Christian Democratic Internationalism: The *Nouvelles Equipes Internationales* and the Geneva Circles between European Unification and Religious Identity, 1947–1954

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Abstract

This article analyses Christian Democratic International organisations after the Second World War, namely the Nouvelles Equipes Internationales *(NEI) and the Geneva Circles (secret discussion groups), in order to understand how and to what extent this international network has been important for European Christian Democratic Parties and for the overall process of European unification. The goal is to describe the relationship between the Christian-inspired parties and their efforts to define a common ideological framework and a successful Europeanism capable of competing with other political groups and ideologies, especially communist and nationalist forces. The main sources used are the minutes of meetings of the NEI and the Geneva Circles.*

Introduction

In many ways, research into Christian Democratic internationalism is still in its infancy. Having begun by analysing those specific nations in which 'Christian' political parties played a key role in government and politics after the Second World War, interest has now refocused on the international dimension.[1] This comparative approach has two main objectives. First, to examine the reasons for

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[1] That is more or less the purpose of the following volumes of essays: Mario Caciagli et al, *Christian Democracy in Europe* (Barcelona: ICPS, 1992); David Hanley, ed., *Christian Democracy in Europe. A*

the success of Christian Democratic parties in post-war western Europe during a period in which they were the leading political force in nations such as Italy, Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Austria, Switzerland and Luxemburg. Second, to explore the formation of international relationships capable of leading to the construction of international organisations very different from pre-war small-scale, marginal structures.

Historians have contributed substantially to these endeavours,[2] tracing with precision the dynamics that led to the creation of the *Nouvelles Equipes Internationales* (New International Teams; NEI),[3] a transparent, open structure with a flexible set of primarily organisational rules, and the 'Geneva circles',[4] unofficial, secret discussion groups through which important figures such as Georges Bidault and Konrad Adenauer could contact each other in a fashion that could not have occurred in public given the political circumstances.[5] Analyses of the organisational structure[6]

Comparative Perspective (London: Pinter Publishers, 1994); Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway, eds., *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Emiel Lamberts, ed., *Christian Democracy in the European Union, 1945–1995* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997); Michael Gehler, Wolfram Kaiser and Helmut Wohnout, eds., *Christdemokratie in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert/Christian Democracy in the 20th Century / La Démocratie Chrétienne en Europe au XXe Siècle* (Vienna: Bohlau, 2001); Thomas Kselman and Joseph A. Buttigieg, eds., *European Christian Democracy: Historical Legacies and Comparative Perspectives* (Notre-Dame: University of Notre-Dame Press, 2003); Michael Gehler and Wolfram Kaiser, eds., *Christian Democracy in Europe since 1945*, vol. II (London: Routledge, 2004). Some articles in these collections take a comparative approach and/or offer an analysis of international relations among 'Christian' political parties, notably Wolfram Kaiser, 'Transnational Christian Democracy: From the Nouvelles Equipes Internationales to the European People's Party' and Anton Pelinka, 'European Christian Democracy in Comparison', in *Christian Democracy in Europe since 1945*, 221–37 and 193–206 respectively; Michael Gehler and Wolfram Kaiser, 'Toward a "Core Europe" in a Christian Western Bloc. Transnational Cooperation in European Christian Democracy, 1925–1965', in Kselman and Buttigieg, *European Christian Democracy*, 240–66; and Philippe Chenaux, 'Les démocrates-chrétiens au niveau de l'union européenne', in Lamberts, ed., *Christian Democracy in the European Union*, 449–58. There is also one attempt to use political science as a basis for constructing a general theory of Christian Democracy: Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[2] The most important of these, for its thoroughness and penetrating analysis, is indubitably Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[3] On the *Nouvelles Equipes* see also Philippe Chenaux, 'Les Nouvelles Equipes Internationales', in *I movimenti per l'unità europea* (Milan: Jaca Books, 1992), 237–52. Although two volumes of essays have appeared recently – Jean-Dominique Durand, ed., *Le Nouvelles Equipes Internationales. Un movimento cristiano per una nuova Europa* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2007) and Stefan Delureanu, ed., *Les Nouvelles Equipes Internationales. Per una rifondazione dell'Europa (1947–1965)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2006) – neither of them makes a significant contribution to the subject.

[4] On the 'Geneva circles' see esp. Michael Gehler, 'The Geneva Circle of West European Christian Democrats', in Gehler and Kaiser, *Christian Democracy in Europe since 1945*, 207–20.

[5] It is significant that the Geneva circles were an initiative by a German, Jacob Kindt-Kiefer, an associate of the former chancellor Joseph Wirth, together with an advisor to Georges Bidault called Victor Koutzine. The 'German Question' was, predictably, one of the main themes of the discussions. For a study of how 'Christian' political parties in Europe approached the 'German Question', linking it with their wider European strategies, see Tiziana Di Maio, *'Fare l'Europa o morire!' Europa unita e 'nuova Germania' nel dibattito dei cristiano-democratici europei (1945–1954)* (Rome: Euroma, 2008).

[6] On this see Roberto Papini, *The Christian Democrat International* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997).

and the personal and party relationships have given us a fairly detailed picture in which it is possible to pick out both key figures and the strategies of individual parties, whose objectives often diverged quite substantially.[7] Relationships with the Catholic Church have also been clarified.[8]

Although historians have proclaimed that their aim is to find the deeper reasons behind this widely distributed European phenomenon, none so far has examined the political culture of European 'Christian' parties.[9] How did they forge a common project, a shared current of political thought and a set of common values, myths and symbols which, taken together, constituted a precise political allegiance? Social doctrine, the market economy and personalism contributed to a distinctive scheme of values common to Christian Democratic parties, particularly the Catholic ones. They reveal a distinctive theoretical framework and show what distinguished such groupings from conservative parties.[10] Personalism – that is a doctrine founded on the centrality of the person conceived as supreme value and ultimate reality – was of particular importance, hailed as a 'new compass' when dealing with the crisis of modernity.[11] How far these elements (the above list is not exhaustive) determined the positions, reasoning and practice of Christian Democratic parties remains to be explored.

Thus, some fundamental questions remain unanswered. How was a consensus forged? How did these parties face up to the struggles and political interactions of the Cold War? How did they grapple with the difficulties of agreeing upon a strategic approach to such great themes of international politics as European unification, relations with the United States, anti-communism and propaganda?[12] What were the

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[7] For a collection of documents issuing from NEI conferences, see *La Démocratie Chrétienne dans le monde. Résolutions et déclarations des organisations internationales démocrates chrétiennes de 1947 à 1973* (Rome: Union mondiale démocrate chrétienne, 1973), 81–116. There are some important documents illustrating international relationships amongst Christian Democratic personalities and movements in Michael Gehler and Wolfram Kaiser, eds., *Coopération transnationale des partis démocrates-chrétiens en Europe. Documents, 1945–1965* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2004). Over the last few years fresh archives have become accessible, opening up new avenues for research. On this important point see Jean-Dominique Durand, ed., *Christian Democrat Internationalism. Its action in Europe and Worldwide from post World War II until the 1990s* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2013), I, 53–115.

[8] For a study identifying European Catholic parties, particularly those of France, Italy and Germany, as a lobby for the Catholic Church, see Carolyn M. Warner, *Confession of an Interest Group: The Catholic Church and Political Parties in Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). In fact the Catholic Church played only a minor role: see Philippe Chenaux, 'Le Vatican et l'Europe (1947–1957)', *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, 4, 1 (1988), 47–81, and *Une Europe Vaticane?: entre le plan Marshall et les traités de Rome* (Brussels: Ciaco, 1990).

[9] Though there are some useful preliminary remarks in Jean-Dominique Durand, *L'Europe de la Démocratie Chrétienne* (Paris: Editions Complexes, 1995), 66–90.

[10] Kees van Kersbergen, 'The Distinctiveness of Christian Democracy', in Hanley, ed., *Christian Democracy in Europe*, 31–47.

[11] Paolo Pombeni, 'The Ideology of Christian Democracy', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 5, 3 (2000), 296.

[12] A necessary starting point is Maurice Vaussard's comment on the failure of European Christian Democratic parties to pay sufficient attention to international politics: Maurice Vaussard, *Storia della Democrazia cristiana* (Bologna: Capelli, 1959), 254. There are some important considerations on the Christian Democratic approach to European unity in Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*, esp. 191–303. See also Philippe Chenaux, 'L'Europe des catholiques: principes et

key ideas, myths and symbols which underlay the models and interpretive paradigms that could guide both individual and mass action? How did Christian Democratic parties develop and propagate a political programme that would mobilise people, arouse enthusiasm and define the historic mission of Christian Democratic parties based on their shared membership of one subculture, in the anthropological sense?[13]

This is a huge task, and the present article can make only a partial contribution to it, relating to the 'golden years' of Christian Democracy in continental Europe,[14] from the foundation of the NEIs in 1947 to 1954, a year marked by a series of important events on both the international and the European scene. To the death of Stalin the previous year, which had ushered in a new phase of the Cold War, had been added the collapse of the European Defence Community (EDC) and thus that of the European Political Community (EPC), which had an enormous impact on the process of western European integration. This failure – which following the scheme proposed by Ludger Künhardt could be described as a 'crisis of integration'[15] – put an abrupt halt to federalist hopes and postponed indefinitely the crucial debate over a common foreign and defence policy. This setback was compounded by the loss of one of the leading drivers of the integration process between 1952 and 1954, the Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi, who died a few days before the French Assembly voted not to ratify the EDC on 30 August 1954. A Belgian diplomat had described De Gasperi, significantly, as a 'mystic' in the European cause.[16]

The main (but not the only) source for the present article are the minutes of meetings of the NEIs and the Geneva Circles, which clearly reveal the attitudes of the various parties and the evolution of the debate amongst them. These documents are of great interest in helping to show whether these assemblies succeeded in forging common guidelines for international politics and, if so, what these were. They do not, however, reveal the complex internal debates inside particular parties. That would require the use of different sources, together with a detailed analysis of discussions within each party. This article does not set out to reconstruct every viewpoint in the variegated world of European Christian Democracy. Rather it aims to trace the painful convergence of attitudes towards and shared interpretive paradigms for the idea of Europe espoused by parties whose inspiration was fundamentally Christian.

projets', in Michel Dumoulin, ed., *Plans des temps de guerre pour l'Europe d'après-guerre (1940–1947)* (Brussels: Bruylant, 1995), 199–213.

[13] Here 'political culture' is to be understood as in the writings of the historian George Mosse. See George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe: the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Boulder: Westview, 1988).

[14] John Madeley, 'Politics and Religion in Western Europe', in George Moyser, ed., *Politics and Religion in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1991), 50.

[15] Ludger Kühnardt, 'European Integration: Success through Crises', in Ludger Kühnardt, ed., *Crises in European Integration. Challenge and Response, 1945–2005* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1–17.

[16] Note from the Belgian ambassador to Italy, Joseph van derElst, to the Belgian foreign minister van Zeeland, 30 July 1952, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et du Commerce Extérieur, Archives Diplomatiques, Dossier 12.415, Italie, dossier général 1952, dossier [un-numbered] n. 3067 d'ordre 760.

Weltanschauungsparteien

Christian Democracy is a political movement inspired by Christianity, independent of the Church but rooted in Christian tradition. Christian Democrats live and move in a pluralist, secularised society; they strive to keep their political aims in harmony with the Gospel and with Christian values. Their world view is drawn from the gospels and from the papal tradition. Their parties are *Weltanschauungsparteien*.[17]

This definition was suggested by the French Catholic historian Jean-Dominique Durand. It is an ambitious attempt to define Christian Democracy in synthetic and universal terms; it brings together some fundamental elements which clarify not only the specific nature of the political movement but also the nature of the post-war international political context. The German-American historian George Mosse puts it succinctly: 'After the Second World War, after suffering the trauma of defeat, what the people of Germany, Italy and France wanted was a total world vision, covering every aspect of life. Christianity could provide it.'[18] Politics in a modern mass society had to meet new challenges and offer a 'totalising world vision'.[19] Christianity was seen as a priceless source for a positive political ideology that would offer security 'amidst the dissolving certainties'.[20] Mosse argues that after the trauma of the Second World War

the very disorientation of society turned men back to spiritual roots, and these contrasted sharply with that totalitarian society based upon explicit non Christian foundations. It was now argued that totalitarianism had come about precisely because men had abandoned Christianity. The post war conflict between the West and the Communist world reinforced such an interpretation of events.[21]

This certainly reflects the convictions of the leaders of Christian political parties. Above all, they realised that this would be the chief battleground in their war against communism at both the national and the international level.[22] As early as May 1947, at the first NEI congress,[23] Father Joseph-Louis Lebret, editor of the journal *Economie et Humanisme*, told the assembled delegates that if they were to oppose communism effectively they must convey 'a ferment of avant-garde progressiveness'. They must, he said, 'take the struggle on to the spiritual level. Marxism succeeds because of its world vision, which includes human control of nature and of the historical process.'[24]

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[17] Durand, *L'Europe de la Démocratie Chrétienne*, 17–8.

[18] George L. Mosse, 'L'opera di Aldo Moro nella crisi della democrazia parlamentare in Occidente', in Aldo Moro, *L'intelligenza e gli avvenimenti. Testi 1959–1978* (Milan: Garzanti, 1979), x–xi.

[19] Ibid. xi

[20] Mosse, *The Culture Of Western Europe*, 412.

[21] Ibid. 406.

[22] For a detailed examination of communism from the Catholic viewpoint, see Philippe Chenaux, *L'Eglise catholique et le Communisme en Europe (1917–1989). De Lénine à Jean-Paul II* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2009).

[23] For a reconstruction of the events leading to the problematic formation of the NEIs and their first congress in Liège, see esp. Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*, 191–8.

[24] 'Une communication du Louis Joseph Lebret, Directeur d'Economie et Humanisme' to the NEI congress at Liège, May 1947, Fonds Robert Bichet (FRB), c. 9, Centre Historique des Archives Nationales (CHAN), Archive Privée (AP) 519.

This communist *Weltanschauung* must be countered by a radically different concept of human existence.

Lebret was, in fact, assuming a 'totalising' stance. In his interpretation communism was not just a political doctrine: it was a clear and purportedly objective concept of history and of human existence. It followed that any counterpoint to communism must develop a positive political ideology capable of attracting the masses, of focusing national and international public opinion. This theme is virtually omnipresent in the debates held at NEI congresses and in the more private conversations at Geneva. For example, the long discussions about the need to forge stronger links amongst the diverse Christian Democratic parties arose fundamentally from the perceived need for an effective ideological and propagandist tool to use against communism. Indeed, the European strategy of Christian Democratic parties was itself strongly determined by the communist threat.

This 'positive ideology' was not put in terms of conserving what already existed or simply containing the communist threat; rather it was a proposal to reform society, sometimes in radical ways. To that extent, it could be argued that in the bipolar ideological conflict of the Cold War, Christian Democracy arrayed itself alongside socialism and liberal capitalism as a force for renewal rather than simply for conservation.[25] Attempts to find ideological common ground arose principally from the need to define the boundaries of the Christian Democratic parties' identity and so create a clear and adequate self-representation.[26] The final resolution of the congress of the International Youth Section of the NEI held at Hofgastein from 10 to 16 July 1949 declared most emphatically that 'on a foundation of Christian and humanist values, the young people of the twentieth century will build a new city, with a new way of life and new forms of civilisation'.[27]

Although radical demands for renewal came most stridently from the younger generation, they were not confined to it. In a speech to the delegates at the fourth NEI congress, the Italian Catholic and anti-fascist politician and intellectual, Luigi Sturzo, insisted that Christian Democracy must present itself as a positive doctrine which did not rest solely on hostility to communism: 'Far from being mere negative anti-Communism, Christian Democracy opposes Communism because Christian Democracy expresses an altogether fresh approach to civil society and the organisation of the State.' The struggle with communism was, above all, a matter of opposing value systems: 'against the Communists' negation of moral values based on liberty

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[25] Referring to the East–West conflict, Federico Romero says that both socialism and liberal capitalism claimed to be 'eminently transformative' ideologies, expressing not 'cultures of conservation and stability' but rather 'philisophies of renewal, sometimes verging on the cathartic': Federico Romero, *Storia della guerra fredda. L'ultimo conflitto per l'Europa* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), 6.

[26] Romero, taking up a definition proposed by Fred Inglis, suggests that one key characteristic of the Cold War was that it was 'fought not so much on the battlefield as in the sphere of representation, over principles and categories – liberty and liberation, deterrence and credibility, integration and sovereignty – which exist only in the public representation that may be conferred on them at any particular time', Ibid. 12.

[27] 'Résolution sur les problèmes de la Jeunesse', NEI, Section Internationale des Jeunes, Congrès de Hofgastein, 10–16 July 1949, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

and Christianity, Christian Democracy raises the total affirmation of those values, not only as a theory, but as practical politics and as a way of organising the social State'.[28]

The Sorrento congress was an occasion to reflect upon, and significantly develop, the movement's ideological profile. More even than Sturzo's densely argued speech, it was one by another Italian delegate, Lodovico Benvenuti, which explored this theme in the greatest depth. Introducing his paper on the nature and objectives of European Christian Democratic political parties, he declared that

they firmly believe that they represent the highest pinnacle of political thought; they feel they have a duty to affirm those principles in the common interest. Christian Democracy is a conception of human life in society which can be raised as a universal standard; it is our awareness of that mission which unites all our movements in a common will.

The conviction that they represented the fullest and most mature form of political thought led inexorably to the idea that Christian Democrats had a mission to fulfil. The political religiosity permeating this sense of mission was stated unequivocally: 'this mission assumes that we are deeply aware of being in the right; it assumes a religious will to create a new world; it assumes an unshakeable intransigence in the face of hostile ideologies'. Christian Democrats were obliged to undertake this mission – to bring about a rebirth, to construct a new world – because they were the 'guardians of the heritage of Christian civilisation, the defenders of the Christian concept of life, which is based on the infinite value of the human soul, the prime mover of social life'. In this context it was obvious that anti-communism alone was not enough to define the Christian Democratic world view. Benvenuti insisted: 'it is because Communism blocks the road to the creation of a Christian society that we fight against Communism'. He defined the opposition to communism in terms not of defending the status quo but of transforming society through a range of different projects:

the real antithesis is not between today's society (which we wish to transform utterly) and Communism. It is between the society to which we aspire and Communism as it currently appears on the stage of History. Communism means universal proletarianisation; what we want on the contrary is a society that excludes nobody and has no proletariat.

This antithesis made open conflict inevitable on many levels. While insisting that Christian Democrats had never sought to provoke ideological warfare, Benvenuti asserted that they rejected the principle of non-resistance, 'both at the ideological level and at the practical level, both nationally and internationally'.[29]

Here, Benvenuti clearly defines the overall dimensions of the political context. The ideological conflict was between differing conceptions of humanity, of society, of history, and it was defined in explicitly and openly religious terms. At the Geneva meeting on 13 February 1950, without any purely propagandist intentions, the German finance minister Fritz Schäffer declared that the real danger to Europe

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[28] Speech by Luigi Sturzo, 'Objectifs de la Démocratie chrétienne dans l'Europe actuelle', given at the NEI congress in Sorrento, 12–14 Apr. 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

[29] Speech by Ludovico Benvenuti to the NEI congress at Sorrento, 12–14 Apr. 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

came from the fact that 'to the East there is a homogenous bloc armed with a Gospel. To that bloc we must oppose our Christian conception of the State'.[30] The communist religion, he argued, must be opposed not by a generic party programme or a particular political ideology but by faith pure and simple. The Belgian Robert Houben voiced this demand unequivocally: 'We must set a Faith against the Gospel emanating from the USSR.'[31]

This interpretation of communism as a kind of religion was widespread throughout the Christian Democratic movement.[32] On this basis, Christian Democratic parties vaunted their explicit religious affiliations when they claimed to be the vanguard of anti-communism. If communism itself was a religious force, no other political movement could be better qualified to compete with it. André Colin, leader of the French *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (Popular Republican Movement; MRP), disturbed at the prospect of more conservative forces acquiring a monopoly over anti-communism, declared that 'we are the only ones who can give the anti-communist struggle its true meaning, without bringing back reactionary policies'.[33]

At the NEI congress in Bad-Ems, Konrad Adenauer, the West German Chancellor, identified Russia as a mortal threat not only because of its traditional political and military expansionism but also because it was 'following a policy and attempting to disseminate ideas and methods diametrically opposed to those of our own, Christian world'.[34] Sensibilities might vary, but they all converged on a shared interpretation. In its final appeal the congress reiterated the main features of the political context expounded by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader, exhorting 'national movements to work harder than ever to spread the message among the masses, and to ensure that law and custom reflected their spiritual concept of a world that needs to be freed from materialism and totalitarianism'.[35] In other words, Christian ideals must be used to counter communist materialism and, simultaneously, to transform reality. A specifically Christian and democratic ideology had to be developed in order to prevent the masses from accepting its opposite. Christian Democracy must not clothe itself in defensive armour; it must come bearing hope, proclaiming itself as 'the best possible instrument for the liberation of humanity'.[36] This, said Colin, meant above all a refusal to 'abandon the labouring masses who place their hopes in us'.[37] Moreover, to gain the support of the young, who 'still have an awareness of absolute truth and the courage to face danger', it was necessary to ensure that the 'ideal of

[30] Speech by Fritz Schäffer to the Geneva meeting, 13 Feb. 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[31] Speech by Robert Houben to the Geneva meeting, 13 Feb. 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[32] For the Italian Christian Democratic Party see Paolo Acanfora, 'Myths and the Political Use of Religion in Christian Democratic Culture', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 12, 3 (2007), 307–38.

[33] Speech by André Colin to the Geneva meeting, 2 Oct. 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[34] Speech by Konrad Adenauer to the NEI congress at Bad Ems, 14–16 Sept. 1951, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

[35] Appeal by the Fifth NEI congress at Bad Ems, 14–16 Sept. 1951, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

[36] Speech by André Colin to the Geneva meeting, 2 Oct. 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[37] Speech by André Colin to the Geneva meeting, 14 Jan. 1952, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

justice, found in the ethics and image of the Christian' was made real to them at both the national and the international level.[38]

This clash between these two different world visions, these two concepts of humanity and human society, was summed up by Franco Nobili, president of the *Union Internationale des Jeunes Démocrates Chrétiens* (International Union of Young Christian Democrats; UIJDC), in his report on the general political situation given in Bruges in September 1954:

> generally speaking, the world is divided into two camps. One of them is attempting, in response to the needs of our times, to safeguard and nourish the heritage of Christian and humanist civilisation; the other is attempting to impose a new system: new in name and new in appearance, but at bottom, a resurrection of the totalitarian systems that have existed since antiquity, systems which are built upon a materialist concept of the world and of humanity.[39]

In his closing speech, Nobili appealed for a greater mobilisation of young Christian Democrats, urging them to increase the pressure on their own party leaders and to spur them towards more dynamic political action, particularly as far as European integration was concerned. He emphasised the contribution each could make to a battle that was being fought on a global scale:

> Therefore I appeal to you to combine all your strengths so as to reinforce our international organisation. I do not mean only your moral and intellectual support. Let us not forget that we are fighting a veritable holy war in the service of our ideals.[40]

Faced with adversaries who had constructed their own consensus by sacralising politics, Christian Democratic parties sought to forge a movement that could beat the enemy on his own ground. It was felt essential to make contact with the masses. Europeanism, the attempt to define shared paradigms of history and European identity, the painful search for an equilibrium amongst individual nationalisms – all these efforts were focused in essence on that one objective.

Christian Democratic Europeanism

The need to strengthen international Christian Democratic organisations, over which the delegations were in profound disagreement,[41] derived chiefly from the ideological conflicts of the Cold War. Even the delegations most reluctant to set up a fully

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[38] Speech by West German minister Adolf Susterhenn to the NEI congress at Bad Ems, 14–16 Sept. 1951, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

[39] Archivio Istituto Luigi Sturzo (ASILS), Fondo Franco Nobili (FFN), I versamento, sc. 8, fasc. 19, 'Report on the General Political Situation' by Franco Nobili to the Seventh Congress of the *Union Internationale des Jeunes Démocrates Chrétiens* (UIJDC), Bruges, 7–9 Sept. 1954.

[40] Closing speech by Franco Nobili to the Seventh UIJDC Congress, Bruges, 7–9 Sept. 1954, ASILS, FFN, I versamento, sc. 8, fasc. 19.

[41] Consider, for example, the significant fact that politicians belonging to the French MRP and the Belgian *Parti Social Chrétien* (PSC) belonged to the NEI in their personal capacity without any formal mandate from their respective parties. The debates over the strengthening of the NEIs and the nature and purpose of the Geneva colloquies is ably reconstructed by Kaiser in *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*, 191–252.

developed international structure for Christian Democracy (including the French and the Belgians) proclaimed the need for a tightly coordinated approach to ideology and propaganda. Although the MRP leaders were very slow to support a reinforcement of the NEIs, they did not underestimate the importance of international ideological solidarity. Indeed, it was they who first launched the whole idea, in much the same way as the British relaunched the socialist internationals.[42]

Significantly, in November 1949 Maurice Schumann affirmed that 'while no spiritual family can claim total solidarity, I am certain that it is stronger in ours than in any other'.[43] While acknowledging the stubborn persistence of nationalism in post-war Europe, Christian Democrats were inclined to believe that national loyalties were being progressively subordinated to transnational ideologies. A young follower of De Gasperi, Paolo Emilio Taviani, said that 'there is a greater distance between me and my neighbour, who writes for *L'Unità* [the Italian Communist daily newspaper], than between me and the black delegate in the French NEI team'.[44]

This could be demonstrated by numerous quotes from the records of Geneva meetings and from speeches at NEI congresses. Suffice it to say that these demands for ideological solidarity, these calls for technical co-ordination in sensitive areas like the press, finance and propaganda, all stemmed from a consciousness that the political struggle had entered a new dimension. If they wanted to make real progress towards mass consensus and the winning over of public opinion, the Christian Democrats had to adopt common ideological and political strategies.

In this context Europeanism was fundamental. The way forward was pointed out as early as the Hague Congress of 1948: 'Relations between States must transcend nationalism and accept a form of organisation that could be described as federative, or federal, or confederal, so as to achieve unity while maintaining diversity.' Starting with the assumption that 'true European unity cannot be created without first restoring the Christian spirit', Christian Democratic parties defined their task as follows: 'Conscious of their mission for that Europe and aware of their responsibilities, the NEIs consider it imperative: 1) to define the originality of European civilisation, and 2) to analyse the political and social preconditions for its perpetuation and spread.'[45]

This declaration of principle and intent – despite some modifications relating to the actual process of European unification – was to constitute the bedrock of Christian Democratic Europeanism in the years to come. A new political and legal idea of Europe, supranational and capable of transcending (at least to an extent) the principle of national sovereignty without obliterating national identities; Christianity as the truest expression of European civilisation; the consciousness of a historical mission: these were constants in the international debate among Christian Democrats. Naturally, ideas on how best to put these principles and convictions into practice

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[42] Peter Van Kemseke, *Towards an Era of Development. The Globalization of Socialism and Christian Democracy, 1945–1965* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006), 38.

[43] Speech by Maurice Schumann to the Geneva meeting, 21 Nov. 1949, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[44] Speech by Paolo Emilio Taviani to the Geneva meeting, 12 June 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[45] 'Résolution du Congrès de la Haye sur l'organisation de l'Europe', NEI, 17–19 Sept. 1948, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

varied with each stage in the process of European unification, with competing national interests and with the life histories of individual leaders. An example would be Alcide De Gasperi, who, despite having been portrayed by some historians as a consistent Europeanist[46] from his youth onwards,[47] was in fact someone whose federalist approach developed slowly and with some difficulty.[48]

At the Geneva meeting in December 1948, the MRP leader Georges Bidault said that whatever legal form might be adopted, 'we must press ahead with the abandonment of national sovereignty in favour of international power'.[49] Konrad Adenauer, speaking on behalf of the West German delegation, called for resolute Europeanist action to prevent Europe being constructed 'in a different spirit', meaning a spirit that was neither Christian nor democratic.[50] This was a burning question. Christian Democratic parties wanted the Europe then being built to be constructed in accordance with their own traditions: it must be fundamentally Christian in other words. And no political movement had better credentials in this respect than the Christian Democrats, who placed themselves explicitly within that tradition.

Contemplating the Cold War and aggressive Soviet expansionism, the Austrian Felix Hurdes, leader of the *Österreichische Volkspartei* (Austrian People's Party), declared that 'The fate of Europe is in the hands of the democratic Christian parties.'[51] The appearance of a strong, cohesive, international socialist group posed serious problems to Christian Democrats.[52] Robert Houben, of the Belgian Christian Social Party, pointed the way forward: 'We cannot make an exclusively Christian Europe; but we must jointly seek out the fundamental principles which will help to build the Europe that we all wish for.'[53]

Similarly, Robert Bichet, referring to the formidable obstacles then impeding the implementation of the Schuman Plan for a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), warned that 'it would be deplorable if the only real attempt to construct Europe should fail even when our friends are in power in the countries concerned. In that case, our Europe will have failed, and the initiative will pass to others.' If the Schuman Plan failed, Bichet warned, the process of European unification would pass into other hands and so 'the Europe that is as yet unmade will be made under the aegis of Socialism.'[54]

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[46] See Daniela Preda, *Alcide De Gasperi federalista europeo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004).

[47] Quite a number of authors have taken this line. See, for example, Stefano Trinchese, *L'altro De Gasperi: un italiano nell'impero asburgico, 1881–1918* (Rome: Laterza, 2006). One work that does justice to the complexity of De Gasperi's development, including the European question, is Paolo Pombeni, *Il primo De Gasperi: la formazione di un leader politico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

[48] On De Gasperi's formulation of a comprehensive Christian Democratic political approach to Europe and the West, see esp. Guido Formigoni, *La Democrazia cristiana e l'alleanza occidentale: 1943–1953* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996) and Paolo Acanfora, *Miti e ideologia nella politica estera DC. Nazione, Europa e comunità atlantica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013).

[49] Speech by Georges Bidault to the Geneva meeting, 22 Dec. 1948, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[50] Speech by Konrad Adenauer to the Geneva meeting, 22 Dec. 1948, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[51] Speech by Felix Hurdes at the Geneva meeting, 8 Mar. 1949, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[52] Speech by Felix Hurdes at the Geneva meeting, 10 June 1949, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[53] Speech by Robert Houben at the Geneva meeting, 13 Feb. 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[54] Speech by Robert Bichet at the Geneva meeting, 26 Feb. 1951, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

The aim of the Christian Democrats was not solely to launch the process of European unification but to give concrete form to a particular idea of Europe. It would be based not on a particular legal form or model of integration (functionalist or federalist), on which points the disagreements amongst Christian Democrats remained substantial, but on an ideological and moral foundation. The new European order must be in perfect accord with Christian tradition. And that tradition must determine the value system – and the hierarchy of values – on which a united Europe could be built.

This ideal was spelt out in an NEI document that synthesises the Christian Democrat concept of Europeanism:

> What, then, is this common ideal that must preside over the construction of a united Europe? Essentially, it is the promotion of a new order that will include obedience to the law, democratic institutions, the search for social justice and the defence of the inherent spiritual rights of human beings, without distinction of race, creed or opinion.[55]

This 'new order' could be achieved only by rediscovering the Christian foundations of European civilisation. The final declaration of the Young Christian Democrat congress at Tours contained a commitment to fight 'for the birth of a New Society', adding: 'If this New Society is to be born, the UIJDC believes that we must rekindle in all Europeans an awareness of the spiritual foundations of European Unity, which means, above all, the Christian character of our humanism.' Addressing the assembled young people, the Dutch finance minister Gerard Veldkamp set them the objective of creating the myth of the 'new man', that is 'European man'.[56] For young Christian Democrats, European unity was the only way to 'save our civilisation and create a new homeland for all the young'.[57]

From a Christian Democratic perspective, European unity was possible only if Europe's religious and civilised traditions were respected. History showed that proposals for unification had no chance of succeeding unless they were unequivocally Christian in inspiration: 'We can be very sure that tomorrow's Europe will either be democratically united on a Christian foundation, or will continue to be a chaos of peoples and trends, incessantly stirring up disorder and war in the world.'[58] Based on a similar interpretation, the meaning that the Christian parties attributed to the construction of Europe went far beyond the merely political and institutional. Europe was to be a new entity, an incarnation of the very forms of Christian thought (peace, freedom, justice, order), which would choose Christian morality as 'the supreme law of people living in community'[59] and so make it one of the pillars of a free world

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[55] 'Unir l'Europe pour construire la paix', NEI document, n.d., CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

[56] Final declaration of the UIJDC congress, Tours, 9 Sept. 1953, reported in *La Jeune Démocratie Chrétienne*, 2–3, Oct.–Nov. 1953, ASILS, FFN, I versamento, b. 8, fac. 19.

[57] Ibid. It is worth pointing out that the theme of the UIJDC congress in Villach in Aug. 1952 had been 'L'Europe, patrie de l'avenir'.

[58] 'Activités des NEI', NEI document, date uncertain (probably 1953), CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

[59] Report by Heinrich von Brentano to the Bad Ems congress, 14–16 Sept. 1951, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

'impregnated with Christian civilisation'.[60] On the purely social level, Europe must become an instrument of 'democratic and social action' aimed at emancipating the proletariat.[61] At a debate on the EDC at the Tours congress the MRP leader, Henri Teitgen, proclaimed rhetorically and significantly:

> Let us make Europe. We shall be defending a civilisation, a soul, a spirit, and – in my eyes, as in yours – lands, fields, towns, mountains, rivers, men and women, children, wealth, enjoyment of justice, coal and steel, and the civilisation, the Christian humanism, that means everything to us.[62]

Europe was thus presented as a core idea, a myth that could arouse enthusiasm, loyalty and consensus, and would be able to compete with the myths of both nationalism and communism. Leading figures in the CDU reiterated that Europeanism was enjoying a perceptible success among the German people,[63] being seen as the only idea that could arouse enthusiasm among the young.[64] Bruno Dörpinghaus put this clearly at a Geneva meeting in February 1951:

> I have often told the politicians that we will never hold the European front with money or with weapons, unless we give the people a living idea that will focus resistance. Of all the spiritual forces in Europe, only the Christian Democrats can put up such resistance. It is no exaggeration to say that this is more important than questions of administration or security.[65]

Dörpinghaus realised that the most urgent priority was ideological and propagandistic. The problem of Europe could not be posed solely in terms of economics or security. Europe must be understood as a 'living idea', sustained by a political movement that was the expression of a spiritual force. This was a terrain on which the battle for Europe might be lost. Bidault had already expressed this fear in March 1949. The Communists' anti-Europeanist propaganda was very effective, he feared, not only because it was more consistent but also because it played upon core ideas that were more concrete and more generally appealing, such as peace.[66]

Again, in the somewhat different context of late 1952, the French delegate André Colin asserted that it was 'highly desirable that the Christian Democrat parties should deploy a continual barrage of propaganda that will destroy neutralist and pro-Communist arguments against our policy for Europe'.[67] Faced with a stalemate and the consequent political vacuum, and aware of the progressive affirmation of neutralism and recrudescent nationalism, Robert Bichet considered that the only possible riposte was to engage in active pro-European propaganda.[68] At the previous Geneva meeting a few months earlier, yet another Frenchman, Henri Teitgen, had

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[60] Report by Ludovico Benvenuti to the NEI congress, Sorrento, 12–14 Apr. 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

[61] Speech by Henri Teitgen to the Bad Ems congress, 14–16 Sept. 1951, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

[62] Speech by Henri Teitgen to the Tours congress, 4–6 Sept. 1953, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

[63] Speech by West German delegate Herbert Blankenhorn to the Geneva meeting, 13 Feb. 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[64] Speech by Bruno Dörpinghaus to the Geneva meeting, 12 June 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[65] Speech by Bruno Dörpinghaus to the Geneva meeting, 26 Feb. 1951, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[66] Speech by Georges Bidault to the Geneva meeting, 8 Mar. 1949, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[67] Speech by André Colin to the Geneva meeting, 3 Nov. 1952, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[68] Speech by Robert Bichet to the Geneva meeting, 3 Nov. 1952, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

stressed the urgent need to coordinate their propaganda relating to foreign policy so as to give a 'striking impression of strength and cohesion'.[69] Christian Democratic Europeanism must present itself as a powerful force of attraction at the international level.[70]

It was precisely as European integration advanced towards the political centre stage that it provoked strong reactions, revealing, amongst other things, the vitality of nationalism. The Dutch delegate Margaretha Klompé called for concerted action 'against the resurgence of nationalism'. She considered it necessary to fight nationalism at both the national and European level, reinforcing the activities of the NEI and generally supporting international cooperation among Christian Democratic parties.[71] The West German delegate and future foreign minister Heinrich von Brentano provided a snapshot of the political situation, stressing the risks it presaged: 'at this moment there is a race in progress between European thinking and nationalist thinking. Moreover, there is still insufficient co-operation among our parties, and all those who support the European ideal. If all this goes on, I fear for the future of Europe.'[72]

In West Germany the ruling Christian Democrats were inclined to blame this state of affairs in part – quite a large part – on the Christian Democratic parties themselves: their divisions and their inability to gloss over their national differences for the sake of unity had hampered European integration and thwarted what could have been a very attractive core idea. Two and a half years previously, von Brentano had denounced what he saw as inertia among Europeanists: 'Nowhere, and in no circumstances, have we shown ourselves willing to renounce even a morsel of our respective sovereignties. Nothing positive has been achieved.'[73]

Since February 1950, when von Brentano had made this comment, substantial progress had been made towards integration; however, an upsurge in nationalism had drastically increased resistance to the abandonment of national sovereignty. This was a particular problem for the West Germans. Adenauer's pro-western strategy, which took precedence over the reunification of Germany (and postponed it *sine die*), inevitably aroused strong nationalist opposition. And naturally the West German Communists seized on the theme of nationalism inasmuch as it was anti-western.[74] In this context, Otto Lenz said openly that 'the best way to head off German nationalism is to unite Europe as quickly as possible'.[75]

Thus, Christian Democrats thought that the transcending of nationalism was essential, both ideologically and as a matter of practical politics. Nonetheless, even the most overt federalism – as manifested during the last two years of De Gasperi's

[69] Speech by Henri Teitgen to the Geneva meeting, 16 June 1952, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[70] Speech by Heinrich von Brentano to the Geneva meeting, 16 June 1952, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[71] Speech by Margretha Klompé to the Geneva meeting, 16 June 1952, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[72] Speech by Heinrich von Brentano to the Geneva meeting, 16 June 1952, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[73] Speech by Heinrich von Brentano to the Geneva meeting, 13 Feb. 1950, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[74] Speech by Konrad Adenauer to the Geneva meeting, 10 June 1949, defining German communism as 'the most verbally nationalistic', CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

[75] Speech by Otto Lenz to the Geneva meeting, 16 June 1952, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 10.

leadership of the Italian Christian Democrats – could not banish the nation from the ideological horizon, or from the political practice of Christian Democratic parties.[76] Europe was hence envisaged as a new creation with a new identity that could transcend national identities without obliterating them. Similarly, new European institutions were not to supplant individual states; instead they would redefine sovereignty based on a new relationship between national and supranational authority:

The new units that are now being established … will never replace the nation states. The sovereignty of the nation states will not be simply abandoned and transferred to these units. The sovereignty of the nation states will remain, but in a new form; the notion of state sovereignty will not disappear but will be put on a new foundation.[77]

Although it did not go beyond a simple summary of the powers already envisaged for the ECSC and the EDC, the document produced by the ad hoc Assembly in 1952–3 with the intention of launching the European Political Community represented a political and legal innovation. Von Brentano explained it as follows: 'the road we are following is a new one; it is *sui generis*, because it is not subject to the system of public law'.

Referring to the relationship between national identity and European identity, the Belgian Christian Socialist Pierre Wigny said firmly that 'we cannot dream of eliminating nation states by creating Europe',[78] or of hampering 'their development'.[79] Nation and supra-nation must co-exist in a dialectic relationship such that the latter could not be conceived as ousting the former. Speaking at the closing session of the Assembly in March 1953, the French foreign minister Georges Bidault addressed himself to all those who feared that 'Europe' might annihilate the individual nation and destroy its identity:

Men whose faithfulness to old traditions makes them attentive to the voice of the land and of the dead are expressing anxiety lest this enterprise lead to the disappearance of their fatherlands. But what is holy and sacred is the fatherland itself, not its frontier posts and customs sheds.[80]

Conclusion

It is clear that the steady emergence of neutralist and nationalist positions in the European Cold War context forced Europeanists to adopt a more cautious strategy. However, an emerging concept of harmony between Europe and the nation states, avoiding opposition and prefiguring an equilibrium between national sovereignty

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[76] We still lack a full analysis of the relationship between Europe's Christian Democratic parties and the nation, or nationalism. For a brief treatment see Peter Pulzer, 'Nationalism and Internationalism in European Christian Democracy', in *Christian Democracy in Europe since 1945*, 10–24.

[77] 'Supranational authority and the notion of sovereignty', speech by Friedrich von der Heydte to the NEI congress, Tours, 4–6 Sept. 1953, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9.

[78] Speech by Pierre Wigny in the Assembly, 8 Jan. 1953, HAEU, EC-fonds, AH-3.

[79] Speech by Pierre Wigny at the morning session of the Assembly, 7 Mar. 1953, HAEU, EC-fonds, AH-7.

[80] Speech by Georges Bidault at the closing session of the Ad Hoc Assembly, 9 Mar. 1953, HAEU, EC-fonds, AH-8.

and supranational authority, was undoubtedly characteristic of Christian Democratic Europeanism.

Over and above the strategies of individual parties during individual stages in the unification process, over and above any chosen model for integration, Christian Democrats had developed a shared concept of European civilisation which inspired them with missionary zeal. Having identified Europe with the religious and civil traditions of Christianity, these parties saw themselves as the sole repository of the ideals and morality of European civilisation and, therefore, as the only force capable of building a Europe that would be true to its own historical, civil and religious identity and traditions. Any calls for conservation or renewal were evaluated with reference to Christian values and Christian principles.

True to their religious inspiration, the parties also presented themselves as the best counter-force to communism, which they interpreted as a politico-religious phenomenon that was opposed by its very nature – its materialism, its concept of humanity, its entire political and social programme – to the *essence* of European civilisation. This interweaving of religious (but non-confessional) identity with political identity was a novel element in the Christian Democratic vision of Europe. At the same time, their shared conviction that democracy was the moral foundation of a civilised co-existence whose roots (to use a Bergsonian expression) sprang from the Gospel was a departure from the political tradition of Christian political parties in Europe. Similarly, their idea of the relationship between the nation states and supranational organisations could not be seen as a mere application of the principles of Christian universalism.

While they must bear some of the responsibility for the collapse of the EDC and of the programme for the construction of a political community that was aggressively asserted at the NEIs,[81] Europe's Christian Democratic leadership did their best to encourage a feeling of 'belonging' among the peoples of post-war Western Europe. As the Belgian historian Emiel Lamberts has said: 'Christian Democrats first developed a cultural and spiritual conception of the European Union, which may be viewed as their specific contribution during the early stages of the European construction'.[82] Similarly, Michael Gehler and Wolfram Kaiser have argued that the crucial function of the NEIs was to serve 'as a forum for the ideological rationalisation of Christian democratic Parties'; in particular, 'transnational cooperation allowed the Christian Democrats to develop their own peculiar notion of Europe'.[83] And, as Peter van Kemseke has suggested, it also functioned 'as a counterweight to social democracy'.[84]

[81] Speech by Belgian Christian Socialist Paul Herbiet at the Bruges congress, 10–12 Sept. 1954, CHAN, AP 519, FRB, c. 9, affirming that 'the idea of Europe has suffered a serious defeat, and those who have caused it bear a heavy responsibility'.

[82] Emiel Lamberts, 'The influence of Christian Democracy on Political Structures in Western Europe', in *Christian Democracy in the European Union (1945–1995)*, 290–1.

[83] Gehler and Kaiser, 'Toward a Core Europe in a Christian Western Bloc', 250–1.

[84] Van Kemseke, 'Towards an Era of Development', 49.

It is primarily in this context that the contribution made by Christian Democratic internationalism to the building of Europe and the dissemination of a European political identity should be assessed. Christian Democratic parties developed a specific idea of Europe, its traditions and identity; they strove to find a shared foundation of values, believing that by rooting themselves in the Christian religion these values would identify a civilisation, and hence a concept of humanity that could dispense with rigid confessional affiliations.