

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE
A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Pinter Publishers
London & New York

Distributed exclusively in the USA & Canada by St Martin's Press

BETWEEN CONFESSIONALISM AND LIBERAL CONSERVATISM: THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTIES OF BELGIUM AND THE NETHERLANDS

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Though the kingdoms of Belgium and The Netherlands share a common history of only fifteen years (1815–30), they are nevertheless comparable in many respects. A skilful historian could certainly write a comparative history of both countries (Kossmann, 1978). Yet one should not exaggerate the similarities. Even though the Reformation reached the southern parts of the Low Countries (now in Belgium) earlier than the northern parts, it had a much greater impact in the latter area. The Dutch republic in the north gained independence from the Habsburg Empire about 200 years earlier than the southern provinces. The Industrial Revolution affected Belgium earlier than The Netherlands, which remained more dependent on agriculture as well as on trade and commerce. Dutch is spoken in both countries, but almost half of Belgium speaks another official language (41 per cent French, 1 per cent German), whereas only 3 per cent of its northern neighbour speaks another language (Frisian). These differences have had an impact on the party systems of the two countries. Even so, their parties can be compared, especially the Christian Democratic parties which have developed closer ties in recent years.

According to Horner (1981), the Christian Democratic parties of the Low Countries are still confessional parties (*Konfessionsparteien*), whereas their sister parties in Germany and Italy are evolving towards liberal-conservative catch-all parties (*Volksparteien*). In this chapter Horner's thesis will be used to structure our survey of the historical origins and development, organisation, electorate, ideology and government records of the three parties. In each section, the two Belgian parties and the Dutch party will be treated separately.

Historical origins and development

Belgium

Although the Catholics in Belgium held their first national political congress in the town of Mechelen as early as 1863, they started organising themselves more seriously as a political party only when the Liberals introduced a law threatening the independence of Catholic schools in 1879 (Irving, 1979, p. 169; de Winter, 1992, p. 32).

The Catholic Party held an absolute majority in the Chamber of Representatives from 1884 until the introduction of universal suffrage in 1919 and it remained the predominant political force in Belgium until World War II. It soon came to consist of several socio-economic factions, usually called *standen* (estates) (Gerard, 1985, pp. 53–282). By 1919 there were four such *standen*: the conservative *Verbond der Katholieke Verenigingen en Kringen*, the working class *Werkersverbond*, the farmers' *Boerenbond* and the middle class *Middenstandbond*.

In the interwar period the *standen* gradually became more important than the party organisation itself. It was not possible to join the Catholic Party directly, but only by being a member of one of its factions. In addition, there was no common political programme, only loose collaboration at election time. In 1936, however, an important reorganisation took place, leading to a more unified party organisation with a Flemish wing (*Katholieke Vlaamse Volkspartij*) and a Walloon wing (*Parti Catholique Social*) and individual membership (Gerard, 1985, pp. 283–509).

After World War II the *Christelijke Volkspartij* (Christian People's Party, CVP) replaced the Catholic Party (van den Wijngaert, 1976; de Groof, 1977; Vandeputte, 1991). Although from the very beginning this party also had two wings, a Flemish and a Walloon one, for well over twenty years it managed to maintain a unitary structure. In 1968, however, the party split along linguistic lines over the issue of the division of the Catholic University of Louvain. (The Socialists and the Liberals were also to split in the 1970s). Initially some common structures – for example, a national president, national headquarters and a secretariat – were retained, but after a while even these organs either became inoperative or were also split (de Winter, 1992, pp. 32–3, 37–8). Today, one of the very few remnants of the old unitary party is its research centre, the *Centre d'Etudes Politiques, Economique et Sociales (CEPESS)*.

From the beginning, Belgian Christian Democrats have been very much involved in efforts to establish international co-operation between Christian Democratic parties. Thus, for example, in 1947 not only the *Nouvelles Equipes Internationales (NEI)* was founded in Chaudfontaine (Belgium), but also a Belgian Christian Democrat, Jules Soyeur, became its first secretary general. From 1950 until 1965, moreover, two other prominent (founding) members of the CVP, Auguste Edmond de Schrijver and Theo Lefèvre, were presidents of the NEI. Finally, Leo Tindemans served from 1965 until 1974 as the first secretary general of the European

Christian Democratic Union (ECDU), and from 1976 until 1985 as the first president of the European People's Party (EPP).

The Netherlands

Because of the traditional *verzuiling* (pillarisation) of Dutch society and politics – which implied separate organisations for Calvinists and Catholics in every area – a unitary Christian Democratic party was only formed in 1980. In that year, three confessional parties, which had formed a federation in 1975, merged into the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) (ten Napel, 1992; Verkuil, 1992). The Calvinist Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), the predominantly Dutch Reformed Christian Historical Union (CHU) and the Catholic People's Party (KVP) had worked more or less closely together in parliament and in government since the late nineteenth century.

From the introduction of proportional representation in 1917, until 1967, the three religious parties together controlled an absolute majority in the Dutch Lower House (Tweede Kamer). In the 1960s and 1970s, the hold of the CHU and the KVP upon their respective Protestant and Catholic electorates decreased dramatically, while the ARP had already suffered considerable losses during the 1948–67 period. The electoral decline contributed to the decision of the three parties initially to federate and then to merge. The merger was facilitated, however, first by ideological rapprochement between the parties and second by ecumenical processes within the Protestant and Catholic churches.

In 1977 the federated Christian Democrats received a slightly higher vote than the three separate parties had received at the previous election. At the 1981 and 1982 parliamentary elections the CDA again suffered some losses. In this period the party was divided, not only into confessional groups but also into left and right wings. Only with great difficulty did it define its position on salient issues like the modernisation of nuclear arms in Western Europe. Yet by 1986, the CDA had overcome these difficulties, closed its ranks and moved from a defensive to a more expansive strategy (van Holsteyn and Irwin, 1988). As a result, it increased its share of the popular vote by more than 5 per cent. At the most recent elections, in 1989, it managed to maintain that level of support, possibly also because of the popularity of its experienced leader, Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers.

The Party organisation and its network

Belgium

In 1945, the newly formed CVP seemed eager to terminate the traditional links which had existed between the Catholic Party and the Catholic Church. Yet, some public support has been given to the CVP by the Catholic Church in the post-war period, most notably by Cardinal Van

Roey, who also openly condemned attempts to create a *travailliste* (left-wing Catholic) Union Démocratique Belge (UDB) in 1944 (Dewachter, 1987, p. 357). Moreover, on both the royal question and the school issue, the CVP and the Church turned out to be very much on the same side. It could be argued, therefore, that not until Vatican II did real changes occur in this respect (Dewachter, 1987, pp. 344–6). However, even with no research data available as yet (Billiet, 1987, p. 299), it is probably safe to assume that there are still numerous, if more informal, links between the Catholic Church and the Flemish and Walloon Christian Democratic Parties.

More or less the same holds true for the links between the CVP and the Catholic social organisations. To be sure, in 1945 the CVP organised itself on the basis of individual membership instead of indirect membership through the *standen*. But it could not, of course, abolish the *standen*. Of these only the conservative Verbond der Katholieke Verenigingen en Kringen actually disappeared. Meanwhile, the General Christian Workers Association (Algemeen Christelijk Werkersverbond, ACW), the National Christian Middle Class Association (Nationaal Christelijk Middenstandsverbond, NCMV), and the Farmers' League (Boerenbond, BB) have proved increasingly influential at all levels of the CVP. At the parliamentary level, for example, the share of the so-called *sans familles* (those CVP parliamentarians who were not backed by any of the organisations mentioned above) decreased in the 1946–81 period, from 36 per cent to 7 per cent. During this same period the CVP parliamentarians affiliated with the Farmers' League have been able to maintain their share of the seats (21 per cent in 1946, against 18 per cent in 1981) despite the decline of the agricultural sector. The members affiliated with the Middle Class Association have made a minor gain (11 per cent in 1946 against 18 per cent in 1981) and the Workers' Association increased its share from 32 per cent in 1946 to 50 per cent in 1981 (Dewachter, 1987, p. 340; see also Smits, 1982). At the ministerial level, 41.1 per cent of the 168 CVP Cabinet members between 1958 and 1985 were affiliated with the ACW, 16.4 per cent with the NCWV, 14 per cent with the BB, while a surprisingly high percentage of 28.6 were *sans familles* (de Winter, 1992, p. 43).

Within the Walloon Christian Democratic Party, factionalism is institutionalised to a lesser degree. Although a number of deputies from the Parti Social Chrétien (PSC) have in practice been close to it, the French-speaking Catholic farmers' organisation (Alliance Agricole) is not formally recognised by the party as a *stand*. The organisation of French-speaking Catholic Workers (MOC: *Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien*), which used to seek exclusive political representation by the PSC, in 1971 decided also to recognise parliamentarians of rival parties – notably federalist Francophone movements such as the Front Démocratique des Francophones (FDF) in Brussels and the Rassemblement Wallon (RW) in Wallonia – as its representatives. Since then, those sections of the MOC which focus on the PSC form the so-called Démocratie Chrétienne (DC). Finally, relations between the PSC and the organisation of the Catholic middle classes in Wallonia (CEPIC: Centre Politique des Indépendants et

Cadres Chrétiens) are not as close as they used to be, especially after a group of deputies from the PSC left the CEPIC to form – together with some previously *sans familles* – the Rassemblement du Centre (RDC) in the early 1980s. In 1981, the *sans familles* accounted for 47 per cent of the PSC seats in the House and the Senate (up from 42 per cent in 1974), the DC for 32 per cent (down from 38 per cent in 1974), while the CEPIC representation remained slightly above 20 per cent in this period (Smits, 1982; Dewachter, 1987, p. 34). Of all the PSC ministers and secretaries of state in the 1971–85 period, 39.3 per cent belonged to the CEPIC, 37.5 per cent to the DC, while only 23.2 per cent were *sans familles* (de Winter, 1992, p. 43–4).

Table 3.1 Membership and electorate of the CVP and the PSC

Year	Membership		Electorate		Membership ratio (%)	
	CVP	PSC	CVP	PSC	CVP	PSC
1968	114.843	30.900	1.154.682	488.335	9.9	6.3
1971	100.517	45.998	1.156.678	473.626	8.7	9.7
1974	114.369	47.422	1.222.646	478.209	9.4	9.9
1977	124.730	56.298	1.460.757	545.055	8.5	10.3
1978	125.027	61.049	1.447.131	560.540	8.6	10.6
1981	124.473	55.333	1.165.239	398.342	10.7	13.9
1985	114.716	42.372	1.291.244	482.254	8.8	8.8
1987	139.575	42.838	1.195.839	491.839	11.7	8.7
1991	131.719*	43.322*	1.036.043	476.740	12.7	9.1

Note: *Membership of 1990

Sources: Deschouwer, 1992, pp. 127, 132 (membership ratio calculated by present authors); Verminck, 1991, p. 536; Vos, 1992, p. 464

As far as membership of the Christian Democratic parties in Belgium is concerned, in 1990 the CVP had 131.719 members, up from 114.843 in 1968. In the same year, the PSC had 43.322 members, up from 30.900 in 1968 (see Table 3.1). The Parti Socialiste (PS) still has by far the highest membership ratio of all Belgian political parties, with around 18 per cent of its voters being party members in 1989. The membership ratios of the CVP and the PSC, at present 12.7 and 9.1 per cent respectively, lie around the national average of almost 10 per cent in 1989 (Deschouwer and Koole, 1992, p. 340).

As is the case with the other political parties in Belgium, which, like Italy, is often characterised as a *particratic*, the national party chairmen of the CVP and the PSC are not only in charge of the daily political leadership of their parties, but they also have a preponderant impact on political decision-making in general. Thus, for example, they meet weekly with 'their' ministers, and sometimes also 'their' parliamentary leaders, to

discuss the cabinet agenda. The CVP and the PSC differ, however, in the way in which their national party presidents are selected. Whereas in the CVP the highest decision-making body of the party – the national party congress – officially elects the chairman upon recommendation of the national party council, in the PSC he or she has been chosen through a direct and secret vote by all members of the party since the late 1960s (de Winter, 1992, pp. 35–7).

Despite their predominant position in the Belgian political system, there is still relatively little legal recognition of parties. Partly as a result of this, no details are known about their finances, except that since 1971 the party groups have received parliamentary grants, and that in 1989 a bill was passed to organise the financing of Belgian political parties by the state on the condition that they reduced their campaign expenditures (Deschouwer, 1992, p. 123).

The Netherlands

Through their Calvinist and Catholic pillars, the ARP, CHU and KVP used to control Dutch society to a large extent. During the heyday of pillarisation both the Catholic and Calvinist churches contributed significantly to the political power of the KVP and the ARP respectively (Luykx, 1991). Since the late 1960s these pillars have started to crumble (Lijphart, 1975; Daalder, 1987). It would be mistaken, however, to believe that all pillar organisations have now disappeared.

In some cases, Calvinist and Catholic organisations have merged or evolved into Christian organisations: the Christian Federation of Employers, the Christian Federation of Small Businessmen and the Christian National Federation of Trade Unions. Other socio-economic groups, such as farmers, have maintained separate Protestant and Catholic organisations. These socio-economic organisations meet about four times a year with the leaders of the CDA in a Convention of Christian Social Organisations. Moreover, most schools in the Netherlands are still denominational (and funded by the state); so are hospitals, homes for the elderly, welfare organisations and broadcasting networks (Duffhues, 1991). Christian Democrats often play an important role in the administration and management of these organisations. Even so, the network has lost some of its cohesion.

Some religious organisations try to keep the Christian Democrats at a distance. This applies particularly to the churches. Relations between the CDA and the major Dutch churches were strained in the early 1980s, when the Peace Council of the churches led a massive campaign against the modernisation of nuclear weapons, while the CDA approved of modernisation (albeit with some hesitation). There seems to be a growing mutual awareness, however, that the gap between party and church(es) may have become too wide. Thus, attempts have recently been made to improve the relationship (CDA, 1991, p. 79–80).

Moreover, a membership survey held in 1986 indicated that 98 per cent

of CDA members belonged to Christian churches (51 per cent Catholic, 47 per cent Dutch Reformed or Reformed). Furthermore, no less than 92 per cent of the CDA party members attended church at least once a month, 78 per cent at least once a week (Zielonka-Goei and Hillebrand, 1988, pp. 127–9).

Membership of the party has declined since 1981, but not as much as that of other major Dutch parties (see Table 3.2). Members still play an important role in the selection of candidates and in the financing of the party – about 80 per cent of the central party funds are contributed by the members (Koole, 1992, p. 191). Though the CDA has retained the organisation structure of a mass party, it can be better described as a ‘modern cadre party’ run by professional politicians, according to Koole (1992, pp. 406–12). The leaders remain accountable to the members (at meetings of the party council) but exercise considerable influence in practice. In a similar vein, the parliamentary party is subordinate to the extra-parliamentary party in theory, but almost independent in practice. Conflicts between the two are rare, however; the party chairman and parliamentary party leader consult each other frequently (Koole, 1992, p. 259). They also meet regularly with the prime minister – since 1977 always a Christian Democrat – who is in fact the political leader of the party, even if he does not hold any formal position within it.

The electorate

Belgium

Unfortunately, sample surveys have only taken root very recently in Belgium (Mughan, 1985, p. 328). What we do know, however, is that in 1970 92.7 per cent of the CVP voters identified themselves as ‘practising Catholics’ (Fitzmaurice, 1988, p. 150). De Winter more recently reported that 44 per cent of the CVP voters and 46 per cent of the PSC voters attend church services weekly, as against 21.3 per cent of the Belgian population as a whole. According to him, 16 per cent of the CVP voters and 12 per cent of the PSC voters do not attend church services at all, against 39 per cent of the overall population (1992, p. 50). Despite having no data available about the religion and church practice of their party members, it seems appropriate to conclude that the CVP and the PSC, like their predecessors, are still predominantly parties of church-attending Catholics.

This impression is confirmed by data analysed by Broughton according to which the Christian Democratic parties in 1977 attracted relatively few voters who did not attend church frequently (see Table 3.3) or who, in 1983, called themselves ‘not a religious person’ or ‘a convinced atheist’ (7.0 and 1.3 per cent respectively) (1988, p. 211).

Yet the same data also indicate that in 1977 the CVP/PSC was supported by hardly more than a quarter of the Catholic population, a significantly smaller percentage than that of the Dutch CDA (see Table 3.4). Similarly, no more than 40.3 per cent of the people who went to church several times

Table 3.2 Membership and electorate of the CDA

Year	Membership	Electorate	Membership ratio (%)
1977	150,712*	2,652,278	5.8
1981	152,885	2,677,259	5.7
1982	147,896	2,420,441	6.3
1986	128,588	3,172,918	4.1
1989	125,033	3,140,502	4.0

Note: *Direct membership of CDA combined with membership of the constituent parties ARP, CHU and KVP

Sources: Documentation Centre Dutch Political Parties

Table 3.3 Christian Democratic preference by church attendance in Belgium and The Netherlands (1977)

	CVP/PSC	CDA
Several times a week	40.3	74.7
Once a week	36.3	67.0
A few times a year or less	22.5	28.1
Never	12.2	16.1

Note: To read this table: 40.3% of all Belgian respondents who went to church several times a week would vote for CVP or PSC in 1977.

Source: Broughton, 1988, p. 200

Table 3.4 Christian Democratic preference by religious denomination in Belgium and The Netherlands (1977)

	CVP/PSC	CDA
Catholic	28.6	48.6
Protestant	12.5*	36.1
Other	12.5*	14.6*
Non Religious	5.4	3.9

Note: *Fewer than ten persons in this category

To read this table: 28.6 per cent of the Catholics in the Belgian sample would vote for CVP/PSC in 1977.

Source: Broughton, 1988, p. 198

a week voted CVP/PSC that year (Table 3.3). In 1983, finally, only 23.6 per cent of the people describing themselves as being religious voted CVP/PSC (Broughton, 1988, p. 211). Part of the explanation for this lies in the breakthrough of the 'community parties', of which especially the Flemish Volksunie (VU; People's Union) attracts a lot of practising Catholics (Fitzmaurice, 1988, p. 177). Even the Socialist Party (SP) and the Liberal Party (Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang) have become more open to Catholics than they used to be, while for example at the European elections of 1989 the Ecologists also turned out to be a major electoral threat. The effects of the recent transformation of the Liberal Party into the Citizens' Party (Partij van de Burger) are not yet clear, although opinion polls suggest a considerable impact on voting behaviour.

Despite the general secularisation of society after Vatican II (Dobbe-laere, 1981), most of the Catholic social organisations in Belgium seem to have lost little of their considerable strength in terms of membership and viability (Dewachter, 1987; Huyse, 1987). Thus, in comparison to the Catholic pillar in general, the CVP performs badly and can without a doubt be considered the weakest stone in the Catholic pillar. In the long run, at least some Catholic social organisations might therefore adopt a system of plural political representation, as in the case of the PSC (de Winter, 1992, pp. 51-3).

Christian Democratic party supporters in Belgium differ little from the average Belgian party supporter. They are slightly older, however, and more often female; moreover, they identify less with the working class and slightly more with the middle classes (see Table 3.5). In addition, Broughton reports that there are somewhat more materialists and fewer post-materialists among CVP-PSC supporters than among party supporters in Belgium as a whole (1992). Compared to their electorates white-collar workers and cadres are manifestly over-represented in both the CVP and the PSC membership, while blue-collar workers are under-represented (Dewachter, 1987, p. 316).

The Belgian electoral system of proportional representation, with no formal threshold, benefits not only a relatively large party like the CVP, but also the much smaller PSC (see Table 3.6). A disadvantage of the system for the Christian Democrats, however, is that new (rival) parties can easily obtain representation in parliament.

The Netherlands

All available election data point in the same direction as in Belgium: the CDA appeals predominantly to religious people and, more specifically, to those who attend church regularly. Broughton, for example, found that in 1977 the party was supported by almost half of the Catholic population and more than a third of the Protestant population. Three quarters of the people who went to church several times a week voted for the CDA (see Table 3.3). Similarly, in 1983 38 per cent of the people describing themselves as being 'a religious person' voted CDA (Broughton, 1988, p. 211).

Table 3.5 Background variables of Christian Democratic party supporters in Belgium (1989)

	CVP/PSC (%)	All party supporters (%)
Age		
< 24	15	19
25-39	26	28
40-54	24	23
55+	36	30
Total	101	100
Gender		
Male	40	48
Female	60	52
Total	100	100
Subjective social class		
Working	28	36
Lower middle	15	15
Middle	40	35
Upper middle	12	11
Upper	4	3
Total	99	100
Religion		
Catholic	95	95
Protestant	3	2
Orthodox/Free	0	0
Others	2	4
Total	100	101

Source: Broughton, 1992

Although in 1986 the CDA still appealed to the religious electorate significantly more than other parties, it attracted a significant number of non-religious voters for the first time. In 1989 14 per cent of the voters with no religion voted CDA, while almost 60 per cent of Catholic voters, and a slightly smaller share of Protestant voters, preferred the Christian Democrats to other parties (CBS, 1990, p. 22). Finally, according to a poll held in 1991, 32 per cent of the CDA voters go to church once a week, 48 per cent less often and 19 per cent never, against 15, 32 and 53 per cent respectively for the entire sample (*Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 1991).

Apart from their religion and church attendance, CDA voters differ little from the average Dutch voter. They are slightly older, however, and more often female; moreover, they are more often married and less often

Table 3.6 Christian Democratic representation in parliament (Belgium)

Year	Seats in Parliament			Vote %		
	CVP	PSC	CVP+PSC	CVP	PSC	CVP+PSC
1968	50 (23.6%)	19 (9%)	69 (32.5%)	22.3	9.4	31.7
1971	46 (21.7%)	21 (9.9%)	67 (31.6%)	21.9	9	30.9
1974	50 (23.6%)	22 (10.4%)	72 (34%)	23.3	9.1	32.4
1977	56 (26.4%)	24 (11.3%)	80 (37.7%)	26.2	9.8	36
1978	57 (26.9%)	25 (11.8%)	82 (38.7%)	26.1	10.1	36.2
1981	43 (20.3%)	18 (8.5%)	61 (28.8%)	19.7	6.7	26.4
1985	49 (23.1%)	20 (9.4%)	69 (32.5%)	21.3	8	29.3
1987	43 (20.3%)	19 (9%)	62 (29.2%)	19.5	8.0	27.5
1991	39 (18.4%)	18 (8.5%)	57 (26.9%)	16.8	7.7	24.5

Source: Deschouwer, 1992, p. 127. Percentages, seats in parliament CVP and PSC, and totals CVP and PSC calculated by present authors.

divorced than the average voter (see Table 3.7; CBS, 1990, p. 21). As Broughton's (1992) analysis of Eurobarometer data indicates, the Christian Democratic voters identify less with the working class and slightly more with the middle classes. Furthermore, there are more materialists and fewer post-materialists in the CDA electorate than in the Dutch electorate at large.

The electoral system of almost pure proportional representation benefits a large party only slightly (see Table 3.8). Though the Christian Democrats would probably benefit more from a British-style first-past-the-post system, they have never advocated such a system in the Netherlands.

Ideology and policy

Belgium

How can the CVP be characterised ideologically? In its famous *Kerstprogramma* (Christmas Programme) of 1945, the newly formed CVP declared that it was a Christian party, because it wanted to build upon the human values that represented the foundations of Western culture and civilisation. Historically, these values were brought forth by Christianity; today, however, they might well be regarded as the common inheritance of believers and non-believers alike (Van den Wijngaert, 1976, pp. 92–3).

According to its most recent ideological document, entitled *Geloof, hoop en toekomst* (1986), the CVP wants to maintain its explicitly though not exclusively Christian character (section 4). Apart from the rather general notion of 'social-personalism' (previously 'personalism'), the party's basic concepts are: solidarity, responsibility and stewardship

Table 3.7 Composition of the CDA electorate (1989)

	CDA (%)	Total electorate (%)
Age		
18-24	7	7
25-34	22	26
35-44	20	25
45-54	16	14
55-64	16	12
65+	20	15
Total	101	99
N=1370		
Gender		
Male	48	52
Female	52	48
Total	100	100
N=1370		
Education level		
Elementary	18	19
Lower secondary	28	25
Higher secondary	33	34
College/university	21	22
Total	100	100
N=1370		
Religion		
Catholic	47	28
Dutch Reformed	18	15
Reformed	15	9
Other	3	6
None	17	42
Total	100	100
N=1369		

Source: CBS, 1990, p. 21-2, data recalculated.

(section 3). Subsequently, from these four principles a number of policy orientations and political values are deduced.

With regard to the economy, the CVP clearly accepts the capitalist and industrial market economy as a means of generating prosperity. Yet, it does not idealise capitalism, but stresses instead the need for a 'guided market economy' (*georiënteerde markteconomie*), which should be acceptable both from a social and an ecological point of view. The party pays

Table 3.8 Christian Democratic representation in cabinet and parliament (The Netherlands)

Period	Coalition	CDA seats in cabinet	CDA seats in parliament	CDA vote (%)
1977–81	CDA+VVD	10 (67%)	49 (33%)	31.9%
1981–82	CDA+PvdA+D66	6 (40%)	48 (32%)	30.8%
1982	CDA+D66	9 (60%)	48 (32%)	30.8%
1982–86	CDA+VVD	8 (57%)	45 (30%)	29.3%
1986–89	CDA+VVD	9 (64%)	54 (36%)	34.6%
1989	CDA+PvdA	7 (50%)	54 (36%)	35.3%

Source: *Parlement en kiezer* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 1991, pp. 10–55).

special attention to small- and medium-sized industries. Workers should be able to participate in the decision-making in their firms (1986, section 15).

Similarly, the CVP only very reluctantly accepts a secularised and individualistic culture. According to the notion of social personalism, an individual can develop and achieve his or her full potential only through interaction with other human beings and through participation in social groups and associations such as families, churches and trade unions (1986, section 11). Therefore, the party supports all kinds of pillarised organisations in the sectors of education, public health, socio-cultural work and so on, demanding that the state (co-)finance these organisations (1991, pp. 12, 45 for example). The Christian Democrats in Flanders would like the parliamentary debate on abortion to be reopened and euthanasia to remain prohibited (1991, p. 33), while they still regard the family as the basic social unit (*houvast voor de samenleving*). Thus, despite strong opposition from both Socialists and Liberals the CVP sticks, for example, to the tax system it introduced in 1988 and which favours families (1991, p. 43).

Although at least one of the constituent parts of its predecessors at times still regarded liberal democracy as a threat to the Church's position in society (Gerard, 1985, pp. 245–9), the CVP by now seems to have accepted wholeheartedly modern representative mass democracy (1986, § 16). Also, the CVP unconditionally (*zonder enig voorbehoud*) upholds political, social and individual rights and freedoms (1986, § 7).

The last time the PSC dealt with its ideology during a national party congress was in 1983. Like the CVP three years later, it adopted 'social-personalism', instead of just 'personalism', as its guiding ideological concept (Dierickx, 1992). For some time in the past, the party was less federalist than its Flemish counterpart, but recently the unitarists in the PSC seem to have lost ground. Also, as in the case of the two liberal parties (Rudd, 1988, p. 204), there are ideological differences between the CVP and PSC with respect to the issue of abortion, the Walloon party being the slightly more liberal of the two (see, for example, Moors, 1990, p. 152).

We might conclude therefore that the Belgian Christian Democratic parties accept the major aspects of modernisation, but two or three aspects of it only with substantial qualifications.

The Netherlands

Before the CDA could be established, substantial debate took place between the ARP, CHU and KVP about its Christian character. In 1978 it was agreed that the CDA would accept the Biblical evidence of God's promises, acts, and commandments as being of decisive significance for mankind, society and government. At the same time, however, the CDA would address itself as a 'people's party' to the entire Dutch population, irrespective of religious belief or social status. Its political conviction – elaborated in a programme of basic principles – is considered the political answer to the appeal made by the Bible. This conviction, rather than the Bible itself, was to be the binding element that everyone in the CDA must uphold (CDA, 1978; CDA, 1992, pp. 16-17).

The basic principles of the newly formed CDA are almost the same as those of the CVP – not surprisingly, because of the contacts between the two Dutch-speaking parties: justice, differentiated responsibility, solidarity and stewardship. Like the CVP, the CDA claims to deduce a series of policy orientations and political values from these principles.

Like the Belgians, the Dutch Christian Democrats have come to accept a capitalist market economy, albeit with qualifications. Corporatist ideas, which inspired the Catholic Party until the 1960s, have been quietly abandoned since then. Yet the Programme of Principles as well as the first election manifesto of the CDA (1977) still contained critical comments on the materialist and competitive aspects of modern society (1977, pp. 8, 24, 28, 38; 1980, pp. 23–5, 31). Production should be oriented towards society and be 'socially meaningful' (*maatschappelijk zinnvol*). Economic power should not be concentrated and should be shared also by workers (CDA, 1980, p. 8).

However, certain sections of the more recent ideological document *Public justice*, published by the party research centre, seem to echo the neo-conservative and liberal critique of the bureaucratic welfare state. The state should focus on its proper responsibilities like the maintenance of (international) law and order. It should confront citizens with their social responsibility and promote competition, not only in the economic sphere but also in the area of education and health (Klink et al., 1990, pp. 116–32). Yet, as Lucardie has argued (1988, pp. 87–8), at least for the time being there remain important differences between the neo-conservative liberalism of Thatcher or Reagan and the reformist or social conservatism of the CDA. For one thing, the CDA also stresses the responsibility of the state to promote social justice. Hence, it seems reluctant to reduce social security and welfare payments, the more so since it once again formed a coalition with the Social Democrats in 1989. Between 1982 and 1989 the Christian Democrats did reduce social expenditure (in coalition with the Dutch Liberal Party), but not dramatically. They also made a modest effort to privatise parts of the public sector such as the State Printing Office and the Post Office Bank.

The CDA accepts modern representative democracy in practice, but with a theoretical qualification: the state is the servant of God (*dienaresse*

Gods) rather than the servant of a sovereign people (1980, p. 5). Moreover, the state should recognise the responsibility of social institutions and the specific rights and character of the Church.

The CDA accepts modern secularised culture only very reluctantly. In its latest (draft) Programme of Principles it refers – like the Belgian CVP and PSC – to the notion of social personalism and rejects individualism (CDA, 1992, p. 8). The CDA strongly supports Catholic and Protestant schools and other pillarised associations and institutions. Officially it still rejects abortion; but, unlike the CVP, the party carefully tries to prevent this re-emerging as a political issue. The CDA also opposes the legalisation of euthanasia, and of commercial television or radio. To be sure, on some other issues – like, for example, the recognition of sexual relationships other than the traditional heterosexual marriage – the CDA has moved to a more liberal position (CDA, 1989). With respect to these moral and cultural issues the CDA is often criticised as being too secular and liberal by the three small Christian (Calvinist) parties in the Dutch Lower House; but the latter have not been able so far to benefit from this electorally. (These parties, which together collected only 4.1 per cent of the popular vote in 1989, will not be dealt with here; they are purely confessional parties which reject Christian Democracy [see Lucardie, 1988, pp. 91–2]).

In conclusion, it seems clear that although the CDA accepts the major aspects of modernity, it only does so with substantial qualifications.

Government record

Belgium

During most of the post-war period the Christian Democratic party has been the strongest political formation in Belgium, with its vote share varying between 48 per cent in 1950 and 24.5 per cent in 1991. While in Flanders the CVP has always been the dominant party, the PSC is only the second or even third party in Wallonia (after the Socialists and the Liberals). Apart from the years 1945–7 and 1954–8, the CVP has always been in the government; moreover, nearly all post-war prime ministers in Belgium – like Gaston Eyskens, Theo Lefèvre, Pierre Harmel, Paul van den Boeynants, Leo Tindemans and Wilfried Martens – have been (Flemish) Christian Democrats. Thus, the party has to a large extent been able to dominate both Flemish and national political life, which has at times given rise to the criticism of a ‘CVP-state’ (Coenjaarts et al., 1979). The impact of the Christian Democratic parties on government policies is further strengthened by the more general phenomena of ‘political patronage’ and ‘clientelism’ in Belgian politics. On the other hand, it has been remarked that as a result of the multiparty system with coalition cabinets and the international dependence of the economy, Belgian policy-making is to a considerable extent a reactive and incremental process, while the policy output of the Belgian system does not only, or even predominantly,

depend on cabinet participation (Dewachter, 1987, pp. 347–53). An additional problem for the PSC is, moreover, that on the one hand it depends heavily on the pivotal power of the CVP for its own participation in government, while on the other hand the coalition preferences of the two parties often conflict. Too close a co-operation with its Flemish counterpart is increasingly disapproved of by its own (Francophone) electorate.

Table 3.9 Party composition of cabinets (Belgium)

Period	Party of prime minister	Other parties
1968–72	CVP	PSC+PSB/BSP
1972–73	CVP	PSC+PSB/BSP
1973–74	PSB/BSP	PRL+CVP+PSC+PVV
1974–74	CVP	PVV+PSC+PRL
1974–77	CVP	PSC+PVV+PRL+RW
1977–77	CVP	PSC+PVV+PRL
1977–78	CVP	PSC+PSB/BSP+VU+FDF
1978–79	PSC	CVP+PSB/BSP+VU+FDF
1979–80	CVP	PSC+BSP+PSB+FDF
1980–80	CVP	PSC+BSP+PSB
1980–80	CVP	PSC+BSP+PSB+PVV+PRL
1980–81	CVP	PSC+BSP+PSB
1981–88	CVP	PSC+PVV+PRL
1988–91	CVP	PSC+BSP+PSB+VU
1991–92	CVP	PSC+BSP+PSB
1992	CVP	PSC+BSP+PSB

BSP: *Belgische Socialistische Partij*
 FDF: *Front Démocratique des Francophones Bruxellois*
 PRL: *Parti Réformateur Libéral* (until 1976, PLP: *Parti de la Liberté et du Progrès*; 1976–79; PRLW: *Parti des Réformes et de la Liberté de Wallonie*)
 PSB: *Parti Socialiste Belge*
 PVV: *Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang*
 RW: *Rassemblement Wallon*
 VU: *Volksunie*

Source: Deschouwer, 1992, pp. 128, 126.

Certain ministries are virtually ‘occupied’ by factions within the CVP-PSC. Examples include the labour and employment, family and public health departments (ACW/MOC), agriculture (BB), and, albeit to a lesser extent the middle classes department (NCMV/CEPIC). In particular the ministry of finance is frequently headed by a *sans famille* Christian Democrat (de Winter, 1992, p. 44).

The Netherlands

The CDA has enjoyed governmental power ever since its creation. One of its constituent parties, the KVP, has been in government as a pivotal

coalition party almost without intermission since 1917 (Koole and ten Napel, 1991). Dutch prime ministers have been affiliated with a Christian party from 1918 to 1940, from 1946 to 1948, 1959 to 1973 and from 1977 to the present. Apart from the prime minister's office, the Christian Democrats tend to run the department of agriculture; often they also hold the portfolios of education, culture and foreign affairs. The Christian Democrats have usually chosen as coalition partner either the Labour Party (PvdA, Social Democrats) or the (Conservative) Liberal party (VVD: Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie); but more often the latter than the former (see Table 3.8). In socio-economic affairs they try to occupy a position in the centre, between Labour and the Liberals. In this area they have been quite effective in moderating conflicts between Capital and Labour and in reconciling a capitalist economy with a strong welfare state. In cultural matters, they have been less successful in their opposition to secularisation and liberalisation, favoured by Labour and Liberals alike.

Conclusion

If Christian Democratic parties evolve from 'closed', anti-modern confessional parties towards 'open', modern liberal-conservative parties, as Horner asserted (1981), the CDA, PSC and CVP may lag behind some other European parties on this road. Nevertheless they are moving in the same direction.

From our analysis of party platforms and declarations of principles presented above we can conclude that the three parties have embraced liberal capitalist economic principles, giving up corporatism as well as Christian socialism, even if they remain critical of capitalist influence in the area of culture and ethics. They try to reconcile Christian principles with secularisation in a pluralist society, advocating personal freedom but fighting abortion and euthanasia. Personalism is still presented as an alternative to both individualism and collectivism. The sovereignty of the people is not accepted explicitly by the CDA; yet it accepts parliamentary democracy and does not contribute much to the power and influence of the churches.

The organisational networks of the three Christian Democratic parties declined in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the Netherlands, but they still survive. Members of the parties are still predominantly practising Christians, who attend church regularly (once a week or so). Most voters belong to the same category, but a growing proportion of the Christian Democratic electorate does not practise any more and may even have left the church altogether.

The Dutch Christian Democratic party has expanded its non-religious electorate in recent years. Yet it has to compete with modern Liberal mass parties – not only the Conservative Liberal VVD but also the leftwing Liberal Democrats 66 – for the secular voters left and right of the centre in the political spectrum. Its Belgian sister parties face an even more arduous task: not only to win secular voters from the large Liberal party, but to

maintain their hold on Catholic voters tempted by Nationalism (both the moderate Volksunie and the extremist Vlaams Blok in Flanders, the Front National in Wallonia), and even by the (originally also Catholic) Greens. In both countries, as a result Christian Democratic power may begin to wane towards the end of the twentieth century.

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