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Europe and the Christian Democracy Movement: A Once and Future Hope?

by

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This essay is adapted from a lecture presented to the Witherspoon Fellowship of the Family Research Council, Washington, D.C., July 20, 2005. It appears here with permission. The author has served as Distinguished Fellow in Family Policy at the Family Research Council and is president of the Howard Center, in Illinois. He is the author of Fractured Generations: Crafting a Family Policy for Twenty-First Century America and The Swedish Experiment in Family Politics: The Myrdals and the Interwar Population Crisis.

In August, 1992, during his address to the GOP National Convention, then presidential candidate Pat Buchanan delighted his supporters and appalled progressive Republicans when he stated:

My friends, this election is about much more than who gets what. It is about who we are... There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself.¹

The term “culture war,” so often heard in our political discourse today, popularly dates from this speech. Yet the phrase’s true origin actually reaches back over a century and across the Atlantic. During the 1870s, the then-new German Empire launched a broad assault on religious liberty and family autonomy, a campaign called *kulturkampf* (translated, “culture war”). Perhaps the most important, if unintended, result of this original “culture war” was to encourage a still amorphous political movement, called Christian Democracy, in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. This experiment in applying Christian principles to popular modern governance developed its own history of triumph and tragedy; and it offers lessons for Americans also trying – now in the 21st Century – to apply Christianity to modern democratic politics.

A Legacy of the French Revolution

It is said that the 20th Century Chinese Communist leader Zhou En-Lai (1898-1976), when asked what the impact of the 1789 French Revolution had been on human affairs, replied: "It's too soon to tell."

Actually, it is unclear to whom and just when Zhou said this. One source says it was to the Archduke Otto van Hapsburg in 1948; another source says to Richard Nixon in 1972; another to England's Tony Benn in 1975; and still another to a French journalist in 1989. The latter could be called miraculous, for Zhou had been dead for thirteen years by then. Perhaps Zhou, living and dead, has simply prattled this observation out to every Westerner that he has met.

All the same, his answer rings true. The revolutionaries of 1789 unleashed passions and ideas that continue their work into our time. Many of them directly target religious and family relations, including the leveling idea of equality, the divorce revolution, secular liberalism, sexual freedom, state-centered education, and communism. The French Revolution also defined our modern political vocabulary: the labels "liberal," "radical," "socialist," and even "conservative" all derive from that time of ferment (for example, it was books by Edmund Burke and Louis deBonald written in reaction to the French Revolution that first defined modern conservatism).

So, too, for Christian Democracy which also rose as a somewhat delayed response to events in France. As a prominent early Christian Democrat explained, 1789 marked "the birth year of modern life," which he also described as "the catastrophe of 1789."² Indeed, one of the most successful Christian Democratic parties would take the strange name, The Anti-Revolutionary Party, in the late 1870s, and would retain it until just two decades ago.

The Christian Democratic Platform

Authentic Christian Democracy, I hasten to add, has not been simply another name for "conservatism." Unlike European conservatives, the Democratic Christian goal has not been to defend the remnants of the old feudal order, nor existing class structures, nor persons of wealth. Nor has Christian Democracy simply been the "rural" or "country" party, defending the interests of small farmers while ignoring the urban, industrial order.

Instead, the movement should be seen as a distinctly Christian response to modernity, one with its own platform. To begin with, Christian Democrats have understood the French Revolution as unleashing an "appalling anti-Christian world power which, if Christ did not break it, would rip this whole world forever out of the hands of its God and away

from its own destiny.” According to these partisans, the secularism spawned by the French Revolution produced a “system of modern and almost incomprehensibly diabolical paganism.” The movement has also held that “it would be utterly absurd for a person to take...a confession of Christ on [his or her] lips and ignore the consequences that flow directly from it for our national politics.”³

Moreover, Christian Democracy has formally opposed economic materialism, in both its socialist and liberal capitalist manifestations. In this view, Europe’s early 20th-Century disorders arose from the “exaggerated liberal-capitalistic economic order” of the prior century. As the Christian Democratic writer Maria Meyer-Sevenich explained:

...they [Marxism and fascism] are nothing but powerful reactionary movements, grown out of the native soil [*Mutterboden*] of the same liberal-capitalist thinking.⁴

Speaking in 1946, Josef Andre offered a Christian Democratic interpretation of the meaning of the Nazi defeat in World War II:

The materialistic view of history is now at an end. What Hegel, Darwin, Haeckel, Nietzsche and Karl Marx strove for, each from his own field of expertise, has been historically overtaken and destroyed with the National Socialist *Zeitgeist*.⁵

Christian Democracy has provided instead, a spirit-centered, Christ-centered world view that would build distinctive political and economic orders.

Notably, Christian Democracy has stood for organic society. The legacy of the French Revolution in both politics and economics was a quest for uniformity, which meant the suppression of diversity, the denial of “everything fresh and natural.” Christian Democrats have held that the spontaneous structures of human life – villages, towns, neighborhoods, labor associations, and (above all) families – need protection from the leveling tendencies of modernity. Only through these organic structures, they have maintained, can the human personality thrive. As the French philosopher Etienne Gilson explained:

From his birth to his death, each man is involved in a multiplicity of natural social structures outside of which he could neither live nor achieve his full development... Each of these groups possesses a specific organic unity; first of all, there is the family, the child’s natural place of growth.⁶

Christian Democrats have insisted that such groups pre-exist the state. That is, the law does not create families and towns; it “finds them.” Accordingly, Christian Democrats have favored tax benefits and state allowances to support

marriage and the birth and rearing of children as recognition of this prior existence of families.

As analyst Guido Dierickx explains, Christian Democrats have also viewed the family as holding both instrumental and intrinsic value. On the one hand, the family is the vehicle for the regeneration of all society:

The Christian Democrats view the (core) family as a privileged opportunity to implement their social... principles. They want the citizens to adapt their private lives to demanding interpersonal relationships. Family life, especially the traditional family life of a married couple with several children, is a first embodiment of such relationships in other sectors of society.⁷

On the other hand, Christian Democrats also have used public policy to re-functionalize, and so strengthen, families. When they:

...would like to entrust more health care and other social service duties to the family, they do so not just to alleviate the burden of the state bureaucracy or of the Ministry of Finance, or to improve the quality of the service rendered to the aged, the young and the sick (though this too is a major consideration), but first and foremost because they hope to strengthen the family. [They believe that] the contemporary family is weakened by the loss of social functionality.⁸

Similarly, Christian Democrats have sought to funnel additional modern governmental services through other “organic” structures as well, notably “non profit” and religious agencies. For example, in the nations of Germany and the Netherlands, where Christian Democratic influence has been decisive, state sectors now allocate nearly 70 percent of gross domestic product. However, only 10 percent of this has been controlled by the central government. Instead non-profit agencies – particularly those with religious ties – have provided the largest share of program implementation.⁹

Two Paths to Christian Democracy

In its purest form, Christian Democracy has also aimed at Christian political unity. The Enlightenment of the 18th Century, which spawned the ideological side of the French Revolution, had itself emerged largely in revulsion over the religious wars of the prior, or 17th century. In that intolerant, bloody era, Catholics and Protestants battled against each other. Millions died in this Christian civil war. The modern Christian Democracy movement has consciously worked to transcend theological differences between Catholic and Protestant by focusing on the common enemy – the

“appalling anti-Christian world power” – and by building a common social-political program. All the same, there were distinctive Roman Catholic and Protestant paths to this end.

The Catholic effort had to overcome the view that the Church of Rome, from the fall of Napoleon in 1815 through the revolutions of 1848, was reactionary, favoring the oppression of the people, opposing their democratic aspirations, and ignoring the new problems posed by industrial society.¹⁰ It was in the German states that the revolutionary year 1848 saw creation of “The Catholic Federation of Germany.” Designed to protect Catholic rights in any future German union, this “Catholic club” became the “Fraction of the Center” in 1858, and eventually The Center Party. While open in theory to non-Catholics, the Center Party focused first and foremost on defending Catholic authority, rights, and church schools.

However, the young Bishop of Mainz, Wilhelm Emmanuel, Baron von Ketteler, began to shape a more interesting and ecumenical social Catholicism. During the Catholic Congress of 1848, he offered a toast to “the plain people” of Germany and declared that “as religion has need of freedom, so does freedom have need of religion”: in that time and place, these were unexpected, radical statements. During the 1860s, Bishop Ketteler turned to the “social question.” He denounced the development of what he called “capitalist absolutism,” called for the creation of Christian labor associations to protect workers, and urged political reforms that would increase wages, shorten the working day, and prohibit the labor of children and mothers in factories.¹¹

In 1871, following German victory in the Franco-Prussian War, the German Empire took form. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck immediately launched his *Kulturkampf*. At one level, this “culture war” aimed at reducing the influence of the Catholic Church in a predominantly Protestant empire. The Jesuit religious order, for example, was banned. At another level, however, all Christians faced new restrictions. An 1871 law banned all clergymen from discussing political issues from the pulpit. Other laws gave the German state more control over the education of all clergy, created a special secular court for legal cases involving clerics, and required state notification of all clerical employment. In 1875, the Empire required that all marriages be civil – not church – ceremonies. In response, Catholic political action through the Center Party accelerated. This “Culture War” lasted until 1878, when Bismarck decided that the greater internal threat to the German Empire came from the socialists.

The “social Catholicism” of Bishop Ketteler and the foray into electoral politics represented by Germany’s Center Party came together in Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical, *The New Age (Rerum Novarum)*. This remarkable document testified to Roman Catholicism’s willingness to meet the promise and problems of industrialization with an affirmative Christian alternative

both to the laissez-faire of classical liberalism and to socialism. Arguing that “the present age handed over the workers, each alone and defenseless, to the inhumanity of employers and the unbridled greed of competitors,” Leo rejected the wage theory of liberalism that considered that wage just which resulted from a free contract between employer and worker. Leo repudiated socialism with even greater fervor, terming it “highly unjust” because it injured workers, violated the rights of lawful owners, perverted the functions of the state, and threw governments “into utter confusion.”

Instead, Leo turned to “the natural and primeval right of marriage” and to the family – “the society of the household” – as the proper foundation for social and economic theory. The right of ownership, for example, while bestowed on individuals by nature, was necessarily “assigned to man in his capacity as head of a family.” Similarly, Leo declared it “a most sacred law of nature that the father of a family see that his offspring are provided with all the necessities of life...” In the natural order, he continued, it was not right “to demand of woman or a child what a strong adult man is capable of doing or would be willing to do.” Women, he affirmed were “intended by nature for the work of the home...the education of children and the well-being of the family.” Consequently, Leo concluded, the principle underlying all employer-worker contracts must be that the wage be at least “sufficiently large to enable [the worker] to provide comfortably for himself, his wife, and his children...”¹² This was the goal of the “family wage.”

Christian Democracy from the Catholic side is, in fact, best understood as *Rerum Novarum* put into action. Indeed, in 1901, Leo issued another encyclical, *Graves de Communi Re*, which openly embraced the “Christian Democracy” label. Contrasting this movement with the principles of Democratic Socialism, Leo stated:

...Christian Democracy, by the fact that it is Christian, is built, and necessarily so, on the basic principles of divine faith, and it must provide better conditions for the masses, with the ulterior object of promoting the perfection of souls made for things eternal. Hence, for Christian Democracy, justice is sacred; it must maintain that the right of acquiring and possessing property cannot be impugned, and it must safeguard the various distinctions and degrees which are indispensable in every well-ordered commonwealth.¹³

In 1906, Germany’s Center Party launched a great debate on its future. Julius Bachem’s article, “We Must Get Out of the Tower” (“*Wir müssen aus dem Turm heraus*”), argued that the Party should cease being strictly “Catholic” and should increase its Protestant membership as the only way to break out of perpetual minority status. Action toward this end, however, was deferred.

Abraham Kuyper

The Protestant strain of Christian Democracy is strongly associated with the Dutch pastor, editor, and politician Abraham Kuyper. The Netherlands, it is important to remember here, was – almost uniquely – a nation born out of religious sentiment. For 80 years (1566-1648), the Dutch Calvinists had fought the Catholic Hapsburgs for religious – and ultimately political – freedom. The Kingdom of the Netherlands was, most assuredly, a nation with the soul of a church (and a Protestant one at that).

The armies of the French Revolution, however, swept over the Netherlands, unleashing there the “anti-Christian world power.” The necessary task became the rebuilding of a Christian nation. In 1879, Kuyper transformed a confessional Calvinist political movement into the Anti-Revolutionary Party. He saw the French Revolution as marking:

...the emergence of a spirit that stole into the historical life of nations and fundamentally set their hearts against Christ as the God-anointed King... In place of the worship of the most high God came, courtesy of Humanism, the worship of Man. Human destiny was shifted from heaven to earth. The Scriptures were unraveled and the Word of God shamefully repudiated in order to play hostage to the majesty of Reason.¹⁴

Kuyper also raised his banner against the intrusion of the industrial principle into local, organic communities. Although writing in 1869, he could have had Wal-Mart in mind when he said: “The power of capital, in ever more enormous accumulations, drains away the life blood from our retail trade. A single gigantic wholesaler swallows up the patronage that formerly enabled any number of stores to flourish.”¹⁵ What he called “the iron steam engine” even endangered the family:

No longer should each baby drink warm milk from the breast of its own mother; we should have some tepid mixture prepared for all babies collectively. No longer should each child have a place to play at home by its mother; all should go to a common nursery school.¹⁶

All the same, Kuyper emphasized that there was no going backwards. Rather, those who believed in Christ must embrace democracy, the spirit of which would only grow. They must “position themselves courageously in the breach of this nation” and “prepare for a Christian-democratic development of our national government.”¹⁷

Kuyper also held that this movement must proceed in cooperation with Holland's Roman Catholic minority, politically organized as The Catholic Party. As he told fellow members of the Anti-Revolutionary Party:

...whereas all the parties of the Revolution ignore, if not ridicule, the Second Coming of our Lord, our Roman Catholic countrymen confess with us: "Whence he will come again to judge the living and the dead"... They, like we, acknowledge that all authority and power on earth flows from God and is rooted in the reality of creation... They say as do you that this God has sent his only Son into the world and as a reward for his cross has placed on his head the Mediator's crown. And they testify with you that this divinely anointed King now sits at the right hand of God, [and] controls the destiny of peoples and States...

All the same, Kuyper opposed a merger of the two Christian parties, calling such a move "a betrayal of our history and our principles."¹⁸

Crisis and Renewal

These cautious steps toward practical cooperation were as far as Christian Democracy went prior to the mid-20th Century. In the Netherlands, the Anti-Revolutionary Party dominated national politics from 1897 until the Nazi conquest of the land in 1940. In Germany, the Center Party participated in a number of coalition governments and – following World War I – helped to craft the Weimar Republic. However, the Party was unable to weather the economic upheavals of the early 1930s nor to prevent Adolph Hitler and his National Socialist Party from rising to power. Following a tumultuous three years, Hitler abolished the Center Party in July 1933. Similarly, a Christian Democratic movement in Italy, called the Popular Party and organized in 1919 by the priest Don Luigi Stutzo, was declared illegal in 1925 by the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini.

However, in the crucible of World War II, Christian Democracy found renewal and a new language. Here, I would like to focus on the example of France.

A key figure was Emmanuel Mounier. Writing in the Catholic idea-journal, *Espirit*, Mounier worked out a "Christianized" version of individualism, called "personalism." This approach saw every human person as unique, a "free agent" with "inherent" moral qualities and with rights rooted in a natural law. This vision placed strong emphasis on the importance of developing all dimensions of the human personality: "social as well as individual and spiritual as well as material." Mounier emphasized that the full flowering of the individual would come only

through social bodies such as family, local community, and labor association. He called for creation of a revolutionary Christian party, one "hard," one worthy of Christ, one "radical" in its social-economic vision.¹⁹

In 1943, a young Catholic philosophy student and disciple of Mounier, Gilbert Dru, drew up a Manifesto for postwar Christian Democratic work. He emphasized the transforming quality of true Christian action: the whole person must become engaged, not just as a cog in a party machine, but as a militant working to build a new France on radical Christian principles. A year later, Dru paid for this Manifesto with his life, being shot by the German Gestapo in Lyons.²⁰

The further elaboration of Christian Democratic doctrine came primarily from two journalist-philosophers, Etienne Gilson and Etienne Borne, both writing for the journal, *Aube*. They rejected the atomistic individualism of the 19th Century "bourgeoisie" which, they said, had exhibited a "narrow," self-centered outlook and had shown "an indifference toward basic institutions such as the family." These writers also scorned the Socialists and Communists for their "materialism" and their hostility toward revealed religion. Indeed, bourgeois liberalism and communism could be seen as "two facets of a single error." The task now facing Western Civilization was to find a middle way between bourgeois liberalism and collectivism.²¹

A second plank in the new Christian Democratic platform was that, while the movement and party would be openly Christian, it would be neither clerical nor strictly Catholic. Following the anti-religious darkness of the Nazi conquest of Europe, this movement would instead forcefully seek to unite Catholic and Protestant believers and sympathetic others – Jews and agnostics – in a defense of Christendom as a civilization with religiously infused values.²²

Christian Democracy also sought to deliver both freedom and justice. As Etienne Borne explained:

Freedom without justice is artificial, deceptive and hypocritical; it can be used to justify the mechanism of the free market and the servitude of the proletariat; such freedom is, in fact, the antithesis of freedom. Likewise, justice without freedom leads to tyranny and to the totalitarianism of Soviet communism or Fascist corporatism.²³

To accomplish these tasks – this is, to reconcile individualism with community and to deliver both justice and liberty – the French Christian Democrats gave priority to the defense of natural social groups. As Borne put it: "A people is not really a people and certainly does not live in freedom unless the natural social groups which compose it accept each

other, and unless the state recognizes their differences and ensures that their interests are represented.”²⁴ This would be true democratic pluralism.

Notably, these new Christian Democrats also renounced the patriarchal, paternalistic family system of old Europe. The father-dominated family could not be reconciled with “personalism,” they said. Post-war Christian Democrats held that women should enjoy equal civil, legal, and political rights. At the same time, restoration of the family did mean: that control of education should be returned to parents; that motherhood and childhood should enjoy special protection by the state; and that heads-of-households should receive a “family wage,” so that mothers might be empowered to remain home with their children.²⁵

Human Rights also became a defining Christian Democratic concern, but with a special twist. Where secular views of the French experience relied on an evolutionary understanding of rights, the new movement emphasized the rooting of human rights in the Creation itself in the Natural Law. Such rights were “inviolable” and “innate” because their fountainhead was God Himself. Bearing a healthy suspicion of the state, Christian Democrats embraced Human Rights in order to protect “the natural rights of each individual” and of “natural social groups” from the overweening power of government.²⁶

Out of this genuine intellectual ferment, Christian Democracy took political form as the *Mouvement Republicain Populaire* (or MRP), which became part of the French governing coalition of 1946.²⁷ In the Netherlands, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, in alliance with the Catholic Party, reclaimed governing power the same year. Christian Democratic parties then won important elections in formerly fascist Italy (1948) and West Germany (1949).²⁸

Large Effects

The effect was large. Christian Democracy created the spiritual and political conditions that made possible rapid European economic renewal. It also laid the foundations for the building of welfare states that were broadly supportive of families organized on the male breadwinner, female homemaker, childrich model. This Christian Democratic moment had two other important results. First, the dream of European Union was largely born among the postwar generation of Christian Democratic leaders, notably Robert Schumann of France, Conrad Adenauer of West Germany, and Alcide de Gaspari of Italy. The early treaties creating the European Coal and Steel Community (Paris, 1952) and the European Economic Community (Rome, 1957) focused ostensibly on economic questions. However, their animating spirit came from a dream to revive Christendom;

indeed, to build a democratic version of the old Holy Roman Empire on the ruins of a continent recently ravaged by war.

The other enduring legacy of post-war Christian Democracy was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. The key architects of this document were: Charles Malik, an Arab Christian Democrat from Lebanon, who served in 1948 both as secretary of the Commission on Human Rights and as president of the U.N.'s Economic and Social Council; and Rene Cassin, a French specialist in international law who, while himself Jewish, was highly sympathetic toward postwar Christian Democracy.²⁹ As one historian has phrased it, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is "largely identical" with the worldview expressed in Christian Democracy.³⁰

Specifically, we find in Article 16(3) the affirmation of "natural" social institutions:

The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.

The word "natural" comes straight out of the Christian Democratic lexicon. Even the use of the word "society" here as distinct from and prior to "the state" is a Christian Democratic marker.

In Article 25, one finds support for family social rights, with particular emphasis on a "family wage":

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including, food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control..

Other provisions declare that men and women have "the right to marry and found a family" [Article 16(1)] and that "motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance" [Article 25(2)]. The Universal Declaration also affirms parental rights: "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children" [Article 26(3)].

Even the term "equality," subject before and later to so much mischief, finds rich meaning in the Universal Declaration through "personalist" conceptions of "the right to life" (Article 3), "the dignity and worth of the human person" (Preamble), and "endowed" human nature:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood (Article 1).

Indeed, the only core Christian Democratic theme not present is an open affirmation of the Deity of Creation. Several members of the drafting committee, led by Charles Malik, sought inclusion of this idea. But in the end, they agreed to more universal language that implied, rather than named, God.³¹

“Silent Revolution”

Yet, as early as the 1950s, Christian Democracy as a vital worldview entered another period of crisis. The youthful excitement, energy, and sense of positive Christian revolution evident in the 1940s dissipated. In France, Christian Democracy’s main political vehicle, the MRP, lost support to General Charles de Gaulle’s new party, the RPI (*Ressemllement du Peuple Francois*) and by 1958 had disappeared altogether. In Italy and West Germany, meanwhile, Christian Democratic parties consolidated their hold on power at the price of their vision. By the early 1960s, they were increasingly pragmatic and bureaucratic, self-satisfied defenders of the status quo. Ambitious office seekers, rather than Christian idealists, came to dominate the party. Movements for “moral and political renewal” became simply mass parties of the right-of-center.³² When a new “crisis of values” hit Europe with particular force in the late 1960s, the Christian Democrats were unprepared to respond. They appeared by then as old and discredited guardians of a new kind of materialism, the very opposite of what the movement’s visionaries intended.³³

Indeed, it is now clear that a “silent revolution” in values set in among Europeans after 1963. It can be seen in the shift away from values affirmed by Christian teaching (such as “responsibility, sacrifice, altruism, and sanctity of long-term commitments”) and toward a strong “secular individualism” focused on the desires of the self.³⁴ Family life became a casualty. Surveys of European youth in the 1970s and 1980s showed that they “appear to be extending non-conformism with respect to abortion, divorce, etc., to parenthood as well,” agreeing by large majorities with statements such as “children need only one parent” and “children are no longer needed for personal fulfillment.”

In explaining this value change, another commentator has pointed to the swift legalization of abortion and to “the falling awareness” among Europeans “of the dignity of every person, even the old and disabled.” He added: “...naked individualism and unbridled libertinism have become increasingly widespread in recent years... Female emancipation, which is well advanced,... appears to be headed in this direction,” as well. Meanwhile, the courts and public opinion grew tolerant of sexual deviance.³⁵ Understood in terms of worldview, such changes symbolized the new triumph of an old foe – “the anti-Christian world power” originally unleashed in 1789 – over Christian Democracy.

New Hope from the East?

All the same, the 1990s marked another resurgence of Christian Democracy, albeit in unexpected places. For instance, a Swedish election in 1991 brought the Christian Democratic Social Party into Sweden's Parliament for the first time, where it joined the governing coalition. Over the next three years, the party successfully pushed for the teaching of Christian values in the state schools and for a new social benefit to go to stay-at-home parents.

More dramatically, Christian Democratic parties emerged in all of the East European nations freed from Communism in 1989-90. In Poland, to choose one example, the Solidarity Electoral Action bloc came to power in 1997, with a campaign manifesto declaring:

We can build a modern, just, and self-sustaining sovereign state; a state founded on patriotic and Christian values, on love and freedom. These values have formed our core identity for a thousand years.

In Rumania, the National Peasants' Christian Democratic Party won that nation's November 1996 election. Christian Democratic parties have also been part of ruling coalitions in Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Latvia.³⁶

Family issues loom large in these nations and on Christian Democratic agendas. The legacy of Communism combined with the arrival of Western-styled social libertarianism to produce a devastating effect on East European family structures. Since 1990, divorce rates have soared; marriage rates have fallen sharply; birth rates have plummeted. Indeed, in 2005, the list of the ten nations with the world's lowest total fertility rates includes Latvia (1.26), Poland (1.24), Slovenia (1.24), the Czech Republic (1.20), and Lithuania (1.19). In response, Christian Democratic parliamentarians from six "new member states of the European Union" – namely the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia – met last year and issued their "Family First Declaration." They formally endorsed the March 2004 "Mexico City Declaration" of The World Congress of Families, and they pledged:

We will coordinate our efforts on behalf of the traditional family, marriage and the intrinsic value of each human life so that the future Europe is not associated any longer with the culture of death, institutionalized egoism and population decline, but with the preservation of religious, ethical and cultural values that enhance virtuous life in all relevant aspects. Healthy family life enhances true and ordered liberty and limits the power of the state.

This document also endorsed other principles central to the Christian Democratic worldview:

- “Procreation is the key to the survival of the human race.”
- “Parents possess the primary authority and responsibility to direct the upbringing and education of their children.”
- “Good government protects and supports the family and does not usurp the vital roles it plays in society.”
- “Sexuality exists for the expression of love between husband and wife and for the procreation of children in the covenant of marriage.”

If Eastern Europe – indeed, if Europe as a whole has any viable future, it lies along these Christian Democratic lines.

Lessons

There has never been a serious Christian Democratic Party in America. This seems due, in part, to the mechanics of our single-district electoral structure, which strongly favor a two-party system with each party in turn serving as an ad hoc coalition of interest groups. Christian Democratic parties – with their more coherent worldview – thrive best in places that use proportional representation.

Also, Americans have had a more complex or, one might say, more confused relationship with the legacy of the French Revolution. Back during the 1790s, Americans were more likely to sympathize with the Revolution’s repudiation of royal and feudal power and its appeals to democracy than to worry about the suppression of the Catholic Church. In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson cut a sweet deal with Napoleon for the purchase of the Louisiana Territory. And in 1812, the United States found itself again at war with France’s chief enemy, the British Empire: and the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Relatively few Americans have shared, say, Abraham Kuyper’s nightmarish view of “the catastrophe of 1789.”

Still, Europe’s experiment in Christian Democracy offers several broad lessons for all Christians engaged in modern politics:

First, the movement has had the most success when it has held true to the “full” Gospel, particularly to Christ’s radical command that

we love our neighbors as ourselves. Issues of social welfare and social justice lie near the heart of true Christian Democracy.

Second, this movement successfully pioneered ways to funnel public health, education, and welfare programs through churches and church-related agencies, models that should be of interest to a nation now experimenting with faith-based initiatives.

Third, Christian Democracy has, at its best, carved out a “third way” of social-economic policy, independent of both the liberal-capitalist and socialist mindsets, by being respectful toward family life and the health of local communities.

And fourth, this movement succeeded only so long as it found animation in authentic Christian faith and enthusiasm. When those diminished, so did the coherence and effectiveness of Christian Democracy, and of the modern European nations as whole.

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11. "Wilhelm Emmanuel, Baron von Ketteler," at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08629c.htm> (7/11/2005): 1-5.
12. Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*; in *Two Basic Social Encyclicals* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1943): 5-11, 15, 55-59.
13. Leo XIII, *Graves De Communi Re* (18 January 1901); at: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/encyc/113grcom.htm> (6/24/2005): 2.
14. Kuyper, "Maranatha," p. 212.
15. Kuyper, "Uniformity," p. 32.
16. Ibid.
17. Kuyper, "Maranatha," p. 222.
18. Ibid., pp. 218-219.
19. See: Einaudi and Goguel, *Christian Democracy in Italy and France*, pp. 81-82; and R.E.M. Irving, *The Christian Democratic Parties of Western Europe* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979): 30-31.
20. R.E.M. Irving, *Christian Democracy in France* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973): 53-54, 58.
21. Irving, *The Christian Democratic Parties of Europe*, p. 31; and Einaudi and Goguel, *Christian Democracy in Italy and France*, pp. 30-31.
22. Noel D. Cary, *The Path to Christian Democracy: German Catholics and the Party System from Windhorst to Adenauer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996): 180; and Einaudi and Goguel, *Christian Democracy in France and Italy*, pp. 28-30, 84.
23. Quoted in Irving, *Christian Democracy in France*, p. 55.
24. Ibid., p. 60.
25. Ibid., pp. 61-62.

26. See: Emiel Lamberts, ed., *Christian Democracy in the European Union, 1945/1995* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1997); 440.
27. For a special focus on the German story, see: Cary, *The Path to Christian Democracy*.
28. The movement also sprang up in Latin America with Christian Democracy particularly strong in Chile. In 1964, Eduardo Frei came to power there with a solid Christian Democratic majority and launched an ambitious program of economic and social reform focused on family and small property.
- 29 On their respective roles, see: Allan Carlson, "The Family is the Natural... Unit of Society: Evidence From the Social Sciences." Paper presented to the European Regional Dialogue for The Doha International Conference for the Family, Geneva, Switzerland, August 23-25, 2004.
- 30 Lamberts, *Christian Democracy in the European Union*, p.142.
31. See: Rene Cassin, "Historique de la Declaration Universelle de 1948," in *La Pensée et Action* (Paris:F. Lalou, 1972): 108, 115.
32. Lamberts, *Christian Democracy in the European Union*, pp.143-144.
33. Although occurring later, the Italian Christian Democratic Party – beset by scandals and in-fighting – disbanded in 1994.
34. See: Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton,NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); 216; and Ron Lesthaeghe, "A Century of Demographic and Cultural Change in Western Europe," *Population and Development Review* 9 (Sept. 1983): 29.
35. Lamberts. *Christian Democracy in the European Union*, p.445.
- 36 See: Adrian Karatnycky, "Christian Democracy Resurgent: Raising the Banner of Faith in Eastern Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 77 (Jan/Feb 1998): 13-18.