

PROTESTANT CULTURE AND PURITAN MORALE

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The relevant message of Calvin's famous theoretical work is the symbiosis of the knowledge of God and self-knowledge, the emphasis of the pedagogical responsibility of preachers and parents. The practical main work is the city of Geneva and the Academy in it: the strictness of morality and intellect. So the image of Switzerland is based on the Helvetian faith, which was complemented by the pedagogical tradition of the country. The positive aspects of the whole society are reflected in different forms but always in an acknowledged way in the literature, the philosophy and social sciences of the 18-20 centuries.

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As the English saying goes: 'There is nothing so practical as a good theory'. We are quite convinced that a parallel can be drawn between this witty paradox and another thesis. There is nothing so topical in the all time present as a historical example to be followed. However, we must immediately add that history does not only mean something that passed. For instance focusing on reforms and observing the practice going on for many years in some field of the social life of a given country – from the point of view of the nation of wandering minds – is definitely a historical heritage by the time the reforms are more or less realised.

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These wandering minds started from the East in the nineteenth century, and seeking for the first revealing experiences they did not need to go as far as the western end of Europe. Let us take Bertalan Szemere for example, who was studying the theory and practices of folk education and teacher training in Leipzig and Berlin in the autumn of 1836. (Szemere, 1983:27-40;60-67) And also Usinskij, the Russian classic of didactics and pedagogy, was researching the whole school system in some Swiss cities in 1862/63. (Usinszkij, 1958:72-184) It seems essential to point out that these regions are protestant countries: in the land of the Saxons and Prussians the hegemony of Evangelicals can be seen and in the cantons of Bern and Zurich the Protestant religion is dominating.

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To start with we should get to know some components of Calvin's systematic conception which have direct or indirect links with anthropology, theology, ethics or pedagogy. For us it has a special, symbolic importance that the first sentence of Calvin's main work (*Institutio Christianae Religionis*) connects the two major targets of human reflection. 'Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.' (*Calvin*, 1986:9)

For Calvinists the knowledge of God cannot distract the attention from the knowledge of ourselves, or vica versa. However the reason why the knowledge of ourselves is not a process meant to be for itself is not only theological, but also ethical. For practical reasons the importance of self-knowledge is justified by the inclination for self-discipline and self-criticism. (*Éles*, 1995) 'How can we improve others – said Calvin in his sermon on Job in 1554 – if we do not improve ourselves first? How can we admonish others? First we have to admonish ourselves before we do this to others.' (*Gyökössi*, 1986:65)

'But God – with his soul – hid the truth in the world surrounding man, in the society and nature. The human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator. If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver' (*Calvin*, 1980:120).

We have already seen how Calvin connected the knowledge of God and ourselves. Now – after describing gifts and motivation – we can observe how seeking God is attached to the study of nature. 'Both labour in vain. To be so occupied in the investigation of the secrets of nature, as never to turn the eyes to its Author, is a most perverted study; and to enjoy everything in nature without acknowledging the Author of the benefit, is the basest ingratitude.' (*Calvin*, 1980:38) Calvin even clearly refers to the joy and use of astronomy (*Calvin*, 1980:39).

He writes about two aspects of the duty of adults concerning teaching and education. The first remark refers to preachers – the other one is about parents. A preacher who speaks to people from the height of his pulpit cannot be measured up to his task. He is the one who looks at the congregation as a mass and is unable to see how his people struggle with managing their everyday life; these preachers cannot act as healers of spiritual problems (*Calvin*, 1980:37).

Calvin himself gave a classic model – in a universal sense as well – to those who wished to become the masters of words to be written besides the words to be spoken, namely in his main work already cited, the preface of which was dated in Geneva on 1 August, 1559. 'My object in this work was to prepare and train students of theology for the study of the Sacred Volume, so that they might both have an easy introduction to it, and be able to proceed in it, with unflinching step.' (*Calvin*, 1995)

Some thoughts about the responsibility of the parents regarding the education of children – about becoming man both morally and intellectually – had already appeared before Calvin. In the flourishing period of the renaissance Erasmus Roterodamus, the humanist (*The moral and scientific education of children in the early years*, 1529) – in the name of classical reformation (*Erasmus*, 1913:47-51; 63), Martin Luther (*About establishing and maintaining Christian schools*, 1523) came up with these serious worries and urging warnings (*Luther*, 1908:163).

'There are so many people – according to Calvin's criticism – who think more about their cows or horses than about their children. They count up their belongings, their land, their field, but they are ignorant about their children.' (*Luther*, 1908:186-187) 'Parents should take care of their children as given by God' – this is the warning of the religious leader of Geneva (*Luther*, 1908:93).

In the eyes of Calvin, christening is merely a "comedy", as long as no relatives can promise the church to undertake the child's education. Because – he writes to John Knox in 1558 – 'there is nothing more absurd than counting someone as a Christian, when we cannot presume that he will be the follower of Christ.' (*Luther*, 1908:201)

Calvin has an international impact mainly thanks to his most significant act in the history of education, i.e. establishing the Academy in Geneva in 1559. French, Latin, Greek and philosophy were taught on an intermediate level, and also Hebrew and theology as university faculties. In this golden age of the Academy in the sixteenth century the professors were prestigious scientists. Classical philology was taught for a time by Justus Scaliger, philosophy by Petrus Ramus, theology by John Calvin, Théodore de Bèze and Pierre Viret.

There is something unexplainably paradoxical in the fact that the reformed religion, which was the most radical protestant church, kept Latin as the language of education. It was not only the communicational heritage of the humanists from the 15-16. century, but also the language of the medieval scholastic philosophers and that of the Italian pro-humanists from the 1200s and 1300s. But perhaps there is an exalantion, and for Calvinists this was a most forcing demand for the fast and wide spreading of the doctrines. It is another paradox that from this point of view the classical and universal Latin was the mutually beneficial ally of the national languages and cultures which were being born and shaped at that time. Without the teachings of Calvin that could be read and also heard in Latin in Geneva how could the spirit of Protestantism have spread in the regions where no one or only few people could speak German?

The college of theology which had been training ministers since 1541 can be regarded as the predecessor of the Academy in Geneva. The Academy, whose official opening was on 5 June in 1559, was born after this college and an institute schooling children united. The big, inaugural speech was made by the first rector, Theodore Beza; the presiding Calvin gave only a short talk. His message was clear: the future results of the Academy will be the glory of God (*Soli Deo Gloria*).

The emblem of the Scottish reformation, John Knox summerised his experiences in connection with the college in 1554 in a letter which he wrote to one of his friends two years later: 'I am not afraid to say that Geneva is Christ's greatest school on Earth since the time of the Apostles. I admit that other schools teach Jesus Christ in his real sense, but I don't know any other towns where morales and religion would be in such a perfect form.' (*Cadier*, 1980:163)

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For more than two centuries Switzerland mostly lived in peace and calmness, but from the end of the eighteenth century to the 1830s the country experienced revolutionary reforms and radical changes. The foreign – first and foremost French – intellectual and political movements influenced and very often forcefully shaped all of these changes – from the political system of the state to the theory and practice of education. Hereinafter we give a brief outline of the facts and names relating to the history of education.

In 1762 *Émile: or, on Education* got published, the main work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who called himself "a citizen of Geneva" even in France. His approach was improved and put into practice for the first time by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi in his home called Neuhof near Zurich between 1774 and 1826. (He was honoured by the National Convention with the title of "the citizen of the Republic of France in 1792, which illustrates the importance of his pedagogical work).

In Pestalozzi's pedagogy traditional conditions, modern requirements, impulses from his homeland and foreign countries, Calvin's theology and Rousseau's philosophy are balanced in an exemplary way. We can call Calvin "Swiss" and Rousseau "French", but we must not forget that it was Paris that "gave" the reformer to Geneva – and in the case of the philosopher the opposite is true: it was Geneva that "sent" him to Paris). Already the journal of the young father (1774) clearly reveals that Pestalozzi's final pedagogical ideas were deeply rooted in the life conditions typical of Switzerland.

'To make peace and happiness by obedience and order: this is the preparation for living in the society. The life-guiding ideals of Swiss people are tidiness, precision, completeness, and perfection!' 'We must be satisfied with what we have or what we can obtain without big loss; nothing to vanity, everything to justice!' 'Man, who is tied up in his desires, can peacefully overcome them by practice.' 'Let your children be free as much as they can; you must be grateful for every occasion when you can give them freedom and peace, do not teach them anything with words that you can teach them by following the inner nature of things.' 'Taking care of a garden, collecting plants, cocoons and bugs in a systematic and thorough way – what a preparation for civil life!' (*Pestalozzi, 1959:73-80*)

What Goethe calls 'Pedagogical province' was actually achieved by Philipp Emanuel von Fellenberg from 1804. Between 1831 and 1836 Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel, the author of *On the Education of Man* (1826), then the creator of the institute called "Kindergarten" (1840) worked in the German speaking part of Switzerland. It was first of all Pestalozzi and Fellenberg who created the pedagogical image of Switzerland – after 1830 it was also helped to a large extent by successful domestic political developments. The already mentioned Usinskij is a good example for the echoes of this Swiss "image" in foreign countries.

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What kind of country became of Switzerland thanks to Calvinism and the pedagogical reform movements unfolding from the end of the eighteenth century? How were Swiss people, their society, mentality and morality seen by Keller and the other thinkers? Now the readers can get an introduction to these reflections.

There is a memorable scene from Martin du Gard's novel *The Thibaults*. This is when Madame de Fontanin és Antoine Thibault are having a conversation and in a little while they start to talk about faith. The catholic doctor suddenly comes up with a crucial revelation: 'Reformation is the revolution of religion. In your belief there are liberating principles.' (*Martin Du Gard*, 1965:238)

How did Gottfried Keller, the most significant belletrist of Switzerland in the 1800s feel in connection with this liberation? He confessed about it in his big novel and in one of his most famous short stories. Keller's mouthpiece, Heinrich Lee is a believer who does not like going to church. That is why we could say ironically: he practices religion as a "correspondence student."

'There are natural born protestants – he wrote in 1854/55 – and I consider myself to be one of them. It was not the lack of a religious feeling that made it unbearable for me to spend any time in the church where you were faced with boring and complicated doctrines, it was because – and I did not know about it myself either – I felt the hazy smoke of the old, extinguished stakes floating in the empty church. So I was forced to communicate with God in a private way, and I stuck to my habit to say my prayers on my own as I wished and only if I felt it necessary.' (*Keller*, 1963a:63-64)

Keller found the social analogy of the God of the free, sovereign, intellectual and spiritual protestant Christianity in the republic of moral duties as a matter of course. 'In the Republic the greatest and the best is expected from every citizen without paying them with the fall of the Republic but highlighting their names and turning them into leaders. I consider the spiritual world to be such a republic, above which only God stands as Providence, whose majesty regards the Law as sacred in its complete freedom, which was given by him, and this freedom is our freedom as well, and ours is his.' (*Keller*, 1963a:232-233)

The principles of Green Henry are fine and lofty. How do the religious and national identity, intellectual, moral and political freedom meet in practice, in the elevated moments of everyday life? A fragment from Karl Hediger's speech made on a rifle ceremony in Aarau, in July 1849, gives a fulfilling answer to these questions. (Keller published this short story in 1877.)

'Look at them, these old sinners! None of them stands in the odor of particular sanctity! Rarely is one of them seen at church! They do not speak well of ecclesiastical matters. But here, beneath the open sky, I can confide something strange to you, my countrymen: as soon as their fatherland is in danger they begin quite gradually to believe in God; first each one cautiously in his own heart, then ever more boldly, till one betrays his secret to another and they then, all together, cultivate a remarkable theology, the first and only doctrine of which is: 'God helps him who helps himself!' On days of rejoicing too, like this, when crowds of people are assembled and a clear blue sky smiles above them, they again fall a prey to these religious thoughts and then they imagine that God has hung the Swiss standard aloft and made the beautiful weather especially for us. In both cases, in the hour of danger and in the hour of joy, they are suddenly satisfied with the words that begin our constitution: 'In the name of God Almighty!'' (*Keller*, 1963b:63-64)

Helvetius saw the real meaning of enlightenment – in the sense of the history of philosophy – in the withdrawal of scholastic thinking. If this is true, enlightenment actually started with reformation. The golden centuries of scholastics were the centuries of ignorance, when – before Luther and Calvin – blind haze covered the earth.' (*Helvetius*, 1962:13) At the end of his book, Helvetius uses even harsher concepts. It is not a branch of philosophy and a religion that is set against each other but rather the dramatic

consequences of Roma's and Geneva's intellectual aura. 'In the catholic cantons of Switzerland there is famine and stupidity, in the the protestant ones there is wealth and diligence.' (*Helvetius*, 1962:435)

His book entitled *About man* was finished in 1769. Practically at the same time Rousseau wrote *Confessions*. One of his extracts reveals that Protestantism has superiority in mentality over Catholicism first of all. The Protestants are generally more trained than Catholics. And this may not be differently, since the doctrines of the first one needs arguing, the other one wants obedience. The Catholic has to accept the decision, about which he is informed, the Protestant one has to learn that himself should make the decision' (*Rousseau*, 1962:69)

Stendhal belongs to the group of those big authors, who keep the enlightenment and the intellectual heritage of the sentimentality alive longer. In *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839) we can read that the Catholic religion deprives from the courage that makes you think about unusual things, and forbids the individual investigation first of all, as the biggest sin: this is already a step to protestantism.' (*Stendhal*, 1968: 215)

Stendhal directly observed the typical "dualness" of the life and personality of the citizens of Geneva in 1837. 'I like the people from Geneva – until they are forty years old. By the time they reach that age they save up a smaller or bigger fortune, however the most capital fault of their character outcrops only at this time: they cannot enjoy themselves, they have not been taught how to live under prosperous circumstances, they become strict and *puritans*, who are angry with anybody being able to enjoy themselves – or *pretend that they are enjoying themselves* and call them *immoral*.' (*Stendhal*, 1975:553) It is a fact that the unfolding sense questions the faith several times. But it is also a fact – yet at first it seems less obvious – that the sense that reaches *fullness* many times goes back to religion with humbleness (but it never humbles itself). There is no doubt that thinking in the case of religion is relentless to everything that is earthly transiently; but in this way, it emphasizes what is eternal. The protesting sense needs faith as much as the protestant religion needs thinking.

'As the river can be saved from desiccation by underground waters, similarly Christianity cannot dispense with the underground flow of grace inspired by thinking. It can only reach its real spiritual power if religion is open towards thinking. As for me – said Albert Schweitzer in 1931 – I know: I could stay faithful to religion only by thinking. The thinking man is more independent in the sense of the traditional, religious truth than the one who does not think, and he feels more strongly what is deep and stable in it.' (*Schweitzer*, 1974:188)

With this quotation of Schweitzer's thoughts we have arrived at our recent past, the twentieth century. What fundamentally crucial life values were developed and preserved by the Swiss people is realised by travellers arriving from far away (Sándor Márai more times) and some temporarily abjected sons of various nations (e.g. Romain Rolland) or some fighting volunteers (Hemingway from Italy) especially in the two world wars. Rilke is a most accurate example of this, because the Austrian poet living in Munich saw the essential points as well in a letter dated on 12 September 1919. 'Our history is the testimony of the immense force of the nature; the people, where united in a crowd, kept something from the hardness and stubbornness of the mountains, and their amazing willpower in the crucial moments was the continuation of the overwhelming energy that makes creeks and waterfalls stream into the valleys.' (*Rilke*, 1999:86)

Against this excerpt of Rilke's we can mention that the author uses poetic exaggeration and he does not even refer to the "shady side", his message was not meant for the public and his statements are nearly one hundred years old. The German emigrant, Röpke is a world famous economist, who taught in the Institute of International Studies in Geneva from 1937 to 1966, and his book cited was published in 1942.

'We would make the worst possible service for Switzerland if we preached it to be the perfect one with hypocritical affability. Switzerland would lose the characteristic of her normalness if her moral force and mental efficiency to be constantly and ruthlessly self-critical would decrease and she would imitate the harmful example of some big countries with this. But because we consider it so normal that she takes praise and criticism with the same stolidity, we set this country as one of the most beautiful historical examples of the internal greatness of external smallness for other countries craving for guidance... The country is the unity of peace-loving farmers and citizens, which showed the world the harmonic balance of the peasantry and the culture of cities and she took the power from this union to unify free from extremes the conservative and progressive forces of the society, continuity and mobility, tradition and modernity, reason and faith, technology and humanity, courage and the love of peace, order and freedom, community and individuality, prosperity and intimacy.' (Röpke, 1943:42-43)

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