
Pro Rege

Volume 11 | Number 3


Article 9

March 1983

Herinneringen aan de Unie Waarin We Ons Thuis Voelden, De Groei Naar Het CDA, and Voor de Duvel Niet Bang (Book Reviews)

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Recommended Citation

Langley, McKendree R. (1983) "Herinneringen aan de Unie Waarin We Ons Thuis Voelden, De Groei Naar Het CDA, and Voor de Duvel Niet Bang (Book Reviews)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 11: No. 3, 28 - 30.

Available at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol11/iss3/9

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A quarterly faculty publication of
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

rock (pp. 103-110) decay methods. It may well be that there is no refutation of Young's arguments on decay methods.

On the other hand, young-earth authors also cite scientific evidence, such as the existence of fossil graveyards. The near-simultaneous death of many animals could take place, the argument runs, only if there were a catastrophe such as a universal flood. Given such a flood, argue the young-earth adherents, one could account for many other geological phenomena ordinarily taken to be evidence of great age. Young is not opposed to a universal flood (p. 178), but he shows there is no need to postulate that any fossil graveyard is the product of such a flood. He lists seven kinds of modern mass mortalities (pp. 76-78) which are the causes of the formation of graveyards similar to the fossil graveyards.

Another argument often used to show that the earth is young depends upon the rate of change of the earth's magnetic field (pp. 117-124). Advocates of a young earth maintain that the recent decrease in this magnetic field indicates that if such a rate of change were extrapolated back for billions of years, the magnetic field would once have been impossibly large. But Young shows quite adequately that the magnetic field of the earth has fluctuated and that the extrapolation is not

warranted.

Young has presented us with a thorough treatment of the subject. Very likely his conclusions would be universally accepted if the subject were not so controversial and if many persons did not suspect a hidden agenda. Yet, it is difficult to see how Young could be proven wrong by anyone attempting to answer his arguments. Because he covers many aspects of the debate very well, it will be necessary for future young-earth authors to deal with his arguments.

In the third section of the book, Young probes the meaning of uniformitarianism, of miracles, and of the relation between Biblical and "natural" revelation. He also discusses the relationship between Christians who differ on the earth-age question.

The book is clearly written and suitable for its intended audience, those who are interested in the earth-age debate. The scientific arguments are not too difficult for the average reader.

A passage which is more technical than any other part of the book (pp. 106-109) would be easier to follow were there not typographical errors in a figure, an equation, and a table.

Because this book was written in a good spirit, the Christian community can obtain a significant benefit from it.

Herinneringen aan de Unie Waarin We Ons Thuis Voelden: Christelijk-Historische Karakteristieken ed. by A.J. van Dulst, The Hague, The Netherlands: Stichting Uniepers, 1980. 128 pages, \$7.00. *De Groei Naar Het CDA: Momenten en Impressies uit Dertien Bewogen Jaren* ed. by H. Borstlap and C.J. Klop, Franeker, The Netherlands: T. Wever, 1980, 205 pages, \$10.00. *Voor de Duvel Niet Bang: Mr. Dries Van Agt Van Weerzin Tot Wellust* by Jan Tromp and Paul Witteman, Haarlem, The Netherlands: De Haan, 1981, 202 pages, \$10.00. Reviewed by McKendree R. Langely, Associate Professor of History.

The three books under discussion are representative of contemporary Christian Democratic politics in The Netherlands largely outside the Kuyperian tradition. The first volume concerns the history of the Christian Historical Union, the second narrates the fusion of Protestants and Catholics in the Christian Democratic Appeal and the third is a popular presentation of the career of Premier Dries Van Agt who held office from 1977 to 1982. Taken together, these volumes give us an idea of the "open" or non-confessional approach to practical Christian Democratic politics.

-I-

The Christian Historical Union (CHU) was formed between 1894 and 1908 when Count Alexander F. de Savornin Lohman refused to support the widening of the right to vote advocated by the leader of the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), Abraham Kuyper. Lohman, a nobleman and a long-time member of parliament, rejected Kuyper's populism and personality

cult. The CHU was made up of a significant number of aristocrats who were devoted to the *Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*. Lohman, as much as Kuyper though in a different way, was a friend and student of Groen van Prinsterer, author of *Unbelief and Revolution*. The CHU, like the ARP, was an heir to the revitalized Calvinism of the early 19th century, represented by Groen. Some of the other leaders of the CHU were the theologian Ph. J. Hoedemaker, parliamentarian and education minister J. Th. de Visser, long-time cabinet minister of labor and education, J.R. Slotmaker de Bruine, the parliamentarian Frieda Katz, parliamentary leader H.W. Tilanus, and the next to last chairman of the CHU, Baron van Verscheur.

True to its Groenian beginnings, the CHU wanted to base politics on Evangelical principles. The CHU always was an open party, in distinction from the confessional Anti-Revolutionary Party, comprised in its last years of confessionals, ethicals, and Barthians. In this diversity there was a kind of unity based on mutual toleration. In rejecting a clear-cut organizational antithesis, Christian

Historicals were involved in both Christian and secular ("neutral") organizations. Likewise the CHU appealed to the whole nation and not to just the Reformed segment. In reaction to the dispute between Lohman and Kuyper, Christian Historicals were careful to avoid creating personality cults. The result was a weak party organization in which moral persuasion and a sense of being a family prevailed. Christian Historicals took part in many national governments and generally adopted a centrist position.

The strength of the CHU is a rejection of an arrogant triumphalism in favor of a more modest and pragmatic political role. This lack of dogmatic leadership enabled the CHU to have fewer splits and adjust gracefully to public conflicts. For example between 1967 and 1980 there was no basic conflict within the CHU about joining the CDA while stormy fights took place within the ARP over the same question. The weakness of the CHU tradition was the softening of the basic religious antithesis between belief and unbelief in public affairs. Basic Christian principles tended to be relativized by the conflicts between individual consciences. The danger was always present that a comfortable centrism would emerge based more on pragmatism than on biblical principles. Yet this book suggested that a more modest alternative to the Kuyperian tradition was a needed corrective to the triumphalism often seen in the attitudes of those claiming the name of Kuyper. The CHU made a positive contribution to Protestant Christian Democratic politics that should not be ignored. Thus there was a good reason for publishing this book with chapters by more than two dozen authors who were either members of the CHU or sympathizers.

-II-

The fusion of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, Christian Historical Union, and the Catholic People's Party into the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) took place between 1967 and 1980. This volume was published by the CDA Institute upon the completion of the fusion process on October 11, 1980. Fifty-two political leaders from the three parties contributed their insights to this book. The authors freely admit that the formation of the CDA was full of tension. Three leaders who tried to deal with these tensions were Willem Aantjes, the parliamentary leader of the ARP, later of the united CDA delegation; Prof. Piet Steenkamp (KVP), the first chairman of the CDA; and Baron Van Verscheur, the chairman of the CHU who headed the CDA ideological commission. Aantjes favored a "confessional" CDA comprised of self-confessed Christians while Steenkamp and Van Verscheur favored an "open" CDA for all those who supported its program. The "open party" concept finally prevailed.

The book is divided into three sections: conversations between the parties (1967-1972), from contacts to federation (1972-76), and from federation to fusion

(1976-80). The reasons given for the formation of the CDA were these: 1) weak coalition cabinets resulting from the relatively small Christian parties confronted by the militant Liberal and Labor parties; 2) the growth of young radicals within the Christian parties causing internal tensions and splits; and 3) an ecumenical climate in which many felt there were no distinctively Reformed or Catholic answers to political problems but only general Christian approaches. At the same time the political programs of the three parties were generally centrist but with accents in center right or center left directions. This book is an early attempt to assess the growth of the CDA and its judgement is positive.

-III-

The third book is a presentation of some journalistic impressions about the CDA leader, Dries Van Agt, who served as the premier of the Netherlands from 1977 to 1982. Authors Jan Tromp and Paul Witteman are secular parliamentary journalists who try to chart Van Agt's political career from "reluctance to enjoyment." Van Agt was a professor of criminal law at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. During the early 1970's he served in the center-right cabinet of the Anti-Revolutionary Barend Biesheuvel and in the center-left cabinet of the Socialist Joop den Uyl. During this period Van Agt became known as an honest and reliable cabinet minister for calling the nation to an ethical reawakening, for being concerned with the plight of the socially weak, and for his strong stand against abortion on demand and pornography. In 1977 he became the leader of the newly-formed Christian Democratic Appeal. After long coalition talks with the arrogant Socialists, Van Agt finally formed a paper-thin parliamentary majority between the CDA and the Liberal Party. As premier, Van Agt presided over a center-right government.

During his first years in power, Premier Van Agt enjoyed great popularity, being voted the "Man of the Year" in 1979. In domestic policy he has made some cut-backs in social welfare spending. Concerning the deployment of the American medium-range nuclear missiles on Dutch soil, Van Agt postponed making a decision because a majority in parliament, including the Socialists, the other leftist parties, and ten members of the CDA, adopted a stance of nuclear pacifism. Generally speaking, weak parliamentary support for his cabinet has discouraged Premier Van Agt from making bold decisions.

-IV-

These three volumes are representative of the integration of Dutch Christian politics into the largely Catholic Christian Democratic politics of a number of West European countries. These parties have banded together in the European Parliament as the European

People's Party. The distinctive Protestant Kuyperian notion of the confessional parties and organizations has been replaced by the open CDA. The first book points out that the Christian Historical Union led the way to the open party concept among Protestants. The second book narrates the movement of the Anti-Revolutionary Kuyperians to the open CDA. The third book gives some impressions of the hesitant centrism of the CDA leader, Premier Van Agt. These books make clear that the firm principles and political spirituality of Kuyper have been unfortunately replaced with vaguer attitudes. This may lead to a loss of support for the CDA in the future, or it may bring a certain political stability to the

Absolute Nothingness: Foundations for a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, by Hans Waldenfels, New York: Paulist Press, 1980. 214 pp. \$7.95. Reviewed by Gordon Spykman, Visiting Professor in Theology.

The Japanese thinker, Nishitani, who sees himself as "a becoming having-become Buddhist" and at the same time as "a becoming not-having-become Christian" (pp. 62-63), quite conceivably personifies in large measure the very spirit of this book. He writes in the foreword that Waldenfels' work "represents perhaps the first attempt on the part of the West to enter deeply into the heart of the problems that have become the focal point of the contemporary discussions between Christianity and Buddhism" (p. v.). Waldenfels, like other participants in this trans-global dialogue, agrees that colossal obstacles stand in the way. For, as Nishitani puts it, there is in the Buddhist religion such "a degree of reciprocity that nothing in the West can approximate it" (p. 105). This prompts the question, therefore, whether participants on both sides "are sufficiently prepared for this kind of discussion" (p. 121).

Accordingly, this review probably calls for another. For only a thoroughly schooled orientalist can really size up a book like this. Reading it is like journeying into a faraway country with strange-sounding names, a distant civilization with a radically different universe of discourse, where the landscape of ideas is wholly rearranged, where the familiar landmarks are re-written in a foreign language, where the very dimensions of time and space and the contours of human experience and reflection are judged by other standards.

How then are we to go about constructing "foundations for a Buddhist-Christian dialogue"—the theme held forth in the title? Given the yawning chasm of religious disparity between these two traditions, can these two utterly remote horizons be fused? Is not the author's stated intention of "laying down a few stepping stones for dialogue" (p. 157) a misconceived venture from the very start? Indeed Waldenfels, while exploring very intensively countless possible points-of-contact, also reckons with the possibility of eventually reaching a fundamental impasse. "In the search to build bridges

Netherlands. At the same time Van Agt has exercised power for a number of difficult years. It is clear that he is not a Christian Democratic statesman of the stature of Germany's Konrad Adenauer or France's Robert Schuman. The lack of both clear Christian principles and Christian Democratic statesmanship may cause problems for the CDA in the future, or such modest but uninspiring Christian Democratic leadership may continue for some time. But a lack of continuing discussion on a politically spiritual perspective as well as an uninspiring leadership may mean hard times ahead for the CDA.

of understanding," he says, "themes such as these (man's consciousness of sin and death, Christ's redemption for them, and the idea of eschatology) can be set aside for the moment, but cannot simply be struck from the agenda" (p. 159). Yet, "for both sides the only radical point of encounter is the point of the radical letting go of self" (p. 124, cf. p. 161). His parting word is this: "Do not the smile of the enlightened Buddha and the tortured countenance of the crucified Jesus really come face to face when we share in the depths where the true self resurrects in poverty, death, and absolute nothingness?" (p. 162).

Nowhere does this book explicitly address the methodological question of a proper Christian apologetic. Yet this issue surfaces implicitly on nearly every page. Where are we to locate the common ground for a Buddhist-Christian dialogue? Is there a "middle way" (p. 16)? Appealing to the theology of his fellow Roman Catholic scholar, Rahner, Waldenfels leans heavily in the direction of a synthesis model of apologetics, taking full advantage of the wide-ranging ecumenical openness created by Vatican II. A mild and sympathetic confrontational approach is not wholly absent. Yet, throughout this painstaking critical analysis, his over-riding tack is to press persistently for possible points-of-contact.

This is no easy undertaking. Consider the following typically Buddhist ideas, which are baffling to most traditional Christian thinkers: "absolute nothingness" (which has nothing to do with western nihilism), "homelessness," "reaching beyond the beyond," "negative identity," "the Great Death," "the Great Doubt" (which has nothing to do with Descartes's doubt), "the great Enlightenment" (which has nothing to do with Kant), "pure relationality," "the absoluteness of subjectivity," "absolute opposition which is the same as absolute harmony," "impersonal personality" and "personal impersonality," "absolute nothingness which is