

Social Care in Protestant Spirit

—On the Role and Significance of the Reformation in the Formation of Nordic Welfare State System

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Abstract: This paper is to examine the changes of Nordic welfare states system and to study the role and significance of basic doctrines, ethics and concepts in the Reformation in the formation of Nordic welfare state system, based on the Protestantism after the Reformation. Moreover, the Protestant social concern theory and practice formed in the Reformation have played an important role in promoting the development of the Nordic welfare state system, which is also the focus of this study. Through analyzing, this paper aims to make the realistic development of Protestant spirit have a new perspective, and to have a deeper understanding of significance of the socio-political philosophy of the Reformation.

Key Words: Reformation; Protestant Spirit; Social Care; Nordic Welfare State System

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1 Introduction

The Protestant spirit, as a direct product of the Reformation, relies on a religious belief with the power of transcendental God to rationalize the wealth accumulation in the mortal life, which provides the proof of “calling” of religious theology for people’s motives and intentions to make profits in secular society. From this point of view, Protestant spirit can be defined as the sum of a series of ethics, ideology and value standards, which are derived from Protestant doctrines and are recognized, respected and applied in all aspects of political and social life. ^[1]

The welfare state system is not a simple combination of the etymology “welfare state” and “system”. From the dimension of socio-political philosophy, “system” is such historical existence with normative meaning, including entity and non-entity. As an intermediary between people and people, and people and society, it adjusts the relationship between them and influences the development of people and society in a mandatory way. ^[2] Therefore, if the system is not defined and

[1] Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1957), 158-163.

[2] 辛明 Xinming. 《制度研究的哲学视野选择及其问题梳理》Zhidu yanjiu de zhexue shiye xuanze jiqi wenti shuli [The Philosophical View and Analysis of System’s Research], 《哲学动态》Zhexue dongtai [Philosophical Trends], No. 10, (2005), 20-21.

restricted, “welfare state system” will contain the sum of all laws, rules and systems under the state form of “welfare state”. Welfare state generally refers to a state form or system established by western capitalist countries after the World War II. Its typical characteristics include: the high level of welfare security, a wide range of welfare beneficiary groups, a comprehensive welfare policy system, and so on. In the form of welfare state, Western governments have designed and adopted various policies and systems in order to accomplish the goals and tasks of welfare state. Based on this, the Nordic welfare state system in this paper refers to the sum of a series of welfare systems implemented by the “welfare state policy” within the Nordic region.

It is undeniable that some Protestant doctrines are the important source of welfare thought after the Reformation in Europe. The idea of Fraternity, Diaconal Work and Grace in Christian doctrine has a great influence on the development of European welfare system. Among them, one of the most important factors to promote the formation of the Nordic welfare state system is the “Protestant Spirit”, the inherent spiritual temperament which maintains the modern welfare state system. In the modern society, this unique inner spiritual temperament, endowed with a new moral stance to the masses who believe in Protestant doctrines, provides an inexhaustible source of power for the formation of the Nordic welfare state system, and prepares a rational religious interpretation for the operation of the welfare state system, which dialectically coincides with the “desire of seeking profits” and the “moral creed of asceticism”. On one hand, it embodies the core of religious culture in the formation of the welfare state system, and on the other hand, it also shows the rational “ecology” achieved by the underlying spiritual motives of the formation of system. It can be seen that the Reformation is of great practical significance and academic value as an ideological and social change of how to promote the formation of the Nordic welfare state system.

2 Protestant Social Care Theory and Practice in the Reformation

In the face of various unknown and powerful external forces, people will form the belief cognition and coping style about the tragic situations of individuals or groups. Therefore, religion contains a particularly distinct spirit of humanistic concern, the compassionate attitude and value orientation. Since the world history entered its modern times, Protestantism was once as the spirit of western culture, and its spiritual essence has contacted, collided, conflicted, exchanged or integrated with other forms of civilizations. The externalization of this ideological tendency into the behavior of the religious believers is often manifested in charitable activities to save the world and people. Therefore, the unique ideas of Protestantism formed a theory of social concern.

2.1 Historical Background of the Reformation

In the early 16th century, there appeared an unprecedented revolutionary movement in the history of Christianity, that is, the vigorous religious reform in Europe. In the middle Ages before the Reformation, the Pope not only owned the supreme power of religion, but also gained the supreme control over secular states and cities. In order to obtain more economic benefits, the Pope took advantage of the privilege of the clergy to buy and sell various positions, which directly caused the aristocratic rulers at that time to obtain most of the bishoprics. The abuse of Pope’s rights directly

led to the further polarization of hierarchy. Ordinary believers were directly excluded from religious rights. Many important positions were occupied by secular aristocrats for political and economic reasons, rather than for the sake of talent and personal ability. However, they, who were not with the devout Christian spirit, only depended on the law to manage religious affairs, which caused great dissatisfaction among ordinary believers. Moreover, not only did money worship prevail in the church at that time, but many people had chaotic private lives and did not perform their duties. The Pope trafficked so many positions to get more money that it caused too many religious personnel, which deepened the discontent of ordinary believers with the church. The famous Dominican Johann Tetzel did the vivid propaganda of the function of Indulgences issued by the St. Peter's Basilica in 1517, just as if "the penny jingles into the money-box, the soul flies out of purgatory."

Facing the corruption and degeneration of the Pope and the Roman Catholic church, German Father Martin Luther posted "Ninety-five Theses, propositions for debate concerned with the question of Indulgences" in Wittenburg on October 31, 1517 to denounce the corruption in the Roman Catholic church and indulgences. This event came to be considered the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Subsequently, all the countries in Deutschland also launched rebellion against the Roman Catholic Church, which eventually led to the religious reformation in Western Europe. Calvin also carried out a series of religious reforms in Switzerland, aiming to get rid of the control of the Roman Catholic church, and quickly established a set of new norms for the management and activities of Protestant Christianity, which gradually made Protestantism mature and perfect.

2.2 The Main Content of Social Care Theory and Practice

The reformation directly challenged the church-centered scholastic theology, and further promoted the believer-centered humanism, which made the human-oriented conception, ethics concerned about people's livelihood, and the desire to pursue happiness in real life more deeply rooted in people's hearts, and then formed the main content of social concern theory. We will analyze the basic ideas and characteristics of Lutheran and Calvinist social concern, which are the most influential schools after the reformation, in order to lay a theoretical foundation for revealing the inner relationship between Protestant social concern theory and the formation of Nordic welfare state system.

a) Lutheranism's Thoughts of Social Care on Justification by Faith

Luther was a faithful and conscientious saint, and at first, he did not doubt the confession ceremony of the Roman Catholic Church. With the understanding of humanism, he made a new interpretation of the Bible: The justice God gave us was a merciful salvation. As long as people believed in Jesus Christ, they could get this salvation, which was the basic doctrine of justification by faith.^[3] Luther pointed out that "There is no difference in works where faith is and does the work, yet this is true only when they are compared with faith and its work."^[4] Like the bishop, Coppersmiths, blacksmiths, farmers just had different responsibilities. The positions God gave to man

[3] Martin Luther, *A Treatise on Good Works*, (Sheba Blake Publishing, 2019), 11.

[4] Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes*, Vol. 1, (published by the Library of Alexandria, 1943), XVII.

had their own functions. It was in these different positions that man gained God's recognition through hard work. At the same time, Luther believed that there should be no poverty or begging among the Chosen People.^[5] Like business, eating, sleeping, praying and fasting, almsgiving has no difference in value. It is the way people serve God, the result of justification and the expression of true Christian identity. Luther's "Justification by Faith" put forward a value of egalitarianism. The idea that even the most humble people were equal to others promoted the establishment of a relationship on equality and mutual assistance among social individuals. It did not mean that the status of those who were in a weak position was relatively low when they were accepting help. Everyone had the right to help and the obligation to offer help. According to the Christian doctrine, it was the duty of every believer to take care of the vulnerable groups in society. For example, in field of social relief and welfare, government should build a system of public welfare fund by the confiscation from monastery for provide relief and lending to everyone who need help, whether rich or poor.^[6] While helping those vulnerable groups, their souls could also be redeemed by God. Under the restraint of such values, believers generally had a strong sense of mission, and Christians tended to have a strong sense of individuals' social responsibility for the advancement of justice, equality and social welfare.

b) The Social Significance of Calvinist's View of Calling

Calvin was another important religious reformer after Martin Luther. Calvin's religious reform not only changed the religious and political life in Geneva, but also had a profound impact on the development of European society. According to Calvinist doctrine, the whole world existed only to serve the glory of God. The only task of the chosen Christians in the world was to obey God's Holy Discipline as much as possible, thereby increasing the glory of God. In accordance with this purpose, God required Christians to achieve social success. Because God's purpose was to organize social life according to his Holy Discipline, the social activities of Christians in the world were entirely "to increase the glory of God", and it was also the characteristic in the work of occupation serving the earthly life of society. According to the inspiration of the Bible and the natural intuition of human beings, this meaningful organizational structure and the arrangement of the whole universe in which we live were undoubtedly created by God for the convenience of human beings, which made the work in the service of impersonal public good increase the glory of God, and made this kind of work become the will of God. Under the Protestant doctrine, everyone needed to work. "For everyone without exception God's Providence has prepared a calling, which he should profess and in which he should labour. And this calling is not, as it was for the Lutheran, a fate to which he must submit and which he must make the best of, but God's commandment to the individual to work for the divine glory."^[7] Rich people were no exception. Even if they did not need to rely on labor to earn the necessities of life, they must obey God's teachings as well as the poor. In Calvinism, this concept of

[5] PELIKAN J. ed. *Luther's Works*, vol. 9. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 147.

[6] 王倩 Wang qian, 宗教改革时期的“基督教之爱” Zongjiao gaige shiqi de jidujiao zhiai [Christian Love in the Religious Reformation], *国学与西学: 国际学刊* [International Journal of Sino-Western Studies, Vol. 10, 2016], 18; Also see Martin Luther, "Ordnung eines gemeinen Kasten. 1523." in Otto Clement, hrsg., *Luthers Werke in Auswahl*, Bd. 2, *Schriften von 1520 bis 1524* (Berlin: Verlag Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1967), 407.

[7] Max weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 106.

“Calling” regarded work as a sacred duty, and a means to increase the glory of God, from which comes the spirit of selflessness, that is, the spirit of struggle to increase the glory of God rather than satisfy personal desires. People on earth must verify their beliefs through active earthly activities to increase God’s glory and state of grace by the results of actions in the process of transforming the real society. This idea of “Occupation doesn’t matter with the Holy and the Secular” directly connected the religion with society and showed the believers’ social concern. After the Reformation, the help to the disadvantaged came from the spirit of fraternity and mutual assistance of religion. It was no longer a self-interested action, but an altruistic behavior of believers for the sake of belief. They were not for the personal interests, which showed a kind of responsibility and obligation.

How far in the background of Luther’s thought of social concern was the most important idea of his worldly conduct, which also dominated Calvinism. According to Luther this concept of work are so indispensable as the others (purity of doctrine, prayer, etc.). The concept of Calvin’s calling was, as we seen, not very different, but that was not true of Puritanism. Of the idea of social concern, on the other hand (more, however, in its Lutheran than its Calvinistic form), there are at least isolated propositions in the Protestant theology, even though it was understood mostly in a philosophical sense.

3 The Internal Relationship between Protestant Social Concern and the Formation of Nordic Welfare State System

Under the influence of social concern theory, the politics, economy and culture of Nordic countries all changed. However, the theory of social concern was not the decisive factor, but a prerequisite. This formation of Nordic welfare state system was a step-by-step process.

3.1 Social concern in Protestant spirit breeding the political foundation of a democratic society

Protestant spirit contained the value of equality and provided the spiritual factors for free democratic politics. Protestantism played a direct role in the formation of the political culture of freedom and democracy in Nordic capitalist countries, and continued to be one of the driving forces for the formation of the Nordic welfare state system. Protestant reform decreased the effect of the church in personal salvation, and individuals could directly communicate with God. The direct communication between the individual and God seemingly elevated the status of God, but actually elevated the status of the individual. God is invisible, while the individual is visible. Communicating with God was actually a kind of personal introspection and Self-discipline. God could be the acceptor of the will and idea of almost any individual.〔8〕 In this way, individuals’ will had its independence and sanctity, and the value of equality for all had its philosophical and religious foundation.

Protestants advocated fairness, not only because they believed that fairness was the foundation of all the supreme morality, but also because they regarded fairness as the source of all the greatest benefits. They resorted to the religion because they believed that religion was a guarantee of Individual rights and interests in a democratic society. Religion, as a kind of belief, was one of the

〔8〕 Cf. Gerhard Wegner: *The Legitimacy of the Welfare State*, (Leipzig: EVANGELISCHE VERLAGSANSTALT, 2015), 35.

main elements of human nature, and at the same time, it provided a spiritual sustenance. No matter how reason developed, there was no situation where there was no authority in the spiritual and moral world in any age of mankind. Once the basic common value belief of the society fell into chaos, individual rights and interests would be threatened. Religious beliefs made it preferable for individual reason to be enslaved by only God and not by the forces of any human being, regardless of monarchs, clergymen, nobles or the general public. Only in the structure of social order with common beliefs could individual rights and interests be guaranteed. But not all religious beliefs or doctrines were suitable for a democratic society or promoted the democratic development. Christianity naturally contained the elements of freedom and democracy, and the religious reform provided the idea of equality. It should be said that modern democratic political thought originated largely from the great Reformation in the sixteenth century. At the same time, Protestant religious doctrine guided the political life of the whole capitalist society and became the basic principle of political and social life.

3.2 Social concern in Protestant spirit ensuring the economic basis of welfare system

Protestant spirit confirmed the legitimacy in belief and morality of the proper pursuit of wealth in a religious way, thus providing the practical psychological dynamics for the development of Nordic welfare states. Protestant spirit regarded the rational pursuit of wealth as the will of God, affirmed the legalization of profit-making activities, and made the western society get rid of the shackles of traditional religion and ethics in the medieval period. This was the first preparation for the formation of Nordic welfare state system in terms of belief and morality, forming a motive force to gain the grace of God by increasing wealth.

The Protestantism after the Reformation endowed the secular life with the value of belief, and the secular labor in an occupation was paid more and more attention in morality. "For the saints' everlasting rest is in the next world; on earth man must, to be certain of his state of grace, do the works of him who sent him, as long as it is yet day. Not leisure and enjoyment, but only activity serves to increase the glory of God, according to the definite manifestations of His will."^[9] Therefore, the social activities of Christians in the world were entirely "to increase the glory of God", and it was also the characteristic in the work of occupation serving the earthly life of society. Therefore, Protestantism guided people to devote themselves to secular activities, bore secular responsibilities rather than escape them. Emphasizing the significance of asceticism of permanent occupation provided the basis for the modern specialized division of labor, which contributed to the development of specialized production, improved the labor productivity and increased the social wealth. In addition, Protestant asceticism did not oppose the rational acquisition of wealth, but opposed the irrational use of wealth. They approved of the rational and utilitarian use of property and regarded it as the will of God. Therefore, the wealth gained by Protestants in the secular occupation for fulfilling God's duty was not consumed, but put into social production as capital to acquire greater wealth. These restrictions imposed on wealth consumption made it possible for capital to be used for productive investment, which naturally increased wealth. This frugal lifestyle combined with great wealth was bound to accumulate more capital and lay a material foundation for the development of Nordic welfare states.

[9] Max weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 104.

3.3 Social concern in Protestant spirit transforming the idea foundation of secular society

Protestant spirit led to a certain change in the views of the Nordic people. For example, Luther advocated that Christians should adapt to their environment, did not escape the responsibility or divorce from reality like monks, but served God in the activities of this world and realized their self-salvation and value of life in the world. Calvin had a more aggressive attitude toward life, believing that the establishment of the kingdom of God by transforming of society in this world was to glorify God. He encouraged people to do every job in a positive spirit. Both Luther and Calvin, the religious reformers, promoted the secularization of society in doctrine and had far-reaching influence. Protestant spirit emphasized rationality and restraint, which made Protestants oppose indulgence and restrain themselves rationally. Only by emphasizing the rationality of permanent occupation and rigorous labor could people have the possibility to get the God's grace and be regarded as the success of life. Because of the restrictions imposed on wealth consumption by the occupational concept of asceticism, it was possible for people to use wealth for welfare and charity.

At the same time, Protestant doctrine provided a way for people to realize themselves. In any hierarchical society or era, the greatest self-realization of people was to reach the highest rank of society. In a feudal society with a very strict status hierarchy, only the aristocracy could accomplish this self-realization, while the rich businessmen were still at the bottom of society. At the beginning of capitalism, businessmen were not proud to earn enough money, but eventually they were even willing to sacrifice their economic interests to gain the aristocratic statuses. The emergence of Protestant spirit greatly broadened the way of self-realization. Everyone can achieve self-realization by doing their own vocation. Self-realization, no longer like the past, only a small number of people's patents in hierarchical society, the road to self-realization becomes very broad.^[10] Under such a concept, people tried to prove that they were God's chosen people through their diligence and wealth, and the rank in heaven was more respectable than that in the secular life. It was undoubtedly one of the most important purposes of their lifelong work to organize labor rationally in order to provide material products for mankind. The change of this secular concept prompted the Nordic people to be willing to provide material products for social development, thereby realizing their self-worth by making contribution to social development and laying the ideological foundation for the formation of the Nordic welfare state system.

4 The Contemporary Value of the Influence of Protestant Social Care on the Formation of Nordic Welfare State System

The Nordic welfare state is the product of the capitalist industrial age. It does not always exist, nor will it always remain at a certain level. Its emergence, prosperity and even disappearance are inevitable in history. The emergence of Nordic welfare system is also the result of the interaction of various factors. It is not only the self-adjustment of the capitalist system in a particular time, but also the display of certain specific history and culture. It also reflects a special social structure.^[11] Of

[10] Cf Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 108-110.

[11] Gerhard Wegner, *The Legitimacy of the Welfare State*, (Leipzig: EVANGELISCHE VERLAGSANSTALT, 2015), 16.

course, it also shows the historical value of the tension between religious belief and the development of Nordic welfare state system.

From the perspective of historical materialism, the emergence of Nordic welfare system has its special historical inevitability, which is the unique historical, geographical and cultural resources of a nation state. If the Nordic welfare system is defined beyond the system, it can also be said to be a cultural expression of the interaction of elements, such as national orientation, freedom and security, fairness and justice, and citizens. It is in this sense that the welfare system has a specific path dependence and is not universal. The Nordic welfare system is rooted in the religious history and culture of the western world, which is under the greater influence of religious consciousness and the tradition of “unification of the state and the church” in culture.^[12] Lutheranism is a state religion in most Nordic countries, which occupies a dominant position. As we all know, “Justification by Faith” emphasizes the equal status and rights of every faithful Christian and excludes privileges. Therefore, the Nordic sense of equality and civilian consciousness can be said to be deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. It can be said that it is this cultural specificity and historical precedence that distinguish the welfare system of Nordic countries from that of traditional religious countries.

Today, the spiritual beliefs of religion are further disenchanted. The secularization of modern society has caused the break of the Protestant spiritual chain in some countries. Therefore, we should rationally adjust the “tension” between material desire and value pursuit through the idea of Protestant social concern, from which we can get the inspiration of modern value belief to promote the development of welfare state system. To construct the support of moral belief for the rational operation of the welfare state system, it is necessary to give reasonable consideration to both the secular material desire and spiritual value demand. Protestant social concern not only fulfilled people’s desire for material wealth in secular life, providing the moral justifications of both unyielding spiritual motivation and the unity of rationality and legitimacy for the action of creating wealth, but also prepared the lofty value belief of “salvation” in religious afterlife for self-restraint and asceticism in real life. Thus, the conflict between ethical value belief and the natural desire for material wealth or between “moral impulse” and “economic impulse”, has been dialectically coincided in Protestant spirit. That is to say, Protestant social concern highly integrates the material needs of natural desire for the world and the value promotion of spiritual world. Therefore, if we want to provide moral incentive mechanism of ethical culture for the operation of the national welfare system, we cannot deny the reasonable material desire of the secular world, but explain the theoretical rationality and realistic realization mechanism of morality, integrate the mechanism of social ethical spirit and provide deep stipulation of moral practice rationality on the premise of affirming the rationality of economic impulse. The value of moral and spiritual values is further highlighted by the “sustained limitation” of the inner experience of material gains in secular life. The value support of moral belief relies on a cultural interpretation system to guide the core of the relationship of the integration between spirit and desire, value and rationality in the operation of welfare system. It guides people to practice the value stipulation of Protestant spirit by the conscious and voluntary moral behavior, so as to achieve a harmonious “value ecology” in which the internal order of individuals’ life and the external order of social life interact positively.

[12] Ibid, 19.

中文题目:

新教精神中的社会关怀——论宗教改革对北欧福利国家制度形成的作用与意义

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提要: 本文以宗教改革后的基督新教(简称:新教)为研究背景去审视北欧福利国家制度变迁,研究宗教改革中的基本教义、伦理、观念对北欧福利国家制度形成的作用和意义。其中,宗教改革中形成的新教的社会关怀理论与实践对北欧福利国家制度起到了重要的促进作用,也是本文研究的重点,希望通过梳理这一问题,使得新教精神的现实化发展有一个全新的展现视角,从而对宗教改革的社会政治哲学意义进行更深入理解与把握。

关键词: 宗教改革;新教精神;社会关怀;北欧福利国家制度