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From Pulpit to Party

Party Formation and the Christian Democratic Phenomenon

Stathis N. Kalyvas

How are parties formed? This fundamental question has far-reaching implications. One of the most robust insights in political science, Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan's "freezing hypothesis," is directly linked to the issue of party formation. Since the configuration of party systems and voter alignments today still reflects cleavages that "froze" in the 1920s, it is essential to explain what accounts for the initial configuration. Despite its obvious significance, the study of party formation remains very much where Rokkan's seminal contribution left it.[1] Recent theoretical innovations offer fresh perspectives and tools for approaching this issue.[2]

In this paper I tackle the issue of party formation in the context of emerging party systems by focusing on a central but surprisingly overlooked European political actor: Christian Democratic parties. These parties have been, and still are, a dominant feature of European (and to some extent Latin American) politics, yet their identity is puzzling, and their nature "enigmatic."[3] The sheer existence of these parties, which stand at the intersection of religion and politics but thrive in secular and liberal societies, raises important theoretical questions about the relationship between politicized religion and democracy. While Christian Democratic parties are unquestionably secular, their prewar predecessors emerged as confessional parties. How did such parties appear in Europe? Is there any causal link between the process of their formation and their secular postwar evolution? Here, I provide Rokkan's theoretical framework with microfoundations. I focus on actors and mechanisms to unpack the dual processes of the construction of political identities and the emergence of political organizations.[4]

This account of party formation goes beyond the usual references to Catholicism, papal encyclicals, and the impersonal forces of modernization. The formation of confessional parties was the contingent outcome of state-church conflicts. Theoretically, cleavage and party formation are distinct processes. Contrary to what Rokkan implied, the actors who foster the emergence of a new cleavage are not necessarily the same as those who create and lead the party representing it. Thus, while the church was instrumental in the emergence of a religious cleavage, it did not form the confessional parties. Nor were these parties formed by conservative political elites. These actors initiated the process that eventually led to the formation of con-

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fessional parties, but they had a compatible set of preferences that excluded the creation of these parties. Confessional parties were formed in spite of their intentions; they emerged as an unplanned and unwanted by-product of their strategic choices. By shaping the structure of future choices, the process of party formation had tremendous significance for the development of politics in Europe. It shaped these parties' character in a profound way and is essential in unraveling the "enigmatic" nature of contemporary Christian democratic parties.

The Christian Democratic Phenomenon

Two broad accounts address the emergence of confessional parties in nineteenth century Europe. The first, rooted in historical sociology, views these parties as creations of the Catholic church in the face of the combined rise of anticlericalism and mass politics (the classic statement is Lipset and Rokkan's). This account posits a "hydraulic" link among conflict, cleavage formation, and party formation. To borrow a phrase from Friedrich Eberle, it provides the sentences but not the grammar of party formation.[5] It implies strongly that these parties are instruments of the church and weakly that they are part of the Catholic culture and institutional context. The second account, rooted mostly in political science, emphasizes the role of Conservative political elites in appropriating religion and Catholic social doctrine to face the advent of mass parties and the rise of socialism. This approach downplays the religious and emphasizes the conservative aspect of confessional parties. For example, Duverger claims that the Catholic parties are "purely and simply conservative parties that changed name."[6] This point is persuasively undermined by recent research which shows that Christian Democratic parties affect their political and social environment very differently from Conservative parties.[7] I argue against both accounts: the formation of these parties was the contingent outcome of strategic decisions made by political actors, rather than the product of these actors' intentions and plans.

The general literature on Christian Democracy fails to capture the most crucial aspects of the formation of confessional parties for a number of reasons. First, it is underdeveloped: the Christian Democratic phenomenon has been singularly overlooked.[8] Second, it is fraught with problems.

The field is dominated by case studies. The few comparative studies tend to juxtapose cases rather than rely on the comparative method as tool for inference. Most accounts are functionalist: causes are accounted for by outcomes. These parties are seen as automatic responses to a variety of stimuli ranging from industrialization to liberalism, including secularization, socialism, and modernity. For instance, Lorwin argues that "with industrialization, urbanization, and geographic mobility ... the churches became concerned about risks to the faith of the masses. If isolation could no longer protect the faithful from exposure to influences corrosive to their faith,

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special institutions had to encapsulate them."[9] Accounts are also essentialist: religious faith is seen as a naturally strong collective sentiment leading to the inevitable organization of politics on the basis of confession. According to this view, confessional parties translate into politics a collective religious identity assumed to exist in a crystallized fashion, "a community of people who have taken the path of politics because of certain earlier pre-political convictions."[10] However, the political unity of Catholics is not a mechanical consequence of their similarity and common religious creed. The presence of strong religious faith does not necessarily or automatically give rise to primordial identities, cleavages, or mass parties, even in countries with a deep religious cleavage, such as France. As Bourdieu points out, "the sense of the social world does not assert itself in a univocal and universal fashion."[11] Catholics were, and are, divided along class and ethnic lines; common political action has been an exception.[12] Hence the construction of Catholic political identity is "an *empirical* rather than a presuppositional question."[13] A theory of party formation should account explicitly for the construction of political identities; it should focus on agency and examine the action of various political actors (and the interaction of their strategic choices) which is crucial in making potential cleavages salient and in shaping the social idea about which social ties are politically relevant. The formation and action of the Catholic movement and confessional parties created a Catholic political identity, rather than the other way around. Once formed, these organizations maintained (and transformed) this identity by enforcing the collective discipline necessary to overcome class or ethnic divisions among Catholics.

Studies assume away the problem of collective action and posit a direct and automatic leap from common interests to political organization and action. For instance, Windell argues that "in Prussia there was a combination of circumstances which made a formal Catholic party useful. The Hohenzollern kingdom was predominantly Protestant; therefore, Catholics as the largest religious minority had special interests to defend."[14] Moreover, many authors assume that actors had both the incentive and the interest to mobilize the masses initially with religious appeals and organize them first into mass organizations, then into mass parties. But as Rosenstone and Hansen point out, this assumption is wrong. "Mobilization is not a universal or a constant occurrence. Political leaders do not try to mobilize everybody, and they do not try to mobilize all the time. Mobilization, after all, is not their real goal;...[it] is one strategy they may use, but it is neither the only one nor, always, the best one."[15] Thus, a theory of party formation should account explicitly for mass mobilization.

A Model of Party Formation

The process of party formation took place in three broad time periods. It began with the launching of the first Liberal attacks against the church (t_1) and ended with the

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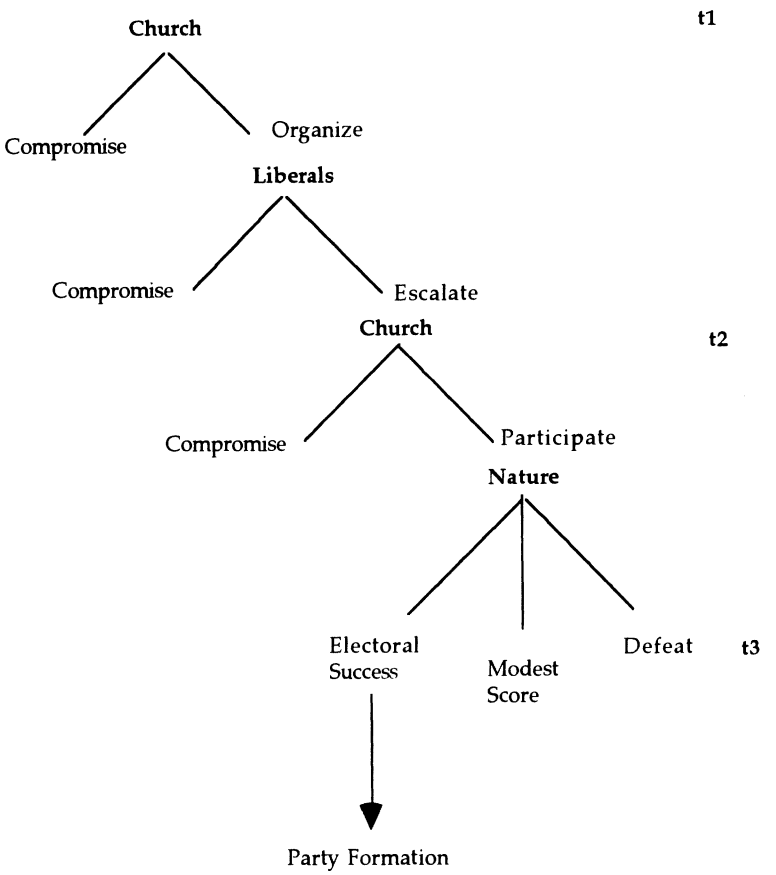
formation of confessional parties (t_3). Three actors are present at t_1: the church, Conservative politicians, and Liberal politicians.[16] The church is a self-interested actor which maximizes power, generally conceived as its ability to influence society.[17] A significant indicator of power is the amount of rights and privileges that the church enjoys, such as the exclusive or preferential provision of certain services, particularly education. The Liberals are exogenous to the model, since they remained constant in their anticlericalism during this period. Figure 1 illustrates the sequence of decisions.

Figure 1 The Process of Party Formation



In the face of Liberal laws decisively curtailing its power and ending its privileged access to decision-making centers, the church had (at t_1) a choice between two broad strategies: to adopt a conciliatory stance and not fight, seeking a compromise

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while essentially accepting most of the anticlerical measures; or to fight back, alone and outside the political process, mainly through the creation of mass organizations (organizational strategy).[18] In looking for means of political action to preserve its influence from the Liberal attack, the church sought to maximize its influence without suffering unacceptably high organizational costs. While the church's loss of influence from the anticlerical attack is obvious, the issue of organizational costs requires further elaboration.

Organizational costs are mostly, though not exclusively, related to control. Control is for the Catholic church a central concern.[19] The Catholic church is a transnational, firmly hierarchical, rigidly stratified, and highly centralized organization with a pyramidal structure. At the top stands the Vatican, and just below it, the episcopates of the national churches. Lay Catholics have been excluded from the exercise of power within the church to such an extent that they came to be canonically defined in negative terms as "those who lack any participation in power of jurisdiction, and especially of order [in the church]."[20] As the pope Pius X reminded Catholics in his 1906 encyclical *Vehementer Nos*: "the church is by nature an unequal society; it is composed of two categories of people: the pastors and the flock. Only the hierarchy moves and manages....The duty of the mass is to accept to be governed and to follow with submission the commands of those who lead it."[21] These attributes were greatly reinforced during the second half of the nineteenth century.[22]

An organization such as the Catholic church can best control its members when it enjoys exclusivity over their loyalties and an institutional monopoly over their representation. Given this concern for control, the church faces a dilemma: by not fighting the church maintains control over its members but reduces its overall influence; by fighting, however, it produces negative externalities, and the creation of new organizational units by an established hierarchy can reduce its control. Indeed, the mass mobilization of lay Catholics requires more than just active recruitment of members; it calls for a totally new organizational structure and logic of action leading to the emergence of potentially competitive parallel hierarchies and the subversion of the asymmetrical relationship between laymen and clergy. This conclusion is consistent with insights from both the sociology of organizations (organizational structures are patterned so as to minimize coordination and monitoring costs, which increase as different subunits expand and grow) and the economic theory of the firm (substantial increase in demand for a firm's product can lead the firm to forgo part of the demand because of internal organizational costs and associated control losses).[23] This conclusion is also consistent with historical institutionalism's emphasis on organizational norms and culture: a distinct structure for laymen was seen as inappropriate since the Catholic church is by definition *the* society of the faithful. Finally, the creation of mass organizations is in itself an expensive, painstakingly slow, and arduous undertaking, usually chosen only when other options are unavailable.[24]

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The church would opt for mass mobilization over nonfighting only if the preservation of its influence was likely to exceed the organizational costs incurred. This option, in turn, hinged on the severity of the anticlerical attack and on the nonavailability of alternative means of action (weak Conservative allies, a solid regime, and lack of extraparliamentary options such as a military coup). Under these conditions, the church was willing to accept a measure of loss of control and fight back by resorting to mass mobilization.

At t_1 the church had a limited time horizon. It saw the process as ending at t_2 and did not anticipate electoral implications because the creation of mass organizations was a defensive strategy intended to shield the church and its flock from further Liberal attacks. Shielding, achieved by isolating Catholics from the "Liberal state" and creating a distinct subculture, was expected to lead eventually to a reconquest of the state from below. Indeed, the church was not alone in believing that liberal democracy would not sustain itself in the long term; early socialists had similar expectations and projects. In sum, although combined with unsystematic support for Conservative politicians, this strategy was nonelectoralist; the church would fight alone and outside the electoral arena. This choice was given an explicit ideological justification through the open rejection of liberal democracy, best expressed in the papal encyclical *Syllabus*, issued in 1864.

At t_2 Liberals escalated their attack against the church. They did so for both intraparty reasons (pressure from their radical wing) and strategic considerations (anticlericalism was one of the few effective weapons of bourgeois liberalism in the battle for working class votes). In fact, Catholic mass mobilization provided Liberals with an opportunity to escalate safely, because Catholic organizations were kept outside the electoral arena. Hence, at t_2 the church faced a graver danger and a new set of options. It could either stick to its initial strategy and remain outside the electoral process, enter this process by organizing ad hoc electoral coalitions (participatory strategy), or create a confessional party.

The fundamental difference between the organizational and the participatory strategies was their scope. In the participatory strategy the church fought with political allies within the electoral process. This strategy broke with the previous practice of unsystematic support for independent individual candidates or divided Conservative factions. Now the church sought the specification of a platform (the equivalent of a contract) as the basis for the formation of a wide coalition of Conservative political forces. The relationship between the church and its allies assumed the form of a mutual subcontracting relation, whereby the political allies would conduct the political fight in defense of the church (although not as the official representatives of the church) and in exchange the church would support them electorally by mobilizing its flock. If successful, the establishment of prochurch coalitions electorally backed by mass Catholic organizations could generate obvious benefits for the church.

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However, this strategy exacerbated the deleterious effects of mass organization and further weakened the link between the church and its members. Control is easier to achieve when Catholic organizations have a restricted field of action. The degree of control that the church exercises on its members diminishes significantly when members enter politics; political participation in the context of competitive politics creates "means of both clerical and lay activism removed from direct episcopal supervision."[25] Three major effects follow. First, important payoffs unconnected to the church become available to Catholic activists. Individual mobility within the organization becomes possible, and it depends on autonomous action rather than passive obedience and deference to the hierarchy. Second, political participation introduces the secular democratic values of individual autonomy and equality into the Catholic world of divinely rooted obedience and hierarchy. Third, participation motivates Catholics to push for more autonomy of action because it gives them, for the first time, a sense of the potential that politics holds for the advancement of their cause. In addition to organizational costs, a highly visible political activity by the church entails the danger of retaliation from anticlerical forces. As a bishop pointed out: "If Catholics made specific demands on candidates for favour to their Church, they could not complain if others made specific demands against it."[26]

The creation of a confessional party, permanently and primarily associated with the cause of religion and organizationally connected to the church, is often erroneously assumed to represent an ideal for the church. In fact, the formation of such a party exacerbates the negative externalities of organization and participation. Now the voters, rather than the church, become the permanent source of power and legitimation for Catholic activists. The church has less control over party activists than over faithful members of its flock or lower clergy. The leader of the German *Zentrum*, Ludwig Windthorst, made this point crystal clear when he refused to obey the pope's orders on a crucial issue. "The Center party," he emphasized, "subsists simply and solely on the confidence of the people: no other support stands at its command, and it is ... required, therefore, more than any other fraction, to heed the pulsebeat of the people."[27] In addition, the creation of a confessional party totally subverts traditional relations within the church. When the priest and *Zentrum* deputy Theodor Wacker asserted in 1914 that the hierarchy had no voice in the party's affairs, he was speaking "as a practical politician, not as a priest or theologian."[28] Using an analogy from political economy, we can think of the church as a rent-seeking "concentrated interest." The advantage these interests enjoy, compared to diffuse interests, is the ability to overcome free-riding. Yet this advantage is canceled when issues are seized by parties and become part of partisan politics.[29] Finally, the creation of a confessional party undermines the church's universalistic claims and produces new risks in the form of the association of the church and religion with potentially unpopular political causes. Universalistic appeal has always been a primary concern for the church, and indeed the contention that "the church cannot become a

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party because it is common to everyone" was included in the 1890 papal encyclical *Sapientiae Christianae.*

While the creation of a confessional party has a negative effect on control, it does not necessarily increase church influence. A confessional party is hard to control because of principal-agent problems. These parties incorporate Catholic mass organizations, thus establishing direct control over the means of mass mobilization. Hence they are more likely to defect than Conservative elite parties, who depend on the church for their electoral performance. The church could control confessional parties by bypassing Catholic mass organizations and appealing directly to the faithful from the pulpit. However, this approach would be difficult and costly because of the superior organizational resources of confessional parties and the partisan loyalties of large numbers of believers. The formation of confessional parties is not efficient for the church, even assuming that their likelihood of defection is not higher than that of Conservative allies; indeed, the cost of party formation far exceeds that of an electoral alliance. It follows that the use of Conservative politicians as political subcontractors controlled through the church's organizational might is preferable to the formation of a party that claims religion as its central mission, incorporates mass Catholic organizations, and becomes a competing agent for the representation of the faithful. "Between the creation of interest-group organizations and political parties, the Church clearly preferred the first option."[30] Hence, given the steep decrease in its influence, the church should opt at t_2 for the participatory strategy over its initial organizational strategy and the formation of a confessional party.

In short, the church expected that broad coalitions of Conservative forces built around a defense of the church platform and powered by Catholic mass organizations would be able to scare the Liberals into stopping their attacks. The church also expected that, following a decent electoral showing of these coalitions, it could use their withdrawal of its organizations from electoral politics as a powerful bargaining chip.

Another actor entered the process at t_2: Conservatives. They faced a choice between three strategies: to demand church support in an unsystematic way, to demand organized electoral church support in the context of the participatory strategy, and to create a confessional party. Conservatives were notables, members of loose parliamentary factions sympathetic to most of the church's claims. However, first and foremost they sought to further their own political careers and causes. Issues are necessary to mobilize support, and politicians who are losers in electoral politics seek to introduce new dimensions of competition. Hence Conservatives were attracted to the use of religion as a political issue.[31] Moreover, mass organization could provide obvious benefits in a time of real or anticipated extension of the electoral franchise. However, as traditional notables Conservatives disliked the idea of a mass party because it made possible the emergence of a new professional political class and threatened their political survival. Therefore, they preferred the cheaper and safer option of seeking organizational resources elsewhere. Catholic mass orga-

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nizations were particularly attractive since the church credibly guaranteed their position outside the political arena. Conservatives, as the Italian prime minister Giovanni Giolitti put it in 1913, could "purchase cheaply" the Catholic votes.[32] Yet they rejected the prospect of a permanent association with religion because this association would restrict their autonomy of action. In sum, Conservatives wanted to be Catholic parliamentarians beholden "neither to party nor to confession," rather than parliamentary Catholics, permanently constrained by the representation of a confessionally defined constituency.[33] Hence Conservatives preferred the participatory strategy over the formation of a confessional party.

In sum, the strategies of the two political actors excluded the formation of confessional parties. Given the actors' preferences, the escalating anticlerical attack, and the nonavailability of alternative ways of action, the model predicts that at t_1 the church will opt for the organizational strategy and at t_2 both the church and the Conservatives will converge at the participatory strategy. The creation of a confessional party is inefficient for both because it induces substantially higher costs but only marginal improvements (if any) compared to the participatory strategy. The participatory strategy constitutes an equilibrium based on the mutual contracting out of the two actors' undesirable but necessary activities: the church contracts out the electoral and political struggle against anticlerical reform to Conservatives, and the Conservatives contract out mass organization to the church.

However, the empirical evidence contradicts the prediction of the model. Confessional parties were formed in five countries, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, and Italy, yet the model's assumptions about actor preferences are supported by historical evidence. The problem does not lie in the assumptions but rather in the incomplete specification of the model. Therefore, the research question should be reformulated as follows. How did confessional parties emerge given actor preferences that excluded such an option? This case is an example of the power of deductive thinking. The discrepancy between the predictions of the initial model and the actual outcome allows the reformulation of the research question and the exploration of otherwise hidden issues. It also underlines the necessity of a dialectical relationship between deductive thinking and contextual/historical research.

The Formation of Confessional Parties: A Revised Account

How were confessional parties formed if nobody wanted them? How was such an inefficient outcome for the two actors reached? Confessional parties emerged because these actors fell victim to the very success of their strategy. First, the organizational strategy led to the emergence of a new actor, the Catholic activists. Then the participation strategy produced impressive electoral results which allowed these Catholic activists to push successfully for the formation of confessional parties. The

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church could neither transform itself into a political party nor prevent its mass organizations from evolving into political parties. Electoral success supplied Catholic activists with political power, which they used to wrest control from the church. In short, the choices of church and Conservatives led to the emergence of a new political actor with its own preferences and the capacity to implement them.

The following analytical narrative combines the abstract model sketched above with a contextual story.[34] It is based on two categories of sources, older historical monographs and case studies that have often been overlooked by the general literature on Christian Democracy and more recent historical and sociological case studies.[35] Although suffering from an absence of a theoretical and comparative perspective (and hence failing to provide an alternative comprehensive account of confessional party formation), these studies reveal a richer, more detailed, and ultimately very different picture of the party formation process. The church's attempts to suppress the formation of these parties emerge with remarkable clarity.

The party formation process varied on a number of points in the five countries under examination, and the individual confessional parties differed in some respects. However, all confessional parties were preceded by mass mobilization based on a religious appeal, and the pattern and underpinning of the dynamic process that led to their formation are fundamentally similar.[36] The formation of confessional parties took place in the same period (1870–1920) in a number of European countries facing quite similar challenges: democratization, the emergence of mass politics, and Liberal anticlericalism. The main political actors were quite close in terms of preferences. Particularly, the national Catholic churches were part of a centralized and supranational institution. This analytic equivalence of the cases allows for a comparative treatment (see Table 1).

Attempts by political entrepreneurs to create parties based on a religious appeal before the 1860s consistently failed. These attempts were ignored by both the church and the part of the electorate composed of faithful Catholics. Most practicing Catholics thought of themselves as Conservatives or monarchists, often even as Liberals. Like an interest group, the church behaved in a pragmatic way, dealing directly with both Conservative and Liberal governments. The "discreet lobbying of ministers on specific concessions to the Church" was much preferred over the mobilization of lay Catholics, which the church firmly opposed.[37] The political weight of lay Catholics was thus minimal: "lay people had assuredly an important role, but as members of the *Establishment*, to the extent that they were part of the top of the ruling class."[38] Hence nothing suggested that viable and strong confessional parties would come into existence. On the contrary, party systems all over Europe were developing along the familiar conservative-liberal dichotomy. However, beginning in the 1860s, state-building Liberal political elites sought to curb the power of the church. They introduced legislative reforms to deprive it of much of its control over education and family. In Germany and Italy this attack took wider dimensions as it

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Table 1 The Formation of Confessional Parties: A Chronological Table

	BELGIUM	NETHERLANDS	AUSTRIA	GERMANY	ITALY
First Anticlerical Threats	1850-1860	1857-1878	1866	1866-1870	1850-1861
Organizational Strategy	1864-1878	1868-1878	1868-1874	1867-1870	1874-1913
Main Anticlerical Attack	1878	1878	1867-1874	1870-1878	1861-1890
Participation Strategy	1878-1884	1878-1888	1887-1890	1870-1871	1913-1919
Electoral Success	1884	1888	1887	1870; 1871	1913; 1919
Formation	1884	1879[a], 1888[b]	1890	1871	1919
Institutionalization Centralization of Party	1910s	1926	1906	1880s	1919

[a] Formation of the Calvinist party

[b] Formation of the Catholic party

became intertwined with the rise of national unification movements. The church was increasingly deprived of its traditional privileged access to governments.

As a result, the church decided to form lay mass organizations firmly set outside the electoral arena, even though it disliked this prospect. The first Catholic associations were formed in the wake of the initial anticlerical attacks, usually by lay Catholics in an unsystematic and decentralized way. The raw material was the existing network of reflection clubs, confraternities, bachelors' associations, and various devotional societies. The church's decision to implement the organizational strategy amounted to the takeover of all these disparate Catholic groups and their expansion, centralization, and coordination into a centralized network of lay associations with the bishops firmly in control. Catholic organizations were now officially sponsored by the church and lost whatever autonomy of action they previously had: the Catholic movement was born. In its initial stages, the organizational strategy was conceived as only an emergency measure in the context of the church's reaction to liberalism, anticlericalism, and dechristianization.[39] The focus of this strategy was civil society rather than the state. As the archbishop of Vienna put it: "Let's create Catholic associations that will take care of only the matters that concern God and the

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church, but rigorously excluding politics."[40] Likewise, one of the leading figures of the Italian Catholic movement argued in 1891 that the organization must at any cost act in such a way as "to make it impossible for it to enter at all the liberal society, parliamentarism, or elections."[41] The Dutch Calvinists' motto "in isolation lies our strength" embodied the initial rationale of this strategy.[42]

However, the organizational strategy failed to produce tangible policy results. It certainly did not deter the Liberals from escalating their attacks against the church. While the church at times called on its members to vote for friendly candidates, it did so in an uncoordinated, unorganized, and ultimately ineffective way. In essence, the organizational strategy had no policy impact. By focusing on the reconquest of the state from below, it neglected to deal with the practical issue of overthrowing Liberal governments.

The church was soon forced to address the immediate dangers of the escalating anticlerical attack. It faced a new choice: either to enter the electoral arena or to continue to shun it. Understandably, the church was very reluctant to engage in direct political action. To begin with, its claim to be above factions would be undermined. Moreover, despite its tight control over Catholic organizations it had difficulty containing the activists who pressed for autonomy and were "giving directives to bishops, provoking frequent complaints from the episcopate."[43] Direct participation in the electoral process was expected to exacerbate this trend. However, the reality of the anticlerical attacks and the dearth of alternative options forced the church to enter the electoral arena, however costly it was. Reluctantly and with much hesitation, the church decided to implement the participation strategy and form broad electoral coalitions with Conservative political factions under the banner of the defense of religion. Contrary to the former practice of unsystematic support of Conservative candidates, this strategy entailed coordinated electoral action, particularly by the newly formed mass Catholic organizations. Such support necessitated the transformation of these organizations into increasingly politicized and electorally oriented organizations.

The politicization of the Catholic movement did not imply autonomy of action. Furthermore, the electoral use of Catholic mass organizations was to be temporary. The goal of the participation strategy was only to reverse anticlerical reforms and to replace them with a new domestic Concordat. The church sought a return to the past rather than the institutionalization of mass political Catholicism. Catholic organizations were expected to return to their original nonelectoral tasks and remain under the control of the church and outside politics. As Gramsci pointed out in his analysis of the Catholic movement, lay mass organizations for the church were "normally to perform a *conjunctural* or occasional role, dispensable should the necessity arise."[44] Much historical evidence indicates that the church neither intended to politicize Catholic organizations on a permanent basis nor planned to fuse Catholic mass organizations and political allies within a single confessional party.[45]

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While the church failed to foresee the actual emergence of confessional parties, it did everything in its power to prevent this prospect from turning into reality. It initially took a variety of preemptive measures to reinforce its control over both its personnel and its members. It also attempted to obstruct any initiative toward the formation of independent Catholic organizations and confessional parties. When these measures proved insufficient, it openly and directly cracked down on every attempt toward independence, autonomy, or uncontrolled politicization coming from the Catholic organizations. However, the dynamic created by the anticlerical attack and the participation strategy raised the costs of repression and made it extremely difficult to dispose of Catholic organizations at will. The pattern of repression and obstruction is repeated consistently across cases and was central to the church's strategy and action.

Likewise, Conservative political elites had neither desire nor plans for the formation of confessional parties. Conservatives viewed identification with the church and promotion of religion as a temporary strategy and expected the Liberal threat to turn Catholic voters into a captive market. As Windthorst declared in 1872, "if the burning complaints of Catholics are finally settled ... the *Zentrum* will be glad to dissolve."[46] Moreover, these coalitions were racked by disputes between lay Catholic activists and Conservative notables. For instance, the attempt by Belgian Catholic organizations to impose a precise, strict, and binding Catholic program on the parliamentary right provoked forceful reactions from the latter.[47]

In short, both church and Conservatives equated success at t_3 with an eventual return to t_1, albeit under new and more favorable conditions. The church would keep most of its privileges and use its organizations to deter future attacks against it, while Conservatives would acquire the loyalty of a substantial number of voters, previously nonmobilized or split along other cleavages, without the cost and risk of building a mass organization.

Their strategies backfired because they had unintended yet important consequences for Catholic identity. They mobilized for the first time lay Catholics *qua* Catholics, effectively giving rise to a Catholic political identity. For this new actor, Catholic activists, the formation of confessional parties was far from inefficient. It empowered them, emancipated them from the church's control, and allowed them to promote their political agenda which, as the church rightly feared, was often distinct from its own agenda. As the German priest Eduard Cronenberg declared in 1871, "the interests of the Catholic people extend further than the interests of the Catholic church."[48]

The creation of mass Catholic organizations and their participation in electoral politics under the tutelage of the church did not guarantee their transformation into confessional parties. What made possible the transition from participation to the formation of confessional parties, in other words, the translation of the new political identity into a new party, was the unexpected electoral success of the coalitions

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which fought the "defense of the church" campaigns. Electoral success was proof to Catholic activists that religion was a political issue with a potential to tap huge forces. Indeed, together with socialist parties, although before them, Catholic movements were the winners of mass politics. In addition, electoral success represented for the Catholic movement the only source of power and legitimation that could replace the church: voters. This success allowed Catholic activists successfully to engineer the transformation of the ephemeral and loose prochurch coalitions into political parties against the wishes of both church and Conservative politicians.

The electoral success of the prochurch coalitions was remarkable and proved to be the turning point in the process of formation of confessional parties.[49] It is impossible to stress its impact more than a contemporary Belgian did. "Until 1884 [the party] was called the 'conservative party.' From then on it is called the 'Catholic party'" (1884 was the year of the Conservative-Catholic victory).[50] As striking as the electoral success was the fact that it came as a surprise. Nobody expected that the prochurch coalitions would perform so successfully. Contemporary observers, participants, and historians alike underline the element of surprise.[51] To be sure, church and conservatives wished and expected a decent result, but their expectations were surpassed. The fact that the success of these coalitions took everyone by surprise is crucial. The failure to anticipate it accounts for the church's and the Conservatives' underestimation of their eventual loss of control over Catholic organizations and therefore of the probability of the formation of confessional parties. This failure was due to two factors. First, the electoral potential of religion as the dominant political issue, especially after the advent of the anticlerical attack, had not been gauged. Second, electoral success occurred in an age of transition to a new political era, the era of mass politics. The power of mass organization, or even the effects of extended or universal adult male suffrage, was unknown. Their advent represented a staggering leap in the dark.[52] Indeed, democracy and uncertainty go hand in hand. As Przeworski points out, democracy is the institutionalization of uncertainty: "outcomes that are unlikely can and do occur."[53]

The church fell victim to the success of its own strategy. It could not freeze the process and bring Catholic activists back in the fold. While it understood that these emerging parties were forcing it to share its control over the "Catholic world," it could not afford to suppress them because of their impressive newfound popular legitimacy. As Molony points out about Italy, "the Vatican acquiesced [in] the formation of the PPI [the Italian Catholic party] because ... it could not prevent it."[54] With newly acquired political power, Catholic activists were no longer willing to accept their relegation to the margins of political life, as passive spectators subject to the suffocating control of the church hierarchy. Still, their acceptance was fraught with conflicts between church and parties and was followed by a vigorous attempt by the church to reclaim its members, mainly through the development of the new organizations of Catholic Action. In addition, when political circumstances permitted, as in

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interwar Italy, Germany, and Austria, the church willingly participated in the destruction of confessional parties. By unintentionally creating a new political class, the strategy of the church affected dramatically the Conservatives as well. They were soon swept away and replaced by the leaders of the Catholic mass organizations.

Conclusion

Confessional parties were formed in three successive steps. First, the formation of Catholic mass organizations (the organizational strategy) mobilized Catholics *qua* Catholics in organizations tightly controlled by the church operating outside the electoral arena. Second, the entry of the church into electoral politics and the creation of prochurch coalitions (the participatory strategy) politicized this embryonic identity by turning Catholic organizations into political machines. Finally, the electoral success of these coalitions allowed Catholic activists successfully to form confessional parties despite the intentions of both church and Conservative politicians. A Catholic political identity emerged as a result of this process. The construction of a political identity requires the institutionalization of a permanent organization capable of representing a mobilized group.[55]

The process of party formation came to fruition through the combination of all three steps. The organizational strategy was necessary but not sufficient in the formation of a distinct Catholic political identity. Mass organization alone could be contained by the church; new outlets needed to be provided so that a collective identity could become politicized. Yet, while the participatory strategy produced collective action in an electoral context, it could not have led to the formation of confessional parties without the organizational strategy which made electoral success possible. Without electoral success, religion would have proved a losing issue, and all relevant political actors would have looked for alternative strategies and issues. Finally, even if the participatory strategy alone had produced electoral successes, Conservative politicians would have lacked the legitimacy, credibility, and, most of all, incentive to appropriate religion on a permanent basis for party building. Only the action of Catholic activists could achieve this end.

Hence Catholic parties were the unanticipated and unwanted consequences of rational political action. When the Liberals launched their anticlerical offensive, no major political actor desired, expected, or planned the creation of confessional parties. Anticlerical attacks were a necessary but not sufficient element in the formation of confessional parties: they did not always result in party formation, as indicated by France. Rather than being a causal factor in the formation of confessional parties, they were a trigger that imposed constraints on the strategies of the main actors and structured their options. Thus, the process of confessional party formation is path-dependent in two ways. Initial decisions had important, unintended, and "sticking"

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consequences. And the outcome was not determined *ex ante*; the process could have derailed at any point. France is a case in point.[56]

The process of party formation had far-reaching political consequences and underscores the continuity between prewar confessional parties and contemporary Christian Democratic ones. The most defining characteristic of Christian Democratic parties, their "catch-all" character, can be traced back to their origins.[57] Confessional parties were formed on the basis of religious rather than class appeals. Hence they were socially heterogeneous from their very inception; their "catch-allism" was a direct effect of the way in which they were formed. Likewise, the distinctive contribution of Christian Democratic parties to welfare state building and their promotion of a distinct type of mass organization are organizational rather than ideological consequences of their formation process. Confessional parties captured part of the nonsocialist political space but were a very different type from Conservative parties because they had to absorb the mass organizations formed by the church in the context of the organizational strategy, including many Catholic workers' associations. Their party formation process explains the recent quantitative finding that the positive relationship between Catholic population size and levels of unionization is contingent on Christian Democratic party strength.[58] In other words, political Catholicism and religion are distinct phenomena. Finally, having been born in spite of the church's intentions, confessional parties resented the church's attempts to control and subdue them. They fought for their autonomy and shifted their political priorities away from clerical issues. In doing so, they also desacralized the politics of their countries.[59] Paradoxically, the end result of their emergence was the gradual irrelevance of religion in western European politics. Hence a central cause of the Christian Democratic parties' secular nature is political rather than sociological, and its root is to be found in the formation process of confessional parties rather than in social changes that took place in postwar Europe.

In short, political development is contingent and path-dependent, and processes of party formation have far-reaching consequences. The emergence of a Catholic political identity was neither automatic nor natural; it was the contingent outcome of conflicts between a variety of actors under specific constraints. It can be understood only through examination of the actions and choices of the main actors and the outcomes these actions generated. "Critical junctures" do not necessarily "produce" parties. Rokkan's theory (and its various applications) may therefore require explicit microfoundations (the "grammar" of party formation). Moreover, Lipset and Rokkan's freezing hypothesis carries an additional dimension: party formation processes shape not only party systems and voter alignments, but also key characteristics of the parties themselves, unrelated to the original cleavages, which endure long after party formation.

The recognition of the intrinsically contingent nature of the political process should not dissuade us from attempting to specify the structural and contextual vari-

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ables which constrain them and to identify the mechanisms which drive them. Combining an analytical perspective with a contextual/historical and comparative analysis produces a research strategy ideally suited to understand the interaction between macro level and micro level, structure and agency, rationality and contingency, and history and theory.

NOTES

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2. A recent example is John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origins and Transformation of Party Politics in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). The formation of mass parties in the context of emerging party systems has not yet been approached from such a perspective.

3. Percy Allum, "Le double visage de la Démocratie chrétienne," *Politix*, 30 (1995), 25.

4. A full-fledged version of the argument is included in Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

5. I owe this citation to Margaret Lavinia Anderson.

6. Maurice Duverger, *Sociologie Politique* (Paris: PUF, 1966), pp. 412–13. His point concerns Belgium, the Netherlands, and Austria.

7. See Kees van Kersbergen, *Social Capitalism: A Study of Christian Democracy and the Welfare State* (London: Routledge, 1995); Joya Misra and Alexander Hicks, "Catholicism and Unionization in Affluent Postwar Democracies: Catholicism, Culture, Party, and Unionization," *American Sociological Review*, 59 (1994), 304–26.

8. Contributions include David Hanley, ed., *Christian Democracy in Europe: A Comparative Perspective* (London: Pinter, 1994); Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Des partis catholiques à la démocratie chrétienne* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1980); R. E. M. Irving, *The Christian Democratic Parties of Western Europe* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979); Giorgio Vecchio, *La democrazia cristiana in Europa (1891–1963)* (Milan: Mursia, 1979); Michael P. Fogarty, *Christian Democracy in Western Europe, 1820–1953* (London: Routlege and Kegan Paul, 1957). A recent and useful book is Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway, eds., *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

9. Val Lorwin, "Segmented Pluralism, Ideological Cleavages and Political Cohesion in the Smaller European Democracies," *Comparative Politics*, 3 (1971), 149.

10. Hans Maier, *Revolution and the Church; The Early History of Christian Democracy, 1789–1907* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 13.

11. Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology: A Critical Review*, 32 (1987), 11.

12. Enzo Pace, *L'Unità dei Cattolici in Italia: Origini e decadenza di un mito collettivo* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 1995).

13. Margaret R. Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network

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Approach," *Theory and Society*, 23 (1994), 630.

14. George G. Windell, *The Catholics and German Unity, 1866–1871* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), p. 11.

15. Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 30.

16. I treat the church as a unitary actor, coterminous with both the church hierarchy and the Vatican. This assumption is sensible given the church's centralized structure; it applies only in the context of this study and with regard to major decisions, such as the formation of mass organizations. The fact that lay Catholics emerged as independent actors at the end of the process does not cancel the fact that the major strategic decisions of the church were made in concert by the Vatican and the national episcopates.

17. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), pp. 235–36.

18. While the exact content of these broad strategies varies across cases, their fundamental elements are similar. The creation of mass organizations is the only way of fighting at t1. Both participation in the electoral process and the organization of a new party require mass organization, missing at t1.

19. Karl Rahner et al., *Obedience and the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Books, 1968).

20. Yves Congar and F. Varillon, *Sacerdoce et Laicat dans l'Eglise* (Paris: Les Editions du Vitrail, 1947), p. 8.

21. Quoted in Roger Aubert, "L'Eglise catholique de la crise de 1848 à la première guerre mondiale," in R. Aubert, M. D. Knowles, and L. J. Rogier, eds., *Nouvelle Histoire de l'Eglise* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), p. 155.

22. David Blackbourn, "The Political Alignment of the Centre Party in Wilhelmine Germany: A Study of the Party's Emergence in Nineteenth-Century Württemberg," *The Historical Journal*, 18 (1975), 780.

23. Oliver Hart, "An Economist's Perspective on the Theory of the Firm," *Columbia Law Review*, 89 (1989), 1766; Saikat Datta, "On Control Losses in Hierarchies: A Synthesis," *Rationality and Society*, 8 (1996), 387–89.

24. Gregory M. Luebbert, *Liberalism, Fascism, or Social Democracy: Social Classes and the Political Origins of Regimes in Interwar Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

25. Laura S. Gellott, *The Catholic Church and the Authoritarian Regime in Austria, 1933–1938* (New York: Garland, 1987), p. 68.

26. Quoted in John McManners, *Church and State in France, 1870–1914* (London: SPCK, 1972), p. 174.

27. Quoted in Margaret Lavinia Anderson, "The Kulturkampf and the Course of German History," *Central European History*, 19 (1986), 112.

28. Ronald J. Ross, *Beleaguered Tower: The Dilemma of Political Catholicism in Wilhelmine Germany* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), p. 62.

29. Verdier shows that organizing a large coalition and politicizing a particular issue increase the cost of rent seeking. First, making an issue partisan requires "field expenses," expenses of mobilization and organization. Second, the set of feasible policy alternatives decreases since the specific issue has to be turned into a general issue to attract public support. Third, the risk of shirking on the part of the political agents becomes greater. Daniel Verdier, *Democracy and International Trade: Britain, France, and the United States, 1860–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 17–20.

30. Mayeur, p. 8.

31. William Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

32. Gabriele de Rosa, *Il movimento Cattolico in Italia: Dalla Restaurazione all'età giolittiana* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1972), p. 352.

33. Margaret Lavinia Anderson, *Windthorst: A Political Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 139.

34. Edgar Kiser, "The Revival of Narrative in Historical Sociology: What Rational Choice Theory Can Contribute," *Politics and Society*, 24 (1996), 249–71.

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35. For Belgium, see Jean-Luc Soete, "Parti catholique et sociabilité en Belgique au XIXe siècle: Les cercles catholiques (1863–1884)," *La Revue Politique*, 3 (1990), 71–81; Jaak Billiet and Emmanuel Gerard, "Eglise et Politique: Les relations difficiles entre les organisations catholiques et leur parti politique avant 1940," in Liliane Voyé, Karel Dobbelaere, Jean Remy, and Jaak Billiet, eds., *La Belgique et ses Dieux: Eglises, Mouvements Religieux et Laiques* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Cabay, 1985); G. Guyot de Mishaegen, *Le Parti Catholique Belge de 1830 à 1884* (Brussels: Maison Ferdinand Larcier, 1946). For the Netherlands, Herman Bakvis, *Catholic Power in the Netherlands* (Kingston: McGill University Press, 1981); E. H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries, 1780–1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Frank Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960). For Austria, John W. Boyer, *Political Radicalism in Late Imperial Vienna: Origins of the Christian Social Movement, 1848–1897* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Alan W. France, "Kulturkampf in Austria: The Vaterland Circle and the Struggle over the Confessional Legislation of May, 1868" (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 1975). For Germany, Anderson, *Windthorst*; Ellen Lovell Evans, *The German Center Party, 1870–1933: A Study in Political Catholicism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981); David Blackbourn, *Class, Religion and Local Politics in Wilhelmine Germany: The Centre Party in Württemberg before 1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). For Italy, Sándor Agócs, *The Troubled Origins of the Italian Catholic Labor Movement, 1878–1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988); Guido Formigoni, *I cattolici-deputati (1904–1918): Tradizione e riforme* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1988); John Molony, *The Emergence of Political Catholicism in Italy: Partito Popolare, 1919–1926* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977); De Rosa, *Il Movimento Cattolico*; Angelo Gambasin, *Gerarchia e laicato in Italia nel secondo ottocento* (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1969). A comprehensive listing of sources can be found in Kalyvas, pp. 265–90.

36. Roger Aubert, "La notion de mouvement catholique: Les enseignements de l'histoire," in E. de Jonghe and L. Preneel, eds., *Théorie et Langage du Mouvement Catholique: Problèmes d'Historiographie* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 1982), p. 191.

37. Blackbourn, "The Political Alignment of the Centre Party," p. 846; Carl E. Schorske, "Politics in a New Key: An Austrian Triptych," *Journal of Modern History*, 39 (1967), 343–86.

38. Aubert, p. 192.

39. Gambasin, p. 65.

40. Quoted in Jean-Paul Bled, *Les fondements du conservatisme autrichien, 1859–1879* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1988), p. 122.

41. Quoted in Gambasin, p. 85.

42. John A. Coleman, *The Evolution of Dutch Catholicism, 1958–1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 40.

43. Piero Zerbi, *Il Movimento Cattolico in Italia da Pio IX a Pio X: Linee di sviluppo* (Milan: Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1961), p. 78.

44. Quoted in Fulton, p. 212.

45. The evidence that the church disliked, did not intend, and obstructed the formation of confessional parties can not be presented in its entirety here because of space constraints. See, among others, Jean-Luc Soete, "Evolution du catholicisme politique en Belgique de 1831 à 1884: La structuration des forces catholiques et la question du programme," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 96 (1983), 193–202; Hans Daalder, "Parties and Politics in the Netherlands," *Political Studies*, 3 (1955), 1–16; Gilbert Edwin Southern, Jr., "The Bavarian Kulturkampf: A Chapter in Government, Church, and Society in the Early Bismarckreich" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1977); Richard A. Webster, *The Cross and the Fasces: Christian Democracy and Fascism in Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960).

46. Quoted in Anderson, *Windthorst*, p. 217.

47. L. Preneel, "Mouvements catholiques et expériences des catholiques en Belgique," in de Jonghe and Preneel, eds., p. 124.

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48. Quoted in Eric Dorn Brose, *Christian Labor and the Politics of Frustration in Imperial Germany* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1985), p. 47.

49. In Belgium (1884) and the Netherlands (1888), pro-Catholic coalitions won majorities. In Austria (1887), Germany (1871), and Italy (1919), they made an impressive entry into party politics. What mattered was the widespread perception by all participants that these coalitions had achieved a big electoral success. The relative ranking of Catholic parties was high, and the losses they imposed on Liberals were impressive in their first electoral showing. Even when not high in absolute terms, their electoral performance was viewed as an indication of their exceptional future potential. See Molony, "The Kulturkampf," p. 67; Anderson, "The Kulturkampf," pp. 95–96.

50. Carton de Wiart in Guyot de Mishaegen, p. iii.

51. See Charles Woeste, *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire contemporaine de la Belgique*, vol. 1 (Brussels: Librairie Albert Dewit, 1927), p. 216; Vanden Berg, p. 99; Boyer, p. 218; Windell, pp. 127, 282; Alfredo Canavero, "Elezioni," in Francesco Traniello and Giorgio Campanini, eds., *Dizionario Storico del Movimento Cattolico in Italia, 1860–1980*, vol. 1 (Turin: Marietti, 1981) p. 290.

52. P. M. Jones, *Politics and Rural Society: The Southern Massif Central, c. 1750–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 233. This phenomenon can be now observed in eastern Europe. After the first elections in postcommunist Russia in December 1993, the political leader Yegor T. Gaidar described the result as a "big and unpleasant surprise." *The New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1993.

53. Adam Przeworski, "Some Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy," in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 58.

54. Molony, p. 6.

55. Bourdieu, p. 13.

56. France is studied in detail in Kalyvas, pp. 114–66.

57. Kees van Kersbergen, "The Distinctiveness of Christian Democracy," in Hanley, ed., pp. 34–35.

58. Catholic population size is associated with high rates of unionization only in the presence of a strong Christian Democratic party. See Misra and Hicks, pp. 304–26.

59. Formigoni, p. 28.

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