

Summary

For the most part of the 20th century there existed in the Netherlands three large political parties with a Christian orientation. They were: (1) a Catholic party, known during its final decades as the *Catholic People's Party* ('Katholieke Volkspartij', KVP), and two parties with a Reformed (= Calvinist Protestant) orientation, namely: (2) the *Anti-Revolutionary Party* ('Anti-Revolutionaire Partij', ARP) and (3) the *Christian Historical Union* ('Christelijk-Historische Unie', CHU). After having existed side by side for many decades, these three parties finally merged in 1980 to form a single new party: the *Christian Democratic Appeal* ('Christen Democratisch Appel', CDA). This merger is usually regarded as a direct consequence of the heavy electoral defeats suffered by the three parties around 1970. The present study wishes to emphasize instead another element of importance at the time for the rallying of the Christian parties: the ideological convergence which was taking place among the three parties in the 1950s and 1960s, thus paving the way for their eventual fusion.

In pursuit of this purpose, Part One (of two) of this book, made up of Chapters I-IV and entitled 'Status and Function of Christian Ideologies', treats the ideological developments within the Christian parties during the period from 1880 to 1970, with special emphasis being paid to the changes taking place in the 1950s and 1960s. The concluding Part Two, entitled 'The Formation of the CDA' and consisting of Chapters V-VII, deals with the relationships between the three parties from their respective beginnings up to the 1980 merger.

Part One: Status and Function of Christian Ideologies

In chapter I, 'Catholic Ideology and Party Formation (1870-1940)', the genesis of the Dutch Catholic party is outlined against the background of the social strategy developed by the Catholic Church in response to impulses from Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) during the final quarter of the 19th century. According to this strategy, Catholic believers in every single country were duty-bound to strive for maximum influence of Catholic political doctrine there. In the eyes of the Dutch Catholics the formation of a political party of

their own was the best way to comply with this duty.

Chapter I furthermore stresses that the Dutch Catholic party, once formed, claimed for its ideology a transcendental status and a universal function. A *transcendental status* because the ideology was based on the natural law as deriving ultimately from God; according to the neo-Thomism propagated by Leo XIII, man was in principle able to know this law rationally – yet in practice only with support from divine revelation. And a *universal function* because this ideology furnished the blueprint for ‘a society as willed by God’.

In chapter II, ‘From Neo-Thomism to Christian Democracy (1945-1970)’, it is explained that the Catholic party in the first years after the Second World War held fast to its neo-Thomistic character. In the course of the 1950s, however, more and more intellectuals began to have doubts as to the transcendental status and the universal function of the Catholic ideology. In the course of the 1960s the KVP formally abandoned its traditional ideology. Henceforth it presented itself as a Christian-inspired political party with a Christian (rather than Catholic) outlook on politics. Rather than being ascribed a transcendental status, this outlook was presented as a political concretization of Christian ideas. In addition, no universal function was ascribed to it, and the ideal of a Christian world-order was abandoned.

These developments made the KVP lose its original *raison d'être* – its special ideology – and develop into a party of the Christian Democratic variety such as had come into being in Western Europe after 1945.

In chapter III, ‘Anti-Revolutionary Ideology and Party Formation (1870-1940)’, the genesis of the ARP is described. The character of this party had been strongly determined by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), who had thought it possible, through application of the ‘basic Reformed principles’ (*Gereformeerde beginselen*, a key concept in Kuyper’s neo-Calvinism), to pin down God’s commandments in an objective fashion and express them in terms of a political ideology. The ARP was viewed by Kuyper as the best way to secure a maximum of influence for the antirevolutionary ideology in the Netherlands.

On the basis of this neo-Calvinism, the antirevolutionary ideology was ascribed – as Catholic political doctrine had been – a transcendental status and a universal function. For all Orthodox Protestants, therefore, support of the ARP was a duty imposed on them by their faith.

The emergence of the other large Protestant party in the Netherlands, the CHU, can largely be explained from the dissatisfaction of certain Protestants (like A.F. de Savornin Lohman, 1837-1924) with the neo-Calvinist character of the ARP. Accordingly the CHU, when it was eventually founded

in 1908, did not base itself on a fully worked-out ideology as the Anti-Revolutionary and Catholic parties had done.

Chapter IV, 'From Neo-Calvinism to Confusion (1945-1967)', deals with the developments occurring in the postwar period inside the ARP concerning the status and the function of the Anti-Revolutionary ideology. Here, too, after the first postwar decade had seen the beginning of a restoration, the foundations under the traditional ideology crumbled away in the course of the 1950s and 1960s. By approximately 1960 the leaders of the ARP had abandoned the idea of having an ideology with a transcendental status and a universal function at their disposal. Unlike the KVP, however, the ARP found itself unable in the 1960s to arrive at a clear-cut alternative for its traditional ideology. Thus, three currents formed themselves within the party: a) a traditional current which wished to leave things – all things – as they were, b) a moderate Christian Democratic current, and c) a dedicated, ultra-social current (the later 'evangelical-radicals'). Since the ideas of these three currents were mutually irreconcilable, the ARP entered the final phase of its existence in a strongly divided state.

Part Two: The Formation of the CDA

In the first chapter of Part II, chapter V, 'Barriers (1880-1956)', it is made clear that up to the mid-1950s the great mutual differences of an ideological nature among the Christian parties ruled out any form of organizational cooperation among them. Even a more intimate collaboration between the two Protestant parties turned out to be impossible because of the ARP's unwavering commitment, and the CHU's objections, to neo-Calvinism.

In chapter VI, 'The Ascent of the Christian Democratic Quest for Unity (1956-1967)', it is shown that around 1960 the KVP was already striving for the formation, in the long run, of an interdenominational Christian Democratic party in the Netherlands. Yet it manifested only little activity in this direction, as the Protestant parties had not yet progressed to that stage. It was only in the course of the 1960s that the two Protestant parties came closer to one another. This process was stimulated by the ideological developments taking place within the ARP. However, the internal division developing inside the ARP caused the talks between the ARP and the CHU to be radically broken off in 1965. Shortly afterwards the idea of a united Protestant party became outdated, as a great many Anti-Revolutionaries and CHU adherents were won over to the ideal of a Christian Democratic party for both Protestants and Catholics.

In chapter VII, 'The Realization of the CDA (1967-1980)', the sluggish formation of the CDA is treated. It took all of 13 years for the old parties to be dissolved. This was mainly caused by lack of agreement on the course to

be taken by the new party. The central question was: will the CDA be a moderate, middle-of-the-road party or will it be given a progressive character? While KVP and CHU already at an early stage opted for the first alternative, the ARP leadership refused for a long time to make a choice. Yet the definite choice the ARP leadership made in the summer of 1971 in favor of a merger with the two other parties amounted in fact to an option for a middle-of-the-road party. A progressive residual group within the ARP was able for a long time to delay the merger process, but never to endanger it. Therefore it is possible to speak of a slow, but uninterrupted growth toward the CDA.

In the concluding considerations, it is stressed once more that the genesis of the CDA cannot be understood without including the ideological factor in one's considerations. The abandonment of the 19th-century ideologies formed an indispensable prerequisite for the merger of the parties. However, the loss of (transcendental) status and (universal) function of the Christian ideologies did more than merely cause a barrier to disappear: it also formed an internal stimulus for arriving at Christian Democratic cooperation.