(Re)Construction of Christian Democratic party identity in Germany and The Netherlands

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I. Introduction

An individual's identity is strongly related to its social roles as modern socio-logical identity theory tells us. The multiple roles an individual performs in a complex modern society are interrelated, they can co-exist with or without conflicting with each other, and altogether they make up a person's identity.[1]

   Political parties have a *collective* identity simply because they are social groups; and they particularly need an identity because they compete with other parties, and therefore they need to form an 'understanding of who we are and who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of them-selves and others (which includes us)'[2]. Political parties are extremely open organizations which have very little control over who joins them, party activ-ism is voluntary, and parties are very heterogeneous social groups with widely differing goals of sub-groups, for instance between office-seekers, usually pro-fessional politicians, and policy-seekers, i. e. rank and file[3]; for all these rea-sons political parties require – possibly even more than other social groups – an understanding of who the we-group is and what distinguishes it from other groups. This understanding allows them to generate active political support, to overarch different policy goals between party wings and to unite the party un-der something – a kind of core identity – that members and supporters have in common, a common distinctive characteristic. The core identity can take many different forms but unlike a person's individual identity it is not made up of multiple identities related to certain social roles (although political parties do perform different roles in the political sphere, government and opposition, for instance). The less unified and clear an identity is the less it is able to fulfil the functions as outlined above. For Christian denominational parties identity con-struction is usually not difficult because the distinguishing trait is given with the adherence to their denomination. The impulse for any activity in the politi-cal sphere is in most cases a defensive one: the perception that the faith or central values of the faith are under a threat or even under attack from the *po-litical* sphere, either directly from the state or from power elites within the state. Thus, religious identity determines or, at least, enhances political identi-

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1   Jan E. Stets/Peter J. Burke: Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory, in: Social Psycho-logy Quarterly 63 (2000), pp. 224–237, here pp. 225–227.
2   Richard Jenkins: Social Identity. London et al. 1996, p. 6.
3   Elmar Wiesendahl: Parteien in Perspektive. Theoretische Ansichten der Organisations-wirklichkeit politischer Parteien. Opladen 1999, pp. 189–211.

ty. For such denominational parties identity problems usually start once the party is established in the political sphere and has to decide on matters with little relations to religious faith. The decision on an abortion law, for instance, may be easily determined by the position of the church but the question whether income tax or VAT (value added tax) should be raised to balance the national budget can hardly be decided with reference to faith or religious doctrine.

Once securely anchored in the political sphere many religious, denominational parties changed over time into Christian democratic parties. Timotheos Frey[4] has recently defined religious parties as parties whose politics are based on religious dogma, basically the Bible, whereas Christian democratic parties have a secular character being more or less vaguely inspired by religion. The evolution from the one to the other, according to Frey, took three different paths:

- endogenously induced change: originally religious parties began to develop an ambition to increase their electorate and to become larger 'people's parties' with a mass appeal (which is more or less what Kirchheimer called 'catch-all-parties'); the exemplary case being the Swiss CVP;
- exogenously induced change: after Second World War parties in many European countries had to start anew after having been prohibited which was taken as a chance to change the religious party model to a more modern Christian democratic model that held more electoral appeal; the exemplary case is the CDU in Germany;
- fusion: not the exemplary but the only case are the Netherlands where in the late 1970s Protestant and Catholic parties merged into the CDA in order to halt their electoral decline and stabilize as a Christian democratic people's party. This category differs insofar from the other two that it makes no statement as to the reasons for this fusion.

This paper will focus on the two latter cases which are both characterized by the fact that the new Christian democratic party was multi-denominational including both Catholics and Protestants (in contrast to the Swiss CVP which remained basically a Catholic party). Obviously, for such a merger not only of different organizations, but also of completely different cultures it was an extremely challenging task to construct a new Christian democratic identity and to reconcile or to transcend the religious differences. Trying to find out how that was done we will proceed in chronological order, starting with the CDU which was founded in 1945 (although it only came into existence as a federal party in 1950, a year after the first federal elections held in 1949) and then go

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4   Timotheos Frey: Die Christdemokratie in Westeuropa. Der schmale Grat zum Erfolg. Baden-Baden 2009, pp. 41–42.

on to the fusion of the Dutch Protestant and Catholic parties and the foundation of the CDA in 1980 (although the constituting parties participated already as a federation with a common platform and list of candidates in the national elections of 1977). In the end, by comparing the two cases, we will try to determine whether there are common patterns of identity construction and whether the CDU could be considered a model for the Dutch case.

II. Identity construction in the CDU

Unlike the Dutch case in the late 1970s the foundation of the CDU did not take the form of a fusion of Catholic and Protestant parties for the simple reason that there were hardly any Protestant parties to speak of. The origins of the Catholic Centre Party can be traced to the 1830s. After the Napoleonic wars the Kingdom of Prussia had won large territories with a Catholic majority, particularly in Rhenania and Westphalia, whereas on the scale of the entire Prussian state Catholics were a minority although this minority was not as repressed as in the Netherlands before the constitution of 1848. In the 1830s conflicts over 'mixed marriages' between the Catholics and Protestants led to conflicts between the church and the Prussian state during which the Archbishop of Cologne was even arrested for a while. This served to politicize the Catholic population. In the revolutionary parliament of 1848/49 *(Frankfurt Paulskirche)* a Catholic club united those trying to defend church rights and privileges and in 1852 in the Prussian Diet a Catholic fraction was formed. Until the foundation of the German nation state in 1871 in which Catholics remained in a minority situation the process of founding a Catholic party had well proceeded. Particularly in the early years of the German Reich, the pressure of anti-catholic legislation of a national-liberal Reichstag majority in collusion with the Bismarck government *(Kulturkampf)* served to mobilize the Catholic population. In this situation identity construction was no problem for the Centre Party. The defence of the Catholic Church, particularly its privileges in school education, was the main political goal and the core political identity. In contrast, in a predominantly Protestant nation state there was no need for Protestants to unite in a religious party.[5] The Protestant liberal mainstream was represented in the liberal parties and more conservative Protestants associated themselves – particularly in Prussia – to the conservative party where the Protestant clergy could always count on political support. Being more closely associated to the

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5   The anti-Semitic Christian Social Party founded in 1878 by the preacher of the Kaiser's court, Adolf Stoecker, remained short-lived and marginal just as the pietistic *Christlich-Sozialer Volksdienst* of the late Weimar Republic and can be ignored in our context. Cf. Günter Opitz: Der Christlich-Soziale Volksdienst. Versuch einer protestantischen Partei in der Weimarer Republik. Düsseldorf 1969.

Protestant Prussian church which had since 1817 united Reformed and Lu-
theran churches the conservatives had always been much more critical of some
of the *Kulturkampf* laws for these affected the Protestant church as well as the
Catholic church particularly in education.

Acting in the political sphere and being confronted with the accusation of
being more loyal to Rome – the Vatican – than to the German Empire the Cen-
tre Party carefully dressed its defence of religious freedom in the language of
civil rights, however, it was always clear to Catholic supporters what was
meant. Another aspect where a political position was determined by religion
was the party's staunch defence of the autonomy of the federal states – some of
which were ruled by Catholic princes and had a Catholic majority population.
Not religion itself, but rather the social composition of the Catholic population
was responsible for the positive attitude of the Centre Party toward social leg-
islation which was seen as a dam against class war and Marxist revolution.[6]

Catholics were, even politically, united only by their religious faith. Socially
the Centre Party was extremely heterogeneous, encompassing all social strata;
among the voters, sympathizers, and members there were industrial workers
just as bourgeois capital owners, there were people from agricultural (both,
farm workers and aristocratic estate owners) and from urban areas; thus, the
Centre Party was on both sides of two of Lipset and Rokkan's classic cleav-
ages. Only the centre-periphery cleavage coincided with the state-church con-
flict because in many regions, particularly Bavaria, the majority of the popula-
tion was Catholic and felt threatened in their regional identity by the
nation-building elites.

With the progress of mass politics in the late nineteenth century not the Cen-
tre Party itself but political Catholicism expanded widely into the emancipat-
ing lower strata of society. The Catholic Labour Movement *(Katholische Ar-
beiterbewegung, KAB)* for industrial workers and the Peoples' Association for
Catholic Germans *(Volksverein für das Katholische Deutschland)*[7] were not
exactly affiliated to the Centre Party but they served to some extent as mobiliz-
ing agencies for the party and their expressed purpose was to help the advance-
ment of the lower classes on the one hand and, on the other hand, to immunize
these against the temptations of Marxism. Only the Christian trade unions,
founded at the end of the nineteenth century, as close to political Catholicism
as they may have been, chose to organize interdenominationally uniting Catho-

6   For the current debate on the role of religion in the establishment of the European welfare
     states see the essays collected in: Kees Van Kersbergen/Philip Manow (eds.): Religion,
     Class Coalitions and Welfare States. Cambridge 2009.
7   Gotthard Klein: Der Volksverein für das Katholische Deutschland 1890–1933. Geschich-
     te, Bedeutung, Untergang (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Zeitgeschichte, Reihe
     B: Forschungen 75). Paderborn 1996.

lic and Protestant workers. The Catholic milieu or *Lager*[8] which included a great plethora of Catholic laymen associations may not have been as closed as Dutch 'pillars' (there were, for instance, no purely Catholic universities, only universities in Catholic federal states where young academics from other regions could go to in order to study, such as Munich or Freiburg) but it was very dense and its backbone, of course, was the clergy of the Roman Catholic church.

There were probably as many Protestant laymen associations as there were Catholic ones, but these Protestant organizations mirrored the divisions of German Protestantism between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches to name only the most important of these divisions. Other than in the Netherlands there was no political conflict between the different Protestant churches and the state. Therefore denominational differences were not politicized and Protestants' *political* loyalties remained divided between several liberal and conservative parties. However much Protestantism have been internally divided, the cultural and political distance of most Protestants to the Catholic Centre party was much too large for attempts of Weimar Republic Centre politicians to open their party to all Christian denominations to meet with any notable Protestant response. In consequence, when all political parties and organizations were banned soon after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 they had – always with the exception of the Christian trade unions – still been separated along denominational lines.

The failure of the Weimar Republic in the years since 1929 and Nazi rule from 1933 to 1945 had taught some bitter lessons:

1. The splintering of the Weimar party system had been an important factor which had contributed to Nazi electoral success so that there was an acute awareness of the need to create a new, moderate, non-socialist party with a mass appeal. The despicable role of the conservatives in the last years of the Weimar Republic as a step-holder of the Nazi seizure of power had discredited the conservative party and had made a considerable portion of Protestants politically homeless. Even many liberals supported the idea of a large non-socialist party although the liberal party was reconstructed after 1945. All this had greatly improved the prospects of Catholic and Protestant political cooperation.

2. Nazi persecution had been experienced by all of the small but seminal opposition and resistance networks in which Protestants, Catholics and even some socialists had cooperated. This experience had certainly put denominational barriers for political cooperation into perspective.

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8   Rainer M. Lepsius: Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur: Zum Problem der Demokratisierung der deutschen Gesellschaft, in: Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.): Die deutschen Parteien vor 1918. Köln 1973, pp. 56–80, here pp. 68–70.

3. Not only the Weimar Republic was seen in retrospection as a failure but also liberal capitalism. The ordo-liberal concepts which had been developed by the Freiburg School long before the end of Second World War were deeply rooted in the tradition of Protestant social ethics and proved to be compatible with the reform ideas based on Catholic social doctrine of solidarity and subsidiarity. In fact, all the protagonists of the concept of a social market economy which is still today a core concept of the CDU were Protestants and either joined or sympathized with the new party.[9]

4. As a consequence of the war started by the Nazis a large part of Germany had been 'liberated' and occupied by the Soviet Red Army. Stalinist communism was seen by many people of Christian convictions as another atheist, materialist, and totalitarian ideology just like Nazism before;[10] and the challenge posed by this ideology could not be faced by small denominational parties.

For these lessons the idea of a new party, which would truly be a centre party in the sense that it would unite all non-socialist currents, moderate Protestant liberalism and conservatism together with the former purely Catholic Centre Party in one big party in the political centre, was 'in the air' in 1945, not only in many cities and towns in the west which were being liberated by the western allies but even in the Soviet zone in Berlin. At the beginning there were several different names; it took some months until the name *Christlich Demokratische Union* (Christian Democrat Union, CDU – that the new party was called Union – and not party – which was to symbolize the union of Catholics and Protestants may have been inspired by the Dutch CHU; this is not very likely though because the influence of the Reformed Protestants in the CDU was not very important) was established everywhere, except, of course, in Bavaria where the CSU stuck to its name in order to emphasize its Bavarian identity.[11] Although the Centre Party was also founded again in 1945, this new party, the CDU, which had come into being in a very decentralized way was supported by the vast majority of the Catholic hierarchy and by some Protestant church authorities. And right from the start it proved to be successful in local and regional elections; in regions with a

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9   Traugott Jähnichen: Das Ideal eines 'starken Staates' zur Sicherung von Freiheit und sozialem Ausgleich. Beiträge des politischen Protestantismus zur christlich-demokratischen Programmatik, in: Jörg-Dieter Gauger/Hanns Jürgen Küsters/Rudolf Uertz (eds.): Das christliche Menschenbild. Zur Geschichte, Theorie und Programmatik der CDU. Freiburg/Br. 2013, pp. 86–119, here pp. 102–105.

10 Maria Mitchell: Materialism and Secularism: CDU Politicians and National Socialism 1945–1949, in: Journal of Modern History 67 (1995), pp. 278–308.

11 Graham Ford: Constructing a Regional Identity: The Christian Social Union and Bavaria's Common Heritage, 1949–1962, in: Contemporary European History 16 (2007) 3, pp. 277–297.

Catholic majority more than in Protestant areas which was no surprise as the organisational backbone of the new party was provided by the former Centre Party networks. Even when ideas of Christian socialism which had been popular in the Catholic left in the tradition of the Catholic labour movement during the immediate post-war years had been supplanted by the concept of a social market economy the party leadership was careful to maintain the social aspects of this concept and not to alienate the party left wing in order to keep the electoral support in the (Catholic) working class which was crucial for the party's mass appeal. In northern Germany it took more than a decade until anti-Catholic prejudices in parts of the population were overcome, smaller parties of a conservative tradition were absorbed by the CDU, and the party's electoral strength had become equal to that of the Catholic regions.[12]

Yet, in 1945 it was a considerable risk to unite Catholics and Protestants in one Christian democratic party because the cultural differences were still huge. An example concerning the view of German history can illustrate the distance between Catholics and Protestants. For the latter Bismarck was the uncontested hero of German history; he was considered a great leader who had fulfilled the dreams and ambitions of many generations to overcome the internal divisions of Germany which had been promoted by foreign powers, mostly the French, since 1648 and to unite the German principalities in one powerful, modern nation state dominated by Protestant Prussia. The Catholics, on the contrary, saw Bismarck as the man who had excluded the most important protector of Catholic interests in Germany, the Habsburg monarchy, from the German nation by the means of war and who had waged the *Kulturkampf* against the Catholic Church in the aftermath of founding the German Empire in order to win liberal support for his otherwise conservative policies. Thus, Bismarck was considered as another in a long line of Protestant villains in German history (going back to Martin Luther).[13] When Konrad Adenauer, the CDU-leader, visited Bismarck's grave in Friedrichsruh during the election campaign of 1953 he did so as the first chancellor of the Federal Republic but, of course, everybody was aware that he also was Catholic and as such paid a special tribute to Protestant feelings.[14]

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12   Frank Bösch: Das konservative Milieu. Vereinskultur und lokale Sammlungspolitik in ost- und westdeutschen Regionen (1900–1960). Göttingen 2002, pp. 206–212. Cf. Hans-Otto Kleinmann: Geschichte der CDU. Stuttgart 1993, p. 137.
13   This is, of course, a somewhat exaggerated picture; in fact, quite a few nationalist Catholics had made their peace with Bismarck, cf. Rudolf Morsey: Bismarck und die deutschen Katholiken. Friedrichsruh 2000. For the political mainstream's attitude to Bismarck see Lothar Machtan: Bismarck-Kult und deutscher Nationalmythos 1890–1940, in: Id. (ed.): Bismarck und der deutsche Nationalmythos. Bremen 1994, pp. 15–67.
14   Frank Bösch: Die Adenauer-CDU. Gründung, Aufstieg und Krise einer Erfolgspartei 1945–1969. Stuttgart et al. 2001, p. 150.

The old Centre Party had been socially heterogeneous, the new CDU was both, socially and denominationally, heterogeneous. The consequence was that the new party's identity could no longer rely on the congruence of religious and political identity which had been the major source of coherence in the Centre Party. Rather, the new party's collective identity became more pluralistic than before – almost similar to an individual's identity which consists of many different features depending on the social role the individual is performing. What is meant is that different groups in the party could choose to identify with different aspects of Christian democracy. The two third majority of Catholics in the party – particularly those in federal states with a Catholic majority – could choose to pretend that the CDU was more or less a continuation of the Centre Party with strong ties to the Catholic milieu in which the laymen organisations served as a pool from which (Catholic) party elites could be recruited. The Protestants of a liberal origin in the party could choose to identify with the concept of a social market economy and the successful minister of economics, Ludwig Erhard, who symbolised this concept like no other. For north German conservative Protestants who on the whole needed the most time to take roots in the CDU their party stood for strong governments both on state and federal level and for an ideological anti-communism. It is questionable, though, whether this subdivided kind of collective party identity was sufficient to fulfill the functions which have been described above, mainly to give the party members an understanding of who the we-group is and who the others are. If there had been nothing else this would probably not have been enough to keep the party together. In fact, there were quite some worries in the early 1960s that the party might disintegrate again. The background of these misgivings were intense rivalries of several CDU leaders over succession to the chancellors Adenauer and his successor Ludwig Erhard which coincided with a debate on foreign policy strategies, the famous 'gaullist-atlanticist-debate'; in this controversy Catholic and Protestant CDU politicians had been quite fiercely opposed for a few years.[15] But what the sceptics had underestimated when they worried about the stability of the CDU was that there were some factors that kept the party together which had to do with the party's identity.

First was an ideological aspect which all CDU factions, from the Catholic left wing to Protestant conservatives, shared: anti-communism.[16] Anti-commu-

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15   Torsten Oppelland: Atlantiker und Gaullisten, in: Hans-Peter Schwarz (ed.): Die Fraktion als Machtfaktor. CDU/CSU im Deutschen Bundestag 1949 bis heute. München 2009, pp. 67–84; Ronald J. Granieri: The Ambivalent Alliance. Konrad Adenauer, the CDU/CSU, and the West, 1949–1966. New York et al. 2003, pp. 159–179, 192–204; Tim Geiger: Atlantiker gegen Gaullisten. Außenpolitischer Konflikt und innerparteilicher Machtkampf in der CDU/CSU 1958–1969 (Studien zur Internationalen Geschichte 20). München 2008.

16   Clay Clemens: Explaining Merkel's Autonomy in the Grand Coalition: Personalisation or Party Organisation?, in: German Politics 20 (2011) 4, pp. 469–485, here p. 471.

nism was not only deeply inscribed in the mentality of post-war West Germany (including the greater part of the SPD); it also had an impact on major policy decisions by the Adenauer government. Anti-communism included the assessment that West Germany was actually being threatened by the Soviet Union and that Stalin's offers of a reunified and neutral Germany were nothing but a scheme to expand Soviet influence to include all of Germany. In consequence, Adenauer's policy to align West Germany to the western powers, particularly the United States, and to rearm West Germany in the framework of the western alliance was universally accepted in the party as being without any reasonable alternative (with the notable exception of the Protestant Gustav Heinemann who decided to break with the CDU over this issue). When the CDU was attacked by the Protestant left, mostly consisting of the reformed denomination, that it was basically a Catholic party which was not really interested in German reunification as this would put Catholics in a minority position again it was the majority of CDU Protestants' who defended Adenauer's policy.[17] In order to counter the allegations that the CDU was in reality a Catholic party with a Protestant fig leaf the Protestants organized as a faction to make Protestants more visible in the general public *(Evangelischer Arbeitskreis, EAK)* but also to have an intra-party lobby making sure that Protestants would be adequately represented in CDU-led governments and administrations.[18] This was accepted by the Catholic party majority although some suspicions that the *EAK* might be intended to serve as a power base for Protestant leaders remained for a long time. Anti-communism also served to polarize electoral politics as Adenauer over and over again associated all Marxist parties – including the SPD – with Soviet and East German communism; this electoral strategy was not only successful, it also reinforced the identification of the party as the in-group as opposed to the out-groups.

Another aspect that had an enormous influence on the development of the CDU party identity was the unexpected size of its electoral success. From the beginning the strategy to reunite Catholics and Protestants to form a party of the political centre proved successful as the party came to lead several coalition governments on the state level after the first elections, it was the largest caucus in the Parliamentary Council which drafted the constitution for the Federal Republic, and it lead the federal government for the first twenty years of the Federal Republic winning an absolute majority of seats in the federal elections of 1953 and 1957. Of course, the percentage of the Catholic population voting for CDU and CSU remained much higher than in the Protestant population but,

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17   Torsten Oppelland: Adenauers Kritiker aus dem Protestantismus, in: Ulrich von Hehl (ed.): Adenauer und die Kirchen. Bonn 1999, pp. 116–148.
18   Id.: Der Evangelische Arbeitskreis der CDU/CSU, 1952–1969, in: Historisch-Politische Mitteilungen 5 (1998), pp. 105–143.

particularly in comparison with the former Centre Party, it was the Protestant vote which made the difference between majority and minority, between coming out of the elections as the strongest or the second party. Thus, when at the beginning of the 1960s the West German party system had undergone a deep process of concentration and only three parties, CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP, were represented in the federal parliament it would have been politically suicidal if the CDU had split over some personal rivalries or denominational suspicions. But electoral success also meant power, power to lead governments on the state and the federal level, to bring the people of the in-group into positions in government and administration, and to shape the new West German state according to one's preferences. Electoral success went together with a new self-image of the CDU which saw the successful reconstruction of the country, the economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s, and the stability the Bonn Republic which, as it was more and more agreed, would not suffer the same fate as the Weimar Republic as its own merit.[19] After these things had been accomplished under CDU rule this had an impact on the collective mentality of the CDU which can hardly be overrated. When in the late 1960s left intellectuals described the Federal Republic as a 'CDU state' it was, of course, meant critically but the CDU took it as a compliment and as an accurate description of the way things were and should be. In other words, within the first two decades of the Federal Republic the historical differences between Catholics and Protestants lost importance as the party factions all identified with the new state and were ready to defend it against attacks from the New Left. A certain FRG-conservatism became deeply engrained in the CDU party identity which gradually began to take the place of denominational elements of the collective identity since the 'secular sixties'.[20] The development of this new identity, together with the structure of the party system, helped the CDU to endure more than a decade of opposition on the federal level after 1969 and also to survive secularisation and the diminishing percentage of the population that still has close ties to the churches.

III. Identity construction in the CDA

In Germany, the establishment of the CDU preceded growing secularization, while in the Netherlands, the creation of the CDA occurred in reverse, with the processes of individualization, secularization and deconfessionalization in the 1960s and 1970s promoting the founding of the party. The electoral decline

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19   Mark E. Spicka: Gender, Political Discourse, and the CDU/CSU Vision of the Economic Miracle, 1949–1957, in: German Studies Review 25 (2002) 2, pp. 305–332, here p. 306.
20   Ronald J. Granieri: The CDU/CSU between Germany and Europe since the Secular Sixties, in: Central European History 42 (2009) 1, pp. 1–32.

that accompanied these processes led the three parties that would constitute the CDA in 1980 to realize that they could only maintain political significance through an organizational merger. Equally important for their unification was the eroding effect that these societal processes had on the traditional identities of the three parties and the 'pillars' (*zuilen*) to which they belonged. Due to this disintegration, these identities became less salient, which of course made a merger more likely. Historically, however, these differences in party identities, linked to distinct religion, had always been very pronounced.

Catholics

Similarly to Germany, the Catholics were in a minority position in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century, although this amounted to 35 to 40 percent of the population.[21] In the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, which was established during the rebellion against the Spanish Catholic king Philip II (1568–1648), they were an oppressed minority in a country governed by a Calvinist elite. The Catholics could not openly profess their religion and they were not allowed to hold public offices. This religious and constitutional discrimination promoted the internal cohesion of the Catholics and the development of an identity in which their distinction from non-Catholics was central.[22] Ultramontanism – the notion that the Pope had authority not only over spiritual but also temporal affairs – was the constituent element of this highly defensive and particularist identity. In national politics the promotion and protection of Catholic interests was given top priority.

In the mid-nineteenth century the position of the Catholics improved due to the increasing power of the Liberals. The new constitution of 1848 enhanced freedom of religion and introduced freedom of association, of the press and of education. This created a constitutional context which not only allowed the Catholics to integrate into the Dutch political system but, paradoxically, also permitted a process of organizational segregation. At the ecclesiastical level, the new freedoms resulted in the restoration of the episcopal hierarchy in 1853. The episcopate, in turn, played a major role in the gradual formation of a Catholic pillar or milieu, consisting of a specifically Catholic press, education system and trade unions, as well as many other lay organizations. This pillar was intended as 'a struggle and protection device', directed against the influence of the non-Catholic environment as well as the promotion of Catholic unity.[23]

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21 Hans Knippenberg: De religieuze kaart van Nederland. Assen 1992, p. 273.
22 J. M. G. Thurlings: De wankele zuil. Nederlandse katholieken tussen assimilatie en pluralisme. Deventer 1978, p. 63.
23 Ibid., p. 93.

In the political field, however, Catholic organization and mobilization started relatively late. This was due to the central role of the episcopate in politics, but also to the high degree of regional concentration of Catholics, with the vast majority living in the southern provinces of the country, making these areas religiously homogeneous and political struggle much less pronounced there than elsewhere. In 1877, Schaepman, a priest and politician, proposed the establishment of a 'general Christian Party', but this was definitely a bridge too far.[24] At the beginning of the twentieth century the first rudimentary Catholic political organization came into being, which in 1926 was replaced by the more stable *Rooms-Katholieke Staatspartij* (RKSP: Roman-Catholic State Party). The RKSP and its forerunners resembled the German Centre Party in many ways: they were religiously homogeneous but socially extremely heterogeneous, and especially after the First World War this would frequently lead to high levels of internal political tension, which could generally be managed by appealing to the shared faith or by episcopal intervention, but not in all cases.

Orthodox Protestants

During the 1860s the political alliance between the Catholics and Liberals came to an end. In 1864, Liberalism was condemned by the Pope in his encyclical *Quanta Cura* as a godless error. In addition, the Liberals rejected the Catholic demand that the State subsidize religious education. After their split with the Liberals, the Catholics found themselves siding with the orthodox Protestants, who had been their archenemies for centuries as the latter's identity was steeped in anti-papist feelings. Orthodox Protestants interpreted the revolt against the Spanish Catholic king above all as a battle of religion. They compared the Calvinist Republic with biblical Israel: both were elected by God. In other words, the Netherlands was considered a Protestant nation willed by God.[25] Of course, Catholics did not fit into this historical perspective at all. As was the case in Germany, they were not trusted because of their ultramontanist inclination and they were considered to be an anti-national element which aimed to replace the Protestant principles of Dutch society with a Catholic foundation. The orthodox Protestants attempted to restrain the development of Catholicism in many ways, and although their anti-papist beliefs gradually became less virulent, they had flared up in 1853 when the episcopal hierarchy was restored.

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24   H. M. T. D. Ten Napel: 'Een eigen weg'. De totstandkoming van het CDA (1952–1980). Leiden 1992, p. 4.
25   Johan van Zuthem: 'Heelen en halven': orthodox-protestantse voormannen en het 'politiek' anti-papisme in de periode 1872–1925. Hilversum 2001, p. 13, 17.

Given these mutual traditional animosities, political cooperation between orthodox Protestants and Catholics was not at all self-evident, to put it mildly. However, due to the Liberal domination of politics and society, the former found themselves deprived of political power and thus in a position that was similar to their religious opponents. As a result of the French Revolution, the State had lost its Christian character and the orthodox Protestants had become isolated. Like the Catholics, they sought their strength in organizational segregation (their own press, housing associations, educational institutions, trade unions, etc.) and a pronounced identity, in which not only anti-papism, but also a hostile view of Liberalism, modernism, rationalism and popular sovereignty – in short, the spirit of the French Revolution – were constitutive. Since the orthodox Protestants were spread across the country and because they lacked – due to their Presbyterian character – a hierarchical religious institution that also could play a guiding role in national politics, contrary to the Catholics they quickly engaged in party formation and political mobilization. In 1879, the *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* (ARP: Anti-Revolutionary Party) was established, the first modern political party in the Netherlands. It was well organized and had a programme which reflected the party's name: opposition to the ideas of the French Revolution. With respect to religion, the ARP was linked with the *Gereformeerde Kerken* (Calvinist Reformed Church), which had come into existence in the same period as a result of a split within the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church). Socially, the party was quite heterogeneous, including industrial workers, farmers and nobles.

The coalition of Catholics and Protestants

The collaboration between orthodox Protestants and Catholics can be attributed to the ARP leader, Kuyper, whose dislike of Liberalism and modernism gradually outweighed his anti-papist sentiments. His notion of the 'antithesis' – the unbridgeable contradiction between the religious on the one hand and the non-religious ('pagan') Liberals and Social Democrats on the other – provided the theoretical basis of their collaboration, with the Liberals' refusal to provide public financing for religiously based schools (known as the *Schoolstrijd*, 'School struggle'), in the name of maintaining the separation of Church and State, being the main reason for the denominational parties joining forces. This 'Coalition' was fostered by an electoral majority system which remained in place until 1918, and resulted in three governments (1888–1891, 1901–1905, 1908–1913) in the period before the First World War. Notably, they were all led by an ARP member despite a stronger Catholic parliamentary presence – which demonstrates the still deeply rooted anti-Catholic inclination within Dutch society at that time.

Within orthodox Protestant circles this rapprochement by the Catholics contributed to a split, with an aversion to the centralist and disciplined nature of the ARP and the authoritarian style of its leader Kuyper also playing a role, as well as disagreement regarding the extension of voting rights Eventually the break led to the foundation of the *Christelijk Historische Unie* (CHU: Christian Historical Union) in 1908. Contrary to the ARP, the Union – not 'Party'! – was a loosely organized group, primarily consisting of notables and the self-employed, with a corresponding identity based on moderation and relative tolerance, although with an anti-papist undertone. The Union was informally affiliated to the moderate orthodox centre of the Dutch Reformed Church. It regarded the unity of the nation as of the utmost importance and was averse to the organizational segregation and pillar formation practised by Catholics and Anti-Revolutionaries. The Union claimed that the Dutch nation had acquired its Protestant character under God's guidance[26], but this did not prevent the party from political cooperation with the Catholics (and the ARP).

During the First World War the two major controversies that had divided Dutch politics for decades were resolved by a compromise (known as 'Pacification'). The 'right' Catholic and Protestant parties ensured that public financing for religiously based education was introduced, while the 'left' Liberals and Social Democrats were able to introduce universal suffrage. This compromise had a major impact on the ARP, CHU and RKSP.

Firstly, it boosted the pillarization process, with the financing of religious education becoming the model for the distribution of broadcasting time among the various broadcasters and grants in the realms of public health and welfare, for example.[27] Secondly, the Pacification also had a great influence on the balance of power within Dutch politics. From 1918 to 1967 the three confessional parties would have a parliamentary majority and would form the core of the government – from 1933 onwards in coalitions with either the Liberals or Social Democrats.

Nevertheless, while the three denominational parties agreed on many fundamental issues (such as social harmony rather than class struggle, and conservative morality), disagreement within the Coalition grew for several reasons. In 1918, the electoral majority system was replaced by proportional representation, which made electoral agreements and programmatic coordination no longer necessary. Moreover, the dominant position of the Catholics (who would be continuously part of the government from 1918 to 1977) provoked resistance within the CHU. Also, now that the school struggle had been re-

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26   Ibid., p. 119.
27   D. Th. Kuiper: Een eeuw 'confessionele' politiek in ontwikkelingsperspectief, in: Paul Luykx/Hans Righart (eds.): Van de pastorie naar het torentje. Een eeuw confessionele politiek. Den Haag 1991, pp. 161–174, here p. 165.

solved, the 'antithesis' lost its binding power. Socioeconomic differences became more apparent, creating tension between the three denominational parties, but also within the RKSP. Despite these strains, their governmental cooperation continued until the foundation of the CDA.

The formation of the CDA

Unlike Germany, the Second World War did not result in a radical renewal of the party system in the Netherlands. While the pillared political system had been criticized, especially by the resistance movement against the Nazi occupation, where a sense of unity originating from the need to fight a common enemy exceeded political differences, attempts to transform the traditional party political relationships were not very successful. Thus, compared to Germany, the impact of the war on the political infrastructure was less profound. Moreover, there was no new real threat in 1945, unlike Germany, where communism was a very real threat in the west after the occupation of the east by the Soviet Union. The RKSP made a comeback under a new name, the *Katholieke Volkspartij* (KVP: Catholic People's Party), while proposals to merge the ARP and CHU failed. However, the three denominational parties continued to constitute the axis of government, as had been the case since 1918, although on a few occasions either the ARP or the CHU refused to participate in the cabinet.

However, what did not happen in 1945 occurred a few decades later when there was a dramatic re-alignment within Dutch politics in the 1960s and 1970s. The emancipation of the formerly underprivileged Catholics and Anti-Revolutionaries seemed to be complete. The establishment of the welfare state, increased social and geographic mobility, higher levels of education – all developments to which the denominational parties had made important contributions – were accompanied by processes of individualization, secularization and deconfessionalization, which undermined the central position of the KVP, ARP and CHU within Dutch politics. The pillars of which they were part (the CHU only *nolens volens*) disintegrated, and to a certain extent their traditional followers began to desert them – either because they had left the Church or because they no longer automatically voted for the KVP, ARP or CHU despite their denomination. Their hegemony came to its end in the elections of 1967, when for the first time since 1918 the three parties did not win a majority in parliament.

The electoral defeat was a hard blow and led almost immediately to official talks between the ARP, CHU and KVP about closer cooperation and a possible merger. However, despite the imminent demise of their dominance, their eventual fusion proved to be extremely difficult. This was partly due to the fact that while all three parties were losing voters, this was not occurring at the same time or to the same extent, affecting their respective sense of commitment to

the merger process.[28] After the first formal contacts (1967–1973), a phase known as 'pre-federation' (1973–1975) followed. After this, came a phase of 'Christian Democratic federation' resulting in a common list of candidates and one programme for the national elections of 1977. The final phase of the federation, which included a common parliamentary group, ended in the official establishment of the CDA as a new party and, as a consequence, the dissolution of the ARP, CHU and KVP in 1980.[29] Certainly helping the emergence of the CDA was the oppositional Labour Party, attempting to drive the denominational parties apart. Ultimately, this strategy of polarization had the reverse effect, bringing these parties closer together.

The identity of the CDA

Another factor which made the merger process tedious was the concern of both the ARP and the CHU that because of the Catholic dominance they would not be adequately represented within the new party. To a large extent this fear – realistic or not – determined the identity of the CDA. In the debates leading to the party's foundation, concerning the relationship between faith and politics, the distribution of important offices and the elaboration of its ideological principles, a balance between the views and wishes of each party was very carefully sought.

   Establishing a consensus on the relationship between faith and politics and developing the character of the new party were matters of great dispute. Founding the CDA required the transition of the three denominational parties into a Christian Democratic party without links to any particular Church or confession.[30] Nonetheless, the Calvinist ARP demanded an exclusive biblical basis for the new party, despite supporters of a more open party (mainly within the KVP) opposing this more fundamentalist view. In addition to the Bible, the latter also wanted humanist principles to be recognized, which could open the party to non-Christians. Ultimately a compromise was reached which marks the party to this day: it was agreed that the Bible alone would act as a guide for political action; however, the fundamental political conviction or ideology of the CDA would not be the Bible as such but 'the answer to the appeal made by the Bible'[31] – hence the name Christian Democratic *Appeal*. This solution ena-

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28   Ten Napel: 'Een eigen weg', p. 340.
29   Ruud Koole: Politieke partijen in Nederland, ontstaan en ontwikkeling van partijen en partijstelsel. Utrecht 1995, p. 188.
30   Kuiper: Een eeuw 'confessionele' politiek in ontwikkelingsperspectief, p. 162.
31   Paul Lucardie: Paradise lost, paradise regained? Christian democracy in the Netherlands, in: Steven van Hecke/Emmanuel Gerard (eds.): Christian democratic parties in Europe since the end of the Cold War. Leuven 2004, pp. 159–178, here p. 167.

bled the CDA – more than its constituting parties – to address the Dutch electorate as a whole, without distinction as to religion or social status.

Non-Christians could join the CDA, but did so only to a very limited extent: in 2008 no more than 2 percent of the party members were non-religious and 3 percent had a different religion.[32] Perhaps the clearly Christian character of the CDA constituted an obstacle – party meetings started with a Bible reading and prayer, a Protestant habit that had initially been rather difficult even for Catholics to accept.

Fear of Catholic domination also played a role regarding the distribution of offices across the former parties. Above all, the balance between the various 'blood types' had to be maintained. This qualification was originally used after the merger of the ARP, CHU and KVP, but as the ideas of these old parties faded and new members increasingly joined the CDA it came to refer to the different denominations within the party. From its founding to the present day, the CDA pays meticulous attention to a proportional distribution of key posts (Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers) among Catholics and Protestants (on a 50/50 basis) to avoid religious antagonisms.[33]

The formulation of the party's principles was also a delicate issue. To avoid having to choose between the Catholic or Calvinist traditions, the CDA partly framed new terms and drew on common elements in the heritage of the three parties.[34] Apart from 'public justice', 'solidarity' and 'stewardship' (care for nature and culture), one of the main principles of the new party was 'differentiated responsibility'. This principle encapsulated classic Catholic and Anti-Revolutionary notions about the relationship between State and society. According to the Catholic principle of 'subsidiarity' (from the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of 1891), the State should not take responsibility for any tasks that decentralized authorities are capable of effectively executing themselves. This limited conception of the State combined well with the vision of the 'spheres of sovereignty' developed by ARP leader Kuyper. He regarded different sections of society (such as the family, education, business or science) as separate and autonomous spheres which the State should respect.[35] The principle of

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32   Ruud Koole/Joop Holsteyn: Religie of regio? Over de bloedgroepen van het CDA, in: Gerrit Voerman (ed.): De conjunctuur van de macht, het Christen Democratisch Appèl. Amsterdam 2011, pp. 131–153, here p. 133.

33   Gerrit Voerman: Die politische Kultur der Christendemokratie in den Niederlanden und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, in: J. L. Kleuters/M. Ragg (eds.): Christendemokratische Positionen in den Niederlanden, der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa. Nijmegen 2003 (Centrum voor Duitslandstudies), pp. 41–52, here pp. 42–43; Jan Schinkelshoek: Oprichting CDA, in: Raymond Gradus et al. (eds.): Canon van de Christendemocratie. Den Haag 2012, p. 69.

34   Paul Lucardie: Nederland stromenland, een geschiedenis van de politieke stromingen. Assen 2007, p. 63.

35   Ibid., pp. 18–19.

'differentiated responsibility' emphasized the need for intermediary structures
between State and citizens ('civil society') and the self-organizing and regulat-
ing ability of society, allowing the CDA to position itself between the statist
Social Democracy (emphasizing collectiveness) and Liberalism (which took
the markets and individuals as its starting point). The notion of a 'responsible
society' also derived from this principle, which served to legitimate an auster-
ity policy aimed at trimming the welfare state in the successful coalition gov-
ernment of the CDA and the Liberals in the 1980s.

IV.   Concluding comparison of the cases and perspective

Identity construction has never been very difficult for Christian denomination-
al parties, with their religious identity to a large extent determining their po-
litical identity. The first denominational political parties were established in
the last decades of the nineteenth century. Within the national political system,
they promoted the interests – which were otherwise ignored – of parts of the
population that were sharply divided along religious lines, living separately
from each other in their own *Lager* or *zuil*. The development of the Catholic
parties in Germany and the Netherlands and the two orthodox Protestant par-
ties in the latter encapsulates this process. While the Catholics in Germany
fought against a Protestant elite in the *Kulturkampf*, in the *Schoolstrijd* the
Dutch denominational parties fought the Liberal elite, to overcome their mi-
nority position. By the end of the nineteenth century, the orthodox Protestants
and Catholics in the Netherlands had joined forces in their struggle for equal
rights. This was remarkable, because – like Germany – they had been diametri-
cally opposed to each other since the sixteenth century, in both religious and
political terms.

     The contrast between Rome and the Reformation also coloured the identities
of the Catholic and the orthodox Protestant parties in a significant way. Given
the mutual, deep-seated animosity, a voluntary amalgamation of both move-
ments was inconceivable. In both Germany and the Netherlands extraordinary
external circumstances brought the movements together – they suffered an 'ex-
ternal shock', to use the terms of the American political scientists Harmel and
Janda[36]; in other words, 'an external stimulus so directly related to perfor-
mance considerations on a party's 'primary goal' that it causes the party's de-
cision-makers ... to undertake a fundamental reevaluation of the party's effec-
tiveness on that goal dimension'. In Germany this 'external shock' came from
the experience of Nazism and the Second World War. The failure of the politi-
cal and economic system of the Weimar Republic and later the threat stemming

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36   Robert Harmel/Kenneth Janda: An integrated theory of party goals and party change, in:
     Journal of Theoretical Politics 6 (1994) 3, pp. 259–287, here pp. 267–268.

from the communist East after 1945 favoured the merger of Catholics and Protestants into the CDU, with the small-scale opposition and resistance to Nazi rule in Germany having demonstrated that denominational barriers could be overcome for the sake of political cooperation.

Such sentiments also existed in the Netherlands after the war, but they were not strong enough to achieve a fundamental regrouping of the party system. A Catholic-Protestant merger only really emerged after several decades, during the 1960s and 1970s. However, this was also due to an external shock. Unlike Germany, it was not so much political but social factors that provided the impetus for the merger, with the interrelated processes of individualization, secularization and deconfessionalization undermining the electoral bases of the ARP, CHU and KVP, and consequently their traditional power base in Dutch politics. A growing awareness that only by closing ranks could the process of political marginalization be halted played a decisive role in the merger.

Clearly, the merger of Catholics and Protestants into one political party contained risks due to major cultural differences between the denominations, something which seems to have been even more the case in Germany than in the Netherlands. For, despite the distortion caused by the Second World War, the denominational milieus were not substantially affected in Germany, with the Catholic and Protestant identities still largely intact when the CDU was founded. In the Netherlands, on the contrary, the disintegration of the Catholic and Protestant pillars during the 1960s and 1970s preceded the fusion of the denominational parties. Undoubtedly, this disintegration facilitated their merger, not only because of the increasing awareness of the decline of their former dominant political position, but also because of the accompanying erosion of the once so pronounced Catholic and Protestant identities. Despite the depillarization, however, these identities were still meaningful enough for the CDA to have to find a carefully considered compromise. The balance between Catholics and Protestants had to take into account both qualitative (foundation and principles) and quantitative dimensions (distribution of posts). This formula of conciliation reflected the traditional strategic mediating role of the CDA's predecessors, trying to bring together diverse and often conflicting interests, which had enabled them play a central role in Dutch politics throughout much of the twentieth century.

Thus, the party identity constructed by the CDA was based on a compromise (including inherent ambivalences) but as such it was also rather monolithic. Once the usual congruence between religious and political identity was broken, the new identity was made compulsory for the sake of unity of the new party. In Germany, however, the identity of the CDU was pluralistic in nature, partly because the identities of the different groups constituting the party – Catholics and both liberal and conservative Protestants – were still relatively strong; over time, as Germany experienced similar social developments as the

Netherlands, pluralism became more political than denominational (neo-liber-al, conservative and Christian social). In the CDU it was thought that an overly pronounced new identity might scare off potential voters' partners, while a 'subdivided' one would allow people to choose the aspects with which they wanted to identify. To put it slightly schematically and perhaps in a somewhat exaggerated manner: the CDU offered something for each person's taste, while the CDA offered one taste for all.