

B O O K R E V I E W S



Steven Van Hecke and Emmanuel Gerard, *Christian Democratic Parties in Europe Since the End of the Cold War*. Kadoc-Studies on Religion, Culture, and Society, vol. 1. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004. €29 (pbk), 343 pp. ISBN 90 5867 377 4.

Tracking the medium-term fortunes of political parties is like aiming at a moving target: it is exceedingly hard to distinguish the secular trends from the 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. This is why such books tend to have a short ‘shelf life’, and some even become obsolete before they are published. Yet, at the same time, it is obviously necessary to fill the gap between journalistic reports and macro-theoretical synthesis.

Given these challenges, Steven Van Hecke and Emmanuel Gerard have performed very competently: first, they assembled a first-rate team of national experts who have successfully tracked the fortunes of European Christian Democratic (CD) parties during the past 15 years; and, second, they complemented their contributions with a thoughtful introduction and conclusion.

The volume’s central insight is that CD parties experienced a cyclical downturn rather than a secular decline. The electoral disasters of the early and mid-1990s were reversed and most parties rose from their deathbeds, to use Paul Lucardie’s apt metaphor. Italy proved to be an outlier rather than a portent of things to come – as many thought at the time. Some parties have successfully reclaimed most of their losses (The Netherlands), others were able to bring their decline to a halt but still lag behind their glory days (Belgium), and one has been more successful than ever (Austria). It is more difficult, however, to specify causal hypotheses about these trends. It is not clear what the effect of the Cold War was; it coincided with several electoral disasters, but did it cause them? Even when this concurrence was not there (as in Germany), Frank Bösch implies that its effect was lagged. Likewise, it is not clear whether there are causal dynamics behind the concurrence of the CD ‘resurrection’ and the events of 11 September 2001.

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Besides electoral performance, the contributors explore the strategies of CD parties in an evolving political and social landscape. There is a multiplicity of trends, with some parties adapting to change and some resisting it. Some parties have completely erased any reference, even perfunctory, to religion, while others are toying with a discourse on ethical and moral values. In some cases, a tough stance on 'law and order' issues has produced electoral dividends, much more than abstract ideological references that have limited appeal. However, explicit references to religion remain risky given the highly secularized European electorates. The contrast of mainstream CD parties with their Scandinavian counterparts in John Madeley's excellent chapter is edifying. These parties are both more religious and more leftist than their mainstream counterparts; however, they have also toned down their distinctive characteristics as they are trying to capture the median voter. Particularly intriguing is the suggestion that trends in the European Parliament (especially the incipient 'bipolarization') may be having some effect in national politics. Last, the issue of (predominantly Muslim) immigration may produce changes either way: towards more secularization (if the issue is framed as one of secular versus religious values) or more religious polarization (if it is framed as Christianity versus Islam). Clearly, CD parties are facing some thorny dilemmas; the consequences of their choices are likely to be momentous. The contributors 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.

Looming large in this volume, though not addressed explicitly, is the fundamental question of the nature of Christian Democracy as a conceptual category. Is it meaningful to be guided by party labels? Why not refer simply to 'centre-right' parties? After all, this is half-heartedly acknowledged by the inclusion of France and Spain in the volume. In fact, we have long known that the reference to religion is something of a misnomer. Contemporary Christian Democratic ideology is not religious: CD parties are secular parties operating in secular societies. As for programmes and policies, despite existing differences, they are all moderate 'center-right'. Clearly, we need more if we are to give the category of Christian Democracy a theoretical weight beyond the casual use of the term.

Moderation turns out to be a key term. From this perspective, the most ambitious theoretical piece of the volume is by Paolo Alberti and Robert Leonardi, pointing to the organization structure of CD parties and its effects on ideology and policy outcomes. The basic argument is that Christian Democracy is distinctive (and hence a relevant conceptual category) because of its long practice of *internal* moderation and consensus, or *consociationalism*. This is correct, though not novel. We know that the distinctive confederal structure of some core CD parties did entail a process of continuous negotiation and compromise between strong occupationally based party organizations; we have also suspected that this internal practice helped generate these parties' *external* moderation, often castigated as opportunism by their rivals. What we still do not know is exactly how this process was sustained over time and across parties, and how exactly it has affected outcomes. In other words, a theoretical contribution requires a clear and transparent formulation and test of hypotheses rather than the re-statement of known intuitions through more typologies and frameworks. When this is done, we would be able to interpret the existing variation in electoral performance, as well as party strategies and policy outcomes, in a much more powerful way than we are able to do now.

To close, my only (minor) criticisms of this volume are the relative neglect of the political economy of CD parties, the non-inclusion of a chapter on Central and Eastern Europe, and the absence of a subject index. Overall, this is a valuable contribution to the rather thin literature on Christian Democracy, one that synthesizes recent developments and suggests several issues worth pursuing further. It is, therefore, an essential tool for students of European politics.

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**Richard Johnston, Michael G. Hagen and Kathleen Hall
Jamieson, *The 2000 Presidential Election and the
Foundations of Party Politics*. Cambridge Cambridge
University Press, 2004, 206 pp.**

Despite an unfortunately clunky title, this is a book that serious students of US presidential campaigns and elections ought to read. Johnston, Hagen and Jamieson's study of the 2000 campaign between Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore aims to unite campaign research coming out of communications and out of political science. Their analysis is both data-rich and accessible. The core data are from the rolling cross-section National Annenberg Election Survey. This is well augmented with campaign ad data and content analysis data of campaign news coverage by the three major national networks.

The book charts the ebbs and flows of the candidates' standings with the electorate throughout three phases in the campaign: Gore's post-convention ascendancy attributed to the fundamentals leading into the election (particularly the strong economy), Bush's post-debate lead traced to doubts about Gore's honesty, and Gore's comeback in the last two weeks of campaigning attributed to voter concern about Bush's proposals to reform Social Security. The authors conclude that Bush generally won the ad war, but that Gore won the news war of the campaign. Gore's news victory is hardly surprising given the ever more obvious biases of network news (recall Dan Rather in 2004), but Bush's supposed victory in the ad war is more difficult to understand. With candidate spending at near equal levels, the difference in ad volume (p. 79) may reflect greater Republican spending in less urban, less expensive media markets.

The study also finds that Gore's support was more volatile through the campaign and that Bush's support was more steadfast (pp. 15, 53). This 'dynamic asymmetry' reflected the fact that 'Bush was much more a pole of attraction or aversion than was Gore' (p. 61). Perhaps more importantly, Bush's support was more solid because fewer Republicans were cross-pressured by their ideological perspectives than were Democrats. While about three out of five Republicans claimed to be conservatives, only one in three Democrats claimed to be liberal (p. 62). One reason not considered for the greater solidarity behind Bush is the fact that Democrats had occupied the White House for eight years – an important