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Corporatism and Christian Democracy in our days

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Today, in the advanced countries, the profound movement to individuation and the desertion of the loyalty to the collectives have become an issue. Robert D. Putnam argues that the Americans are dropping out from the political life and the organizational life. In recent years social scientists have framed concerns about the changing character of American society in terms of the concept of “social capital” (Putnam, 2000, 18). Exactly as Putnam says, the social capital is becoming poor.

Common sense, law and order, traditional values, civil society, etc. are presented as the answers for the growing problem of insecurity (nationally and internationally) and as an alternative to the permissive society of the previous decades in which only economics mattered (Gerard & van Hecke, 2004, 311). It is in this respect that the recent interest of Christian Democrats for ‘communitarianism’ and ‘social capital (ism)’ (which are based on traditional principles of Christian Democracy) has to be understood (Gerard & van Hecke, 2004, 311, note22). Social capitalism has been the model with which Christian Democracy tried to establish cross-class appeal, and religion was its vehicle. Religion cuts across class and acts to unite different social groups, a fundamental condition for the establishment of social capitalism (van Kersbergen, 1994, 40).

Christian democracy’s political practice has always been infused by the conviction that society consists of socially embedded persons rather than individuals and that group loyalties are stronger than individual choices (Conway, 1996, 24). Christian Democracy is the result of a historical coincidence of liberal political Catholicism and social Catholicism (van Kersbergen, 1995, 205). Christian Democracy comes into being where the intent of political and social Catholicism meets with a historico-philosophical concept which recognizes in democracy, not only the providential form of the state and society of a Christian age, but also the surest guarantee of the security of the church (Maier, 1969, 22).

Recently (1986), the Belgian Flemish CVP has redefined its ideology as ‘social-personalism’ instead of ‘personalism’ in order to distance itself explicitly from all kinds of individualism. It is fair to say that solidarity is now the final objective of the CVP and that this solidarity consists first of all in the quality of interpersonal relationships (Diericks, 1994, 22). Both Liberals and Socialists are at the *Gesellschaft* end of the dimension,

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Nationalism and Ecologism at the *Gemeinschaft* end, and Social Personalism somewhere in the middle but more to the *Gemeinschaft* end (Diericks, 1994, 29).

Philippe C. Schmitter says "Corporatism can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports" (Schmitter, 1979,13). And he adds that the ideological definition closest to his analytical one is Mihail Manoilescu's one, "The corporation is a collective and public organization composed of the totality of persons (physical or juridical) fulfilling together the same national function and having as its goal that of assuring the exercise of that function by rules of law imposed at least upon its members" (Schmitter, 1979, 44).

Schmitter provides the key distinction between two different subtypes of corporatism. The one he calls societal corporatism, which is autonomous and penetrated, and the second, dependent and penetrated, as state corporatism (Schmitter, 1979, 22). The origins of societal corporatism lie in the slow, almost imperceptible decay of advanced pluralism; the origins of state corporatism lie in the rapid, highly visible demise of nascent pluralism (Schmitter, 1979, 23).

It was Corporatism that performs the very political harmony by introducing vocational representation system colored by feudalism. The encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931 by Pope Pius XI was based on corporatism and broadened the idea of that. *Quadragesimo Anno* was influenced by Comte de Mun, von Vogelsang and von Ketteler. Von Ketteler's influence was considerable, not only on the political practice of German political Catholicism, but also on papal social ideology. *Rerum Novarum*, in particular, was inspired by him and Leo XIII mentioned this more than once (van Kersbergen, 1995, 218 ; Bowen, 1971, 79). Leo's paternalistic discussion of the plight of workers in industrial society was, despite its basic conservatism, a great contrast to previous church approaches to social issues (Burns, 1990,1126).

Social doctrine originated as a new branch of Catholic doctrine as the result of the temporal power of the Church. The Church started to centralize its control over morality and the moral dimensions of the economic realm in particular. Rome became the oracle of the moral dimension of social, economic and political life. The 'neo-feudalism' of social doctrine was essentially an attempt to provide an alternative for liberal individualism and socialist collectivism (van Kersbergen, 1995, 220; Burns, 1990, 1126).

German political and social Catholicism had adopted quite an active position with regard to social policy already in the 1870s (van Kersbergen, 1995, 218). Von Ketteler is in many senses the personification of the attempt to modernize the Catholic social movement. He embodies through his life and works the whole spectrum from charity and neighborly love to the embrace of state aid and social policy as the means to moderate capitalism. In

fact, von Ketteler represents the pivot not only of contemporary social and political Catholicism, but of integral Catholic Germany of the 19th century (van Kersbergen, 1995, 215; Alexander, 1953, 412). Franz Hitze (1851-1921) had acquired an early reputation for intellectual brilliance and theoretical perspicacity as one of the outstanding younger members of the group around the Social Catholic review, *Christlich-soziale Blätter* (Bowen, 1971, 96-97). Hitze said, "Life is more than the sum of single acts and society is more than the sum of its component individuals" (Bowen, 1971, 103).

Leo XIII believed he had sufficiently accounted for the modern world by pointing to nineteen centuries of church-state relations, by leading the church back to political neutrality, and expecting Catholics to make their own arrangements with particular forms of government, even with democracy. This defect was later widely felt. It explains why it was that in the nineteen twenties ideas about the corporate state came into their own again, as they had been developed in the 1880s by De Mun in France and by Karl von Vogelsang in Austria. These ideas were put forward by Pius XI in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* of 1931 but earlier Leo XIII rejected them as impracticable. The helplessness of the anti-parliamentary forces, among which Pius XI must be included, undoubtedly facilitated the rise of fascism (von Aretin, 1970, 180).

In Italy, the corporate system which on 19 January 1939 replaced the party political structure of deputies seemed to put these ideas into practice. Mussolini formulated his aims on 10 November 1934 with reference to the ideal of social peace developed in *Quadragesimo Anno*: 'We intend to create an organization which within our society will slowly but surely iron out the differences between the highest and the lowest standards of living and will secure social justice (von Aretin, 1970, 191)'.

Quadragesimo Anno made the great impact on Dollfuss, Salazar, the Movement Rex, and the Central Party in the period of the Weimar Republic. Perhaps the most significant development in European Catholic politics in the 1930s was the enthusiastic support given by Catholic groupings to the authoritarian regimes established in Portugal and Austria. (Conway, 1996a, 24). Pius XI (1922-39), son of a conservative Lombard family, was sympathetic not only to the Dollfuss regime but also the *Estado Novo* of the Jesuit-trained Salazar. These and other governments, based upon the principles of order, authority, and hierarchy, called for a society organized along corporative lines which attacked the enemies of the church: freemasonry and Communism (Coppa, 1987, 200).

Pius XI retained an antidemocratic view of the world, and his clear preference in his dealings with Mussolini was for a church-state alliance rather than liberal arrangements. When Pius XI did try to reestablish a church-state alliance, his attempts backfired, demonstrating that it was no longer possible for the church to enforce its religious authority through temporal, political means. Pius XI's failed policy made clear that the church would be wiser to protect its autonomy than to romanticize its past. At that time, it seemed that Pius XI was indeed correct that fascism could offer what a liberal government could not, that is, a return to the confessional state (Burns, 1990, 1137-1138).

Dollfuss' system was undoubtedly the most sincere of various attempts to give political expression to the ideas developed by *Quadragesimo Anno*. It was, however, doomed to failure from the outset because of its frontal attack both on the Austrian left and on the rising tide of National Socialism. Dollfuss was assassinated on 25 July 1934 in an unsuccessful coup d'état of Austrian national socialists and his place was taken by Kurt von Schuschnigg who continued to expand the pattern of the corporate Austrian state. In the eyes of their contemporaries, Catholic and fascist Italy, and Catholic and semi-fascist Austria were the two countries in which Catholic social and political concepts had found their most perfect expression (von Aretin, 1970, 211).

In Austria, Hitler's seizure of power in Germany also affected the course of the negotiations for a Concordat in Austria. As a result, the Christian Socialist Party in 1933 felt it necessary to combat two formidable enemies: its old enemy, Marxist Socialism, and a new nemesis, National Socialism. Although the danger from this new opponent was considerable, Austrian Catholics noted that the Holy See believed Bolshevism to be more threatening than Nazism. And in order to fight Bolshevism, the Vatican was prepared to make concessions to Hitler's Germany (Weinzierl, 1987, 17).

In the 1934-1937 periods political Catholicism in Austria was organized in the "Fatherland Front," an authoritarian party in a one-party state (Almond, 1948, 38). But, the goals of the "Catholic program" as articulated by the bishops in their pastoral letters were never fully realized. The "Anschluss" in March 1938, welcomed with some enthusiasm even by Catholics, permanently ended the hopes of fulfillment of the hierarchy's plans for Austria. The expectation of Innitzer and some of his episcopal confreres that a *modus vivendi* with National Socialism could be achieved proved to be an illusion, a skillful deception on the part of Hitler and his aides (Weinzierl, 1987, 20).

In Belgium, the economic crisis of the 1930s precipitated a crisis of the political system. Parliament was criticized for its inefficiency, and government policy was denounced as too unstable. The close ties between government and business were also attacked. A number of Belgian voters, especially from the middle class, thus abandoned the traditional parties and became attracted to several authoritarian parties with fascist tenets (Lamberts, 1999, 360). As in other predominantly Catholic countries such as Portugal and Austria, young Catholic intellectuals — encouraged by the encyclicals of Pius XI — advocated a more heroic and confrontational Catholicism which sought to reverse the ascendancy of modern liberal values in Belgium (Conway, 1996b, 200-201).

During the interwar period, in Belgium, some Catholic leaders tried to develop a Christian "democratic corporatism," in which parliamentary government would be maintained but the state would commit its resources to maintaining each economic group. One could argue that by creating the para-statal credit institutions and regulating commerce, and by giving the lower middle class a stake in the political system that it had lacked, these leaders began forming a kind of "democratic corporatism." This corporatist politics appears to have succeeded in winning back the loyalty of the lower middle class after its flirtation with

Rexism. Whereas in the elections of 1936 Rex had won 11.5% of the vote, in 1939 Rex received only 4.4% (Strikwerda, 1990, 229). The Flemish-French split and Rex's turning towards Nazism hurt Degrelle's appeal, and the more dangerous international climate encouraged a return to the traditional democratic parties (Strikwerda, 1990, 229-230).

In Germany it was partly in an attempt to win back anti republicans and anti parliamentarians that the ideas of Catholic corporatism experienced a revival, especially after the issuing of the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* and the establishment of a kind of corporative system by the Austrian regime (Evans, 1981, 265).

The conservative, Romanticist corporatism never assumed a prominent position in the Zentrum's political program, although it kept functioning as the utopian ideal, as a point of reference for the critique of liberal individualism and social collectivism (van Kersbergen, 1995, 219).

The German Catholic clergy had always been markedly concerned with the church's security and other needs; this was even more the case by the later 1930s and singularity so in the war years (Zeender, 1987, 112). In March 1933, Catholic Center deputies joined the majority in providing Hitler the two-thirds vote in the Reichstag to establish his dictatorship. While Monsignor Ludwig Kaas might have been influenced by his determination to achieve the concordat, most members of the Center voted for the enabling act for other reasons (Coppa, 1987, 207; Evans, 1981, 394).

Critical of capitalism and socialism, Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* and Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*, minimizing class differences, suggested the modern adaptation of medieval corporatist structures to contemporary society. In many instances, the parliaments of some nations were reorganized along the lines of corporations and steps were taken to regulate relations between labor and capital according to papal teaching. Recognized by the Vatican and often extolled by the native hierarchies, the regimes of the radical Right appeared to enjoy significant favor in church circles (Wolf & Hoensch, 1987, x). Pius XI had surrendered the right of any Catholic organizations to challenge fascism and, more important, agreed to dismantle those organizations in exchange for an agreement that Mussolini, like Hitler, had no intention of keeping when it became inconvenient. The dictators signed to gain international prestige and, at least temporarily, to remove the Catholic church from the ranks of the domestic opposition (Burns, 1990, 1138-1139).

In fundamental ways, Catholic ideology denied basic tenets of fascist thought, specifically in the area of the roles of the state, the church, and the individual in society, and in the theory of racism. There is evidence to suggest that when regimes of the radical Right preached totalitarianism and racism, they generally lost the support of the "clericals". When the radical Right was not so radical or when it was successfully tamed by the traditional Right, the clergy and the churches responded favorably (Wolf & Hoensch, 1987, xi).

Repudiation of the class struggle, criticism of capitalism and socialism, reliance upon the corporatist structure, recognition of the Catholic Church as a mainstay of national

culture and identity, and opposition to communism, were points of agreement between many clerics and members of the radical Right. But the differences, which included disagreements on the role of the state, education of the youth, and racial theory, were sufficiently fundamental to call into question the judiciousness of forging “clerical” and “fascist” into a new word (Wolf & Hoensch, 1987, xi).

The Romantic critique of capitalism constitutes historical root of contemporary Christian democracy. The conservative Romantic critique of the emerging industrial society was the starting point for social Catholicism. The contents of political Romanticism varied considerably. There existed no such thing as a coherent set of ideas constituting a doctrine, because the single great mistake of the Romantics was that they reduced politics to aesthetics. The emphasis on aesthetics inhibited political activity (van Kersbergen, 1995, 211-212; Schmitt, 1986, 158-159). The essential contradiction of the romantic — which, especially in political romanticism, justifies the impression of inner untruthfulness — is that the romantic, in the organic passivity that belongs to his occasionalist structure, wants to be productive without becoming active (Schmitt, 1986, 159).

While in the troubled circumstances of the 1930s, many Catholics rallied to visions of an authoritarian political system and corporatist social order in the post-1945 years it was a cautious acceptance of a democratic system and of a neo-capitalist social market economy which characterized much Catholic politics. Nevertheless, these changes should not be allowed to disguise the existence of a common core of beliefs (Conway, 1996a, 8). Although corporatism is rightly viewed as an intrinsic component of the Catholic tradition, its importance for the post-war development of Christian Democracy must not be overstated. In fact, one could argue that deliberately subduing the importance of corporatism (under Pius XII) was a precondition for the acceptance of democracy and for Christian Democracy as a political movement (van Kersbergen, 1995, 206-207).

Nineteenth-century assumptions about liberty and initiative in the pursuit of individual self-interest and the benevolent, self-corrective operation of free and competitive markets and political processes were no longer valid. As a consequence of these new tensions between central and peripheral capitalisms and between all autarkically minded nation-states, the twentieth century would impose new conceptions of justice and forms of political organization. Corporatism would be one of the institutional responses to these *impératifs de l'époque* (Schmitter, 1979, 34-35).

Christian democracy comes into being where liberal political and social Catholicism meet. The accommodation to capitalism and democracy has not been an easy road because there has been a long and uneasy controversy between liberal political Catholicism which came to adhere political democracy, and social Catholicism which had difficulties embracing democratic principles because of its ideology of the organic society and its corporatist rather than democratic stance (van Kersbergen, 1995, 208).

The key concepts for understanding Christian Democracy are integration, (class) compromise, accommodation, and pluralism (van Kersbergen, 1994, 36). Both pragmatism

and opportunism are effects-of the properties of integration, reconciliation, accommodation and pluralism (van Kersbergen, 1994, 37).

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