

UPF Europe: Max Weber - A Tribute in Honor of the Centenary of his Passing

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Max Weber

A Tribute in Honor of the Centenary of his Passing

A century ago an epoch-making German scholar Max Weber (Karl Emil Maximillian Weber) died of pneumonia, brought on by the Spanish Influenza epidemic. He died on June 14, 1920.

Max Weber was a scholar of political science, sociology and economics, producing a corpus of work that is recognized throughout the world for its insights. He was a pioneer in the field of the Sociology of Religion and, in particular, he analyzed the influence of Protestantism on the emergence of modern capitalism, having asked the question as to why modern capitalism flourished in countries that were majority Protestant, and not in other countries that had not embraced Protestantism. He published his findings in the monumental book entitled "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (Die protestantische Ethik und der 'Geist' des Kapitalismus), in 1904-1905. According to Weber, modern capitalism was associated with Calvinism that gave rise to a unique work ethic coupled with a form of instrumental rationality.

In other words, material forces alone did not give rise to modern capitalism, but rather religious ideas were important causal factors.

For the remainder of his career, he devoted himself to researching the "economic ethics of the world's religions," seeking to understand why modern rationality and economic practices emerged in certain countries in northern Europe where Protestant ideas, and especially Calvinism, were dominant.

Weber understood that religion was a very significant factor related to human action and human reasoning, and therefore a factor that had an impact on economic development. This idea was in stark contrast to Karl Marx's view of religion as a form of escapism that resulted from the false consciousness of the oppressed proletariat, an "opium of the people."

After completing "The Protestant Ethic," Weber started to invest entire his life to the study of Comparative Sociology focusing on major religions of the world. Unfortunately, he could not complete this task due to his untimely death.

On this centennial anniversary of his passing, under the critical situation brought on by the Corona virus, it is appropriate that we consider the inter-relationship between faith, politics and the economy. It may be said that Max Weber tried to catch the inter-connection of ideas and material forces, the mind and the body within society. A German publishing company, when they published Max Weber's Complete Works in 1984, were greatly surprised that two thirds of the orders came from Japan.