Introduction

Why Look at Christian Democracy?

This book is a study of the political ideology of Christian Democracy, a set of principles and values that has, on the one hand, been extremely influential in the history of Western democratic regimes, but, on the other hand, remains severely understudied, especially when compared with its main ideological rivals: socialism, liberalism and conservatism. I begin by substantiating these two claims.

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY'S HISTORICAL INFLUENCE

In almost all Western continental European democracies, political parties either explicitly or implicitly describing themselves as Christian Democratichave been in power for an overwhelming portion of the second postwar period. Writing in 1998, for instance, Emiel Lamberts noted that in Germany the CDU was in government for thirty-six of the fifty years that had elapsed since the end of the Allied occupation; in Italy the DC was in power for forty-seven of the fifty-two years since the Liberation; in the Netherlands the CDA occupied positions of government for forty-nine of the fifty-three years since the end of the Second World War, whereas the same figure for the Belgian PSC is forty-seven out of fifty-three years (cf. Lamberts 2003, 122). In all these countries, Christian Democratic parties continue to exist and have been in and out of power for the past couple of decades, despite the collapse of what previously used to be one of the main pillars of the European Christian Democratic movement: the Italian DC.

One reason why this extended period of political hegemony is not very frequently recalled – especially in the Anglo-Saxon world – is that the

country many most readily think about in connection with continental Europe is France, which constitutes a partial exception in this regard. While, to be sure, a recognizably Christian Democratic party – the MRP – emerged as the largest single political force from the first French postwar elections, and continued to dominate the country's politics throughout the Fourth Republic, during the formative period of the Fifth Republic, French politics was marked by the resurgent ascendancy of General De Gaulle, who succeeded in co-opting much of the MRP's electorate for a rather different political project. French Christian Democracy has since struggled to recover its previously dominant position (without ever dying out entirely nonetheless) and remains in this sense an exception with respect to the rest of continental Europe.

Throughout the western part of the continent, then, Christian Democracy's extraordinary continuity in power was compounded by the fact that the period of its ascendancy included several constitution-making moments, which in many cases produced constitutional documents that are still in effect today. In Italy, for instance, the DC held the largest number of seats in the 1946–1948 Constituent Assembly. In Germany, the CDU held twenty-seven out of the sixty-five seats in the body that drafted the country's 1948 Basic Law, and the party's founder and secretary, Konrad Adenauer, also served as its chair. Moreover, in this respect, France is more in line with other continental European countries, since the MRP played a key role in drafting the constitutions of both the Fourth and the Fifth Republics, despite its subsequent decline. It does not seem an exaggeration, therefore, to suggest that postwar continental European democratic constitutions are to a significant degree "products" of Christian Democratic actors and thinkers (Lamberts 2003).

In addition, Christian Democratic parties were also decisively involved in what are today often considered the two greatest political achievements of the second postwar period in Europe: the creation of welfare states and the process of European integration. The former might strike some as a surprise since – again, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world – there is a widespread conviction that it was primarily Social Democrats who built Western Europe's welfare regimes (see Berman 2006). That too, however, may be mistaking the exception for the rule. For, apart from the United Kingdom and the comparatively small Scandinavian countries, Social Democratic parties were kept well out of power throughout the first few decades of the second postwar period in most of continental Europe. In countries such as Germany, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg it was therefore primarily Christian Democratic parties

that presided over the edification of the welfare state (Van Kersbergen 1994). As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, this had a lasting impact on both the structure and goals of these countries' welfare regimes.

That the process of European integration was to a large extent driven by Christian Democratic actors and thinkers is more often recognized, if only because of the striking fact that the holy trinity of Founding Fathers famously constituted by Alcide De Gasperi, Konrad Adenauer and Robert Schuman, as well as virtually all the national governments in office at the time of the signing of the 1957 Treaty of Rome, were composed primarily (if not exclusively) by Christian Democratic party members (Kaiser 2004). What is less often pointed out, however, is that throughout its first few decades, the process of European integration was regarded with much skepticism – if not outright opposition – by most *other* European political parties and movements. As we will see in more detail in Chapter 4, for instance, as late as the mid-1970s, the Swedish Social Democratic Prime Minister, Olaf Palme, described the emerging European Economic Community in terms of what he called the "four C's" – "capitalist," "conservative," "colonialist" and "clerical" – because he took it to be "dominated by Christian Democracy" (cited by Moss 2005, 5).

Outside continental Europe, the historical influence of Christian Democratic parties and ideas has been less but is still very significant. In the introduction to their edited volume *Christian Democracy in Latin America*, for instance, Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully write that: "Christian Democracy has been an important political force in several countries in the region. It is impossible to understand political life in recent decades in Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Venezuela without analyzing the Christian Democratic parties of these countries … Because Christian Democracy was and is such an important actor in Latin American countries, it illuminates key points of political processes in the region" (Mainwaring and Scully 2003, 3; 3–4). Chapter 9 of this book further suggests that, even though no significant Christian Democratic party ever emerged in the United States, several aspects of the country's politics can also be helpfully illuminated through the prism of Christian Democratic principles and values.

THE PAUCITY OF EXISTING LITERATURE ON CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

Despite the manifest political importance of Christian Democracy, there is surprisingly little academic literature on this topic. In fact, in the

introduction to their 2003 edited volume on the "historical legacies" of European Christian Democracy, Thomas Kselman and Joseph Buttigieg write that: "Virtually all the studies that have appeared over the past few years acknowledge the crucial role that Christian Democratic parties have played in the history of Europe since the end of the Second World War, but express surprise at the paucity of previous work on this topic" (Kselman and Buttigieg 2003, 1). David Hanley (1994) states that such a literature is "basically non-existent"; Andreas Kalyvas (1995) describes it as "underdeveloped"; whereas Steven Van Hecke and Emmanuel Gerard (2004) suggest that the topic is "as much under-researched as lacking in theoretical elaboration."

Indeed, if we consider the number of existing volumes that either directly or indirectly ask the question 'what is socialism?,' 'what is liberalism?' or 'what is conservatism?' it may appear surprising that no comparable volume has yet been published, prior to this one, at least in the English language.[1] Two further points about the existing academic literature on Christian Democracy are worth noting. First, that most of it has been written by supporters – or sympathizers – of this political project. Thus, as Martin Conway has noted, Christian Democrats have, for the time being, by and large, "written their own history" (Conway 2003, 44). This has tended to give the literature a rather "apologetic" bent (Kaiser 2004, 128–129). What is still missing is therefore a balanced appraisal of Christian Democracy's strengths *and* weaknesses, from a normatively more detached point of view.

Second, the existing literature on Christian Democracy has been written primarily by historians and empirical political scientists. This has translated in a preponderant focus on "actors, strategies and political outcomes" (see Kalyvas 1996, 13), at the expense of the underlying *ideological principles* that informed them. Indeed, what remains perhaps the most widely cited monograph on Christian Democracy in English explicitly challenges the utility of what its author calls an "ideational" approach to this topic (ibid., 16; on this point, see also Kalyvas 2003). While agreeing that it would be simplistic to assume that political ideas or ideologies are ever translated directly into political outcomes, I believe it is

[1] To my knowledge, no comprehensive book-length study of the political ideology of Christian Democracy exists in other languages either. However, this topic has received a greater measure of attention by continental European scholars in particular. For some illustrative examples, see Caldera 1977; Mayeur 1980; Giovagnoli 1996; Papini 1997; Becker et al. 2002; Uertz and Buchstag 2004; Scoppola 2005; Formigoni 2008; Frey 2009; and Pombeni 2015).

equally inadequate to abstract from the "ideational" dimension entirely; for, ideological principles and orientations define the "broad parameters" within which actors define their preferences and strategies, and therefore the political outcomes that are possible within a given historical context (see Blyth 1997; Campbell 2002; Hay 2004; Baumgartner 2014). Thus, the present study focuses in particular on the *political ideology* of Christian Democracy, from the perspective of political theory.

THE STAKES OF THIS BOOK

My interest in the political ideology of Christian Democracy is not merely historical or antiquarian. On the contrary, a key wager of this book is that an understanding the nature, content and historical influence of this set of ideas can help enrich the conceptual tools for the comprehension of the present world, both from a heuristic and a normative perspective. The proof of this is ultimately in the pudding, but several preliminary considerations can be advanced to justify such an expectation.

First, as mentioned, despite having lost their previously hegemonic position in most of continental Europe, Christian Democratic political parties and movements are still very much part of its current electoral and political landscape. Barring the case of the Italian DC (which may ultimately turn out to be more of an exception than a rule), Christian Democratic parties are in power, or at least involved in government coalitions, in: Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and arguably also Spain, Hungary and Poland, at the time of writing. This continued electoral strength is reflected in the fact that the EPP remains the largest single parliamentary group in the European Parliament. Beyond Europe, then, Christian Democratic parties remain key governmental forces in Chile, Mexico, Venezuela, Costa Rica and El Salvador.

Of course, all such parties have had to adapt to the times and are very different from when they were first created. However, it is striking that, in moments of crisis, many of these parties are keen to reaffirm their commitment to the core values of the Christian Democratic ideology. For instance, in the immediate aftermath of Donald Trump's election in the United States, Germany's Angela Merkel wrote a public letter offering the newly elected president "close cooperation" on the basis of the values of "democracy, freedom, and respect of the dignity of man." As Samuel Moyn has acutely pointed out – and I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2 – the appeal to the principle of "human dignity" is an unmistakable reference to one of the core values of the Christian Democratic

ideology (see Moyn 2017, 1). At a moment when many looked at the leader of the German CDU as the last best hope for Western democratic polities to survive what was widely seen as a populist onslaught, Merkel therefore chose to retreat to the safe space of well-established Christian Democratic doctrine. To understand what the reference to "human dignity" meant for her, and the broader ideological framework in which it is inscribed, it therefore appears as important as ever to have a clear idea of what the Christian Democratic ideology as a whole stands for.

More broadly, a further claim I want to advance in this book is that, precisely because of its extended period of political hegemony in many advanced Western democracies, various constitutive aspects of the Christian Democratic ideology have over time sedimented in the *institutional framework* and background *political culture* of these countries. Because institutions and cultures change more slowly than the electoral fortunes of partisan organizations, its values and principles continue to affect contemporary politics, even if the salience of Christian Democracy as a partisan phenomenon has declined over the past few decades (without nonetheless being eroded entirely). The metaphor I will use to express this point – which I will return to at several junctures in this book – is that of the *hermit crab*: the type of crab that is sometimes found inhabiting abandoned seashells on the beach. The suggestion here is that Christian Democracy played a decisive role in shaping the institutional and cultural shell of modern democratic regimes, particularly in continental Europe, but also – to a lesser extent – in the Americas. Over time, its fortunes oscillated and in some cases Christian Democracy was wiped out entirely as a partisan phenomenon. Yet the shell remained and has been progressively reinhabited by new political actors, driven by different ideological forces: such as, in particular since the 1970s and 1980s, a resurgent liberalism that had been almost entirely discredited in the postwar period. The result is that today many Western democratic regimes have the structure of a hermit crab, with a Christian Democratic shell constituted by established institutions and background political cultures, and either liberal or social democratic crabs living within them. While these new inhabitants try to remold the shell in their image, they are also at the same time constrained by it.

If this is indeed the case, studying the political ideology of Christian Democracy may be – for continental Europe – a little bit like studying the political views of the Founding Fathers in the United States: a theoretical endeavor for which there is virtually an industry in the United States itself, but which has so far lagged far behind on the old continent. Indeed,

as I already pointed out, the general assumption has been that the architects of the Western European postwar order have been either liberals or social democrats. However, that is only true of a few rather exceptional cases. In most continental European countries, liberals were widely discredited and social democrats fell way short of political majorities in the aftermath of the Second World War. It was therefore predominantly Christian Democrats who took up the task of rebuilding the old continent after its political catastrophe, which means that the world we inhabit today is still, to a large extent – and whether we like it or not – a product of Christian Democratic actors and ideas.

Finally, a study of the political ideology of Christian Democracy also has the potential of contributing to several ongoing normative debates within the field of academic political theory. For instance, a topic that has recently sparked a great deal of interest – and controversy – is that of the most appropriate way of organizing the relations between politics and religion within a democratic regime (see Bhargava 2005; Taylor 2007; Habermas 2008; Calhoun et al. 2011; and Cohen and Laborde 2015). A surprising feature of this debate, however, is that it has by and large remained organized around a rather narrow set of categories, pitching the concept of "secularism" on one side and that of "religious establishment" on the other, with "post-secularism" somewhere in between (see Gorski et al. 2012). A study of the political ideology of Christian Democracy can help enrich this set of categories, inasmuch as Christian Democrats were directly confronted with the problem of integrating a specific religious tradition (i.e., Christianity, and in particular Catholicism) within the framework of modern democratic regimes. To do so, they developed a wide array of sophisticated concepts and proposals that in many ways transcend the overloaded distinction between "secularism" and "religious establishment." A question I will confront directly in Chapter 10, therefore, is whether this specific set of concepts and proposals may serve as a model for the successful integration of other religious traditions – such as most notably, Islam – within the framework of contemporary democratic regimes.

Another burning normative question today is that of the most appropriate political response to the challenge posed to the health and stability of existing democratic regimes by the recent rise of various forms of far-right populism (see Mény and Surel 2001; Mudde 2004; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Mair 2014; Muller 2016; and Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2018). Here, too, there may be an analogy with the fact that Christian Democratic parties and ideas played a key role in politically defeating – or

at least taming – another phenomenon of the far right – i.e., fascism in many countries of continental Europe in the second postwar period. A question I will be investigating in the last chapter of this book is whether Christian Democratic parties and ideas may still have a normatively useful role to play in channeling at least some portions of the electorate (such as, notably, the religious right) away from these forms of far-right populism and in a direction that is more compatible with the health and stability of democratic regimes.

Without anticipating here my answers to these multiple and overlapping questions, I hope the previous discussion has been sufficient to establish that there is both a *real need* and a potentially *high payoff* from a comprehensive study of the political ideology of Christian Democracy, from a perspective that is at once theoretical and empirically informed, historical and forward-looking, and neither apologetic nor prejudicially critical. This is the study the book has the ambition of providing.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The book is divided into two parts. The first offers a theoretical reconstruction of the substantive content of the Christian Democratic ideology through a discussion of the meaning this ideological tradition has historically assigned to a number of core concepts, as well as the logical and semantic relations between them. The second part adopts a more historical approach, examining the successive political uses of Christian Democratic ideas and principles, both in continental Europe and Latin America, as well as the way in which they continue to shape contemporary political frameworks and their persistent normative potential as a set of categories for addressing several presently salient political issues.

More specifically, Chapter 1 examines the philosophy of history on which the Christian Democratic ideology is predicated through an analysis of the meaning this ideological tradition has historically assigned to the critique of *materialism*. Chapter 2 outlines the core metaphysical principles of this ideological tradition through an analysis of the meaning it has historically assigned to the concept of *personalism*. Chapter 3 discusses the specific conception of the people – and therefore democracy – that underscores the Christian Democratic ideology, through an analysis of the meaning it has historically assigned to the concept of *popularism*. Chapter 4 focuses on the distinctive conception of the state advocated by Christian Democrats, through an analysis of the meaning they have historically assigned to the concept of *subsidiarity*. Chapter 5 examines

the main socioeconomic policy orientations that Christian Democrats have sought to extrapolate from their religious convictions, through an analysis of the meaning assigned to the concept of *social capitalism*. Chapter 6 analyzes the specific mode of articulation of the domains of politics and religion implicit in the Christian Democratic ideology through an analysis of the meaning this ideological tradition has historically assigned to the concept of *religious inspiration of politics*.

In the second part, Chapter 7 provides an outline of the successive historical uses of Christian Democratic ideas and principles by political parties operating under this banner in continental Europe, focusing in particular on the second postwar period in Italy, Germany and France. This also lays the groundwork for engagement with the question of whether continental European Christian Democracy is destined to an inevitable demise, given its recent electoral decline in some of its core contexts of origin. Chapter 8 broadens the focus to the European Union as a whole, examining the extent to which characteristically Christian Democratic ideas and principles can be said to have been inscribed into the background institutional framework and political culture of EU-level politics. This points to a different mode of persistence of Christian Democratic ideas and principles, which stems from their previous political strength but is independent from their current electoral decline. Chapter 9 discusses the historical trajectory of diffusion and implantation of the Christian Democratic ideology outside its primary context of origin, focusing in particular on the two American subcontinents. While most of the analysis is devoted to a discussion of the historical experience of Christian Democracy in Latin America, I also devote some attention to the question of why no significant Christian Democratic party or movement ever developed in the United States. Finally, Chapter 10 evaluates the persistent normative potential of Christian Democratic principles and values by assessing their capacity to enrich ongoing theoretical debates over two currently salient political issues: that of the political integration of Islam within the framework of existing democratic regimes and that of the most appropriate political response to the recent rise of various forms of far-right populism in advanced Western democracies.

NOTES ON METHOD AND DEFINITIONS

Before jumping into the substance of the analysis, I offer in this liminal section a discussion of some background methodological and definitional

issues. Readers eager to get to the substance of the arguments may wish to skip this section, or perhaps return to it later. Since, however, it is my experience that academic discussions of Christian Democracy often turn on questions of method and definition, I felt it necessary to make at least some of my own presuppositions explicit and, where possible, justify them with respect to some possible alternatives. More specifically, I will be discussing here: (1) the overarching method I propose to employ to study the Christian Democratic ideology; (2) the way in which I define this ideological tradition and what marks its distinctiveness from others; (3) the primary sources I will be using to conduct this study; (4) my own normative outlook with respect to Christian Democracy as an object of study.

THE CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

The method I will be employing in this book is inspired by what Michael Freeden has called a "conceptual" approach to the study of political ideologies (see Freeden 1996, 2001, 2006; Freeden et al. 2013). As well as providing clear guidelines for how to examine its object, this approach has the advantage of providing a definition of the concept of ideology itself, which does not prejudge the question of its normative value. I will therefore begin by discussing how – and why – I propose to apply this method to the study of Christian Democracy.[2]

[2] To my knowledge, the conceptual approach to the study of political ideologies hasn't yet been applied to the study of Christian Democracy in particular. If we look at Freeden's seminal book *Ideologies and Political Theory*, for instance, after the first methodological part, we find it contains substantive chapters on liberalism, conservatism, socialism, feminism and ecologism but *not* Christian Democracy (see Freeden 1996, viii–x). A similar pattern can also be observed in most of the subsequent monographs and textbooks that either implicitly or explicitly adopt Freeden's conceptual approach to the study of political ideologies (see for instance: Festenstein and Kenny 2005; Heywood 2012; Wetherly 2017). The only, partial, exception is Paolo Pombeni's chapter "Christian Democracy" in the *Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, edited by Michael Freeden and Marc Stears in 2013, which however adopts a rather different methodological approach. From this perspective, the study I am proposing here can be seen as offering a contribution to the emerging field of studies on the conceptual approach to political ideologies, by supplying the "missing chapter" on the Christian Democratic ideology in the form of a self-standing book.