

The Influence of Orthodox Christianity on Economic Behaviour

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Weber's very important theory on the influence of religion on economic behaviour was tested in the societies which belong to different cultural and religious circles. However, due to various socio-political circumstances, the testing of Weber's theoretical-methodological framework has been largely neglected in the countries where Orthodox Christianity is dominant. However, the difficulties that arose in Orthodox societies during the post-socialist transformation, as well as the shift from the economic research paradigm to the cultural one on the global level, along with the revival of religion in Eastern Europe as one of the most important institutions of ideological and social life, contributed to the focus of our scientific interest be directed in this direction. The central questions that we tried to answer on this occasion were primarily related to the specifics of the concept of work in Orthodox Christianity and the relationship to the accumulation of capital.

Keywords: Orthodoxy, Weber, intra-worldly asceticism, extra-worldly asceticism

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of work and economic behaviour in a society cannot be fully explained without taking into account the influence of cultural and value parameters on work ethics. These should help clarify how latent value contents through psychological mechanisms influence the formation of personal attitudes and attitudes towards work and economic activities. One of the important factors that shaped the value-cultural influence on the attitudes and behaviour of individuals over a long period of time is certainly religion, because religious representations have had a very significant impact on human consciousness for many centuries. In this context, religion can be understood as a system of beliefs and attitudes that play 'a strategic part in the human enterprise of world-building' (Berger 1990: 27). In this way, the dominant and centuries-old value system determined by religion shaped the role of the individual within society and his/her relationship to that society.

The idea of the influence of religion on the attitudes and behaviours of individuals came from Max Weber, who, based on the assumption that the value and normative culture of Protestantism greatly influenced the emergence and development of the capitalist spirit, made one of the greatest contributions to research on the influence of religion on the social system. He started from the assumption that ethical concepts based on faith in religious forces are among

the most important factors which shape people's lifestyles. Of course, Weber's immediate goal was not to provide a complete causal explanation of the emergence of capitalism, nor did he believe that Protestantism exclusively produced capitalism, which he very clearly and often pointed out.

Weber's main hypothesis was tested in societies with different national, cultural and religious characteristics, including those where the Orthodox Church is dominant. However, if we look at the entire body of texts which are devoted to the analysis of the relationship between the ethical content of Orthodoxy and the development path of the countries where this confession prevails, we will notice that compared to all other religions, the least attention is paid to the analysis of the influence of Orthodoxy on social development. Even in Weber's sociological studies of religion, the domain of the Orthodox Church received little attention. It is interesting that the neglect of this research field is not only characteristic of Western Europe, but this neglect is even more striking in the societies with predominantly Orthodox cultural tradition. The reasons should certainly be sought in the half-century-long dominance of socialist regimes in most Orthodox countries, which discouraged sociological or any other research on the influence of religion on everyday life. However, this debate was revisited after the collapse of socialism in Orthodox societies, where religion has been revived as one of the most important institutions of ideological and social life. It is in this period that the processes of democratic reforms and the transition to a market economy begin. Given that this process has been hindered by various difficulties, there are several authors who indicate a rather negative correlation between Orthodox Christianity and economic development, but also those who contest these claims.

Of course, this work does not strive to answer all the questions related to the influence of Orthodoxy on socio-economic development, because it is an undertaking that requires a long-term engagement of entire scientific teams. We will here limit ourselves to the analysis of some isolated studies of the relationship between Orthodoxy and economic and social development. Therefore, in this paper we will focus on two aspects of the complex relationship between religious values and social development: first, relying on Weber's method, we will try to look at the influence of Orthodoxy on economic behaviour, and above all, the Orthodox understanding of work and the attitude towards the accumulation of material goods; secondly, we will consider to what degree Orthodox theological teaching appeared as a consequence of certain socio-historical circumstances.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before we turn our attention to the main topic of this text, it is necessary to refer to those authors who have studied the correlation between Orthodoxy and socio-economic development. Although Max Weber's sociological research on religion has paid little attention to the domain of the Orthodox Church because he did not systematically deal with the economic ethics of Orthodoxy, isolated observations about this phenomenon can still be found in various places in his work (Weber 1976). According to Weber, mysticism represents the basis of Orthodoxy, which seeks salvation in passive contemplation and complete spiritual tranquillity. Therefore, according to him, Orthodoxy encourages escape from this world, not active participation in it, which cannot have a positive effect on the accumulation of material wealth based on dedicated work. S. Bulgakov, a thinker who occupies a prominent place among theorists of Orthodox spirituality, has a similar reasoning. He sees

the difference between Protestantism and Orthodoxy, first of all, in the dominance of materialistic or idealistic attitudes towards the world. While in the West a person gains God's favour by working and saving, thus acquiring material wealth in this world, in the East we have a reverse situation, where through prayer and self-denial, i.e. renouncing worldly wealth, one can only serve God. This also causes a difference in the work ethic, which in Protestantism is outwardly directed, while Orthodoxy gives priority to work on the inner self. 'It is work on mental health and balance through "inner spiritual action", i.e. ascetic simultaneous acceptance and transcendence of this world of natural necessity, while turning to the heavenly kingdom of ideas. Therefore, here appears the distance towards the earthly material realm' (Bulgakov 1991: 223). German sociologist A. Müller-Armack (1968) starts from the assumption that certain religious dogmas are determined by real religious organisational forms. According to him, mystical Orthodox dogmatism is a common spiritual expression that connects all areas of life into a single organisation – the state as a core, and the church which is close to it. Such an organisational concept prevents a differentiated social structure, the emergence of free cities, as well as the free development of entrepreneurship, which largely makes the Orthodox East inferior to Western societies from the point of view of economic development. D. Savramis (1963), a Greek sociologist of religion, in his analysis of the economic ethics of Orthodoxy relies entirely on Weber's method, because according to him it is the only way to clarify the question: why there is no influence in the Orthodox Church that could be compared to the influence in Calvinism? He concludes that the essential difference between Orthodoxy and ascetic Protestantism is the type of asceticism. In Protestantism, there is active asceticism, acting according to the will of God, while in Orthodoxy contemplation dominates, where the mystical union with the divinity is the main feature and the main goal of the asceticism of the Orthodox faith. This kind of religious feeling, a result of passive asceticism in the Orthodox Church, has had a negative economic impact in the prevalently Orthodox cultures. The Orthodox world often equated rationalism and rationalisation with faithlessness, which greatly hindered the rational systematisation and organisation of one's own way of life, and therefore economic life. A. Buss (1989), a Russian sociologist of religion, devoted special attention to the study of Russian Orthodox Christianity, also following the Weberian approach to this phenomenon. Analysing the relationship between the church and the state in Byzantium and Russia, he tries to figure out whether the transformation of extra-worldly asceticism into intra-worldly asceticism, which is characteristic of Western societies, has taken place in the East. Buss concludes that modern individualism does not have a cultural basis in the Orthodox tradition, as is the case in Western countries. This is also confirmed by the collective liturgical responsibility recognised by Russian law, which, as Buss states, everywhere it was introduced significantly reduced the formation of private capital and the capitalist acquisition of wealth. The Greek sociologist of religion G. I. Mandzaridis (2004) interprets the Orthodox faith in a similar way. According to him, the Orthodox Church does not perceive the world and man's presence and actions in the world rationally, but liturgically. The justification of man is not seen as an individual achievement nor is it sought on a worldly level – it is gained by transcending individuality and liberation from slavery to the world. Therefore, the goal of work is not the production or creation of material goods, but a suppression of egotism as the source of all evils, and the cultivation of selfless love.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS LABOUR AND CAPITAL ACCUMULATION IN ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WEBER'S THEORY

Every religion, therefore Orthodoxy as well, where it is the dominant confession among believers, encourages a certain system of values and a certain culture that determines the behaviour of the congregation. Using Weber's approach, in this work we will primarily be interested in how Orthodox teaching on the meaning and path of salvation influences the practical life of Orthodox believers. More precisely, in what way the religious-ethical content participates in the formation of the attitudes of individuals towards the world and the basic motives that directly determine their lifestyles in societies with predominantly Orthodox believers.

Over many centuries, religious representations exerted a key influence over human consciousness. The man thought intensely about what would happen to him after death, and these thoughts were greatly determined by his confessional affiliation. The essential question posed has been the role of man in his own salvation. When it comes to this question, Protestantism sets off from the fact that a person with original parental sin has irretrievably lost the ability to do anything spiritually good, and is therefore completely incapable of spiritually converting, i.e. getting back on the right path. According to this understanding, man is forever sinful, and no matter what he does and how much he tries to get spiritually closer to God, his efforts are in vain. However, in order to justify his existence on earth, he must find another existential meaning, and given the spiritual irreversibility, this new way of serving God must have a secular character. Accordingly, an individual can only serve God in such a way that he will conscientiously and loyally perform the calling that God intended for him, whereby constant work and acquisition of wealth to be shared with the community are considered good deeds.

Any refusal to act this way is considered a sin for which there is no forgiveness (Weber 1989). Considering such a pessimistic understanding of man as a sinful and spiritually irredeemable being, Protestantism, according to Weber, requires him to assume personal responsibility in this world and redeem in this world through personal effort. By thus taking responsibility for himself and the community, he serves God. Prayer here has no purpose as in Orthodoxy or Catholicism; the Protestant believer is somehow separated from God. Protestant theology teaches us that individuals are originally chosen for salvation, and the chosen ones are revealed to us through success in economic activity. Obviously, the only way to achieve prosperous economic activity is through honest work. The amount of accumulated material wealth is the most significant indicator of how successful individuals are in economic activity, and thus whether they are chosen and destined for salvation.

In contrast to Protestantism, in the Orthodox Church there is an optimistic view according to which man is able to renew, enlighten, perfect himself, and even turn into a deity (Savramis 1963). In Orthodoxy, likewise, man is seen as a sinful being, but not in such a way that he could not become enlightened again, of course, on the condition that he spiritually dedicates himself completely to God. However, this enlightenment cannot be achieved through worldly calling and rational acquisition of material goods, but exclusively through unconditional faith and contemplation. In this way, man is given the opportunity to get closer to God and save his soul. Orthodox theologians believe that God's kingdom on earth will be realised at the moment when all people reach this level of transcendence.

The difference in the understanding of man's duties on earth also produces a different type of asceticism in the two Christian confessions. In Protestantism, the intra-worldly asceticism prevails, which implies an ascetic and humble life of the individual, but in this world.

That is, the Protestant believer does not strive to escape this world, but sees the purpose of one's existence in devotion to one's calling. This entails the acquisition of material goods by which one helps the community in which one lives. It is important to emphasise here that the accumulation of wealth is not in itself the utmost goal, but a means that allows the individual to help those who are in need and thus do good deeds and serve God. Therefore, instead of contemplation, Protestantism preaches industry.

Considering the optimistic understanding of man's spiritual transformation, Orthodoxy preaches a different type of asceticism. Hard work and rational acquisition of material goods are not the way in which one can approach God. Instead, unconditional faith and contemplation are the only way to eventually achieve salvation and with a pure heart unite with God. It is precisely this primacy which is given to contemplation that has determined a specific kind of extra-worldly asceticism which entails renouncing this world and turning to the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, we come to the conclusion that Orthodoxy, at its core, is not interested in salvation in this world, but, as Bulgakov (1991) states, in salvation from this world and its transcendence. The goal of such asceticism is 'the elevation of human nature into the sphere of the divine and its spiritualistic, mystical union with God' (Savramis 1963: 339). Accordingly, the main goal of the Orthodox Church is deification. Deification, however, as emphasised by Mandzaridis (2004), is ultimately a passive, not an active state. Man does not actively create, but accepts deification as a gift of God's grace. Of course, this does not imply that a person is allowed to do nothing, because deification cannot just 'happen' without efforts to remove everything that prevents the action of God's grace in one's life (Mandzaridis 2004). This way of life is not preached only for monks, but is recommended for every Christian.

The main difference between Orthodoxy and Protestantism is obviously in the type of asceticism. In Protestant countries we have active asceticism and serving according to the will of God as God's tool, while in Orthodoxy we have a soul-saving contemplative mysticism, 'where to *have* does not *mean* to act, where the individual is not a tool but a vessel of the divine' (Savramis 1963: 339).

The different forms of asceticism present in Orthodoxy and Protestantism have produced different attitudes towards work and the acquisition of material wealth in the two confessional cultures. While Protestantism requires the individual to constantly work and care for the community in order to serve God, Orthodoxy sees service to God primarily in a contemplative attitude towards God and overcoming the earthly material world. Therefore, the earthly calling and acquisition of material goods is of a secondary importance in Orthodoxy. An Orthodox person striving to serve God simply pays less attention to work, acquisition of goods and property. Orthodox philosophy, namely, holds that serving God should consist of spiritual dedication to God. Therefore, the Orthodox believer should earn just as much as to meet his/her basic needs. He/she should not waste the rest of the energy on the rational acquisition of material goods, but on contemplatively approaching God, in the hope that one day he/she will save his/her soul (Ristić 2005). Extra-worldly asceticism instructs the individual to view the secular world as less valuable and promotes a general disinterest in material achievement.

Work, above all, serves the physiological needs, because the satisfaction of more than physiological needs leads to the danger of man falling into ever-increasing sin. The goal of work, as stated by Mandzaridis (2004), is not the production of material goods, but the suppression of self-love which is perceived as the source of all evil, and the cultivation of selfless

love. The work that people carry out without personal benefit and without compensation is considered ideal, because, according to Basil the Great (Basil the Great in Mandzaridis 2004), the purpose of work should not be to satisfy individual needs, but to 'serve the needy'. According to him, this is the only way to avoid the 'crime of self-love'. Such an attitude, which from the very beginning excludes the appropriation and accumulation of wealth, is applied in the communal life (*kinovia*), which represents the ideal form of society. Hence, Orthodoxy turns to the work ethic only as much as is necessary to meet the basic needs of the community in question (Capaldi 2005). Such an understanding of work is closer to the socialist than to the capitalist understanding of economy (Ristić 2005), which possibly led Dostoevsky to claim that 'orthodoxy is our Russian socialism' (Bulgakov 1991: 200). N. Gvozdev (2001) notes that some other Orthodox societies throughout history were based on a socialist economy. He states that Byzantium regulated its economy by controlling the production and sale of goods through guilds, while together with the church it provided social assistance to the population, among other ways by establishing hospitals and other social institutions. This might be one of the reasons why socialism originated in those countries with predominantly Orthodox confession (Russia, Yugoslavia).

It is obvious that the dominant religious context of Orthodoxy does not connect activity and work in the material world with the salvation of the soul. Therefore, although work in a symbolic sense has an important role in the maintenance of the community (as a form of collective assistance to community members), from the perspective of the individual, it does not represent one of the backbones of the general symbolic system. This view has a very significant social impact and is reflected by a number of concrete things. For example, Müller-Armack states that 'the attitude towards work which is devoid of morals can also explain the fact that the number of church holidays in South-Eastern Europe could swell to such a number that it almost exceeded the number of working days. A peasant in Serbia worked on average only 160 days, and the rest is non-working time due to holidays or unfavourable weather conditions. There is also a whole series of family patron's days, which together with Sundays make up a total of 160 holidays per year. In Bulgaria, a peasant had an average of 120 working days, including the time when he did not work due to winter' (Müller-Armack in Savramis 1963: 342). As Savramis (1982) states, citing archaeologist H. Schliemann, we have a similar situation in Greece, where in addition to 52 Sundays, 97 different holidays are celebrated, totalling 149 non-working days.

According to Weber, such a spiritual climate, in which working to acquire material goods does not contribute to the salvation of the soul, can stimulate the so-called adventure capitalism, often found in the East. This form of capitalism is characterised by the acquisition of material goods without a moral obligation for it to serve the community, an attitude which is characteristic of the organised economic system in Protestantism. Namely, the ethical principles that regulated the way of acquiring and distributing material wealth in Protestantism did not exist in Orthodoxy, which means that no systemic social purpose of an individual's acquired goods is foreseen. Because of the dominantly spiritual commitment to God, the Orthodox refuses to grasp the world with reason, which can hinder innovation and rational incentives which are the basis of entrepreneurship and successful economic activity, as well as the rational use of property. An Orthodox cannot change this world by action, but only by devotion to God through prayer, and such a contemplative approach entails the absence of systematic self-control and an organised professional life. Consequently, in such circumstances, a modern capitalist enterprise could hardly have arisen because the Orthodox lacked

‘rational objectification of the instinctive character of life with rewards and a system of rational intra-world ethics of work’ (Weber in Savramis 1963: 342). Such a spiritual climate, inhibiting for the development of economic ethics, can partially explain the fact that in a significant number of Orthodox countries the merchant, as the originator of capitalist activity, was known for his dishonesty. This is confirmed by a 17th-century Russian proverb, cited by A. Bas – ‘those who trade are thieves’ (Bas 1989: 239), as well as the verses of P. Petrović-Njegoš, a Montenegrin bishop and 19th-century ruler, who in the most representative work of Serbian culture – ‘The Mountain Wreath’, says ‘a merchant lies to you with a coy smile’ (Petrović-Njegoš 1997: 25).

The dominantly spiritual religiosity of Orthodoxy, in which reason does not occupy a significant place, could not even contribute to the rational development of the state to which it was tied and was dependent on throughout its history. According to Müller-Armack (1968), the real historical effect of certain ideas and values which are formulated around certain religious dogmas are mediated by the corresponding organisational forms. Thus, for example, Catholic rational theology, in his opinion, represents the spiritual foundation of a differentiated organisational form in the West – the political autonomy of the church in relation to the state. On the other hand, he sees the mystically sensitive Orthodox theology as the basis for a common spiritual expression that firmly integrates all areas of life into an undifferentiated organisation in the East – a strong central state and a church dependent on it. It is here necessary to mention the concept of Caesaropapism, a relationship between church and state characteristic of Orthodox countries in the past (Byzantium, Russia). This concept, as stated by Bass (2010), signifies the ancient sacral royal dignity of archaic societies in which the idea of the unity of ecclesiastical and secular authority never disappeared. From this comes the view that Christian emperors are carriers of spirituality, although not in the same way as bishops and the rest of the clergy, but their rule is blessed by the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the emperor is not only at the head of the state, but he is also considered the representative of the church. On the other hand, the role of the patriarch is reduced to the interpretation of dogma, without the possibility of interfering with socio-political issues.

In such a way, Orthodox Christianity did not establish an adequate critical attitude towards its secular rulers, the clergy did not act autonomously in the field of public and political relations and were not independent from the secular government. ‘Eastern Christianity preserved its demand to integrate and harmonise the totality of intra-worldly and extra-worldly reality’ (Tomka 2010: 204). The absence of autonomy of the church in the East, which in contrast to the West did not possess any political power, caused, according to Müller-Armack (1968), the lack of a class made up of privileged and independent clergy and nobility, the lack of free cities, as well as the absence of entrepreneurship as the foundation of the capitalist system. He also suggests that the absence of autonomy of the Orthodox Church and the lack of a theologically rational interpretation of the dogma resulted in the absence of independent social movements that would serve as the basis of a developed civil society.

However, the viewpoints according to which the deterministic sequence went in the opposite direction, i.e. that every religious teaching is determined by certain specific socio-political circumstances, are not rare either (Ristić 2005; Makridis 2012; Makridis 2019). I. Ristić (2005) cites two significant socio-historical circumstances that led to the creation of a state-dependent church in the East (collegial) and the state-independent church in the West (autonomous), which in turn created two different types of religiosity and theological teaching, and ultimately different forms of asceticism. The first circumstance is that

the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as the most dominant of the four Eastern Patriarchates, was too close to the centre of power and the emperor to be able to establish its own centre of power which would be independent of the secular centre of power and on the basis of which the church could build its own autonomy within the state. The Roman Patriarchate, on the other hand, was far away from the secular centre of power, so the lack of control by Constantinople contributed to its somewhat independent identity.

Another circumstance that led to different theological teaching and even different development of the two churches was the fact that the patriarch of Constantinople had to share spiritual authority and compromise with the other three very influential traditional patriarchates in Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria, while the patriarch whose seat was in Rome had neither a spiritual nor a secular competitor in his environment, and was therefore able to gain both the spiritual and political power. While in Constantinople a strong state dominated the church, in the West a new state was created with the help of the church, which had an increasing influence on secular issues as well – the law passed by the secular rulers had to be approved by the Pope first; the Pope had the authority to depose even emperors (Bass 1989). As a consequence of the above, a compromise imperial (state) church with the indisputable power of the emperor emerged in the East, with the simultaneous weakening of the position of the eastern patriarchies both within Byzantium and in the struggle for primacy with Rome, while in the West a papal (autonomous) church emerged, which amidst the struggle for primacy was gaining political strength.

The Eastern Church did not have the opportunity to separate from the state and become an autonomous institution, so it turned its position of 'tied hands' into a virtue. In accordance with its theological point of view, according to which man should not aspire to power and activity but only to contemplation, it renounced any struggle for autonomy from secular authority, considering the ideal system to be the unity of secular and spiritual authority (symphony) in which each individual has a predetermined place and task – to approach God through a contemplative life. It was precisely this primacy given to contemplation that produced a specific extra-worldly asceticism.

This concept of the symphony of state and church, which did not contribute to the creation of autonomous segments of society, independent of the state, as is the case in the West, caused the emergence of the patrimonial state in the East. Undifferentiated social structure, political centralisation, 'patrimonial bureaucracy that functioned only on the basis of personal subordination to the ruler' (Bass 1989: 238), the absence of a rationally reliable law and administrative system could not be a suitable ground for the development of capitalism as it developed in the West (Bass 1989; Beron, 1970; Weber 1924).

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this paper was to analyse the influence of Orthodox religion on economic behaviour, and above all the religious understanding of work and the accumulation of material wealth. Of course, it should be kept in mind that the influence of religion on the social and economic development of a modern state is limited, but its influence should neither be underestimated nor overestimated. In any case, this is not a simple task because the influence of religion is intertwined with numerous other social and political factors. However, a certain similarity can be observed in the economic systems of those societies with the same confessional background, which certainly encouraged us to conduct this sort of analysis.

Staying faithful to Weber's methodological approach, which, despite numerous challenges, managed to show how Protestantism contributed to the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe, it can be likewise deducted that the core values of the Orthodox religion are not compatible with those on which capitalism is based. Compared to the capitalist value system, the Orthodox value system has a completely different set of primary goals. It is based on the fact that the individual seeks a contemplative path to God, while the accumulation of material goods is something that distracts him/her from this endeavour. The acquisition of material possessions for an Orthodox Christian is secondary, it in itself has no religious value nor does it contribute to salvation. This creates a certain amount of repulsiveness towards the worldly accumulation of material wealth, beyond what is necessary to sustain life. In this context, only the work that satisfies the basic needs of life or helps other members of the community (without material compensation) is considered to be godly.

The state organisation itself, i.e. the relationship between the church and the state, is cited as unfavourable for the development of capitalism on the soil of predominantly Orthodox societies. Unlike Western societies, where we have a separation of the church and the state and their autonomy, i.e. a more dynamic relationship between the social and political systems, in Orthodox societies we have a symphony of the church and the state, i.e. the unity of these institutions which did not contribute to the creation of autonomous segments of society, but the emergence of the patrimonial state.

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Stačiatikybės įtaka ekonominiam elgesiui

Santrauka

Labai svarbi M. Weberio teorija apie religijos įtaką ekonominiam elgesiui buvo išbandyta visuomenėse, priklausančiose skirtingiems kultūriniais ir religiniais junginiams. Tačiau dėl įvairių socialinių ir politinių aplinkybių šalyse, kuriose dominuoja stačiatikybė, M. Weberio teorinių-metodologinių nuostatų patikrinimu nebuvo rūpinamasi. Vis dėlto, sunkumai, iškilę stačiatikių visuomenėse posocialistinės transformacijos metu, taip pat perėjimas nuo ekonominių tyrimų paradigmos prie kultūrinės pasauliniu lygmeniu, kartu su religijos atgimimu Rytų Europoje, kaip vienos svarbiausių ideologinio ir socialinio gyvenimo institucijų, prisidėjo prie to, kad mūsų mokslinis interesas būtų nukreiptas šia linkme. Pagrindiniai klausimai, į kuriuos bandėme atsakyti, pirmiausia buvo susiję su darbo sampratos krikščionių ortodoksijoje ir požiūrio į kapitalo kaupimą specifika.

Raktažodžiai: stačiatikybė, M. Weberis, vidinis asketizmas, išorinis asketizmas