Introduction

Representative democracy and liberal Protestantism seem to have a natural affinity. Like liberal Protestantism, representative democracy entails the relegation of belief to the domain of the private, the individual, and the subjective. It privileges not truth as such but the individual's freedom to search for truth. People can pick and choose for themselves from sacred texts in their quest for models and rules of conduct to adapt to contemporary needs. Individualism entails a desire for autonomy that often seems incompatible with submission to religious authorities. From being forces that shaped entire societies, religions are reduced to merely personal preferences. To believe is no longer to belong. This affinity with liberal Protestantism gratifies liberal Protestants and reassures agnostics, but it disturbs both those Protestants who are not liberals and those believers who are not Protestants—starting with Catholics.[1]

The theological drift of democracy is not exclusively in the direction of liberal Protestantism. It also tends toward pantheism, to the idea that God is All and All is God.[2] In putting everyone on the same level, its doctrine of social equality undermines the sense of individuality. The citizen is absorbed by the people, the people by humanity, and humanity itself by an indifferent and undifferentiated Nature. The finite is swallowed up in the vague and nebulous infinite. Sensitivity to difference and to particularity is dulled. The sense of the person is lost in the totality, and the dignity of the individual person becomes meaningless. This pantheistic tendency appeals to environmentalists and to the most radical democrats, and it is welcome to those totalitarian ideologues who find their own freedom a burden. However, it disturbs those believers who uphold the Christian concept of the person and of personal salvation along with the broad outlines of Genesis: for if God created the world, then the world is not God. The tendency toward pantheism is particularly disturbing to Catholics, whose traditions sensitize them to the importance of hierarchy, order, and form.

In this book, I set out to show how the Catholic Church has responded to these two contradictory yet complementary challenges, the upper and nether millstones of liberal Protestantism and pantheism, which, under more or less totalitarian regimes, have squeezed it to the point of persecution or driven it to the point of civil war—for example, during the Vendée (1793), or in Mexico

(1926–29) and Spain (1931–39). How has the church adapted to liberty and equality? To what extent has it turned threats into opportunities?[3]

My analysis is organized around the two great councils that, for the Catholic Church, bestrode the last two centuries: Vatican I (1870) and Vatican II (1962–65). I intend to show that the First Vatican Council was just as "modern" as the Second Vatican Council, and even that the latter reasserted aspects of tradition against the former. I intend to show that the two councils represent in effect the two poles between which the Catholic Church oscillates in the age of democracy, but also that these two poles are complementary and can be successfully integrated within a single perspective. By analogy with the "Gregorian Reform" of the eleventh century and the "Counter-Reformation" of the sixteenth century, I speak here of a "Vatican Reform." I argue that the contemporary Catholic Church is blending the work of the two councils into a coherent program of Vatican Reform on the basis of which it can go forward.

The First Vatican Council set the seal on the renewed affirmation of the importance of the papacy in the democratic age. Under the Ancien Regime, Catholics were for the most part nationalistic and attached little importance to the papacy. But with the end of the "confessional state" and the destabilization of national religious identities came a shift in allegiances. Catholics now looked to Rome as the center of a religious identity that was no longer rooted in national traditions. Vatican I defined the doctrine of papal infallibility. Yet though reactionary in several ways, it nevertheless represented an adaptation to political deconfessionalization. There was an element of liberalism in the triumph of ultramontanism. (By "ultramontanism" is understood the ecclesiastical tendency to look *ultra montes*, beyond the mountains—that is, the Alps—toward Rome, emphasizing the superiority of popes over bishops.) Catholics would never have turned to the papacy in this way had they not in effect agreed with liberals that there was something irreducibly secular about the modern state.

Vatican II completed the work of Vatican I. The council fathers of Vatican II gave explicit, albeit measured and conditional, recognition to the merits of democracy and liberalism. They abandoned the concept that the state as such had specific duties with regard to God. They ceased hankering after the confessional state and acknowledged the right to religious liberty, making it the cornerstone of Catholic political thought. They emphasized the political role of the laity and abandoned the idea that political life ought to be predicated on close collaboration between civil and ecclesiastical hierarchies.

It is not my intention to rewrite the history of the councils, for their story has been well enough told.[4] I intend rather to put forward a history and an interpretation of Catholic political thought in the age of democracy, concentrating on the case of France and on the now somewhat forgotten history of Gallicanism—the doctrine that, in contradistinction to ultramontanism, set a high value on political life and on the milieu of the nation. There are two reasons for this.

In the first place, it was France that set the tone for Catholic political thought between 1650 and 1950, when the church was, more or less, adapting to what we call the "modern world." In the history of France, we see clearly the tensions that elsewhere remained hidden. France was at once the epicenter and the laboratory for the process. In Spain, Quebec, Italy, and the United States, for example, the debates were neither as wide-ranging nor as profound. It was France, more than anywhere else, that saw real reflection on the relations between Catholicism, nationalism, liberalism, and democracy, because it was France alone that was at once a great Catholic nation, a cradle of the nation-state (unlike Spain or the Habsburg Empire), and the stage for the Revolution. The crisis of the Revolution called forth the most powerful and the most extreme analyses, ranging from the political theology of Joseph de Maistre to a homogenizing Jacobinism and a republican anticlericalism. Over the past few centuries, the most substantial, the most engaged, and the most influential Catholic political thought has been that of France. Demographic shifts within the universal church and internal change in France have latterly combined to bring that intellectual primacy to an end. The internal arguments of American Catholicism now hold center-stage, but that is a recent development. Previously it was in France that religious, political, and intellectual life came together with unparalleled vigor, conferring a more universal significance upon the events of the nation's history.

Second, the tension between Vatican I and Vatican II, between the two poles of the Vatican Reform, plays out at the level of the universal church a tension that first arose in the heart of political and ecclesiastical life in France. The forces that shaped developments within the Gallican church came to shape the universal church. The Catholic Church was caught between two paradigms to which it neither could nor should conform if it were to remain Catholic: that of a church organized on a purely national basis; and that of a church entirely separate from the nation-state, autonomous and self-sufficient under the guidance of the papacy. This book is therefore especially concerned with the history and varieties of Gallicanism, because, within the Catholic Church, Gallicanism is the preeminent tradition of distinctly *political* thought. Gallicans have always insisted on the autonomy of the temporal or secular power. It was within the matrix of Gallicanism that, from the high Middle Ages onward, the secular tradition took shape. This Catholic tradition, which has attracted surprisingly little attention from professional historians, has nevertheless played a crucial role in the development of the framework of modern politics: the liberal and democratic nation-state.

My project is thus situated at the intersection of several intellectual disciplines: the history of ideas, religious and political history, ecclesiology, and political philosophy, with a particular emphasis on the last of these. It seeks to complement the fine work that has already been done in these various areas.

Neither church historians nor historians of political thought have yet attempted a "history of Catholic political ideas in the democratic age." I aim to fill this gap.[5] I do not presume to paint a complete picture: that would be an impossible task. Thus, I scarcely touch upon "social Catholicism," nor do I deal with papal policy as such. I can only hope that the reader will accept my oversights and omissions as the necessary price of a welcome brevity. The authors whom I have picked out for analysis have been chosen for their representative character and because they offer the clearest and boldest arguments. It goes without saying that I confine my view largely to Catholic authors. However, the Catholic Church envisages itself precisely as church, and not as sect; as a church that aspires to embrace all, even pagan philosophy. So I have no hesitation in drawing where appropriate upon non-Catholic and non-Christian authors. If the history of the church is, as the church likes to think, the history of Truth, then it is better if it is not confined to the presbytery. The church encompasses the life of nations, and its horizon is the unity of humanity made manifest.