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## THE NEW CONSERVATIVE ETHIC AND THE GLOBAL CAPITALISM

*In a series of essays, from 1904, that led to his still essential *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber argued that certain Protestant moral values, particularly in Calvinism, lead to the rise of capitalism. John Calvin emphasized predestination but thought that economic success and religious faith provided signals that a person had been chosen for salvation. Calvinism regarded money as a sort of necessary evil, and an important principle of Calvinism was that a person should strive to glorify God in everything, including his vocation. A new religious ethic, as a root of modern world, including religious tolerance, gave path to a new economic system. Weber thought that the religious underpinnings of individual productivity were replaced later by secular institutions and differences in religion no longer mattered much for economic outcomes at that stage.*

**Ključne reči:** Globalism, Capitalism, Calvinism, Neoconservative Era, Evangelical Ethics, Oil Dependency, National Security, Postmodern Policy, "Georeligious" Reality, "American Creed".

„Max Weber is alive and well, and living on the outskirts of Santiago de Chile!”<sup>1</sup>

As a revolt against the centralized power of the papacy, Protestantism moved the center of religious authority either to the local community or to the national state, applying new forms of authoritarian coercion. “Calvinists favored very strong community control over the individual; Calvin's Geneva became a kind of early totalitarian state, and the Calvinist communities in the Netherlands were coercive to local nonconformists”. The Protestant national congregations were more efficient than the traditional Papacy; and also more authoritarian. The Protestants rebelled in the direction of mass participation by the local community make them more emotional and also more traditionalistic. The Protestant tendency to fuse with the political organization of the state endangers modern secular

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<sup>1</sup> Peter L. Berger, Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today. *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 4, Special Issue: Religion and Globalization at the Turn of the Millennium (Winter, 2001) pp. 443-454.

principles. The Catholic world had more internal contradictions and conflicts, and the Catholic leaders tended to be modern, less dogmatic, and more flexible.

A century after Max Weber and his *Protestant Ethic*, a number a questions is risen around a presumption that capitalism is loosing its moral compass and absolute global predominance.

*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is still founded in the global network of American descent and character. The roots of American evangelism and business culture are deeply rooted in a few constituent theocracies as Puritan New England, and also in non-typical but important Mormon Utah. And the consensus about the secular and democratic republic was achieved through the balance between religious communities and the public interest in both religious freedom and tolerance.

America is a country with a free religion market and a great variety of religious offerings. However, during the first and second George W. Bush administration, 2001-2008, especially after 9/11, the U.S. have also gone, although temporarily, in theocratic direction. Neoconservative era was guided by a general conviction that the government should be guided by Christian evangelical ethics and religious motivations. Simultaneously, the American and global economies have been toppled down in process of most serious recession after 1929.

American economy and foreign policy persistently rely on oil supplies, oil politics and oil related religious fundamentalism. Oil dependency has brought the U.S. to the dependency in using much of its political, economic and military resources around in oil rich zones where the American presence, together with the support of Israel, provoke resistance among local authoritarian conservative regimes, political Islam, especially religious fundamentalism. Current downfall of the previous leading world economic power is emerging as a serious general, global threat. Problems of oil dependency and national security, domestic political influence of religious right during two G. W. Bush administrations and financial collapse are becoming basic concerns of American policy. Especially because crusading and simplistic neoconservative Christianity and financial instability have clearly marked deviation of secular Protestantism and the super power capabilities provided by values of previous economic growth and political superiority of liberal democracy and the 90s golden era.

American Protestantism has been mostly evangelical and missionary. Its messages have been preached in circumstances that provided significant level of freedom from the state control and influence. Religious zeal was usually focused on individual pursuit of salvation, accompanied by great revivals, collective emotions, charismatic leaders and their preaching. Protestantism is also a crucial structure in modern culture architecture, the genuine revolt against conservative tradition, its corruption, monopolies and manipulation, rejection of hierarchy and accent on individualism. However, American Protestantism, especially when related to political or ideological groups, has embraced cultural anti-modernism, prophesy of crusade, cataclysmic prophecy, moralistic policy and government.

The XXI century began with attack of global terrorism against global and American values and culture. Religious fanatics of 9/11 sent a strong message of global sentiments of anti-globalism as a political religion. However, the U.S. also emerged, during the neoconservative period, along India, Russia and many Islamic countries, as influenced by political religion and rigid religious or pseudo-religious ethics transferred into public domain, including politics and state policy.

In relation to dominant religious influence in policy and culture, America is still diverse and mostly secular. However, first XXI century administrations were also influenced by a ruling elite supported by two fifths of conservative electorate convinced in preemptive righteousness of a biblical nation as a high-technology and gospel spreading, biblically spurred superpower.

Postmodern policy has also relativised the meanings and notions of liberalism and conservatism in relation to the state and the church. The “liberal” religious position is anti-dogmatic, favorable to spiritual freedom and innovation. Secularism is anti-dogmatic intellectual flexibility. Modern conservatism is “romanticist”, as anti-rationalist opposition to contemporary, and hides a few liberal characteristics as dislike of populism, the uniformity imposed by the central state, and sometimes stresses the autonomous rights of the individual. Modern liberalism is based upon a centralized rule of law, decentralized autonomous rights and mass participation. Liberals and conservatives are less far apart than they have been for centuries. Liberals have lost their faith in a superior rationality and in a reforming path. Conservatives seem to have won the philosophical battle, but they have no organizational device for putting their beliefs into practice, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Neoconservative era emerged in context of a new “georeligious” reality. Although high religiosity and religious tolerance derived from the very character of American identity and culture, America has left far away in the past its puritan and evangelical essentials. The percentage of foreign-born Americans has surpassed 10%, and the general religious and ethnic diversity reached global proportions. There are more Muslim Americans than Episcopalians, than members of the Presbyterians, and as many as the Jews. The immigrants in last decades since the liberalizations of immigration policy in 1965 have expanded diversity of religious life, and religion doesn’t mean just Christianity with a division dedicated to Judaism any more. America has become “the most profusely religious nation on earth”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Randall Collins, *Liberals and Conservatives, Religious and Political: A Conjunction of Modern History*. *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 54, No. 2, Theory and History in the Study of Religion (Summer, 1993) pp. 127-146.

<sup>3</sup> Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America. How a “Christian Country” Has become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2001) pp. 2-5.

The past decade millennialism was justified in a sense that a new era really arose with religious fundamentalism, oppositions to globalism, new political concepts deriving from fundamental, anti-modern or non-modernized religion, and backing to vintage historic roots. The world history entered in a serious global financial and economic crisis. Dispute of secularism emerged also the U.S. Although there are clear traces in American political culture that religion wasn't just a private affair without public influence. American Revolution had also roots in resurrection of Congregationalists and Presbyterians against Anglican church, although was not a war between new American genuine religious communities, and the Anglican hierarchy, but the denomination split became a crucial turning point in shaping of American culture and identity. The Civil war neither was a religious war, but there were traces of protestant dispute between North and South seriously divided the nation as a whole, just as the nation was split politically. By the end of XX century, according to Gallup, religious affiliations remained "one of the most accurate and least-appreciated political indicators available". In 2004 religious affiliation was one of value strongholds in presidential elections, and the "religious gap" obviously conformable with political division.

As globalization exported American policy, business and culture abroad, and spread them globally, American concerns, doubts, problems and crisis also became global phenomenon. At least American doubts and crisis influenced global reality. Anti-globalism was also obtaining global proportions and character. New century began with anti-global and anti-American Islamist terrorist strike on the US on 9/11, reminding how deep Max Weber theory was when connecting religion, morality and modern world foundations.

American new century administration was guided by neo-Calvinist religious and moral imperatives. The 9/11 attack was publicly explained as God's displeasure with secular immorality. But attackers were connected with forces of evil. Among secular Americans and political liberals were rising worries about the Christian right pressures, and, gradually, antipathies to evangelicals and desecularisation. With neoconservative dominance also went insecurity in foreign policy, especially related to the failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, while beaurocratisation and pressures on banking system led to the financial crisis, and massive losses in housing and jobs.

Neoconservatives mainly emerged from the general Republican course dating from the end of eighties. In that sense America was politically and religiously "southernized". In these circles America was considered as a "Christian nation", and "the myth of the separation of church and state" rejected. In public the platform was generally presented in debates about abortion or sex education. Environmentalism was considered as waist of government budgets, and abolition of such federal agencies and departments has been demanded, as Energy Department and the Environmental Protection Agency. However, the G. W. Bush administration continued to grow significantly.

One of the symbols and instruments of neoconservatism was former Missouri senator John Ashcroft as attorney general. Ashcroft was a favorite candidate of religious right. Ashcroft considered the barrier between the church and the state as “a wall of religious oppression”. The House and Senate enjoyed majority in theological correctness, and the foreign policy was toppled down to black and white dualistic simplification of right and wrong, good and the evil, especially in oil and Islamist related area, while autocratic and anti-liberal BRIC regimes were left to grow endangering fragile and inconsistent rule of law and state of human rights and political freedom. Liberal media used terms as “theocrat” and “theocon” to describe ruling antiseccular and antiintellectual ideology. “In Republican politics theological correctness...became a policy shaping force in determining Middle Eastern geopolitics, combating global AIDS, defining the legal rights of fetuses, pretending that oil was not a cause for the invasion of Iraq, and explaining geological controversies in language compatible with the Book of Genesis”<sup>4</sup>

Domination of antiseccular and antiliberal Protestantism coincided with emergence of financial crisis. Crisis also reached the global proportions. There is a serious debate if the crisis was produced by excessive regulation pressuring the banking sector to invent “exotic forms of adjustable-rate mortgages” and the uncertain dangers posed by hedge funds, or, the opposite, deregulation, tax cuts, deficit finance and growth of a massive credit bubble. As the G. W. Bush era has already gone into history with the 2008, there is a certain possibility that its general policy could really be described as Big Government conservatism. Neoconservative administrations (2001-2008) tolerated huge federal spending, downplayed swollen deficits and created a Department of Homeland Security. Big government conservatism didn't mean moderate, or liberal. On very important issues, with exception of federal spending, G. W. Bush and neoconservatives kept standard conservative attitude (anti-abortion, anti stem-cell research and anti gun control, etc). In comparison with G. W. Bush, Ronald Reagan also cut taxes and curbed domestic spending, but was a small government conservative who declared in his inauguration address that government was the problem, not the solution. Big government conservative policy has increased spending and broadened federal administration. The government funds were also used to expand social programs run by religious organizations.

A century after Max Weber and his *Protestant Ethic*, there is still ongoing debate, between all other related questions, which faith plays the market best and becomes superior in world economy. Probably every significant contemporary religious system opened a way to the protestant, especially Calvinist relation to business ethic and practice. Moslem case is especially interesting. Moslems have generally abandoned the general sense of guilt according to the

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<sup>4</sup> Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy. The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil and Borrowed Money in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Viking Penguin: New York, 2006) p. 236.

Koran state that *riba*, interest, that brings increase through the wealth of other people, will bring “no increase with Allah”. In 1998, the influential scholar Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo released the so-called “Dow Jones Fatwa”, allowing believers to invest in funds with a degree of a “permissible impurity”. Islam is a religion without a centralized hierarchy, even without a consecrated priesthood, based on the community participation of all male believers, led by the most learned, pious, and enthusiastic. The local community authoritarianism of Islam is developing a “religious democracy” in mass mobilization. As a decentralized democracy of believers, Islam has one aspect that looks liberal in terms of Western traditions, while at the same time it reinforces extremely conservative positions in terms of individual rights and cultural freedom. Islamic movements in Indonesia seemed to seriously contradict the conventional view, suggesting that under certain conditions a self-conscious movement can promote values compatible with modern capitalism.

The Roman Catholic Church reactions have been ranging from resistance against secularity to a cautious adjustment. The case of Spanish Opus Dei is especially interesting, offering a wide foundation of Max Weber's. The movement has appeared as staunchly conservative in terms of Catholic orthodoxy, and has remained so, however Opus Dei played an important role in the introduction of market economy during the transitional transformations of the Franco regime that paved a way to the subsequent tradition to democracy.<sup>5</sup>

In *Faith, Morals, and Money*, Edward Zinbarg tries to discover if dominant religions already offer similar ethical injunctions about the market, business and economy (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism). He concludes that the world religions are remarkably consistent in their teachings on business ethics, and as the ideological reasons that have kept religion out of the market and economy, he supposed that religious ethics is “describable apart from metaphysical and theological convictions”. Zinbarg suggests that a Christian “covenantal” business ethic cannot survive in a global marketplace, as the participation in global economy understands the reality of religious pluralism.<sup>6</sup>

In last decades American culture was struggling to articulate an effective business ethics. Recent scandals of Enron and WorldCom constitute examples of deficiency of ethical decision-making. Religious communities generally claim that business is too corrupt and profit-driven. On the other side, business estimates clergy as ignorant of economics, overly critical of wealth,

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<sup>5</sup> Nikola Samardžić, Španska modernizacija i autoritarni poredak. Tranzicija u Frankizmu (1951-1969) / The Modernization of Spain and the Authoritarian Regime. Transition During Franco (1951-1969), Zbornik Seminara za studije moderne umetnosti Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu III/IV (2008) pp. 140-154.

<sup>6</sup> Edward D. Zinbarg, *Faith, Morals, and Money: What the World's Religions Tell Us About Money in the Marketplace*. Continuum International Publishing Group (December 2001) 182 pp.

and inefficient with church funds. Beliefs vary, in the U.S., if promoting religious beliefs along with products and services may be crucial, or a plain suicide, in a country born out of a need for religious freedom. According to a Gallup Poll, a large percentage of corporate America feels comfortable about opening up regarding their spirituality. Approximately 95% of Americans say they believe in God or a universal force, 48% claim to have spoken about their religious faith at work that day. A growing number of companies employ chaplains to assist in times of need or spiritual crisis. Employers estimate that their staff needs an outlet for stress, anxiety, and guilt for working horrendous, but necessary, hours.

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet empire, liberal democracy and free market economy reached their peaks in global development and influence that undisputably lasted during a following decade (1989/91-2001). The mission of American foreign policy thus became clearly epitomised in export of policy, values and investments. Principles of private property, entrepreneurship and innovation have been undoubtedly related to freedom of thought, speech and movement. The market economy and democracy appeared to be deeply intertwined, especially in process of challenging traditional institutions and communities, as national government, collectivist societies and conservative, fundamentalist religion leadership. Liberal individualism and market economy fostered strong personal inequalities, resisted the localization of power, and also encouraged greed and selfishness. Global economy created new, assimilationist global culture. "As the printing press led to the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and to the birth of Protestantism", new communication technologies influenced the decline of traditional intermediaries as traditional financial institutions or media, introducing specific individual players in global economy.<sup>7</sup> "The globalization of economics, politics, and human affairs has made individuals and groups more ontologically insecure and existentially uncertain" One main response to such insecurity is to seek reaffirmation of one's self identity by drawing closer to any collective that is perceived as being able to reduce insecurity and existential anxiety. The combination of religion and nationalism is a particularly powerful response ("identity-signifier") in times of rapid change and uncertain futures, and is therefore more likely than other identity constructions to arise during crises of ontological insecurity."<sup>8</sup>

Globalization increased the gaps between winners and losers. Open market economy and democracy are threatening traditional structures in many societies. Nationalism and religion supply powerful collectivistic convictions in their ability to offer impression of security, stability, and simple answers. New

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Attali, "The Crash of Western Civilization: The Limits of the Market and Democracy." *Foreign Policy*, No. 107 (Summer, 1997) pp. 56.

<sup>8</sup> Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security." *Political Psychology*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (Oct., 2004) p. 741.

corporate reality introduced new types of independent despotisms. The state laws still impose in the form of regulation protection of ethnic, religious and other minorities and women, and to some extent consumers and the environment. Both liberal democracy and economic conservatism took part in idealizing private business, while other economic alternatives have failed to deliver on their ideological promises.

“Religion has a two-way interaction with political economy. With religion viewed as a dependent variable, a central question is how economic development and political institutions affect religious participation and beliefs. With religion viewed as an independent variable, a key issue is how religiosity affects individual characteristics, such as work ethic, honesty and thrift, and thereby influences economic performance”. Compensators like salvation, damnation and nirvana are great motivators of human behavior. In other contexts, the afterlife beliefs can promote anti-social actions.<sup>9</sup>

American neoconservative experience underlines the central drama of Protestant theology as the temptation how to resist intellectually and practically with the reality of a secular world. Therefore the question of the relationship between capitalist culture and puritan ethic remains relevant even after a century of Max Weber and the *Protestant Ethic* ongoing debate. The question was especially gaining in importance during debates over the introduction of a market economy in the post-Communist societies, with the recurring question as to whether cultural factors have been hindering the success of such an economy, or conversely whether some cultures may facilitate the economic transition.

A global resurgence of religion from the beginning of XXI century is certainly a phenomenon of exceptional political significance. Political religion, emergence of BRIC populist and authoritarian counterbalance to Western democracy, and global financial crisis disputed the expected historical supremacy and triumph of liberal democracy and open market economy. Secular principles are also disputed worldwide, although global culture and economy have left enough, although limited circumstances and conditions. The continuing debate about the political importance of religion suggests that there is a lack of clarity concerning just how religious values, norms and beliefs stimulate and affect developments in contemporary societies and policy. Secular principle has survived in much of the industrialised West but not in many parts of the Third World. In the Third World, secular political ideologies are not regarded by dominant oligarchies, including churches and clergy, as the most useful for the pursuance of collective destiny. Religion is, instead, often allied with totalitarian legacy, nationalism and ethnicity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rachel M. McCleary and Robert J. Barro, Religion and Economy. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Spring, 2006) pp. 49-72

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Haynes, Religion, Secularisation and Politics: A Postmodern Conspectus. *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Sep., 1997) pp. 709-728.



Instead of an epilogue: it seems that both religion and capitalism are not dead yet. In the last of his books, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Samuel Huntington reminded that the “American Creed” and its key elements, the English language, Christianity, religious commitment, English concepts of the rule of law, the responsibility of public policy, and the individual rights, derived from the “distinct Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers of America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries”. Huntington predicted three possible American futures, cosmopolitan, imperial and national. In cosmopolitan, the world remakes America, and globalization and multiculturalism trump national identity. In the imperial, America remakes the world, unchallenged by a rival superpower, according to its values aspirations. In national, “America remains America”, resisting the cosmopolitanism and the imperial impulse. Huntington, as liberal, preferred an American nationalism “devoted to the preservation and enhancement of those qualities that have defined America since its founding.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity*. Simon & Schuster (New York, 2004) 448 pp.

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## NOVA KONZERVATIVNA ETIKA I GLOBALNI KAPITALIZAM

### Abstrakt

Iskustvo neokonzervativne epohe dve administracije Džordža W. Buša (2001-2008) podseća na jedno od centralnih pitanja protestantske teologije kao iskušenja u odolevanju stvarnosti sekularnog sveta i modernih država. Pitanje odnosa kapitalističke kulture i puritanske etike ostaje važno i nakon punog veka Maksa Vebera i njegove *Protestantske etike i duha kapitalizma*. Pitanje je naročito dobilo na važnosti u procesu primene načela tržišne privrede u postkomunističkim sistemima, dok se postavljalo važno pitanje, da li kulturni činioci mogu uticati na uspešnost ekonomije, i da li neke kulture mogu olakšati process ekonomske tranzicije, a koje subkulture načelno suprotstavljene liebarnoj demokratiji. Izuzetno je važna nova uloga političke religije na početku XXI veka. Politička religija, populistička i autoritarna protivteža zemalja BRIC zapadnoj demokratiji, i globalna finansijska kriza osporili su istorijski trijumf, koji se najavljivao, liberalne demokratije i ekonomije slobdnog tržišta. Tome je doprinela i neokonzervativna administracija u SAD. Zato je u nekadašnjem Trećem svetu religija ostala da se povezuje i udružuje s totalitarnim nasleđem, nacionalizmom i etničkim identitetima.

**Ključne reči:** Globalizam, kapitalizam, kalvinizam, era neokonzervativaca, eangelijska etika, zavisnost od nafte, nacionalna bezbednost SAD, postmoderna politika, "georeligiozna" realnost, "američka vera"