

The lasting presence of Christian Democracy

Dr. J.F. Groen

Why are Christian democratic parties apparently resilient in the face of the secularisation which characterises western society? What I would like to show in this paper is that this resilience has to do with these parties being conscious of a religious kernel in all human reasoning and policy making, and as a result, these parties embracing a model of 'civil society' that safeguards human life and freedom of domination by either the state or the market. Both these points define a *political* point of view and do not require actually affirming a particular *creed*. Thus the central political ideas embraced by Christian democracy do not lose their appeal in times of secularisation.

What I present is an argument in philosophy and political theory. I would like to point at some larger structures in the landscape of politics which connect some pivotal ideas that have been developed since the foundations of western democracies were laid in the seventeenth century. My analysis will depart from a common day understanding of the main political ideologies in our societies. This understanding should appear intuitively to be correct. The argument succeeds when it has described a political view that we (intuitively) feel is 'Christian democratic', without reference to confessional ideas.

1 Religion and politics

The relationship between religion and politics is extremely complex. In the context of this paper, I focus more in particular on the relationship between Christianity and politics. Though confessed Christians in Western Europe often attach themselves to Christian parties and organisations,¹ Christian parties cannot label themselves as the voice of Christians, and Christians do not by definition affiliate themselves with Christian organisations. In virtually all political parties one can find

¹ Of course, where christian parties and organisations exist. Under which conditions christian parties and organisations are formed, is of course an issue in itself.

confessed Christians.² Only for Catholics the directive ever was issued that they had to form Catholic organisations and vote on members of the Catholic Party (for example, the notorious bishops' Mandement of 1954 in The Netherlands). The Christian creed itself does not oblige to a particular political position and confessed Christians do shape policies that would be banned by their own church.³ As a consequence, the connection between the Christian creed and what Christians actually do in politics is not an issue for political theory.

Without going into a detailed analysis, the statistics seem to indicate that Christian Democratic parties have a wider share of the electorate than what would be expected based on, for example, regular church attendance. The central position of Christian Democratic parties in the political landscape of, for example, Germany, The Netherlands, and Belgium, is somewhat at odds with the level of active church attendance in these countries. Where The Netherlands at first sight does not show a big discrepancy,⁴ Germany shows more diverging numbers.⁵ Thus, the question arises indeed why a generally secularized electorate still gives significant support to a Christian Democratic party.

A complication is that political theory sees the presence of confessional parties in general as highly problematic, but also has not done much research into this issue – that at least seems to be a constant complaint in articles on the presence of Christian democracy (Kersbergen 2008, 260). A widely shared view on the origin of Christian Democratic parties is, as Kalyvas (1996, 7) summarises it, that confessional parties are a “political and historical” anomaly. That these parties do not fit into an analysis that is based on class cleavages is the most general explanation; which, however, also

² The so-called ‘Doorbraak’ after WW-II was initiated by Christians who deliberately wanted to connect with the newly formed Labour Party PvdA. Farmers’ organisations began combined, split in a ‘neutral’, a protestant and a Catholic organisation, but many Christian farmers choose to stay in the neutral organisation. Nowadays, these organisations are merged in LTO-Nederland. See Van Marrewijk 1990, 10.

³ The Catholic minister of justice Hirsch Ballin installed a commission which will advice on parenthood for lesbian couples -- <http://rechtennieuws.nl/14876/commissie-lesbisch-ouderschap-en-interlandelijke-adoptie.html> (12-04-2010) -- which is completely against the rules of ‘Rome’.

⁴ *Trouw* of 29 July 2009 writes that over between 1997 and 2008, the number of people participating in Sunday worship at least once a month has dropped from 23% to 19%. In the elections of 2006, 26.5% of the voters voted for the CDA, and 4,5 for the two other Christian parties. The followers of these latter more orthodox parties are also more faithful in weekly attendance.

⁵ 3.9% of EKD-membership attends every Sunday, and 16% of Catholics -- <http://www.hanisauland.de/lexikon/c/christentum.html> (retrieved 09-04-2010), whereas CDU and CSU combined won 38.5% of the popular vote in 2002 (http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ergebnisse_der_Bundestagswahlen, (09-04-2010)).

says something about the limits of bipolar political analysis. Kalyvas's own explanation for the rise and resilience of Christian Democratic parties is that these were an unintended consequence of Catholic action against anticlerical attacks by liberals (1996, 6)⁶ and that in the end these parties themselves "deemphasized religion to protect their autonomy and ... independence of the Church" (1996, 260). Thus, they "did not discard Catholicism but secularized it, while embracing liberal democracy." (1996, 264)

Christian Democratic parties became a political reality in itself, independent of church affiliation, and have acquired sufficient inertia as part of the political landscape to be able to carry on independently from the trends to secularisation in Western societies. Kalyvas's might be a plausible explanation for those Christian Democratic parties that have its roots in Catholic Parties, it does not go for Dutch Calvinist parties that eventually merged in the Dutch CDA. The ARP of Abraham Kuyper is not only seen as the first modern political party in The Netherlands, it was a deliberate and intentional product that was connected with the social movement under Kuyper's activist leadership. His political and social ideas contain some key concepts that are not connected with a particular confession. The intention was to form 'Christian organisations', and not 'organisations of Christians'.⁷ I think one can interpret this that the intention was to form a political party, or a labour union, and to give this organisation a certain quality: a better political party as *political* party. Kuyper's movement was a social movement that stated that a better society was possible and necessary.⁸ This leads to the suggestion that Christian Democracy from the beginning represented in the first place a political ideal and that its' continuing presence can be analysed via political theory and social movement theory. In short, for a Christian political party a common political vision is necessary, not a common religious conviction (Woldring 1996, 24). This *political* point of view would be the beginning of an explanation of Christian Democracy's resilience in the face of secularisation. This explanation then would have to achieve two things: first, it should show that Christian Democracy is less connected with the

⁶ In hindsight, it is plausible that the central struggle in the nineteenth century was not that between capital and labour, but a struggle against the power of a liberal elite; that is also suggested when Van Doorn (1989, 36) concludes that in the Netherlands it was the confessional party of A. Kuyper, which broke the power of the liberals.

⁷ See Abraham Kuyper as cited in Klapwijk 1995, p.97.

⁸ In *Identiteit als Belofte* I have argued that for the Christian Labour movement that formed alongside, the breach with the socialist labour union was felt as a loss.

prescriptions of a particular creed, without denying that it has a 'religious' point of view. Second, it should clarify that this political point of view is a viable political position in its' own right and thus is attractive for people who are not confessed Christians

2 What is a 'religious' point of view?

If a confessed religious creed does not provide the content of the Christian democratic view, does that mean that religion has nothing to do with its' political vision? Within the political-philosophical discourse we can only give a descriptive account of how people base their political vision on a religious creed. We cannot argue about the validity of these grounds; politically speaking, it does not add anything to the validity of a policy whether or not it represents a correct interpretation of the Bible, the Koran, the book of Mormon, or whatever source people have. And as there is no one-to-one relationship between a professed faith and a political position, there is no reason to make exegesis part of political analysis. G'd in the description is not illuminating for political theory. What *is* important for this analysis is the characterisation 'religious'. What is a 'religious' point of view?

Generally accepted is that 'religious' means something to the extent of 'concerned with religion'. The COD also gives 'scrupulous, conscientious' as meanings. That hints at 'religious' being a quality of human beings, rather than a connection with a creed or confession. This is a somewhat different use of what we commonly think when calling something 'religious'; it is maybe closer to what in current discourse is labelled 'spiritual'.

Herman Dooyeweerd, one influential philosopher for the Christian Democratic tradition, talks about the religious roots of thought, which for him means that we direct our thought away or towards God (NC I, v), but we do not need to include God at this point. I would characterise this *act of directing* itself as religious, not too much out of line with Dooyeweerd's own introducing of the 'pistic' aspect of human thought, viewing 'faith' as an irreducible function of human knowledge (1955-58, III, 299). To which point one directs one's thinking is not important for this act to be called 'religious'.

There is a moment in our thinking where we direct our thoughts and acts towards something. This act appears to originate from nowhere when we realise that in all our acts and thoughts, 'I' am implied, but 'I' never can look behind myself; 'I' escapes all efforts to approach it 'objectively'. And, by saying 'I', I have already directed myself. This direction is 'religious': it is groundless and a sign of having faith (in oneself). This 'having faith' is a direct and immediate certainty, without any discursive

reasoning, and which manifests itself in theoretical knowledge and practical life.

This 'groundless foundation' appears in our reasoning when we have exhausted arguments and possible evidence for our point of view. We experience that we cannot stand behind ourselves, and that there is a point where we can only, legitimately though, say something to the extent of 'I', or, with the USA Declaration of Independence, 'We' hold these truths to be self-evident. From Descartes till the recent foundationalism discussion we have not been able to find one clear, distinct anchor point for our knowledge and arguments. What we rather discover is that every foundation is itself a dry dock under our ship that floats in an endless and groundless ocean (Duintjer 1977, 76). However many arguments we provide, we are still floating in this groundless mass of water. Even though we do not use G'd as an anchor point anymore, nor a first mover who wound up the clockwork, it is a leap of faith when we reach the end of the pile of dry docks and still stay with the direction we have chosen. We show that we have faith in this groundless foundation. That we can trust ourselves to this groundless foundation is an expression of the religious character of human beings. Fundamentalism denies exactly this quality, and thus becomes intolerant of everyone who has faith with a different fixed anchor point – and in the analysis given here, 'religious fundamentalism' would be a contradiction in terms.

There are all kinds of differences between people – opinion, faith, science, policy – where in the final analysis we arrive at this religious foundation of the precepts and directions that 'we', and maybe not 'you', consider to be self-evident. When Robert Nozick states "Individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights)" (1974, ix) he makes a religious statement in the sense I use it. There is no ground for this statement other than that he cannot scrap this first line from the bottom of his argument – it will immediately sink to the bottom of the groundless ocean..

A bit more complex than this are the politically and morally 'hot' issues of abortion and euthanasia. At the basis of all the different views we hold regarding these issues, religious ideas are at stake.

However we think about abortion, allowing it or not *is* in the end a political decision, even within a society where everyone has the same world view. When do we say that the foetus is a human being: after conception, after birth, or somewhere in between? Does the life of the baby trump the life of the mother; is it only the woman who decides? For all possible positions in this debate we can give arguments, and some of these arguments can also be accepted by opposing parties. But in the end, the arguments contain a religious position and will not convince someone who has an opposing

position. The law will reflect a political decision, and cannot claim to have settled the ethical and ontological issue of *when* human life begins.

That the opposing views in this and similar cases are 'irreconcilable' is a bit of a truism. John Rawls introduced the term 'reasonable differences' for such a situation, arguing these are due to the 'burdens of judgment': "sources of disagreement ... between reasonable persons are the many hazards involved in the *correct* (...) exercise of our powers of reason and judgment" (1996, 56, my italics). Without lapsing into relativism, it is hard to see how the opposing positions in ethical issues such as abortion and euthanasia are due to the fact that people are for all kinds of reasons hindered in the *correct* exercise of reason and judgement, or how reason can solve these issues. Rather than calling these 'reasonable differences, we have to speak of differences where we cannot blame the other party for being unreasonable or irrational. These differences go back to 'religious' positions, i.e., the positions which result from our groundless choosing of a direction. These issues are politically highly significant because these ask for decisions and whatever decision we make, it goes against the deepest 'religious' views of one of the parties involved. The best thing we have learned from the religious wars in the seventeenth century is that we have found a political solution to the religious conflicts that belong to our human existence.

3 Liberal Democracy

The basic pattern of western society is the liberal democracy as it was outlined for the first in full by John Locke. The political order he describes honours the liberty and equality of human beings and he sketches a basically democratic political order in which men enter based on their consent (Second Treatise, nr. 117), connected with a market economy based on private property. Beyond the direct influence on the American Revolution, this pattern of a democratic order connected with a concept of property has remained untouched by the subsequent political ideologies in western societies.

Concerning the democratic order, a more extensive argument can be omitted here. It is sufficient to note that mechanisms to invite and assure the consent of the objects of legislation are institutionalised in western societies and supported by the major political ideologies.

That John Locke's concept of property is not contested by the political ideologies that shaped our current democratic systems, asks for some explanation. Locke defines property as an active right, a

right that involves a duty for others to respect it.⁹ Man, so he argues, has a property in his own body, and thus in the labour of his own hands. As a consequence, whatever man picks up and mixes with his own labour, becomes his property (27). In this way, whatever is taken from the *common* stock and mixed with someone's labour becomes one's *private* property. This is no theft, Locke argues, because otherwise one would starve to death – how can one eat an apple when it has not first become one's property (28).

That the earth is given to us in common, and that we can have private property is crucial here, because these premises define the two big sins in Locke's account of property. All things are given to us in common to enjoy, and taking out through one's labour more than oneself can enjoy, and thus to waste it, is taking what in fact belongs to others (31). Thus the first sin is theft by taking out too much. The second sin is wasting that which could benefit all. Labouring the land will yield more, up to 100 times according to Locke's estimate (42), and when one does not labour the land, one withholds this yield to the benefit of all (43).¹⁰

So, "in the beginning, when all the world was America" (49), private property was limited to what one could labour oneself, or, what came to the same, to what did not lead to wasting common property. Money first makes it possible to possess more than one can labour and use oneself, without wasting common property. The basso continuo of political deliberation and ideologies since has been how to combine acknowledging the right to (some sort of) private property with contributing, and not wasting or exhausting, the common good, and how to deal with the inequalities that result from the use of money.¹¹ What is legitimate property, does it exist, and how does it relate to the common property? What is not contested, however, seems to be the idea that legitimate property originates in the labour of our own hands. For liberalism and capitalism this goes without saying. The political order is based on private property, and the market is left free to have its' way. An invisible hand is supposed to provide for the common good.

Socialism turns this around and chooses for common property. If a worker makes a chair out of €10,- worth of wood and his boss sells the chair for €100,- and gives the carpenter €20,- in wage, the employer has taken €70,- that does not belong to him. The most radical is then to collectivise the

⁹ In his study *Natural Rights Theories* Richard Tuck (1981) shows how John Locke stands at the end of the development of the idea of natural rights which originated from the discussion about rights to property that was induced by the critique on having property by the Franciscan order.

¹⁰ This is also a straightforward legitimation of the colonisation of the American continent.

¹¹ So nowadays, John Rawls opts for redistribution, whereas Robert Nozick opts for private entitlements.

production process, as communism decreed. Socialism did not in that radical way abolish private property, but it does focus on ways of redistributing wealth. The market cannot be left to function freely, the state has to regulate and direct the market so that it will first provide for the common good.

4 State – Market – Society

The institution of a market is based on the tacit agreement to use money, an agreement that is not based on a contract, as is political society. In Locke's picture, we see the contours of the political sphere, the state, and the economic sphere, the market, becoming clear. Since John Locke, a separate sphere called 'civil society' has developed as a "social realm which is neither dominated by state power nor simply responsive to the systemic features of capitalism" (Calhoun 1994, 311). Both the market and society are forms of social organisation that is not under the directives of the state (Calhoun 1994, 307). Thus, in short, we can distinguish the three spheres of state, market, and society that define the realm for political and social life. In a short characterisation, one can think of the state which regulates for the common good; the market which provides for the common good; and society which embodies the common good.

Within the triangle of state – market – society three configurations exist, each resulting from the pull of one of the corners. (1) The liberal configuration that puts the market in the centre; (2) the social democratic configuration that focuses on state regulations; (3) the configuration of 'civil society' with which Christian Democracy has become connected. What this means for society becomes clear when one correlates these configurations with types of social (movement) organisations.

(1) The liberal (and 'neo-liberal') configuration with its' emphasize on a free market, an invisible hand, and a night watcher state, correlates with charity and volunteer organisations which do good work for people in need, and lobby organisations that have access to the political process. This was the issue with liberalism in the nineteenth century: confronted with the proletarianisation, liberalism did not think of structural reforms, but only in terms of individual benevolence and charity. The Salvation Army and benevolent industrialists are products of this liberal spirit. The America of De Tocqueville shows that there can be a viable and active society under a liberal configuration.

The pitfall of this configuration is that society can become dominated by lobby organisations and is itself politically toothless: the associations in society do their own thing, without connection to the political process. Mirjam Smith shows how in contemporary Canada, in my opinion a fairly pure classic liberal society, charity and volunteer organisations are encouraged, and even take over

services from government, but are not allowed to exert political influence. The best way for social movements to have influence on policies, is to become a professional lobby organisation. Political activism by a social movement organisation will be punished by taking away its' status as charitable organisation.¹²

(2) The socialist configuration focuses more on the state as regulator of life in society and guardian of the common good. The support and help for people in society is organised by the state itself, and social organisation have to represent society, and thus in a way reproduce the political map of society. Here, one does not need a lobby organisation to influence the political process; this influence is incorporated into the social-political system. Social Democracy works towards democratisation of all institutions in society. In general, it will resist formation of separate organisations such as religious schools; the formation of a Christian labour union in the Netherlands was felt as a kind of desertion. In this configuration, structural reform is possible through the democratic process. For society as an independent sphere, there is not much space left, as it is being incorporated in the political process, and thus pulled in the corner of the state. State dirigisme is the pitfall for social democracy.

(3) A third configuration grants society more autonomy. It allows for institutions and social organisations that can have influence on the social-political system, without being lobby organisations or without being incorporated in the political process or the state. Life in society has to be free from domination by the state or the market. Organisations also can be connected with particular ideologies and convictions of people in society, they do not have to represent society as a whole. The state becomes more or less a night watcher state for society, providing the supporting framework ('subsidy') and letting society fill in the content. This configuration is embraced by Christian Democracy, and also for a large part developed by Christian parties because it allows them to organise on the basis of their confession. But not only Christians: the Dutch broadcasting system as it was designed in the first half of the 20th century shows how a plurality of social organisations can exist. In this system, everyone who considered themselves as representing a world view was able to get a broadcasting license and funding from the licensing fees. Airtime was allocated according to the number of members of the broadcasting society. A further requirement was that the organisation would offer a general program, i.e., containing news, culture,

¹² The story Mirjam Smith sketches is corroborated by the experiences of the author of this paper. In BC, people were sent to volunteer organisations for guidance with their applications for disability benefits. However, there was no independent platform where one could address the injustices and resulting inequalities in order to change policies.

entertainment, information. The idea was that airtime was a public good and public opportunity, and that not the state, but the public itself (= the people) should fill it with content. It gave Catholics, protestants, socialist, and others equal access to this new medium. The state only set the rules for access. (Hiemstra 1997).

This third model gives society its' own voice, next to the political process. The danger for this model is corporatism, when groups in society become the kernels of political and economic organisation.

5 Society and community

Three different configurations of society result from the pull of one of the corners of the triangle state-market-society. The most unclear position here is that of society: it either is made toothless when the corner of the market pulls too hard, or it becomes incorporated in the political process when the corner of the state pulls too hard. Society itself does not seem to have a very coordinated pull. That is for some part due to a confusion about what society and its associations are. The rise of communitarianism has muddled these concepts.

'Community' and 'civil society' have both been raised to the status of 'feel good concepts'. In political discourse, and especially in Christian democratic ideas, both are considered positive ideas, and both 'should be strengthened'. What exactly is meant with 'community' and 'civil society' is less clear. In order to clarify the lasting appeal of Christian democracy, it is helpful to address some misunderstandings here, especially since Christian democracy is attracted to communitarian ideas. What I want to show is that under each of the terms of 'community' as well as 'society' two distinct entities are subsumed.

First community. The value of 'community' is central for so-called 'communitarianism'. It is good to distinguish between philosophical communitarianism and political communitarianism (Swift 2006, 133/4). Philosophical communitarianism goes back to Michael Sandel's critique on the unencumbered self that he saw as background of John Rawls's theory of justice. Rawls, in Sandel's view, gives too poor a picture of the moral qualities of the individual, because Rawls's individualistic starting point does not allow that "we attribute responsibility or affirm an obligation to a family or community or class or nation rather than to some particular human being" (1984, 62/3). This is a highly problematic position. It is one thing to acknowledge that our moral self is in some fundamental way connected with a community and that we can have a responsibility towards a group of persons, rather than a single individual. That however does not mean that we have a moral obligation towards

this group that trumps all moral considerations and ultimately defines our moral self. The “infinite right of the subject” (Hegel) means that we are never bound to the limits of our community, or class or nation. We can say “I” and distance ourselves from a particular community, and this is the individual freedom that is primordial for a tradition where the individual is not to be used for the benefit or purpose of the group.¹³ For a human society, we cannot design rules that a priori are connected to our own community or nation. When our religion prohibits conversion to another faith, we cannot introduce this precept in the constitution of a liberal democracy, however it would represent our responsibility to what we might consider our community.

Political communitarianism, connected foremost with the ideas of Amitai Etzioni, is concerned with issues of rights and duties, rebuilding local communities, responsibilities towards society, and it has a rather complex relationship with philosophical communitarianism.¹⁴ The connection between the two is of course the idea of community, where political communitarianism sees communities as important for the moral and social development of responsible citizens, and sees in our individualistic culture a danger for the development of responsible citizens. *Bowling alone* does not contribute to *The Good Society*, to make a pun on the studies by Putnam and Bellah.

According to Etzioni, communities exist where people have frequent interactions resulting in (1) strong affective bonds, and (2) a shared moral culture. Which groups would count as communities in this strong sense? Most likely religious and ethnic groups, and maybe nations. But the waning of community is mostly connected with such observations as ‘bowling alone’, that people spend less time doing things together and have fewer face-to-face contacts in general. Affective ties can develop even over the internet, as Etzioni also points out (2004, 227). But for most activities that people do together, the football club, the volunteer support organisation, the gardening club, talking in terms of a ‘shared moral culture’ is misplaced. Thus, most common activities are not communal activities because they do not involve the formation of a shared moral culture.

What is important for people, and that is a truth underlying the political communitarian vision, is that it is important for the social and moral development of people to do things together, and that when people stop doing things together, something is lost. A rich associational life is sign of a healthy society, and what in a wider sense is labelled ‘community’ are these associations where people do

¹³ This *is* the individualist truth in Rawls’s original position, despite that Nozick came with his libertarian critique in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

¹⁴ None of the communitarian philosophers such as MacIntyre, Sandel, Charles Taylor, have signed the communitarian manifest of Amitai Etzioni.

things together. In a horizontal and mobile society, people are part of multiple associations at the same time, and for as long as it takes.¹⁵ People are part of local 'communities' for as long as they live in a particular place, and these local 'communities' coexist with other 'communities' and associations. People will do things together, in the neighbourhood, the sports club, as a volunteer, on the internet, and these activities are important for the quality of society and the morality of the individual. This associational life is essential for a viable society. The most important here is the moral development that results from cooperation. Solidarity and a view on the common good are learned in this way, but these moral precepts are not part of the moral culture that would make a football club a community. These moral values rather form the 'grammar' that defines associational activities, and only by participating in these practices do we learn the rules.¹⁶ What political communitarianism calls 'community' would better be called 'association'.

A few words on the second fuzzy concept, society. Most likely, an analysis of the meaning of the term 'civil society' as it has been used in political and social theory in the last two or three decades, will reveal an equal number of meanings as the 95 or so that Thomas Kuhn found of the term 'paradigm'. I think the confusion is that 'society' can apply to either a sphere that is not state or market, or to the totality of the configuration of state, market, and society in e.g. Dutch society. Maybe it is more clear, following to some extent Michael Walzer's 'associationalism' (1995, 171) to say that a 'civil society' is a configuration of state, market and society where there is a plural and active associational life together with some more institutionalised communities that are neither state nor market – churches, for example. This 'civil society' is, as Walzer identifies it, the "setting of settings" (1995, 163), the setting where we as citizens produce and exchange in the market, discuss politics, and connect with others in all kinds of associations. Society itself is then the independent sphere formed by these associations of cooperation next to, and distinct from the state and the market.

6 Trias Societas

The configuration of a *Trias Societas*, of state, market, and society as relatively autonomous and independent spheres, holds the key to the resilience of Christian democracy in times of

¹⁵ See Lawrence Friedman, *The Horizontal Society* where he argues that contemporary society is less hierarchic, and contains more equal and fluid bonds.

¹⁶ Pillarisation in the Netherlands was based on a common moral culture, and broke down once it was realised that cooperation was more fundamental to the activities of the pillarised organisations.

secularisation. Within the triangle state-market-society, political ideologies pull the organisation of society to the respective corners. Christian Democracy represents more than other ideologies the voice of society. Within this triple force field, Christian Democracy stands for a public responsibility of 'society' where neither state nor market are dominant. This is in line with a plurality of associations in society as it was already described by the Calvinist thinker Althusius (see Woldring), and it is connected with a more general problem in democracies: how to protect the minority against the majority, or more general, how to protect the individual from domination by other individuals. This general problem is in completely different settings also put forward by political thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and John Dewey.

Abraham Kuyper's idea of sphere sovereignty tries to answer that question too. For Kuyper, there is nothing, even not a contract that can bind man: nobody has the right to reign over another person (1898, 73). His solution is to settle a balance of powers in society, where the state's power is balanced by other spheres – the family, the church, the school. Kuyper highly appreciated the American Constitution where the *Trias Politica*, the balance of the powers in the state, found its purest realisation.

This idea of sphere sovereignty also results from a certain relativity in the Christian confession. The many schism in the church – from the reformation to the one led by Kuyper himself – lead, according to him, to the giving up of the idea of the visible unity of the church, where after *thus* freedom naturally appears on stage (1898, 94).¹⁷

Along this line, one can think of the *Trias Societas*. Only power can subdue power, so the power of the state and the market should be counterweighted by the power of society. A 'civil society' would be characterised by a multiple, plural dispersion of power in society, and as a consequence, it can take citizens' responsibility seriously.

The associational configuration of society is a result of the realisation that people in honesty and good faith will have different opinions and views about the most important principles for life.

Organising a confessional party was done in the conviction that its' confession is also relative, and that always the freedom that was claimed for the own group, should be equally given to others. That was, for one, the argument made by the government commission that reported on the Dutch Broadcast system later on, in 1926 (Hiemstra 1977, 92). The confessional basis of Kuyper's ARP was in this way secularisation-proof. Admitting that one has a religious view, leads to admitting that

¹⁷ Calvinisme is itself a secularising religion – see Bruse 2003, 246ff.

others who have different views are not unreasonable or irrational, and thus to a situation where nobody is excluded *a priori* from the political discussion.

7 Conclusions

Without introducing a positive religious affiliation or creed, we can say that all politics and political programs go back to a religious position. This is no attempt to annex human thought and action to one particular religion. It is about showing that there is a dimension of trust and faith inherent in all human reasoning and action. Without this religious dimension of trust, it is hard to conceive of human society.¹⁸ Further on, the religious position implies a recognition of its' own relativity, and this contributes to a freedom and plurality for associations in society.

Christian democracy's political ideology can achieve two important things in modern society. First, it can give voice to movements and voices that say that a better society is possible, against the domination of the market. Christian democracy has its' roots in the Christian social movement, and this heritage is still a driving force. The idea of a social market economy and the 'Rhineland model' as a way to mitigate the effects of capitalism on human life, is another result of its'political ideology. Secondly, the idea of ownership by focussing on the associations in society and supporting these via the principles of subsidiarity and sphere sovereignty. These principles safeguard against domination by the state. It is the idea that people can, and should, be responsible for their life where they can and where it matters. This also means a mitigation of tendencies to too much individualism. Important for understanding the position of Christian democracy in the political landscape is a multidimensional political analysis. Analysing 'civil society' as a configuration of the triangle state-market-society shows that there is more in the political landscape than the axes of left-right, or labour-capital. That is maybe not a very new conclusion, more research in this is needed. One of the internet resources for making up one's mind for the parliamentary elections in June 2010 in The Netherlands, the *Kieskompas*,¹⁹ analysis the positions of political parties on two scales, left-right, and conservative-progressive, and finds the ChristenUnie firmly located in the scarcely populated quadrant of left *and* conservative. This party is closer to the Calvinism of Kuyper than the much

¹⁸ This is a dimension which is deeper than what is rightly said about trust and non-trust society (Putnam and Fukayama). It is about the very basic dimension that makes it possible that humans bond, conceive offspring, raise and educate their children, and hope that their kids will have a good life.

¹⁹ See www.kieskompas.nl

bigger CDA in The Netherlands. However, I have not tried to describe or analyse the actual policies of Christian democratic parties. I rather have tried to show the specific pull Christian democratic ideas have and that it represents a position that can be analysed purely in political terms. In short, Christian democracy stands for a society that is free from the power of money, and free from bureaucratic and impersonal organisation by the state. That is the appeal as a political ideology and one does not need reference to a confession to make this position clear.

Dr. J.F. Groen works for the expertise centre Socires, The Hague

I wish to thank mr. J.-W.Sap of the VU University for comments on this paper.

Literature

- Steve Bruce 2003 *Politics and Religion*. Cambridge, Polity Press
- C. Calhoun 1994 "Nationalism and Civil Society: Democracy, Diversity and Self-Determination." In: C. Calhoun (eds.) *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- J. Dewey 1984 *The Public and its Problems*. In: J.A. Boydston (eds.) *The Latter Works, 1925-1953 vol. 2, 1925-1927*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press
- H. Dooyeweerd 1955 *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*. Vol. III Amsterdam: Paris
- Otto Duintjer, 1977 *Rondom Regels*. Meppel, Boom
- A. Etzioni 2004 "On Virtual, Democratic Communities." In: A. Feenberg & D. Barney (eds): *Community in the Digital Age.*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 225-238
- L. Friedman 1999 *The Horizontal Society*, New haven, Yale UP.
- Hans Groen 1998 *Identiteit als belofte*. Zoetermeer, Boekencentrum.
- J.L. Hiemstra 1997 *Worldviews on the Air: The Struggle to Create a Pluralistic Broadcasting System in the Netherlands*. Lanham: University Press of America
- Stathis N. Kalyvas 1996 *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*. Ithaca, Cornell UP
- Kees van Kersbergen 2008 "The christian democratic Phoenix and modern unsecular politics." *Party Politics* VOL 14. No.3 pp. 259–279
- John Stuart Mill 1859 *On Liberty*
- Michael J. Sandel 1984 *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge, Cambridge UP
- Miriam Smith 2005 *A Civil ociety?* Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview press
- Adam Swift 2006 *Political Philosophy*. Cambridge, Polity Press
- Richard Tuck 1979, *Natural Rights Theories*. Cambridge, Cambridge UP
- M. Walzer 1995 "The civil society argument." In: R. Beiner (eds.) *Theorizing Citizenship*. Albany: State University of New York Press pp 153-174
- H.E.S. Woldring 1996 *De Christen Democratie*. Utrecht, Het Spectrum