
Politics and religion in the modern world

Edited by
George Moyser



London and New York

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Politics and religion in Western Europe

John Madeley

INTRODUCTION

One of the classic themes of sociology focuses on the role of religion as a kind of social glue or cement which binds the constituent elements of societies together and so underwrites the social order. Conservative thinkers of the nineteenth century in particular pointed to religion as an (or occasionally *the*) essential foundation of any society or civilization and the founding fathers of the modern social sciences, with the conspicuous exception of Marx, placed the study of the social impact of religion close to the centre of their concerns. Despite its pedigree, the relevance of this view to modern society is, however, far from obvious and the political history of the countries of Western Europe in the modern period suggests rather that the impact of the religious factor has generally been as much to undermine as to underwrite the stability of the social and political order.

While the discipline of sociology has often stressed the secular functions of religion in all types of society, it was until quite recently fashionable among political scientists to believe that the religious factor had ceased to have much impact at all—whether in the direction of conflict or consensus—on the contemporary politics of the western democracies. There was a widespread assumption that the trends toward industrialization, urbanization and cultural secularization which Europe had pioneered in the nineteenth century had led to the complete displacement of religion from any central role in public life. If religion itself had not dissolved away in the cold light of Reason, as Enlightenment thinkers had once expected, it was surely much more marginal for the modern European with an essentially secular and materialist approach to life and politics. After 1945 in particular, the political agenda seemed to revolve almost

entirely around the humdrum business of 'who gets what, when, how'. The great moral and ideological questions about the merits and demerits of socialism and capitalism, communism and fascism, which had so exercised politicians, commentators and activists in the interwar period, seemed to have lost their purchase on the public mind—a fact doubtless accounted for in large part by the complete discrediting of fascism during the Second World War, the stigmatization of communism with the onset of the Cold War and the west's rapid economic recovery.

In the 1960s, however, two things happened which undermined this set of assumptions. First, there was the re-emergence of ideological conflict and political turbulence around a wide range of issues which did not seem, except to the most unreconstructed of reductionists, understandable purely in terms of class or group competition for material benefits. Questions relating, for example, to the political role of ethnicity, race, religion and gender or to the implications of western-style 'modernization' for economic development across the globe, national self-determination, peace and environmental protection raised disturbing questions about whether people's concerns had changed or whether previous assumptions about the nature of those concerns had been inadequate. Second, a number of studies led political scientists to re-examine the orthodox assumptions about the secularity and materialism of politics in the liberal democracies. In 1967 for example, S.M.Lipset and Stein Rokkan published a seminal survey of the origins and development of social cleavage patterns underlying the characteristic structures of western party systems, which argued for a new understanding of the non-economic springs of modern politics.¹ They showed that not only had religion and other sources of cultural differentiation been of prime importance in the foundation of the European party systems in the late nineteenth century but that the effects of this early impact had been extended into the most recent period by virtue of a sort of 'freezing' of the party systems which had occurred some time in the 1920s.

While they seemed to require some revision of the conventional view of the historical importance of religion, these claims were not of course incompatible with the deeply rooted assumption that the religious factor was in some way archaic—a survival from some earlier era; indeed, the implication of Lipset and Rokkan's analysis in particular was that its importance derived almost entirely from the twist given to modern developments by the outcome of events as distant as the Reformation and the French Revolution. Two years

later, however, Rose and Urwin underlined the contemporary significance of the religious factor when their examination of the social bases of political parties led them to the surprising conclusion that, contrary to previous assumption, 'religious divisions, not class, are the main social basis of parties in the Western world *today*'.² This was only one of a number of studies which 'rediscovered' the political impact of the religious factor at about this time and since then a number of publications have been concerned with the question of assessing and accounting for the strength of the religious factor in the politics of the liberal democracies.³

One of the notable aspects of Rose and Urwin's analysis was the use of a number of alternative survey criteria for identifying the presence of the religious factor in different national contexts; in some it was a matter of confessional affiliation, most often whether respondents were Catholic or Protestant; in others a matter of attitude to the Church(es) or the clergy, in particular whether respondents were pro- or anti-clerical; and in yet others a 'behavioural' criterion was used, in particular whether or not (or how frequently) respondents attended religious services. It might be objected that this involved a double (or treble) counting of the religious variable which was likely to skew the analysis and undermine its validity, but it seems more appropriate to observe that the different use of membership, attitudinal and behavioural criteria in different contexts only represented an appropriate recognition of the complexity of the factors governing the inter-relationship of religion and politics.

One of the factors which becomes clear on even the most cursory survey of the subject is that the population of Western Europe is differentiated both within and between its various political regions on a number of criteria affecting the structure, content and location of religion, which are at least potentially relevant to politics. First, there are the confessional differences between the Catholic and the several varieties of Protestant Churches, denominations, sects and cults with their particular traditions of social and political thought. Second, there are the religious differences internal to the main confessional traditions—differences of observance, belief and opinion, including those directly related to conflicting political viewpoints. Third, there are the different patterns of Church—state relations which have been of central importance in determining the relationship at both mass and elite levels between different groups of religious activists and adherents on the one hand and between the religious and those of no

religion on the other. In addition to these 'religious' dimensions account must also be taken of the impact of multifarious other social, economic and cultural forces which vary greatly from one national context to another. Fortunately, Lipset and Rokkan's developmental model has helped to make sense of these complexities in so far as they have affected the development of modern party systems, by providing a framework for identifying the main dimensions of difference and relating them to the historical conjunctures at which they were generated.

It would, however, be wrong to overemphasize the complexity of the West European case by stressing too much the diversity of factors which have cumulatively intersected at different points in time. Seen in a wider comparative context the relative simplicity of the case might be the first impression. After all, the following survey of the main interconnections of religion and politics in postwar Western Europe will concern itself almost exclusively with the Latin form of Christianity and its local variants in the context of the liberal democratic arrangements which have obtained almost everywhere since 1945. On the one hand, after the virtual annihilation of European Jewry during the holocaust and despite the immigration of significant numbers of people of non-European cultural traditions, the most influential linkages between religion and politics have until recently concerned Christian Churches, denominations and groups deriving from the western or Latin tradition. And on the other hand, with the exception until the mid-1970s of the Iberian peninsular, politics has, in the manner of liberal democracy, been almost entirely a matter of parliaments, parties and pressure groups.

More significant perhaps than the multifarious differences between the regions of Western Europe, which must necessarily be a central focus of attention in what follows, is the trend toward cultural secularization which can be observed over the last few generations almost everywhere. As the contents of this book indicate, by comparison with other parts of the world, society and politics in contemporary Western Europe *is* in fact marked by an extraordinarily high level of secularization; with the exception of the continuing struggle in Northern Ireland and occasional dramatic episodes like the 1984 demonstrations in Paris on behalf of religious schools—and the 'religious content' of such exceptional cases can easily be disputed—religion seems to account for very much less political conflict or consensus in the 1980s than it did, for example, in the 1880s. This said, it is still remarkable—and was until relatively recently largely

unremarked—just how much the religious factor continues to obtrude into the world of politics, where, by long-standing liberal-democratic prejudice, it has no legitimate place.

EUROPE AS A WHOLE

The first remarkable fact is that the religious geography of Europe has changed little since the end of the wars of religion in the seventeenth century; the boundaries between areas dominated by populations of, severally, the Roman Catholic, Lutheran/Evangelical, Calvinist/Reformed, and Anglican confessions still by and large run where they were fixed about three hundred years ago. The fact is all the more remarkable because the political boundaries which define the territorial limits of Europe's states have undergone considerable change over the same period so that the religious and political lines of demarcation no longer coincide in the way they once did. The political map of Europe, not least the line which has since 1945 divided it into its western and eastern parts, has thus been overprinted on a set of religious territorial divisions which it only in part reflects, with the consequence that the various parts of contemporary Western Europe differ from each other not only by confession but also by degree of confessional diversity.

An important reason for the relative fixity of the religious or confessional map is to be found in the nature of the Westphalian settlement of 1648 which brought to an end not only the Thirty Years' War but also the century or more of religious wars which had followed in the wake of the Reformation. That settlement, with its decisive recognition of the principles of secular sovereignty, finally established the rule, first assayed almost a century before, that it was for the political authorities to decide which religion should be established in a particular territory. One effect of applying this rule was to reinforce tendencies to religious uniformity *within* political units (while recognizing religious differences as *between* them) and over time to entrench the different confessional forms of Christianity in the culture of Europe's various national population groups. The rule did not of course entail granting a significant degree of religious liberty to any other than 'the prince'; indeed the inclusion of decision-making in religious matters within his jurisdiction meant that the disciplines of religious monopoly could be enforced, where the prince so decided, with even greater rigour than before. Thus the Huguenots in France, the victims of the Inquisition in Spain or the

occasional religious dissidents of Lutheran Scandinavia all suffered at the hands of princes who long after 1648 continued to see in the maintenance of religious conformity an essential support of the existing social and political order.

Table 2.1 traces the continuing legacy of these early-modern developments in the very uneven distribution of Europe's main confessions. The overwhelming predominance of Christians in the population of all the countries is of course a legacy from the much earlier period of Europe's conversion but the patterning of dominance as between the different confessional forms of Christianity dates from approximately 1648 and continues to provide the basis for the most natural division of the whole area into four groups of countries. Two of the groups are characterized by the overwhelming predominance of a single confession—in Scandinavia, Lutheranism and in the southern part of the continent, Roman Catholicism—while the other two, the British Isles and the Continental countries of mixed confession, are constituted of countries divided between at least two confessions, even though in each case only one or other of the Protestant confessions has been historically dominant. An important corollary of this four-way division is that in the two groups of countries which are by and large confessionally homogeneous there has been no basis for the type of political conflict between confessional groups which has been of considerable importance in the groups of countries of mixed confession. A more controversial aspect of this classification is the degree to which, and the way in which, the political culture of the various countries has been affected by the nature of the different confessions. Despite the interest of such influential scholars as Weber and Troeltsch in these issues it remains a matter more of conjecture than of well-founded argument whether or how the traditional political quiescence of Lutheranism as against, say, the more combative, almost 'republican', spirit of Calvinism has affected the politics of the different parts of Protestant Europe. The magnitude of the impact of Roman Catholicism on the politics of all the countries where its adherents form the majority or a large minority is on the other hand less open to doubt, although variations in the strength, nature and timing of that impact does raise questions about how much is contributed by the intrinsic nature of Catholicism and how much by contextual factors.

By the late eighteenth century the basic patterns of confessional affiliation were still firmly entrenched although some experiments in religious toleration had been attempted in Britain and in those

Table 2.1 The populations of the West European states by religion & confession, 1980
(All figures expressed as % of total population)

	All Christians	Membership of historically dominant confession	Membership of other main confession(s)	Non-religious and atheists	Others
SCANDINAVIA					
Denmark	95.9	95.0 (L)	0.6 (C)	3.6	0.8
Finland	94.4	92.5 (L)	1.2 (O)	5.5	0.8
Iceland	97.3	96.4 (L)	0.7 (C)	2.1	0.8
Norway	98.1	97.6 (L)	0.3 (C)	1.7	0.4
Sweden	70.9	67.6 (L)	1.4 (C)	28.7	0.3
BRITISH ISLES					
United Kingdom	86.9	56.8 (A)	13.1(C)	9.5	20.6
England	-	69.0 (A)	14.0(P)	5.0	2.0
Scotland	-	67.0 (CV) 1964	16.0(C)	5.0	3.0
Wales	-	45.0 (A)	40.0(P)	4.0	5.0
N. Ireland	-	25.0 (A)	38.0(P)	2.0	12.0
Rep. of Ireland	99.5	95.3 (C)	3.7(P)	0.4	0.6

CONTINENT: MIXED RELIGION						
Netherlands	85.7	41.8	(CV)	42.6	(C)	3.5
Switzerland	97.4	42.9	(CV)	52.8	(C)	2.4
West Germany	92.8	46.7	(L, CV)	43.8	(C)	4.9
CONTINENT: CATHOLIC						
Austria	96.6	88.8	(C)	6.2	(P)	2.3
Belgium	90.9	90.0	(C)	0.4	(P)	2.1
France	80.1	76.4	(C)	2.0	(P)	6.0
Italy	83.6	83.2	(C)	0.4	(P)	0.2
Luxembourg	94.4	93.0	(C)	1.3	(P)	0.8
Portugal	95.3	94.1	(C)	0.8	(P)	0.5
Spain	97.0	96.9	(C)	0.1	(P)	0.1

Note: A=Anglican, C=Roman Catholic, CV=Calvinist,

L=Lutheran, O=Russian Orthodox, P=Protestant (in column 4 also includes Anglican)

Source: Numerical data derived from D.B.Barrett (ed.) (1982), *The World Christian Encyclopaedia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

parts of the Continent where rulers influenced by the Enlightenment flourished in the 1700s. The coming of the French Revolution and the diffusion of its impact across Europe, however, inaugurated a new era. While the 1648 settlement had made both for religious unity and conformity *within* Europe's constituent political units and for diversity *between* them, the tendency of the French Revolution was to divide national populations internally in terms of attitude and behaviour relating to religion and politics. Its impact was particularly marked in Catholic Europe where the Church had retained much of the privilege, wealth and even, on occasion, power which had been stripped from it elsewhere at the time of the Reformation; this, in addition to the close association of its leadership with the monarchy and aristocracy against whom the revolutionaries and republicans directed their main assault, would have made it an obvious target even if Enlightenment thinkers had not already identified it as an 'infamous thing' which should be crushed in the interests of Reason and Progress. In France itself after a series of radical reforms had been imposed on the Church, an attempt was actually made to destroy it altogether. While the de-Christianization campaign of Year 1 (1793–4) failed and was not again attempted in Western Europe, a great gulf opened up in France and elsewhere in Catholic Europe between the partisans of the Church and of the Revolution. Nor did the gulf get much narrower over the succeeding century; between the 1840s and the 1870s it widened again as the Church responded to the rising tide of European liberalism with increasing intransigence and from the 1880s to 1914 French politics witnessed a series of bitter set piece battles between 'the two Frances'. The contemporary emergence of socialist movements with a strong Marxist bias gave the clerical-anti-clerical struggle added impetus as the two forces fought for influence among the industrial working class, which was being called into existence by the other great transforming process of the time, the industrial revolution. Nor are these observations of mere antiquarian interest in an examination of religion and politics after 1945; the legacy of the bitter struggles between clerical and anti-clerical forces has continued until recently to exert a considerable influence on both the form and content of mass politics in Europe, its force only diminishing sharply in the 1960s.

While the epicentre of these religio-political upheavals was principally in Catholic Europe no part of Western Europe was left unaffected by controversy about the issue of dismantling the old

systems of confessional monopoly. Everywhere the terms of the old Church-state alliances were progressively relaxed during the nineteenth century as liberal and radical forces fought for the introduction of, successively, religious toleration, religious liberty and religious equality. The recognition of these principles involved breaking the link between citizenship and adherence to a dominant creed, accepting the rights of individuals to choose their own religious orientation (or none) and, finally, removing the barriers to equality of civil status which attached to religious differences.

By contrast with Catholic Europe opposition to these trends among Protestant populations came less from the leadership of the established Churches than from revivalist movements or groups who objected to the dilution of the faith tolerated by relatively easy-going Church elites. One consequence of these various developments was a growing pluralism of religious, anti-religious and religiously indifferent belief and behaviour as the secularizing impact of modernization processes and the various countervailing movements of religious revivalism and liberal reform undermined the religious uniformity which had characterized the old monopoly system. As has already been seen this pluralizing tendency did not go so far as to 'wash out' the predominant confessional colouration of the different countries and regions of Europe however. One of the reasons for this was that religious revivalism in the various Protestant and Catholic areas tended to take forms peculiar to the dominant traditions—pietism in the Lutheran cultures, Methodism and its various offshoots in the Anglican, and one form or other of precisionism or evangelical revivalism in the Calvinist. None the less by the time in the late nineteenth century when the liberalization and democratization of the political systems finally admitted mass electorates to involvement in politics, the population of most of the European states showed a previously unwonted variety in matters of religion and non-religion and in most of them this variety was more or less directly reflected in the character of the parties and party systems which arose to channel (and contain) that involvement.

There is of course no *a priori* reason why differences in matters of religion should be translated into differences of political loyalty or behaviour but conditions at the time of the first emergence of Europe's mass political parties (approximately 1870 to 1920) were such that in very few parts of Europe did the religious factor fail to leave its mark. Nowhere had the legacy of the old discriminatory Church-state arrangements been completely liquidated, whether in

terms of remaining elements of religious privilege and underprivilege, or of variable propensities to take account of religious groups' claims in making arrangements for new public services such as education or of the simple inertial tendency for new organizations to develop in such a way as to reproduce and reinforce old religious group loyalties. The force of these different circumstances varied greatly, however, between the different parts of Europe.

In Catholic Europe, where opposition to the traditional Church-state arrangements took the form of a clash between 'coherent and massive secularism' and 'coherent and massive religiosity',⁴ the liberal political traditions deriving from the French Revolution ranged themselves with the rising force of continental socialism against the often disparate groups on the right who retained a loyalty to the Church. The conflict over the control and content of public education which for a time became virtually endemic in Catholic Europe was thus just another battle in the ongoing war between anti-clericalism and clericalism, secularism and religiosity. In Europe's other confessionally homogeneous area, Scandinavia, with its Lutheran state churches, a different source of opposition to the traditional arrangements derived from the groups of religious revivalists and dissenters who occasionally combined with more secular elements to resist the influence of the old establishment. This meant that instead of the stark bipolar confrontation between secularism and religion which made such a deep and lasting impact on the situation in Catholic Europe, the basic controversies on Church-state issues in the Protestant north were more easily and more quickly composed; by 1920 indeed they had largely ceased to affect patterns of political competition, although, as will be seen, other related issues such as temperance and the control of sexual mores, have continued up to the present time to generate significant political consequences.

In the two groups of countries of mixed religion other, more complex patterns developed at the formative stage of Europe's modern party systems. Here of course the potentially relevant religious differences also included the confessional one between groups which, after centuries of discrimination on the one hand and privilege on the other, often defined their community identities in religious terms. In the British Isles, until 1921 a single state comprising four distinct nationality groups, there was a strong tendency for national and confessional differences to reinforce each other; thus Irish nationalists and to a lesser extent the Scots and

Welsh often looked to the distinctiveness of their national-religious traditions for a bulwark against the Anglican-dominated culture of the old social and political elites.

From the 1800 Act of Union to the 1921 Irish Treaty both main islands, Britain and Ireland, were under the undivided rule of London and the Catholic majority in Ireland had to wage a bitter struggle to achieve recognition of their rights first as Catholics and then as members of a separate nation; O'Connell's campaign for Catholic rights in the 1820s in fact led to the creation of Europe's first mass Catholic reform movement of any significance and was an important source of inspiration to liberal Catholics on the Continent.⁵ Once O'Connell's campaign had succeeded the religious issues tended to be replaced by more secular nationalist concerns, but the confessional divide between Catholic and Protestant communities within Ireland continued to define the principal basis for the rival nationalist and unionist movements—something which, notoriously, continues to be the case today in Northern Ireland, the one part of the island to remain part of the United Kingdom after 1921. In the Republic of Ireland on the other hand, where Catholicism had become so closely identified with the nationalist cause before 1921, there has been no basis for a non- or anti-Catholic party; the Irish Republic thus exemplifies the paradox that in a country where one religion is overwhelmingly dominant it may well fail to register as a source of political conflict (not least, of course, because no party *dare* oppose religion or the Church).⁶ On the island of Britain religion has also by and large failed to register as an important aspect of party politics since around the time of the First World War even where, as in the case of many parts of England, Scotland and Wales, there has been a historically strong, second axis of opposition, namely that between the religious establishment and dissent (Church and Chapel). Whereas earlier religion was of considerable importance in dividing conservative from liberal supporters in all three countries on issues such as education or Church establishment, the rise to prominence of the Labour party with its new political agenda of class-related issues largely erased the political traces of religious antagonism.⁷ The fact that in addition Labour, like the Liberal party before it, was not tainted by secularism in the manner of continental socialism meant that in Britain, as in most of Scandinavia, the political impact of the religious factor waned considerably after 1918.

In the mixed religion territories of the Continent the old contrast between privileged Protestant majorities and disadvantaged Catholic

minorities provided early occasion for the creation of political groups or alliances to fight for the interests of Catholics; indeed in Belgium just such a movement was involved, in alliance with local liberals, in seizing national independence from the Protestant-dominated Netherlands almost a century before Irish Catholics achieved a similar feat. In the territories which, unlike Belgium, continued to be of mixed religion, however, the religious factor operated in contexts which combined the distinctive features of the three other groups of countries—the secular-religious axis of Catholic Europe, the establishment-dissent oppositions of Scandinavia and even on occasion the conflicts which resonated sub-state community identities in religious terms as in the British Isles. The outcome was a multiplex system of religious tensions and oppositions arrayed variously across the political space of the different countries in a remarkable variety of combinations. For the purposes of this brief survey it must suffice, however, to resolve the patterns into their basic elements, that is the principal religious-political constituencies which, though occasionally internally divided, acted and interacted as more or less solidary groups: the Catholics, the liberals (usually secular Protestants), the conservatives (usually establishment Protestants) and the dissenting or fundamentalist Protestants. In addition to these elements the formative period of the party systems also of course saw the emergence on the left of, first, the socialists and then, after 1917, the communists each with their own brand of anti-clerical animus to add to that of the liberals.

Table 2.2 summarizes in schematic form the underlying dimensions of religious-political opposition obtaining in the different groups of countries at the time that the modern party systems were created, i.e. over the period 1870–1920. It illustrates the reasons for both the particular strength of the religious factor in all the continental countries and the degree of complexity of the situation in those of mixed religion. Over this period in the continental groups the translation of the religious factor into politics meant that whereas in 1870 only Germany had a denominational party, by 1920 every country except France had one⁸—and in the Netherlands, where the full complexity of religious-political tensions was first translated into the shape of the party system, there were already several denominational parties. As Lipset and Rokkan pointed out in their pioneering study of the development of party systems and voter alignments it was the political translation of these and other

cleavages which set the pattern for decades to come; 'the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s.'⁹ The patterns of political opposition achieved a degree of permanency because, at some point in the 1920s, a 'freezing of major party alternatives' occurred in the wake of the extension of the suffrage, and this freeze survived the political turmoil of the 1930s, the traumas of the Second World War and persisted for a further twenty years after 1945.¹⁰

One of the main reasons for the long persistence of these basic patterns of party competition is that, especially in Continental Europe, they represented the translation into politics of cleavage lines which, despite their early origins, had gained a new vitality and force through the spread of modern forms of mass organization. Over the period when the parties were coming into existence there was also a tendency for all major groups involved in electoral competition, and the Catholics and socialists of the Continent in particular, to develop dense organizational networks to cater for the needs and aspirations of their members in the economic, social and cultural fields as well as the political. These organizations became the institutional embodiment of, and support for, more or less distinct political subcultures which tended at the extreme to constitute almost complete, mutually exclusive subsocieties—segments of the national societies to which they belonged and which, at the limit, they collectively more or less constituted. In the confessionally mixed areas the mutual insulation was often spatial, as the boundaries between different areas of subcultural dominance continued to run along the geographical fault lines of the mid-seventeenth century. In response to the challenges of industrialization, urbanization and geographical mobility, however, these old distinctions were also reproduced in non-spatial, associative form through the development of the proliferating organizational networks. Of the Netherlands where this process of segmentation or *verzuiling* progressed furthest it could be said that by the 1920s the wider national society had for certain purposes almost ceased to exist as Catholic, Calvinist and secular subcultural organizations competed with each other to cater for almost every need of the segments into which the population was exhaustively divided.¹¹

The development of parties *pari passu* with this type of social and cultural segmentation was, like segmentation itself, much less pronounced in Scandinavia and the British Isles. Where it did occur at all, as in the case of the (non-sectarian) Labour or socialist camps,

Table 2.2 The religious factor in West European Politics, 1870–1920, by region

	<i>Religious factor dimensions</i>		
	Secular– religious [(XXX)]	Catholic– Protestant [(XX)]	Establishment– dissent [(X)]
Scandinavia			X
British Isles		XX	X
Continental Mixed	XXX	XX	X
Continental Catholic	XXX		

Note: The number of Xs indicates the relative weight or impact of the different dimensions, i.e., the degree to which they have tended to generate strong and long-lasting tensions in the political arena.

it was not reinforced by the mutual antagonism and rivalry with powerful religious constituencies evident in much of the rest of Western Europe; the impact of the religious factor, which gave such an impetus to segmentation on the Continent, had, as noted, declined greatly by 1920. The principal exception to this generalization in the period after 1920 has been in Northern Ireland, the one part of the British Isles where a confessional contrast continues to divide the community into mutually antagonistic subcultural groups and the mutual reinforcement of rival religious and ethnic identities lends a particular virulence to the conflict. Another, much less dramatic exception is to be found in Norway, where the Christian Peoples' Party emerged first in one region in 1933 and then at national level in 1945 to give new life to a native tradition of fundamentalist protest which ranges itself as much against the secularism and indifference of the right as of the left. In this case there was an exceptional combination of the existence among the revivalists of a remarkably strong network of organizations supporting a dissident religious subculture, an unusual degree of anti-religious sentiment on the left and a failure on the part of the right to attract the support of the revivalists.

Among the Protestants of continental Europe only the Dutch with their advanced form of segmentation produced significant religious parties but amongst the Catholic populations the exceptional cases were those which failed to foster important parties of religious inspiration before 1920; in the Benelux countries and in Germany,

Austria and Switzerland Catholic parties had already established themselves in national parliaments, and, in most cases, in government by 1920. Even in Italy, where the papacy had expressly forbidden full political involvement on the part of Catholics up to the time of the First World War, a Catholic party emerged in 1919 with over 20 per cent of the votes. The main exception, as already noted, was in France, where, even though the contest between clericals and anti-clericals had contributed much to the fissile material of politics throughout the nineteenth century, numerous attempts to found a Catholic party were frustrated as other unfinished business of the country's turbulent political history continued to divide Catholics into mutually hostile factions. Yet another attempt was made in the 1920s shortly after a similar experiment in Spain, where the same sort of obstacles also stood in the way of launching a major Catholic party; in both cases however the attempt again failed.¹²

Even though Europe's party systems might be said to have 'frozen' between the 1920s and the 1960s, the end of the Second World War did mark an important new departure for Europe's religious parties, particularly on the Continent (see Table 2.3). All of the predominantly Catholic parties with the exception of the Swiss underwent significant changes in or around 1945, either altering their name (and with it most often their rules and programmes) or, as in the case of Germany, France and Italy, actually being completely remodelled. The significance of these changes was that they signalled a shift from what might be called denominational or confessional politics to the politics of Christian democracy. This shift was signalled not least in the changes of name: whereas in the interwar period not one of the religious parties was known by the Christian democratic label (only one, the Austrian Christian Social party, even approximated to it), in the postwar period this nomenclature became almost universal among the predominantly Catholic parties. Ironically, the only important Catholic party which by 1980 was not known by either the Christian democratic or Christian social label was the Austrian party which in 1945 had adopted the label Austrian Peoples party (APP) in order to dissociate itself from the authoritarian traditions and dubious record of its predecessor. In or around 1945 the old parties of Belgium (CSP) and Luxembourg (CSP) and the new parties of Germany (CDU/CSU) and Italy (DC) adopted one or other of the two labels. In Switzerland, where non-involvement in the war meant that 1945 was not, as in most of the rest of Europe, a time for new beginnings, the (Catholic) Conservative Peoples party did not make a change of name until 1957,

when it became the Conservative Christian Social party, only to change it once again in 1971 to the Christian Democratic Peoples party (CDPP). Finally, even the Catholic Peoples party of the Netherlands followed the trend in 1976 when it joined with the two main Calvinist parties to form the new Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA). Of the Protestant religious parties more generally, only the small Swedish Christian Democrat party (CD) adopted a variant of the continental—and predominantly Catholic—label, the others preferring to retain their more distinctive original names: Christian Peoples party (Norway and Denmark), Christian League (Finland), Protestant Peoples party (Switzerland), Anti-Revolutionary party and Christian Historical Union (Netherlands until 1976).

The shift from denominational to Christian democratic politics involved much more than a re-christening however; it also entailed at least four other changes of importance. First, it involved an attempt to remove any ambiguity about the parties' commitment to liberal democracy in preference to more authoritarian forms of government or social organization such as, for example, those indicated by Pope Pius XI's endorsement of corporatist ideas in 1931. This new, or newly emphatic, commitment often took the form of statements to the effect that (liberal) democracy was the system of government most in agreement with the dictates of Christianity and that, accordingly, it should be supported against its enemies. Second, it involved ceasing to concentrate on attending to the *interests* of a Church or client religious community and directing attention instead toward promoting the *values* of Christianity as such (in so far as these were thought to have political relevance). Third, there was a change from reliance on the leadership (or even dictation) of clerical hierarchies to a reliance instead on independent, elective lay leaderships which could claim a legitimate independence of judgement in the political arena. And fourth, the shift meant broadening the parties' electoral appeal beyond the constituency of the faithful and openly attempting to attract the support of anyone, regardless of religious standing, who could be persuaded to support the parties' aims and policies. These were all important changes which did much to affect the form and content of postwar politics. It is none the less worthy of note that only the fourth change entailed any attempt to transcend the established cleavage lines inherited from the prewar era.

The religious parties were well placed to benefit from the particular circumstances of the immediate postwar period. Nazism had demonstrated with dramatic brutality that the extremism of a

political right which eschewed traditional Christian values was quite as destructive and barbarous as any threat from a secularist left. In many countries, furthermore, groups of religious activists had been able to demonstrate their attachment to both national and democratic values through involvement in wartime resistance movements and this demonstration of their bona fides lent a new credibility to their commitment to Christian democracy. In addition a revival of interest in religion as a focus for the reconstruction of normal life after the traumas of war gave the new and the rejuvenated religious parties a fair wind; their stress on Christian values, the rule of law and respect for the family were attractive to many on the centre-right who feared what the surge in support for the more left-wing parties might usher in. By hewing to a centrist line with often strongly reformist and occasionally anti-capitalist elements new-style Christian democrats were also able to appeal to moderate left-wing elements, particularly those with religious attachments.

For most of the religious parties the first twenty years after the war was for all these reasons a period of unparalleled electoral success; in Italy and Germany the Christian democrats soon achieved the status of dominant parties in this period, while in almost all the other continental democracies their counterparts maintained the position of largest or next-largest party often making themselves virtually indispensable in coalition governments.¹³ Even in France, where religious parties had always previously been bedeviled by a combination of secular-religious polarization between left and right and the fissiparousness of the right, it seemed that at last the right conditions for the launch of an important religious party had come into existence in the immediate postwar period. The Popular Republican Movement (MRP) was launched within months of the liberation by a group of Catholic militants with common experience in religious youth organizations and the resistance, and at its second election in June 1946 the party managed to take more votes than any other party. Unfortunately the favourable conditions of the immediate postwar months did not last long as Gaullism soon reemerged as the major movement of the right, severely undercutting the MRP's standing with the more traditional Catholics. Although it continued at a modest level of support throughout the IVth Republic and took a leading part in its many governments, the MRP faded after 1958, its constituent parts dissolving into the shifting political alliances of the centre while most traditional Catholics aligned themselves with the Gaullist right.

Table 2.3 Confessional religious and anti-religious parties of Western Europe

Country	Religious party	Founded (renamed)	Highest vote (1945–1985)	Other parties rated cohesive by religion, (Rose and Urwin, 1969) with highest vote (1945–1985)
SCANDINAVIA				
Denmark	Christian Peoples Party	1970	5.3 (1975)	SPP 11.3 (1981)*
Finland	Christian League	1958	4.8 (1979)	FDPU 23.2 (1958)*
Iceland	—			—
Norway	Christian Peoples Party	1933	12.4 (1977)	CP 11.9 (1945)
Sweden	Christian Democrats	1964	1.8 (1970)	CP 6.3 (1948)
BRITISH ISLES				
United Kingdom	—			—
England	—			—
Scotland	—			—
Wales	—			—
N. Ireland	—			UL 23% (1968)† UUL 54% (1968)†
Rep. of Ireland	—			—
CONTINENT:				
MIXED RELIGION				
Netherlands	[Anti-Revolutionary Party [Christian Historical Union [Catholic Peoples Party Christian Democratic Appeal Political Reformed Party	1879 1908 1926 [1945] 1976 1918	12.9 (1946)] 9.2 (1948)] 31.7 (1956)] 32.0 (1979) 2.4 (1952)	Lab P 33.8 (1977) Lib P 17.9 (1977)

Switzerland	Christian Democratic Peoples Party	1896 [1957-71]	23.4 (1963)	SD	27.0 (1955)*
	Protestant Peoples Party	1919	2.2 (1979)	RD	24.1 (1979)*
West Germany	Christian Democratic Union/ Christian Socialist Union	1945	50.2 (1957)	SPD	45.8 (1972)
				FDP	12.8 (1961)
CONTINENT:					
CATHOLIC					
Austria	Austrian People's Party	1891 [1945]	49.8 (1945)	SP	51.0 (1979)
Belgium	Christian Social Party	1884 [1945]	47.7 (1950)	Soc	37.3 (1954) Lib 21.6 (1965)
				CP	12.7 (1946)/ V 11.1 (1971)
France	Popular Republican Movement (MRP)	1945	28.1 (1946)	Gau	31.9 (1962)/SP 37.8 (1981)
				CP	28.6 (1946)/RSP 15.2 (1956)
				Con	II 15.3 (1956)
Italy	Social Democratic Centre Christian Democrats (DCI)	1966 [1976] 1945	ca.9.0 (1979) 48.5 (1948)	PCI	34.4 (1976)/PSI 20.7 (1946)
				MSI	8.7 (1972)/Rep 4.8 (1946)
Luxembourg	Christian-Social Party	1919 [1945]	42.4 (1954)	SP	41.4 (1951)/CP 15.5 (1968)*
Portugal	Centre Socialist Democratic Party	1975	16.7 (1976)	CP	19.5 (1979)*
Spain	+			CP	10.8 (1979)*

Notes: † Data from survey

* Attributions additional to those made in Rose and Urwin (1969). Those for Denmark and Finland are made on the basis of comparability with Norway and Sweden. Swiss cases are determined by secondary analysis of data in H.Kerr (1974), 'Switzerland: social cleavages and partisan conflict'. Sage *Professional Paper in Comparative Political Sociology*, 1,06,002.

+ There is a very small Christian democrat party in Spain (as there is also in Portugal) which takes less than 2 per cent of the vote. More importantly, up to one third of the deputies of the Union of the Democratic Centre (35.0 per cent in 1979) are reckoned to be Christian democrats of one sort or another.

Party names as given in and (except where familiar) abbreviations derived from T.T.Mackie, and R.Rose, (1984), *The International Almanac of Electoral History*, 2nd edn., (London: Macmillan.) Electoral data also from same source.

Among most of the Protestant populations of Western Europe religious parties continued to be either marginal, as in Switzerland, or completely absent, as in England, Scotland and Wales; religiously active people distributed themselves instead across the political spectrum according to their political as opposed to their religious predilections, which were generally regarded as irrelevant to the main concerns of politics. As exceptions to this general pattern, however, in the Netherlands the two main Calvinist parties managed to maintain a fairly stable level of support into the 1960s, at a level only slightly below that of the interwar period. The one Protestant country where the Christian democratic wind did blow in 1945 was Norway where the CPP managed to break through at national level, aided in large part by the same favourable conditions which prevailed elsewhere, not least the resistance experiences of a number of religious figures. The principal object of surprise in the Norwegian general election of 1945, the CPP was found to be more solidly based than most contemporary observers believed, as the party successfully established itself over the following years until by 1973 it had become the third largest party in the country.

Despite developments in Norway and the Netherlands, the contrast between the Protestant and Catholic parts of Europe remained remarkable. Nor was this a matter merely of there being more parties on the Continent with religious names or identities. As the last column of Table 2.3 indicates, after 1945 continental Europe also had a large number of ostensibly non-religious parties for which the religious factor was of very particular significance; these were the parties for which either confessional affiliation, religious behaviour or attitudes to religion provided a 'factor of cohesion' and, most often, an element of political self-identification. In the case of most of the parties listed the religious factor operated in reverse as it were, religion or the Church entering into party politics as a focus of enmity on the part of anti-clerical forces still prosecuting the struggles which had been to the fore in the nineteenth century. However archaic these struggles seemed, the evidence is clear that their impact on patterns of electoral choice made them of continuing significance in the postwar era.

The survival of the anti-clerical element in continental politics was encouraged by the fact that the attempt on the part of many Christian democrats to make a break with the clericalism of the past only succeeded in part. Indeed, Whyte refers to the whole period from 1920 to 1960 as the peak period of what he calls closed Catholicism,

when Catholic parties co-existed with Catholic social organizations (such as trade unions, farmers' organizations, etc.), all under strong clerical guidance—not least at election times.¹⁴ He argues that the postwar attempt of the Catholic parties to begin again on a more open and less confessional basis was foiled in part by countervailing forces which actually made for a revival of closed Catholicism. In addition to the factors which helped to boost the prospects of all religious parties, such as the eclipse of former right-wing parties, the further extension of women's suffrage and the onset of the Cold War, Whyte points to other circumstances which helped to reinforce the earlier habits of confessional or denominational politics: the distinctiveness of Catholic social doctrine, the continuing strength of the organizations of Catholic Action, the re-emergence of the schools issue in a number of countries and 'the renewed willingness of some national hierarchies to give strong guidance to their flocks'.¹⁵ The conclusion is that despite the virtual disappearance of the clerical deputy from the parliamentary scene,

[on] the whole, it seems true that, at least in Germany, Italy and the Low Countries, electoral intervention by the Catholic hierarchies was more continuous and intensive in the period 1945–60 than in any previous period of equivalent length.¹⁶

The anti-clericalism of those on the left against whom these interventions were generally directed might be seen then as more than just a hangover from earlier times; it represented an understandable response against the continuation of what was seen by many, including many Christian democrats, as unwarranted clerical 'interference' in politics.

One of the secrets of Christian democracy's success in the twenty years after 1945 was a degree of ideological diffuseness which made the political content of its programmes and policies difficult targets for anti-clericals to aim at. Its claim to stand for Christian principles, democracy, economic liberalism and social progress (and *against* communism) failed to distinguish it in substantive terms from any but the most extreme political alternatives, while helping it to retain the support of socially heterogeneous electorates which had supported the prewar religious parties. The radical strains which were in evidence in the immediate postwar period were soon drowned out as Christian democratic participation in government confronted party leaders with the difficulty—and the electoral unpopularity—of actually implementing radical changes. Most of the

parties continued none the less to accommodate groups and tendencies of diverse political tempers and in some cases this was done by tolerating the proliferation of more or less organized factions. Thus in Italy factions named after various prominent party figures differed not only in terms of how progressive or conservative they were but also in terms of ideas about how the party should relate to the Church; intergralists argued for a close reliance on the hierarchy and a stress on the party's specifically Catholic orientation while autonomists, who tended to predominate in the leadership, argued that the party should keep the Church at arm's length and present itself as 'the party of Catholics but not a party of Catholics pure and simple'.¹⁷ Although there were costs and dangers in ideological diffuseness, it was turned to good electoral effect as the parties made a virtue of being non-doctrinaire and spread their appeal to the most diverse sections of the electorate; in so doing they pioneered the winning formula later copied by others of the ideologically open and socially diverse 'catch-all party'.¹⁸

After the golden years of 1945 to 1965, the late 1960s and early 1970s were a period of relative decline for continental Christian democracy, however, as a number of factors combined to undermine their electoral standing amidst a general thaw of party systems and voter alignments. First, there was the significant drop in levels of Church membership and orthodox religious practice which occurred during the 1960s. One recent author concluded that:

From about 1967 the Churches were in a state of crisis in most parts of Western Europe. There was a general decline in church attendance; many churches lost members.... Even in Britain, where the churches were already relatively weak, the years 1965–70 saw a larger percentage decline in membership than any previous period this century; in many Catholic countries—the decline in the religious indices in the later 1960s and early 1970s was more spectacular, and the effects of these years far more traumatic.¹⁹

Second, the unsettling effects of the Second Vatican Council with its encouragement of a new pluralism within the Church and a new openness to the world, embracing not just other Christians but non-believers also, tended to undermine the cohesiveness of the Catholic bloc which most Christian democratic parties, for all their commitment to openness, had regularly relied on. Third, the Christian democrats' principal political rivals on the left, having discovered the electoral attractiveness of a non-doctrinaire approach,

tended to abandon their anti-clerical rhetoric along with other Marxist baggage and this had the effect of shifting them towards the centre of the political spectrum where they were able to attract the support of Christian democracy's more reformist elements.

The result of these combined tendencies was that 'during the sixties and early seventies Catholic parties and social organizations were becoming less powerful or less confessional or both', in other words 'closed Catholicism' was, finally, entering a steep decline.²⁰ Several parties, for example, in the Benelux countries experienced a large loss of votes, while in France the MRP finally expired as an independent political force. Other parties, for example those in Germany and Austria, fared better 'but only by dint of diminishing their confessional character'.²¹ The most spectacular collapse of a religious party occurred in the Netherlands, however, where, as noted earlier, the apparatus of confessional segmentalism had long lent impressive support to a complete range of confessional parties. There the Catholic Peoples party's vote fell from 31.9 per cent in 1963 to 17.7 per cent in 1972 as the proportion of all Catholics supporting it fell from 85 per cent to 38 per cent.²² The Protestant CHU and ARP were also in decline at the time (although the latter had lost most support in the first decade after the war) and in 1976 they agreed to pool their resources with the Catholic party in order to present a common, Christian democratic front to the electorate. Finally, four years later the three parties actually abandoned their separate identities and formed the new Christian Democratic Appeal.

Curiously it was also during the decade from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s that in Scandinavia, where previously a religious party had established itself only in Norway, new religious parties appeared on the political scene. Sweden's Christian democrats fought their first national election in 1964, two years before Finland's Christian League and seven years before Denmark's Christian Peoples party did the same thing. As Table 2.3 indicates none of these new formations became major parties, unlike their established counterpart in Norway. All of these signs of new life were none the less symptomatic of important changes occurring along the traditional borderline which, particularly in the Lutheran cultures, is expected to insulate the worlds of politics and religion from each other. The reason why these signs of new life should appear in Scandinavia just as the religious parties of other areas of Europe were encountering one sort of crisis or another is to be found

in the changed balance in the salience of Church-state issues on the one hand and politics-of-morals issues on the other. The importance of the former during the formative period of the modern party systems had helped to facilitate, and in Scandinavia to frustrate, the emergence of religious parties. In most of continental Europe, Church-state conflicts, particularly over religion in the schools, had tended to bind members of a particular religious tradition together in defence of Church interests, but in Scandinavia, where the religious activists were divided into a range of different voluntary associations and denominations, such questions had tended to be a source of division. In the 1960s, however, when the frozen patterns of the party systems started to thaw, the classic Church-state questions were hardly anywhere prominent on the political agenda; instead, almost everywhere significant politics-of-morals issues, relating for example to drugs, pornography or abortion were at least periodically to the fore and here the large religious constituencies of the Continent tended to be torn internally, while the small constituencies of religious activists in Scandinavia found themselves united in the face of advanced programmes of liberalizing reform.²³

Since the early 1970s continental Christian democracy has enjoyed something of a revival in its fortunes although this has tended to be in spite of, rather than because of, changes occurring within the religious sphere. In Irving's opinion the revival instead owes something to changes in the economic climate which began in the mid-1970s and put a premium on prudent housekeeping, and also to different party managers' efforts at reforming and strengthening their political machines. 'These factors', he adds, 'have helped to compensate for the erosion of the traditional Catholic, rural and female electorate, which for long formed the basis of Christian Democratic strength and stability'.²⁴ In Italy two referenda on politics-of-morals issues, on divorce in 1974 and on abortion in 1981, pointed up both the unwillingness of religious parties to run the errands of the Church and the unreliability of Catholic voters' support for the Church's restrictive stands on such issues. As Furlong commented in 1982, it remains an open question what influence groups with a strong commitment to promoting the Church's stands on such issues could have 'in a DC increasingly dominated by preoccupations of governmental stability and clientelist distribution of public resources, in which religious issues merely add one variable to the complexities of coalition formation with lay parties'.²⁵ His own conclusion was that the Christian Democratic Party had effectively become a conservative

party 'whose Catholic inspiration is scarcely visible either in its policy output or in its electoral programmes and only marginally in the speeches and writings of its leaders'.²⁶

Whether or not Christian democracy generally should be regarded as a political tradition which does little more than add a religious aura or sanction to political conservatism has been much debated. While Fogarty in the 1950s argued that it could only be true to its sources of inspiration (could only really *be* Christian democracy) if it pursued policies of radical change and reform, most commentators have assigned it to the centre of the political spectrum, if only to distinguish it from other traditions such as that of the continental liberals which on central economic questions have often been more to the neo-liberal right. There are those, however, who follow Furlong and conclude that, while Christian democrats might well repudiate the conservative label, 'in terms of their political principles and policies, the nature of their political support and their political position *vis-à-vis* other major European political parties, they can be identified as conservatives of the pragmatic and reformist tradition'.²⁷ Such debates have in large measure revolved around alternative views about the meaning of the term conservative (particularly on the Continent) or the precise reference of left-centre-right labels. It can be argued, however, that in the last quarter of the twentieth century the principal challenge to the Christian democratic tradition is not to place itself advantageously so as to catch any political winds blowing from or towards left, centre or right, but to avoid capsize in the newly-choppy and turbulent waters of electoral volatility. In this respect the example of Germany is of particular interest because of the common view that Christian democracy there is overwhelmingly conservative in its emphasis.

GERMANY

The relationship between religion and politics in Germany is of particular interest for a number of reasons. First, as the western part of the country where the Reformation began, it is the only part of Europe where all three of the major confessions of the continent have been continuously represented ever since: Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists have all had areas of local dominance in what was until the nineteenth century a veritable patchwork of small states. For Germany, in fact, the principal significance of the 1648 settlement, apart from the fact that it marked the end of the devastating Thirty

Years War, was that it extended to Calvinists the application of the Augsburg rule which had up to then applied only to Catholics and Lutherans in the Holy Roman Empire. This basic confessional diversity was furthermore increased rather than decreased in the early nineteenth century when the (originally Calvinist) Hohenzollern monarchy forced through an ecclesiastical union of Lutherans and Calvinists in its territories. Nor did the cross-confessional phenomenon of revivalism do anything to simplify the picture; rather, it added a degree of internal diversity to the existing confessional communities which articulated new tensions between liberal elitist and more orthodox, popular religious traditions. In summary then, not only does the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) belong to the group of mixed religion countries, it is historically perhaps the most mixed of them all.²⁸

Second, the territory of the FRG also spans large areas of both very high and very low levels of religiosity. When Thomas Luckmann argued that ‘church-oriented religion has become a marginal phenomenon in modern society’ he did so on the basis of studies undertaken largely in certain Protestant areas of West Germany which ‘have long been among the most secularized in the Christian world’.²⁹ Other parts of the Federal Republic, on the other hand, such as Bavaria or parts of the Rhineland, belong to that extended area which Fogarty identified as Europe’s religious heartland where levels of orthodox religious observance have historically been very high.³⁰

Third, as has already been noted, Germany is also the country where the political potential of the religious factor was first realized and transposed into the forms of modern party politics: the Zentrum was in some ways as much a model of party organization for Europe’s Catholics as was the SPD for Europe’s socialists. In a number of respects they both resembled each other, not least by developing rival organization networks on segmental lines to the point where they almost became states within the state. This tendency both to innovate and to ape one another has finally been carried into the politics of the FRG as the CDU and the SPD have jointly pioneered the techniques and the ideological agnosticism of ‘catch-all party politics’ on the Continent.³¹

By the first decade of the twentieth century the disadvantages of cultural and political segmentalism were already appreciated by some Catholic leaders; in 1906 one of them argued in a famous pamphlet that it was necessary for Germany’s Catholics to leave the

fortified tower or ghetto which they had built for themselves if they were to maximize their influence (*Wir müssen aus dem Turm heraus*) but this suggestion was not successfully acted on until after the Second World War. The Centre party (Zentrum) had not in fact started as an expression of ‘political Catholicism’—in its very first years it had even attracted the support of a small group of Protestants around Ludwig von Gerlach—but the onset of the *Kulturkampf* in the early 1870s had soon reduced it to a *de facto* confessional party.³² In 1874 it managed to mobilize the support of almost the entire Catholic electorate of the Reich in defence of Church interests against Bismarck’s campaign, a feat probably never equalled by any other confessional party in Europe.

Within the majority Protestant community there were few attempts to emulate the Centre party and launch a specifically religious party. Prussian conservatism paid tribute to Stahl’s defence of divine right monarchy against democracy and continued to attract the support of many orthodox believers well into the Weimar period, while more liberal Protestants (adherents of what is known as *Kulturprotestantismus*) cast their votes for various centrist parties. In the 1890s, however, the Conservative party effectively opted to become an agrarian interest party rather than a Christian conservative party.³³ The great majority of Protestants who belonged to the established Churches did not of course suffer from disadvantages by virtue of their religion, unlike the Catholics in the 1870s, and accordingly little incentive existed for the creation of a confessional Protestant party. In addition, Lutherans in particular were historically committed to the view that religion and politics were two separate spheres which should not be allowed to impinge on, or interfere with, each other.³⁴ There were none the less some exceptions which proved the rule of the Protestants’ confessional nullity in politics. Thus, for example, in 1878 Adolf Stocker founded a Christian Social Workers party which was to survive in one form or another for approximately thirty years and during Weimar a small Christian Service party also flourished. Both of these parties can be seen as responses on the part of Protestant religious activists to the challenges of militant secularism, represented from the 1870s by the SPD and after 1917 by the Communist party as well. All of these parties and their related organizations were suppressed during the Third Reich so that 1945 involved an almost completely new beginning.

At the collapse of the Third Reich and the end of the Second World War the country was faced with the need for massive reconstruction.

So far as the Churches were concerned not the least of the challenges was the need to come to terms with the recent Nazi past, the war guilt attributed to the whole nation by the Potsdam Agreement and the even deeper sense of collective guilt provoked by the final disclosure of the Nazi regime's most barbarous atrocities. The revulsion against Nazism had created a vacuum which the Churches were well-placed to fill; there was a general desire to return to traditional standards such as the rule of law and personal and political freedom. Furthermore, as the only sources of public authority to survive the Nazi collapse, the Churches were generally entrusted by the occupation authorities with a wide range of civil functions. Since they were also the only important organizations to span the four occupation zones they tended for the same reasons to take on the role of the sole legitimate voice for the whole German nation.

In 1945 one of the lessons of the recent past was how much Christians of different confessions actually had in common with each other. The incipient division of the country between east and west was considerably altering the confessional balance between Catholics and Protestants; whereas the former had previously been in a clear minority position, they now moved towards near parity within West Germany. As elsewhere in Europe the experience of common suffering and struggle had also helped to create a new basis for co-operation across earlier, traditional boundaries. In particular among the Protestants, who had previously provided much of the support for right-wing nationalist parties, there was a significant number who had discovered a commonality of Christian values with the Catholics from whom they had earlier been politically separated. Disabused by recent experience of the Lutheran tradition of obedience to authority and political quiescence, those who had supported the Confessing Church, in particular, during the Nazi period, looked for a way of building support for an active politics of Christian inspiration. Meanwhile many Catholics were determined to resist rebuilding the Zentrum's political tower or ghetto which in the past had not only repelled non-Catholics but had also during the Weimar Republic progressively failed to attract the support even of practising Catholics. Had there still been issues which divided Catholic from Protestant on Church interest grounds there might have been some real incentive to revive the confessional division in politics but these issues were soon settled. The Basic Law of 1949 returned to the separation of Church and state and the guarantees of religious freedom, which had obtained under Weimar, while at the

same time allowing the continuation of generous systems of financial support through the levying of Church taxes by the general tax authorities.

The organizational origins of the CDU are to be found as early as mid-June 1945 in the formation of groups in Berlin and Cologne. The individuals who came together were of the most diverse religious and political backgrounds having before 1933 been supporters of not only the Centre party but also the conservative DNVP (Deutsche-Nationale Volkspartei) and the liberal DDP (Deutsche Demokratische Partei) and DVP (Deutsche Volkspartei). They included Christian socialists (Dirks), Catholic trade unionists (Kaiser, Arnold), conservative Protestants of the nationalist tradition (Dibelius, Schlange-Schoeningen), conservative Catholics (Adenauer) and leaders of the Confessing Church (Heinemann). As a French commentator remarked rather dismissively in 1946, 'this party is socialist and radical in Berlin, clerical and conservative in Cologne, capitalist and reactionary in Hamburg, and counter-revolutionary and particularistic in Munich.'³⁵ It was with this diversity in mind that the party eventually adopted the title of Christian Democratic (in Bavaria, Social) Union, thereby making a virtue out of its necessity to appeal to, and to unite, a broad spectrum of opinion.

In the years 1947 to 1949 the new party's individual identity began to emerge; it was then that crucial developments occurred and decisions were taken affecting where it would stand on the left-right spectrum, what weight confessional considerations would carry and what sort of organizational form it would take. As chairman of the first CDU organization in the British zone, where *Land* parties had been licensed a year earlier than elsewhere, the conservative Catholic Konrad Adenauer was from the beginning at the centre of events, playing a key role in fixing the party's image and character. Not the least significant of his achievements was the dilution of some of the ideological commitments made by some of the party's founders, thereby ensuring that it remained pluralistic, non-doctrinaire and pragmatic.

In the early months Christian socialist ideas had been much to the fore; even though in 1931 the Pope had virtually declared Christian socialism to be a contradiction in terms, the exigencies of the immediate postwar situation made a commitment to planning, nationalization and 'economic justice' attractive in West Germany as much as elsewhere in Europe at the time. Accordingly the regional Berlin, Cologne, Bad Godesberg and Frankfurt programmes of 1945

were distinctly leftist in slant. With the ideas, as well as the parties, of the right generally discredited, the Ahlen programme as late as 1947 also incorporated sharp criticisms of capitalism, which was presented as being not only intrinsically corrupt but also in large measure responsible for Hitler's rise to power. Two years later, however, Adenauer was able to preside over what turned out to be a decisive shift to a much more conservative economic philosophy, when the Düsseldorf programme, on which the party fought its first general election in 1949, committed it to building a 'social market economy', a blend of free enterprise and social provision based on insurance principles. It was this new economic policy, favoured by the Protestant economist and economics minister, Ludwig Erhard, which, together with the boost delivered by Marshall Aid, laid the foundation for the country's 'economic miracle' and helped to underwrite the CDU/CSU's electoral success. Within a few years of its foundation the CDU, under Adenauer's leadership, had changed from being a left-leaning reformist party to being a party of the centre-right whose conservatism in economic policy was only augmented by its successful absorption of potential right-wing rivals. By the 1960s indeed it had in one view become 'the party of all those who were suspicious of "socialism" and "collectivism" in the broadest senses of these words'.³⁶

One of the features which distinguished the CDU/CSU from all other Christian democratic parties in Western Europe at the time of its foundation was of course its genuinely cross-confessional basis. Although it has throughout its history received considerably greater support from Catholics than from Protestants, the party has always retained an important Protestant element, and to reflect this the distribution of leadership positions over the party's first two decades was so arranged as to include an equal number of Catholics and Protestants. Indeed, confessional differences were also taken into account in the formation of the coalition cabinets; the CDU/CSU's allocation of ministerial posts was balanced in such a way that there was parity between the two confessions within the government as a whole, once the affiliation of ministers from all parties had been taken into account. From the mid-1960s this principle of confessional parity has been eroded, with Catholics enjoying a numerical preponderance on the executive and in the parliamentary group. The trend is explained more by a decreased sensitivity to confessional backgrounds in the 1960s than by any metamorphosis towards a Catholic party of the old, prewar type. The pragmatic cast

of the party was beyond doubt by the 1960s, encapsulated as it was in the 'double compromise' which had underlain its successes in government and at the polls: the compromise between Protestantism and Catholicism, which resolved into little more than a vague emphasis on Christian principles, and the compromise between capital and labour, middle and working classes which was enshrined in the commitment to the 'social market economy'.

As the dominant party of government from 1949 to 1969 the CDU/CSU was influenced greatly by the character of its leadership, headed for most of this time by Adenauer. It was in its first years a remarkably loose-jointed organization; having grown from its base in the various zones and *Länder*, the CDU only actually became a fully federal party at its first national congress in 1950 and even then the federalist leanings of many of the *Land* associations stood in the way of setting up a powerful national secretariat of the type desired by Adenauer. Paradoxically, however, the weakness of the party in the country only served to strengthen the standing of Adenauer's leadership. Indeed by the early 1960s the CDU was seen by many commentators as little more than a *Kanzlerwählerverein*, an association for the election of the chancellor, the main purpose of which seemed to be to contest elections on behalf of its leadership and then wait in the wings for another four years as Adenauer exercised to the limit his constitutional right to lead and direct national policy according to his own lights.³⁷

The electoral basis for the Christian Democrats' success was the combination of support from a relatively solid Catholic constituency, inherited from the days of the Centre, with the support of conservative Protestants whose attachment tended to be more a matter of pragmatic choice on the basis of the party's policy than of confessional loyalty or other religious motivations. Left-leaning Protestants, whose religious ties were often little more than nominal, at first provided the main electoral support for the CDU/CSU's main rival, the SPD, but after the 1959 Bad Godesberg conference decision to abandon anti-clericalism that party moved to attract religious people of either confession who might support its aims, whatever their grounds for so doing. In the early 1960s the ferment of change within the Catholic Church had the effect, of making the choice of left-wing alternatives by Catholics more legitimate, thereby undermining the unity and cohesion of German Catholicism which the more conservative members hierarchy, such as Cardinal Frings of Cologne, had long been at pains to preserve. The pastoral

letters issued at election times tended to become less politically pointed; whereas in the 1950s stress was usually laid upon assessing the Christian credentials of particular candidates and parties when choosing between them, by the early 1970s the pastoral injunction tended instead to be simply in favour of voting and thereby performing one's citizen duty. As if to confirm the basis for this stand, in 1971 the Catholic bishops' conference announced that as a general principle the Church should refrain from speaking out on issues where there was no clear biblical guidance. This progressive withdrawal from the habit of broadcasting its own political judgements and wishes on the one hand and the effect of the internal controversies unleashed by, for example, Pope Paul VI's encyclical on birth control in 1967 on the other, severely undermined the cohesiveness of German Catholicism when it was already being weakened by declining church attendance and an increase in mixed marriages. In 1969 the consequences of all these changes became evident when a marginal decline of the CDU/CSU vote and a new increment in support for the SPD at the general election of that year led to the latter taking over from the former the role of principal party of government; after twenty years with the CDU/CSU as the senior partner in an unbroken succession of cabinets, the SPD took over the same role for the years 1969 to 1982.

The defeat of 1969 was a severe blow for the Christian Democrats. Many saw it as another mark of the general trend towards cultural and political secularization which seemed to be underway almost everywhere in Western Europe; parties such as the CDU/CSU which had traditionally relied (if only in part) on the political loyalty of religious groups were bound to suffer when those groups became either smaller or less cohesive. Nor had the West German party made any serious attempt to resist the general trend, seemingly preferring to join it instead; during the 1960s, despite the pleas and warnings of the Catholic hierarchy, it had presided over a steep reduction in the number of single-confession public schools and had even gone along with a liberalization of laws relating to homosexuality, blasphemy and adultery.³⁸ The party was from the start only partially reliant on a relatively solid Catholic vote however; it is interesting to note that the CDU/CSU was the only 'religious' party which Rose and Urwin, using West German data from 1967, did not rate as cohesive in terms of religion—its attachment to 'catch-all' politics was thus clearly reflected in the make-up of its electoral support.³⁹ As a broad, pragmatic party of the

centre-right it was however well-placed to benefit when the tide of opinion turned back in favour of more conservative policies and attitudes in the mid-1970s. Among the factors which helped to turn the tide were the international economic crises associated with the oil-price increases of 1973 and 1979 and the resurgence of political violence and terrorism, not least on West German soil.

The overall 'swing to the right' which helped West Germany's Christian Democrats and was evident in much of northern Europe was not the only, or even the most striking, political trend which occurred in the wake of these developments however; there was also the emergence, particularly among the country's 'post-materialist' youth, of a wide range of campaigning groups and organizations devoted to the promotion of 'new politics' issues such as nuclear disarmament, women's rights, environmental pollution and concern for the plight of the Third World. Many of these groups included significant numbers of religious (mainly Protestant) activists, whose vocal presence tended to accelerate the 'political decomposition' of the religious constituencies, but the response of the general population to the new activism with its tactics of direct action and attention-grabbing initiatives was actually to become more conservative.⁴⁰ As the principal political vehicle of conservative values (secular as well as religious) the Christian Democrats were thus able to benefit doubly from the political turbulence of the 1970s and 1980s despite the continuing trend of cultural secularization. Greatly strengthened also by a reform of the party's organization, the CDU/CSU was finally returned to government in 1982 by courtesy of the FDP, which chose to switch coalition partners, and a year later the Christian Democrats achieved their second-highest ever electoral level of support.

As this account implies, the resurgence of the Christian Democrats owed most to factors unrelated to developments in the religious sphere; it was certainly not a consequence of some latter-day revival of religion. On the other hand it was not hindered by the fact that left-liberal proposals for reform in areas of particular sensitivity to the Churches and the more religious sections of the population also called forth a widespread conservative reaction. In 1972 the SPD-FDP coalition's proposal to liberalize the abortion law aroused predictably strong opposition among both Catholics and orthodox Protestants and inaugurated a long cycle of campaigning and public agitation on the issue. As if to add more fuel to such fires of religion-related controversy the FDP in 1974 published a series of theses and

proposals under the title 'Free Churches in a Free State'. Amongst the proposals canvassed were the abolition of the Church tax in favour of an entirely voluntary system of membership dues, the removal of public subsidies and fiscal privileges and the introduction of a rule that public education should be religiously neutral. Upholders of traditional Catholic teaching were also further provoked by the liberalization of the divorce laws in 1977 and in the 1980 election there was a sign that the Catholic hierarchy was about to return to its old ways when a pastoral letter deplored not only the decline of moral standards but also the high level of the federal government's borrowing. This highly controversial lapse into old habits of direct political 'interference' seems to have been an aberration, however, and the 1980s saw markedly less controversy than the previous decade so far as the more directly religion-related issues were concerned. One reason for this was that by the time they decided to enter a coalition with the Christian Democrats in 1982 the FDP had dropped their commitment to reform Church-state relations (although it was clear that they would not agree to a repeal of the liberal reform of abortion and divorce legislation). One recent analyst argues that regardless of surface appearances which might imply its decline or decay the religious dimension has continued since 1949 and continues still to provide a significant factor underpinning the relative stability of voting patterns in Germany, at least on the right.⁴¹

CONCLUSION

The impact of the religious factor in the politics of Western Europe is often seen as an anachronistic survival from a pre-modern era. In so far as it has operated as a source of social cleavage and political differentiation, instead of a source of undisputed social and political authority, it has, however, failed to provide the social glue or cement which Durkheim and others regarded as its prime social function in traditional societies. It is true that the origin of the broad confessional differences which have resonated in the politics of several nations is to be found in the early-modern—and certainly the pre-industrial—era, although the other sources of religious-political cleavage between clerical and anti-clerical or religious and anti-religious (or religiously indifferent) population groups are at least in part products of the industrial age. And as has been seen these cleavages continue to be reflected in the patterns of mass politics of some countries (not least in Germany).

At the level of party systems and voter alignments the role of religion has been particularly prominent in much of Western Europe. For the first twenty years after the war cleavages between sections of the several populations identified by criteria of religious affiliation, attitude or behaviour continued to be reflected in the patterning of party support and, consequently, in the character of the parties themselves. This connection between religious differences and the choice of political alternatives at elections, having been established during the formative period of the party systems, survived into the 1960s largely through the operation of the inertial forces which survived the traumas of the Second World War. Even parties such as the CDU/CSU, which emerged for the first time after the war, have been seen to reflect the continuing impact of older religious cleavages as inherited electoral loyalties to earlier confessional parties were transferred to the new. In the British Isles and Scandinavia on the other hand the impact of the religious factor on voter alignments in this period was of political importance at national level only in the exceptional cases of Northern Ireland and parts of Norway, the class factor otherwise being overwhelmingly dominant. People who attached importance to religious matters in these societies tended to distribute their votes between parties either without reference to religious considerations or according to differing views as to the implications for political action of their religious concerns. Those who adopted this approach exemplified what Fogarty in the 1950s identified as the Anglo-Saxon type of Christian democracy in contrast to the continental type which was characterized by voters opting, along with others of the same religious stripe, for parties identified with distinct religious traditions.⁴²

Since the 1960s politics in Western Europe has been characterized by unwonted levels of electoral volatility and old political loyalties have tended to be eroded. Two main types of explanation have been offered for the sea change which has occurred; it either marks a transitional process of *realignment* from the relatively stable conditions which existed when competing class and religious cleavages patterned the vote, to some future stable state when other cleavages may have established themselves, or it signals a loss of function for parties as such, a *dealignment* of voters and parties, as other types of organization such as public bureaucracies, the electronic media or pressure groups perform tasks previously undertaken by political parties.⁴³ If either of these explanations are borne out Christian democracy is likely to face a crisis along with all of Europe's other

established party-political traditions. This does not mean that the impact of religion on politics would necessarily diminish further, although a continuing decline in the political cohesiveness of religious groups would mean that, even if there were to be no further decline in the actual size of those groups, their impact is likely to be more diffused. It is quite possible, however, that on one measure at least, the impact of religion could in fact increase as 'political Christians' engage themselves for and against the 'new politics' of peace, environmental, development and other issues. There are already signs of such diversity as was discussed in the last section.

It is also possible, however, that the thinkers of the Enlightenment were partly right and that as the part of the world where western Christianity, liberal democracy, the modern nation-state and industrial capitalism first took recognizable form (before they were exported to, or imposed upon, other parts of the world), Western Europe is now also pioneering entry into a post-religious age. If this turns out to be so, the post-Christian era in Europe itself will, in all probability, not so much see the disappearance of Christianity as its return instead to the socially and politically marginal position it occupied before Constantine elevated it into the official religion of the Roman Empire one-and-a-half millenia ago.⁴⁴ From this position Christians of different stripes will doubtless continue to make a distinctive contribution to the political life of societies to which they belong—all the more distinctive perhaps because of their marginality and almost certainly with more of an impact than their even more marginal forerunners before Constantine were either willing or able to achieve. In doing so, however, they are likely to find themselves as only one among a number of different minority constituencies attempting to make their voice heard; the triumphalist days when the Christian Church could claim the allegiance and obedience of men of power as well as their subjects are surely gone forever.

In Western Europe at least, religion's contribution to political life seems already to have changed from that of being a straitjacket, which for a long time constrained political movement, to that of being a coat-of-many-colours, which might yet add to the liveliness of political debate and the diversity of its sources of inspiration.

NOTES

- 1 See S.M.Lipset and S.Rokkan (1967), 'Cleavage structures, party systems and voter alignments', in S.M.Lipset and S.Rokkan (eds) *Party Systems, and Voter Alignments*, New York: Free Press.

- 2 See R.Rose and D.Urwin (1969), 'Social cohesion, political parties and strains in regimes', *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 12, emphasis added.
- 3 See A.Lijphart (1971), *Class Voting and Religious Voting in European Democracies*, Glasgow: University of Strathclyde Occasional Papers, see also R.Rose (ed.) (1974), *Electoral Behaviour: A Comparative Handbook*, London: Collier-Macmillan; D.Martin (1978), *A General Theory of Secularization*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell and J.H.Whyte (1981), *Catholics in Western Democracies*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- 4 See Martin, op.cit., p.6.
- 5 See J-M.Mauryeur (1980), *Des Partis catholiques à la Démocratie chrétienne XIXe-XXe siècles*, Paris: Armand Colin, pp.23-4.
- 6 See J.H.Whyte, 'Ireland: Politics without social bases', in Rose, op.cit., pp.619-51.
- 7 See K.Wald (1983), *Crosses on the Ballot: Patterns of British Voter Alignment Since 1885*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 8 See Whyte (1981), *Catholics in Western Democracies*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, p.63.
- 9 Lipset and Rokkan, op.cit., p.50.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 See A.Lijphart (1968), *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Accommodation in the Netherlands*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 12 On France, see R.E.M.Irving (1973), *Christian Democracy in France*, London: George Allen & Unwin and on Spain see S.G.Payne (1984), *Spanish Catholicism: An Historical Overview*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- 13 See R.E.M.Irving (1979), *The Christian Democratic Parties of Western Europe*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs and George Allen & Unwin. For a more recent overview see J.T.S.Madeley (1986), 'Prophets, priests and the polity: European Christian democracy in developmental perspective', in J.Hadden and A.Shupe (eds), *Prophetic Religions and Politics: Religion and the Political Order*, New York: Paragon House, Ch. 18.
- 14 Whyte, op.cit., Ch. 4.
- 15 *ibid.*, p.88.
- 16 *ibid.*, p.91.
- 17 Irving, op.cit., p.77.
- 18 See O.Kirchheimer (1971), 'The waning of opposition in parliamentary regimes', in R.Rose and M.Dogan (eds), *European Politics: A Reader*, London: Macmillan.
- 19 H.McLeod (1981), *Religion and the People of Western Europe*, Oxford: University Press, pp.134-5.
- 20 See Whyte, op.cit., p. 111.
- 21 *ibid.*, p. 100.
- 22 See H.Bakvis (1981), *Catholic Power in the Netherlands*, Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, p.2.
- 23 See J.T.S.Madeley (1977), 'Scandinavian Christian democracy: throw-back or portent?', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp.267-86.

- 24 Irving op.cit., p.xxi.
- 25 P.Furlong (1982), 'The Italian Christian democrats: From Catholic movement to conservative party', *Hull Papers in Politics*, no. 25, Hull: University of Hull Department of Politics, p.40.
- 26 *ibid.*
- 27 See Z.Layton-Henry (ed.) (1982), *Conservative Politics in Western Europe*, New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 17.
- 28 See F.Spotts (1973), *The Churches and Politics in Germany*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, p.291.
- 29 See McLeod, op.cit., p.137.
- 30 See M.P.Fogarty (1957), *Christian Democracy in Western Europe 1820–1953*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp.7–9.
- 31 See O.Kirchheimer, op.cit., pp.280–96.
- 32 See K.Buchheim (1953), *Geschichte der Christlichen Parteien in Deutschland*, Munich: Kösel Verlag.
- 33 *ibid.*, p.281.
- 34 See E.Troeltsch (1931), *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. by O.Wyon, London: George Allen & Unwin.
- 35 G.Pridham (1977), *Christian Democracy in West Germany*, London: Croom Helm, p.23.
- 36 Irving op.cit., p. 121.
- 37 See A.J.Heidenheimer (1960), *Adenauer and the CDU: The Rise of the Leader and the Integration of the Party*, The Hague: Nijhoff.
- 38 See Spotts, op.cit.
- 39 See Rose and Urwin, op.cit., p.59.
- 40 See K.L.Baker, R.J.Dalton and K.Hildebrandt (1981), *Germany Transformed: Political Culture and the New Politics*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 295.
- 41 See F.Pappi (1984), 'The West German party system', *West European Politics*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 7–26.
- 42 See Fogarty, op.cit., p. 10.
- 43 See R.Dalton, S.Flanagan and P.Beck (eds) (1984), *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 44 See A.D.Gilbert (1980), *The Making of Post-Christian Britain*, London: Longman.