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Noel Cary. *The Path to Christian Democracy: German Catholics and the Party System from Windthorst to Adenauer.* Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 1996. xi + 355 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-65783-0.

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If, as Ecclesiastes tells us, there is nothing new under the sun, then we must wonder how the words of the preacher are to be reconciled with the founding of the CDU. Here, surely, was a genuine novelty: a party that broke down the confessional barrier characteristic of German electoral politics since the introduction of universal manhood suffrage, attracting large numbers of Catholic and Protestant voters as no predecessor ever could. This transformed the central European political universe and made the CDU the dominant force in the Federal Republic of Germany, a position it retains to this day. In *The Path to Christian Democracy*, Noel Cary asserts that the Christian Democratic Union was not quite so novel as it may appear at first glance and that its post-1945 founding and remarkable success should be seen in the context of a four-decades-long effort to reform the German party system.

As the book's subtitle indicates, Cary sees this effort and the intellectual debate accompanying it as occurring primarily among supporters of the Center Party, before 1933 the main political representative of Germany's Roman Catholic population. By the early years of the twentieth century, he suggests, a number of Center politicians were growing increasingly disenchanted with the German party system and its proliferation of politically inflexible parties based on abstract ideas–*Weltanschauungsparteien* was the phrase they used. They sought a political realignment, leading to a British-style system with two main parties, one in government, one in opposition, each encompassing supporters with different cultural and religious ideals, each politically flexible and promoting concrete economic and social interests.

The Center, they suggested, could be the agent for such a political realignment, but in order to do so, it would have to attract Protestant voters by giving up something of its Catholic- confessional aura, perhaps even by taking the drastic step of ceasing to advocate confessionally segregated public education. The interconfessional (if predominantly Catholic) Christian labor movement always played a major role in such considerations, *since* the envisaged reformed Center *was* generally understood as a party that would promote social-welfare ideals with an anti-laissez faire slant, thus enabling it to obtain a broad spectrum of working-class support. Cary traces the fortunes of this idea beginning with Julius Bachem's celebrated "Wir muessen aus dem Turm heraus!" article of 1906, through the efforts during the Weimar Republic of Christian trade-union leader Adam Stegerwald and those of Joseph Wirth, the dominant figure in the Center Party's left wing. It was this viewpoint, the author suggests, that motivated the founders of the CDU after 1945, but also (and this is one of the most interesting points of the book) their rivals, who refounded the Center Party, which, in the newly created political entity North-Rhine Westphalia, was able to offer the CDU a few years of spirited competition. Ultimately, the CDU proved the more appropriate heir to this political tradition and helped shape the West German polity and party system in the direction that past Center politicians had wished to go.

This book is best understood as a history of political ideas, in which the author traces the persistent notion of reform of the party system through quite different political situations, often abstracting from the different and specific contexts in which the same idea was repeatedly emphasized. Consequently, some of the literature dealing in detail with particular situations, such as Winfried Becker's history of the founding of the CDU, or Ute Schmidt's account of its conflict with the refounded Center after 1945, is mentioned only briefly in the book; other works, such as Karsten Ruppert's *Im Dienst am Staat von Weimar*, a history of the Center in the years 1923-30, do not appear at all. Ruppert's book, for instance, shows that Stegerwald's and Wirth's initiatives were by no means coordinated, but separate, different, and more mutually contradictory than complementary. Ruppert also delineates the specific conflicts of economic interests out of which some of these initiatives developed, an issue that Cary does not address, and the author's portrait of the re-

formers' social and economic programs remains vague.

Even taken on its own terms, though, I have to wonder if the book's argument is entirely convincing–whether the differences between the post-1945 CDU and the politics of the Federal Republic and pre-1933 Catholic visions of political reform do not outweigh the similarities. Contrary to the reformers' plans, the Federal Republic has not had a two-party system. The labor movement, although formally non-partisan, has in fact been closely affiliated with the SPD, something that the pre-1933 Catholic politicians' realignment plans were designed to prevent. As Maria Mitchell has shown in an impressive article in the June 1995 *Journal of Modern History*, the early CDU was very much a *Weltanschauungspartei*, energetically denouncing secularism and materialism while promoting the Christian values of the "West." Perhaps most important, supporting the interconfessional CDU did not mean that Catholics had to give up political markers of their distinct cultural identity, as earlier reformers had suggested. They could continue to support confessional public education (Cary distortingly downplays the great importance of this issue for the early CDU); take a distanced and polemical attitude toward Protestants; and, above all, follow the political lead of the clergy (and it is odd that a book on German Catholics and the party system has virtually nothing to say about clerical attitudes toward politics)–that is, they could continue to live in a distinct, separate Catholic subculture while voting for an interconfessional party.

A book that culminates in the successes of the CDU must consider Konrad Adenauer, yet Cary can show nothing in Adenauer's extensive pre-1933 career to connect him to the earlier reform initiatives. In a similar way, the pro-free market ideas of Ludwig Erhard, another crucial figure for the CDU, seem quite different from the statist or corporate economic conceptions advanced by earlier Catholic political figures. Adam Stegerwald died unexpectedly in 1945, but his bright young man from the 1920s, Heinrich Bruening, played no role in the CDU, as was the case with the other prominent 1920s reformer, Joseph Wirth. There is thus not much evidence for a personal continuity in these reform policies, and the occasional figures Cary can produce in support of such a notion, such as the ex-Christian unionist Karl Arnold, the long-term Minister-President of North-Rhine Westphalia and advocate of a CDU-SPD coalition, were not in the political mainstream of the postwar Christian Democrats.

In sum, after reading this intellectually stimulating, elegantly written, and carefully researched book, the best and in many ways the only English-language treatment of the subject, I came away unconvinced by its main thesis. The CDU *was* something new under the sun; Noel Cary underestimates the political innovations of Konrad Adenauer and the specific post-1945 political circumstances –including the memory of the Nazi regime, the division of Germany and onset of the Cold War, and the long postwar economic boom–that brought his ideas to fruition.

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