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The Development of Dutch Christian Democracy

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF DUTCH CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

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1. Introduction

The topic of this chapter is the development of Dutch Christian Democracy between 1945 and 1995. It should be noted at the outset, however, that unlike several of its neighbouring countries, the Netherlands did not have a unified Christian Democratic party until 1980. Before that, there were three major religious parties: the orthodox Protestant Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) and Christian-Historical Union (CHU) and the Catholic People's Party (KVP; between 1926 and 1945 called the Roman Catholic State Party or RKSP). Some authors have emphasized the Christian Democratic character of the Catholic party¹. Others hardly even mention the Protestants while dealing with Christian Democracy in the 19th century². Although from a comparative point of view it may be true that Christian Democracy is essentially a Roman Catholic movement³, in the Netherlands the two orthodox Protestant parties should be regarded as "embryo Christian Democratic parties" as well⁴. As a matter of fact, neither the relatively high ideological profile of the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) nor the disproportionately large ideological influence that this party has had within the European People's Party (EPP) can be properly explained without taking into account the political philosophies of its *three* predecessors⁵. Therefore,

1. J.A. Bornewasser, "Denkbeelden over christen-democratie in katholiek Nederland. Verschuivend begrip en veranderende werkelijkheid 1892-1973", *Trajecta*, III (1994) 131-154.
2. A.F. Manning, "Niederlande und Belgien: Christliche Demokratie im 19. Jahrhundert" in: W. Becker and R. Morsey, ed., *Christliche Demokratie in Europa. Grundlagen und Entwicklungen seit dem 19. Jahrhundert* (Cologne-Vienna, 1988), 91-112.
3. Essentially, if only because Protestant variants of Christian Democracy also exist in Scandinavia. See D. Hanley, "Introduction: Christian Democracy as a political phenomenon" in: D. Hanley, ed., *Christian Democracy in Europe. A Comparative Perspective* (London-New York, 1994), 1-11, at 8.
4. R.E.M. Irving, *The Christian Democratic Parties of Western Europe* (London, 1979), 113. Several smaller orthodox Protestant parties - notably the Political Reformed Party (SGP, founded in 1918 and currently the oldest political party in the Netherlands), the Reformed Political League (GPV) and the Reformed Political Federation (RPF) - are, on the contrary, purely confessional parties which reject Christian Democracy and will therefore not be dealt with in this chapter. The same applies to the various smaller Roman Catholic parties that have from time to time existed but that have in general been more short-lived.
5. R.A. Koole and H.-M. ten Napel, "De conservatieve verleiding. Christen-democratische machtsvorming op Europees niveau", *Civis Mundi. Tijdschrift voor politieke filosofie en cultuur*, XXXII (1993) 12-18.

this chapter will have to consist of two parts that deal with the ARP, the CHU and the KVP between 1945 and 1980 (section 3), and the CDA between 1980 and 1995 (section 4).

Since it is impossible, moreover, to understand the developments within the ARP, the CHU and the KVP in the post-war period without first considering the religious and political situation in the 19th and early 20th centuries, I will start out with some remarks on the historical background before 1945 (section 2). Since the Second World War provided much less of a historical break in the Netherlands than in other Western European countries, the part of this chapter that deals with the historical background will be somewhat more detailed than the part that deals with the three religious parties between 1945 and 1980. I will end with a conclusion (section 5).

2. Historical background before 1945

The single most important characteristic of Dutch politics is without doubt that the Netherlands is a pluralistic society, a country of religious and political minorities. Two cleavages have traditionally been of particular importance: religion and social class. The oldest, and in many respects the most important, of the two is religion. As one observer recently put it: "The political impact of the fundamental religious cleavage on Dutch society, expressed both as a liberal-confessional conflict and as a Calvinist-Catholic antithesis, can hardly be overstated. Religious strife and dissension constitute one of the major continuities in the history of this nation. The religious cleavage controlled Dutch politics during the second half of the 19th century; it was the single most important cause for the rise of the "pillarised" structure of the political system (1917-1967), and it determined the dominance of Christian and Catholic parties during most of the 20th century. In effect, religious conflicts and pillarisation explain why an interdenominational Christian Democratic party did not arise until 1980" ⁶.

As a result of the religious cleavage, Dutch society has since the Reformation and the revolt against the Spanish (1568-1648) consisted, roughly speaking⁷, of three groups: Roman Catholics (the oldest group), orthodox Protestants and a secular or humanistic minority. Although the size of the different groups as well as the relations between them have naturally varied in the course of the centuries, these three groups with their fundamentally distinctive identities have always been there and still are. The presence of these three groups is illustrated by the fact that it has proven extremely difficult, if not impossible, to write a truly comprehensive political and social history of the Netherlands. To be sure, each of the three groups

6. K. van Kersbergen, *Social Capitalism. A Study of Christian Democracy and the Welfare State* (London-New York, 1995) 43.

7. Roughly speaking, if only because - certainly in the beginning - many Humanists were practising Christians.

has brought forth its own gifted, sometimes excellent, historians⁸. Thus examples of fine Roman Catholic historians include W.J.F. Nuyens, G. Brom and L.J. Rogier. Examples of talented orthodox Protestant historians are G. Groen van Prinsterer and C. Gerretson. Finally, examples of outstanding humanistic historians include R. Fruin, J. Huizinga and J. Presser. The first real "synthesis" has yet to be written, however, despite claims to the contrary.

Although from the outset three minorities can thus be distinguished in Dutch society, in the first half of the 19th century it was still possible to speak - as in several other Western European countries - of a conservative/liberal dichotomy in parliament. The Liberals were politically dominant, J.R. Thorbecke being their renowned leader. Despite, or maybe partly because of, their dominant position the Liberals have traditionally remained less organised than the three other political families⁹. Thus, the first liberal party was formed only in 1885, mainly in reaction to the formation of the religious parties. Also, until the Second World War, and again after 1966, there have been at least two separate Liberal parties because of differences of opinion with regard to things like universal suffrage and the role of the state in social and economic life: the conservative-liberal Liberal Union (LU, since 1921 called Liberal State Party or LSP) and the progressive-liberal Radical Democratic League (VDB, founded in 1901).

Meanwhile, around 1850, the orthodox Protestant historian and statesman G. Groen van Prinsterer had begun to emancipate himself ideologically and politically from the rival political group, the Conservatives. In this process, which had already started in the 1830s and which can only be explained against the background of the modernistic religious and theological climate of those years, the lectures he gave for friends during the winter of 1845-1846 on the topic of "Unbelief and Revolution" played an important role¹⁰. Although Groen van Prinsterer would stand practically alone in parliament for another two decades, he indirectly laid the foundations for what in 1879 became the first national party organisation in Holland, the orthodox Protestant ARP¹¹. The name Anti-Revolutionary Party referred to the French Revolution, which because of the principle of *ni Dieu, ni maître* was interpreted as a revolt against God. Its first leader was the charismatic A. Kuyper, who had also authored the party's first program. A.F. de Savornin Lohman was elected leader of the parliamentary party. Very soon, in 1894, de Savornin Lohman and several other more conservative members left the ARP, universal suffrage being one of the divisive issues, as in the case of the Liberals. In 1908, they joined with two other small religious parties to form the CHU¹². While most adherents of the CHU belonged to the

8. G. Puchinger, *Ontmoetingen met historici* (Zutphen, 1979).

9. G. Taal, *Liberalen en radicalen in Nederland (1872-1901)* (The Hague, 1980).

10. G. Groen van Prinsterer, *Ongeloof en revolutie. Een reeks van historische voorlezingen* (Kampen, 1922 [1847]).

11. J.A. de Wilde and C. Smeenk, *Het volk ten baat. De geschiedenis van de AR-partij* (Groningen, 1949).

12. H. van Spanning, *De Christelijk-Historische Unie (1908-1980). Enige hoofdlijnen uit haar geschiedenis* (Leiden, 1988).

Dutch Reformed Church, the ARP drew its support largely from the Calvinist churches that had been founded by Kuyper in 1892 but went back to the schisms of 1834 and 1886.

Although a Catholic party was not formally established until 1926, the Roman Catholics were the second minority in Dutch society to begin to organise itself politically¹³. Originally, the Roman Catholic Members of Parliament had worked closely with the Liberals. The reason for this was that they had been discriminated against in the time of the Dutch Republic (1579-1795), when the orthodox Protestants, despite their being a minority, were the culturally and economically dominant group and had acted very much as if the Netherlands was a Protestant country. The Roman Catholics expected - not without reason - to benefit from cooperating in politics with the Liberals, as the latter were preparing the constitutional revision of 1848, which not only paved the way for modern parliamentary government but also included the introduction of a bill of religious and other rights. As a result, despite an emotional appeal from a number of orthodox Protestants to the King, the episcopal hierarchy was re-established in the Netherlands in 1853. During the 1860s, however, the Roman Catholics and the Liberals gradually grew apart. One of the main reasons for this was that the Vatican, as well as the Dutch bishops, began to stress the necessity of separate Roman Catholic schools, something the Liberals opposed. Following the example of Kuyper, a poet and priest by the name of H.J.A.M. Schaepman wrote the first Roman Catholic political program in 1883. Yet, as I noted above, it would take until 1926 before the first authentic Roman Catholic party was founded. One explanation for this was that the Roman Catholics long remained somewhat hesitant to manifest themselves politically after having been treated as second-class citizens for centuries. Second, for the Roman Catholics, political action was and has always remained less central than activities in other sectors of society. In this they differed from the orthodox Protestants and, albeit to a lesser extent, the Socialists.

Not only did the orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholics start to organise politically in the second half of the 19th century, relatively soon they also began to cooperate closely in parliament and cabinet in the so-called Coalition. This was a remarkable development, given that it occurred in a country in which orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholics had gone their separate ways for centuries and in a period of time in which of course no ecumenical contacts whatsoever existed between their respective churches. That the Coalition was formed can to a large extent be attributed to the goal of public financing of religious schools that the two political groups had in common, but as so often the good personal relations between Kuyper and de Savornin Lohman, on the one hand, and Schaepman, on the other, were instrumental as well. The Coalition of orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholics resulted in a number of cabinets, especially after the introduction of a system of proportional representation and universal suffrage in 1917. Between 1848 and 1917, the Netherlands had had a single-member district

13. L.J. Rogier and N. de Rooy, *In vrijheid herboren. Katholiek Nederland 1853-1953* (The Hague, 1953).

system and cabinets had consisted of either the Liberal parties or the religious parties. Because of the introduction of proportional representation and universal suffrage a year earlier, in 1918 the Liberals were reduced in size while the three major religious parties together acquired an absolute majority of the seats in the Second Chamber, which they would not have to give up until 1967¹⁴. Partly as a result, between 1918 and 1994 the Roman Catholics in particular have participated in every¹⁵ cabinet. The Coalition of Roman Catholics and orthodox Protestants broke up definitively already in 1939, however. One reason was that the ARP had developed in a conservative direction during the 1930s, whereas the RKSP as well as the CHU had gradually advocated somewhat more progressive policies in order to combat the international economic recession. There had, however, been a growing number of policy differences between the religious parties already since 1917, when the common goal of the financial equalisation of public and private primary schools had been reached (the so-called "Pacification"). Before the Coalition definitively broke up during the 1930s, the Anti-revolutionary Prime Minister H. Colijn occasionally broadened the Coalition with the Liberals, something he had already been in favour of since at least 1913¹⁶.

Industrialisation in the Netherlands took place later than in other Western European countries. Therefore, the second cleavage mentioned above - social class - did not become important until around 1880. Moreover, because of the binding force that religion constituted within both the Roman Catholic and orthodox Protestant parts of the population, only the humanistic third group was actually split in two as a result of this cleavage. Thus, since about the end of the 19th century, it was possible to speak of four political families in Dutch society: the Roman Catholics, the orthodox Protestants, the secular middle class or the Liberals and the secular working class or the Socialists. The secular working class organised itself in the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP, founded in 1894), with P.J. Troelstra as its first leader¹⁷. The Socialists would remain in opposition at the national level until 1939, when a cabinet of Christian Historicals and Roman Catholics was formed and for the first time, contained two Socialists¹⁸.

Finally, what makes the Dutch (and indeed the Belgian) case interesting from a comparative point of view is that for the better part of the 20th century three of the four political minorities mentioned earlier - the Roman Catholics, the orthodox Protestants and the Socialists - have in effect been tightly organised subcultures that structured most, if not all, aspects of political,

14. In the parliamentary elections of 1959, the three religious parties acquired exactly half of the seats (75 out of 150).

15. Except in the short-lived Colijn V cabinet in 1939.

16. G. Puchinger, *Colijn en het einde van de Coalitie*, I, *De geschiedenis van de kabinetsformaties 1918-1924* (Kampen, 1969), 13-14, 102-109; Id., *Colijn en het einde van de Coalitie*, III, *De geschiedenis van de kabinetsformaties 1933-1939* (Leiden, 1993), 71.

17. J. Perry et al., *Honderd jaar sociaal-democratie in Nederland, 1894-1994* (Amsterdam, 1994).

18. In addition, there was one minister with an Antirevolutionary background in this cabinet, however against the will of the leadership of this party.

social and also personal life. In Dutch these subcultures are usually known as “zuilen” or pillars. The segmentation of Dutch society into these different subcultures is called “verzuiling” or pillarisation. I am somewhat hesitant to use this term, however, first of all because it is a rather strange metaphor, and second because for many social scientists as well as historians it has an outright negative meaning¹⁹, whereas from a political science point of view it is at least equally possible to argue that the attempt that was made by people and organisations during the heyday of pillarisation to maintain an explicit relationship between their religious and other beliefs and social and political action should be preferred to the rather technocratic and uninspired character of Dutch politics today.

3. The ARP, the CHU and the KVP between 1945 and 1980

Following the Second World War, another major attempt at a “breakthrough” of the Dutch party system was launched by the Socialists, the main reason being that as a result of the pillarisation of Dutch society, they could only appeal to the non-religious voters. Therefore, unlike in neighbouring countries, they were not able to attract more than 20% to 25% of the national vote. More specifically, the Socialists in a sense tried to reintroduce the two-party and one-dimensional party system that the Netherlands had known in the first part of the 19th century²⁰. Like the earlier attempt undertaken by Groen van Prinsterer around 1850, however, this second “breakthrough” initially remained unsuccessful. Before too long, after the possibility of the formation of a unified Protestant People’s Party had been briefly discussed, the two major orthodox Protestant parties re-emerged, while the Roman Catholic State Party merely changed its name into Catholic People’s Party (KVP)²¹. As a result, although an ideologically somewhat broader formation, the Labour Party (PvdA) which was founded in 1946, closely resembled its immediate predecessor, the SDAP. This was even more the case after P.J. Oud, together with a small group of progressive Liberals who had formerly belonged to the VDB but had joined the PvdA after the War, became disenchanted and left the party again in 1947. A year later, this group of progressive Liberals joined with the conservative-liberal Party of Freedom (PvdV, founded in 1945 as the successor of the LSP), to form the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). Therefore, after 1945 the Netherlands retained its multiparty system as well as its multidimensional party system. By now, the major parties of the Roman Catholic, the orthodox Protestant, the Socialist, and the Liberal political families were, respectively, the KVP, the ARP and the CHU, the PvdA, and the VVD.

19. See G. Puchinger, “Verzuiling??-Ontzuiling??”, *Transparant. Orgaan van de Vereniging van Christen-Historici*, IV (1993) 4-8.

20. As will have become clear from the previous section, no political parties in the modern sense of the word had yet been founded at that time. Therefore, the use of the term “party system” is somewhat problematic in this context.

21. J.A. Bornewasser, *Katholieke Volkspartij 1945-1980*, I, *Herkomst en groei (tot 1963)* (Nijmegen, 1995).

As far as the importance of the two traditional cleavages in Dutch society are concerned, however, there was a change in that after World War II social class instead of religion would for a while become the most important cleavage²². Central issues included the reconstruction of the country after the Second World War and the development of the welfare state. Partly as a result, there was once again - as in 1918 - a significant change as far as the composition of the cabinets was concerned. The Socialists, who had entered government for the first time in 1939, continued to take part in a series of broad "Roman-Red" coalitions in the years immediately following the War. From 1948 to 1958 these were headed by a Socialist prime minister, W. Drees. Between 1959 and 1989, however, the three religious parties worked together mostly with the Liberals (that is, 24 out of 30 years). Some political scientists have argued that this was only natural since especially the Catholic party was not so much a centre party but socioeconomically speaking a party of the Right and thus ideologically closer to the Liberals than to the Socialists²³. Others, however, have - more correctly, I believe - pointed out that this relatively long period of isolation between 1959 and 1989 was at least partly the Socialists' own fault²⁴. More specifically, the relationship between the religious parties and the Socialists almost inevitably had to suffer from the polarisation strategy adopted by the latter in the 1960s and 1970s, which will be dealt with later. Because of the temporary importance of the socioeconomic cleavage, the Socialists and the conservative Liberals worked together in only two cabinets up until 1994, Drees I (1948-1951) and Drees II (1951-1952). Between 1959 and 1977, the conservative Liberals even explicitly excluded the possibility of their cooperating within cabinet with the Socialists²⁵, thus making it significantly easier for the KVP, in particular to play its pivotal role in Dutch politics than it would otherwise have been.

Meanwhile, in 1966 a party called Democrats '66 (D'66, later changed into D66) was founded. Over the years, this party has developed into a progressive-liberal system party not unlike the pre-War VDB, as opposed to the conservative-liberal VVD. Its original purpose, however, was to "explode" the pillarised party system. By the time D'66 was founded, the traditional pillars in Dutch society had, as a result of secularisation and individualisation processes and a number of theological and other factors like the arrival of modern television and the effects of generational change,

22. R.A. Koole and H.-M. ten Napel, "De riante positie in het vermaledijde 'midden'. Confessionele machtsvorming op nationaal niveau" in: P. Luykx and H. Righart, ed., *Van de pastorie naar het torentje. Een eeuw confessionele politiek* ('s Gravenhage, 1991), 72-92. See also H.-M. ten Napel, "The Dutch party system in crisis" in: D. Broughton and M. Donovan, ed., *Changing Party Systems in Western Europe* (forthcoming).
23. H. Daudt, "De ontwikkeling van de politieke machtsverhoudingen in Nederland sinds 1945" in: J.E. Ellemers et al., *Nederland na 1945. Beschouwingen over ontwikkeling en beleid* (Deventer, 1980), 178-197.
24. See, for example, J. Bosmans, "Historische twijfel aan de 'uiterste noodzaak': de onzin van Daudt", *Acta Politica*, XXII (1987) 227-233.
25. J.M.M.J. Clerx and R.J.J. Stevens, "Polarisatie als ideologisch surrogaat. De nieuwe antithese VVD-PvdA, 1959-1971" in: P.G.C. van Schie, ed., *Tussen polarisatie en paars. De 100-jarige verhouding tussen liberalen en socialisten in Nederland* (Kampen, 1995), 115-126.

already started to crumble, though thus far they have not completely disappeared. On the contrary, important areas like education, broadcasting and health care, despite changes, remain more or less segmented²⁶. As far as political life is concerned, the parliamentary election of 1967 marked a turning point. Until 1994, it was the only real "historic" national election the Netherlands had experienced since the introduction of the system of proportional representation and universal suffrage in 1917. First of all, as was mentioned above, in this election the three religious parties lost their combined parliamentary majority which they had enjoyed for fifty years in a row. Second, the KVP in particular lost dramatically. As a matter of fact, in just nine years - between 1963 and 1972 - the party lost almost half its seats in parliament. Third, the PvdA also reached a historic low-point of 23.6% of the vote. Fourth, the Liberals, who had always opposed the principle of pillarisation because of their conviction that religion was and had to remain essentially a private matter, gained one seat. Fifth, the new party D '66 was particularly highly successful in 1967. As in other Western European countries and the United States of America, new "post-materialist" issues - such as the environment, peace, and the need for individual self-expression - appeared on the political agenda. As will become clear from what follows, however, in the end these issues would not replace religion and social class as the two most important cleavages in Dutch politics.

Partly because of the heavy losses of the religious parties, the progressive parties - but to a certain extent also the Liberals - adopted the so-called polarisation strategy²⁷. By doing away with the accommodationist style of the 1940s and 1950s, it was hoped that the electorate would be forced into two opposing camps. The religious parties would then either have to choose for cooperation with the left-wing parties or with the right-wing parties. In either case they would split and, as a result, disappear. Thus, the main purpose of this strategy was to achieve the "breakthrough" in the party system that had failed immediately after the Second World War. Once again, the effort turned out to be in vain, however, and eventually even counter-productive because this relatively hostile political environment proved to be an extra stimulus for the eventual merger, in 1980, of the two major orthodox Protestant parties and the KVP into the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA). Other incentives for the merger, which was not obvious, included the decreasing hold which the ARP, the CHU and the KVP had upon their respective Protestant and Catholic electorates; the desire of important portions of the Roman Catholic and orthodox Protestant subcultures to maintain an explicit relation between the Christian faith and political action; the fact that the leaders of the three parties had come to know each other in the *Nouvelles Equipes Internationales* (the European Christian Democratic Movement); the strong desire within all three parties for co-operation at the municipal and provincial levels; and the role played by party leaders and

26. J.C. Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw. Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Meppel, 1995).

27. H. Daalder, "Changing procedures and changing strategies in Dutch coalition-building", *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, IX (1986) 507-531.

parliamentary leaders of the three parties such as B.W. Biesheuvel and J. de Koning (ARP), A.D.W. Tilanus and O.W.A. Baron van Verschuer (CHU) and W.K.N. Schmelzer, F.H.J.J. Andriessen and, last but not least, P.A.J.M. Steenkamp (KVP) ²⁸. Ideologically speaking, the merger of the three major religious parties was made possible by the process of convergence between the Roman Catholic and Anti-revolutionary political philosophies that had taken place between 1955 and 1965, that is, well before the electoral losses of 1967 ²⁹.

The main obstacles, apart from organisational inertia, in the process were: the fact that the electoral losses did not hit the ARP, the CHU and the KVP simultaneously or to the same extent; personal rivalries; and differences of view concerning the basic principles and policies of both the three old parties and the new CDA as well as the fact that, in practice, the two issues turned out to be very much interrelated. Part of the leadership of the ARP wanted the CDA to adopt a radical attitude and considered explicitly stated Christian principles to be a guarantee for this. On the other hand, those Catholics who were in favour of a more progressive policy believed that deconfessionalisation of the party was a prerequisite for such a course. In the end, it was agreed that the CDA would accept the biblical evidence of God's promises, acts and commandments as of decisive significance for mankind, society and government. At the same time, however, the CDA would address itself to the entire Dutch population, irrespective of religious belief or social level. This political conviction, which is worked out in a programme of basic principles and which is considered as the political answer to the appeal made by the Bible, is the binding element that everyone in the CDA must uphold, not the Bible itself. In this respect, the CDA resembles other European Christian Democratic parties. At the same time, however, it is also clear that, by merging, the religious parties have certainly not undergone a complete metamorphosis into their very opposite. The basic principles of the newly formed CDA are almost the same as those of the Flemish Christian People's Party (CVP) - not surprisingly, because of the contacts between the two Dutch-speaking parties ³⁰: justice, differentiated responsibility, solidarity and stewardship. Like the CVP, the CDA claims that a series of policy orientations and political values are derived from these principles. In practice, it is first and foremost the ceaseless attempt to integrate and reconcile a plurality of societal groups with potentially opposing interests that makes the CDA distinctive ³¹. Another distinctive element of Christian Democratic political thought in the Netherlands concerns its

28. H.-M. ten Napel, "Een eigen weg". *De totstandkoming van het CDA (1952-1980)* (Kampen, 1992).

29. R.S. Zwart, "Gods wil in Nederland". *Christelijke ideologieën en de vorming van het CDA (1880-1980)* (Kampen, 1996).

30. P. Lucardie and H.-M. ten Napel, "Between confessionalism and liberal conservatism: the Christian Democratic parties of Belgium and the Netherlands" in: D. Hanley, ed., *Christian Democracy in Europe. A Comparative Perspective* (London-New York, 1994), 51-70.

31. K. van Kersbergen and H.-M. ten Napel, "The Philosophy, Policies and Perspectives of European Christian Democracy", *The Allen Review. An Oxford Journal of Catholic Thought*, (1994) 7-10.

resolutely pro-European character. Finally, the CDA differs from other political movements with respect to issues that concern morality, such as abortion and euthanasia, although distinctiveness on these points should not be exaggerated. Moreover, as a result of the multiparty system with coalition cabinets, the impact of the CDA and its three predecessors on government policies should not be exaggerated³².

4. The CDA between 1980 and 1995

The merger of the ARP, the CHU and the KVP into the CDA can be regarded as the single most important party-political renewal in the Netherlands since the Second World War. Although the Christian Democrats no longer occupied a majority position in parliament but only about a third of the seats since 1967, they have been able to maintain their strong position in the centre of Dutch politics and even strengthen their crucial role during cabinet formations by merging³³. As a result, until 1994 it was impossible to form a coalition without the CDA. After a brief intermezzo, the Den Uyl cabinet (1973-1977) in which the Socialists worked together with representatives from the KVP and the ARP, the Christian Democrats between 1977 and 1989 largely continued their cooperation with the Liberals that had started in 1959, the main issue now being the crisis of the welfare state. In 1986, they even - for the first time in Dutch parliamentary history - openly announced before the elections that they wanted to continue the sitting coalition. Paradoxically, this polarisation strategy of the right - as it has been called - did not lead to a split within the Christian Democratic party but instead to a landslide victory of nine seats. Moreover, for the first time the CDA proved able to attract a substantial number of non-religious voters. At least in part, this was made possible by the popularity of the then Prime Minister and leader of this party, R.F.M. Lubbers³⁴. In 1989, however, the parliamentary caucus of the VVD withdrew its support for the Lubbers II cabinet. After the Liberals had been defeated in the elections that were subsequently held, a third Lubbers cabinet was formed that consisted of Christian Democrats and Socialists. By that time, the PvdA had distanced itself through a series of programmatic and organisational reviews from styles and postures adopted in the late 1960s and the 1970s, notably the polarisation strategy. In a sense, this coalition of Christian Democrats and Socialists, therefore, appeared to mark the end of a period of relative turmoil in Dutch politics and the return to the system of consensus democracy that had existed

32. With respect to the 1920s and 1930s this has already been argued by I. Schöffer, "De Nederlandse confessionele partijen 1918-1938" in: L.W.G. Scholten et al., *De confessionelen. Ontstaan en ontwikkeling van de christelijke partijen* (Utrecht, 1968), 41-61.

33. K. van Kersbergen, P. Lucardie and H.-M. ten Napel, ed., *Geloven in macht. De christen-democratie in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 1993), 23-37.

34. H.-M. ten Napel, "Rudolphus (Ruud) Lubbers" in: D. Wilsford, ed., *Political Leaders of Contemporary Western Europe. A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport, 1995), 279-287.

until the 1960s. Especially at the start of the cabinet, it was sometimes compared to the series of broad "Roman-Red" coalitions headed by Drees between 1948 and 1958.

In 1994, however, both the Christian Democratic and Socialist parties performed poorly in the Second Chamber elections. The CDA suffered an unprecedented loss of 13% of the national vote, whereas the PvdA was back at its historic lowpoint of 1967 with a mere 24% of the vote (a loss of 8%). D66, on the other hand, performed so well that it actually doubled in size. The conservative-liberal VVD also gained 5,4% of the votes. By now, it had become clear that the conservative Liberals were the main beneficiaries of the depillarisation process. Although the VVD suffered electoral losses during the second half of the 1980s as a result of leadership problems (after having polled 23,1% in 1982), in 1994 it took 20% of the vote in the national elections against barely 8% in 1948. In the provincial elections of 1995, which are not of course completely comparable to Second Chamber elections, this percentage had climbed to an astonishing 27,2%. For the Socialists, the corresponding figures are 24% in 1994 against 28,3% in 1946 and for the Christian Democrats 22,2% in 1994 against 51,5% in 1946. These electoral results facilitated the formation, in the summer of 1994, of the first humanistic cabinet since 1918, composed of Liberals and Socialists. Consequently, if the national election of 1967 was the first "historic" election after the introduction of a system of proportional representation and universal suffrage in 1917 because the religious parties lost their combined parliamentary majority, the election of 1994 might well be called the second "historic" election because the Christian Democrats on that occasion also lost their pivotal position in the process of government formation.

Even after the two years that have passed since the last elections, it is extremely difficult to interpret what has really happened in 1994. Like Michael Fogarty in a recent article in *The Political Quarterly*, however, I see no reason to differ from the judgment of CDA's own Evaluation Commission that "while account needs to be taken of recent and prospective developments in secularisation, the formula for politics on a Christian basis worked out in the first years after emancipation and the crumbling of the pillars, and set out in *Points of Departure*, remains as valid as ever and that the defeat of 1994 is largely attributable to "a fit of political incompetence"³⁵. As Fogarty rightly argues: "in the 19th and early 20th century a main reason for religious party formation had been defensive, a drive for 'emancipation' in the sense of securing equal treatment for schools and other religious institutions in the face of attacks from Marxists and ideological Liberals, with a sub-theme of securing equal consideration for Catholics in a country which had traditionally seen itself as Protestant (...) But there had always been a second reason for party formation on a religious basis, summed up in the slogan 'emancipation, yes; assimilation, no': the conviction among core believers that religious belief penetrates or should penetrate every aspect of a believer's life

35. M. Fogarty, "How Dutch Christian Democracy made a new start", *The Political Quarterly*, LXVI (1995) 138-155, at 154.

and lead to corresponding patterns of behaviour, something distinctive to contribute to the rest of the community. With this went and continues to go the practical judgment that the most effective way to carry this contribution out in politics is to concentrate Christian forces rather than scatter Christian influence over other parties or institutions - provided that this is practicable, as under the Dutch pattern of proportional representation it is”³⁶.

One example of political incompetence is the way the rapidly deteriorating personal and political relationship between the Christian Democratic prime minister Lubbers, who had already in 1990 indicated that he did not want to continue his job after the next election, and his successor L.C. Brinkman whom he himself had designated, had been dealt with - or rather had not been dealt with - by the party leadership. This deteriorating relationship led to increasing tensions between the parliamentary party of the CDA in the Second Chamber, of which Brinkman was leader, and the Christian Democratic ministers in the Lubbers III cabinet. In the end, it was unclear for many Christian Democratic voters whether, by voting for the CDA, they would support the centre-left policies of the Lubbers III cabinet or the more conservative policies advocated by the parliamentary party.

More structural factors, however, are also likely to have played a role. More in particular, it can be argued that once again there has been a change with regard to the relative importance of the two traditional cleavages in Dutch society in that social class has lost some of the prominence it had as a cleavage during most of the post-War period. As a matter of fact, as in other Western European countries, the Socialists have been so successful in reaching their original political goals that they have in a sense become a party without a “heartland”. The old working class has virtually disappeared, although because of technological developments (the advent of “the information age”) new forms of inequality are already emerging. On the other hand, because of the continuing processes of individualisation and secularisation³⁷, one of the most fundamental issues in Dutch politics today is whether the Netherlands as a society is gradually disintegrating³⁸, whether there is such a thing as a “crisis of liberalism”. Values issues - both cultural ones like abortion and euthanasia and social ones like crime, education and the family - are back on the political agenda. As a result, it is possible to speak of a new cultural dichotomy between the Liberal parties, which regard the development of society since the 1960s as predominantly positive, and the Christian Democrats who tend to emphasize the potential risks and are therefore somewhat more pessimistic in their outlook³⁹. To a certain extent, the CDA can be qualified as a communitarian party, although the ideological

36. Ibid., 142-143.

37. While at present half of the Dutch population still regards itself as “Christian”, according to some researchers this percentage will have dropped to as little as 20% in the year 2020. J.W. Becker and R. Vink, *Secularisatie in Nederland, 1966-1991. De verandering van opvattingen en enkele gedragingen* (Rijswijk, 1994).

38. See, for example, *Eigentijds burgerschap*. WRR-publication under the direction of H.R. van Gunsteren (The Hague, 1992).

39. J.Th.J. van den Berg, “Politieke partijen: naar een nieuwe fundering”, *Socialisme en Democratie*, L (1993) 242-245.

differences between communitarians like A. Etzioni and the Christian Democratic political philosophy should not be underestimated. The intriguing question is which position the Labour Party, which traditionally has had both a Liberal and a communitarian wing, will eventually choose in this controversy. At present its liberal wing seems to dominate. Consequently the cultural cleavage largely coincides with the traditional religious cleavage in Dutch politics. The old antithesis between the religious and the non-religious parties, therefore, seems to have returned. The socioeconomic cleavage will not completely disappear, however. This, in combination with the fact that the three traditional groups in Dutch society - Roman Catholics, orthodox Protestants and Humanists - are still there, justifies the expectation that not only the Liberals, but also the Socialists and the Christian Democrats are likely to remain major actors on the Dutch - and indeed the European - stage for the foreseeable future, provided that they remain as ideologically outspoken and distinctive as possible. As far as I am concerned, neither the much-discussed "crisis of party" nor the "crisis of representation" can change that. Despite the impact that new media technologies will no doubt have on democratic politics⁴⁰, it is difficult to see how we could do without representative democracy in general and Liberal, Socialist and Christian Democratic political parties in particular in the 21st century.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued that two major attempts at a "breakthrough" of the existing party system have taken place in the course of Dutch political history, both of which remained largely unsuccessful in the short term but gained importance over the years⁴¹. The first "breakthrough" was initiated around 1850 by the orthodox Protestant historian and statesman Groen van Prinsterer, whose opposition to the spirit of the French Revolution and to Liberalism eventually paved the way for both Christian party formation and - much more indirectly - the so-called Coalition of orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholics that has resulted in a number of cabinets between 1888 and 1939. Following the Second World War, a second attempt at a "breakthrough" of the party system was made, this time by the Socialists in order to put an end to the by then dominant position of the religious parties in Dutch politics. Although both the orthodox Protestant parties and the Catholic party re-emerged, the increasing secularisation of Dutch society as well as far-reaching theological changes within the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches made them consider possibilities for co-operation relatively soon afterwards, especially after the historic parlia-

40. J.B. Abramson, F. Christopher Arterton and G.R. Orren, ed., *The Electronic commonwealth. The Impact of New Media Technologies on Democratic Politics* (New York, 1988).

41. One of the first to draw this comparison was J.A.H.J.S. Bruins Slot, *Bezinning en uitzicht. De motieven der huidige wereldontwikkeling en onze roeping daarin* (Wageningen, 1952).

mentary election of 1967 in which they lost the majority of seats in the Second Chamber that they had enjoyed since 1917. By merging, the Christian Democrats were initially able to maintain their strong position in the centre of Dutch politics until 1994 when they once again suffered heavy electoral losses and a coalition of Socialists and Liberals was formed. Thus, to a certain extent - there are, of course, also important differences - the situation in which Dutch Christian Democracy finds itself in 1995 resembles that of the middle of the 19th century. Once again, Liberalism is dominant. Once again, also, the Christian Democrats are in opposition to Liberalism and the spirit of the French Revolution, that is in a sense represented by the coalition of Socialists and conservative and progressive Liberals.

As I have also argued, however, it is too early to conclude that the movement is bound to disappear altogether, although the very fact that I - and others - mention the possibility of a decomposition of Christian Democracy illustrates how deep the crisis is in which Dutch Christian Democracy currently finds itself.