

Calling and Volunteering in Modern Society:

How Weber's Analysis of the Protestant Ethic may help Understand Volunteering

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The aim of the article is to show how the concept of 'calling' may help shed light on volunteering as a modern, social phenomenon as 'calling' is laid out in Max Weber's essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and with a side view to philosophical notions of the "good life". Research on volunteering has demonstrated that a shift in the nature of volunteering seems to take place. The shift involves a tendency away from "traditional volunteering" to an emerging "new" form of volunteering. Both forms are studied and characterised. The change more generally means a shift from normative connectedness to a collectivity to a connectedness based on utilitarian rationality.

Characteristics of the two forms of volunteering are compared with different versions of the calling in Protestant ethic, as Weber has analysed them. The comparison shows that each of the two forms of volunteering may be associated with one particular version of the Protestant ethic in their more or less secular representations. Similarly, by introducing the notion of the good life, it becomes clear that there is an affinity between how the good life is constructed on the basis of the two forms of volunteering and in the two main versions of the Protestant ethic.

Keywords: Protestant ethic, calling, volunteering, good life, Lutheranism, Calvinism, Pietism

Introduction

The aim of the article is to show how the concept of 'calling' may help shed light on volunteering as a social phenomenon as laid out in Max Weber's famous essay on the Protestant ethic and its connection with what Weber calls "the spirit of capitalism"¹ and with a side view to philosophical notions of the "good life". The designation 'volunteering' or 'voluntarism' in the Nordic context derives from the 19th century philanthropic movement in the UK. It refers to the morally based engagement by the upper classes to benefit the poor as opposed to the statutory

1 Weber, M. (1930), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London. In the article I will make use of both Parsons' English translation from 1930 of Weber's revised German edition of 1920 and Peter Baehr and Gordon Wells' new translation of the original German edition of 1904–1905 (Weber: 2002). In their introduction Baehr and Wells say they want to rid Weber's essay of its "Parsonian lense" and for the first time provide an English translation of Weber's original essay.

measures. In the Nordic context voluntary engagement is more aptly characterised by the egalitarian ethos permeating the Nordic societies and the hierarchic organisation inspired by political organisations.²

The concept of volunteering may be defined in various ways. Quite common is Pessi's definition in her doctoral dissertation: "Volunteering is help provided by an individual out of free will and without pay in an organizational context".³ The definition includes four elements: volunteering is carried out in order to benefit others, it is non-obligatory, unpaid and takes place in an organisational context. The first three elements are more or less universal in definitions of volunteering; the last element is less common.⁴ The inclusion of the fourth element in a definition of volunteering may be taken to reflect what is the most common way of organising voluntary efforts in the Nordic context, as mentioned above.

In my concrete illustrations and specific historical references I will restrict myself to the Norwegian context. However, I have no reason to believe that the validity of my presentation is limited to Norway. My ambition is not to present a historical, causal analysis of the connection between Protestant ethics and forms of volunteering in contemporary Norwegian society. My goal is more modest, to suggest a possible connection "at the level of meaning", to show that there is a possible "elective affinity" between the (secularised) Lutheran and the Calvinist versions of "the Protestant ethic" and "the spirit of volunteering" in contemporary society.

Two Forms of Volunteering

Research on volunteering has demonstrated that a shift in the nature of volunteering seems to take place, what we may characterise as a modernisation of volunteering. The shift involves a tendency away from "traditional volunteering" to an emerging "new" form of volunteering. In the Norwegian setting "traditional volunteering" typically involves a long-term commitment based on organisational membership and a sense of duty, an example of a form of normatively based connectedness to a collectivity, with a collective mode of orientation.⁵ Historically it is connected with the development and growth of a "civic spirit" from the middle of the 19th century. Social and popular movements were formed to work for the

2 Lorentzen, H. (2004), *Fellesskapets fundament: Sivilsamfunnet og individualismen*, Oslo, 30f

3 Yeung, A. B. (2004), *Individually Together: Volunteering in Late Modernity: Social Work in the Finnish Church*, Helsinki: The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health, 52f

4 Dekker, P./Halman, L. (2003) 'Volunteering and Values: An Introduction', in P. Dekker/L. Halman (ed.), *The Values of Volunteering: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, New York.

5 Lorentzen: 2004

collective values and interests of members and supporters,⁶ in many cases welfare or philanthropic organisations working for the common good. Faithfulness and life-long membership was expected. By leaders of voluntary organisations in Norway, traditional volunteering or voluntary work, is seen to be on the decline.⁷ The following two examples may in a simple way illustrate what is held to be traditional forms of volunteering:

John is an active member of the local Red Cross association and has been for many years. He has served as a board member there. He is currently engaged in the local Visitor Service for lonely elderly people as its leader and a visitor, and in the Search and Rescue Corps. John also serves on the board of the "Volunteer Centre", with the goal to co-ordinate voluntary efforts undertaken by persons and organisations in the municipality and which is owned by the municipality and the Red Cross in partnership.

The case illustrates a typical form of "traditional" volunteering in a Norwegian context. It takes place within the framework of a philanthropic organisation as unpaid, leisure time activity. It involves both welfare activities that bring him in direct contact with primary beneficiaries of the organisation and management activities, which elicit experience in running an organisation, decision-making processes and, perhaps, political influence.

Tone⁸ related that they [she and her spouse] have the coming weekend off. They plan to visit ships [with Norwegians on board] in the town of [Y] [approx. 300 km away], going by car and staying in a hotel: 'In this way we combine the useful and the pleasant.'⁹

Visiting ships is (a minor) part of the regular work of one of the spouses. It means a combination of bringing newspapers, servicing and socialising with the Norwegians onboard, which often involves pastoral care. The case illustrates a form of volunteering different from the first case. It is performed within the framework of a voluntary organisation, but not as organised voluntary work. It is performed as an extension of regularly, paid work and is intended to help fulfil the organisation's mission. This form of volunteering would be difficult to understand if it is not perceived as an expression of personal dedication to, identification with, the mission of the organisation – or at least a strong feeling of loyalty to the organisation and its mission. But the loyalty in this case has its personal costs and the costs are compensated for by adding an element of pleasure to it.

6 Johnstad, T./Klausen, J. E./Mønnesland, J. (2003), *Globalisering, regionalisering og distriktspolitikk*, Oslo: Makt- og demokratiutgreiinga 1998–2003; Seip, A.-L. (1981), *Om velferdsstatens framvekst: Artikler*, Oslo.

7 See e.g. Heiberg, A. N. (1999), 'Frivillighet i endring', *Dagbladet*. Oslo.

8 John and Tone are fictitious names.

9 Research note from a visit to a Norwegian Seamen's Church abroad. All translations made by the author.

The “new” or what Dekker calls “late modern version of volunteering”,¹⁰ is generally supposed to be on the rise. As this process of change is analysed in a Norwegian setting, what is new is the mentality. Active membership in and faithfulness to an organisation is an individual choice in another sense than before, a choice which can be reversed at any time. The choice is made on the basis of what the individual thinks serves his/her interest the best, not on tradition. More generally this means, in its consequences, a shift from normative connectedness to a collectivity to a connectedness based on utilitarian rationality.¹¹ On a societal level the change in mentality coincides with a renewed interest in the voluntary sector by the state. By researchers in the field the renewed interest by the state has been interpreted as a consequence of a shift from a policy of support and laissez-faire to support based on a more strategic or utilitarian perspective, that is, guided by the question of how voluntary organisations may be used as instruments to implement public policies.

The new volunteering is characterised by self-orientation; the volunteer is a “free agent” whose engagement is limited, contract-based and with few “obligations”. In a strategic, long-term perspective this kind of volunteering may be connected with financial gain or at least social status in the labour market.¹² This form of volunteering may be illustrated by the following case:

Renate Viken (23) is involved in visitor service at a refugee reception centre run by a voluntary organisation (of which she is not a member). She is a university student in human geography and wanted to have a social experience of a different sort, something “which you don’t learn by studying in the reading hall.” She “is the new and modern volunteer [”dugnadsarbeider”]. She is young, consciously seeking a professional career and uses her volunteering to get relevant experience. [...] Like many other young and ambitious people she uses part of her leisure time to engage in volunteering”.¹³

The case provides the rationale for her volunteering. The point to be made in addition is that her choice of activity is hardly a random choice. It is an activity where she is able to use her own life experiences; it is a popular type of activity to engage in, it is clearly defined and delimited, it concerns the daily life of the other part, it is a social activity and it serves a need in the community.

Wollebæk and Selle¹⁴ have studied volunteering in different age groups in Norway. They find that older Norwegians perform volunteer work because they

10 Dekker, P. (2008), ‘Civic Virtues and Volunteering in Europe. Contemporary European Perspectives on Volunteering’. Ersta Sköndal Högskola, Stockholm, 10–12 September 2008.

11 Lorentzen: 2004

12 Traditional and new volunteering and how the change affects and challenges an organisation like the Red Cross, is described in Lorentzen, H. (2008), ‘Visjoner og virkelighet: Røde Kors’, in Samfunnsanalyse 2007, Oslo: Institutt for samfunnsforskning.

13 Nguyen, T. D. (2007), ‘Frivilligheten famler’, in LO-Aktuelt, Oslo.

14 Wollebæk, D./Selle, P. (2003) ‘Generations and Organizational Change’, in P. Dekker/L. Halman (ed.), *The Values of Volunteering: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, New York.

belong to traditional voluntary associations. Younger Norwegians are less likely to belong to a voluntary association although they volunteer at the same rate. "The new model of participation is [...] characterized by a strong activity orientation, short-term commitment, extensive turnover and a weak or contained value basis".¹⁵ Since the authors only have access to cross-sectional data, they are unable to determine whether this is the result of generational or life cycle phenomena. Wollebæk and Selle argue the case for generational phenomena. One of the arguments they put forward is the decline in membership in traditional, value based organisations.

In the Norwegian voluntary sector a transition seems to take place at the individual as well as the structural level, at the individual level from traditional volunteering to new volunteering. At the structural level there is a change in organisational membership, whereby explicitly value-based organisations (religious organisations, women's organisations, philanthropic and voluntarism organisations and the like), the type of organisation illustrated in the first case above, are losing members while culture, sports and other leisure type organisations are increasing in membership.¹⁶ What has traditionally characterised the Norwegian voluntary sector, amateur-based voluntarism and social movement forms "with broad, outward oriented goals for society" seem to have faded away in the direction of greater pluralism in form and content.¹⁷

Østerud, Engelstad and Selle¹⁸ (2003) connect the new volunteering to other structural changes. They claim that the traditional form of organising volunteering has met with competition from a new form of organising, what they call ad hoc organising.¹⁹ The authors see it as a result of the new rationality of organisational society characterised by an "increasing degree of self-organising for quick satisfaction of immediately felt needs".²⁰ One of the consequences is that it is difficult to involve people in administrative work like board membership, a widespread form of traditional volunteering illustrated in the first case presented above. The structural change implies increasing degree of professionalisation and centralisation of the voluntary organisations. The traditional correlation between organisational membership and political influence is no longer to be taken for granted. It means for the organisations that membership is less important and useful than before, that a large membership may be as much a liability as an asset when it comes to being an efficient organisation. The traditional membership role becomes threatened. It is only to be expected that such changes will have an im-

15 Wollebæk/Selle: 2003, 174

16 Lorentzen: 2004, 130; Sivesind, K. H. (2002), *The Voluntary Sector in Norway: Composition, Changes, and Causes*, Oslo: 100ff; Tønder, J.-K. (ed.) (2003), *Samfunnsspeilet*, Nr. 4/2003, Oslo.

17 Sivesind: 2002, 113

18 Østerud, Ø./Engelstad, F./Selle, P. (2003), *Makten og demokratiet, en sluttbok fra makt- og demokratiutredningen*, Oslo.

19 Østerud/Engelstad/Selle: 2003, 147ff

20 Østerud/Engelstad/Selle: 2003, 147

pact on how people choose to organise themselves. In this Østerud, Engelstad and Selle²¹ argue that there is a connection between the functioning of the political system, the structure of the voluntary sector and forms of volunteering.

Participation in voluntary activities is still high in Norway. Even when membership rates have remained constant, surveys indicate that the share of active members has declined.²² However, the relative number of people that have been involved in voluntary work has increased during the last decade. During the same period the amount of voluntary work performed has been stable, indicating that each volunteer contributes fewer hours of work per year.²³

If we conceive of the volunteering involved in the three cases as based on dedication to a cause, we deal with different types of causes: it is reasonable to interpret the dedication connected with the first and the second cases to be to the activity itself as the cause. In the third case, the primary dedication is to a cause outside the activity; to which the activity is a means. The person is primarily dedicated to her own professional career.

The concept of dedication makes the notion of the “good life” topical. Western philosophers have struggled with this idea since the time of the Greek classics. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle associates the good life with happiness. He claims that for “most men, and men of the most vulgar type” the good life deals with seeking pleasure. For the more sophisticated it means seeking honour. But for the most learned the good life means pursuing a virtuous, contemplative life. Only for these people there is congruence between what they desire to do and what they ought to do. What people ought to do is a question of personal value systems as well as the basic values of society. In this way the “good life” is in social science related to “quality of life” as measured with reference to some normative standards.²⁴ Charles Taylor refers to Aristotle in his discussion of the good life and develops his conceptions further, primarily in his book *Sources of the Self*.²⁵ Taylor distinguishes three dimensions of the good or moral life, dimensions which he thinks we find in one form or another in every culture:

1. Practices that express a conception of concern, love or respect for the ‘other human being’; duties, obligations, responsibilities,

21 Østerud/Engelstad/Selle: 2003

22 Statistics Norway (2009), Survey of Level of Living, 2007: Organisation Activity, Oslo: Statistics Norway, http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/07/02/10/orgakt_en/ (accessed 25 June 2009), 59f

23 Wollebæk, D./Selle, P./Strømsnes, K. (2008), Endringsprosesser i norsk frivillighet: En kunnskapsoversikt: Rapport til Kultur- Og Kirkedepartementet i forbindelse med kunnskapsoppsummering knyttet til frivillighetsarbeid, Bergen: Stein Rokkan senter for flerfaglige samfunnsstudier, 40.

24 Ferriss, A. L. (2004), ‘The Quality of Life Concept in Sociology’, in *American Sociologist*, 35, 37–51; Wortham, R. A./Wortham, C. B. (2007), ‘Spiritual Capital and the “Good Life”’, in *Sociological Spectrum*, 27, 439–452

25 Taylor, C. (1989), *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge.

2. Human aspiration to enjoy a fulfilled, meaningful life, where some contrast is drawn between the fulfilled and the misspent life,
3. Dignity, which elicits the respect of others, born from the recognition of something like nobility; something that we find when we 'look up' to another person, group or life form.

The two forms of volunteering spelled out above in the three cases may be related to Taylor's notion of the good life, though with unequal emphasis on the various dimensions and in all cases with little weight on the third. The two forms and the corresponding cases may be taken to illustrate different conceptions of the good life. What they have in common, and which is a central element in modern western culture, is that their engagement is based on an understanding that they are free to choose whether or not to get involved in the forms of activity that the cases illustrate. This freedom may be connected with a more fundamental freedom, the freedom to shape individual identity in the light of the person's desires, values and convictions; assuming nothing on authority.²⁶ A second feature they are likely to share is the idea that caring for others is a basic value and a central element of the "good life". Where they may differ, is in the priority given to this value as compared to the value of "self-realisation" in a narrow meaning. The cases illustrating traditional volunteering, interpreted within the framework presented in this section, seem to put a stronger emphasis on the welfare of others in their volunteering than the case illustrating new volunteering.

The Concept of Calling

In this article I will choose a different approach to volunteering than the political science approach referred to above, from the sociology of religion, which may serve as a complement to the former. In my presentation I will mainly use Max Weber's analysis of the calling as my theoretical point of departure.²⁷ I will also draw on the Swedish theologian Gustav Wingren and his analysis of Luther's concept of the calling²⁸ and have a side view to Charles Taylor's theory of modernity as it is laid out in *Sources of the Self*.²⁹ In his sociological analysis of the connection between "*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*" Weber introduces the concept of the calling. In the word calling (as well as in the German "Beruf"), "a religious conception, that of a task set by God, is at least suggested"³⁰ Weber claims that in the sense of a life task or a field in which to work, the concept of the calling was a new idea, a product of the Reformation, and a Protestant

26 Taylor: 1989, 211

27 Weber: 1930

28 Wingren, G. (1993), *Luthers lära om kallelsen*, Skellefteå.

29 Taylor: 1989

30 Weber: 1930, 79

notion, and he considers Luther to be its father. Weber's essay has over the last century inspired a whole industry of research. Swatos and Kaelber have tried to sum up the status of Weber's thesis after a century of follow-up and criticism.³¹ Basically, the thesis has not been falsified. For the purpose of this article the main point is that Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethics has not been rejected.³²

Lutheran Conception of Calling

Luther uses the word "calling" in different ways³³, and in the context of work he uses the concept only to describe the work of the Christian. In the description of the work of the non-Christian, Luther seems to use other words.

It is clear that the concept of calling reflects a religious notion of a task given by God to benefit the neighbour.³⁴ The way Weber reads Luther he finds there is a difference in the significance of the calling in the young and not so young Luther. Here I will restrict myself to the young Luther who connected the calling with work. The calling was understood in terms of God as the creator of heaven and earth, that we are created as human beings in order to cater for each other through work. Luther declared that we are the daily bread in each other's lives. Work is the source of our daily bread and our living together in a community of human beings. Thus, there are obligations connected with the calling, "the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world."³⁵

In its secular meaning, in the context of work, the idea of calling meant that all occupations were equal in the sight of God, and that God was as glorified through a candle maker creating high quality candles as he was through a priest. This gave "every-day worldly activity a religious significance".³⁶ Luther's focus broke down the clergy/laity distinction in medieval Catholicism for a doctrine he called the "priesthood of all believers".³⁷ The individual was to fulfil the obligations of his or her position in the world in order to be acceptable by God. Unlike the monk, whose duty it was to be otherworldly, obtaining salvation by denying self and the world, for Protestants fulfilment of one's duty in worldly affairs was the highest form that the moral activity of individuals could take. As Weber reads Luther, ordinary labour in a calling appears to him [Luther] as "the outward expression of

31 Swatos, W. H./Kaelber, L. (ed.) (2005), *The Protestant Ethic Turns 100: Essays on the Centenary of the Weber Thesis*, Boulder, Colorado.

32 see e.g. Cohen, J. (2002), *Protestantism and Capitalism: The Mechanisms of Influence*, New York; Swatos/Kaelber: 2005

33 Weber: 1930, 208; Wingren: 1993, 15

34 Wingren: 1993, 18; 73f

35 Weber: 1930, 80

36 Weber: 1930, 80

37 Luther, M. (1998), 'Address to the Nobility of the German Nation, 1520', in P. Halsall (ed.) *Internet Modern History Sourcebook*, New York, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/luther-nobility.html> (accessed 1 August 2009).

brotherly love.”³⁸ Weber considers Luther’s claim to be poorly argued, but, nevertheless, concludes, that “this moral justification of worldly activity was one of the most important results of the Reformation.”

In his approach to the concept of calling Luther takes the estates – or social positions in modern sociological terminology – as his starting point. From the estate he develops the social role, i.e. moral aspects of the role, which generally includes the ten commandments.³⁹ When a person accepts the religious calling, he/she receives the calling while being in certain estate or social position. The convert is not supposed to give up his/her social position, but remain in it.⁴⁰ Thus the Lutheran conception of the calling did not hold ethical principles for the reform of the world. Faithfulness may be taken to be a key characteristic, with a meaning that we may relate to Weber’s notion of value rationality.⁴¹

In the connection between the relationship with God and the calling Luther emphasises that salvation is an act of God alone; it does not rest on love or work in the calling, only on faith. From man God demands that a life in the calling is to be “pious and righteous before the world”.⁴² It is God’s righteousness, but it is fleeting and does not make a basis for salvation, only for the good things of life in interpersonal relations. Thus in such relations man does not ask for God’s salvation by the good deeds carried out. In life in the calling man’s only preoccupation is with what the neighbour needs and how to make the neighbour happy. However, since man lives in an area of tension between God and the devil a life in the calling does not mean that good deeds are appreciated and rewarded just like that.⁴³ In a secularised form this means that every trade where man serves his neighbour, every trade in which the occupant contributes to the common good is worthy of appreciation and that there is no urge to seek the most profitable position. Luther’s mind and reasoning is formed by a medieval and its rather static, view of society. At the individual level the normative basis for the life in the calling is not static, in the sense that it is not about a given set of social norms or rules of conduct, but rather about values, attitudes and a healthy and sensible power of judgement where actions are “situated”. As Weber noted, Lutheran faith lacked the drive to order moral life in a systematic, rational way, the motive to constant self-control, which was a central part of the Calvinist doctrine. The lack of motive for strict personal discipline and rational ordering of life as a whole, made a poor basis for a capitalist spirit.

In this way the Lutheran conception of life in the calling involves what we may call a weak form of *utilitarianism*. The basic moral principle of utilitarianism is to

38 Weber: 1930, 81

39 Wingren: 1993, 17

40 Wingren: 1993, 72

41 Weber, M. (1978), *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley, California.

42 Wingren: 1993, 35

43 Wingren: 1993, 161

maximise welfare, either for the individual or for society.⁴⁴ Abraham⁴⁵ distinguishes two types or two meanings of utilitarianism: the decision to act is made with a view to either its effects on social institutions or a collectivity, or its effects on the agent in question (e.g. its personal worth). In both cases the decision is based on the agent's evaluation of the consequences of action in terms of welfare, "usefulness" or "worthiness".⁴⁶ We may call the first type *collective utilitarianism*, and the second type *self-oriented utilitarianism*. In the Lutheran context life in the calling involves utilitarianism in the first sense.

Luther's concept of calling involved two "transvaluations" with consequences for the conception of the good life. Firstly, he gave everyday life, productive life and life in the family, a superior moral value and made it a core element in the fulfilment of a meaningful life. Secondly, he emphasised that life in the calling is life in the service of others, of society as a whole. Thus, the service of others is another basic dimension of the good life. "The cobbler should stick to his last", an old saying goes. In our context it would fit as a characteristic of a traditional Lutheran attitude to the world. It points back to the medieval influence under which Luther developed his theology. The good life is to be faithful to one's duties, satisfied with what one has got, not to strive to "conquer the world", so to say at least not through work. In this way we may construct a link between life in a calling, the good life and the first two cases of volunteering, illustrating what I have called traditional volunteering.

Calvinist Conception of Calling

Weber's primary interest in his essay on the Protestant ethic was in the connection between religious ideas and capitalism. With this intention Weber concluded that Luther and Lutheranism were of limited interest. It was in the teachings of John Calvin and the Calvinists that Weber saw the clearest expression of the calling in a manner that had connections to the development of the capitalistic spirit.

One type of difference between the Lutheran and the Calvinist conception of the calling is connected with their notions of a life in the calling. In the Lutheran sense a life in the calling involves the duty to serve the neighbour, not necessarily as called by God, as in the religious context. A life in the calling exceeds the limits of professional employment (work rationality). The Calvinist conception of the calling developed out of the Lutheran conception. While the Lutheran achieves salvation only through the grace of God, received in faith, irrespective of good works and the conviction of his salvation is based on emotions, the Calvinist cre-

44 Tranøy, K. E. (2009), Article: "Utilitarisme", Store norske leksikon, <http://www.snl.no/utilitarisme> (accessed 28 July 2009).

45 Abraham, G. (1983), The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Utilitarianism, *Theory & Society*, 12, 739–773.

46 Abraham: 1983, 751

ates his conviction of his own salvation “in a systematic self-control”.⁴⁷ To Calvin community with God could only be perceived in the conscious awareness of the way God worked through the believer. Thus faith, by God’s grace, proves itself by its “objective results” to make the believer sure of his/her salvation. Like the Lutherans, the Calvinists believe that good works are not a means to obtain salvation. However, to the latter such works “are indispensable as a sign of election”⁴⁸; they are means to rid the believer of the fear of damnation. The purpose of life is to add to the glory of God through good works, not a set of singular good works, but “a life of good works combined into a unified system.”⁴⁹ It is a rational type of asceticism, which means leading “an alert, intelligent life”. It means that the moral conduct of man is subjected to “a consistent method for conduct as a whole”⁵⁰ and requires “a life guided by constant thought”.⁵¹

Calvinist ethics is more strongly utilitarian than Lutheran ethics. While the Lutheran conception of the calling involved the acceptance of the lot God has assigned to a person, a change of calling was not objectionable to the Calvinist. It was even supported if it meant a calling “more pleasing to God”, i.e. more useful in a utilitarian perspective.⁵² The rational this-worldly asceticism which was the ideal of the Calvinist was conducive to the accumulation of wealth. The greater the wealth, the more secure the Calvinist felt about his state of salvation. In this way accumulation of wealth tended to be a consequence of life in the calling, something to be encouraged. At the same time wealth was an ethical challenge as it implied a temptation to “idleness and sinful life”. The utilitarian orientation inherent in Calvinism was of the first type, the collective type, in order to extend or increase the common good, the welfare of the collectivity, not for personal gain or personal welfare – or only to a limited degree.⁵³ It may be associated with Weber’s notion of instrumental rationality.⁵⁴

There was an unintended tension in the Calvinist version of life in the calling: the rational asceticism, the systematic, methodically ordered life to increase the glory of God through good works created the wealth that undermined the same rational asceticism at the personal level. As Weber sees it, Protestant asceticism provides a basis for the spirit of capitalism, which in its consequences generates wealth threatening the very same ethic. Protestant asceticism “contains within it the seeds of its own destruction”.⁵⁵ The pursuit of the glory of God produced the

47 Weber: 1930, 115

48 Weber: 1930, 115

49 Weber: 1930, 117

50 Weber: 1930, 117

51 Weber: 1930, 118

52 Weber: 1930, 162

53 Weber: 1930, 171

54 Weber: 1978

55 Nielsen, D. A. (2003), ‘The Incredible Shrinking Protestant Ethic, *International Journal of Politics*’, in *Culture & Society*, 16, 587–598, 591f; cf. Weber: 1930, 174–177

means to establish the glory of man. Weber demonstrates in his analysis of works of Richard Baxter the weight put on the importance of resisting the temptations of wealth in the preaching of English Puritan leaders.⁵⁶ It tells us that the tension between the two types of utilitarianism is a real tension. It finds its “natural” release in allowing for self-orientation as part of the life in the calling, a calling that is now stripped of its religious roots. It had to come to a point – especially when the religious motivation had faded away – when self-oriented utilitarianism gained its way as ethically acceptable. This represents a transformation of the original Calvinist ethos.

The difference between Lutheran and Calvinist conceptions of the calling may also be expressed in the following way: in the Calvinist tradition God has prepared a calling for everyone, in which he/she should live to work for the divine glory. For the Lutheran the calling was “a fate to which he must submit and which he must make the best of”.⁵⁷ In the secularised Calvinist-inspired version of the calling, the glory of God is replaced by the worldly success of the self. The (secular) transformation of the Calvinist ethic meant that man was allowed to enjoy the fruits of the success of the self, fully developed in the self-oriented utilitarianism of Bentham with happiness as the main goal.⁵⁸

The Calvinist shares the Lutheran’s perception of the good life as a life in the service of others where everyday life, productive life and life in the family, are of superior moral value. But the Calvinist cannot be content with a quiet life in the social position he found himself when he was called. To the fulfilment of a meaningful life, to the good life, belongs self-discipline, hard work (the Protestant work ethic), methodical conduct as means to prosperity, innerworldly success. The Calvinist lives to “conquer the world” through systematic work. It seems to be a certain resemblance between this form of the good life and the third case illustrating the two basic forms of volunteering presented above.

Lutheran Pietism

In Norway the Lutheran tradition came to be moulded by Calvinism in the form of Pietism in important segments of the population.⁵⁹ Pietistic religious revivals in their consequences came to have effects on the whole of society, religiously, culturally, socially and economically.⁶⁰ Pietism meant methodical piety, it meant that

56 Weber: 1930, 155–161

57 Weber: 1930, 160

58 cf. Driver, J. (2009), ‘The History of Utilitarianism’, in E. N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2009

59 Meistad, T. (1993), *Kirkens historie: En innføring*, Kristiansand; Rasmussen, T./Thomassen, E. (2002), *Kristendommen: En historisk innføring*, Oslo, 296

60 Repstad, P. (1981), *Mellom himmel og jord: En innføring i religionssosiologi*, Oslo; Aarflot, A. (2001), ‘Hans Nielsen Hauge’, in K. Helle/G. Hjeltnes/E. Lange/L. Smith/L. Walløe (ed.), *Norsk biografisk leksikon*. Oslo.

rational ascetic living, basically an alien element to orthodox Lutheranism, was required by those who were called. The Pietistic fathers were convinced that “God Himself [has] blessed His chosen ones through the success of their labours”.⁶¹ But the religious anchoring of this rational asceticism was much less consistent than in Calvinism, which made it more insecure and shaky. This was due to the scepticism of the Lutherans to the methodical regulation of life, “which in the eyes of the Lutherans smacks of “justification by works” [*Werkheiligkeit*]”.⁶² As a consequence, a Pietistic life in the calling involved a stronger form of utilitarianism than the original or “orthodox” Lutheran, but weaker than in Calvinism.

In his analysis of the difference between Calvinism and (Lutheran) Pietism Weber concluded that the difference had had some practical consequences in the way people related to work. He saw the virtues connected with Pietism to be those that pertained to “the faithful official, clerk, labourer, or domestic worker”, while he saw Calvinism more associated with “the hard legalism and the active enterprise of bourgeois-capitalistic entrepreneurs”.⁶³ This quality of Pietism was what made Pietists so attractive as bureaucrats to the kings of Prussia and later the kings of Denmark-Norway.

With the last conclusion in mind, we may possibly construct the qualities of the good life for the Pietist to be associated both with what I have already written about the good life in the traditional Lutheran context, and with fulfilment of, or loyalty to, the cause – or causes – that he or she decides to engage in, be it at work or life outside work. It means a life in the service of others. The Pietist may not be content with a quiet life in the social position he found himself when he was called, but hard work and loyalty to the chosen cause(s) and in the positions allowing for a meaningful life are basic qualities of the good life. Though I have already connected the second case illustration with traditional Lutheran ethic and corresponding notions of the good life, the case may be better characterised as an example of a Pietistic ethic.

Calling and Volunteering

Characteristics of the two forms of volunteering presented in the article may be associated with different versions of what Weber more generally termed the Protestant ethic in their more or less secular representations. Similarly, by introducing the notion of the good life, it becomes clear that there is an affinity between how the good life is constructed on the basis of the two forms of volunteering and in the two main versions of the Protestant ethic. The traditional Lutheran ethic and

⁶¹ Weber: 1930, 133

⁶² Weber, M. (2002), *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism and Other Writings*, New York, 165, note 181

⁶³ Weber: 1930, 139

the corresponding construction of the good life has its parallel in traditional volunteering, and the conception of the good life based on characteristics of the Calvinistic ethic is parallel to that connected with the values of new volunteering.

Even though traditional volunteering to some extent may be substituted by new forms of volunteering the examples or cases that served as illustrations in the beginning of this presentation, demonstrate that several forms may co-exist in the same society. I characterised the first case as an example of traditional volunteering, which typically involves a long-term commitment, based in organisational membership and a sense of duty, a normatively based connectedness with a collective mode of orientation. The form of rationality involved may be associated with what I have called collective utilitarianism though not in a pure form. It is reasonable to believe that such volunteering is based on both types of utilitarian orientations, but with collective orientation as the primary. Though volunteering may imply a systematic and rational conduct in the voluntary work, it will not generally be connected with a rational asceticism as a model or requirement for life as a whole. Structurally this form of volunteering may have an affinity to the Lutheran conception of life in a calling, stripped of its religious anchoring.

If we also take the second case into consideration, it seems reasonable to interpret it in terms of the transformed Lutheran notion of the calling in its Pietistic form. It shows someone willing to exceed the requirements specified in the employment contract. What they do exceeds the expectations and limitations associated with what we may call “work rationality”. They extend their professional engagement well beyond the requirements and expectations of the employer in order to serve the cause, and the cause is the welfare and well-being of the neighbour. They are committed to the task – and in our particular case, it is reasonable to presume that they interpret their engagement as a task given by God – to benefit the Norwegian members of the crew on board the ships they visit. In that sense the calling is given by the neighbour. We may associate it with the weak form of collective utilitarianism characterising the Lutheran tradition.

The third case may be taken to express a transformed and secularised concept of ‘calling’. What the periodical *LO-Aktuelt* writes about Renate Viken and her volunteering⁶⁴ we may interpret as a calling in line with the secularised version of the Calvinist conception. What is illustrated in the case is ascetic action or a form of systematic self-control.⁶⁵ The life of the good works combined into a unified system, is the career. The systematic pursuit of a career has made it a rational element to engage in volunteering. Therefore, volunteering must be, in a planned way, incorporated into the rational plan of the seeking of a career. The elect are those who demonstrate that they advance on the career ladder. The sign is the

64 Nguyen: 2007

65 cf. Weber: 1930, 115

CV. Volunteering is subordinated to the requirements of the career as “unified system”. We do not know how concentrated and zealous the person or her like-minded are in the pursuit of a career. We may have the feeling that in contemporary Northern-European society even the career seekers may be distracted from the straight path. In our context, what Weber sees as a weakness of Lutheranism from his point of interest, as compared with Calvinism, may for our purposes seem relevant: in Weber’s eyes Lutheranism is flawed with a more relaxed morality than Calvinism. Weber claims that the Lutheran faith does not motivate constant self-control and deliberate regulation of one’s life, which the Calvinist doctrine does. Instead, it “left the spontaneous vitality of impulsive action [...] nearly unchanged”.⁶⁶ In a young Norwegian aspiring professional in the making we may expect that life is more than the systematic pursuit of a career, and that the type of volunteering he/she chooses to engage in, is determined not *solely* from what will look good in the CV. It may be taken as an indication that a new type of rationality of life is gaining ground, deprived of most forms of asceticism, representing an ethical principle of hedonism.

If it is true that the form of volunteering exemplified in the third case is becoming more characteristic of volunteering in contemporary Scandinavian society than the first case (and the second) and has increased in significance over the past thirty years or so, it may be taken to be a sign of a modernisation of the voluntary sector, an extension of the domain of purposive rationality, or, in cultural terms, the individualisation process as it is experienced in the Western societies. Calculation may gradually be replacing norm as a regulator of more aspects of social life.⁶⁷ Such a development correspond with Marx’ prediction of future development of a society based on a capitalist mode of production as he outlined it in *Capital*⁶⁸ to which Weber’s essay should be seen as a complement.

Nevertheless, in the same way as it should not be surprising that, what we may see as a secularised Calvinist inspired understanding of the calling, is gaining ground even in the voluntary sector, it should not be a surprise that the Lutheran understanding of the calling does not retreat that easily in our society. It is deeply permeated by the Lutheran religious and cultural tradition, be it in a secularised form. Such traditions are not easily uprooted.

In the article I have introduced two perspectives on forms of volunteering, one from political science, another from the sociology of religion. In research on volunteering the former is the most common. What I hoped to accomplish was to show that the latter perspective may serve as a useful complement to the former. I have not nearly fulfilled the task of establishing scientifically the connection be-

66 Weber: 1930, 126

67 cf. Habermas, J. (1971) *Technology and Science as Ideology, Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*, London.

68 Marx, K. (1976), *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, London.

tween Protestant ethics and “the spirits of volunteering”, but I hope to have contributed one fruitful step.

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