THE WORLD OF IDEAS OF DON LUIGI STURZO

In the space of a single article a survey of Don Sturzo's world of ideas can be merely indicative, a throwing into relief of certain fundamental conceptions which give his thought so particular an originality and potency. Even so, selection is not easy; his mind embraces so many planes. Behind the political thinker is the sociologist, seeking the constant laws of human relationships; behind the sociologist is the metaphysician, the theologian, whose contribution to the shaping of Catholic thought is gaining increasing recognition;[1] behind the theologian the mystic, for whom all human fellowship receives its true meaning in the fellowship of man with God, and Christianity is seen as a cosmic fact, irradiating the whole of human existence, throughout history and throughout the world. Such higher reaches, however, were best left to more competent pens than mine. I propose here to deal mainly with certain aspects of his sociology where it converges on political philosophy, the philosophy that at once inspired his active life and drew from it confirmation and vital elements.

Did space allow, it would be illuminating to illustrate this marriage of thought and action: how, as a young priest, intending to devote himself to university teaching and music, he was swept into active public life under the inspiration of Rerum Novarum, on the crest of the Christian Democratic movement of the nineties, to become the organiser of trade unions and peasant co-operatives, a leader in municipal activities and reforms, then founder of national institutions, and finally, in 1919, the founder and leader of a great political party in which his ideals found practical embodiment. These facts should be born in mind; it was thus that his theories were born and tested, and if they are sometimes presented in formulas of an almost mathema-

[1] See, for instance, an article by Mgr. Bruno de Solages, Rector of the Catholic Institute of Toulouse, in his Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique (Oct.-Dec., 1940), where, dealing with the theology of the just war, he speaks of Don Sturzo as 'the man who has certainly done most to make contemporary theology concern itself with adapting the theory of the just war to the contemporary world,' and, after quoting Professor Le Four of the Sorbonne to the effect that Don Sturzo's book, 'The International Community and the Right of War,' contains 'some of the most suggestive pages that have been written on this formidable problem,' he concludes: 'With him, the theology of the just war has finally put the stress on the duty of international organisation.'

tical precision and generality, they have behind them a wealth of concrete experience.

The new school of sociology of which he is the exponent may be described as *integral* sociology, in that it takes into account the constant impingeing of the supernatural upon the natural, the plain, historic fact that man has not lived by bread alone. Or it may be called '*historicist*' sociology, in that it envisages society not as something static, but as a living reality in continuous process.

His conception of history is basic for his whole outlook. 'A mixture of free and conditioned, of individual and social, in a continuous process—so we see history, but from the providential standpoint beneath this human ant-hill, enclosed in its cycle of conditioning factors and volitions, of thoughts and acts, are hidden higher ends, whether known or not, which reveal themselves, in their objective ripeness and in our subjective ripeness to perceive them, as willed by God.' History, in short, is a process 'moved by imminent forces from a transcendant and absolute principle towards a transcendant and absolute end.'

In this process there is no determinism; men are at once conditioned and free, and conditioning factors may either be accepted as insurmountable barriers or awaken the urge to overcome them, when they become aids to progress.

Constant in the historical process is what he defines as the *tendency towards rationality*: the innate urge to seek the good, that which corresponds to reason (an urge of which we find a counter-proof in psychological rationalisations), but since our vision of the good is never flawless or entire, often the pseudo-rational or semi-rational is taken for the rational. Progress comes through the pressure of the 'should-be' on what is, in a dialectic of which the negative moment is the realisation of present errors and deficiencies, and the positive the overcoming of the semi-rational or pseudo-rational by the rational. (It is thus, for instance, that first slavery, then serfdom and to-day the wage-system revealed themselves as incompatible with man's moral dignity).

Because of human freedom, progress is never constant, nor can a *hic manebimus optime* ever be reached in this world. Were it so, the dynamism of human process would come to an end. As it is, ideals find only partial realisation; in the very achievement of realisation they are, as it were, spoiled, but this defectiveness of realisation brings a stimulus to further effort.

In the dialectic of the historical process two currents are continuously apparent, the *mystical* and the *organisational*. The mystical,

or ideal current (Don Sturzo gives preference to the term 'mystical' as implying a sense of faith, of affective conviction, and not of something wholly intellectual) is that which sharply aware of present deficiencies seeks renewal and reform. The organisational current crystallises into institutions and concrete fact something of what the mystical current conceives, but such embodiments will become petrified and dead unless constantly quickened and renewed. The distinction between the two is never absolute, because they are constituted by human individuals and reflect the complexity of human minds, but their twofold working can be discerned in every field of social life. Though both are to be found in the Church as in the State, it is essentially the role of the Church to be the expression of the mystical current in the face of the State, even though in certain moments these roles may be reversed.

When, as to-day, the State tends to become Leviathan, a totalitarian monster, the human conscience rebels against the constant encroachment on its rights, creating a dualism which the Church polarises in the conception: 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.'

Between Church and State there is always potential conflict, reflecting the conflict between the spiritual life and temporal life of man. Thus they tend to form a dyarchy—two co-existent powers, each limiting the other, but with one or the other predominant, owing to the fundamental tendency of all society towards a unification that is never complete. Always in such cases the dualism between the two reappears, precisely because it is the essential role of the Church to represent the criticism of what is in the light of what should be.

. . . . . .

Church, State and Family are for Don Sturzo the three *primary social forms,* which though sometimes merging always tend to find their autonomy. But even the primary forms of society are not something above and beyond the individual. All society is 'the multiple, simultaneous, continuative projection of individual consciousness.' The antithesis between the individual and society is a creation of abstract thought. Man is social by nature; he is born into a specific society—his family. His relative being can find fulfilment only in association with others, in a *communion* that brings into being a *community.*

Don Sturzo's insistence that the essential basis or, to use the schoastic term, the efficient cause—of any society is a *fact of consciousness,* to which material causes are subsidiary, is one of his most

illuminating contributions to sociological thought. As he notes, a group of people in a railway-carriage do not constitute a society, while a husband and wife, even if they are childless and divided from each other by emigration, war or imprisonment, may retain their consciousness of belonging to each other. The social bond is moral, even in the family, where the physical relationship must be subsumed in a specifically human one, founded on mutual affection and duty: otherwise it disintegrates. Thus all society is 'unified in rationality,' by a common aim, an ideal motive, a spiritual principle.

This spiritual basis for any true community is essential. Not only the Church, but the State, the family, if they concentrate on purely material goods, turning what should be a means into an end, will produce a darkening of the collective consciousness, and be torn asunder by the individual egoisms of their members. This applies even in the economic sphere itself. Hence for Don Sturzo the first necessity for economico-social reform is to give all workers a moral participation in the work on which they are engaged: the lack of such participation has been the sore of the wage-system.

The beginning and end of social life is *human personality,* with its freedom and dignity, of which the formal liberties that are part of the democratic ideal are as the 'leaves, fruit and flowers.' The fact that human personality fulfils itself through association, has led Don Sturzo to posit the most suggestive *Law of Individuality-Sociality.* 'The more individuals increase in conscious personality, the fuller the development of their associative qualities and forces; the fuller the development of such forces, the more do individuals develop and deepen the elements of their personality.' This holds good also for communities: as these enrich and deepen their personality, the greater and more fruitful becomes their capacity for associating with others. Hence his insistence, in politics, on the value of local government, of fostering regional personality, of the Organic State founded on a harmony of diversities, integrating but not suppressing the activity of other organisms.[2] Moreover, carrying this conception into the international field, he sees in such organic States the organic basis for a valid International Community, in which the relationships between Governments would be complemented by a whole network of relationships between kindred bodies.

---

[2] Compare the inaugural appeal of the Italian Popular Party in 1919: 'For a centralising State, seeking to restrict all organizing powers and all civic and individual activities, we would substitute a State truly popular, respectful of the natural centres and organisms—the family, classes, Communes—respectful of individual personality and encouraging private initiative.'

The *International Community*, like other communities, must be the expression of a communion. It will become increasingly a reality as the consciousness of belonging to such a community develops among the individuals of the different peoples. (We may compare the case of the British Empire, or the birth of the United States). The wider and the deeper this consciousness, the more effectively will the International Community take shape as a true society, with valid authority, and the more force, the irrational element, will yield precedence to law, the rational element, so that power will rely more on law and less on force.

. . . . . .

Some of Don Sturzo's most original observations deal with the question of authority and liberty. These he sees not as antithetical, but as complementary, the one presupposing the other. Liberty, like authority, comes from God. Neither can be unlimited, for every right implies a corresponding duty, which limits it. Authority (if it is true authority) is limited by the sense of responsibility, the obligation to respect the rights of others. Liberty has the same limitation. Without them, authority would become tyranny and liberty licence, each turning in fact into its negation, for tyranny means the absence of authority, which rests on consent, and licence the trampling down of the liberties of others. Thus authority and liberty form an inseparable synthesis : liberty is, as Cicero saw, a participation in authority. It is the great merit of democracy that it extends this participation to the whole world.

Democracy, Don Sturzo defines as ' the political and social system resting on the free, organic participation of the whole people in the common good.' This cannot mean mass rule. Another of his illuminating theses is the necessary existence of *political élites* (a theory he has developed from Pareto, giving it an original turn). Always only a minority will take an active, directive part in political life; the masses *qua* masses will follow where others lead. But in a democracy such élites are drawn not from a small privileged class but from all classes. A classless society is unfeasible, for natural differentiation could be repressed only by tyranny. The free formation of political élites from every class, will on the contrary bring an enrichment of public life. Traditions of culture and public service (if they are kept alive in new generations), the stablising influence of the middle classes, the workingman's experience in wrestling with harsh realities, all mean a positive contribution to the ordering of the common weal.

When Pius XI. declared that 'politics, rightly understood, are a form of Christian charity,' he confirmed an outlook of which Don Sturzo has been an untiring exponent. With the extension of the orbit of the State, so that politics enter into every form of social life, no one has the right to stand aloof from them. On Catholics in particular devolves the duty of the defence of religious and moral values on the political plane.

Neither politics nor economics (nor any form of human activity, individual or collective) can escape the moral law. Hence the urgent need for recognition of the primacy of morality. While, in the Sicilian proverb, 'God does not pay on Saturdays,' political immorality brings a sure nemesis.

For the future, Don Sturzo remains a firm optimist. Whatever tragedies, whatever crises, we have yet to meet, always the seed of the Gospel will send forth new shoots, for the impulse of Christianity is always working not only in the Church but in 'the whole world which has been, mystically, conquered by Christ and potentially lives in Him.' Even in periods of cataclysmic ruin, that impulse remains, perennial principle of hope and of renewal.[3]

BARBARA BARCLAY CARTER.

[3] The theses condensed or quoted in the above article have been gleaned here and there in Don Sturzo's works. These are, in chronological order: *Italy and Fascismo* (1926), *The International Community and the Right of War* (1930), *Essai de Sociologie* (Paris, 1935), *Politics and Morality* (1937), *Church and State* (1939), *Les Guerres Modernes et la Pensée Catholique* (Montreal, 1941) His doctrine on authority and liberty is set forth in a notable chapter in the People and Freedom Group's symposium *For Democracy*. Mention should also be made of his latest book, *The True Life—Sociology of the Supernatural*, now in the press in the United States, in which the theological and mystical basis of his thought finds explicit affirmation—as it does, indeed, in symbolic form, in his dramatic poem *Il Ciclo della Creazione*.