

Example of research paper on the effects of calvinism on the industrial revolution...

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



The Effects of Calvinism on the Industrial Revolution

The evolution of the world has been accompanied by various developments that are worth celebrating. One of the developments is industrialization. Historians have been concerned about understanding the actual cause of industrial revolution, a period that was characterized by the emergence and development of industries. It has been argued that industrial revolution was necessitated by the need to increase production and cater for growing population. It has been further argued that such a development was facilitated by availability of labor, market, fertile lands, accumulated capital and favorable climate for agriculture, among other factors. However, other historians have contended that industrial revolution was undoubtedly initiated and even advanced by Calvinism.

Calvinism is a protestant theological system that was considered as an alternative to the conservative Christian life characterized by blind submission of followers to superstitious beliefs and abuses that were most prevalent during the dark ages. Calvinism is associated with various key figures such as Heinrich Bullinger, Martin Bucer, Peter Martyr and Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin. The Christianity branch bears the Calvin name because John Calvin was particularly influential in its formation¹. Currently, the concept is applied in referring to the practices and doctrines that characterized the reformed churches. One school of thought credits Calvinism for laying the groundwork for the later emergence and progress of capitalism in the European northern region. Historian scholars acknowledge that Calvinism gained momentum during the age of enlightenment that was

characterized by reformations of European societies using reasoning power and scientific advancements rather than faith, revelation and tradition. Indeed, it is justifiable to argue that the industrial revolution was a product of Calvinism².

Calvinism, a theological system whose origins can be traced to the Christian reformer John Calvin, is understood to have emerged from the group of Christians who had attained enlightenment. They embraced scientific advancements and intellectual interchange while opposing intolerance, superstition and abuses by the state and the church. In the past, money lenders, as well as the money-making activities, were hated. Although the moneymaking and money-lending practices were necessary, the staunch believers never welcomed the practice. The society believed that it was particularly difficult for the shopkeepers and other businesspersons to please and act in the ways of God. Acts of usury were considered extortionists, and the usurers were never allowed into the church. Usurers who forced themselves into the church would be denied sacraments, among other forms of religious recognition. Acceptance into the church was subject to practical tests oriented on the desire for money³. The moneymaking practices were not only considered as a contravention of religious teaching, but also as morally wrong⁴.

Before Calvinism, the spirit of working was never embraced. Working hard was considered to be for the poor. The rich would seldom engage in physical work. The society led lives that entailed contemplation and leisurely activities. The poor did not have much aspirations such as those aimed at

improving their welfare. Additionally, before Calvinism, despite the fact that monks did not dominate the society, the Benedictine monasteries were considered as the center stage of social, economic and political life. The economic order revolved around the monasteries, as well as the parish⁵.

However, with the emergence of Calvinism, the view took a different turn. Calvinism was the perspective that gave birth to capitalism. Calvinism comprised various elements that contradicted the views, as well as the condemnations against Usury. Calvinism came up with the view that the changing living conditions had rendered irrelevant some of the traditional views such as those that asserted the desire for money was evil. Instead, Calvinism insisted that people should be encouraged to look for money through profiting. Such money could be lent to the poor to improve their welfare. One of the inferences on the relationship between capitalism and Calvinism has often based on the fact that capitalism came soon after protestant movements took effect. It is further reinforced the capitalism did not emerge as a coincidence of developments between economic and religious developments, but because of logical developments assumed by religious doctrines and economic perspectives⁶. It was widely believed that undesirable social practices during the period were a reflection of failed religious decisions.

Of all the protestant ideas, Calvinism is considered pivotal in shaping the societies, as far as the predestination doctrine is concerned. The predestination doctrine reaped human beings of some of the divine purpose that the catholic clergy had emphasized. Calvinism came up with the change

in the perception towards work. This even made the committed conservative Christians to begin viewing work and associated incomes as blessing from God.

Before capitalism, the entrepreneurs would try to mobilize the laborers to spend time working by offering high wages. However, laborers would spend limited time harvesting. Laborer had the view that they could earn the same amount even when they spent the rest of the time on leisure. It is argued that most of the societies that consisted of well-developed capitalist societies were those dominated by the protestant populations. Max Weber attempted to find an answer to the relationship. Weber did not find a direct answer to the phenomenon. However, it even became clear to him that the number of rich protestant populations was higher than the catholic population⁷.

It is argued that whereas the Lutheran doctrine laid emphasis on the believers to embrace their sinfulness account while relying on the grace of God, the Calvinism laid emphasis on the conduct that would increase the grace of God. The Lutheran doctrine asserted that God helps those who have faith in him while the Calvinism taught that God is helpful to those who help themselves. The Catholics viewed the credit of man as cumulative of his actions while the Calvinist perceived the work as the subject of great concern. The Calvinist view perceived God as a supernatural being that demanded human beings to live by doing what is considered constructive. This is what resulted to methodical perspective, an assertions that laziness may lead one to the path of sinning. The Calvinist explained that those who

did not work hard could hardly sustain themselves, and could even resort to stealing⁸.

Whereas Catholics considered wealth as detrimental to the service of the clergy, the Calvinist considered wealth as an element that could strengthen the service of the clergy, as well as the prestige. Christians were urged to desist from being lazy and wasting time. They were urged to work hard and capitalize on every opportunity that presented itself. In the end, poverty was viewed as undesirable and contravention to the glory of God. Besides, the art of making profits became justified ethic of the Calvinist society⁹. The Calvinist utilized the biblical story of Job and the talented servants to justify their materialism doctrine. Nevertheless, whereas the accumulation of material wealth was encouraged, the doctrine discouraged the society from spending on leisure and relaxation purposes. It was asserted that the wealth was only to serve the glory of God. A combination of these points only ensured that even as people worked hard, they served as much as possible¹⁰.

Alternatively, the limitations imposed on the expenditure only ensured that people gathered capital for further investment opportunities. For example, shrewdness, which was dominated by a Calvinist population, was characterized by increased simplicity in the religious circles. This feature, combining with the urge to work hard, resulted in the substantial accumulation of wealth. However, as time went by, the spiritual aspects of wealth creation started to fade. Thus, Calvinism became the catalyst for industrialization. After creating many capitalist converts, the doctrine of

predetermination then bore unequal distribution of wealth¹¹. Calvinism came with the view that physical work was a calling from God, and that all human beings were created to work. The protestant work ethic promised to improve the living conditions of those who embraced it. Many Christians were convinced by the doctrine, setting the stage for industrial revolution¹². Indeed, industrialism was embraced by most of the protestant dominated states. As the protestant dominated societies grew rich, they started to drift from the religious roots. Following the rebirth of Protestantism, the orientations of the economy were changed by finance and mercantilism. The economy ceased to be community-oriented, welcoming the capitalism and nationalist approaches. Calvin was always at the centre of such reforms.

Calvinism initiated mechanistic approaches to the word order, resulting in industrial revolution¹³. Capitalism gave birth to industrial revolution. The industrial revolution was characterized by the development of factory manufacturing system, consisting of systems of division of labor¹⁴. These developments were also accompanied by the development of commodity systems such as money, labor and land, which saw factories, emerge as commercial systems.

In this regard, Calvinism can be considered as an approach that fueled industrialization in various ways. In one way, it fostered the view that working to gain profits was not evil. Thus, the society began to accept all the moneymaking practices and even ventured into the practice. Even as they ventured in the moneymaking practice, Calvinism restricted them from spending the money on leisure and relaxation activities. This was a

deliberate step to ensure that the society saved as much as possible from their daily economic activities. It may be argued that those who heeded and saved enough became better placed to make large and promising investments such as factories. Besides, Calvinism came with the view that physical work was acceptable, and that every person was required to work hard. The eventuality was that the society began to embrace hard work. Most people resorted to seeking employment, even offering to work as laborers in the established factories. Calvinism remains relevant to this day and has undergone resurgence in regions such as North America in most recent years. The time magazine describes Calvinism as among the greatest ideas that continue to change our world.

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