of the body of Christ in Christian self-understanding.

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