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Robert Schuman and the Politics of Reconciliation

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Democracy owes its existence to Christianity. It was born on the day when man was called to realize the dignity of the human personality in temporal life, in individual liberty, in the respect of personal rights and by the practice of universal brotherly love. These ideas had not been formulated before Christ. Democracy is thus tied to Christianity both doctrinally and chronologically. . . . Christianity caused the dignity of work to be recognized and the obligation of all people to submit to this dignity. It recognized the primacy of interior values which alone enoble man. The universal law of love and of charity has made each man our

neighbor. On this law rests the social relations in the Christian world.¹

These inspiring words formed the credo of the "Father of Europe," the Christian Democratic statesman, Robert Schuman (1886-1963). In an age of secular politics it is refreshing to examine the contribution of this courageous statesman called "a saint in a business suit" who initiated an end to the age-long hostility between France and Germany and laid the foundations of the European Economic Community.

Historical Background

Born in Luxembourg in 1886 of French parents from Lorraine, Schuman studied law

at the universities of Berlin, Munich, Bonn, and Strasbourg between 1904 and 1910. Then he began a legal practice at Metz, in a French border region controlled by Germany at that time. He was fluent in French and German, a fact which proved to be a great asset later in his career. During these early years he became involved in the various associations in Lorraine in support of a Catholic press and Catholic social organizations in order to popularize a Christian perspective on public life. The defense of religious and educational rights of Catholics were also among his concerns. After World War I Lorraine became a part of France and in 1919 Schuman was elected a deputy of the French National Assembly—a position he basically held until 1962. In 1931 he joined the parliamentary caucus of a Christian Democratic party called the Popular Democratic Party.

In March, 1940, as France was about to be engulfed in war, Schuman was appointed Under-Secretary of State for Refugees in the Reynaud Cabinet. At the beginning of the Nazi Occupation in 1940, he voted in favor of giving power to Marshal Petain but refused all governmental posts offered him by the German Occupation authorities. After being the first French deputy arrested by the Nazis, he made a daring escape and a large reward was offered for his capture. He spent the remainder of the war in hiding, planning for the future.

Re-elected a deputy in October, 1945, Schuman joined the new Christian Democratic party, the Popular Republican Movement (MRP). In 1946 he was appointed Minister of Finance in the Ramadier Cabinet, a position which demanded a great struggle against inflation in order to achieve a balanced budget and economic decentralization. Robert Schuman served as Premier of France from November 1947 to July 1948. But it was in the post of Foreign Minister from July 1948 until December 1952 that Schuman made his greatest contribution to Franco-German reconciliation; because of this he was called the "Father of Europe." As

Foreign Minister he served under eight different premiers, thus bringing some stability to the foreign relations of the French Fourth Republic.² Robert Schuman was able to seize an historic opportunity for peace with the sure understanding of a world statesman.

Perspective

Even as a young man Schuman was a very committed Catholic with an integrated world-view. He had been influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John of the Cross, the psalms, and above all, the writings of the Thomist philosopher of culture, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973). During his long public career, Schuman considered politics a calling requiring a priest-like devotion. He firmly advocated lay political action with a Christian inspiration and rejected any form of clericalism.

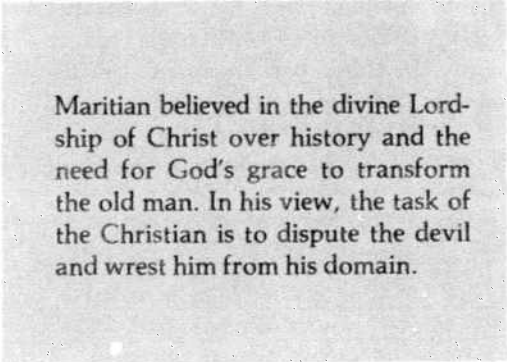
During the 1920's and 1930's there was much discussion in France on the nature of Christian politics. One of the most influential books on this subject was *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom* (1936) published in Paris by Jacques Maritain. This book was a major conceptual blueprint for the growing Christian Democratic movement that would become a major force in French politics from 1944. Maritain developed a powerful critique of the dehumanizing normlessness of both communism and fascism and called for believers to work for the establishment of the "New Christendom" by infusing civilization with a Christian spirit. Society could be made more humane with this integrated theocentric humanism. Some of Maritain's main principles included a lay structural pluralism, social unity and civil tolerance, the freedom of the temporal order from the control of the church, the law of social stewardship of economic life, organic interdependence, the freedom of persons, social unity based on both divine authority and human equality as well as the undertaking of a common practical task by Christians and non-Christians

to build a society on brotherly love. Maritain believed that the Christian does not make the world into the Kingdom of God, but that to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom he can make society more fully human by applying the principles of love, justice, and dignity. In rejecting the absolutization of "politicism" and "economism," Maritain believed in the divine Lordship of Christ over history and the need for God's grace to transform the old man. In his view, the task of the Christian is to dispute the devil and wrest him from his domain. For history is the struggle between the Kingdom of God and the realm of perdition. Due to the theocratic and clerical oppressiveness of the Catholic past, Maritain opted not for politics by Christians under the Catholic flag but for political movements that are Christianly inspired and open to both Christians and non-Christians who accept both a Christian Democratic perspective based on a distinctive philosophy of history and the societal principle of Pope Pius XI. The Pope held to the subsidiarity principle, viz., it is unjust for higher social bodies to perform what can be accomplished by lower institutions. Maritain firmly hoped that such an ambitious plan for a "New Christendom" would reintegrate the working masses with Christianity.³

Influenced by Maritain, Schuman matured, convinced of the validity of this Christian Democratic world-view. By joining the parliamentary group of the Popular Democratic Party in 1931 he expressed his agreement with its four basic principles: 1) acceptance of the French democratic Republic; 2) concern for social justice expressed in reformist legislation and more equitable economic distribution; 3) the endorsement of a political perspective based on a "humanism with a Christian inspiration"; and 4) the call for a French foreign policy that was patriotic and favored international cooperation.

During World War II Schuman spent his time in hiding. He moved twelve times to prevent the Gestapo from catching up with

him. In July, 1942, he had a secret conversation with a priest, the Abby of St. Martin in Ligugé. The transcript of this important statement on the fundamental character of Nazism was discovered in the Abby's archives in 1967. Schuman was concerned to point out that the aggressive and racist policies of Hitler resulted in war, concentration camps, and genocide. Beneath these bloodthirsty policies was an anti-Christian spirit which exploited the individual to further the goals of the National Socialist government. The elite SS troops were singled out as particularly anti-Christian and neopagan in ideology and practice.⁴



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This reflective Frenchman clearly recognized that the war against Hitlerite Germany involved a fundamental spiritual struggle. He expressed this spiritual antithesis as follows:

Nazism has its own religion which appeals to God but which is in fact a type of materialistic pantheism. This religion is not a minor matter but the center of the ideology itself. This is why Nazism wants to abolish all other religions. It is essentially at war with Christianity. It is not only foreign but hostile to every idea of the personal destiny of man, of the absolute worth of the person, of personal immortality and of the requirements of conscience. Not only does Nazi religion misunderstand these

doctrines but it sees them in direct opposition to its own fundamental conceptions.⁵

European Integration

It was also during the war that Schuman first conceived the idea of Franco-German reconciliation. After the chaos of Hitler's war, Europe needed to be rebuilt on the basis of Christian and humane values. Basic to this rebirth of Europe was the development of harmony between France and Germany. Thus when he became the French Foreign Minister in July, 1948, Schuman knew that he finally had the opportunity to put his ideas into practice.

A clear statement advocating international cooperation was made by the French leader at the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, D.C. on April 4, 1949. Schuman emphasized that his government signed this treaty with full knowledge of the consequences of three wars within a century. It was clearly stated that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was not an offensive alliance but only a defensive pact against the threat of Soviet aggression. He strongly endorsed NATO as an international organization for peace and security. The French leader concluded prophetically,

Nations are more and more convinced that their lives are closely bound together, that their salvation and their welfare can no longer be based on an egotistical and aggressive nationalism, but must rest upon the progressive application of human solidarity.⁶

During his first visit to Bonn, West Germany, as French Foreign Minister on January 14, 1950, Schuman again took up the theme of reconciliation at a luncheon given in his honor by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer who was also a Christian Democrat. Schuman stressed that the most important development of post-war Franco-German relations was the creation of an at-

mosphere of trust in which healing ties could bind the nations in peace. With a sense of mutual appreciation he declared:

. . . when one day the history of our time and its problems is written, it will be recognized that we attempted an important piece of work here on the Rhine, our Rhine, the German and French Rhine, this river that is one entity despite all national frontiers. I am convinced that our work will succeed.⁷

Adenauer was very encouraged by these remarks.

The theme of Franco-German reconciliation was undoubtedly a priority in the French leader's thought during the first half of 1950. Schuman tended to be a solitary thinker who informed his governmental colleagues only when he had reached a decision. He reached such a decision on May 7 when he called the American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson. Schuman outlined to Acheson his proposal that a common Franco-German coal and steel community be created as a first step toward the unification of Western Europe. Secretary Acheson was surprised but impressed with his French colleague's vision of the rebirth of a united Europe. Acheson then sent an "eyes only" message to President Harry Truman asking for permission to express serious interest when the plan was unveiled. President Truman replied in the affirmative.⁸

After receiving the approval of the French Cabinet, Foreign Minister Schuman on May 9, 1950, unveiled his historic plan to change the course of centuries of hatred between Germany and France. He boldly called for the creation of a Franco-German coal and steel pool: "The French Government proposes to take action on a limited but decisive point: it proposes to place all French and German steel and coal production under a common high authority in an organization open to all other European countries."⁹ The purpose of this coal and steel pool was to

create a practical solidarity of production between the two former enemies so that war between them would be both impossible and unthinkable. This fusion of interests would enhance the standard of living for both Frenchmen and West Germans by the modernization of production facilities and the elimination of all tariffs on goods going between these countries. In addition there would be the introduction of common railroad freight rates. This coal and steel pool would be governed by a common High Authority of independent leaders appointed by their respective governments on a parity basis. Its president would be chosen by the common consent of the governments involved.

The decisions of this High Authority would be enforceable in the signatory countries with an appropriate opportunity for appeal. Twice a year a United Nations representative would make a report on the work of the coal and steel organization.

Schuman made it very clear in this historic declaration that his ultimate goal was the creation of a united Europe. The coal and steel pool was the first step towards the creation of a European federation which was designed to eliminate the causes of war between the two main continental powers of Western Europe, raise the standard of living for all Europeans, contribute to the development of Africa and above all make a fundamental contribution towards the creation of a stable peace. In this climate of peace, Schuman was convinced Europe had a great contribution to make in its civilizing world mission. His concern was not simply to encourage big business cartels but rather truly to enhance the quality of life on the continent. This proposal was simple and limited in scope but with wide implications that the Foreign Minister knew could change the course of European and world history. He declared:

France has acted essentially for peace. If peace is to have a chance, there must be first of all a Europe. Five

years almost to the day after the unconditional surrender of Germany, France is taking the first decisive act in the construction of Europe and is associating Germany with it. This act must necessarily transform European conditions. This transformation will make it possible to take other common actions that have been impossible until now.¹⁰

Rationale

In later years Schuman made two major statements explaining the world-view perspective behind his proposal of 1950. The first explanation was given in a speech delivered at Harvard University on June 11, 1954, on the topic of "European Integration." The second statement was his memoir, *Pour l'Europe* (For Europe), published in 1964. It is important to examine the arguments Schuman used concerning European integration in order to discern the difference between economic pragmatism and his own Christian Democratic perspective.

Robert Schuman admitted at the outset of his argument that this was a Christian Democratic, world-view perspective. His concern was to seek a consistent wholeness in his political efforts to unite Europe. Any notion of impartial neutrality was rejected. He asserted that there is a natural equality between all men of every class as created by God and redeemed by Christ. All men share in a common dignity. He stressed the primacy of the higher values of Christian civilization which both believers and other men of good will share, especially the universal law of neighborly love. But all men are also obligated to value honest work. Their democracy must be normed by such Christian values as respect for both individual freedom and the rights of groups and harmony between the needs of individuals and groups. Schuman correctly pointed out the inability of both *laissez-faire* individualism and collectivism to deal adequately with the full range of human

problems. Therefore, he emphasized that people and nations were socially interdependent and must come together to solve common problems, not resort to militant nationalism which ignores the needs of other nations. The two world wars had painfully demonstrated the logical end of nationalism: intolerance, persecution of other national/racial groups, and war. In the post-war period a new approach was needed so that these serious wounds might be healed and nations might deal with their common problems and to build a new society dedicated to the preservation of human dignity and social progress.

The French leader recognized that for solidarity to succeed, the French had to stop hating Germans and the Germans, the French. Only by creating a psychological climate of mutual trust and reconciliation could the benefits of meaningful cooperation between the two countries be realized.

Schuman correctly recognized that the limits of the capacities of the individual European nation-states had been reached and that a wider kind of institution was needed to benefit the war-devastated region. Schuman was asking the French and the Germans to forgive one another, begin building bridges of mutual trust across the Rhine and create an international institution capable of dealing with their common economic problems on a practical level.¹¹ Declared the French leader:

After two world wars, we have finally recognized that the best guarantee for the nation no longer is found in its splendid isolation no matter how powerful, not even with its own military force but with the solidarity of nations that are guided by the same spirit and accepting the common tasks in the common interest. . . .

Under the pressure of experience. . . we are led back to the Christian law of noble but humble fraternity. And by a paradox which overtook us, if

we were not Christians—subconsciously Christians perhaps—we extend the hand to our former enemies not simply to pardon them but together to construct the Europe of tomorrow.¹²

Mutual trust could be built by a common commitment to a supranational authority to exchange freely basic commodities without tariffs and other restrictions. The result would be to integrate the French and German economies in such a way as to make war a great disadvantage to both:

. . . it was necessary to change the attitude and orientation of our politics in substituting the old antagonisms for a loyal cooperation with equal rights and obligations. Thus the relations between the two countries are definitively purified and liberated from the nightmare of a possible new conflict. . . .

We did not think it wise to begin with European federation. But the convergence of the two categories of problems (Franco-German and European) have led us to visualize a concrete solution capable of responding to both of these concerns. . . .

The field of coal and steel offered us a partial experiment. It seemed to us to unite all the conditions necessary for technical success as well as for economic and political efficiency. After the pre-1950 competition, it was a contribution to a peaceful and constructive cooperation.¹³

Not only would this iron and coal pool make a larger market for goods produced from these basic industries, but it would also greatly lessen unemployment and be a defense against communist agitation. Because of the French leader's commitment to international solidarity, he wanted other

European nations to join the coal and steel pool to create a large common market in Europe. Due to his world-view perspective, Schuman also realized that economic integration could not be completed without political integration in a united Europe with a federal executive and a European parliament. Schuman dreamed of a powerful, democratic, independent and united Europe that would be able to play a world role for peace and the enhancement of the higher values of human dignity. This type of solidarity was to be based on the love of neighbors and the values of Christian civilization.

The central point of the subsidiarity principle was that higher societal institutions should undertake a task in the field of industrial development only when lower bodies had failed to meet the needs of the common good. The Schuman Plan was based on a structural and moral hierarchy.

Schuman strongly believed that religious values were the necessary basis of civic virtue and he strongly opposed secularist attempts to separate religious values from public conduct for he saw that social disintegration was the result. This relationship was also important in the relations between nations:

In the international realm the same claim is also made as seen in 1) the solidarity of the believers of all countries and 2) the Holy See as the most influential advisor by its independence, its disinterested impartiality and by its humane policies which are sensitive to all the distress and dangers threatening the various peoples regardless of their credos.¹⁴

Schuman was fully aware of the contrast between his views on European integration

and the emergence of the so-called "people's democracies" then developing in Eastern Europe from Poland to Albania under the orders of Joseph Stalin. What emerged in Schuman's Franco-German Coal and Steel Pool was a concrete expression of his notion of neighborly love, using the Catholic subsidiarity principle as its conceptual framework. The central point of the subsidiarity principle was that higher societal institutions should undertake a task in the field of industrial development only when lower bodies had failed to meet the needs of the common good. The Schuman Plan was based on a structural and moral hierarchy. On the bottom were people and families, on a second level were business and labor groups, on the third level were France and West Germany, and above these nations was the Coal and Steel Community under the supervision of the United Nations. Above all these structures in the realm of grace was the Pope who generated moral values for the whole of society below.¹⁵

Results

The Schuman Plan received a positive response not only in West Germany and France but also in Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and The Netherlands whose governments signed the treaty creating the European Coal and Steel Community on April 18, 1951. There were five agencies in this community: a High Authority, a Common Assembly, a Council of Ministers, a Court of Justice, and a Consultative Committee. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer stated that

The Schuman Plan was certainly of great economic importance, but its underlying ideals were of even greater significance. A community of European countries was to be created on the basis of complete equality, the only basis of a genuine community. This fundamental idea was of the greatest consequence for the political

life of Germany, for France, Europe and the world.¹⁶

So successful was this supranational Coal and Steel Community that it led to the creation of the European Economic Community by the six nations in the Treaty of Rome in 1957.¹⁷ The Christian Democratic ideal of European federalism had found a successful structural expression for the common good based on Robert Schuman's politics of reconciliation.

Critique

1. Robert Schuman has been widely recognized as the political architect of the movement for European integration. His untiring work for this federalism as exemplified in his historic Declaration of May 9, 1950, earned him high honors for changing the course of contemporary European history. The reasons for his wider concerns were his profound Christian Democratic perspective and his border land bicultural heritage. As a major statesman, he made a significant contribution to European and world peace.

2. The French Foreign Minister correctly saw that after World War II a new Christian Democratic option was needed as part of a fresh political start after the failures of fascism, communism, secular democratic politics, and the explosive forces of conflicting nationalisms. New values were needed for public life and Schuman correctly perceived that they should be Christian Democratic values.

3. It took a long time for the Christian Democratic perspective to mature and gain popularity. Martain's influence on Schuman was very important as were the Christian Democratic press and parties. The French statesman correctly saw that politics was never "just politics" but always involved basic perspectives on the meaning of life. For this reason Schuman's legacy involves a spiritual perception of the meaning of public affairs in order to discern man's sin and

God's grace in human history.

4. The basic inspiration for the Coal and Steel Community was the politics of reconciliation involving mutual trust and interdependence. The courageous initiative went against centuries of hatred and war. Schuman wanted his coal and steel plan to make a concrete contribution toward building a lasting peace in Europe. He demonstrated that higher values upon which to base new economic and political institutions were necessary. Thus he was not primarily concerned to help big business *per se* but to build a united and pluralist Europe to improve the general quality of life. He also wanted to give Western Europe (and NATO) a positive world role as an alternative to communist agitation and Soviet expansionism.

5. As a Catholic, Schuman was committed to Christian Democratic political action, by laymen, with the Pope exerting only moral influence over society as an embodiment of the universal law of fraternal love. He thoroughly rejected clericalism in all forms. The subsidiarity principle was enriched in creative ways as an institutional and moral hierarchy in order to deal with problems on a supranational basis after the failure of lower institutions and nation-states to solve their own problems.

6. There is in this position a muted sense of the antithesis between belief and unbelief which reveals the typical Catholic nature/grace dualistic synthesis. One example of this ambiguity is found in the expression "humanism with a Christian inspiration" which blurs the distinction between man's sin and God's grace. The result seems to be a vague residue of values of a Christian civilization while there is little emphasis on personal commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord. Often terms like "solidarity," "internal values," and "the universal law of love" are not clearly defined and thus are open to varying interpretations. Underlying this whole approach is the notion of all men of good will organizing politically to further vague values of

Christian civilization without a clear call to personal faith in Christ as basic to Christian politics. The moral authority of the Pope was contrasted with secularist political indifference, but Schuman rejected the clear distinction between the Gospel and humanism.

7. The coal and steel plan and Christian Democratic proposals in general raised some fears, especially among socialists and other anti-clerical parties, that men like Schuman were actually working for the creation of a clerical "black Europe" under Vatican control.¹⁸ This fear is an aspect of the theocratic legacy that even some Protestants have been concerned about.

8. Basic to Schuman's plan was the conceptual model of the subsidiarity principle which is hierarchical in nature. It presents the potential danger of a misplaced elitist manipulation of the state. In this scheme moral values influence society in the realm of nature, from the pope who is in the realm of grace. Quite different is the Reformational principle of sphere sovereignty. In this view the various creational and societal structures receive their mandates directly from God. God's ordinances in the creation are understood properly in the light of scriptural norms. While there is also a structure of authority, Christians seek to infuse it with Christian values by appealing to biblically-informed consciences. Nevertheless, there is a convergence between the principles of subsidiarity and sphere sovereignty which make practical projects such as the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community justifiable from either viewpoint.¹⁹ Thus Robert Schuman's politics of reconciliation is a legacy that should be valued by all those seeking to honor the Lord of the Nations in public affairs.

Notes

¹Robert Schuman, *Pour l'Europe* (Paris: Nagel, 1964), pp. 56-58 (my translation).

²Robert Rochefort, *Robert Schuman* (Paris: Cerf, 1968), pp. 53, 17, 26, 38, 57, 64, 69, 70, 85, 89, 96, 124, 142, 149, 165, 221, 233, 311. Egon A. Klepsch, et al. *European Parliament: 25 Years Christian Democratic*

Group (Luxembourg: General Secretariat of CD Groups, 1978), p. 9.

³Rochefort, pp. 47, 53; Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom* translated by Joseph W. Evans (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), pp. 39, 61-63, 275-81, 6, 42, 93, 76, 162-64, 172, 176-78, 192, 203-206, 111, 91, 93-94, 108, 206, 261, 263, 164.

⁴Rochefort, pp. 71-2, 128, 369-382.

⁵Schuman statement in Rochefort, p. 367 (my translation).

⁶Rochefort, pp. 131-32, 135; Robert Schuman, speech of April 4, 1949, *Vital Speeches*, Vol. XV, No. 13 (April 15, 1949), p. 388.

⁷Schuman speech of January 14, 1950, quoted in Konrad Adenauer *Memoirs, 1945-1953*, trans. Beate R. von Oppem (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1966), pp. 234-35.

⁸Dean Acheson, *Sketches from Life of Men I Have Known* (New York: Harper, 1961), pp. 35-38.

⁹Robert Schuman, "Franco-German Coal and Steel Pool," speech of May 9, 1950, in *Vital Speeches*, Vol. XVI, No. 16 (June 1, 1950), p. 482.

¹⁰*Vital Speeches*, p. 482-83.

¹¹Robert Schuman, "European Integration: Obstacles and Progress," *Vital Speeches*, Vol. XX, No. 20 (August 1, 1954), pp. 616-620; Robert Schuman, *Pour l'Europe*, pp. 55-78, 23-34, 37-51.

¹²Schuman, *Pour l'Europe*, pp. 30, 44 (my translation).

¹³Schuman, *Pour l'Europe*, pp. 156-58 (my translation).

¹⁴Schuman, *Pour l'Europe*, pp. 129-150, 70-71 (my translation).

¹⁵R. E. Mulcahy, "Subsidiarity," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XIII (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), pp. 762-63; Schuman, *Pour l'Europe*, pp. 28-30, 170-71, 156-57, 163, 167, 65, 71; Schuman, *Vital Speeches*, Vol. XVI, No. 16, p. 483.

¹⁶Adenauer, *Memoirs*, pp. 339-40.

¹⁷Russell B. Capelle, *The MRP and French Foreign Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 47-48; Adenauer, pp. 339-40; R. E. M. Irving, *Christian Democracy in France* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973), p. 188

¹⁸Capelle, p. 150

¹⁹Oswald von Nell-Breuning, "50 Jaar Quadragesimo Anno," *Christen Democratische Verkenningen* (December, 1981), pp. 599-606; H. E. S. Woldring, "Sturen aan Structuren: Welke Zin Hebben Samenlevingsstructuren?" and A.M. Oostlander, "De Toekomst van West-Europa: Enkele Kanttekeningen" in C. Bremmer and A. Vermeulen, eds., *100 Jaar Partij: Bezinning en Perspectief* (Franeker, The Netherlands: T. Wever, 1979), pp. 103-109, 237-246; B. Goudzwaard, "Tijd voor Bezinning: Protestanten en Katholieken in de Politiek," *Nederlandse Gedachten*, Vol. 26, No. 37 (September 13, 1980), pp. 6-7.