CHAPTER 4

The Alliance of Religion and Business

In a brief note, Marianne Weber refers to the founder of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Jane Addams: the ‘angel of Chicago’ who ‘provided the proletarians who were thrown together from all over the world with all the things that they could not provide for themselves’.¹ When Brecht demonstrates, in Saint Joan of the Stockyards, the contradictory ways in which Christian religion functions within Chicago’s class struggles and the manner in which it ultimately fails, he is thinking of this sort of ‘worker priestess’. But in Weber’s perception of ‘Americanist’ religion, it is neither the working environment and lifeworld of the Chicago stockyard nor large capital’s ‘fortresses’, with their Puritan methods of socialisation, that serve as the starting point.² As the visit to America proceeds, there occurs a peculiar shift, whereby the social poles of capitalist socialisation, around which religious articulations group themselves and between which they seek to mediate, are elided within Weber’s reflections on the relationship between religion and the ‘capitalist spirit’.

For these reflections are preceded, in the journey, by a change of scene, from the world of capitalist production to Chicago’s colleges, ‘far outside the metropolis set among carefully tended green lawns and in the shade of old trees’.³ Weber believes he can recognise that what students learn there is ‘habituation to work’, ‘far more … than there is among our students’, and this appears to him to result from the fact that the colleges were founded by Puritan sects. To be sure, the ‘religious spirit’ has already ‘mixed with uncongenial components’, the sectarian organisations have been transformed into sports clubs—‘Their “cricket team” is regarded as the best in the country’—, and asceticism has become prosperity: ‘the young rascals are rolling in money’. But when attending the Quaker service, he still encounters a certain ‘special’ silence: in the wholly undecorated, altarless room, there is nothing to be heard except ‘the crackling of the fireplace and muffled coughing’, until, in an odd combination

² On the uses to which Puritanism is put within corporate ideological strategies, see André Philip 1926, pp. 126–7, note 1.
of spontaneity and planning, someone ‘moved’ by the spirit holds a ‘carefully prepared’ speech.4

Religious relations also appear to him as ‘utter chaos’. He notes both the ‘tremendous power’ of the church congregations and the fact that they are exposed to a much stronger process of secularisation. Students are required to attend three-fifths of the religious services that are held on a daily basis. If they fail to do so, they are expelled after two years, but if their ‘chapel record’ is higher than required, their surplus attendance is added to their record the following year. Sometimes the service consists in a theological lecture on Harnack’s history of dogma. ‘At the conclusion the dates of the next “foot-ball,” “cricket,” etc. are announced, as the harvesting used to be announced in German villages’.5

Following his return to Germany, Weber uses the ‘chapel record’ as the opener of a two-part feature article on ‘Churches and Sects’ first published in the Frankfurter Zeitung on 13 and 15 April 1906 and then re-published, in a slightly expanded form, in Christliche Welt on 14 and 21 June 1906. These articles constitute the foundation for Weber’s essay ‘The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism’, which he completed shortly before his death in 1920 and appended to the essay on the ‘Protestant Ethic’ in the first volume of his Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion.6

While he does not do so in the 1920 essay, the two 1906 versions see Weber employing the ‘chapel record’ as an example by which to illustrate to his German readers the relationship between the religiosity of ‘Americanism’ and its ‘superiority in the struggle for existence’.7 Weber argues that in spite of its rigid separation of church and state, America has developed a far more intense ‘churchliness’ than Germany.8 He traces this phenomenon back mainly to the fact that the place of religious commitment to the state has been taken, in America, by a close alliance between religion and commerce. While the American authorities never display any interest in one’s religious affiliation, the people one does business with ask about it almost every time. ‘Why pay

5 Quoted in Marianne Weber 1975, p. 289.
6 I will henceforth cite the expanded version from Christliche Welt as ‘Weber 1906a’ (Part I) and ‘Weber 1906b’ (Part II), whereas I will cite Gerth and Mill’s translation of Weber’s 1920 version as ‘Weber 1946a’.
7 Weber 1906a, p. 559.
8 For example, the dues paid for church activities sometimes amounted to as much as eight percent of the average income: even a fraction of this financial imposition would have led to mass secession from the church in Germany (Weber 1946a, p. 302; compare Weber 1906a, p. 559).