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THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

(Annual Association Address)

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I am grateful to you for the opportunity of addressing you on this occasion—grateful not only for the honor, but for the pleasure of being able to harangue fellow philosophers at a time when good food and good manners prevent them from talking back; and grateful also because the topic of our general discussion at these sessions is the philosophy of democracy. Yet in this last respect, I must confess, my gratitude is mixed with other emotions as I stand before you.

I cannot help recalling the Fifteenth Annual Meeting held in Washington in 1939. It was devoted to the philosophy of the state.

One of the papers presented on that occasion claimed to demonstrate the proposition that democracy is morally the best form of government because the most just; or, stated more strictly, that democracy is the only perfectly just government, and hence that the political community can attain its due perfection only through democratic institutions.¹ As I recall the paper, I also remember murmurings and mutterings which spread through the philosophical corridors after it was delivered, voices of dissent from so radical a thesis, voices of doubt about the steps of the proof, and, last but not least, voices of disapproval over the fact that the author of the paper had said—not by implication, but explicitly, and without apology—that the political philosophy of Aristotle and St. Thomas fell short of the whole truth, both by reason of serious inadequacies and because of grave errors.

I was one of the few who agreed with that paper six years ago. I was not shocked by the criticism of Aristotle and St. Thomas, because it has always seemed to me that political philosophers must suffer the blindnesses of their limited historical perspectives. Aristotle did well enough for a Greek, and St. Thomas well enough for a thirteenth century man, but neither could do well enough for all time. As Don Sturzo has recently pointed out in a brilliant paper,² no competent moralist today could take the Greek or mediaeval view of slavery, or war, or nationalism. So no competent political thinker today could take the Greek or mediaeval view of the forms of government, and of democracy among them.

I said that I was one of the few who agreed with the demonstration of democracy given six years ago. I still do, with greater assurance and for stronger reasons. An elaborate series of articles on the theory of democracy, written collaboratively and published in *The Thomist*, has removed what few doubts I may have had at the

¹ See the Fifteenth Annual Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical

² “The Influence of Social Facts on Ethical Conceptions,” in *Thought*, XX, 76, March, 1945: pp. 97-116. Writing of slavery, which he regards as “an unnatural institution” which “should be frankly condemned as wholly indefensible,” Don Sturzo says: “So long as the system continued in fact, ethical conceptions did not escape its influence. It is true that moral discussion sought to limit the immoral consequences of slavery, by insisting on the Christian duties of mutual forgiveness and charity among owners and slaves. Nevertheless, the question of principle was left untouched even by those who regarded the abolition as an ideal (to be realized only in the very distant future) and, still more, by those who sought to justify the seemingly inevitable practice on the ground that it was not really contrary to nature or even that it was a legitimate deduction from the natural law” (pp. 98-99. italics mine).

time.³ These articles have solved what difficulties I could raise against the thesis. They have convinced me that every principle on which the demonstration rested was sound, and that every step of the proof was valid. They even helped me to understand how the truth about democracy on the natural plane and in the temporal order is thoroughly consistent with the truths of Christian faith about the supernatural life and the eternal destiny of man.⁴

Some of you may have read the articles I refer to, although perhaps not; they were unduly long and hard to read.⁵ Simple points were often labored and the documentation often seemed unnecessarily painstaking or, perhaps, painful. The authors obviously labored under the impression that they had to work against long unchallenged prejudices and venerable, because unexamined, verbalisms in traditional political theory. Nevertheless, the articles seemed clear to me; more than clear, demonstrative and unanswerable so far as they went.

³ “The Theory of Democracy” appeared in the following issues of *The Thomist*: III, 3, pp. 397-449; III, 4, pp. 585-652; IV, 1, pp. 121-181; IV, 2, pp. 256-354; IV, 3, pp. 446-522; IV, 4, pp. 692-761; VI, 1, pp. 49-118; VI, 2, pp. 251-277; VI, 3, pp. 367-407; VII, 1, pp. 80-131. The series was left incomplete, with three or four more installments to come, when one of the collaborators went into active service as a naval chaplain. It will probably not be completed as originally planned, but the whole may be forthcoming entirely recast. As I understand it, the four parts to come would have dealt with the following topics: the absolute injustice of slavery; the absolute injustice of subjection; the problem of the relative justification of unjust forms of government, such as despotism and oligarchy, by reference to historic circumstances; and the future of democracy.

⁴ See especially Parts II and III dealing with the theory of the political common good in itself and in relation to natural and temporal happiness and to eternal and supernatural salvation (*The Thomist*, III, 4; IV, 1, 2), in which it was proved that the political common good is a means to temporal happiness and that temporal happiness is truly an end in the natural order, inferior in perfection to, but not subordinated as a means to, the beatitude of the blessed in heaven.

⁵ My guess that these articles were either not read or not read well enough was completely substantiated by the discussions I heard at the Milwaukee meeting both before and after I delivered this paper; discussions in which questions were raised as if *de nova* although these articles had already raised and answered them, and in which positions were taken as if irrefutable although these articles had already considered and refuted them. For example, the one hundred and thirty page analysis of the modes of happiness (Part III of “The Theory of Democracy”) adequately explained why the supposition that man has only a supernatural end is utterly unthomistic as well as contrary to all the facts of nature; yet this supposition was frequently broached by persons who showed no acquaintance with an analysis that met all their difficulties and objections, or who talked as if they had the authority of St. Thomas for their extraordinary view that the composite natural substance, man, has no *telos* proportionate to its physis.

Perhaps I am not alone in thinking that the argument was unanswerable and the theory unobjectionable. No serious objections or irrebuttable refutations have appeared in the journals or come to my notice, with one slight exception—a little flurry on the common good in relation to the doctrine of the person, which has been ably dealt with by Father Eschman;⁶ and which, in so far as it was relevant to the theory of democracy, Father Farrell completely disposed of in his paper this morning.⁷ On the record, then, maybe there is more agreement now than there was six years ago.⁸

One other fact tends to suggest that the general tenor of opinion may have changed with the times. It is the simple fact that this meeting is devoted to the philosophy of democracy. Considering that fact, I ask myself: To what other form of government would this Association devote a whole session? To oligarchy, even when eulogistically called “aristocracy”? Hardly. To despotism or absolute government, even when masquerading under the less offensive name of “monarchy”? Just as unlikely. The only possibility I can think of is the so-called “mixed regime.” But even then, if all the confusions were eliminated, and the mediaeval *regimen regale et politicum*—an accident of feudalism—were separated from the Aristotelian mixed constitution, we would not devote a whole meeting to its discussion, because we are a philosophical, not an historical, association. Royal and political government belongs entirely to the past. It has no present existence. It has no future. And, what is more important, it is obviously an historical anomaly which cannot be defended in principle.⁹

Of course, it is true that democracy has no present existence either; or, at best, the inchoate existence of something just coming to be. But democracy does have a future—a future in the order of right

⁶ “In Defense of Jacques Maritain” in *The Modern Schoolman*, XXII, 4, May, 1945, pp. 183-208.

⁷ “Person and the Common Good in a Democracy,” published elsewhere in these Proceedings. Cf. the analysis of the common good given in Part II of “The Theory of Democracy,” *The Thomist*, III, 4.

⁸ Unfortunately the printed record does not seem to be an entirely reliable sign of philosophical work done or undone. See fn. 5 supra.

⁹ See “The Theory of Democracy,” Part IV, in *The Thomist*, IV, 3, 4; VI, 1, 2, wherein the theory of the forms of government is completely re-analyzed, and the doctrine of the mixed regime is clarified and corrected.

political desires, not merely in the order of predictable fact. That, I take it, is why we are concerned at these meetings with the philosophy of democracy, as we would be with no other form of government. That is why I have chosen to talk to you this evening about the future of democracy. Let me explain this choice a little more fully.

Six years ago, and until quite recently, it was appropriate, patiently and systematically, to develop the theory of democracy, a theory which may have pre-existed in some of its principles, but which no political philosopher before John Stuart Mill explicitly understood or analytically expounded.¹⁰ But we cannot be patient and theoretical any longer. It is necessary now to talk practically about the future of democracy.

The future of democracy is, moreover, inseparable from the future of world peace, which must be brought into existence for the first time by the institution of world federal government. That, in turn, means no future for nationalism, imperialism, or capitalism. Both democracy and world peace require us to attenuate and then eradicate all the exclusionary prejudices of race and locality, and to overthrow all forms of despotism and oligarchy—by education where possible, by revolution where not.

Finally, let me repeat what I have already said: democracy does not exist in practice. It is still an unrealized ideal—yet thoroughly practicable, in no way utopian. Of all the forms of government traditionally recognized, it is the only one which has no past. All the others have pasts which teach us not to wish a future for them, and to wish that democracy would replace them wherever they still exist, precisely because it corrects in principle and will remedy in practice their fundamental injustices and faults. *Democracy belongs entirely to the future; but the future will belong entirely to democracy only if we can completely overcome the various obstacles to its existence, preservation, and growth.*

The nature of these obstacles and the steps to surmount them are the main matters I wish to discuss. But I must begin by summarizing the theory that, absolutely speaking, democracy is the only perfectly just form of government. Have no fear. After-dinner time is for digestion, not demonstration. I shall merely state conclusions, not give arguments. The theoretical position stated, I shall then proceed to deal with the practical problem of what must

¹⁰ In his *Essay on Representative Government*. See “The Theory of Democracy,” Part V, in *The Thomist*, VI, 3; and VII, 1.

be done to turn theory into fact, to put the political principles of democracy into action. I shall do this under three heads:

First, the economic obstacles to the realization of democracy;

Second, the human obstacles, which must be met by education; and

Third, the political obstacles—war and international anarchy—which can be solved only by world government.

II.

I turn at once to a summary statement of the theoretical doctrine, and I begin with the basic distinction between two ways of considering the diverse forms of government, i.e., *absolutely* and *relatively*.

Relative justification is by reference to contingent and limited historic conditions. In this manner, a form of government which is not the best absolutely, nor free from essential injustice, may be justified as the best that is practicable for a given people at a given time.

Absolute justification is by reference to the nature of man as a rational, free, and political animal; to the nature of the political community as an indispensable means to the good life on the natural plane and in the temporal order; and to the nature of government as organizing and regulating the community so that it may serve effectively as a means to this end.

The absolute consideration does not neglect the range of individual differences within the human species, any more than it ignores the differences between the normal and the abnormal, the mature and the immature. It does, however, abstract from those defects or inadequacies which are not due to nature, but to nurture—to failures of education, to deficiencies of experience, to economic impediments, to restricted opportunity, to cultural limitations of all sorts.

The *theory* of the forms of government should be stated absolutely. The relative mode of consideration is significant only in relation to judgments about *historic societies*. I shall, therefore, first speak *abstractly* and then *historically*.

Absolutely or abstractly speaking, there are only four forms of government.

A. TYRANNY, which is absolutely unjust because it totally perverts government from its natural and due end.

B. DESPOTISM, or absolute as opposed to limited government; personal government by men above all positive law, rather than political government by men holding office under constitutional law. The intrinsic injustice of despotism is that mature, normal men are ruled as children, with no voice in their own government and with no juridical defense against their governor.

C. OLIGARCHY, or constitutional government with restricted citizenship, in which the restriction is based on wealth, race, color, sex—anything except immaturity, abnormality, and criminality. The intrinsic injustice of oligarchy is simply that no accidents of human nature, other than legal infancy, mental abnormality, and criminal conduct, provide a just criterion for determining who shall and shall not be admitted to citizenship.

D. DEMOCRACY, or constitutional government in which only the immature, the abnormal, and the criminal are excluded from citizenship; or, positively, that government under which all normal human adults enjoy political equality as citizens and exercise political freedom through the juridical rights and powers vested in the fundamental political status of citizenship. The injustice intrinsic to despotism is absent because no man rules except he be first a citizen and except as an officeholder with limited powers. The injustice intrinsic to oligarchy is overcome by the abolition of all unjustified exclusions from citizenship.

Let me briefly comment on these four forms of government.

Strictly speaking, tyranny is not a distinct form of government, but a perversion, in different ways, of the other three. Despotism and oligarchy are more susceptible to tyrannical perversion than democracy, though both may avoid tyranny, as when the absolute power of the despot is benevolently exercised. The benevolence of a despotism, however, in no way minimizes the intrinsic injustice of absolute rule. I shall not deal here with the other perversions of government, beyond the simple observation that oligarchies can suffer degeneration into despotisms, and democracies into oligarchies. The line of political progress is in the opposition direction, usually by means of revolution: despotism overthrown in favor of republican or constitutional government; or the

oligarchical constitution gradually amended in the direction of democratic universalism.

The three distinct forms of government, despotism, oligarchy, and democracy, are not coordinately divided. Because both are constitutional or political government, both oligarchy and democracy are divided against despotism which is non-constitutional, or personal, absolute government. Then within the generic sphere of constitutional government, oligarchy represents every species of unjust constitution, and democracy the one species of just constitution.

This analysis permits no mixed regime or combination of the distinct forms of government. Absolutely speaking, despotic and constitutional government totally exclude one another; and so do the oligarchical and the democratic constitution. Aristotle's polity or mixed constitution, combining what he called oligarchy and democracy, arises from imperfect conceptions of the meaning of oligarchy and democracy, and could have political reality only under the conditions of injustice intrinsic to the best of Greek political institutions. So, too, in the case of the mediaeval *regimen regale et politicum*, which unstably combined the contradictory opposites of despotism and constitutionalism, and which could have political reality only under the peculiar historic circumstances of feudalism, and in terms of the injustices peculiar thereto.

Anyone who understands the basic terms of this analysis can work out the demonstration for himself by applying, at every step, two principles: (1) that all men are by nature political animals; and (2) that justice consists in treating equals equally. Wherever any normal, mature man is treated as a slave, as a subject of despotic rule, or as a political pariah excluded from citizenship, there, absolutely speaking, injustice is being done.

Now let me briefly apply this analysis historically in order to verify the principle that democracy has never existed at all in the past and does not fully exist today.

In the absolute mode of consideration, I have used dyslogistic names for the unjust forms of government. There is no one in this audience, I hope, for whom the words "despotism" and "oligarchy" do not immediately connote injustice, even as the words "tyranny" and "imperialism" do. No one in this audience would defend these institutions or practices on absolute grounds. That would be as irrational as the recommendation that Ireland again submit to England would be unIrish.

But we are all acquainted with the defense of despotism and oligarchy—never tyranny, of course—on historical grounds, justifying them relative to certain imperfect conditions of man and society. When despotism is relatively justified as the benevolent absolute rule of a people who are as yet incapable of self-government, it is eulogistically called royal government, monarchy or kingship. And when oligarchy is relatively justified as the benevolent constitutional rule of a population some portion of which is, or is supposed to be, as yet incapable of citizenship, it is eulogistically called a republic, or given the generic name of constitutional government.

With these considerations in mind, we can briefly review the political history of the west in order to verify the proposition that until fairly recently democracy did not even begin to exist, either in legal principle or actual practice.

In the ancient world there were two basic political conflicts: first, that between the Greeks and barbarians, in which the principle of constitutional government was opposed to oriental despotism; and, secondly, that among the Greek cities themselves, in which there was opposition between two forms of *oligarchical* constitution. These were called by the Greeks “oligarchy” and “democracy,” *but both were oligarchies because both involved slavery and other unjust exclusions from citizenship.*¹¹

In a later, the Roman, phase of the ancient world, the first of these two oppositions repeats itself—the conflict between despotism and

¹¹ I am sorry that I must so flatly disagree with Don Sturzo’s leniency in being willing to say that democracy in some sense existed in the Greek city-states. (See his paper published elsewhere in these Proceedings.) If we wish to keep our analytical terminology clear and precise, we must say that in no sense did Athens or any other ancient city ever live under a democratic constitution. And if, with a clear analysis in mind which we are not willing to compromise, we wish to deal charitably with the historical facts, we ought to say that the Athenian constitution in the Periclean age was, at best, in motion away from oligarchy and toward democracy. (See W. R. Agard, *What Democracy Meant to the Greeks*, Chapel Hill, 1942.) Father Ward who declared himself as agreeing with Don Sturm, must also admit a difference between motion and being. The fact that the world so far has not seen democracy in being, but only the motion toward it, does not warrant the inaccurate statement that democracy has existed at various times in various degrees. That would be like saying that as a person gradually overcomes a vice, thus moving toward the correlative virtue, he possesses that virtue in increasing degrees; whereas, in principle and in fact, until the vice is completely overcome, the virtue does not begin to exist in any degree.

oligarchy, in terms of the monarchy which preceded the republic, or in terms of the empire which succeeded it.

In the mediaeval world, the major tension was between purely royal government (or absolute kingship) and government both royal and political; but apart from a few free self-governing cities, there were no republics in the mediaeval world, and the few that existed were oligarchical in constitution.

In the modern world, there have been two movements. First, the gradual dissolution of the *regimen regale et politicum*, which turned more and more despotic in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, thus causing republican revolutions that began by setting up limited monarchies and then predominantly constitutional governments. Second, beginning no earlier than the nineteenth century, the gradual amendment of republican constitutions by extensions of the suffrage and by correction of various forms of oligarchical injustice, both with respect to citizenship and office-holding.

What is our situation in the present day? For the most part, the people of the world live under despotisms of one sort or another, domestic or colonial. A comparatively small part of the human race enjoys the blessings of constitutional government—the liberty of life under law which is due every being who by nature is rational, free, and political. And where constitutional governments exist, many of them still retain operative vestiges of oligarchy, whether overt or concealed. Few, if any, are by explicit enactment perfectly democratic in constitution; and where these are democratic on paper or in constitutional principle, not even they are even remotely democratic in actual practice.

I shall illustrate my point by taking the United States. Reforms, like charity, ought to begin at home. To become perfectly democratic, the constitution of the United States still needs amendment; specifically, the explicit abolition of all poll taxes or restrictive property qualifications for suffrage. Until that is done, we have first- and second-class citizens in this country, even as women were second-class citizens before the woman suffrage amendment.¹²

¹² Let me say in passing that I have recently had certain experiences which have taught me how radical the doctrine of democracy is. During the war I lectured on the theory of democracy in Army camps all over the country to assemblages of officers and men. On all occasions, officers arose to say, with some vehemence, that I was not preaching democracy, but communism.

Let us suppose that the constitution of the United States is presently amended and becomes in legal principle the charter of perfectly democratic government. Does that mean that democracy will then exist in fact in this country? That the principles will operate in practice? Far from it. If we are concerned with democracy as a practical, political reality, we must go beyond the acceptance of its principles in theory, and beyond their enactment into the laws of the land.

I turn, therefore, now to the three basic obstacles which we must overcome to make the practice conform to the theory, and to ensure democracy a future in reality as well as in principle. First, the economic obstacle.

III.

Even though oligarchy is removed from the constitution, it still exists in practice to whatever extent the wealthy are able to exercise undue influence on the government, but principally in terms of the economic servitude of the working classes in a capitalistic economy.

Political democracy will not work in practice unless it is accompanied by economic democracy in the organization of industry and by economic justice in the regulation of all matters which affect subsistence, employment, and economic security.¹³

Following our good leader, the late Virgil Michel, I hold that profit-making capitalism necessarily involves the exploitation of the proletariat, and so is an intrinsically unjust economy.¹⁴ A just political community cannot be built upon the foundations of an unjust economy.

¹³ “We must bring industrial democracy into America. We have political democracy, and so we must have democracy for industry, to make workers feel that they have part in the management and that they have a voice in what is going on” (Eric A. Johnston, as quoted in *The New York Times*, for December 31, 1945, p. 1).

¹⁴ See “The Facts About Capitalism” in *The Commonweal*, March 12 1937, pp. 541-543. “Even if capitalism were defined in terms of the modern conception of property Christians should have to condemn it. But the word capitalism stands generally for an economic system in which capital plays the preponderant part—and therein lies its vice from the Christian standpoint. ... In doing this, capitalism degrades men to mere economic factors of cost, to be bargained for at lowest possible market prices.” (p. 542). See also Father Virgil Michel’s *Christian Social Reconstruction*, Milwaukee, 1937.

Let me make the essential point here in another way. Defending the exclusion of the non-propertied, laboring classes—the proletariat—from citizenship, John Adams enunciated this principle: *No man who is economically dependent on the will of another man for his subsistence can exercise the freedom of judgment requisite for citizenship.* The principle is completely true. No man who is subservient to the arbitrary will of another man for his economic livelihood can act as that other man's equal politically. This is just as true of wage-slaves under capitalism as it was so obviously true of chattel slaves or serfs under feudalism.

But the principle being true, John Adams drew the wrong practical conclusion from it by advocating an oligarchical constitution, excluding the economically dependent (the unpropertied) from citizenship. He sought to adapt the polity to an unjust economy, making the polity thereby unjust. If we are democrats politically, we must proceed in exactly the opposite direction. We must reform an unjust economy to make it fit a just polity, and that reform plainly means the abolition of capitalism as we know it.

What does it mean positively? Communism? I hardly think so, for when men are subservient for their subsistence to the will of the state, they are no more economically free than they are under private capitalism. Political democracy is as incompatible with communism as with capitalism. The answer, I think, lies in a departure toward the mean *away from both extremes*—toward what R. H. Tawney describes as the functional economy, very much like guild socialism,¹⁵ or toward the kind of democratic socialism Father George Dunne advocates as indispensable for the salvation of democracy in his remarkably vigorous and clear article of recent date.¹⁶ Both capitalism and communism must move toward a socialism in which the economic order is rightly separated from and properly subordinated to the political order. (Let me add that I think there are many signs that such motion is now occurring—*away from both extremes!*)

¹⁵ See *The Acquisitive Society*, New York, 1920. Cf. Amintore Fanfani, *Catholicism, Protestantism, and Capitalism*, New York, 1935.

¹⁶ "Socialism and Socialism" in *The Commonweal*, Nov. 23, 1945, pp. 134-139. I would differ from Father Dunne only in thinking that democracy, far from being saved from perishing, will not be born in practise until capitalism is reformed into a just socialistic economy. Only that reform can save us from the otherwise inescapable conflict between the capitalism of the west and the communism of the east.

I have not dealt adequately with the economic problem. I have merely stated a basic principle and pointed out a direction. I can quite confidently leave the rest of this problem for the penetrating treatment it will receive from Yves Simon's paper tomorrow morning on economic organization in a democracy.¹⁷

IV.

I turn now to the educational problem. The human obstacle to the realization of democracy in practice is necessarily an accidental one. It does not, it cannot, lie in the essence of a rational, free, and political nature. But that nature needs training—the formation of good habits—for it to realize the perfections of which it is capable. Democracy demands a higher degree of human training than any other form of government, precisely because it depends upon the reasonableness of free men exercising their freedom politically. (Let me add, in passing, that the fallen nature of man does not present an insuperable obstacle to democracy, though the fact that it impedes democracy more than other forms of government confirms the truth that democracy is the ideal proportionate to the absolute nature of man.)

The obstacle here is not human nature but our various educational failures—failures in every department, religious and spiritual, moral and intellectual. I shall discuss only one aspect of the educational problem: the failure of our educational institutions in the sphere of specifically intellectual training.

That failure is measured by the educational requirement of democracy. The essence of the democratic constitution is universal citizenship. Hence all men must be educated for citizenship. But this is not simply a quantitative matter. The problem is not solved by erecting and financing a school system ample enough to take all the children in. We have almost done that in this country during the last fifty years, but even if we had done that completely; even if all children not committed to asylums for feeble-mindedness went through our American schools and colleges, American education would still be serving democracy miserably. The reason is simply that American education is predominantly vocational rather than liberal. It is based on the thoroughly undemocratic prejudice that more than half the children are not intelligent enough for truly liberal education. (Need I add that more than half the educators do not know what a truly liberal education is?)

¹⁷ Published elsewhere in these Proceedings.

Vocational education is training for a specific job in the economic machine. It aims at earning a living, not living the good life. It is servile both in its aims and in its methods. It defeats democracy in the same way that an economic system does which keeps most men in economic servitude. To exercise the freedom of democratic citizenship, men must not only be economically free, but they must also be educated for freedom; which can be achieved in no other way than by giving every future citizen the maximum of liberal education. Put concretely, that means schooling for every boy and girl from kindergarten through college, with a curriculum from which every vestige of vocationalism has been expunged. In a just economy, the costs would be met in such a manner that no child would be deprived because of poverty. In a just economy, vocational training, thrown out of the schools, would be undertaken by industry through a system of apprenticeships. Training for a specific job should be done on the job, not in the schools.

But, it will be said, this is impossible for other reasons. I know this from the sad experience of having talked about American education to teachers and laymen in large groups all over the country. The real reason, they say, why we have to train the majority of children vocationally is that only the fortunate few who have superior mental endowments are capable of receiving liberal education. They have no facts to support this statement, but the fact that they make it shows that they understand neither democracy nor education.

If a child has enough intelligence to be admitted in maturity to citizenship, which means enough intelligence not to require hospitalization, enough intelligence to become a parent, govern a family, and earn a living, then that child has more than enough intelligence for all the liberal education we can find time to give him in ten or twelve years of schooling.

Let me state this in the form of a dilemma: either a child has enough intelligence for liberal education through the Bachelor of Arts degree, or he does not have enough intelligence for democratic citizenship. Deny the validity of this dilemma, and you make a mockery of democratic citizenship. A citizen is not a political puppet pushed around by propaganda. He is a free man, exercising a critical and independent judgment on basic questions affecting the common good. Not all men may have the talents required for high public office, but all normal men do have sufficient mentality for the primary and basic office in the democratic state—citizenship. They have the power, but it must be

trained, and that training, the development of a free and critical mind, is one of the essential aims of liberal education,¹⁸ accomplished by the discipline of the mind in its essential functions of reading and writing, speaking and listening—all the arts of thinking, not merely speculatively or privately, but practically and socially.

Our oligarchical ancestors understood this. Whether in Greece and Rome, or in this country during its formative period, they knew that citizenship required liberal education; they knew why education had to be liberal in order to prepare for citizenship; that knew that intellectual discipline was prerequisite for freedom of mind and freedom in action. So far they were right, but they made one fatal error. They identified the propertied classes with the intellectually elite. They restricted citizenship to the well-born and disguised their oligarchical injustice under the aristocratic pretension that only the few—the same few—had enough wit to deserve citizenship. They were hypocrites, but so are we if we continue to think, as most Americans do, that the equality of citizenship belongs to all, but not equality of educational opportunity. Admitting all children to school is not enough. We must give them all the same kind of education; not liberal education for the few, and vocational training for the many. To say this does not mean that we should try to give each child the same *absolute amount* of education, for each can receive only according to his capacity. But it does mean that each child has a sufficient capacity for liberal education, even as he has enough intelligence for citizenship, and that each should receive the *same proportion*, namely, as much as he can take, which is much more than we have ever tried to give.

So far we have failed, partly because our educators are anti-democratic, harboring all the prejudices of oligarchy and the delusions of aristocracy; and partly because we have not yet even tried to solve the technical problem of constructing and administering a liberal curriculum for all the children. This last fact, by the way, explains the popularity of vocationalism with the educational profession. Not knowing how to universalize liberal education; not wanting to think about it because it is so difficult a problem, they conceal their ignorance and sloth behind the untruth

¹⁸ It is not the only aim of liberal education. Though it must prepare for citizenship, liberal education must aim beyond it at the human (i.e., rational) use of leisure which political and economic freedom permit men to enjoy, but which they will not be able to enjoy without liberal training. On this point, see Professor Francis MacMahon's paper on democratic education, published elsewhere in these Proceedings.

that the failure is God's rather than man's; that the Creator may have intended men for freedom, but that, paradoxically, He did not endow the majority with enough mind to be educated up to it.

We may constitutionally grant all normal men the status of citizenship; we may even achieve the economic reforms necessary to emancipate them from servitude and to secure them from poverty; progressive industrialization and technical progress may provide all men with sufficient leisure; but unless we educate all men liberally for citizenship, they will not be able to discharge the duties of that high office, and democracy will exist only on paper, not in practice.

Liberal education cannot be completed in school. We grasp the essence of such education only when we understand it to be preparation for more education, more liberal education throughout an entire life. Unless liberal schooling is followed by adult liberal education, it will be to no purpose. Habits fail from disuse; the intellectual virtues cannot be kept alive without continuous exercise. Universal adult education, liberally conceived, is, therefore, not an after-thought; it is an essential part of democracy's educational requirement. Without it, the mind of the citizen will go to sleep, and a sleeping citizen might just as well be a dead one.

One word more on education. Liberal education cultivates all the intellectual virtues except prudence. Like the moral virtues, prudence cannot be taught in school, or by teachers out of books anywhere. Prudence is a habit formed only by the exercise of practical judgment, and practical judgments can be truly made in a practical manner only by those who have the responsibility for action. Deprive men of citizenship, and they will not develop the virtue of political prudence, which is the habit of judging rightly about means to the common good. The sort of education, then, which is requisite for political prudence comes from political action itself, from active participation in the political life. This means that there is no way of fitting men for citizenship without first making them citizens. I shall return to this point presently. Here I wish to add merely that the Thomistic, *not* Aristotelian, distinction between reign and political prudence is invalid, albeit a necessary consequence of the invalid notion that the *regimen regale* is a divine sort of rule, that divinity doth hedge a king, separating him from ordinary men by a special kind of prudence. Political prudence is the same virtue in rulers and ruled. What distinguishes the magistrate who has some special competence is knowledge or art, not prudence.

V.

I turn finally to that obstacle to democracy which cannot be surmounted by constitutional, economic, or educational reforms within any of the states now existing. I call this obstacle “political” because it can be overcome only by the most radical political action in the world’s history, *though not by this alone*.

The obstacle is the anarchy of separate sovereign states. The remedy is the formation of a single world-wide political community through federal union, thus establishing for the first time effective world government and positive law, replacing alliances, leagues of nations, and the reign of international law which has always been, and must always be, devoid of the sanctions requisite for government.¹⁹

War, upon which other forms of government thrive almost in direct proportion to their intrinsic injustice; war, the heady wine of tyranny, weakens and enervates democracy. Despite the international anarchy, democracy may come into being locally through just domestic institutions, but it can never really flourish and grow to full maturity in practice if it is continually beset by war or the threat of war in inter-state affairs. Political history teaches us that the best republican institutions of the ancient world were overturned by dictatorships arising to meet the needs of efficiency in war. The events of our own age confirm the insight that due process of law, which is the essence of constitutionalism, and the public debate of public issues, which is indispensable to democracy, must be abandoned or abridged under the exigencies of war. Furthermore, the international anarchy, which is identical with the permanent existence of a state of war between sovereign states (whether carried on quietly by the diplomats or noisily by the generals), necessitates not only the maintenance of permanent military establishments, but also the diremption between a government’s domestic and its foreign policies. Both of these factors operate against democracy.

By its very nature, an armed force, serving as a military not a police arm of government, must be organized and must operate

¹⁹ Don Sturzo succinctly summarized why national sovereignty must be abolished to institute effective world government, in the single statement that “there can be no sovereign above a sovereign.” UNO is a creature of absolute sovereigns. It cannot be a sovereign government so long as the national states remain sovereign.

undemocratically. Soldiers cease to think like citizens simply because they cannot be soldiers and continue to live like citizens. Whether in the form of a standing army, or by universal military training, or with the conscription of a large citizen armed force during actual hostilities, the military order of life dulls democratic sensibilities, glorifies caste distinctions, and displaces the participated decision by the absolute command.

By its very nature also, foreign policy expresses calculations of expediency, not determinations of justice. The necessarily Machiavellian character of foreign policy cannot help infecting domestic legislation. What is worse, foreign policy cannot be popularly determined, as domestic policy can be, because it must be fomented secretly and stealthily executed by all the deceptions of diplomacy. Foreign policy is necessarily the prerogative of the executive branch. Any check on foreign policy by the legislature or by popular referendum hamstringing a government in foreign affairs. But the supremacy of the legislative should be unexceptional and inviolable in popular or democratic government. The processes of government cannot be perfectly democratic if they are forced to include foreign affairs as a major concern of the common good which cannot be openly submitted to the people or settled by due process of law.

Hence we see that the international anarchy, misnamed the society of nations, works against democracy in any state where it may arise, because it perpetuates war, keeping the nations forever embroiled in fighting, or, what is as bad, in foreign affairs. This was true before August 6, 1945; but it is much more urgently true now in the light of all that the explosion at Hiroshima portends. The atomic warfare of the future puts a life-or-death premium on secrecy in preparation and surprise in attack. In every war, the initial advantage is to dictatorships rather than democracies, because they can proceed without popular discussion or consent; but in the next war the initial advantage will also be the final one. And there will be a next war soon enough, unless world government is formed to prevent it. *Even world government may fail but nothing else can succeed.*

The ideal of democracy and the ideal of world peace are separable in thought, but not in practical realization. The one is the ideal of perfection in human government, responding to the political nature of man; the other is the ideal of perfection in human association, responding to the social nature of man, for, whether viewed naturally or supernaturally, all men are brothers. As Don Sturzo has observed, the national state, no more than the city state, fulfills

the requirements of the perfect, natural society, for it must be that society without which men cannot truly live well, and they certainly cannot live well in a world at war. The world political community has always been implicitly the ultimately perfect society, for nothing else can abolish war and perfect human life. I quote Don Sturzo: “When a particular society is no longer able to attain this specific end except in collaboration with other societies of the same kind, it becomes a duty to collaborate.”²⁰ Again: “The necessity of war will continue to exist so long as there is no power above the wills of individual states having the means of war at their disposal.”²¹ To state the same thought in my own words: The unity of peace which is the common good of all mankind cannot begin until the specious society of nations is transformed into a world-wide society of men. Until all men are citizens of the world, none will enjoy fully the citizenship granted by local and isolated democracies. Without unlimited fraternity, liberty and equality cannot reach their proper limits.

But if the promise of democracy cannot be fulfilled—worse, if its very existence is threatened—in the absence of world government, can world federal government be instituted without all the federating states becoming democratic societies at once? This is the other face of the problem. We know two things: first, that any federal government must be constitutional, cannot be despotic; second, that the constitution of a federal government must create federal citizenship, over and above whatever political status a man has in his local community. In the light of these two principles, we cannot avoid the question whether a world federation can include, side by side, states which are fundamentally dissimilar, even opposed, in polity—some despotisms, some republics, and, of these, some oligarchies and some tending, at least, toward democracy.

I think the principles which pose the question also determine the answer. Since I am not able to give the requisite analysis here, let me state my answer cautiously: first, I doubt that world federal government can begin at all *without some republican institutions being established in every participating community*; and, second, I doubt that world federal government can develop, or even long survive, *unless oligarchies everywhere are rapidly replaced by democracies*.

²⁰ Op. cit., fn. 5. on p. 106.

²¹ Op. cit., p. 108.

Flying in the face of supposedly obdurate facts, these answers seem to make world government impossible to achieve in the immediate future; certainly not before the next war. A predominant portion of the world's peoples are not yet ready for constitutional government, much less democracy. For social, economic, and cultural reasons, despotic or colonial government seems to be relatively justified in their case. Democracy may be the best government absolutely, but not for them, or at least not yet and not soon. *These are the facts*, the realists will tell us.

Without denying the fact that most of the world's peoples are, for one reason or another, politically backward, undeveloped, or immature, we are compelled to revise our notions about the length of time required for their transformation. The time remaining to us before the next war is short. If world government does not prevent the next war, democracy may not survive anywhere. If world government prevents the next war, it cannot long survive without democracy everywhere. What, then, are the chances of accomplishing what the sober-minded would regard as a political miracle?

My only answer is that the chances are partly of our own making. One way of getting rid of the white man's burden is to drop it. One way of getting a people to breast the currents of their own political life is to throw them into the water all at once, not immerse them gingerly by degrees. Industrialization and economic revolutions will accelerate everywhere the emancipation from peonage and serfdom. We can also expect the processes of education to be vastly augmented everywhere. But most important of all is the fact that political prudence is acquired only through practice, and that if a people are to be educated up to the responsibilities of politically mature men, they must be given the opportunities for political experience through self-government. I repeat what I said before: There is no way of fitting men for citizenship without first making them citizens.

The theoretic distinction between an absolute and a relative consideration of the forms of government is, therefore, now of the greatest practical importance. That distinction has been traditionally used to justify inferior forms of government for inferior peoples, or peoples living under inferior economic or cultural conditions. We must now use it in the opposite way: to demand that inferior conditions be remedied so that the best form of government absolutely is also the best relatively for every human group. This must be done rapidly. There is only one way of doing it. As in the case of Christianity, to make democracy work

we must try it, and the sooner, the better for all of us.

VI

Permit me a few words in conclusion. We have been considering the future of democracy in terms of the necessity for economic, educational, and political reforms, and in the light of one fact which desperately shortens the time left in which to accomplish these reforms—the fact of the atomic bomb.


That fact may mean no future for democracy at all. The day of judgment may be at hand. It will soon be feasible, the scientists tell us, for man to blow this planet to smithereens by setting up a chain reaction which explodes all terrestrial matter. Should that event occur, terminating the earthly existence of the children of Adam, it will be an act of God, not a human deed.²² Only the Creator can destroy. Man, exercising his free will, had a choice between Eden and the world, but man playing with atoms cannot choose whether to *stay* in the world or to commit race suicide.

There is another possibility. Through man's discovery of atomic fission, God may be preparing another cataclysm, a second—though perhaps not the last—cleansing of the world, by fire this time instead of water. In that alternative, a few primitive peoples, untouched and untainted by our civilization, may survive to begin a new cycle of human history, the stages of which are totally unpredictable by us.

On neither of these alternatives can we talk practically about the future of democracy. To think practically at all, we must proceed on the hope that God's plan permits the continuation of human history as we know it, moving toward the realization of a temporal common good in which all men participate without distinction of class or boundary. Corrupt as it may be, our civilization seems to contain the seeds of a better world. The slow motion of history toward economic emancipation, democratic government, and a world community has brought us to the point from which we can at least glimpse the promised land. Whether we shall be permitted to enter it depends on our making the right choices in the short time which remains before there will be no choices left for our civilization to make.

We are still free to choose, but, it seems to me, we are no longer free to think which choices are right and which wrong. Our choices

²² See *God and the Atom*, by Msgr. Ronald Knox, New York, 1946.

can still spring from our passions, and in that fact our freedom to turn the wrong way still resides; but if our decision is determined by reason, it must be determined for democracy and world government against all other alternatives. 

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