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State and Christian Enlightenment: Background of the Mass Elementary Education in Central Europe

Država in krščansko razsvetljenje: ozadje množičnega osnovnega šolstva v srednji Evropi

Abstract: Mass elementary education powered by the state – one of the cornerstones of the processes of modernization – began to be established in continental Europe in the late eighteenth century. Increasingly centralized political institutions, with the decisive assistance of the school network, gradually created a bourgeois-industrial society centered on the performance-oriented individual committed to the state. The key to the spread of the school network and literacy was the coordination between Enlightenment ideas, state authorities, and ecclesiastical organizations. The situation in the Central European environments under consideration – Austria (part of which was also the territory of present-day Slovenia), Prussia, and other German lands – shows that the social role of education was strengthened by reform types of Christianity, which, based on the pursued harmony between the Church and State, sought to create a rational, industrious, and morally responsible individual.

Key words: General School Ordinance (1774), school reforms in Central Europe, Enlightenment and Christianity, reform Catholicism, history of elementary education

Povzetek: Množično dostopno državno osnovno šolstvo – eden od temeljnih gradnikov procesov modernizacije – se je v celinski Evropi začelo vzpostavljati ob koncu 18. stoletja. Vse bolj centralizirane politične institucije so z odločilno pomočjo šolske mreže postopoma ustvarile meščansko-industrijsko družbo, v katere središču se je nahajal storilnostno naravnan in državi predan posameznik. Za širjenje šolske mreže in pismenosti je bila ključna usklajenost med razsvetljenjskimi idejami, državnimi oblastmi in cerkvenimi organizacijami. Stanje v obravnavanih srednjeevropskih okoljih – Avstriji (katere del je bilo tudi ozemlje današnje Slovenije), Prusiji in drugih nemških deželah – kaže, da so družbeno vlogo izobraževanja krepile reformne oblike krščanstva, ki so si na podlagi želene skladnosti med Cerkvijo in državo prizadevale ustvariti racionalnega, delavnega in moralno odgovornega posameznika.

Ključne besede: Splošni šolski red (1774), šolske reforme v srednji Evropi, razsvetljenstvo in krščanstvo, reformno katolištvo, zgodovina osnovnega izobraževanja

1. Introduction

Mass elementary education powered by the state – one of the cornerstones of the processes of modernization – began to be established in continental Europe in the late eighteenth century.¹ Establishing compulsory education accessible to children from all social classes was closely intertwined with the process of forming modern nations and states. It ran in parallel with economic and technological change driven by industrialization and urbanization.² In terms of its novelty and long-term impact, mass elementary education from the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was similar to the novelty and challenges of the so-called digital revolution and the emergence of artificial intelligence at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.³ The thematic focus of this article is to shed light on the expansion of the school network and literacy considering the intertwining of Enlightenment ideas, state authorities, and ecclesiastical organizations. Based on this, we adopt a view of the Enlightenment as a multifaceted cultural phenomenon that, despite its criticism of institutional religion, cannot be placed in direct opposition to Christianity or the Catholic Church.⁴

Models of organized school systems made their way from country to country, thus influencing one another. This was definitely the case with the far-reaching importance of Johann Ignaz von Felbiger (1724–1788),⁵ an Augustinian canon and abbot of the monastery in Żagań (German: *Sagan*) in Silesia, in the southwest of present-day Poland, who was tasked with a school reform as a minister in the Prussian government. The Prussian model of elementary education was the oldest in this context and helped shape developments in several countries, particularly the neighbouring Habsburg Empire, where Felbiger was invited in order to guide a school reform by Maria Theresa (ruled: 1740–1780), who introduced compulsory education for all children aged six to twelve by issuing the General School

¹ This article is part of the research program "P6-0269 Religion, Ethics, Education, and Challenges of Modern Society" and basic research projects "J5-4595 Between Tradition and Modernity: Slovenian Catholic Intellectuals and the National Question in a Transnational Perspective (1848–1948)" and "Slovenian Intellectual History in the Light of Contemporary Theories of Religion: From Separation of Spirits and Culture War to Communist Revolution" supported by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

² The relation between mass elementary education and modernization processes in Europe is elucidated by two overview works: Horn Melton 1988; Westberg et al. 2019.

³ The novelty and challenges of artificial intelligence in (religious) education and society are illustratively explained in the following works: Vodičar 2023; Nežič Glavica 2023.

⁴ Such a view is increasingly present in modern historiography; the following edited volume is particularly valuable in this context: Burson and Lehner 2014. A theological critique of the notion of the incompatibility of the Enlightenment with Christianity is provided by the following monograph: Avis 2022.

⁵ Reference biography of Johann Felbiger: Krömer 1966.

Ordinance in 1774. (Westberg et al. 2019, 5–7; Green 1994, 2) Based on the approximately simultaneous beginnings of the development of state elementary education between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, this study takes into account the situations in selected Central European environments: the Habsburg Empire, which also encompassed present-day Slovenia, the Kingdom of Prussia, and other German lands. Due to the importance of Maria Theresa and Joseph's reforms for Slovenian history, the article's focus is the situation in Austria.⁶

2. Foundations of the Educational and Ecclesiastical Reform

In 1774 Empress Maria Theresa proclaimed compulsory elementary education for all children aged six to twelve, irrespective of their sex and social status. The aim of the General School Ordinance was to integrate the diverse regions of the empire into a unified national community, and its main concern was to promote literacy among all strata of the population. The subjects to be taught in all elementary schools were reading, writing, arithmetic, and catechesis. A major reason for issuing the school ordinance was the principles of the novel Enlightenment worldview. The ruler believed that traditional adherence to the Catholic faith and morals, along with teaching catechism, enhanced with the Enlightenment values of diligence, frugality, and curiosity, would contribute to material and moral progress in the country and bring happiness to the population. At the core of her reflections was the fundamental Enlightenment postulate of the necessity and viability of educating people, encompassing both children with the help of parents aware of its importance and teachers and adults through reading, listening to Church sermons, and through actions by the state. (Viehhauser 2019, 23–24; Okoliš 2009, 39–40; 42; Borgstedt 2004, 53)

The goal of the reform efforts of the time was to increase revenue in the state budget, strengthen the army, and foster a feeling of belonging to the monarchy in the population. All this would have been impossible without increasing the literacy rate and at least a basic knowledge of German. However, the unification of the country was not reflected in the total domination of German as the main means of communication for most of the population and the political elite. The school ordinance allowed the use of regional (vernacular) languages in teaching and writing textbooks where this ensured that the maximum possible number of inhabitants understood the subject matter, while requiring unity in teaching methods, teaching contents, and school organization. The introduction of compulsory elementary schooling brought about a new level of relations between the ruler and their subjects. Through the daily experience of life in school and with school, the state became 'real' for the inhabitants; schools – in a similar vein to

⁶ Fundamental historical and sociological monograph on establishing the modern school system in the Habsburg Empire: Cvrček 2020.

posting stations, district offices, and army barracks – became tangible expressions of the previously abstract state. (Viehhauser 2019, 19; 22; Stollberg-Rilinger 2017, 714–715; Ciperle and Vovko 1987, 37)

Ideationally, state interventions in education, which had been the domain of the Church for centuries in Austria, was based on criticism of Baroque folk religiosity marked by lavish ceremonies and processions, the veneration of saints, and numerous holidays.⁷ The effects of such religiosity were disapproved by an increasing number of Catholic intellectuals, both laypeople and priests, even bishops and especially theology professors. To this religiosity, they ascribed a susceptibility to superstition, mental confusion and idleness, which caused economic and moral harm to the state, including an adverse influence on the operation of the bureaucratic and military apparatus. Instead, they advocated for 'rational' or 'inner' religiosity focused on the reading of spiritual literature, reflection about evangelical stories,⁸ and a highly virtuous life intertwined with the expansion of literacy, the teaching of Catholic doctrine to all strata of the population, and a sense for following instructions by the state. Among theologians of the time, a similar spirit was specifically highlighted by Lodovico Muratori (1672–1750), an Italian priest and polymath, especially in his work *On the Orderly Devotion of Christians (Della regolata divozione dei cristiani 1747)*. It was Christoph Migazzi, an initially Enlightenment-oriented archbishop of Vienna⁹ (in office: 1757–1803) and, *inter alia*, vice-president of the Court Commission of Studies (*Studienhofkommission*), a body tasked with the implementation of the school reform in Austria, who had a translation of this work into German (1757) published. (Stollberg-Rilinger 2017, 564–569; Printy 2010, 188–189; 195; Klueping 2010, 134–135; 141; Gierl 2013, 357)

Another direction in reform Catholicism of the time that is comparable in terms of content drew from Jansenism,¹⁰ an originally Dutch–French¹¹ spiritual movement akin to radical Protestant denominations that claimed to be returning to the first centuries of Christianity. Jansenism emphasized human susceptibility to sin and a beforehand selection of people for salvation, i.e. the doctrine of predesti-

⁷ In 1753, Maria Theresa successfully negotiated with Pope Benedict XIV (ruled: 1740–1758) to reduce religious holidays in Austria by two thirds; an additional reduction followed in 1772. A similar measure was the ban on multiday pilgrimages, except those to the central shrine of Mary in Austria, Mariazell in Styria. (Stollberg-Rilinger 2017, 581; Klueping 2010, 144).

⁸ In this sense, Catholic Enlightenment gained fresh impetus owing to the above-mentioned Pope Benedict XIV, who allowed in 1757 for the entire Bible to be translated into vernacular languages and made available for public use with appropriate commentary (Lehner 2010, 23).

⁹ The importance of Vienna as one of the major centers of Catholic Enlightenment is supported by the fact that eight of the twenty German editions of Muratori's work were published in this city (Lehner 2010, 28). However, the archbishop of Vienna ceased to publicly support Enlightenment views in the late 1760s when he realized reforming the Austrian society entailed the submission of the Church to the state, particularly regarding its property and the appointment of bishops. A comprehensive biography of Christoph Migazzi is provided in the following classical monograph: Wolfsgruber 1897.

¹⁰ Classical overview study on Jansenism in Austrian lands: Hersche 1977.

¹¹ The influence of Muratori spread to Austria quickly in part due to Habsburg possessions in Northern Italy. A similar geographic and political factor can be identified with Jansenism as the Habsburgs had 'extraterritorial' possessions in Holland (the so-called Spanish Netherlands) (Klueping 2010, 128–129).

nation; it fostered an ascetic way of life, an orderly structure of an individual's day, frequent confession and penance, rare reception of communion, modesty in ceremony and clothing; it advocated for a decentralization of the Church by curtailing the competence of the Pope, for introducing vernacular languages to liturgy, and for raising the education level in all strata of society. Although the teachings of its founders – Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), a Flemish bishop, and Pasquier Quesnel (1634–1719), a French theologian – were denounced by Pope Clement XI (ruled: 1700–1721) in his bull “Unigenitus Dei Filius” (1713), different forms of Jansenism remained popular throughout the eighteenth century in noble, bourgeois, and ecclesiastical circles of Habsburg lands. They spread particularly persistently among lecturers and priesthood candidates in schools of higher theological education, where they decisively shaped the teaching of moral theology up until the mid-nineteenth century.¹² One of the most prominent proponents of Austrian Jansenism, which was favourable towards state authority, was Johann Karl von Herberstein, a bishop of Ljubljana (in office: 1772–1787).¹³ In the environments mentioned, Jansenism also acted as an expression of the prestige of the higher social strata, to distinguish them from uneducated and ‘lazy’ masses. Politically, through the theory of natural law, which was popular in Protestant lands, it advocated for limiting the property and social privileges of the Church. Its operation should be limited to the performance of rituals, preaching, teaching the people, and ensuring the morality of priests. (Stollberg-Rilinger 2017, 576–577; 584–585; Klueting 2010, 132–133; 152; Gierl 2013, 357; Lehner 2010, 21–22)

3. Education and the Church as Part of the State

Maria Theresa was personally a devout Catholic; she publicly attended religious ceremonies and supported the Baroque notion of the Habsburg dynasty as the protector of the Catholic Church and its orthodoxy. Although she remained within the limits of ‘Austrian piety’ (*pietas Austriaca*) as regards the fulfilment of religious duties, she aimed to strengthen the state by limiting the Church's influence on social life. (Stollberg-Rilinger 2017, 560–561; 563; 571–574; Klueting 2010, 128; Weston Evans 1979, 169) Education was to become a systematic concern of the political authorities, but they would still support Catholic religious and moral content in teaching. An opportunity for a decisive state intervention in education arose with a decree by Pope Clement XIV (ruled: 1769–1774), “Dominus ac Redemptor Noster”, which disbanded the Jesuit order in 1773 at the level of the whole Catholic Church. In Austria and other Catholic countries, Jesuits had been the main providers of education and scientific activities since the late eighteenth century, especially at the levels of secondary and higher education. In this role, they shaped not only future priests but lay intellectuals as well. After the Jesuit

¹² On the role of Jansenism in eighteenth-century moral theology: Laun 1979.

¹³ Herberstein's work and his place in the Central European cultural and ecclesiastical streams are highlighted in the following edited volume: Škulj 2004.

order was abolished, the Austrian state took over many of its buildings and possessions, while a number of Jesuits entered state service. This created the basis for education to become primarily a matter of the state (*politicum*) and only secondarily a matter of the Church (*ecclesiasticum*). (Viehhauser 2019, 25)¹⁴

In the following decades, involving the Church in the strengthening of the school network was in accordance with the plans of Joseph II (ruled: 1780–1790). Even more than Maria Theresa, his mother, he envisioned the place of the Catholic Church in society as an extension of the state. Joseph's mindset was based on the Enlightenment interpretation of the ideals of natural law, according to which a ruler is not the keeper of orthodoxy and their subjects' guide to eternal salvation, as had been the case in previous centuries, but rather a custodian of the common good within earthly realities, which gives them the right and duty to intervene in the religious sphere, which remains part of public life. Thus, in Joseph's understanding, the state justifiably exerted its authority by managing Church property,¹⁵ by establishing new dioceses and parishes and determining their borders in line with the borders of political administrative units, by appointing bishops, by abolishing monasteries of contemplative orders (e.g. Carthusians, Cistercians),¹⁶ and by generally directing the operation of the Church,¹⁷ which is visible in particular in the moral, educational, and charitable spheres. (Trontelj 2022, 21; Klueting 2010, 144–146; 150; Lehner 2010, 13)

As an educated Augustinian from the religiously heterogeneous Silesia, Johann Felbiger knew the operation of the Protestant urban and rural schools there, which were better and more numerous than the Catholic ones. One reason he started designing his school reform was to strengthen the position of the Catholic Church in the land and prevent the increasing practice of Catholic parents sending their children to schools of 'competing' faiths. When reading pedagogical literature and assessing practical examples, he was inspired by the developing school system in Prussia, especially the example of the 'Real School' (*Realschule*) in Berlin. The teaching there was based on the group method, i.e. the teacher lecturing to a large group of students in one classroom, and on imparting knowledge following the principle of cause-effect questions and answers, known as the catechetical method, which was to promote quick memorization and a systematic understanding of the subject matter. The institution in question had been founded in 1747 as a form of a secondary school for future teachers by Johann Julius Hecker (1707–1768), a Lutheran pastor and former student of the renowned pedagogical institute in Hal-

¹⁴ The circumstances of the suppression of the Jesuit order and the Enlightenment streams in the Catholic Church in the eighteenth century are discussed in the following overview monograph: Van Kley 2018.

¹⁵ The state consolidated the property of the abolished contemplative monastic orders and Church land of feudal origin into so-called religious funds, which it managed – nominally in the name of the Church and in different forms up until the end of World War I – mostly for priests' income and the needs of the education system. More on Austrian religious funds: Batič 2017.

¹⁶ The process of abolishing monasteries of contemplative monastic orders is discussed in the following overview study: Beales 1997.

¹⁷ One of the more radical forms of submitting the Church to the state was a ban on selling blessed candles and rosaries. Due to resistance from the masses, Joseph's successors did away with most of his interventions in religious life. (Kluetig 2010, 144; 157).

le, which had begun its work in 1695 at the initiative of August Hermann Francke (1663–1727), a theologian and founder of the spiritual and cultural movement¹⁸ called Pietism. (Viehhauser 2019, 26; Krömer 1966, 23–24; Schmidt 1988, 178; Doney 1988, 8–9; 13–14) Based on Prussian pedagogical theory and practice, Felbinger developed an education program in Silesia in 1764, a decade before the Austrian general School Ordinance, and founded a ‘normal school’ in Sagan for the education of teachers, which was to be an example to all other primary schools. Felbinger’s program set out requirements for the education and selection of teachers, for attending classes and for overseeing their implementation. Thus, the later system of education in Catholic Austria was decisively shaped by principles from Protestant Prussia. (Krömer 1966, 37–38; Engelbrecht 1984, 103; Doney 1988, 14) The pedagogue formulated his principles in line with the contemporary notion of the ideal state as a well-functioning machine. (Viehhauser 2019, 28; 33; Stollberg-Rilinger 2017, 182) His handbook, the *Method Book for Teachers in German Schools* (*Methodenbuch für Lehrer der deutschen Schulen* 1775) contains a notable thought: “every student in class must watch, think, hear, and work as one.” (4)

The purpose of Maria Theresa and Joseph’s elementary education was not the formation of independently thinking citizens, but rather of subjects loyal to the state and characterized by two values in particular – diligence and piety (Stollberg-Rilinger 2017, 691). Maria Theresa’s school ordinance did not stay in force for long. In 1806, Francis II (ruled: 1792–1806) adopted a new school ordinance with the official title “Political Constitution of German Schools in Imperial-Royal German Hereditary Lands” (*Politische Verfassung der deutschen Schulen in den k. auch k.k. deutschen Erbstaaten*). The new order relinquished state competence over education, entrusting it once more to the Catholic Church. Despite its incomplete realization, the 1774 school ordinance brought profound and lasting change to education in Central Europe. In particular, it established a public space where the state became permanently present among all strata of the population. It also contributed to the consolidation of some principles still applied in social life today: education as a concern of the state, an awareness about the accessibility of a fundamental body of knowledge to all children, the importance of group teaching, and considering the moral development of students. (Ciperle and Vovko 1987, 34; Engelbercht 1984, 120)

4. Education in the Catholic and Lutheran Environments

As elsewhere in Central Europe, in those German lands¹⁹ where the Catholic fa-

¹⁸ The influence of renewed Lutheran religious fervour and of promoting literacy for the purposes of studying the Bible, which are encompassed by the concept of Pietism, on education and social life in Prussia is presented in the following overview study: Gawthrop 2006.

¹⁹ The Catholic Enlightenment streams were – due to linguistic closeness, personal contacts of individual intellectuals, and similarity in ideas – particularly intertwined on German and Austrian soil. Still, two major differences can be observed between the German and Austrian environments: Jansenist views were weaker in Germany, and there the state did not make such radical interventions in Church matters like the Habsburg Empire did during the rule of Joseph II. (Klueting 2010, 130)

ith was dominant, representatives of the Catholic Enlightenment opposed the influence of Jesuits, who had total control of higher education and promoted Baroque spirituality until the last third of the eighteenth century. Instead, they saw their ideal in the urban, educated, moralistic, and outwardly modest version of the Catholic faith, striving to distinguish themselves from their coreligionists in rural areas. (Printy 2010, 192) Such opposition to Jesuits was in line with the aims of rulers and bureaucracy to form a centralized and efficient state, for which they needed highly educated men in the fields of law, mathematics, and natural sciences. In this light, they reproached the Jesuit education system – based on classical languages, rhetoric, philosophy, and theology – for empty theorizing and vague moral theology, the obsolescence of the method of learning by heart, being removed from reality with its almost exclusive use of Latin, and falling behind German Lutheran universities, where law and history were favoured in the eighteenth century.²⁰ (Printy 2010, 193–194; Lehner 2010, 31; Hammerstein 1977, 42; Doney 1988, 9–10)

The connection between religion, education, and the state was knowingly expressed by Johann Michael Bönicke (1734–1811), a chancellor of the Salzburg Archdiocese, which covered parts of Austrian and Bavarian territory: “Religion should support the state. It should enlighten the citizen about his duties. It should foster a love for his occupation /.../, precision in his craft. It should provide teachings on happiness for society and for each of its members.” (Hollweger 1976, 297) It was this ‘applied’ aspect of religion that was particularly expressed in Catholic spiritual and pedagogical literature from German lands, where it is possible to detect an echo of the sense of inferiority among German writers in view of the intellectual and military strength of Protestant areas, especially Prussia. As a result, these writers sometimes even reduced Jesus Christ to the role of the ‘teacher of virtue,’ thereby emphasizing the importance of education for diligent, frugal, honest, and state-authority-obedient life of all social strata. (Printy 2010, 197–198; 205; Doney 1988, 9–10; Lehner 2010, 17) The already mentioned Johann Felbiger, whose work was characterized by experiences from both Protestant Prussia and Catholic Austria, reflected along the same lines. For instance, he advocated the view that religion was not merely a means to attain eternal life but also an incentive to fulfil everyday duties, which led to a happy life on the personal and social levels. (Felbiger 1774, 60; Doney 1988, 8–9)

Although Lutheran Prussia was considered a model of progressiveness in mass elementary education between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, it had no overarching state legislation that would provide for the formation of a

²⁰ Criticism of Jesuit pedagogy was also reflected in a transformation of theology studies in Austrian universities and seminaries. The reform that was introduced by Joseph II in 1782–1785 and was in place until 1857 originated in a plan by Franz Stephan Rautenstrauch (1734–1785), a Benedictine. Due to acquired knowledge ‘useful’ to priests in teaching the people, Rautenstrauch ascribed central importance to subjects in history, biblical exegesis, and moral theology. In addition, the ruler banned theology studies in monasteries and required priesthood candidates to undergo four-year education in state-led ‘general seminaries,’ which operated in the capitals of regions or larger areas, plus an additional year of pastoral practice. (Klueting 2010, 139; 147; 152; Zschokke 1894, 31–48)

modern school network with a single and symbolically meaningful act (Caruso and Töpper 2019, 41). In the nineteenth century, Prussian elementary or people's schools (*Volksschulen*) were highly successful in lesson attendance rates, teacher training, subject diversity, and school network management owing to a highly developed culture of education. This culture enabled the systematic attention of secular (city, regional, national) authorities, which was enhanced through cooperation with educational institutions of the Lutheran Church, the entity behind the official religion on Prussian soil. The care of secular authorities was reflected mainly through guidance by the increasingly efficient bureaucratic apparatus, the progress of which was unimaginable without literacy being increasingly accessible to the masses; at the same time, literacy was thought to contribute to the rising military and economic strength of the country. (43–44)

An important step in the process of establishing mass education, which was part of wider efforts for a centralized organization of the state using the existing Church network, was the 1736 decree *Principia Regulativa* ("Regulative Principles") by Frederick William I (ruled: 1713–1740), King in Prussia. The decree prescribed obligations of Lutheran congregations in constructing school buildings and remunerating teachers. (Dietrich and Klink 1972, 131–132) The king entrusted the oversight of education to Lutheran ecclesiastical councils (consistories) and awarded pastors the authority to appoint teachers. As the supreme leader of the state Lutheran Church, the king determined the financing of ecclesiastical institutions, which included schools. In the field of education and social life, he thus consolidated the congruence of the Church with the needs of the state, which further enhanced the bond between the Church and state from the beginnings of the Protestant reformation in the sixteenth century. (Caruso and Töpper 2019, 44–45) Mandatory attendance in elementary schools was first expressly prescribed in 1763, when Frederick II the Great (ruled: 1740–1786) issued the "General Land School Regulations" (*Generallandschulreglement*), which are considered one of the most important documents in the history of European education at large. The initiative to adopt this document came from the observation that the Prussian army, which had recently won the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), had too few literate officers, which reduced its efficiency. The School Regulations stipulated that students should finish their schooling only when they could read and write as well as know the basics of the Christian faith. (Königlich-Preußisches 1763) Despite a clearly expressed will of the state to regulate elementary education, the impact of the school regulations was limited. The main reasons for the problems were the small number of civil servants, who could not monitor the school reform, and the reliance on Lutheran pastors, who were mostly not trained teachers and highlighted the religious aspect of education in their work. (Caruso and Töpper 2019, 44–45; Van Horn Melton 1988, 173–175)

Significant changes in education followed with the "General State Laws for the Prussian States" (*Allgemeines Landrecht für die Preußischen Staaten*) of 1794. Parts of the code dedicated to education set the foundations for numerous administrative and content-related measures in elementary education throughout the

nineteenth century, which was characterized by a general rise in literacy. The code in question included about nineteen thousand provisions, aiming to regulate various aspects of public life in the state and thus becoming a typical expression of enlightened absolutism. The code communicated that education as a whole was a concern of the state, which was to encompass both control over learning content and teachers and their training in all public and private schools. Even so, the commitment of the state to care for education did not entail the exclusion of the Lutheran Church from the process of mandatory mass education as national and regional authorities cooperated with it in different forms up until the mid-twentieth century. (Caruso and Töpper 2019, 46–47; Leschinsky and Roeder 1983, 54)

5. Education and Lutheran Enlightenment

Before the Enlightenment, social and cultural development in eighteenth-century Prussia was decisively shaped by Pietism, a Lutheran spiritual movement advocating for ecclesiastical reform, renewal of religious fervour, moral exemplary life, and expansion of literacy for the purposes of studying the Bible and general knowledgeability. By emphasizing personal responsibility and self-reflection for own and community life and the necessity of accessible education in light of fulfilling religious and social duties, Pietism came close to the Enlightenment and facilitated modernization processes; as a result, there were similarities to the streams of reform and Jansenism in the Catholic Church. On the other hand, this movement distinguished itself from the Enlightenment and acted anti-modern by advocating for the primacy of religion in all areas of life, the usefulness of attending ceremonies and showing public signs of piety, and the necessity of ensuring the free operation of the Lutheran Church in relation to the state. (Gierl 2013, 348–350; 356; Doney 1988, 8–10) In Prussia, Pietism-minded Protestant pastors, university professors, government officials, and benefactors from different social strata – as members of the ‘state Church,’ which had already cooperated with the authorities in education and other fields – contributed to launching a process of establishing a modern school network at the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels; they also played an important role in religious care in the Prussian army. By the end of the eighteenth century, Pietist principles of education became part of official policy, which aimed at establishing a state education system based on the institutionalization of education, youth socialization, and the development of the intellectual and moral inner world of each student. It was also in the interest of the Prussian royal government to keep Pietists dependent on the financial assistance of the state – even though they stressed the primacy of faith over any other earthly dimension, they saw a greater threat in Church representatives that lacked fervour than in the sponsorship of the state, as long as it supported their ideas. (Gierl 2013, 351; 353; Marschke 2013, 488–489)

The institutions of August Hermann Francke, a theologian and the founder of Pietism, elevated the city of Halle, where they were erected around the year 1700 –

e.g. pedagogical institute, Latin school (gymnasium), elementary school for children of both sexes, orphanage, hospital – to a model education center. Its main purpose was to provide conditions for the intellectual and character formation of talented elementary and secondary school students of different social backgrounds, who would spread Pietist views among the people as they would have access to influential positions in the state and ecclesiastical apparatus based on their good education. Through Halle, Pietism asserted itself in education, and through education, in later decades it became part of the identity of the Prussian state, which also supported Pietist initiatives financially. The essence of Francke's pedagogy was the formation of a student's will through the regular reading of suitable literature, continuous control over students' activities, a meticulously prescribed daily program, everyday prayer and personal reflection about deeds done or omitted, and assessment of all acquired knowledge in the form of exams four times a year. 'Corrupt' human nature – which, according to traditional Lutheran anthropology, can only do good owing to God's grace and faith in Christ as the Savior – was thought to become available to God and fellow men through (self-)control; an individual was to develop a 'piety of the heart,' the fundamental driving force of earthly society, which is ordered according to God's idea. (Gierl 2013, 366; 384–385; Loch 2004, 275)

In 1905, Max Weber (1864–1920), a German sociologist and economist, advocated his findings about the far-reaching social impacts of the Protestant work ethic in his momentous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (*Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*). He said this ethic originated in the spiritual interpretation of practicing a secular profession as a life mission or 'calling' from God, which developed in the Calvinist and Puritan versions of Protestantism – he said it became the ideological and psychological basis for the flourishing of the capitalist system in Northwestern Europe and North America between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Weber's 'spirit of capitalism' can also be understood with a different view, which is centered on Protestant expectations after reading the Bible personally and, deriving from this, on the promotion of spreading literacy among different strata of the population. In this context, rising literacy and general education rates gradually led to more multifaceted, organized, and profitable forms of economic life, which were accompanied by technological innovations – indeed, in the Western world, capitalism first asserted itself in mostly Protestant environments, where the literacy rates were highest and grew the most rapidly. There is a notable difference in literacy rates in Lutheran German lands, where around 40% of the population was literate as early as the start of the eighteenth century, or Lutheran Sweden, where literacy encompassed over 80% of the population at the start of the nineteenth century, on the one hand and Catholic Italy, where only around 20% of the people were literate at the same time, on the other. Even though the establishment of parish elementary schools had been encouraged already by the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the Catholic Church became actively involved in elementary education only at the request of state authorities in the late eighteenth century. (Mosher 2016, 397; 399–401; 407; Becker and Woessmann 2009)

It is worth highlighting that the Catholic Church may have been the main provider of scientific and educational activity in Europe, but it reached only a small part of society in this field until the nineteenth century. Moreover, the Catholic Church did not oppose reading the Bible as such, but it did discourage individuals with no theological education from reading it as it feared the emergence of individual interpretations, which could come in conflict with its teachings and cause disunity in the Church. Unlike official Catholicism, Jansenism, which was similar to Protestantism, encouraged reflection alongside passages from the Bible to strengthen moral life – this was one of the reasons Jansenists and Enlightenment-oriented Catholics were so strongly in favour of education accessible to the masses. Interestingly, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Catholic world had the highest literacy rates – up to half the population – in religiously heterogeneous lands or in areas bordering Protestant territories, e.g. in Catholic parts of Belgium or German lands. This was in part due to imitation of nearby Protestant practices and in part due to a concern for preserving the Catholic identity in the population, i.e. preventing students from going to ‘competing’ Protestant schools. The latter was one of the key reasons why Johann Felbiger, who was from the religiously heterogeneous Silesia, created his reform program. (Mosher 2016, 405; 407; Doney 1988, 5; Lehner 2010, 15)

Catholic priests and Protestant pastors played a key role in establishing an Enlightenment spirit among the majority rural population, especially by preaching in churches, visiting homes, teaching in schools and writing or translating different handbooks. They thus enhanced their position of spiritual authority with an educational teaching role and supported the central concern of the Enlightenment – addressing the ignorance of the mind and maximizing work efficiency for personal and social wellbeing. An example is provided by the collection of entertaining and instructing stories titled *A Booklet to Help Peasants (Noth- und Hülfsbüchlein für Bauersleute, 1788)*, which became one of the most popular works of the late eighteenth century. Its author was Rudolph Becker (1752–1822), a Prussian writer and pedagogue and representative of the Lutheran conservative current of the German Enlightenment. It was intended for rural youth in particular, using words and pictures to warn them of work hazards, imparting the basics of agriculture and medicine, and promoting diligent, frugal, and pious life. It was printed in approximately half a million copies, translated to different languages, and saw one hundred and nineteen editions. A Slovenian translation was provided by Marko Pohlin (1735–1801), a member of the Order of Discalceate Augustines, priest, and linguist, one of the leading representatives of the Enlightenment-oriented priesthood in Carniola. In the Central European priesthood, the mission of teaching people not only about spiritual matters but also practical and economic skills, which was promoted by Enlightenment thinking, was preserved even in the following decades, when the Enlightenment was replaced by other ideologies, such as the formation of a national consciousness. (Studen 2014, 15–17; Doney 1988, 3–4; 27; Lehner 2010, 14–15; 27)

6. Conclusion

Reforms in the field of education aiming for the establishment of state-powered mass education accessible to children from all social strata did not arise in an ideationally and organizationally empty space. In Central European environments, e.g. Austria, Prussia, and other German lands, the state school networks relied on initiatives by Christian Churches and were part of Enlightenment currents trying to reconcile the Christian faith with a rational view of life and with state interests. In establishing an elementary school network, such efforts were most notable in areas with a Protestant majority, starting no later than the end of the sixteenth century. This is because the demand of Reformers to read the Bible personally as a necessary means to strengthen the relationship with God presupposed literacy. As a result, the Lutheran Church recommended providing basic education to the maximum possible segment of the population and, accordingly, printing books, which led to the development of educational institutions of different levels and to a gradual rise in the overall education rate. The success of the Protestant school system was facilitated by the moral and financial support of the political authorities as they enabled Protestantism to have the status of the state Church under the supreme leadership of the secular ruler. As a result, Enlightenment followers could align the existing positive attitude towards education with their own views, placing education in the context of fulfilling the needs of the increasingly centralized state. (Soysal and Strang 1989, 280; 285–286) The disbandment of the Jesuit order provided an important incentive for intensifying state interventions in the field of education. In the Catholic world, this circumstance was a sign of wider cultural change symbolically ending the Baroque period – the ‘empty space’ that emerged was filled by the state, which started to gradually adjust it with new approaches.

To increase its power and intervene in all areas of public life, the state needed qualified bureaucrats, engineers, and military commanders; it had to create a unified culture and assert a national consciousness among the population. After all, the reform plans of Johann Felbiger, which were adopted by Maria Theresa, arose from his personal experience of living in an area with a religiously heterogeneous population, which was claimed by two countries. This enabled him to draw comparisons with more successful schools of Protestant communities, in which he recognized a challenge to the Catholic faith and culture. From the Enlightenment on, most notably in the nineteenth century, Central European state-powered education systems aimed to mould young people into diligent and moral individuals who identified with the state and strove to strengthen it and, as a consequence, recognized compatriots in other individuals – irrespective of social, regional, and religious differences. Thus, it was exactly through the decisive help of mass elementary education that during the nineteenth century, trust in reason and an increasingly centralized state created a new bourgeois and industrial society, with the ideal of a productivity-oriented individual devoted to the state at its core. (Green 1994, 9–11)

In terms of ideas, state interventions in education, which had been the domain of the Catholic Church for centuries in Austria and certain German lands, was based on criticism of Baroque folk religiosity marked by lavish ceremonies and processions, the veneration of saints, and numerous holidays. The effects of such religiosity were disapproved by an increasing number of intellectuals, both laypeople and priests, even bishops and especially theology professors. Instead, they advocated for 'rational' religiosity focused on the reading of spiritual literature and a highly virtuous life intertwined with the expansion of literacy, the teaching of Catholic doctrine to all strata of the population, and a sense of following instructions by the state. On the other hand, Pietism in Prussia and other Lutheran German lands – by emphasizing personal responsibility and self-reflection for own and community life and the necessity of accessible education in light of fulfilling religious and social duties – came close to the Enlightenment and facilitated modernization processes; as a result, there were similarities to the streams of reform and Janse- nism in the Catholic Church. It was Catholic priests and Protestant pastors who played a key role in establishing an Enlightenment spirit among the majority rural population, especially by preaching in churches, teaching in schools and writing different handbooks. They enhanced their position of spiritual authority and supported the main concern of the Enlightenment – diminishing the ignorance of the mind and maximizing work efficiency for personal and social wellbeing.

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