

Christian Democracy

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Abstract

Despite its centrality in European politics, Christian democracy came to be the object of systematic research only recently. We review the research that has emerged since the mid-1990s and pinpoint its contributions in specifying the origins, evolution, and broader impact of Christian democratic parties. We begin with a discussion of the origins of Christian democracy and show that it is a distinctive political movement; we review the state of contemporary Christian democratic politics, describe the impact of Christian democracy on the process of European integration, evaluate the content of the Christian democratic welfare regime, and explore whether the European Christian democratic experience travels outside Europe and Christianity, especially in the world of political Islam. We conclude with an overview of the future outlook of this political movement.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, the most common way to begin a study on Christian democracy was to complain that this political movement was neglected by scholars, despite its critical importance for democratic constitutions, party systems, and the political-economic regimes of continental Europe (Hanley 1994, p. 1; van Kersbergen 1995, p. ix; Kalyvas 1996, p. 1; Frey 2009, p. 19–20).¹ In the introduction to their edited volume on Christian democratic parties since the end of the Cold War, Gerard & van Hecke (2004, p. 10) argue that the topic of Christian democracy “is as much under-researched as lacking in theoretical elaboration.” Indeed, research on Christian democracy pales when compared to the effort that has gone into theorizing and investigating empirically the twin political phenomena of socialism and social democracy.

This neglect is consequential. On the substantive side, it distorts our understanding of European politics because Christian democracy, with social democracy, forms the “political family” that has decisively shaped postwar European politics and societies, including the European integration process. Clearly, it is impossible to analyze the political history and impact of social democracy without abundant reference to Christian democracy as its major political alternative. To put it bluntly, it is impossible to understand contemporary Europe without taking into account Christian democracy. Yet, to cite just one example, Berman’s (2006) *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe’s Twentieth Century*, fails to even mention Christian democracy, a failure that undercuts her central argument that Europe’s postwar period was essentially of a social democratic nature (Lynch 2008, Müller 2007). On the theoretical side, the neglect of

Christian democracy reflects a deep difficulty in grasping the relationship between religion and politics in the European context, despite the central role of religion in the emergence of modern, secular European societies. This difficulty has important implications for the way we also understand religious mobilization in emerging democracies outside Europe.

Fortunately, since the mid-1990s, Christian democracy has been the focus of more research attention than ever before. This new research has contributed to a much better understanding of Christian democracy: its origins, evolution, and contribution to European politics (including party and party-system formation and the political economy of Western democracies), as well as the broader theoretical issue of the relation between religion and politics. Ironically, however, this renewed interest coincided with what appeared to be an unstoppable decline of Christian democratic parties following the end of the Cold War. As a result, the literature’s frequent references to Christian democracy often served as a mere pretext for introducing arguments either about the return of social democracy as the presumed leading political actor in Europe or the emergence of an extreme and populist right prefiguring the radical reconfiguration of European party systems. For mainstream political science, Christian democracy appeared to have become history.

This paper proceeds in seven sections. We begin with an examination of the origins of Christian democracy. In section two, we focus on the concept of Christian democracy: Is it a distinctive political movement—and if yes, how? In section three, we review the state of contemporary Christian democratic politics. Section four examines the impact of Christian democracy on one of the most momentous global developments of the twentieth century, European integration. In section five, we turn to political economy and review the Christian democratic welfare regime. In section six, we explore how the European Christian democratic experience travels outside Europe and Christianity. Section seven concludes with a discussion of the future of Christian democracy.

¹Christian democratic parties also emerged in several Latin American countries (most notably in Venezuela in the 1940s, Chile in the 1950s, El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1960s, and Costa Rica and Mexico in the 1980s); they remain major political players in Chile and Mexico (Mainwaring & Scully 2003). Nevertheless, Christian democracy is primarily a European phenomenon; hence our focus on Europe.

THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

Contemporary Christian democratic parties evolved from Catholic² confessional parties created in the second part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century. These parties emerged out of a largely antiliberal and “ultramontane” (meaning leaning beyond the mountains toward Rome) mass Catholic movement that challenged the ascendancy of liberalism in Europe from a “fundamentalist” and theocratic perspective (as codified in the 1864 papal encyclical “*Syllabus of Errors*”). Indeed, Christian democracy was a concept coined in opposition to liberal democracy. Though spearheaded by the Catholic church, which feared for the loss of its privileges, especially in the field of education, Catholic movements gained their independence from the church through their transformation into parties. The Catholic church resisted this process, which robbed it of its monopolistic control over its flock, but could not thwart it because democracy provided Catholic activists with an effective source of power and legitimacy. Although initially ideologically opposed to democracy, these activists quickly realized that their interests lay in the consolidation and further expansion of parliamentary and electoral democracy, institutions that provided them social and political power (Kalyvas 1996).

The process through which confessional parties were formed carried two important, though contradictory, implications. First, it turned religion into the foundational element of confessional parties, the core of their identity, but religion proved more of a hindrance than an advantage. Second, their religious appeal turned these parties into highly heterogeneous coalitions of interest groups united only by their initial adherence to religion; although this heterogeneity increased the salience of class within these parties, it contributed to the

decrease of the salience of class in their party systems.

The study of Christian democracy was for a long time the exclusive purview of historians, typically those engaged in country-based monographs and in a few instances in comparative history (e.g., Mayeur 1980, Vecchio 1979). With few exceptions, political scientists did not study it (Irving 1979, Fogarty 1957). This trend was reversed in the mid-1990s. The renewed interest in Christian democracy had two related sources. On the one hand, historians decided to pay more attention to a political movement that had always played second fiddle to its competitors—fascism, communism, socialism, and liberalism. Historians asked the provocative question whether Dahrendorf’s (1980) statement, that the social democratic century had come to an end by the late 1970s, was wrong in the sense that such a century had never existed in the first place. The twentieth century obviously was above all a fascist and communist era. Moreover, the postwar era in democratic Western Europe was above all a period of Christian democratic primacy, in contrast to what the dominant social scientific cliché implies. Most decisively, Kaiser & Wöhnout (2004b, p. 1) challenge the mainstream view of the postwar era by pointing to the crucial role of Christian democratic parties in anchoring new party systems in postwar Europe; in legitimizing the market economy through social security and welfare provisions and the introduction of corporatist forms of consensual socioeconomic policy making; and in ending national frictions and rivalries by constructing the supranational European Union of the early twenty-first century.

In what is, perhaps, the most systematic analysis of the origins of Christian democratic parties in the nineteenth century, Kalyvas (1996) analyzed the formation of confessional parties in five European countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, and Italy) and the failure of such a party to effectively emerge in France. He called attention to an empirical paradox: Confessional parties emerged not as a direct result of the will of

²With the exception of the Calvinist parties in the Netherlands, all other confessional parties were Catholic (Kalyvas 1996).

the organized church, but in opposition to it. Likewise, these parties were not merely the resort of unsuccessful politicians looking for new political vehicles; they were formed, instead, in opposition to existing conservative parties. To help make sense of this paradox, Kalyvas specified a rationalist model of party formation, stressing the contingent and unintended outcomes of strategic moves made by the Catholic church and conservative politicians in response to liberal anticlericalism and the rise of mass politics during the late nineteenth century. Cost-benefit considerations by the church and the conservatives led them both to oppose the formation of confessional parties. In light of the liberal assault, the church reluctantly opted for an interest-group strategy of mass mobilization short of party formation. The church traditionally controlled its members through hierarchy and centralization, and it correctly anticipated that the formation of mass organizations and a political party would break this unity and subvert the hierarchy by allowing the lower clergy and lay Catholics to become independent of the episcopate. However, mass organizations could be kept on a tight leash. Meanwhile, conservative politicians who were losing ground in the emerging democratic competition saw the newly formed church organizations as repositories of compliant local organizers and voters. They also feared that the permanent politicization of religion and the association with the church would restrict their autonomy.

Although both church and conservatives opposed the formation of confessional parties, they chose a course of action that led to the realization of this unwanted outcome. First, the church launched a mass social movement to defend itself from the liberal onslaught. Provoked by the increasing anticlericalism of the liberals, this movement became politicized after the church decided to use it in support of those conservative politicians who agreed to defend the church's interests. The unexpected electoral success of these prochurch coalitions provided the means for the political emancipation of Catholic activists from the church and the conservative politicians. In other words, electoral

success provided the mechanism of transition to the formation of confessional parties. The formation of confessional parties reinforced a distinctive Catholic political identity, which not only reinterpreted Catholicism in much less doctrinal terms but also started to challenge the religious primacy of the church in political matters. As a result, political Catholicism became separated from the church and religion, and "[t]hus, in a paradoxical way, the politicization of religion contributed to the secularization of politics" (Kalyvas 1996, p. 245). In this account, religion was primarily an electoral and organizational asset, while the creeping transformation from elite to mass politics took the first movers by surprise and contributed to the emergence of a new political actor that was fully compatible with the realities of a new political age.

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY?

Until recently, political scientists tended to deny any distinctive character to Christian democracy. The name itself was seen as a bizarre but ultimately inconsequential label for "plain vanilla," middle-of-the-road, conservative parties, primarily characterized by pragmatism and opportunism.³ Because Christian democracy was not distinctive, there was no Christian democratic phenomenon and hence no need to study it.

This view was eventually challenged by studies that established the existence of a Christian democratic phenomenon and analyzed it from a theoretical and comparative perspective (van Kersbergen 1995; Kalyvas 1996, 1998a). The Christian democratic phenomenon can be broadly thought to rest on two pillars: a heightened capacity of Christian democratic parties to accommodate heterogeneous groups

³Indeed, Christian democracy still tends to be treated as rather nondistinctive in such otherwise excellent handbooks, such as Kriesi's et al. (2008) overview of European politics and Katz & Crotty's (2006) handbook on party politics.

and sectors, which gave rise to an early and pronounced “catch-all” profile; and a creative ability to both retain and tone down their religious identity, which was an essential feature in their formation.

Perhaps the first systematic exploration of the distinctive elements of Christian democracy was that of Irving (1979, p. xviii–xix), who listed several principles of distinctiveness, including the Christian commitment to elementary human rights, liberal democratic values, and class and transnational reconciliation. Building on this, van Kersbergen (1994, 1995, 1999) argued that the key concepts that made Christian democracy distinctive were integration, (class) compromise, accommodation, and pluralism. In his view, it was the continuous effort to integrate and reconcile a plurality of societal groups (or nations, in the context of European integration) whose interests were often at odds that made Christian democracy a distinct political movement.

In this framework, pragmatism and opportunism could be interpreted as effects of values such as integration, reconciliation, accommodation, and pluralism. It is likely that it was this dimension of the Christian democratic movement that made it so hard to grasp—a dimension that grew from the unusual organizational structure of this movement: internally divided into institutionalized factions or wings, having close organizational links with labor unions as well as employers, farmers, women’s organizations, and youth organizations.

The cause of this heterogeneity was an ideological appeal that emphasized religion at the expense of class. However, external inter-classism produced internal classism. Powerful Catholic workers’ and peasants’ associations had to be incorporated into the new parties, which ended up adopting a peculiar confederate structure based on organizations defined in terms of class (*standen* or *lager*). The ensuing conflicts gave rise to intensely accommodationist and consociational practices that were necessary for ensuring the parties’ unity and cohesion. Mediation between these divergent and increasingly assertive interest groups

was imperative. As a result, Christian democratic parties have displayed extreme skill in deploying and managing the politics of mediation (van Kersbergen 1994), which their opponents have derided as opportunism and a belief “that the ends justify the means.” The principle of subsidiarity (higher authorities, such as the state, should intervene only where individuals or smaller communities are not competent), which is central in the process of European integration, can also be traced back to these developments (van Kersbergen & Verbeek 1994, 2004). Last, the ability to accommodate divergent class interests within the party produced a heightened capacity to successfully appeal across classes and sectors. In van Kersbergen’s (1994) words, Christian democracy was a catch-all party *avant la lettre*.

This observation implies that the political outlook of the Christian democratic parties was determined by the actual balance of power within it, and, as far as the movement succeeded in mirroring society at large, within the national community as well. In that respect, policy variation across Christian democratic parties can be seen as a reflection of the intraparty balance of power.

Beyond its seemingly inherent pragmatism, it was the relation of Christian democracy to religion that puzzled many observers. The movement’s name refers to Christianity and, by direct implication, to religion. Yet there is also a general consensus that Christian democracy should not be confused with the official church, or even with Catholic culture in general (van Kersbergen 1995, 1999). Social Catholic political ideology goes far beyond the teachings of the Catholic church (the “grand tradition”) because Christian democratic political and social movements clearly transcend the church’s social and political theory and practice (the “little tradition”; see van Kersbergen 1995, ch. 10).

Prewar confessional parties, albeit friendly to religion, avoided an institutional and ideological association with the church. Likewise, the church could only protect its universalistic identity by moving away from a direct and daily involvement in politics. However, the

confessional character of these parties could not be shed because religion had become the cement that kept their heterogeneous social base together. The quandary was solved in an ingenious and momentous way. Confessional parties redefined religion into a nebulous humanitarian and moral concept that allowed them to be simultaneously Christian and secular. Vague formulations such as “religious inspiration” or “values of Christian civilization” are today the sole references to religion in the official discourse of these parties. It is now perfectly possible to be simultaneously a Christian democrat and an agnostic, atheist, Muslim, or Hindu—and this is not even perceived as a contradiction. (In fact, this “contradiction” fuels one of the main objections that smaller, more orthodox Christian parties, like the Dutch Christian Union, voice against Christian democracy.)

The paradox of allegedly religious parties governing highly secular societies, adopting secular policies, and distancing themselves from the church led to the characterization of Christian democratic parties as opportunistic organizations whose relation to religion was meaningless at best and misleading at worst. Hence the issue: Either the contemporary Christian democratic parties’ religious profile is meaningless, in which case one must explain the label’s persistence in a very secular context; or it is consequential, in which case it seems irrational, as it would undermine these parties’ electoral appeal.

Explicit references to religion are scarce and perceived as risky given the highly secularized European electorates. The Scandinavian Christian democratic parties provide an interesting, albeit limited, contrast. These parties are both more religious and more leftist than their counterparts elsewhere in Europe. However, as they have become more successful, they have toned down their religious message in an effort to capture the median voter, thus approaching the mainstream Christian democratic model (Madeley 2004).

Placing religion front and center would imply that Christian democracy could never become a true catch-all party—especially in a

secular context where the mobilizing power of the church has declined considerably. Indeed, appealing to religion or confession may scare away nonreligious voters or voters with a different creed. In a nation where, say, 30%–40% of the population claim Catholic church membership, a party that exclusively tries to mobilize religious voters on the basis of religious appeals can never hope to win a parliamentary majority. However, broadening the party’s appeal to include nonreligious voters or members of different creeds entails a serious risk because Christian democracy likely encounters a trade-off quite similar to the one faced by social democracy. Paraphrasing Przeworski (1985), this trade-off could be expressed as follows: When Christian democratic parties direct their efforts to mobilizing the support of nonreligious allies, they find it increasingly difficult to recruit and maintain the support of the religiously inspired voters. Such a dilemma, however, would be relevant only if we assume the continuing salience of religion as an electoral mobilizer, that is, under conditions of marginal or constrained secularization. This implies that if Christian democratic parties can be considered catch-all parties at all (Krouwel 1999, 2003), they could only have become catch-all parties in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the process of secularization really started to affect political affiliation. In other words, a theory of Christian democracy has to consider both the political salience of religion and the aftermath of secularization.

At the same time, religion has also been a vehicle of general political appeal, precisely because it transcends class. Christian democracy has always had strong social integrative capacities by virtue of its (religiously inspired) political ideology. With respect to the topic of political democracy and electoral competition, one of the main differences between social democracy and Christian democracy is that the former’s vehicle for mass support was the appeal to class as a principal base for political articulation, while the latter employed a religious appeal to cut across class cleavages. What therefore seems cataclysmic for social democracy is

beneficial for Christian democracy. To put it differently, what is a trade-off in social democratic politics may involve a payoff for Christian democracy. By stressing the cross-class nature of the movement, Christian democratic parties managed to attract voters by appealing to “catholicity” in its literal sense. Christian democracy’s choice or problem has not been whether to seek support exclusively in one class or to rely on multi- or even nonclass forces, but rather how to formulate and implement a feasible mediation between the various layers of society, whether these are defined as classes or not. Of course, this was possible in secularizing societies, where a toned-down version of religion could attract many more voters than it lost.

As for the catch-all character of Christian democracy, it was not so much an effect of the transformation of Western European party systems and of the growing intensity of electoral competition, as Kirchheimer (1966) argued, but rather the manifestation of the way the religiously inspired political ideology was made ready for the electoral battle. Although the Christian democratic parties of continental Western Europe are in several respects very close to Kirchheimer’s catch-all party, not all catch-all parties are the same; the empirical evidence suggests that each has a distinctive profile that takes advantage of their pragmatic, opportunistic, and reformist tradition (Krouwel 2003, Frey 2009). The logic of electoral competition forced Christian democratic parties to moderate the conflicts between capital and labor in order to attract voters from the ranks of workers more easily. At the same time, these parties tried to stabilize other social and cultural cleavages that were beneficial to them. Christian democrats tend to choose those issues that appear to be particularly apt to mitigate traditional socioeconomic cleavages and keep the sociocultural lines of conflict constant (Schmidt 1985, p. 390; Frey 2009, pp. 36–38). In short, Christian democratic parties have parlayed their religious background into a unique advantage in societies where a class compromise was both feasible and beneficial.

What is the relationship between postwar Christian democratic parties and prewar confessional parties? Two views have emerged from the literature. According to the first one, even though modern Christian democratic parties are the heirs of the older religious (primarily Catholic) parties, they were built up anew after World War II as fully democratic and centrist political parties. It was only then that they acquired their distinctive character as religiously inspired, yet secular, parties that fully accepted parliamentary democracy (Warner 2000, Conway 2003, Gehler & Kaiser 2004, Kaiser & Wohnout 2004a, Frey 2009). In that line of thought, Frey (2009) distinguishes between “pure” religious parties and Christian democratic parties proper on the basis of the analytical difference Lane & Ersson (1999) made between structural parties, which are based on social cleavages, and nonstructural parties, which attempt to bridge social-structural conflicts. Based on the Comparative Manifesto Data (Budge et al. 2001, Klingemann et al. 2006) and the Comparative Political Data Set (Armingeon et al. 2006), which in different ways characterize the organization, political ideology, electoral appeal, and government potential of major political parties in democracies, Frey (2009) defines and classifies Christian democratic parties empirically as nonstructural parties. These parties, which usually pick the label “Christian-democratic,” share the features of an ideology aimed at conflict accommodation; they are internationally connected through the Christian Democratic International (currently Centrist Democrat International) and, in the European context, via the European People’s Party (the largest political party in the European Parliament). Based on these criteria, Frey identifies 16 Christian democratic parties in 13 European countries (see **Table 1**).

According to Frey, religious parties have their roots in traditional cleavage conflicts, whereas Christian democratic parties foster an ideology that transcends cleavage-based politics and has as its primary aim the mediation of cleavage-based conflicts (e.g., class conflict). With this distinction, he arrives at a position

Table 1 Contemporary Christian democratic parties in Europe^a

Country	Party
Austria	Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP (Austrian People's Party)
Belgium	Christelijke Volkspartij, CVP (Christian People's Party, Flemish; currently Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams, CD&V)
	Parti Social-Chrétien, PSC (Social Christian Party, Walloon; currently Centre Démocrate Humaniste)
Denmark	Kristelig Folkeparti, KrF (Christian People's Party; currently Kristendemokraterne)
Finland	Suomen Kristillinen Liitto, SKL (Christian League; currently Kristillisdemokraati)
Germany	Christlich-Demokratische Union, CDU (Christian Democratic Union); Christlich-Soziale Union, CSU (Christian-Social Union, Bavaria)
Ireland	Fine Gael (Tribe of the Irish)
Italy	Partito Popolare Italiano, PPI-DC (Italian People's Party); Centro Cristiano Democratico, CCD (Christian Democratic Center; currently merged into the Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e Democratici di Centro, UDC)
Luxembourg	Chrëschtlech Sozial Vollekspartei, CSV (Christian-Social People's Party)
Netherlands	Christen-Democratisch Appel, CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal)
Norway	Kristelig Folkeparti, KrF (Christian People's Party)
Portugal	Partido Popular/CDS-PP (Center Social Democrats/People's Party) ^b
Sweden	Kristdemokratiska Samhällspartiet, KdS (Christian Democratic Community Party; currently Kristdemokraterna)
Switzerland	Christlich-Demokratische Volkspartei, CVP (Christian Democratic People's Party)

^aAdapted from Frey (2009, p. 50).

^bFrey included, despite its name, the Portuguese Partido Popular/Center Social Democrats. It is controversial, but we think he is correct. In its political manifesto of 1993, the party explicitly describes itself as Christian democratic, although the party's statement of principles does not contain any reference to Christian democratic ideology or tradition (see various documents at <http://www.cds.pt>, accessed Dec. 16, 2009).

similar to that of recent historical analyses that stress the discontinuity between pre-World War I and interwar confessional parties and postwar Christian democracy. Indeed, several historians have expressed skepticism about what they see as a “teleological interpretation” of European Christian democracy (Conway 2003; Kaiser & Wohnout 2004b, p. 2). These historians present their work in contrast to political science studies and emphasize that for modern postwar Christian democracy to emerge, a radical break with its social Catholic, anticapitalist, and antidemocratic past had to take place. Thus, Conway (2003, p. 46) calls for an analysis of Christian democracy that “while not neglecting its long-term origins and initial ideological character, resituates it in the immediate context of postwar Europe.” Partly, the critical attitude toward “teleology” must be seen as a response to the sometimes overly enthusiastic, essentialist, and almost hagiographic histories of Christian democracy written by Christian democrats themselves, including the otherwise

informative early studies by Einaudi & Goguel (1952) and Fogarty (1957), as well as the more recent study by Durand (1995) (for a concise overview see Gerard & van Hecke 2004, pp. 12–18). The main worry here is that teleological interpretations give rise to a retrospective narrative of a long-term democratic commitment, social compassion, and solidarity of Christian democrats, which distorts the reality of a presence (if not dominance) within these parties of antidemocratic, anti-Semitic, anticapitalist, antiparliamentary, corporatist, and authoritarian forces throughout much of their history.

Yet, pointing to continuities between prewar confessional parties and postwar Christian democratic parties should not be confused with a teleological reading of the Christian democratic phenomenon. According to Kalyvas (1996; see also Cary 1996, Leonardi & Alberti 2004), the process of party formation had far-reaching political consequences that underline an important continuity between the older confessional parties and contemporary Christian

democratic ones. Take, for instance, the “catch-all” character of the postwar parties. Because prewar confessional parties were formed on the basis of religious rather than class appeals, they were socially heterogeneous from their very inception; and because they were built on top of mass corporate organizations formed by the Catholic church, they had to manage daily internal class compromises, so they naturally became catch-all parties with a sensitive ear toward compromise.

Ultimately, perceptions of continuity and discontinuity are not as far apart as often imagined. No one would challenge the fact that postwar Christian democratic parties look very different from their prewar predecessors; likewise, it would be difficult to deny that key elements of their outlook, like their social concern, can be traced back to their origins. In fact, no political scientist active in this field would disagree that “there needs to be recognition that Christian Democracy was not a uniform movement that arrived ‘ready made’ in the history of post-1945 Europe but a dynamic and evolving phenomenon that was molded more by circumstance than by intent” (Conway 2003, p. 47). Kalyvas’ (1998) stylized political account of the rise of Christian democracy revolves around the paradox that Christian democracy was the “contingent outcome of strategic decisions made by political actors, rather than the product of these actors’ intentions and plans” (p. 294). Overall, it is fair to say that this debate reflects cross-disciplinary sensitivities; different degrees of generality and theorization are acceptable in history versus political science.

In summary, whether initiated by political scientists or historians, the combination of historical, comparative, and theoretical methods in the study of Christian democracy has been beneficial; it has facilitated the identification of Christian democracy’s distinctive features not only as a vote-seeking and office-seeking actor but also as a policy-oriented political movement. Christian democracy has tended to rely on social policies with broad cross-class appeal in order to accumulate power, for which the religious appeal was beneficial. Its distinc-

tiveness was reflected in its political ideology and through it in the social-policy regimes it fostered.

The identification of the distinctive character of Christian democratic parties helped reverse a view that dominated political science until the mid-1990s. It should be now established that Christian democratic parties were not merely pragmatic and opportunistic conservative parties that went by another name.

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

The national political profile of contemporary Christian democratic parties hinges on how these parties translate and modify within their own organization the structure of conflicts found in their national contexts (van Kersbergen 1995, 1999). The analysis of how Christian democratic parties have evolved since the end of the Cold War, as reflected in the case studies assembled by van Hecke & Gerard (2004), stresses the importance of historical context as a key factor for explaining the variation of European experiences: the speed with which the Italian Partito della Democrazia Cristiana (DC)⁴ collapsed in the 1990s (Leonardi & Alberti 2004); the remarkable stability of the German CDU after reunification, as well as its sudden decline and its recent apparent recovery (Bösch 2004); the fact that in 2002 the ÖVP became the strongest Austrian party, with 42% of the vote, for the first time since 1966 (Fallend 2004); the small but increasing importance of the Christian parties in Scandinavia (Madeley 2004); the repeated inability of Christian democrats in France to become an independent political force (Massart 2004); the failure of Spanish Christian democracy (Matuschek 2004); the wild electoral and power swings of Christian democracy in the Netherlands (Lucardie 2004); the diverging paths of the Flemish-speaking

⁴Acronyms not defined in this paragraph are defined in Table 1.

and French-speaking Christian democratic parties in Belgium (Beke 2004); and the success of Christian democracy at the European level (van Hecke 2004).

Despite all this variation, there are important similarities that allow some generalizations. In the recent history of Christian democracy, the main commonality is the survival of a political movement that should have been extinct a long time ago according to secularization theory. Likewise, it is possible to say that the prediction of a decisive decline of Christian democratic parties following the end of the Cold War has been falsified. Cyclical downturn is a more correct characterization as the electoral disasters of the early and mid-1990s were reversed and most Christian democratic parties rose from their deathbeds, to use Lucardie's (2004) apt metaphor. Italy proved to be an outlier rather than a portent of things to come, as many thought at the time.

To be sure, tracking the medium-term fortunes of political parties is like aiming at a moving target. It is exceedingly hard to distinguish deeper trends from much more common cyclical ones, the conjectural changes from the structural ones, the idiosyncratic and particular features from the general and universal ones, the causal effects from the correlational ones. It is also hard to synthesize divergent national trends into clear common patterns. At the same time, it is also necessary to try to inductively distinguish what appear to be the most interesting patterns. Three emerge: stability, collapse, and volatility.

Although we cannot discuss every case here, the German, Italian, and Dutch experiences deserve special attention as intriguing instances of variation. The decline of German Christian democracy began comparatively late but has not led to political insignificance. The decline of Italian Christian democracy, in contrast, was initially hardly perceptible, but then sudden and dramatic, such that by 2008 only remnants of a once-dominant party could be traced. The Dutch Christian democratic experience is one of wild swings: steady decline, sudden recovery, decay again, and finally revitalization.

In the late 1980s, Christian democracy in Germany faced organizational, ideological, and electoral problems that were very similar to those of parties in other countries: loss of voters and of political and governmental dominance, especially at the "Länder" level (Bösch 2004). Secularization; the dwindling effect of anticommunism; the transformation of traditional values; poor economic circumstances; conflicts with the peace movement, the unions, and the churches; an unpopular leadership—all these factors added to the expectation that the end of the Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands/Christlich-Soziale Union (CDU/CSU) was near. However, Chancellor Kohl's CDU/CSU won the 1990 election with 43.8% of the vote, just 0.5% short of his score in the 1987 elections and >10% more than the main rival party, the social democratic SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands). The German unification clearly contributed to the unexpected victory of the German Christian democrats, who, probably for the final time, were able to play the anticommunism card. The inclusion of the East into the German political system provided new voters for the CDU. Traditional cleavages (religion more than class) hardly mattered for these new voters. Instead, they picked the party that offered the best deal for a rapid assimilation into West Germany. Bösch (2004, p. 59) observes that between 1990 and 1994, "the CDU became the party of the Catholic and economically powerful South and the poor atheistic East." The unique conditions of German politics helped delay the effects of what appears to have been the normal cause of decline of Christian democracy in other countries, namely the end of the Cold War (Keman & Pennings 2006). However, the unification effect ran out of steam by the late 1990s. In fact, the Kohl government was blamed for having underestimated the costs of unification and for being responsible for mass unemployment (11% nationally, but a high 20% in the Eastern part), which turned into the main campaign issue in 1998. At the elections of that year, the CDU suffered a significant drop (5.8%), and although

its Bavarian sister party CSU managed to retain its vote share (down only 0.6%), the combined Christian democratic strength at the federal level went down to a historic low of 35.2%. Christian democracy was out of power when a “red-green” coalition was formed between social democrats and the Greens. In opposition, Christian democracy gained back some of its strength and reached 38.5% of the vote in the 2002 elections, exactly the same score obtained by the social democrats. The 2005 elections were disappointing for the Christian democrats, who again lost votes (35.2%), but so did the social democrats, adding to the fragmentation of the German party system and making it extremely difficult to assemble a winning coalition of either the center-left or the center-right. As a result and out of necessity, therefore, a Grand Coalition between Christian democracy and social democracy was forged with a Christian democratic chancellor at the helm (Clemens 2007). The recent electoral outcomes for Christian democracy and social democracy in Germany and the rise of new political parties [the Greens in the 1980s and the Left Party (PDS/Die Linke) (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus) more recently] seem to fit the general trend in Europe: a political convergence between traditional mass parties of the center-left and the center-right, while the center declines as a result of rising electoral volatility and the increasing strength of challengers on both the left and the right. This trend is particularly strong in countries where Christian democracy and social democracy have traditionally been the main competitors for power. Both seem to be losing their role as pivotal powers in the party systems in which they operate (Keman & Pennings 2006).

The case that contrasts most sharply with the German developments concerns the Italian DC (Partito della Democrazia Cristiana). On average, and until 1992 (excluding the one-time high of 48.5% at the elections of 1948), the DC's share of the popular vote was almost 34%. Then, in 1992, the party suddenly won <30% of the vote, although the Christian democrats remained in government. Between

1992 and 1994, the whole Italian party system collapsed and with it the DC, which exploded in a plethora of small successors that never attained anywhere near the former strength of the DC. Leonardi & Alberti (2004) argue that the systematic failure of the DC's political elites to maintain the productivity of the consociational construct of their party, their continued effort to deal in mutually advantageous compromises and exchanges with coalition partners (especially the socialists), and their neglect of political fragmentation inside and outside the party (e.g., the emergence of a regional contender) made the party unable to respond adequately to a series of crises, challenges, and political changes that even a well-disciplined party would have found difficult to surmount. Such developments include generally relevant events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the international financial crisis, the formulation and implementation of the European Monetary Union criteria, ongoing secularization, and the rise of a populist movement, as well as specifically Italian circumstances: the *mani pulite* (clean hands) corruption scandal, the introduction of a largely majoritarian electoral system, and the drifting apart of, on the one hand, the Catholic subculture and the church, and on the other hand, the politicians of the DC. In the elections of 1994 (under the new electoral system that forced parties to form electoral blocs), the Partito Popolare Italiano (the DC's successor) won only 11.1%, and the centrist “pole” of which it was part won a mere 15.8%. Since then, the Christian democratic legacy has been scattered over several parties that participate in diverging political blocs or poles, and at least two parties claim to be the real Italian Christian democratic party (see **Table 1**).

The Dutch main Protestant and Catholic parties recovered from the crisis of confessional politics in the 1960s and 1970s by merging into a single new party, the Christen-Democratisch Appel (CDA). This party was more distinctively Christian democratic than its predecessors in its social-policy profile and its cross-confessional and cross-class appeal. The

new Christian democracy radically broke with confessionalism, diluted denominational differences between Catholics and Protestants, and proved successful in the 1980s. By the end of the era, the party had become the most powerful one, earning 35.3% of the vote in 1989. In the next two elections (1994, 1998), however, the party lost an unprecedented 16.9% of the vote, its membership was drained, and the party lost its pivotal role in coalition building. In 1994, for the first time in 76 years, the Christian democrats failed to become part of the government. The CDA was forced to act as the major opposition party until 2002. Being removed from the national center of power implied that it became more difficult to hold onto power at the regional and local levels (Duncan 2006, 2007). At first, the liberal right and center-right profited from the electoral hemorrhage of the Christian democrats, but in the late 1990s voters shifted to the left for an alternative (Lucardie 2004, p. 161). Many an obituary was written in those days for Dutch Christian Democracy, but unpredictably the CDA's electoral appeal was re-established in the early 2000s, and the party became once again the biggest in Parliament. The CDA in 2006 regained ~80% of its parliamentary power of 1989, and with that it could recapture the pivotal position in coalition building.

As in other countries (and as for other parties), one of the main political problems of Christian democracy in the Netherlands has been to craft a convincing and electorally appealing program of socioeconomic adjustment to the new (international) economic conditions and of welfare-state reform. The party used its forced sojourn in opposition during the 1990s to try to revitalize its ideology, policy platform, organization, and strategies (see van Kersbergen 2008). However, as elsewhere, this task was seriously hindered by structural weaknesses relating to secularization, the decline of politically expressive and fairly fixed collective identities, the ill-adapted nature of its own preferred social and political model, and the loss of social embeddedness. In the end, the CDA came up with a modernized political ideology with roots

in the Christian democratic tradition, but it also started to incorporate mainstream conservative, market-liberal proposals. None of this seemed particularly convincing to the voters or could address effectively the structural weaknesses of the party.

However, as in Germany and Italy, country-specific developments helped the Christian democrats to recover from their identity crisis. In the Dutch case, it was the arrival of right-wing populism that proved oddly beneficial for Christian democracy. As elsewhere in the Western world, political distrust and dissatisfaction had been growing in the Netherlands for some time, a trend whose depth was missed by the main parties. In the early 2000s, Pim Fortuyn, a political entrepreneur, began to politicize the diffuse popular discontent and antielitism, predominantly targeting the ruling coalition of social democrats and market liberals. The populist challenge suddenly provided the Christian democrats with an opportunity to escape electoral marginalization by also exploiting the surfacing political discontent to their advantage. A drastic change in the Christian democratic approach was the successful strategy of harvesting the growing dissatisfaction with immigration and pushing for the integration of the Muslim minority (van Kersbergen & Krouwel 2008). To some extent, then, the recovery of Dutch Christian democracy, despite structural weaknesses not unlike those experienced in other countries, was contingent on the shocking assassination of the populist Pim Fortuyn, a development that abruptly shifted the opportunity structure to the advantage of Christian democracy in 2002 (Pennings & Keman 2003, van Holsteyn et al. 2003).

Significantly, we find no instances of parties in Central and Eastern Europe that come near the success of contemporary Christian democracy in, say, Germany or the Netherlands.⁵ Why? One relatively straightforward

⁵The Czech Christian and Democratic Union (KDU-ČSL) won 7.2% of the vote in 2006, and the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU-DS), arguably one of the most electorally successful parties so far, won 18.4% in 2006.

answer is that because this region includes Europe's most secularized countries, the electoral chances for any political party appealing to religion were dim from the outset. As Bale & Szczerbiak (2008) correctly note, this reasoning leaves out one puzzling case: Poland. This is a country where virtually the entire population is Catholic, half of whom regularly attend church; where a large proportion of the population is employed in agriculture; where there exists a strong, socially conservative union movement; and where an anticlerical left emerged in the early 1990s. These are conditions thought favorable for Christian democratic parties to emerge and thrive (Kalyvas 1996, Frey 2009). There were indeed many attempts to establish self-proclaimed Christian democratic parties in the early 1990s, yet the closest parties to emerge were either fully religious parties (such as the Christian National Union) or nonreligious center-right/right-wing parties. In short, no successful Christian democracy arose in Poland.

Of the factors identified that account for the emergence and success of Christian democracy in continental Europe, only two were present in Poland: a high number of practicing Catholics and the presence of an anticlerical left. There were five reasons for Christian democracy's failure in Poland. First, parts of Christian democracy's core constituencies were either missing or fiercely competed for by other parties (e.g., female voters disproportionately do not vote for the center-right, and an agrarian party attracts the peasant vote). Second, potential competitors on the right were not discredited by association with the totalitarian past. Third, the Catholic hierarchy was unwilling to back a single Christian democratic party. Fourth, the most important civil-society organization, the labor union Solidarity, refused to support any of the center-right political parties. Finally, despite anticlericalism, there was no specific need for an actor to defend the church's interests, as nearly all political parties of the center-right were committed to Christian values and sympathetic to the church's social and political agenda.

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Recently, considerable attention has been paid to the role of Christian democracy in international politics, particularly in European integration (see particularly Kaiser's 2007 tour de force). Christian democrats can credibly claim the paternity of the idea of European integration, both as a solution to war and as an answer to international coordination problems that hampered economic and social prosperity. They take pride in the success of "the risky undertaking of European integration: the process by which national sovereignty is renounced in order to stimulate and improve the quality of the rule of law in the common territory" (Oostlander 2003, p. 131). There are legitimate reasons for their pride. One example is the *Secrétariat International des Partis Démocratiques d'Inspiration Chrétienne* (SIPDIC), founded in 1925, whose core issue was pro-Europeanism, particularly focusing on Franco-German reconciliation (van Kemseke 2006, p. 28; Kaiser 2007). Referring to Christian democratic politicians during the interwar period, Pulzer (2004, p. 21) advises us to "recognize the extent to which the idea of political action beyond the boundaries of the nation-state was alive in those decades and how many of those who realized the European idea after 1945 served their political apprenticeship then."

The six nations that pioneered the process of European integration (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) all had well-established Christian democratic parties. This is why the process of European integration was, from Britain's perspective, nothing more than a cover for a "Catholic conspiracy, orchestrated from the Vatican" (Young 1998). As Pulzer (2004, p. 22) put it, "The odor of incense clung to the movement. At the heart of the new enterprise was the Europe of Charlemagne; it was not at all clear to everyone whether they were witnessing the birth of a United States of Europe or the resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire."

The role of Christian democracy in the process of European integration has been studied in depth only recently (Kaiser 2007). This delay is surprising given the fundamental role of Christian democracy in all phases of integration: the early foundation period (1947–1957), the period of sclerosis (1960 and 1970s), the rebirth of Europe (mid-1980s), and its rapid deepening and widening (1990s and 2000s). As Granieri (2009, pp. 3–4) provocatively argued, “If scholars hope to understand both the development of European Christian Democracy and the uneven course of European integration since the 1960s, they need to appreciate the connection between the crisis of Christian Democracy in a secularizing Europe and the crisis of European identity that began at the same time.” Lieshout (1999) has convincingly shown that political, rather than economic, dynamics have been propelling European integration. Seen from an international relations and foreign policy perspective, the European project “provided the institutional context in which the continuous struggle for power between France and Germany could at last be fought using peaceful means” (Lieshout 1999, pp. 1–2). Lieshout also shows how quickly and thoroughly the supranational solution (the Schuman plan) that the French initially proposed to address the “German question” was overhauled by traditional intergovernmental behavior. The governments of the member states have determined all major steps in further European integration. Such governments are made up of political parties, either governing alone or in coalition with other parties. As such, understanding the political dynamics of European integration requires an appreciation of the role political parties play. Kaiser (2007) demonstrates the crucial importance of the transnational networks of Christian democracy. These have been functional for “creating political trust, deliberating policy, especially on European integration, marginalising internal dissent within the national parties, socialising new members into an existing policy consensus, coordinating governmental policy-making and facilitating parliamentary ratification of integration treaties” (Kaiser 2007, p. 9).

Although the association between Christian democracy and European integration must be qualified (Christian democratic parties had no monopoly on this idea and were internally divided about it), it appears that the pro-European and prointegration stance came more naturally for Christian democrats than for any of their rivals (Pulzer 2004, p. 22). Moreover, the core ideological concepts of Christian democratic politics seemed ready-made for European integration in four ways. First, the principles of integration and accommodation are key pillars of the Christian democratic political philosophy and organizational practice (Irving 1979, pp. xviii–xix). Second, the doctrine of personalism stresses that individuals become full “persons” only when they are members of their respective communities. The sovereign nation-state is but one such community: “The national community is just one among others—locality, workplace, religion—and not fundamentally different from a supranational community” (Hanley 2002, p. 464). Third, with subsidiarity as a principle of governance, Christian democrats possessed a quasi-federalist principle, along with long organizational practice, which allowed them to structure and constrain their supranational ambitions. Finally, for Catholics especially, in contrast to the more nationally oriented Protestants, the idea of trans- or supranationalism is not particularly alien given the transnational structure of the church.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

A huge comparative literature assesses the impact of political parties on the political economy of advanced capitalist democracies (Huber & Stephens 2001, Korpi & Palme 2003, Allan & Scruggs 2004, Starke 2006). Like the mainstream literature on political parties, for a long time it overlooked the impact of Christian democracy. The so-called social democratic model of political economy and welfare-state emergence and growth was dominant throughout the 1980s until roughly

the early 1990s (Esping-Andersen & van Kersbergen 1992). The central thesis was that both egalitarian outcomes and the quality of welfare arrangements (universalism, solidarity, redistribution) were a function of the extent to which the population was organized as wage earners within the social democratic movement. A developed welfare state, therefore, was interpreted as the outcome of the accumulated power of the working class and its political representative, social democracy.

The social democratic model, however, quickly ran into severe empirical problems because many countries pursued social justice policies, had extensive programs of market intervention, and were generally generous social spenders, yet lacked the type of social democratic power mobilization that the model posited as the cause of such a political-economic architecture. Apparently other parties beyond social democratic ones could behave as pro-welfare actors. Moreover, the model also broke down for historical reasons: Early reforms of capitalism were pioneered by liberal and conservative state elites and rarely, if ever, by socialists or social democrats (e.g., Bismarck in Germany in the 1880s). This all necessitated a thorough theoretical and empirical revision of the model of welfare-state construction and expansion. This was done partly by reconsidering the role of Christian democracy in the history of the welfare state (Huber & Stephens 2001, Seeleib-Kaiser et al. 2008).

An early answer was that Christian democracy (or political Catholicism) constituted a functional equivalent or alternative to social democracy for expanding the welfare state (Stephens 1979, Wilensky 1981, Schmidt 1982). Catholic social thinking on the fair family wage, compassion for the poor, and usury, for instance, clearly allowed for the adoption of a pro-welfare stance by Christian democratic parties (Kaufmann 1989), particularly crucial in family policy (Fix 2001, Morgan 2006). Going deeper, Opielka (2008) has recently argued that the values underlying the social and political ethics and translated into modern social policies clearly have Christian foundations,

in addition to their more obviously humanist underpinnings. This is consistent with Kahl (2005, 2007), who traces the upstream effects of Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist/Puritan practices on contemporary antipoverty policies. In addition, one of the basic assumptions of the social democratic model was challenged: that the power of labor equals the power of social democracy. Christian democratic parties operated in the political center and enjoyed considerable working-class support, and they were commonly backed by powerful Catholic unions (van Kersbergen 1995). This political constellation was highly favorable to welfare-state development.

The most interesting thing about welfare states is not how much they spend, but how and on what they spend, and which social institutions bear most responsibility. The more radical differences between welfare states are of a qualitative, rather than quantitative, nature. There exist different types of welfare regimes, i.e., different ways of combining social institutions for the provision of work and welfare: public provisions (e.g., compulsory insurances, social services, job protection regulation), market-based arrangements (e.g., occupational pensions, private insurances), societal organizations (e.g., religious charities, organizations for voluntary work), and the family (informal care) (Esping-Andersen 1990). This new conceptualization of a welfare regime facilitated an improved understanding of the impact of politics on social policies and their effects. It clarified that Christian democracy did not simply promote welfare-state development like social democracy; instead, the movement fostered a distinctive welfare-state regime that is significantly and systematically different from both the social democratic and conservative/liberal social policy regimes, and its rise is connected to the ideology of social Catholicism and the power of Christian democratic parties. Christian democracy is associated with a core of social policies that aggregate into a welfare-state regime funded by social democratic rates of spending but with very different features (Huber & Stephens 1993, Huber

et al. 1993, van Kersbergen 1995). The Christian democratic welfare regime (Germany being the prime example) is generous but passive and transfer oriented. Its main features are income replacement rather than job protection or creation, the privileging of families rather than individuals, the fragmentation and semipublic character of major aspects of the administration and execution of welfare policies rather than their centralization and state control, the reproduction of social status rather than the re-fashioning of the social structure, and the relative obstruction of women's access to the labor market.

A decade and a half of research in the 1990s and 2000s further documented the causes, consequences, and contemporary reforms of the various regimes, including the Christian democratic welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1996a, Goodin et al. 1999, van Kersbergen 1999, Scharpf & Schmidt 2000, Pierson 2001, Esping-Andersen et al. 2002, Seeleib-Kaiser et al. 2008). The findings on the continental European Christian democratic welfare regime can be summarized as follows. The regime was characterized by occupationally distinct, employment-related social insurance, combining (sometimes) very high replacement rates with generally strict levels of employment protection. The system aimed to protect the male-breadwinner household. Social policy was predominantly based on the principle of industrial insurance against occupational risks, financed by earmarked payroll contributions from employers and workers. Strong social-partnership traditions extended into the administration of social insurance. The status of labor-market policies was strongly correlated with the passive character of social security. The regime lacked a distinctive legacy of active employment-policy priorities.

These characteristics of the Christian democratic welfare regime were subsequently used to study whether and to what extent they were causing the difficulty in which the systems were finding themselves in the period of economic challenges since the oil shocks of the 1970s. The Christian democratic regimes were haunted

by the so-called "welfare without work" syndrome (Esping-Andersen 1996b). In the Christian democratic welfare states, spiraling unemployment in the early 1980s led to a view that strategies of compulsory work reduction, such as early retirement and disability leave, were socially acceptable alternatives to high levels of unemployment among younger workers. The unintended result, however, was that within less than a decade, labor-supply reduction produced a problem of structural labor-market inactivity and an associated financial crisis of the employment-based social-insurance system. The generosity and long duration of insurance-based income-replacement benefits, the passivity of the benefit system, its contributory financing, and relatively high minimum wages all worked together to produce a downward spiral of labor shedding. Payroll financing of social benefits put a premium on high productivity, but shedding less productive workers increased the "tax" on labor because an ever smaller number of workers had to provide for an increasing number of inactive citizens. In short, the Christian democratic regime maximized worker productivity, producing an unintended inactivity trap. Productivity gains went together with rising wage costs and (early) exit of less productive workers, requiring yet further productivity growth and adding to the pressure to further reduce the work force subsidized by passive social policies such as early retirement (Hemerijck & Manow 2001, van Kersbergen & Hemerijck 2004).

Currently, the literature on the Christian democratic welfare state is focusing on explaining the puzzle of how the "frozen welfare state landscapes" (Esping-Andersen 1996b, p. 24), characterized by the welfare-without-work syndrome, are changing rapidly even though reform was thought to be almost impossible. The questions are how and under which conditions is welfare-state reform possible, and who is actually doing the reforming? Do Christian democratic parties still play a crucial role in the reform of the welfare regimes to which they are historically attached and still politically committed? Or is it the case, as much recent

literature on the welfare state has stressed, that the role of Christian democracy is diminishing because political party struggles more generally matter less and less in welfare-state reform? Aging populations, sluggish economic growth, long-term unemployment, changing family structures and gender roles, the transformation of life-cycle patterns, the postindustrialization of labor markets, the rise of new risks and needs as well as international pressures (e.g., globalization and European integration), not only seemed to bring an end to a golden political age of expansion, but also appeared to narrow considerably the maneuvering space for pro-welfare political actors (Huber & Stephens 2001, Pierson 2001).

New theories have been proposed that explain how international economic pressures and domestic social, cultural, and demographic challenges create pressure for radical adjustment. Such theories imply that governments of whatever political persuasion can do little for the welfare state's survival in the face of such overwhelming forces. Economic interdependence is expected to help liberal and conservative governments pursue their agenda of rolling back the welfare state and force social democratic and Christian democratic governments to adjust radically their systems of social protection to keep up with international competition. As a result, cross-national differences between social-protection systems are disappearing as welfare-state regimes converge toward a lowest common social denominator (for a critical overview, see Garrett 1998, Glatzer & Rueschemeyer 2005). This view, however, is controversial and contested. Stephens (2005), for instance, argues that in northwestern Europe, trade openness leads to the expansion of the welfare state, but only under social democratic or Christian democratic rule. If the secular right is in power, it does not take place. Both social democratic and Christian democratic welfare states are not only compatible with competition on the world market, but "to the extent that they enabled wage restraint and provided collective goods valued by employers, such as labor training, the gener-

ous social policies actually contributed to competitiveness" (Stephens 2005, p. 70). Seeleib-Kaiser et al. (2008, pp. 100–5) demonstrate that the welfare-state reforms implemented in the Christian democratic welfare states Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands do not follow any clear and consistent logic that one would expect on the basis of partisanship. Contrary to what van Kersbergen & Hemerijck (2004) suggest, Seeleib-Kaiser et al. find that there has been a "Christian-democratization" of social democratic social-policy positions, which has facilitated a shift from an exclusively Christian democratic type of welfare state to a liberal-communitarian model. This model stresses the need to expand public policies to assist families and the necessity to correlate the right to social benefits much better with the obligation to participate in society (e.g., to actively seek work). The overarching political aim is to restore the social cohesion of the community, a type of political program still closer to Christian democracy than to social democracy (Seeleib-Kaiser et al. 2008, p. 169).

Another recent development in the political-economy literature concerns a critical rethinking of the role of religion and Christian democracy in welfare-state development that challenges mainstream approaches. As argued above, the welfare-state literature originally posited that it was the combination of Christian democracy and Catholic social doctrine that explained why Christian democratic welfare states were as generous in terms of social spending as the social democratic ones, although qualitatively different. A new perspective on religion and welfare-state development (van Kersbergen & Manow 2009) stresses how social cleavage structures and electoral rules interact to produce the different political class coalitions behind the various welfare regimes. In countries with proportional electoral systems, the absence or presence of state-church conflicts was the key factor that helped determine whether class remained the dominant source of coalition building or whether a political logic not exclusively based on socioeconomic interests (e.g., religion) was

introduced into politics and, particularly, into social policy. This perspective highlights (class) coalition politics and institutional effects. In countries with a majoritarian electoral system, only one social-cleavage dimension can be represented in politics, namely the labor–capital class conflict. In such systems, the right tends to govern more often than the left, explaining why a residual (or liberal) welfare state emerged. In proportional systems, more cleavage dimensions can be represented via party politics, and the cleavage structure explains which parties arise and how the middle class is integrated into the political system. In Scandinavia, parties of agrarian defense arose because of the absence of a strong religious cleavage and the presence of an urban–rural conflict. The typical universal social democratic welfare state was the result of a coalition between social democratic parties and the rural middle class. In continental Europe, the second cleavage represented in the party systems, besides the dominant labor–capital cleavage, has been the religious (state–church) cleavage, as a result of which parties of religious defense emerged. The typical continental welfare states are the product of a coalition between social and Christian democracy.

This approach looks at which type of middle class entered into a coalition with social democracy and argues that the patterns of class coalitions better explain the observed empirical variation in welfare-state development. It deemphasizes the direct role of Christian democracy in shaping the continental welfare-state regime, to the point where it argues that the features of even a prototypical Christian democratic welfare state such as Italy's are the unintended and unanticipated outcomes of a clientelistic policy mode in which Catholic social doctrine has no impact on policy outcomes (Lynch 2009). More generally, the fact that the transfer-heavy, insurance-based, family-privileging type of welfare regime is also found outside the OECD context and in countries (especially in Latin America) where Christian democracy has not been the dominant political actor challenges the robustness of the Christian

democratic effect.⁶ In fact, the recent debate on the relative weight of the various factors that impact on welfare-state development and regime variation in Latin America may cast new doubts on the causal mechanisms widely thought to account for the emergence of the Christian democratic welfare states (see Segura-Ubierno 2007, Haggard & Kaufman 2008).

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY BEYOND EUROPE AND CHRISTIANITY

Does the Christian democratic model travel beyond Europe and Christianity? Following Kalyvas (1998b, 2000, 2003), we answer a qualified yes. Our answer implies that the legacy of European Christian democracy transcends its temporal and spatial boundaries and carries a much broader significance.

Our answer calls for a move that is at once conceptual, historical, and analytical. Rather than attempting to compare contemporary Christian democratic parties with contemporary religious parties elsewhere, we should focus instead on the prewar confessional parties of Europe. First, and like many religious parties today, the European confessional parties appeared in a political context that can best be described as one of “emerging democracies.” This is a context characterized by considerable institutional uncertainty and fluidity, where democratic norms are not consolidated, and political actors are not necessarily committed to existing institutions. Second, prewar confessional parties can be conceptualized as organizations engaging in “religious mobilization.” Despite widely differing religious doctrines and political and social environments, it is possible to study religious mobilization in a theoretical and comparative fashion, much as it is possible to study labor or ethnic mobilization across cultures, space, and time. Religious mobilization is characterized by five features: (a) an

⁶We thank Isabella Mares for pointing this out to us.

“antisystem” critique of liberal institutions relying on religious rhetoric; (b) the reconstruction, not just the mobilization, of existing religious identities; (c) a mass mobilization relying on a wide use of selective incentives and a concomitant focus of economic and social issues; (d) a cross-class appeal; and (e) links to pre-existing religious institutions (Kalyvas 2003).

Focusing on religious mobilization in the context of emerging democracies is a move that builds on an extensive recent critique of essentialist approaches that assume an inherent incompatibility of certain religions with liberal democracy, pluralism, and even modernization (Tibi 1990; Huntington 1996; Lewis 2002, 2003). Such approaches remain prevalent in public discourse, especially after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, but enjoy little scholarly support (Kalyvas 2000, Wiktorowicz 2004, Bayat 2007, Roy 2007).

With religious mobilization defined, a number of questions can be posed. Here we raise two that focus on its causes and consequences. First, what accounts for variation in the incidence, timing, size, and type of religious mobilization? The answer must take into account demographic, historical, cultural, institutional, and ideological parameters. Second, can religious mobilization possibly contribute to democratic consolidation, and if so, how? In short, what are the conditions for a successful political incorporation of religiously inclined parties into emerging democracies? Put otherwise, what is the path out of “unsecular politics”?

It is possible to analyze the process of potential incorporation as an interaction between incumbents and religious challengers (Kalyvas 1998b, 2000; Berman 2008; Altinordu 2009). Focusing on parties that rely on religious mobilization, Kalyvas (1998b, 2000, 2003) emphasizes the centrality of the process of moderation, which is fraught with three key questions. First, what is the structure of opportunities afforded by the existing political system? (Are incumbents willing to link moderation with incentives and radicalization with sanctions?) Second, what is the structure of electoral constraints? (Is the religious party able to win a parliamentary

majority or must it rely on electoral coalitions with secular partners?) Third, what is the religious party’s association with the religious institution to which it is related? (Is this religious institution centralized or decentralized?) Connecting these three dimensions should help us predict whether religious mobilization ends up consolidating a fledgling democracy by swaying the religious party toward a moderate path. Let us examine these three questions in more detail.

First, a religious party’s willingness to moderate hinges on the structure of incentives and sanctions faced by that party. Following Huntington (1993, p. 165), it is possible to see democratic politics as entailing a “participation/moderation trade-off.” Participation in electoral politics tends to lead to the moderation of previously radical groups, as political interests, pragmatic considerations, and political learning take precedence over dogmatic rigidity (Nasr 1995, Anderson 2000, Schwedler 2007). Likewise, Berman (2008) emphasizes sanctions imposed on radicalization by incumbent elites. The experience of the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or Justice and Development Party) in Turkey is an example of the ability of Islamist politicians to understand a political opportunity structure that provided both incentives and sanctions, leading to the incorporation of political Islam through a more skillful management of sensitive institutional relationships (Altinordu 2009).

At the same time, however, as Altinordu (2009) warns, moderation may not be an option if regime incumbents are uninterested in the incorporation of religious parties. Insofar as emerging democracies (not to speak of authoritarian regimes) can be political contexts where the opportunities attached to moderation are limited, we may well fail to observe it, but not because of the religious party’s unwillingness. If religious parties realize that they will not be allowed to govern even if they win a majority (or if they are not allowed to compete in the first place), they may naturally turn to nondemocratic alternatives. Naive observers will then be likely to attribute such a turn to the religious character of the party rather than

to the opportunities afforded to it by the political regime. In an international context characterized by a simplistic discourse on terrorism, undemocratic incumbents will have an incentive to play up a false “secular” card and reduce the opportunities available to religious parties so as to (perversely) tip the internal balance of religious parties toward radical factions and justify crackdowns supported by the international community in the name of democracy, or at least stability.

If the political system is open and opportunities exist, the second question comes up: What is the structure of electoral constraints faced by the religious party? Is it able to win a parliamentary majority or must it rely on electoral coalitions with secular partners? Two possibilities exist. On the one hand, when electoral constraints are salient, religious parties will be likely to moderate via the mechanism of coalition formation. This was the path followed by most confessional parties in nineteenth-century Europe and most recently by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party or Indian People’s Party) in India following the 1996 elections. It is interesting to note that analysts who had been skeptical about the BJP’s prospects for moderation recognized later that “the logic of Indian politics has made it clear to the BJP that if they want to be in power they must find enough coalition partners in the South and East, which is impossible without ideological moderation” (Varshney 1998, p. 15).

On the other hand, if electoral constraints are lacking, that is, if parties have the capacity to win parliamentary majorities that allow them to govern without partners, then the key explanatory variable falls on nonelectoral constraints. This process is illustrated by nineteenth-century Belgium (Kalyvas 1998b) and contemporary Turkey (Altinordu 2009). The presence of institutional actors, such as the army, who have the ability to guarantee the democratic and secular nature of the regime will be crucial in moving these parties toward moderation. At the same time, however, this scenario can produce the failure of incorporation along with democratic deconsolidation.

This is where the third question comes in: What kind of association exists between the religious party and the religious institution to which it is related? We begin by noting that the process of moderation can be either endogenous, if it is initiated exclusively by the religious party, or exogenous, if it is initiated by religious actors associated with the party. Assuming democratic incumbents, religious parties poised to win majorities in emerging democracies face a commitment problem (Kalyvas 2000). An ex ante credible signaling of postvictory behavior is critical. Though willing to moderate, the leadership of young religious parties may be unable to send the unambiguous signals that will satisfy ruling elites—unable, that is, to suppress the radicals. A solution to this problem can be provided by religious institutions. Centralized, authoritarian, and hierarchical religious institutions can play a positive role when they help religious parties to overcome credibility problems by shouldering the responsibility of silencing the radicals. This is, in fact, what happened in nineteenth-century Belgium but failed to happen in Algeria in 1991–1992, because the leadership of the FIS (Front Islamique du Salut) was not helped by the decentralized structure of Islam (Kalyvas 2000).

The lens of religious mobilization shows the relevance of the Christian democratic experience for contemporary non-European and non-Christian settings, opening important and interesting possibilities for comparative work, as indicated by a spate of recent studies (Wickham 2004, El Ghobashy 2005, Ismail 2008, Altinordu 2009).

THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE: AN OUTLOOK

We have seen that grasping the history and character of Christian democracy is crucial for understanding European politics, including the process of European integration. The Christian democratic experience more generally conveys important lessons about religious political mobilization and religion as a foundational

element of political identity, which are also relevant outside the European context. Moreover, as we argued, a theory of Christian democracy should not only consider the political salience of religion but should also inform us about the political consequences of secularization. And it should give us more analytical bite to make sense of the gradual decline, yet survival and cyclical downturn, of Christian democracy that we observe.

With this outlook, then, we ask what the future holds for Christian democracy in Europe. Presently, we can observe a multiplicity of trends, with some parties adapting to them and some bucking them. Some parties have completely erased any reference, even perfunctory, to religion, while others are toying with a discourse on ethical and moral values, targeting “postmodern” issues such as conception, euthanasia, etc. In some cases, a tough stance on “law and order” issues has produced electoral dividends. Particularly intriguing is the suggestion that trends in the European Parliament (especially the incipient “bipolarization”) may be having some effect on national politics. Last, the issue of (predominantly Muslim) immigration may produce changes either way: toward more secularization (if the issue is framed as secular versus religious values) or more religious polarization (if it is framed as Christianity versus Islam). Clearly, Christian democratic parties are facing some thorny dilemmas, and the consequences of their choices are likely to be momentous. Various studies already do an excellent job at showing how particular contexts affect choices—but also how different choices are made in contexts that are not very different.

Gerard & van Hecke (2004) rightly argued that Christian democracy is an undertheorized topic. Stronger theory is necessary in order to develop a comparative framework for explaining not just the historical development of Christian democracy but also the cross-national variation in the movement’s continuing capacity to mobilize, and its impact on the political economies of various countries, i.e., if it can be shown that the partisan effect is still

operational. Leonardi & Alberti (2004, pp. 21–22) have identified two approaches in the study of Christian democracy: (a) a rationalist approach that treats Christian democracy as a “unitary player, with a given set of preferences and interests and driven mainly by cost–benefit concerns” and (b) a reflexivist approach that sees Christian democracy as a “distinctive political phenomenon with a consistent set of values intrinsically reflected in its political identity.” Their own alternative constructivist and institutionalist approach sees Christian democracy as “an articulate phenomenon characterised by political moderation and originating from a ‘consociational’ pattern of interactions that have been more or less institutionalised in time and space” (Leonardi & Alberti 2004, p. 24).

The distinction between the rationalist and reflexivist approaches seems overstated, as it does not really lead to different interpretations of Christian democracy. Most, if not all, research seems to converge around the observation that Christian democracy’s unique features are its capacity to mobilize a plurality of interests and to accommodate diverse constituents. These features have accorded Christian democratic parties a remarkable ability to adapt to a continuously changing economic, social, cultural, and political environment, which is functionally related to the development of the movement’s ideology, policies, and strategies. However, this consensus about the nature of Christian democracy does not offer us many theoretical clues about major emerging issues. For example, under what conditions do Christian democratic parties adapt successfully to a new structural context increasingly affected by ongoing secularization and globalization? Under what conditions can Christian democratic parties adapt to new competitors such as populist parties?

Following Meguid (2005), we may try to understand the future political prospects of Christian democracy by focusing on the strategic interaction among competitors. Meguid’s modified spatial model for explaining the electoral strength of niche parties posits

that a mainstream party is capable not only of moving its policy position when faced with a niche competitor, but also of manipulating the salience and ownership of the issue that the new party wishes to introduce into political competition (Meguid 2005, p. 357). How Christian democratic parties strategically react to the emergence of right-wing populist challengers is therefore crucial for their survival (Bale 2008). Another issue is the more general question of the (electoral) opportunities for religious parties. Most analyses hold that Christian democracy's fate is not linearly linked to secularization. Why not? One explanation is that secularization is not a one-dimensional process that implies only the severing of religious and political identity. Surely, religion as a cognitive shortcut for party identification has declined spectacularly (Norris & Inglehart 2004), but we know much less about how beliefs, norms, values, and institutional arrangements that were initially Christian are transformed into secular values and institutions (Kahl 2005, 2007)—and how this influences political identities. This transformation, however, may be an important element of the structural process that we label secularization. We therefore need to take it into account if we are to understand not only why support for religious parties is so volatile but also why such parties manage to survive at all. In other words, analyses that focus on structure alone tend to suffer from a one-sided and somewhat mechanical conception of secularization, and as a result, both variation and survival of religiously inspired political actors pose problems of explanation.

Taking a less structured approach, one might hypothesize that the link between secularization and party affiliation is variable because religious political movements are simply not the passive casualties of the changes in social structure. Here, the literature certainly has part of the story right when the stress is on how the parties adapt in order to “become more secular in their electoral appeals,” moving toward “‘bridging strategies’ that enable them to win electoral support from many diverse social groups” (Norris & Inglehart 2004,

p. 211). But that may be just part of the story, as such an analysis tends to overlook and therefore underestimate how religious parties themselves are active producers of a modernized version of “unsecular politics” (Kalyvas 2003, pp. 293–94). This term refers to “a political context in which religious ideas, symbols, and rituals are used as the primary (though not exclusive) instrument of mobilization by at least one major political party (i.e., a credible contender of power).” The modern version of unsecular politics is the often uneasy attempt to strip off the explicitly and exclusively religious ideological baggage, while at the same time constructing a new religiously inspired package of beliefs, values, and norms. In this sense, modern Christian democratic politics is neither religious nor secular; it is “unsecular.” Moreover, the ability to dialectically manipulate how religion is perceived in politics may well be the hallmark of Christian democratic parties, very much as the dialectical manipulation of class has been the foundation of social democracy.

In addition, because religion has not vanished and continues to exert a significant influence on culture and politics, the secularization paradigm as derived from modernization theory has increasingly come under attack (Davie 1994, Stark & Iannaccone 1994, Berger 1999, Stark 1999, Martin 2005; but see Bruce 2002 for a powerful defense). According to a former proponent but current critic of the paradigm, our world is as “furiously religious as it ever was” (Berger 1999, p. 2). Political scientists should pay more attention to recent debates in the sociology of religion (Aldridge 2007, Davie 2007) that could provide them with well-theorized, albeit contradictory, hypotheses on the likely fate of religious political organizations. Either religion continues to be important for the cultural and political attitudes of citizens (the point of view of the critics of the secularization paradigm), and as a result the opportunity structure for religious parties is much more advantageous than is often assumed; or the social significance of religion declines further, with the number of religiously

oriented individuals continuing to drop and the level of religiosity among believers persistently falling (as the secularization paradigm holds). Or perhaps Christian democratic parties hold the key to survival without complete ideological capitulation.

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Errata

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