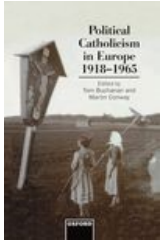

Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965

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CHAPTER

6 Belgium

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Abstract

This chapter discusses political Catholicism in Belgium. Belgium has been a heartland of Catholic Europe during the 20th century. In no other European state from the First World War to the 1960s did Catholicism consistently enjoy such a preponderant influence over religious, social, and political life as in Belgium. The power of the Church and its myriad affiliated organizations was guaranteed by the dominant position occupied in Belgian politics by the Catholic Party. The Catholic Party in its successive manifestations formed an indispensable element of the many coalition governments that ruled Belgium. Sharing power with the Socialists or the predominantly centre-right Liberals, the Catholic Party enjoyed a quasi-permanent presence in government. Apart from the hiatus imposed by the German Occupation of 1940 to 1944 and brief periods of opposition from 1945 to 1947 and again from 1954 to 1958, politicians representing Catholic parties have formed part of every government coalition in Belgium since 1884. Of the thirty-six governments that ruled Belgium from 1918 to 1968, no fewer than twenty-seven were headed by a Catholic prime minister.

Keywords: political Catholicism, Belgium, Belgian Catholics, Belgian Catholicism, Catholic Party

Subject: European History, History of Religion, Political History, Modern History (1700 to 1945), Social and Cultural History

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Belgium has been a heartland of Catholic Europe during the twentieth century. As foreign visitors to the country were often quick to remark, in no other European state from the First World War to the 1960s did Catholicism consistently enjoy such a preponderant influence over religious, social, and political life as in Belgium.[1] High levels of religious practice (though with marked regional and social variations) were combined with a formidable network of social, cultural, and educational institutions which enveloped the lives of the faithful from childhood to old age. The power of the Church and its myriad affiliated organizations was guaranteed by the dominant position occupied in Belgian politics by the Catholic Party. As Fig. 6.1 illustrates, its share of the national vote only once fell below 30 per cent (in 1936) and, with a peak

p. 188 of 47.7 percent in the election of 1950, the party usually formed the largest grouping ↳ in the Belgian parliament. This electoral success was reflected in the control which the party exercised over government. Although, with the exception of the years 1950–4, it never possessed an overall majority in parliament, the Catholic Party in its successive manifestations formed an indispensable element of the many coalition governments which ruled Belgium. Sharing power with either the Socialists or the predominantly centre-right Liberals (or, on occasions, with both of its major rivals simultaneously), the Catholic Party enjoyed a quasi-permanent presence in government. Apart from the hiatus imposed by the German Occupation of 1940 to 1944 and brief periods of opposition from 1945 to 1947 and again from 1954 to 1958, politicians representing Catholic parties have formed part of every government coalition in Belgium since 1884. Of the thirty-six governments which ruled Belgium from 1918 to 1968, no fewer than twenty-seven were headed by a Catholic prime minister.[2]

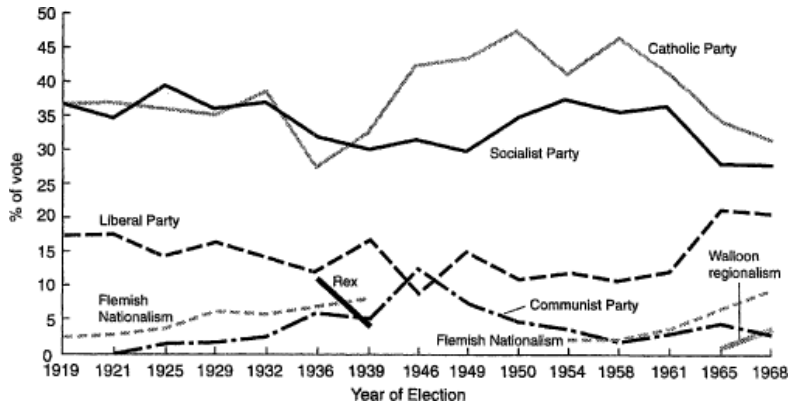

Fig. 6.1. Election results in Belgium, 1919–1968.

Superficially, the power exercised by the Catholic Party reflected the powerful position occupied by the Catholic Church in Belgian life. With the exception of small Jewish and Protestant minorities, some 98–9 per cent of the population was nominally Catholic.[3] The immigrant groups, notably from Italy, which settled in Belgium during the inter-war years did nothing to undermine the ascendancy of Catholicism and only since the 1960s with the arrival of new immigrant populations from Turkey and North Africa has religious pluralism become a significant feature of Belgian society. The appearance of a uniformly Catholic population did, however, mask significant differences in levels of religious practice between different regions and social classes. The rapid industrial growth and urbanization experienced by Belgium during the nineteenth century led large numbers of workers in the francophone industrial areas of Wallonia to abandon all contact with the Catholic faith. In a town such as Seraing in the heart of the Liége industrial basin as few as 8 percent of the population attended church regularly by 1920 and the situation was broadly similar in the other major industrial centres of Charleroi and the Borinage. Elsewhere the decline in religious practice was less marked. Nevertheless, the spread of liberal and positivist ideas (often associated with Freemasonry and organizations of *libre-penseurs*) gradually drew a significant proportion of the bourgeoisie away from the Church and contributed to the strength of a rationalist and anticlerical Liberal political tradition. Only in the rural bastions of the francophone Ardennes and Dutch-speaking West Flanders and Limburg did adherence to the Catholic faith remain all but universal.[4]

The first half of the twentieth century saw, however, little further decline in levels of religious practice. Secularization was halted and, though Catholic hopes of a rechristianization of society remained unrealistic, there was—even in some industrial regions—a modest return to the rituals of Catholicism indicated by a
p. 189 rise in the numbers of religious baptisms, marriages, and burials. More significantly, for many ↳ of those who were already practising Catholics, their religious faith acquired a greater centrality in their lives. During the early 1930s and again in the later 1940s a mood of spiritual renewal was evident within Belgian

Catholicism. A surge in religious vocations, enthusiastic participation in pilgrimages and religious retreats, and the mass membership of lay movements such as the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Belge (Catholic Association of Belgian Youth) and the Legion of Mary all bore witness to the vitality of a Catholic faith which went beyond the rituals of conventional observance.[5]

Catholicism in Belgium was, thus, for much of the twentieth century not a religion in decline. In 1950 there was one priest for every 600 inhabitants (compared, for example, with figures of one for 751 inhabitants in Italy and one for 970 inhabitants in Spain) and a major survey of religious practice carried out in the same year discovered that some 42 per cent of the adult population attended mass regularly. The long-established regional and social variations remained. In Brussels and the province of Hainaut (which included the industrial cities of Charleroi and La Louviere as well as the mining region of the Borinage) attendance fell below 30 per cent, while in predominantly rural provinces such as Luxembourg, West Flanders, and Limburg the average was over 60 per cent. The accuracy of these figures, based on returns compiled by parish priests, is open to question and sociological research consistently demonstrated an imbalance in religious practice towards women, the young, and those living in smaller communities.[6] Nevertheless, it is clear that, assisted by a centralized ecclesiastical hierarchy based on the archbishopric of Mechelen (Malines), the Belgian Catholic Church retained a strong hold over much of the population. Only from the 1960s onwards would the rapid economic modernization of Flanders and the consequent social and cultural changes provoke a further marked fall in religious practice.

The strength of the Catholic faith did not, however, in itself guarantee the political success enjoyed by the Catholic Party. Catholicism was a bond which united Belgians from a wide variety of backgrounds but the faithful shared little else in common and throughout the twentieth century the Catholic Party was forced to confront divisions within its ranks fostered by differences of political ideology, regional identity, and social class. In part, these divisions were the consequence of the dominant position enjoyed by Catholicism within Belgium. Simply because the vast majority of the population was in a nominal sense Catholic and because the Catholic Party exercised such a decisive influence within the political process, the need to maintain
p. 190 Catholic political unity at all costs was less evident. Unlike, for example, in the ↳ neighbouring states of Germany and the Netherlands, the Catholics of Belgium never formed a distinct minority mindful of the need to protect their particular interests against those of a Protestant majority. But the challenges posed to Catholic political unity also reflected the wider problem of the unity of the Belgian state. Despite Belgium's origins in a diplomatic compromise in 1830, the rulers of the new state succeeded in inculcating a sense of nationalism into their new citizens which was made manifest in the patriotic commitment with which almost all Belgians responded to the German invasion of August 1914. During the subsequent fifty years, however, a process of social and regional dislocation gradually gathered pace which in the 1960s led to the emergence of substantial regionalist movements in both Dutch-speaking Flanders and francophone Wallonia. The institutions of the Belgian state—its monarchy, army, and parliament—still existed but their hold over the loyalties of the population could no longer be taken for granted and Belgium's political leaders began the complex process of transition to a new federal political system.[7]

The history of political Catholicism in Belgium from the First World War to the 1960s is, thus, largely the story of the efforts to maintain a unitary Catholic Party in an increasingly diverse, even fragmented, society. If much of the electoral base of the party was composed of the Dutch-speaking peasantry and *petite bourgeoisie* of Flanders, it also enjoyed considerable support from the francophone farmers and middle classes of Wallonia and Brussels. Divisions of social class reinforced regional tensions. The gradual emancipation of the working classes gave rise to a predominantly Flemish Christian Democrat movement which challenged the more conservative stance of the party's largely francophone and bourgeois leadership. Encouraged by the Church hierarchy, the different components of the Catholic Party maintained a unity based on a shared hostility to their Socialist and Liberal opponents, but this integrated Catholic pillar could not survive indefinitely the process of regional and social fragmentation. Finally, in the 1960s the pillar

shattered. The francophone and Flemish wings of the party split into separate groupings while the exhaustion of old clerical-anticlerical antagonisms and the theological changes initiated by the Second Vatican Council created a new political climate in which the former close connection between religious practice and political allegiance declined. Many Catholics no longer saw any necessary connection between their religious beliefs and their political actions, while others preferred to pursue new forms of Catholic-inspired political engagement outside distinctively Catholic political structures.

The resilience with which the party resisted for so long this process of fragmentation owed much to the strong tradition of Catholic political action inherited from the nineteenth century. Indeed, Belgium has good claim to have been the birthplace of modern forms of political Catholicism. Immediately after the
p. 191 achievement of independence from the Netherlands in 1830, Catholic politicians and the Church ↳ hierarchy had participated actively in the structures of the new Belgian state. The Constitution of 1831 guaranteed the position of the Catholic Church and was reinforced by subsequent laws which granted the Church considerable influence over education. Opposition to the Church was a rallying-point for Liberal politicians and during the 1860s and 1870s the power of the Catholic Church became the dominant issue in Belgian political life. Rival Catholic and Liberal electoral associations were formed and, stimulated by the anticlerical actions of the Liberal government after 1878, the newly constituted Catholic Party won a decisive victory in the elections of 1884. A system of plural male suffrage was introduced in 1893 which granted every adult male the vote while ensuring the supremacy of bourgeois interests. But this limited concession to working-class pressure did little to undermine Catholic power. The Catholic Party gained an overall majority of parliamentary seats in every election from 1884 until the First World War and enjoyed a monopoly over political power. These successive Catholic governments worked to protect the material interests of the Catholic electorate while also ensuring that the Church, and in particular its rapidly expanding network of educational institutions, retained its privileged position in Belgian society.[8]

This uninterrupted thirty-year period of Catholic government was unique in pre-1914 Europe and, not surprisingly, the Belgian Catholic Party became a model which Catholics elsewhere in Europe sought to emulate. It was not, however, a unified organization. No central structure existed and, though the party retained its unity in the face of determined opposition from the Liberals and, subsequently, the Socialist Parti Ouvrier Belge (Belgian Workers' Party), it remained an informal coalition of parliamentary deputies, local electoral associations and social organizations.[9] The greatest challenge to its unity came from the Catholic workers' movement. From the 1880s onwards, Catholic trade unions and social insurance organizations developed rapidly and they soon demanded representation for the interests of Catholic workers in parliament. In 1891 a Catholic Ligue democratique belge (Belgian Democratic League) was formed and throughout the 1890s a Flemish priest, Adolf Daens, sought to build an alliance of Catholic workers and agricultural labourers in East Flanders. The goal of an autonomous Catholic workers' party was, however, consistently opposed by the leaders of the Catholic Party and by the ecclesiastical hierarchy which expelled Daens and finally obtained a papal condemnation of 'Daenisme' in 1905.[10]

Nevertheless, Catholic workers' organizations continued to expand and a national confederation of Catholic trade unions was created in 1912. By then, the nascent Christian democrat movement had been drawn firmly
p. 192 within the fold of the governing Catholic Party. In 1905 the bishops officially recognised Catholic workers' ↳ organizations as one of the constituent groupings of the Catholic Party and a number of deputies were elected to parliament who expressed the concerns of Catholic workers. In many respects, these concessions were of little real significance. The party remained opposed to simple manhood suffrage and continued to give priority to the defence of the interests of the middle classes and of the rural population. But it guaranteed the principle of a single Catholic Party and ensured that, amidst the often stormy electoral politics of the 1900s, the party retained its unity and its control of governmental power.[11]

The Catholic Party's long ascendancy ensured that, almost uniquely in Europe, there was no tradition of Catholic alienation from the parliamentary regime. In marked contrast to Third Republic France or post-

Unification Italy, Catholics in Belgium readily identified with the system of liberal parliamentarism established by the Constitution of 1831. Together with the monarchy, the constitution—and the regime of controlled bourgeois parliamentary politics which it incarnated—came to form a central symbol of the new Belgian nation. Thus, although the Catholic bishops frequently railed against other modern evils, the parliamentary regime was exempted from their strictures. Their electoral success as well as the absence of any historical antipathy to the political system led the bishops and the Catholic political elite to regard the liberal regime, if not as a truly Catholic political order, at least as one which favoured their material and spiritual interests. In contrast to the travails experienced by Catholics elsewhere in Europe, Belgium in the pre-1914 years appeared almost as a Catholic paradise in which control of political power combined with a strong Church and a flourishing network of schools and social organizations protected the faithful from the twin horrors of atheistic liberalism and Marxist socialism.[12]

The First World War reinforced the identification of the Catholic Party with the established political order. The German violation of Belgian neutrality in August 1914 and the subsequent harsh occupation of the country provided a rallying-point for Belgian patriotism as well as bringing together the leaders of the Catholic, Liberal, and Socialist parties in a wartime coalition of national unity. While Belgian troops under the personal leadership of King Albert I continued the military struggle against the German armies on the Yser front in West Flanders, the tripartite government in exile at Le Havre acted as the custodian of the political interests of the nation. Within the occupied country, the Catholic primate of Belgium, Cardinal Mercier, emerged as the principal spokesman for the population, denouncing in a series of outspoken pastoral letters the sufferings inflicted on Belgium by the German authorities.[13]

p. 193 With the abrupt German withdrawal from Belgium in November 1918 and the subsequent triumphant return of the King, the Catholic Party appeared well placed to resume its dominant role in Belgian political life. In fact, the liberation of 1918 marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented crisis for the party during which it struggled to retain its unity against a combination of social, ideological, and regional divisions. The reasons for this crisis were both external and internal to the Catholic Party. In the months following the liberation, King Albert initiated a series of constitutional reforms intended to placate the demands made before and during the war by Socialist and Flemish groups. Their effect was to bring about a democratization of the political system. Most importantly, simple manhood suffrage was introduced, thereby destroying almost at a stroke the Catholic Party's monopoly over political power. Though it won 37.02 per cent of the vote in the elections of 1919 (compared with the Liberals' 17.64 per cent and the Socialists' 36.67 per cent), the party could no longer hope to enjoy an overall majority of seats in parliament and throughout the inter-war years it was obliged to share power in coalition with one or both of its historic adversaries.[14] In addition, the events of the First World War and the consequent mood of democratization in the country caused a marked shift of power within the Catholic Party away from its predominantly francophone and bourgeois leadership towards Flemish and working-class or 'Christian democrat' elements. No longer were these groupings content to accept a subsidiary role within the party and in the elections of 1919 independent Catholic worker candidates contested a number of Flemish electoral districts.[15]

Confronted by this democratic breakthrough within Belgian politics, the need for reform of the Catholic Party's structures was evident. The informal arrangements of the pre-1914 era would no longer suffice and in 1921 a new party organization was introduced. The Union Catholique Belge/Katholiek Verbond van België (Belgian Catholic Union), as it was titled, was composed of four groupings of farmers, workers, the middle classes, and the Fédération des Cercles (Federation of Circles, the pre-1914 political associations), each of which had an equal part in the selection of candidates and elaboration of policy.[16] In practice, this new structure did little to resolve the party's difficulties. The central problem was the socio-linguistic division between the predominantly francophone bourgeois figures who controlled the Fëdëration des Cercles and the largely Flemish Christian democrat wing of the party represented by the Algemeen Christelijk

Werkersverbond/Ligue Nationale des Travailleurs Chrétiens (National Christian Workers' Union, ACW/LNTC). This was established as an umbrella organization for Catholic worker organizations in 1923 and it worked closely with a grouping of Flemish Catholic Party deputies in parliament, the Katholieke Vlaamse Kamergroep (Flemish Catholic Parliamentary Group) led by Frans Van Cauwelaert. Differences of
p. 194 temperament and ideology ↳ between these two camps ran deep and reached a climax after the elections of 1925 when the Christian democrat wing of the party led by Prosper Poullet chose to enter government with the Parti Ouvrier Belge of Emile Vandervelde. This unprecedented coalition of Marxist Socialists and Christian democrat Catholics aroused fierce opposition from both business interests and conservative Catholic politicians and, although the government was forced to resign in 1926, its legacy of bitterness and recrimination endured within the Catholic Party throughout the later 1920s and early 1930s.[17]

That the Catholic Party did not disintegrate into its heterogeneous components during the difficult years after the First World War owed much to the forces which still worked to preserve the unity of Catholic political organization. One such factor was the discreet but effective role played by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In 1926 the wartime primate of Belgium, Cardinal Mercier, who had opposed the introduction of simple manhood suffrage and had also taken a firm stand against Flemish demands, died and he was replaced by the less charismatic but more cautious figure of Cardinal Van Roey. The son of a Flemish peasant family, Van Roey remained archbishop of Mechelen (Malines) and primate of Belgium for thirty-five years until his death in 1961 and he undoubtedly did more than any other individual to determine the course of Catholic politics from the 1920s to the 1960s. Van Roey's attitudes were highly traditional. Although Flemish in origin, he was distrustful of Flemish nationalism and possessed a deep-rooted antipathy to the atheistic, corrupting influences of modern culture. All forms of innovation—be they doctrinal, political, or social—were in Van Roey's eyes suspect and his aim throughout his long primacy was to protect the Catholic faithful against the evil spirit of the modern age. He sought to achieve this goal by two means. On the one hand, he encouraged the further expansion of Catholic social and educational institutions in order to surround the faithful with a comprehensive network of distinctly Catholic organizations; while, on the other hand, he consistently supported the Catholic Party as the sole authorized Catholic political grouping. Only by maintaining their political unity, Van Roey believed, could the Catholics ensure effective representation of their interests while also providing a rampart against the malevolent anticlericalism of the Liberal and Socialist parties.[18]

Van Roey had no hesitation in making public his support for the Catholic Party. His pastoral letters and other public pronouncements made clear to the faithful their duty to vote for the party's candidates, declaring, for example, in a speech in 1931 that 'C'est notre parti catholique traditionnel seul qui prend et
p. 195 assure sur le terrain politique la dëfense de nos intérêts suprêmes: sans lui, nous aurions à redouter ↳ comme en d'autres pays où l'organisation politique des catholiques fait défaut, les pires catastrophes.'[19] Reinforced by the advice offered by many local priests, such instructions did much to bolster electoral support for the Catholic Party and were complemented by the influential role which Van Roey and his fellow bishops played within the Catholic Party. Relations between the Church hierarchy and the Catholic political ëlite were always close and, in addition to ensuring that Catholic ministers were responsive to the Church's interests on matters such as education policy, the bishops intervened regularly in disputes between the party's different groupings in order to preserve the overall unity of the Catholic cause.

That unity was also reinforced by broader political and socio-economic factors. Compared with the polarised politics of the pre-1914 era, conflicts between the three main parties during the 1920s and 1930s were relatively muted. Despite their allegiance to different philosophies, little divided Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals on many practical issues while the absence of an overall parliamentary majority for any one party obliged them to work together in the continually shifting but essentially immobile coalition politics of the era.[20] Such cohabitation did little, however, to blur the distinctions between the three major parties. Indeed, it served to reinforce the compartmentalization of Belgian society into distinct Catholic, Socialist,

and Liberal socio-cultural communities. This phenomenon of the pillarization of Belgian political and social life has frequently been remarked upon by historians and political scientists. Initially derived from the comparable example of the Netherlands,[21] it highlights the process whereby the political fault-lines derived from the nineteenth century gradually brought about a political segregation of Belgian society. Separate educational systems, youth movements, trade unions, insurance leagues, women's organizations, and even football teams and pensioners' groups, all served to reinforce this division into three largely separate Catholic, Socialist, and Liberal worlds in which an individual's allegiance to one or other political tradition was continually reinforced by the patterns of his or her daily life.[22]

Expressed in abstract terms, such an analysis can provide a misleading caricature of Belgian society. In reality, the increasing sophistication of a more technologically advanced, mobile, and urbanized society made any complete compartmentalization of social and cultural life impossible. Moreover, this emphasis on vertical pillarization should not be allowed to disguise the horizontal divisions of social class which, especially in times of crisis, transcended these socio-cultural divisions.[23] Nevertheless, especially during the fifty years from the First World War to the 1960s, most Belgians did identify with one of the three socio-
p. 196 cultural groupings. These loyalties ↳ worked to reinforce the immobility of the political landscape and also helped to preserve the unity of the Catholic Party. To cast one's vote for the party was the expression of an identification which for many Belgian Catholics had determined the pattern of their lives since childhood. In these circumstances, the opportunities for dissident movements were limited. The Catholic Party alone possessed the mantle of the authentic representative of the Catholic community while breakaway movements were deprived of access to the unofficial sources of influence and patronage which the network of Catholic religious, social, and economic organizations provided.

Nor for most Belgian Catholics did such dissident movements seem desirable or necessary. The compartmentalization of Belgian social life fostered a strong sense of a homogeneous Catholic identity which transcended internal regional or social divisions. Despite all the disputes within the Catholic Party during the 1920s and 1930s, most Catholics still retained a sense of their fundamental differentness from those of their compatriots who did not practise their faith. Continually reinforced by the teachings of the Church, the rhetoric of the Catholic press, and the prejudices expressed in private conversations, this hidden frontier between Catholic and non-Catholic was a durable reality which helps to explain the superficially illogical coexistence of different linguistic, ideological, and social groups within a common Catholic political organization.

That unitary Catholic political structure never appeared so vulnerable as it did in the early 1930s when three distinct but closely connected crises threatened the Catholic Party with disintegration. The first of these arose from the continuing tensions between the party's Christian democrat groupings and its predominantly conservative leadership. The demise of the Poullet-Vandervelde government in 1926 was the starting-point of a concerted attempt by the party's parliamentary leaders, aided by Van Roey and his fellow bishops, to impose a greater conformity within Catholic political ranks. The Christian democrat organizations grouped in the Algemeen Christelijk Werkersverbond/Ligue Nationale des Travailleurs Chrétiens (ACW/LNTC) were repeatedly accused by the Fédération des Cercles of bringing a spirit of class struggle into Catholic politics while the bishops ensured that lay religious organizations such, as the highly successful Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (Christian Workers' Youth) founded in 1925 by the abbé Cardijn were kept apart from Christian democrat political activities.[24]

The various Catholic worker groups were, however, not easily intimidated. Membership of Catholic workers' organizations, such as insurance leagues and cooperatives, grew rapidly during the 1920s and, under the leadership of Henri Pauwels, the Catholic trade-union confederation, the Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond/ Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens (Union of Christian Trade Unions, ACV/ CSC) expanded from 133,156 members in 1925 to 304,010 by 1933. All these groupings were predominantly Flemish in composition. For
p. 197 example, 74.4 per cent of the membership of the ACV/CSC in 1940 was located in Flanders, 7.4 per cent in ↳

Brussels and only 18.3 per cent in the industrial heartlands of Wallonia.[25] In part, this was a consequence of the Socialist hegemony in the heavy industries of francophone Belgium, but it also reflected the close connection between the Catholic workers' movement and the development of a Flemish consciousness. Flemish grievances against the power exercised by the political and economic ëlite of Brussels as well as by a francophone bourgeoisie within Flanders had gained strength after the First World War. Demands for equal rights for the Dutch language in education and public administration went hand in hand with resentment at the prosecution by the Belgian judicial authorities of the small number of Flemish intellectuals who had chosen to work with the German administrators of Belgium during the First World War. Catholic workers' organizations could not remain immune from this upsurge in Flemish aspirations. In the 1920s the ACW was to the fore in Flemish campaigns and, though much of Flemish nationalism moved towards the political right during the 1930s, the Flemish and Christian democrat causes remained inextricably intertwined.[26]

Conversely, the association between the Flemish and Christian democrat movements strengthened the resolve of the largely francophone élite of the Catholic Party to counter the challenge represented by those whom they termed the 'démocrates flamands'. This tension became more marked as the world economic depression of the early 1930s made itself felt within Belgium. The Liberal-Catholic coalition government headed by the Catholic prime minister Charles De Broqueville implemented a policy of orthodox deflation which increased unemployment and imposed reductions in public expenditure. The depression threw the Catholic trade unions and the ACW/LNTC on the defensive. While seeking to minimize the reductions in welfare programmes, the Christian democrat groups were obliged to support the policies of a Catholic-led government, the consequences of which were keenly felt by their own supporters.[27] The strains which this created were evident throughout the Catholic Party but it was in the francophone industrial city of Charleroi that they found their clearest expression. Already during the 1920s the local Catholic Party had become polarized between its conservative leaders and Christian democrat groups led by an energetic young lawyer, Jean Bodart. Polemics in the local press and rivalries over control of Catholic social organizations sustained the conflict which took on a national dimension when Bodart was elected to parliament in 1932. His election had been preceded by attempts by the local Fédération des Cercles to insist that Bodart express his willingness to accept party discipline but in 1933 he resigned from parliament rather than support the policies of the De Broqueville government.

p. 198 At the subsequent general election in 1936, the local LNTC ran an independent electoral list against the Catholic Party and two of its candidates, including Bodart, were elected to parliament.[28]

The emergence of rival Catholic camps in Charleroi was, however, exceptional. Elsewhere, Christian democrat groups stopped short of breaking with the Catholic Party and the national congress of the ACW/LNTC in 1933 reluctantly expressed its support for government policies. Similarly, the ACW/LNTC rejected approaches from the Socialist Parti Ouvrier Belge to join its campaign for a plan for national recovery and the formation of a new tripartite Catholic-Socialist-Liberal government in 1935 led by a Catholic economist, Paul Van Zeeland, which devalued the Belgian franc and began a policy of modest reflation, made it easier for the Christian democrat groups to give their full support to the party's leadership.[29] This caution illustrated the self-imposed limits within which the leaders of the ACW/LNTC operated. Though eager to acquire a powerful position within the Catholic Party, most Catholic worker organizations were reluctant to contemplate forming their own party or forging alliances with those outside the Catholic community. Their ambitions remained rooted within the traditional mentalities of the Catholic world and, though they were Christian democrat in the sense that they claimed a Catholic inspiration for their desire for social, economic, and political reforms, their ideology stopped short of acceptance of participation in a pluralist politics and secular society which the term 'Christian democracy' would come to acquire by the 1960s.

The second challenge faced by the Catholic Party in the 1930s was the support shown by much of its Flemish electorate for demands for greater rights for Flanders. As early as 1919, Flemish grievances had led to the

creation of a nationalist Front-partij (Front Party) and, though only a small minority supported independence, there was considerable support for an enhanced status for Flanders within the Belgian state. Reluctance on the part of the government to concede to their demands fed Flemish resentments and in a by-election in Antwerp in 1928 the Frontpartij candidate, Auguste Borms, one of those figures who had worked with the Germans during the Occupation of 1914–18 and who had been sentenced to death after the Liberation, was elected to parliament. This result was exceptional but in 1933 a new nationalist political grouping, the Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (Flemish National Union, VNV), was founded which in the 1936 elections won 13.56 per cent of the vote in Flanders and gained sixteen seats in parliament.[30] Initially an amalgam of pacifist, Socialist, and Catholic ideas, Flemish nationalism had become by the 1930s a largely
p. 199 Catholic-inspired movement which, in opposition to the parliamentary ↳ Belgian regime, gravitated towards the authoritarian right of the political spectrum. The association between the Flemish movement and Christian democrat groups continued but it was increasingly overshadowed by the emergence of nationalist groupings of the extreme right. Rather as in Croatia and Slovakia, Flemish nationalism of the inter-war years acquired a particular religious and political character which was reflected in the symbolism of the Yser Tower, inaugurated in 1930 to commemorate the Flemish dead of the First World War, with its unambiguous inscription: 'Alles voor Vlaanderen, Vlaanderen voor Kristus' (All for Flanders, Flanders for Christ).[31]

The policies of incremental reform practised by Van Cauwelaert's Katholieke Vlaamse Kamergroep in parliament no longer satisfied Flemish aspirations and new, more radical, forms of action were demanded. It was from the young that this pressure was strongest. The Catholic student organization in Flanders, the Algemeen Katholiek Vlaams Studentenverbond (Flemish Catholic Student Union), was disowned by the bishops because of its outspoken support for Flemish nationalist aspirations and in 1934 an influential periodical, *Nieum Vlaanderen* (New Flanders), was launched which became the rallying-point for a new generation of Flemish Catholic politicians. Though it stopped short of support for an independent Flanders, *Nieuw Vlaanderen* called for wide-ranging political reforms and advocated an alliance with Flemish nationalist groups.[32]

Combined with the support for Flemish demands long voiced by Christian democrat groupings, this pressure obliged the Catholic political leaders to respond to Flemish aspirations. Support for the Catholic Party in Flanders fell from 47.22 per cent in 1932 to 37.32 per cent in the elections of 1936, largely at the expense of the nationalists of the VNV and in December 1936 the newly created Catholic Party organization in Flanders, the Katholieke Vlaamse Volkspartij (Flemish Catholic People's Party, KVV), signed a limited agreement with the VNV. Though it had few immediate consequences, this accord expressed the willingness of the two parties to work together to advance Flemish interests and led to some local collaboration between the KVV and the VNV. The *rapprochement* between the Catholic Party and Flemish nationalist groups helped to limit the losses suffered by the party in Flanders. In the 1939 elections, both the KVV and the VNV gained votes and, though the continued absence of major political reforms led some Flemish Catholics to opt for the integral nationalism represented by the VNV, others—such as the editor of *Nieuw Vlaanderen* and future Catholic prime minister, Gaston Eyskens—chose to remain within the Catholic fold.[33]

p. 200 The third source of division in Catholic political ranks came from a very different quarter. While the Christian democrat and Flemish nationalist groups posed the major challenge to Catholic unity in Flanders, in francophone Belgium it was an amalgam of bourgeois and rural discontents which threatened the position of the Catholic Party. In Brussels and Wallonia, the Socialist party was the dominant force among the working class and the Catholic Party drew its support largely from the Catholic elements of the bourgeoisie and the rural populations of southern Wallonia. Both these groups had strong grievances. For the francophone bourgeoisie, the democratic reforms introduced after the First World War had destroyed their former political ascendancy while the economic upheavals of the inter-war years created unprecedented difficulties for many members of the middle classes. The rural communities of areas such as

southern Namur and the Ardennes were similarly adversely affected by economic trends. The fall in world agricultural prices was felt particularly severely by the small-scale farmers of these upland regions who struggled to maintain their living standards in the face of strong competition from cheaper imports.

Francophone Catholic discontent first surfaced immediately after the First World War in the modest success enjoyed by periodicals such as *L'Autorité* (Authority) and the nationalist league, the Jeunesses Nationales (National Youth), established by the Catholic writer and politician Pierre Nothomb.[34] It was, however, during the 1920s that this dissatisfaction gathered strength. A vogue for authoritarian figures such as Mussolini and the Action Française movement of Charles Maurras was evident among Catholic university students and many senior Catholic figures who found in such foreign examples an expression of their own discontent towards a parliamentary regime which no longer seemed responsive to their interests. The largely conservative political organization within the Catholic Party, the Fédération des Cercles, was strongly influenced by these ideas as were periodicals such as the influential *Revue catholique des idées et des faits* (Catholic Review of Ideas and Events) which maintained a steady attack on the alleged failings of the democratic political system.[35] Not all francophone Catholic discontent was, however, merely reactionary in nature. It also drew much of its strength from the enthusiasm evident among many younger Catholics during the 1920s for a more assertive Catholic faith. This generational revolt against what the young perceived to be the spiritual complacency of their elders formed part of a more general upsurge in Catholic radicalism throughout Europe. As in other predominantly Catholic countries such as Portugal and Austria,
p. 201 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.

The principal manifestation of this spiritual resurgence was the rapid growth of the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Belge (ACJB) which was founded only in 1921 but which ten years later held a congress of 100,000 young supporters in Brussels.[36] The immediate impact of the success of the ACJB was to draw many young francophone Catholics away from conventional political activities. The youth groups of the Catholic Party shrank into insignificance while the ACJB, with its rhetoric of spiritual purity and Catholic reconquest, led much of Catholic youth to look on the inevitable compromises and coalitions of parliamentary politics with distaste.[37] By the early 1930s, however, the pressure of events both within and outside Belgium caused some of these Catholic radicals to seek a political expression for their ideal of a more militant Catholicism. The impact of the economic depression combined with events such as the rise of 'pagan' Nazism in Germany and the murder of the Austrian Catholic leader Dollfuss in 1934 created a mood of urgency in which the ACJB's goal of a gradual reconversion of Belgium to the Catholic faith no longer seemed sufficient. Instead, periodicals such as *La Cîté chrétienne* (The Christian City) and *L'Esprit nouveau* (New Spirit) called for a Catholic-inspired New Order in Belgium inspired by papal doctrines and modelled on the analogous examples of Salazar in Portugal and Dollfuss's regime in Austria.[38]

This quest for a Catholic third way between liberal parliamentarism and the statist authoritarianism of Mussolini and Hitler gave rise to the most significant Catholic dissident grouping in inter-war Belgium: the Rexist movement led by Léon Degrelle. Rex derived its name from a publishing house, Christus Rex (Christ the King), owned by the ACJB in the Catholic university town of Louvain (Leuven). Its title was in itself significant. The cult of Christ the King reigning in majesty over the world was central to the imagery of the ACJB and Degrelle and the other Rexists, as they soon became known, were young students who had been enthused by the mood of Catholic spiritual renewal in Louvain during the 1920s. Degrelle was from the outset the dominant figure within Rex. He was a charismatic and ebullient figure who, after his appointment as the director of the publishing house, used his journalistic and commercial talents to launch a series of mass-circulation periodicals which combined Catholic piety with a shrewd grasp of popular tastes. His father was a provincial Catholic politician in the Luxembourg but the young Degrelle soon became dissatisfied with the cautious conservatism of the Catholic Party. His ambitions broadened in scope and

during 1934 he began to hold public meetings at which he used his considerable rhetorical powers to heap
p. 202 scorn on the ↳ political élite and to call for a new political and social order inspired by Catholic ideals.[39]

In the difficult circumstances of the early 1930s, Degrelle's simplistic message enjoyed considerable appeal and Rexist groups of young Catholic militants gradually appeared throughout francophone Belgium. Finally, in November 1935 Degrelle chose to challenge the leaders of the Catholic Party directly. Together with a group of young supporters, he stormed into a meeting of the national leadership of the Fédération des Cercles at Kortrijk (Courtrai) and delivered a passionate denunciation of their personal and political failings.[40] Whether Degrelle intended to launch his own political movement or simply to bring about a transformation within the Catholic Party was unclear but this *coup de Courtrai* led both the Church and the Catholic political leadership to distance themselves publicly from Rex. Degrelle, carried away by his own success and by the enthusiasm of his supporters, responded by announcing that Rex would contest the forthcoming elections in May 1936 as an independent political force. After a turbulent and improvised election campaign, during which Degrelle combined Poujadist denunciations of the political élite with vague promises of wide-ranging political and socio-economic reforms, his movement won 11.49 per cent of the vote and twenty-one of its candidates were elected to parliament.[41]

This remarkable success was based principally on the Catholic electorate of francophone Belgium. In Flanders, Rex gained only 7.01 per cent of the vote while in the francophone rural provinces of Namur and the Luxembourg it won 20.35 and 29.06 per cent respectively. All the major parties lost votes to Rex but it was the Catholic Party which was the principal victim of Degrelle's appeal. The party slumped from 38.55 per cent of the vote in 1932 to 27.67 per cent in 1936—its lowest electoral score until 1981.[42] Degrelle's demagogic talents had capitalized upon the political and socio-economic grievances of the bourgeois and rural electorate of the francophone Catholic Party. Peasant anger at the problems of the agricultural economy combined with student radicalism and bourgeois discontents to create a heterogeneous coalition of the Catholic discontented. It did not, however, prove to be a durable basis upon which to build a mass party. During the summer and autumn of 1936 Degrelle and his colleagues tried to capitalize upon their electoral success but, faced with the resolve of the Van Zeeland government to oppose the new movement, the Rexist leaders were forced to adopt ever more desperate tactics. A Mussolinian 'March on Brussels' in October 1936 was a fiasco and in April 1937 Rex sought to recover the political initiative by instigating a by-election in Brussels in which Degrelle stood against a single candidate representing the Catholic, Liberal, and Socialist parties, the prime minister Paul Van Zeeland.[43]

p. 203 The outcome of this unequal contest was probably never in doubt but a few days before the election Degrelle unwisely sought to claim at a public rally that his party enjoyed the unspoken support of the primate of Belgium, Cardinal Van Roey. The Archbishop of Mechelen's attitude towards Rex had always been very circumspect. Although he had repeatedly made clear that Rex was in no sense an official Catholic organization, he had avoided making any categorical condemnation of the new movement and had long hoped that a reconciliation between Degrelle and the Catholic Party would prove possible. The Rexist leader's attempt to claim episcopal backing for his campaign against Van Zeeland did, however, force Van Roey to abandon his former caution. Pressed by the leaders of the Catholic Party to declare his support for the prime minister, the Cardinal duly issued a public statement denouncing Rex as 'un danger pour le pays et pour l'Église'.[44] This intervention consolidated Degrelle's already inevitable defeat and when the results of the election on 11 April were announced the Rexist leader had won only 19 per cent of the popular vote. The defeat hastened the process of internal disintegration of Rex which from the summer of 1937 entered into a rapid decline. Having broken with his initial Catholic inspiration, Degrelle drifted towards an emulation of Nazi and Italian Fascist models and in the subsequent general elections in 1939 Rex gained the support of only 4.43 per cent of the electorate while most of its erstwhile supporters returned to the Catholic Party.[45]

Probably the only chance for Rex to have established a permanent place in Belgian political life was if conservative francophone elements in the Catholic Party had opted to ally themselves with it. There certainly were prominent Catholic figures who privately advocated such an alliance during the winter of 1936–7 but they finally chose to remain loyal to the Van Zeeland coalition government of Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals.[46] The maintenance of Catholic political unity was greatly assisted by the energetic leadership of the new president of the Catholic Party, Hubert Pierlot. A former Catholic minister of the interior from the Luxembourg, Pierlot was well aware of the seriousness of the Rexist challenge and he seized on the electoral defeat of May 1936 to accomplish wide-ranging reforms of the party's internal structure. The unwieldy system of power-sharing between different groups introduced in 1921 was abandoned and a new structure implemented which combined a system of individual membership with devolution of power to the francophone and Flemish wings of the party, each of which acquired its own identity and its own name: the Parti Chrétien Social (Social Christian Party) in francophone Belgium and the Katholieke Vlaamse Volkspartij (Flemish Christian People's Party) in Flanders. The new structure was not without its problems, and antipathies between the Fédération des Cercles and the LNTC ensured that it
p. 204 never came fully into operation in ↳ francophone Belgium.[47] Nevertheless, the changes introduced by Pierlot did mark a major step towards the creation of a modern political party and, combined with a modest economic recovery and the political reforms introduced by Van Zeeland, they ensured that the Catholic Party of the immediate pre-war years recovered some of the unity of purpose and organisation which had been so absent for much of the inter-war years.

As war approached, the Catholic Party once again stood at the centre of attempts to organize national defence. Pierlot himself became prime minister in February 1939 and during the subsequent summer and winter his coalition government sought to preserve Belgium's neutrality. On 10 May 1940, however, the German forces attacked and Pierlot and his fellow ministers joined King Léopold III in leading the struggle against the Nazi invaders. The superiority of the German military machine was, however, soon evident and on 28 May 1940 the King, as commander of the Belgian armed forces, was obliged to conclude an armistice with the Nazi authorities.

In military terms, the logic of the armistice was unavoidable but its political consequences were considerable. The Nazi invasion had brought to a head the longstanding tensions between the political élite and the young king, who had come to the throne on the death of his father Albert in February 1934. Léopold was a firm supporter of the diplomatic independence of Belgium and he regarded the armistice as having marked the conclusion of his country's involvement in the war. Pierlot and his principal ministers disagreed and, while Léopold chose to remain in Belgium and was taken prisoner by the German armies, the ministers retreated to France intending to continue the military struggle alongside the Western Allies. Compromise between the King and the government proved impossible and the Belgian ministers in France issued a decree on 28 May stating that, by virtue of his imprisonment, the King was unable to exercise his responsibilities and that the government had temporarily assumed his powers. For his part, the King refused to accept the legitimacy of the government's actions and during the remainder of 1940 he tried to reach some form of accommodation with the Nazi authorities, culminating in an inconclusive meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden on 19 November 1940. After the defeat of France in June 1940, the Pierlot government sought to enter into negotiations with the King and the Nazi authorities but their approaches were rebuffed and in the autumn Pierlot and his Foreign Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, escaped from France via Spain to London where they established a government in exile in December 1940. This was recognized by the Western Allies but not by Léopold III who remained a mute but influential figure within German-Occupied Belgium until his deportation to Germany in 1944.[48]

The conflict between the King and the government was to overshadow much of Belgium's post-war history
p. 205 but in the immediate aftermath of the defeat attention ↳ was focused instead on the need to adapt to the German military victory. In the summer of 1940 almost all Belgians accepted that Germany had achieved a

definitive hegemony over continental Europe and they supported the King's efforts to preserve some form of unified Belgian state. Catholics shared in this national consensus. Cardinal Van Roey and the majority of his fellow bishops gave Léopold their full support while many ordinary Catholics participated in the process of national reconstruction.[49] For those Catholic militants who before 1940 had opposed the parliamentary regime, the military defeat had, however, a wider significance. It appeared to vindicate their pre-war views and in the summer of 1940 a number of Catholic-inspired groups emerged which—as in Vichy France—advocated a new political and social structure based on Catholic principles.[50]

Such enthusiasms were on the whole short-lived. As it became apparent that the war was not in fact over and that the Nazi authorities were unwilling to support the emergence of a new regime within Belgium, so the prospects of wide-ranging political reform receded. Nevertheless, some Catholic elements remained committed to a vision of an authoritarian and corporatist Belgium and chose to adopt a policy of collaboration with the Third Reich. The two principal collaborationist movements in wartime Belgium were the Flemish nationalist VNV and the Rexist movement led by Leon Degrelle. Both were, at least in part, dissident Catholic groups in origin and, though they had already evolved before the war towards a quasi-fascist political stance, much of their ideology and social composition continued to reflect their Catholic background. The VNV rapidly emerged as the foremost partners of the German military administrators of Belgium and several thousand members of the VNV served in German military and paramilitary units both within Belgium and in Russia. The predominantly francophone Rexist movement followed an even more extreme course. Though initially shunned by the Nazis, Degrelle opted unambivalently for the German cause. Rexist soldiers—including Degrelle—fought on the Eastern Front while in francophone areas of Belgium Rexist militants were appointed by the German authorities to positions of influence in local and provincial government. As German military fortunes waned, so the VNV gradually sought to withdraw from wholehearted collaboration but the Rexists remained loyal to the Nazi cause. Degrelle forged an alliance with Himmler's SS and during the latter years of the war the erstwhile advocate of a Catholic spiritual revolution became an unlikely hero of the Nazi propaganda machine.[51]

Though spectacular, the evolution of the VNV and Rex was atypical of majority Catholic opinion. The oppressive policies of the German authorities served to discredit anti-democratic political ideas and, as the war progressed, there was a substantial evolution in Catholic political attitudes away from the authoritarian
p. 206 projects ↳ of the 1930s and towards a vision of a new, more democratic, political and social order.[52] As during the first German Occupation of 1914–18, the Church emerged as a prominent institution in wartime Belgium. The cautious Van Roey was ill-suited to assume the role of national spokesman adopted by his predecessor Cardinal Mercier but his pastoral letters criticizing German policies had a considerable impact, while at a local level it was often Catholic priests who from the relative freedom of the pulpit acted as a voice for patriotic sentiments.[53] Some Catholics also became involved in active resistance to the German forces. Catholic militants were prominent in both the substantial clandestine press and in the intelligence networks which supplied military information to London as well as in the escape networks created for Allied airmen. Others joined the patriotic, army officer-led Armée Secrète (Secret Army) which emerged as a clandestine military force within Belgium while some Christian democrat figures, notably in Wallonia, joined the coalition of left-wing Resistance groups which constituted the Front de l'lndépendance (Independence Front).[54]

With the Allied liberation of Belgium in September 1944, the question of Catholic political organization once again came to the fore. At first sight, the events of the war years appeared to have rendered obsolete any unitary Catholic grouping. Distrust of the pre-war parties and the political conflicts which they represented was widespread and amidst the euphoria of Liberation there was—as in much of Europe—an expectation that the divisions of the past would give way to a more democratic and egalitarian society. The Catholic Party was too rooted in the pre-war system to participate in this new world and there were many Catholic intellectuals who, through their wartime experiences in Resistance organizations and study groups, had

come to regard the ghetto mentality fostered by distinctly Catholic forms of political organization as outmoded.[55] Nor was it merely intellectuals who shared this outlook. The sufferings and disruptions of the war years had done much to break down the divisions within Belgian society. By throwing together Catholic and non-Catholic, the Nazi Occupation had undermined the mutual distrust fostered by the pillarization of Belgian social institutions while stimulating a new mood of national common purpose.

In other respects, however, the war years had consolidated Catholic unity. The suspension of political activity imposed by the German invasion had silenced the factional squabbles within the Catholic political elite while the decision of the Rexist movement and the VNV to collaborate with the Nazi authorities had discredited the two major dissident groupings within the Catholic world. The experience of Occupation also
p. 207 worked in other ways to restore a sense of a distinctive Catholic ↳ identity. The prominent role played by the Church during the war reinforced the power of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and had also helped to stimulate a mood of spiritual renewal. Attendance at mass rose markedly amidst the uncertainties and dangers of war and Catholic social and youth groups—as well as the Catholic-sponsored charitable organization Secours d'hiver/Winterhulp (Winter Help)—had galvanized the energies and idealism of the Catholic laity.[56]

Thus, though all were agreed on the need to avoid a return to the Catholic Party of the inter-war years, Belgian Catholics emerged from the war with a renewed sense of their common purpose and a heightened optimism that the values of Catholicism did indeed offer a distinctive solution to the problems of a modern democratic society. The ecclesiastical hierarchy encouraged this attitude. Van Roey feared that a postwar secular coalition of Liberals, Socialists, and Communists would attack the power of the Catholic Church and he regarded the resuscitation of a Catholic political grouping to be an urgent priority.[57] Aided by the return of Pierlot and other Catholic political leaders from London, Van Roey encouraged the efforts of a predominantly younger generation of politicians to create a new Catholic Party which, while rejecting the ghetto mentality of its predecessor, would act as a spokesman for distinctively Catholic values and interests. The result was the Parti Social Chrétien/Christelijke Volkspartij (Christian Social Party/Christian People's Party, PSC/CVP). Already in December 1944, a preliminary basis for the new party's programme had been defined and in May 1945 a more detailed programme was published. In the summer of 1945 the liberation of Léopold III from detention in Austria provoked a crisis within the government of national unity and the Catholic ministers resigned. Their departure from government hastened the creation of the new party. An inaugural congress was held in August at which Auguste De Schryver was elected as the PSC/CVP's first president and a series of commissions were established which defined its stance on a wide variety of social and political issues. These formed the basis of the PSC/CVP's manifesto in the first post-war elections held in February 1946. Supported strenuously by Van Roey and his fellow bishops, the party won a remarkable 42.66 per cent of the vote—the highest score achieved by any Catholic political grouping since the First World War.[58]

The success of the PSC/CVP was all the more striking because it was achieved despite the challenge posed by a rival Catholic political grouping, the Union Demo-cratique Belge (Belgian Democratic Union, UDB). This had been created in the immediate aftermath of the liberation by a group of predominantly francophone Catholic intellectuals who intended that it should be a non-confessional progressive party based on the example of the British Labour party. The party made much of its Resistance credentials and advocated wide-
p. 208 ranging social reforms as well as an end to ↳ the confessional divisions in Belgian social and political life. It enjoyed the support of a new newspaper, *La Cïité nouvelle* (New City), and the first congress of the party was held in Brussels in June 1945. When the Catholic ministers resigned from the government in the summer, supporters of the UDB took their place and the party's principal spokesman, Marcel Grégoire, became minister of justice. The success of the new party did, however, prove to be transient. Its main strength was in the city of Liege and it possessed little by way of national organization. Moreover, the UDB was, despite its claims to be a workers' party, predominantly a middle-class organization and most Catholic trade-

unionists even in Wallonia chose to remain aloof from it. Most importantly, the UDB encountered the implacable opposition of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In October 1945 Van Roey received De Schryver, the president of the PSC/CVP, and the Cardinal subsequently called on all Catholics to unite behind the new 'official' Catholic Party. Crushed between the rise of the PSC/CVP and the ascendancy of the Socialist and Communist parties among the francophone industrial working class, the UDB could appeal only to a small predominantly middle-class electorate and in the 1946 elections it won a mere 2.19 per cent of the vote. Soon afterwards, the party's leadership resigned and the UDB disappeared as a political grouping.[59]

The demise of the UDB symbolized the immobilism of the post-war Belgian political landscape. Despite the rise of the Communist Party, the three historical parties—the Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals—remained the dominant political forces and continued to enjoy the support of a large majority of the electorate.[60] These traditional divisions acted as a weight on the new PSC/CVP forcing it almost despite itself to adopt the attitudes and mentality of the pre-war Catholic Party. There is no doubt, however, that the founders of the party intended that it should be a genuinely new political force. 'Un parti nouveau, une doctrine neuve, des équipes jeunes, voila ce qu'est le PSC', declared its manifesto and three-quarters of its deputies elected to parliament in 1946 were indeed new figures who had not held office before 1940.[61] The structures of the party were also consciously intended to be a break with the prewar Catholic Party. Building on the reforms introduced by Pierlot in the late 1930s, the PSC/CVP was composed of individual members and separate regional bureaucracies were established to direct the party in Flanders and francophone Belgium. The Fëdëration des Cercles was abolished while the Christian democrat groups were obliged to surrender their formal power in favour of an indirect if nevertheless substantial influence from outside the structures of the party.[62]

p. 209 The most important change in the post-war PSC/CVP was, however, in its ideology. Rather than merely acting as the defender of the interests of the Catholic Church and faithful, the new party was—its propagandists insisted—committed to a new form of society which would provide a 'third way' between liberal capitalism and Marxist totalitarianism:

> Nous voulons avant tout sauver l'homme. Aujourd'hui celui-ci est asservi. Ou bien il est dominé par les puissances d'argent, ou bien il est guetté par le césarisme administratif d'un État totaiitaire. Nous voulons restaurer la liberté. En centrant toute sa doctrine et toute sa politique sur la notion de la personne humaine épanouie dans ses sociétés naturelles saines, le PSC s'oppose absolument aussi bien à la théorie capitaliste libérate qu'à la philosophic marxiste.[63]

'Personalism' was the key word in their ideology. Like the MRP in post-war France, the PSC/CVP derived many of its ideas from Catholic philosophers such as Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier whose calls for the liberation of the individual from the twin perils of the totalitarian state and the anomie of liberal society permeated its rhetoric. Though it was inspired by these Catholic values, the PSC/CVP was eager to insist that it was not confessional in character. The replacement of the word 'Catholic' by the more conciliatory term 'Christian' in the party's title was one indication of this change in outlook and its leaders insisted that the PSC/CVP was open to all Belgians who supported their programme of political and socio-economic reforms. This programme was a genuinely new departure. In contrast to Catholic infatuation with authoritarian models in the 1930s, the PSC/CVP stressed its commitment to a more open and democratic parliamentary regime, albeit reinforced by a strong executive capable of assuring the supremacy of the national interest. Similarly, the party rejected pre-war Catholic dreams of a corporatist socio-economic structure, advocating instead substantial social reforms including improved welfare provision, industrial democracy, and a more egalitarian distribution of wealth.[64]

The bold ambitions of the founders of the PSC/CVP were, however, contradicted by the realities of the political situation. In 1947 the party formed a coalition government with the Socialists but few elements of their programme of reforms were put into operation. The priorities of economic reconstruction and the

diplomatic and ideological integration of Belgium into the Cold War West European alliance cast disfavour on ideas of political or economic reform while pressure from Cardinal Van Roey ensured that the party remained closely tied to the defence of traditional Catholic interests.[65] Similar pressures were felt by Catholic parties elsewhere in Europe but it was above all the controversy surrounding King Lépold III which
p. 210 undermined the efforts of the PSC/CVP to emerge as a truly non-confessional party ↳ in Belgium. At the Liberation, Léopold's brother, Prince Charles, had been appointed as regent but in 1945 the King was released from detention in Austria and declared his intention of recovering his throne. Negotiations between Léopold III and the government failed, however, to reach an agreement on the conditions for such a return and Léopold reluctantly went into exile in Switzerland. Within Belgium, the future of the King soon became the dominant political issue. The Liberal, Socialist, and Communist parties all opposed the King's return, accusing him of having sought to collaborate with the Germans during the Occupation and of wishing to undermine the democratic constitution. In response, the Catholic Church emerged as the principal defender of the King. Van Roey was convinced of the rectitude of Léopold's wartime actions. He visited the King in exile in Switzerland and in a pastoral letter issued in 1951 bitterly denounced the accusations levelled at the King as 'une campagne effrénée de calomnie et de diffamation'.[66]

The 'question royale', as it was termed, confronted the Catholic political leaders with an awkward dilemma. On the one hand, the majority of them instinctively supported the King, and the Catholic ministers had resigned from the government in 1945 in protest at Léopold's exclusion from Belgium.[67] On the other hand, to support the campaign for the King's return would be to encourage the very polarization of politics on clerical-anticlerical lines which it had been the intention of the PSC/CVP to avoid. Their initial response was to take refuge in advocating that the issue should be resolved by a national referendum and the Socialist-Catholic coalition government formed in 1947 tacitly agreed not to confront the problem. The royal issue refused, however, to disappear. The country became ever more clearly divided into pro-and anti-Léopoldist camps while from exile the King led a determined campaign to clear his name and regain the throne. There still were Catholic leaders—especially Christian democrats in Wallonia—who avoided giving their support to Léopold but in general the struggle became one between a 'progressive' coalition of Socialists and Liberals and a rival 'clerico-royalist' coalition of Catholics and right-wing Resistance groups. Regional differences added to the bitterness of the conflict. In Brussels and Wallonia, support for the King was muted while in Flanders the Léopoldist cause also became a struggle to assert the Flemish Catholic identity against the liberal and secular influences of francophone Belgium.[68]

Support for the King worked to the electoral advantage of the PSC/CVP. In 1948 women had finally been accorded the vote in parliamentary elections and in the subsequent elections in 1949 a female Catholic vote and the party's status as the principal standard-bearer for the Léopoldist cause enabled it to win 43.56 per
p. 211 cent of the vote and brought it within one seat of capturing an overall majority in the Chamber ↳ of Deputies. The new Catholic-Liberal coalition government led by the Flemish Catholic prime minister Gaston Eyskens pressed ahead with organizing a national referendum on the King's future. The referendum held on 12 March 1950, far from resolving the royal question, merely served, however, to demonstrate the depth of the divisions within the country. The pro-Léopold cause won a narrow majority of 57.68 per cent of the national vote but only 42 per cent of the voters in Wallonia had supported the King while in Flanders he had gained 72 per cent of the vote.[69] Unable to agree on how to proceed, the government resigned and fresh elections were held on 4 June 1950. Once again, the PSC/CVP benefited from its support for the King winning 47.68 per cent of the vote and for the first and only time since the First World War it gained an overall majority in the Chamber of Deputies. A government composed solely of PSC/CVP ministers was formed under the leadership of Jean Duvieusart and in July Léopold finally returned from exile to his palace in Brussels.

The determination of the PSC/CVP to use its narrow parliamentary majority to restore the King to power was, however, opposed by the anti-Léopoldist forces. In a confrontation with gendarmes at Grâce-Berleur

near Liège three anti-Léopold demonstrators were shot dead and a general strike was launched by the Socialist trade unions in Wallonia. There was talk of a march on Brussels by groups opposed to the King and, amidst a quasi-insurrectionary atmosphere, the Duvieusart government desperately sought a solution to the crisis. Some of its members remained adamant in their support for the King but a majority of the government finally chose to support a compromise proposal (which also enjoyed Socialist and Liberal support) whereby Léopold would delegate all powers to his son Baudouin and formally abdicate in his favour when Baudouin came of age in 1951. During a tense night of negotiations from 31 July to 1 August the King initially appeared to accept this proposal and then rejected it and flirted with forming a new government composed of his supporters before finally backing down and accepting the compromise solution.[70]

National conflict had been narrowly avoided but the repercussions of the denouement of the royal crisis within the PSC/CVP were substantial. Despite its overall majority, the party had failed to impose its views and the party's right wing led by Paul Vanden Boeynants angrily denounced those Catholic ministers—principally Flemish Christian democrats—whom they accused of having betrayed the King and the party. Both the prime minister, Jean Duvieusart, and the president of the party, Baron van der Straten-Waillet, resigned and a mood of bitter recrimination dominated the special congress of the PSC/CVP held in September 1950. The royal crisis had sapped the morale of the new party and, although it retained power until 1954, it enacted little legislation of consequence. Membership of the party declined markedly and in the subsequent elections in 1954 the PSC/CVP lost its overall majority of seats and left office.[71]

p. 212 The disunity in Catholic ranks was, however, rapidly restored by the actions of the ↳ new Liberal-Socialist government of Achille Van Acker. This alliance of Socialists and centre-right Liberals had its origins in their common struggle against Léopold's return but it possessed little rationale other than a shared antipathy to the PSC/CVP. Divisions over economic issues were inevitable and the members of the government chose to concentrate on the one goal on which they could unambivalently agree: education reform. Although their proposals to modernize the state system of schooling were in many respects no more than an overdue reform of an archaic structure, they were inevitably perceived by the Catholic Church as an attempt to undermine its own substantial network of schools. Van Roey had always made defence of this separate Catholic educational system a central element of his strategy for the protection of the faithful and he promptly voiced his categorical opposition to the proposed legislation.[72]

More surprisingly perhaps, the PSC/CVP under the leadership of its new president Théo Lefevre also threw itself enthusiastically into what rapidly became known as the *guerre scolaire*. Still recovering from the trauma of the royal crisis and for once out of government, the various factions of the PSC/CVP found in opposition to the education reforms a means of restoring their sense of purpose and identity. A Comité pour la défense des libertés démocratiques/Nationaal Comité voor Vrijheid en Democratic (Committee for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms) was founded to lead the campaign against the reforms and, although its petitions and mass rallies could not prevent the proposals from becoming law, they did demonstrate the ability of the Catholic community to unite against the 'atheist' menace. As a collective pastoral letter issued by the bishops declared with undisguised relief in 1955:

> Nous voyons avec une grande satisfaction que l'union de toutes les forces catholiques sans exception s'est fait solide et ferme sur le terrain de l'enseignement et de 1'éducation, parce qu'il touche au domaine de la conscience et de la religion. Depuis des mois, cette union s'est forgée partout avec enthousiasme.[73]

In many respects, the politics of the 1950s appeared to mark an anachronistic return to the battle-lines of the 1880s and 1890s. Liberals and Socialists—the *gauches* of the nineteenth century—had come together in support of their old rallying-call of secular education while the Catholics had united in defence of their Church, schools, and faith. This appearance was, however, largely illusory. The Socialist-Liberal alliance was no more than transitory and after the 1958 elections was replaced by a more orthodox Catholic-Liberal

government headed by Gaston Eyskens. It introduced compromise legislation enabling the public education system to expand while guaranteeing state funding of Catholic schools and effectively brought the *guerre scolaire* to a close.[74] More significantly, the common defence of Catholic schooling could not postpone indefinitely the factors working to undermine Catholic political unity. These were a combination of the old
p. 213 and the new. Prominent among them was the ↳ unresolved nature of the relationship between the PSC/CVP and the Catholic trade unions and other worker organizations. The new structure of the PSC/CVP introduced after the war had deprived the Christian democrat federation, the Algemeen Christelijk Werkersverbond/Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien (as the Ligue Nationale des Travailleurs Chrétiens was renamed in francophone Belgium), of any official status within the party. Nevertheless, especially in Flanders, the ACW remained a major force in Catholic politics. It was an important financier of the PSC-CVP and also enjoyed considerable influence over the selection of party candidates. Its power was reinforced by the continuing rapid expansion of Catholic worker organizations. Membership of the Catholic trade-union federation, the ACV/CSC, for example, rose from 342,099 in 1945 to 731,281 in 1959 and for the first time exceeded that of the rival Socialist grouping, the Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique (General Federation of Belgian Workers, FGTB).[75]

Despite this growth, a mood of dissatisfaction was evident within Christian democrat ranks. The events of the war years had reinforced the divisions between the largely Flemish leadership of the ACW/MOC which retained a traditional vision of the movement: operating within a Catholic political and socio-economic pillar and its groups in Wallonia where many militants had been attracted by the short-lived UDB and by the social and apostolic radicalism of a lay Catholic spiritual movement, the Mouvement Populaire des Familles (People's Family Movement, MPF). The bishops suppressed the MPF and in October 1946 the Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien (Christian Workers' Movement, MOC) was established as the new official Christian democrat organization in francophone Belgium. This subordination to the Church hierarchy and to the Flemish majority of the ACW was not, however, acceptable to all francophone Christian democrat militants, some of whom remained aloof from the MOC or became active in the Walloon regionalist movement.[76] Nor was such discontent limited to Wallonia. In Flanders too, many members of the ACW were frustrated by the absence of substantial political or socio-economic reforms. The events of the Cold War and the *question royale* had enabled more conservative elements in the PSC/CVP to stifle much of the initial radicalism of the new party. The Socialist-Catholic coalition government of 1947–9 and the Catholic government of 1950–4 enacted few major reforms and, especially among the Flemish rank and file of the ACW, there was bitterness that their numerical strength had still not enabled them to exercise decisive influence over the policies of the PSC/CVP.[77]

As in the 1930s, Flemish aspirations for greater political and cultural autonomy constituted another challenge to Catholic political unity. No significant devolution of power from Brussels occurred after the liberation and Flemish nationalism suffered during the immediate post-war years from the discredit cast
p. 214 upon it by the VNV's wartime collaboration with the Nazi authorities. Gradually, however, Flemish ↳ grievances resurfaced. A new Flemish nationalist grouping, the Christelijke Vlaamse Volksunie (Flemish Christian People's Union), contested the elections of 1954 and, although it subsequently abandoned its Christian label, this party once again drew its strength from Flemish Catholic discontent at francophone political and economic dominance. Similar sentiments were felt by many within the CVP and, especially among its Flemish youth groups, the aspiration for a more just society had become inseparable from substantial constitutional reform. Radical figures—such as the president of the Flemish Catholic Students' Association and future prime minister Wilfried Martens—openly called for a federalization of the Belgian state while the leaders of the CVP and the ACW established a Vlaamse Werkgroep (Flemish Working Group) in 1955 which advocated in more moderate terms a substantial redistribution of economic wealth and political power in favour of Flanders.[78]

A third factor working to undermine Catholic political unity was the emergence of a more educated and self-confident Catholic laity reluctant to accept uncritically the guidance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Much of the strength both of the pre-war Catholic Party and of the PSC/CVP had always rested on the willingness of the Catholic faithful to obey the exhortations from the clergy and bishops to remain united behind a single political party. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the bishops continued to issue instructions to the laity to vote, as Van Roey expressed it, for 'des hommes qui respectent l'Église catholique, ses droits et ses représentants, plutôt que des gens qui la considèrent comme une institution ennemie et dangereuse, qu'il faut brimer sournoisement, si pas ouvertement combattre'.[79] The effectiveness of such interventions did, however, steadily decline. If most Catholics were willing to mobilize in defence of their educational system during the *guerre scolaire* of the 1950s, they no longer shared the octogenarian Van Roey's apocalyptic view of the world. Social and economic changes had created a more integrated and fluid society in which the isolation of the Catholic community no longer seemed to many Catholics to be either feasible or desirable. Periodicals such as the francophone *La Revue Nouvelle* (New Review) and the Flemish *De Maand* (The Month) reflected the opinions of a new Catholic middle class, confident in its beliefs and open both to the new theological ideas being expounded by figures such as the Louvain professor Gustave Thils and to contact with those beyond Catholic ranks who shared their views. The mentality of the ghetto had begun to disappear and, although the combined influence of Pius XII and of Cardinal Van Roey ensured that heretical voices within the Belgian Church were marginalized, the aspiration for a more democratic and open community of the Catholic faithful made itself felt with ever greater insistence during the 1950s.[80]

It was during the subsequent often tumultuous decade of the 1960s that these various forces finally
p. 215 destroyed Catholic political unity. In Belgium, as in much of ↳ western Europe, the 1960s formed, in the words of the Belgian sociologist Karel Dobbelaere, 'un moment décisif de rupture culturelle'.[81] A combination of generational, material, and ideological conflicts overwhelmed traditional boundaries of segregation and obedience and, in the case of Belgium, also came close to destroying the structures of the unitary state.[82] In no area of Belgian life were these upheavals more dramatic than within Catholicism. In August 1961 Van Roey died aged 87 and his successor Cardinal Suenens, who played a prominent role at the Second Vatican Council, did not seek to impose the same political or spiritual uniformity on the faithful. New ecumenical and spiritual initiatives were launched while the clergy no longer advised the faithful on how to cast their vote.[83] Stimulated above all by the rapid pace of socio-economic change in Flanders, attendance at church fell markedly. After 1968 the level of religious practice fell by an average of 1.9 per cent per year and by 1981 only 26 per cent of the population regularly attended mass. This remarkably rapid transition to a largely secular society was also reflected in a fall in recruitment to the clergy and, though membership of Catholic social organizations such as trade unions and the numbers attending Catholic schools both continued to rise, these institutions increasingly took on a deconfessional and pluralist character.[84]

In the political sphere, the most significant change was a surge in support for Walloon and Flemish autonomy. Pressure for constitutional reform developed rapidly during the 1960s among both the francophone and Flemish populations of Belgium. In Wallonia, the stimulus was provided by the bitter general strike during the winter of 1960–1 against the economic austerity measures implemented by the Catholic-Liberal government of Gaston Eyskens. The strike was initiated by the Socialist trade-union federation, the FGTB, but many Catholic trade-unionists of the CSC also became involved and, although the national leadership of the CSC/ ACV avoided giving its approval to a strike against a Catholic-led government, it expressed its general support for the aims of the strikers. Rarely had internal Catholic political unity been so visibly challenged and, in response, Cardinal Van Roey issued a statement denouncing 'les grèves désordonnées et déraisonnables auxquelles nous assistons à présent' and calling on the strikers to return to work.[85] The time for such magisterial dictates had, however, passed. The CSC leaders were furious at Van Roey's intervention and, though the strike eventually petered out amidst violence and mutual recrimination, it acted as a catalyst for the emergence of Walloon regionalism as a

major political force. Support for a distinct Walloon identity had for the first time acquired a mass audience and in March 1961 the Socialist trade-union leader André Renard launched his Mouvement Populaire Wallon
p. 216 (Popular Walloon ↳ Movement). Isolated Catholic figures had long been active in Walloon regionalist groups but after the strike they too acquired a significant following. The Catholic-inspired regionalist movement Rénovation Wallonne (Walloon Renovation) gained considerable support among Christian democrat militants of the Mouvement Ouvrier Chrétien and formed an important element of the new Walloon regionalist political grouping, the Rassemblement Wallon (Walloon Alliance), which in the elections of 1968 won 10.6 per cent of the vote in Wallonia.[86]

The rise in regionalist sentiments also eroded support for the Flemish wing of the PSC/CVP. A series of political controversies in the early 1960s concerning the linguistic frontier between Flemish and francophone areas and the status of the largely francophone city of Brussels within Flanders aggravated long-standing Flemish grievances at what they perceived to be the inferior status of Flanders within the Belgian state. The CVP sought as far as possible to act as a mouthpiece for Flemish discontents but it was out of step with the radical mood of many younger Flemish militants who organized a series of marches on Brussels and who swelled the ranks of the nationalist Volksunie. In the 1968 elections, the Volksunie won 16.9 per cent of the vote in Flanders, largely at the expense of the CVP which saw its share of the vote in Flanders fall from 56.5 per cent in 1958 to 39 per cent in 1968.[87]

It was above all the controversy surrounding the University of Louvain or Leuven which symbolized the linguistic divisions within the Catholic community. This historic central institution of Belgian Catholic life was increasingly paralysed in the 1960s by conflicts between its francophone and Flemish students. The Flemish demanded that, as it was located in Flanders, the university should become a Dutch-language institution but in a pastoral letter issued in 1966 the bishops categorically opposed any change in its bilingual national character. This provoked an angry response from many Flemish Catholics and their campaign of 'Walen buiten' (Walloons Out) forced the Catholic–Liberal coalition government headed by the francophone Catholic Paul Vanden Boeynants to intervene. The government refused to support the immediate transfer of the francophone students from Louvain and, in response, the Flemish CVP ministers unilaterally resigned from the government in February 1968. At the subsequent elections in March, the PSC and CVP presented for the first time separate party programmes and, although they maintained a common national president until 1972, they rapidly became—and have remained—separate regional parties committed to independent policies.[88]

The divorce within the unitary Catholic Party brought about by the symbolic but highly emotive issue of the University of Louvain marked the end of a certain form of political Catholicism in Belgium. A party which straddled the division between the francophone and Flemish populations was no longer viable and, in
p. 217 common with ↳ the Socialist and Liberal parties, the Catholics were forced to accept the preeminence of the linguistic division. It was not, however, merely regional tensions which had undermined Catholic unity. The concept of a fundamental division of outlook between Catholic and non-Catholic held so dear by Cardinal Van Roey and reinforced by the social and cultural pillarization of Belgian life no longer reflected the reality of a modern pluralist society. As the emergence of non-confessional regional parties in Flanders and Wallonia had demonstrated, it was possible for Catholics and non-Catholics to collaborate on many issues and, with the resolution of the *guerre scolaire*, clerical–anticlerical disputes appeared finally to have become part of history The Liberal and Socialist parties were both quick to recognize this change. In 1961 the Liberal Party had relaunched itself as the Parti pour la Liberté et le Progrès/Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang (Party for Liberty and Progress, PLP/PVV) which explicitly rejected its anticlerical heritage and sought to win middle-class Catholic votes. Similarly, in his May Day message of 1969 the president of the Socialist party, Léo Collard, declared the clerical–anticlerical division to be a relic of the past and called on all progressive forces to unite on a non-confessional basis.[89]

Neither the Liberal nor Socialist initiatives brought them immediate success but, combined with the growth of the Rassemblement Wallon and the Volksunie, they contributed to the erosion of the electoral base of the PSC and CVP. In 1958 the unified PSC/CVP had won 46.5 per cent of the vote; by 1971 the combined vote of the now separate CVP and PSC was only 30 per cent.[90] The main change was, however, less one of numbers than of mentality. No longer did it seem natural to Catholics and non-Catholics alike that the Catholic community should remain unified behind a single party. Though opinion polls showed that most Catholics who attended mass regularly continued to support the PSC and CVP, the 'invisible frontier' between Catholic and non-Catholic had been substantially eroded. Catholics participated in a variety of political formations while the PSC and CVP began hesitantly to develop new identities deprived of the quasi-automatic loyalty of the faithful.[91]

Viewed with the often misleading benefit of hindsight, the maintenance of Catholic political unity in Belgium during much of the twentieth century must inevitably appear to have been a largely artificial enterprise. Composed of militants united by the all too slender thread of religion and tied to a unitary nation-state which itself was increasingly threatened by divisions between its francophone and Flemish populations, it is tempting to dismiss the Catholic Party and the PSC/CVP as historical anachronisms inherited from the nineteenth century. However, as this chapter has sought to indicate, the political unity of
p. 218 Belgian Catholics was not merely part of the ↳ baggage of past history. The consistent electoral success of the Catholic Party from the 1880s to the 1960s reflected the real sense of community which existed among most Belgian Catholics. Amidst the relatively placid landscape of Belgian society, the division between Catholic and non-Catholic was one deeply rooted in the patterns of family and social life. Catholics felt themselves to be distinct from their religiously indifferent or atheist compatriots and this sense of differentness was continually reinforced by their participation in the extensive network of Catholic social, educational and cultural institutions.

Support for the Catholic Party was the expression of that reality and, though divisions of region or social class often worked to undermine Catholic unity, they did not destroy the conviction that Catholicism represented a distinct political ideology. Alongside the other dominant forces of liberalism and socialism, Catholicism did seem to possess a coherent political agenda derived both from papal teachings and a Catholic intellectual heritage. Over time the content of that ideology underwent significant changes, veering in the 1930s toward some variant of corporatist authoritarianism before emerging after the Second World War as a personalist ideology of social liberation. But the conviction that a core of Catholic ideas existed survived these various changes. Only with the broader social and political transformations during the post-war years did the basis of Catholic unity begin to disappear. The notion of a distinctive Catholic community no longer matched a more educated, more mobile, and more urbanized society while ideological changes both within and beyond Catholicism eroded the sense of a separate Catholic value structure. In the 1960s the centrifugal forces of social, regional, and ideological diversity at last outweighed the centripetal forces of religious solidarity. A unitary Catholic political structure was no longer possible and in its place there emerged a variety of forms of Catholic political engagement which reflected the plural character of Belgian Catholicism.

Notes

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3 R. Aubert, *ISO ans de vie des eglises* (Brussels, [1980]), 47–9.

4 Ibid. 48–52; L. de Saint-Moulin, 'Contribution á Phistoire de la dechristianisation: La Pratique religieuse a Seraing depuis

1830', *Annuaire d'histoire liégeoise*, 10 (1967), 33–126; H. Hasquin (ed.), *Histoire de la laïcité principalement en Belgique et en France* (Brussels, 1979).

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7 There is no satisfactory modern history of Belgium in English. E. H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries 1780–1940* (Oxford, 1978) provides an introductory synthesis, albeit one written from a Dutch perspective. A much more comprehensive and stimulating account is given by Witte and Craeybeckx, *Belgique politique*.

8 R. Aubert, 'L'Église et l'état en Belgique au xix^{e} siécle', *Res Publica*, 10 (1968), 9–31; *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (Bussum, 1978) xiii. 178–85 and 395–429; P. Gérin, 'L'Église et la politique en Belgique avant 1914', *Res Publico*, 27 (1985), 523–31; A. Simon, 'Le Cardinal Mercier et la politique', *Res Publica*, 6 (1964), 112–16.

9 A. Simon, *Le Parti catholique belge 1830–1945* (Brussels, 1958), 85–9 and 111–15; E. Gerard, *De Katholieke Partij in crisis* (Leuven, 1985), 49.

10 L. Wils, *Het Daenisme* (Leuven, 1969); Witte and Craeybeckx, *Belgique politique*, 112–16.

11 Witte and Craeybeckx, *Belgique politique*, 116–17; J. Neuville, *Une géénération syndicate* (n.p., 1959), 75–123; *Katholieken en Landbourv: Landbouwspolitiek in België 1884–1914* (Leuven, 1987).

12 A. Simon, 'Le Cardinal Mercier et la politique', *Res Publica*, 6 (1964), 112–16; M. Claeys-Van Haegendoren, 'L'Église et l'État au xx^{e} siécle', *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 542–3 (1971), 3–5; J. Remy, 'Le Défi de la modernité: La Stratégic de la hiérarchie catholique aux xrx^{e} et xx^{e} siécles et Pidée de chrétienté', *Social Compass*, 34 (1987), 153–61.

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18 A. Simon, 'L'Influence de 1'église sur la vie politique dans l'entre-deux-guerres', *Res Publica*, 4 (1962), 393–4; R. Aubert, 'Le Cardinal Van Roey', *Reuue Nouuelle*, 34 (Sept. 1961), 113–30; W. S. Plavsic, *Le Cardinal Van Roey* (Brussels, 1974); Cardinal Suenens, *Memories and Hopes*, 53–5.

19 Claeys-Van Haegendoren, 'L'Église et l'État au xx^{e} siécle', 7.

20 A good general account of inter-war Belgian politics is provided in Höjer, *Le Régime parlementaire belge de 1918 á 1940*.

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22 Witte and Craeybeckx, *Belgique politique*, 292–304.

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