

10  
2010

# R

# evista de História da Sociedade e da Cultura

Tomo II



Centro de História da Sociedade e da Cultura  
Universidade de Coimbra

Coimbra

# Don Luigi Sturzo. A Man Through Many Seasons

Giovanna Farrell-Vinay

Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Roma

giovannafv@btinternet.com

Texto recebido em/ Text submitted on: 23/02/2010

Texto aprovado em/ Text approved on: 23/04/2010

## *Resumo/Abstract:*

O padre siciliano Luigi Sturzo (1871-1959), inspirado pela encíclica *Rerum Novarum* (1891), abraçou a Democracia Cristã. Em 1919 fundou o *Partito Popolare Italiano*, um partido da massas. Os católicos italianos entraram na política nacional numa altura de grande instabilidade. O fascismo esmagou os *Popolari* e o Vaticano resolveu a Questão Romana com Mussolini, enviando Sturzo para o exílio. Este viveu em Londres, entre Outubro de 1924 e Setembro de 1940, quando se mudou para os EUA, onde permaneceu até 1946. Em Londres, com a ajuda dos liberais intelectuais e católicos progressistas, afirmou-se como académico, moralista político e protagonista da luta contra o Fascismo. A sua missão secreta nos Estados Unidos, com a conivência dos Serviços Secretos Britânicos, para derrubar o isolamento católico foi parcialmente destruída pelos diplomatas italianos e prelados católicos que o relegaram para Jacksonville. Mas o bispo de St. Augustine, Joseph Hurley, protegeu-o. Sturzo cooperou com Hurley e com os Serviços Secretos britânicos e americanos, inicialmente contra o Nazismo, e depois contra o Comunismo. Preparou o terreno para o êxito pós-guerra da *Democrazia Cristiana* de De Gasperi, mas, regressado a Itália, foi o seu crítico mais feroz.

In 1891 *Rerum Novarum* led a Sicilian priest, Luigi Sturzo (1871-1959), towards Christian democracy. In 1919 he founded the *Partito Popolare Italiano*, a mass party. Italian Catholics entered national politics amid great instability. Fascism quashed the *Popolari* and the Vatican settled the Roman Question with Mussolini, sending Sturzo into exile. He lived in London from October 1924 to September 1940, when he moved to the US. He returned home in 1946. Aided by British Liberal intellectuals, Labourists and progressive Catholics, he established himself as a scholar, political moralist and leading anti-Fascist. His US secret mission, agreed with British Intelligence to overturn Catholic isolationism, was partly wrecked by Italian diplomats and Catholic prelates who relegated him to Jacksonville. But St. Augustine's Bishop, Joseph Hurley, protected him. Sturzo co-operated with Hurley and with British and American Intelligence, first against Nazism, then against Communism. He prepared the ground for the post-war success of De Gasperi's *Democrazia Cristiana*, but back home became its fiercest critic.

## *Palavras chave/Keywords:*

Católico; Democrático; Fascismo; Questão Romana; Vaticano.

Catholic; Democratic; Fascism; Roman Question; Vatican.

## Family and Early Life

Luigi Sturzo did not indulge in genealogy but took notes when, in the summer of 1930, his twin sister brought him an extract compiled by a cousin<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps he was intrigued by the exile of one of his ancestors. According to Ludovico Muratori – so we read in Sturzo’s notes – a leader of mercenaries called Ludwig Sturz came to Italy from Germany in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Eventually he settled in Sicily and was killed in a tournament in Palermo. For about two centuries the Sturzoes were not heard of until, in 1672, a Tommaso Sturzo led with one Sances a short-lived uprising in Catania. Sances drowned whilst trying to escape. Tommaso was captured, condemned

<sup>1</sup> Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Roma (henceforth: ASILS), Fondo Barbara Carter, busta 832: L. Sturzo to B. Barclay Carter, 10 Aug. 1930. Unreferenced details are from: Sturzo’s diaries 1924, 1940, 1941 (ASILS, Fondo Luigi Sturzo (henceforth: FLS), fascicolo (henceforth: f.) 253, carta (henceforth: c.) 9; f. 624, c. 1, 7); the over 1000 letters of Luigi Sturzo, Barbara Barclay Carter and Cicely Mary Marshall (1924-53) that I am editing for Sturzo’s *Opera Omnia*; WEBSTER, Richard - *The Cross and the Fasces*. Stanford University Press: 1960; CARRILLO, Elisa - *Alcide De Gasperi. The Long Apprenticeship*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1965; PIVA, Francesco, MALGERI, Francesco - *Vita di Luigi Sturzo*. Roma: Cinque Lune, 1972; MOLONY, John - *The emergence of Political Catholicism in Italy*. London: Croom Helm, 1977; DE ROSA, Gabriele - *Luigi Sturzo*. Torino: UTET, 1977; ID. (ed.) – *Luigi Sturzo - Mario Sturzo. Carteggio 1924-1940*. 4 vols. Roma: Storia e Letteratura, 1984-85; ID. - *Luigi Sturzo nei documenti dell’Office of Strategic Service*, in ARGIOLOS, Concetta (ed.) - “*L’appagamento morale dell’animo*”. *Raccolta di scritti di Gabriele De Rosa*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2007, p. 71-89; MALGERI, F. - *Chiesa, cattolici e democrazia. Da Sturzo a De Gasperi*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 1990; ID. (ed.) - *Luigi Sturzo - Alcide De Gasperi. Carteggio (1920-1953)*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2006; LA BELLA, Gianni - *Luigi Sturzo e l’esilio negli Stati Uniti*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 1990; PAPINI, Roberto - *The Christian Democrat International*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997; MALANDRINO, Corrado (ed.) - L. Sturzo-M. Einaudi, *Corrispondenza Americana 1940-44*. Firenze: Olschki, 1998; FARRELL-VINAY, Giovanna - *Sturzo e l’Inghilterra*, in ARGIOLOS, C., SPINEDI, M. G. (eds.) - *Universalità e cultura nel pensiero di Luigi Sturzo*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2001, p. 181-223; FORMIGONI, Guido - *Luigi Sturzo e la posizione internazionale dell’Italia nel secondo dopoguerra*, *IBID.*, p. 361-393; GRAY, Lawrence - *L’America di Roosevelt negli anni dell’esilio di Luigi Sturzo fra Jacksonville e New York: quale America ha conosciuto?*, *IBID.*, p. 521-549; RICCARDI, Andrea - *Luigi Sturzo e la Curia romana*, *IBID.*, p. 467-483; FARRELL-VINAY, G. (ed.) - *Luigi Sturzo a Londra: carteggi e documenti (1925-1946)*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003; EAD. - *The London Exile of Don Luigi Sturzo. The Heythrop Journal*. XLV (2004), 158-177; EAD. - *Clio derisa. Sturzo sorvegliato della Polizia politica. Italia contemporanea*. 249 (2007), 665-674. Biopics of Sturzo’s English friends are in: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/index.html?url=%2Findex.jsp>.

to death, and then perpetually exiled to Mineo, near Caltagirone. Nothing else was recorded until 1807, when a Giuseppe Salvatore Sturzo became Baron of Altobrando. In the coat of arms, above the baronial coronet stood a castle with an ostrich (*struzzo*) to its right, holding a stick in its beak and surmounted by three stars. It was all in gold on a blue-celeste background<sup>2</sup>.

It sounds grand, but was mere social climbing. The Altobrando estate was part of the barony of Barchino. Giuseppe Salvatore bought the title in 1773 together with half the Altobrando estate. Feudalism was abolished in Sicily in 1812, but titles remained as social badges. The baronetcy passed from Luigi's grandfather, Mario Sturzo, to his father, Felice, and then to Luigi's brother, also called Mario. As Bishop of Piazza Armerina since 1903, with a modern outlook and a strong philosophical bent, he cared little for his title. More substantial were the over 500 hectares of land accruing in 1823 from the marriages to the Taranto sisters of Mario and Francesco, Luigi's grandfather and great uncle. Felice acquired more land from his marriage to Caterina Boscarelli, a physician's daughter.

Felice and Caterina had seven children, born in the Risorgimento's key years: Margherita (1859-1922), Mario (1861-1941), Remigia (1865-1928), Rosa who died in infancy, and the twins, Emanuela (1871-1948) and Luigi (1871-1959), born a year after the seizure of Rome. The Vatican would later bargain with Mussolini for the settlement of the Roman Question at Luigi's expense. Mario and Luigi became priests and Remigia a Daughter of Charity, as Giuseppina. The eldest daughter, Margherita, chronically ill with arthritis, and the youngest, Emanuela, nicknamed Nelina, were spinsters. In 1901, after a year in a convent, Nelina renounced her supposed vocation and became the family estate manager. Named after her uncle, Emanuele Taranto, a chemistry teacher and leading local intellectual, she was well-educated, but did not follow in his footsteps. Sociable and very elegant, she was utterly devoted to Luigi, looking after him in Caltagirone and then in Rome. She was gutted when he left for London in October 1924 and for a year kept up previous plans to buy a flat in Rome, dreaming of his return. Eventually she accepted reality, joining him every summer for a month or so in France or elsewhere in Europe, gladly exploiting the fashionable shopping

---

<sup>2</sup> ASILS, FLS, f. 310, c. 97.

opportunities of Paris and other cities. Back home, she wrote him often and carefully filled parcels of homely goods, to repay the kindness of his London friends. The traffic from Caltagirone to London of oranges, *panettoni*, *torroni* and ceramic objects was remarkable, especially at Christmas<sup>3</sup>.

The bond between Luigi and his brother was as strong but different. Ten years his senior, Mario was Luigi's main mentor and model. Their shared interest in literature, philosophy and theology, born out of juvenile enthusiasm, continued unabated throughout adulthood. When Luigi left, Mario knew, like Nelina, that it was exile, but unlike her he faced reality squarely. After some anguished letters he silenced his despair and set out to comfort his brother by fuelling those intellectual pursuits that he knew were vital to him. They kept conversing by letter and postcard, producing an extensive correspondence that illuminates their intellectual interests. Mario died in November 1941, shortly after his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Luigi was in America. Their last meeting had been in Paris, in April 1926. Both brothers owed much of their fortitude to their upright, strong-willed and pious mother. Her family had denied her a formal education, regarding it as dangerous for a girl, but she had formed her own culture, based on religious and mystical books. Mario thought Luigi had her critical mind. Felice Sturzo who had studied law and engineering without graduating in either, was to his sons a model of faith and patient selflessness.

Then there was uncle Emanuele Taranto. The Sturzos often gathered with other ultramontane friends in his drawing room. They regretted Sicily's lost opportunities to gain independence and had no nostalgia for the Bourbons, but resented the anticlericalism of the Liberals. Novelties such as the forced currency (running from 1866 to 1881), and military conscription, spoiled their acceptance of Italy's unification. Their frequent discussions of religion were indicative of the contradictions and difficulties caused to many a faithful by the Church's failure to deal with modernity. They thought the Pope had been wrongly robbed of temporal power. Yet their preoccupation with the Roman Question contrasted with their fondness for Father Gioacchino Ventura (1792-1861), a champion both

---

<sup>3</sup> DE MARCO, Vittorio (ed.) - *Luigi Sturzo - Emanuela Sturzo. Carteggio (1891-1948)*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005.

of Sicilian independence, and – with Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-52) and Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855) – of that compromise between Liberalism and Catholicism which in 1848-49 Pius IX had first embraced and then rejected. Now that Liberal Catholicism was out of bounds, Taranto and his friends thought Catholics should engage in social action to regain influence and counter the ills of industrialisation. These were still vague ideas, imported by Mgr. Mario Mineo Janni from his trips to Northern Italy, where the lay Catholic organisation, *Opera dei Congressi*, was stronger than in Sicily. To young Luigi it was background noise, but the seeds sown in his uncle's drawing room would later lead him to re-think the role of Catholics in Italian politics and re-appropriate Liberal democracy under the cloak of Christian ideals of social justice.

### Vocations

In those years of Church and State rift, devout Catholics sent their sons to Seminary and their daughters to Convent school, to avoid the secularism of State schools. Luigi attended the seminaries of Acireale (1883-86) and Noto (1886-88), with intervals at home due to illness. Early in 1941, in a desperate attempt to persuade Mgr. Lardone, the Prefect of Studies at Washington Catholic University, to get him out of St. Vincent's Hospital in Jacksonville and find him a family instead, he revealed that community life had always made him ill<sup>4</sup>. Thus, from 1888 he stayed home, completing his studies at the recently re-opened Seminary of Caltagirone. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1894. It was an easy decision, he recalled in 1958. Gabriele De Rosa detected in his words “a hint of a peasant's character, solid, positive, proceeding without hesitation or much brain raking”<sup>5</sup>. In 1898 he graduated in theology at the Gregorian University in Rome.

As a seminarian he loved literature, music, philosophy and history. He wanted to preach and teach, which he did in Caltagirone's Seminary from 1890 to 1902. Those early influences from his uncle's drawing room began

---

<sup>4</sup> ASILS, FLS, f. 575, c. 84.

<sup>5</sup> DE ROSA, Gabriele - *Sturzo mi disse*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 1982, p. 90.



to germinate upon reading Leo XIII's 1891 Encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. From a secular viewpoint, it was but a belated attempt not to miss a last train. Rejecting class war, *Rerum Novarum* recommended anachronistic unions of workers and employers, like the medieval guilds. However, by recognising the rights of workers and encouraging Catholics to seek social justice beyond *bienfaisance*, it boosted the progressive wing of *Opera dei Congressi*, potentially opening a re-connection via social action to national politics, forbidden to the faithful since the mid 1860s by the *Non Expedit* decree. After the popular unrest of 1892-93, known as *Fasci Siciliani*, Luigi felt his place was among the people. With Emanuele Arezzo, Vincenzo Mangano, Giuseppe Montemagno and Ignazio Torregrossa he began to set up rural banks, peasant co-operatives and mutual help associations. He alternated field work with periods at the Gregoriana in Rome, where his transformation from a regressive intransigent into a progressive intransigent was enhanced by his encounter with the social economist Giuseppe Toniolo and Don Romolo Murri, an early proponent of Christian Democracy. The episode Sturzo related in 1941 in *My Political Vocation*, of Easter 1895, when the misery he saw in a working-class district of Rome so struck him that he was sick for days thereafter, should be placed in this context. It was not a sudden illumination, as hagiography would have it, but choices maturing over many years<sup>6</sup>.

Through *Rerum Novarum* he also began to see society as the bedrock of human nature. Exile gave him leisure to develop his early intuitions, leading him to describe society as an ever-shifting, multi-faceted interface built into human nature itself "... a kind of multiple, simultaneous and continuative projection of individuals in their activity"<sup>7</sup>.

From social to political commitment was a short step. The *Non Expedit* forbade Catholics to vote or be candidates in national elections. But they

---

<sup>6</sup> STURZO, Luigi - *My Political Vocation*, *The Commonweal*, 23 (1941), 537-540, also in ID., *Les Guerres Modernes et la Pensée Catholique*. Montréal: L'Arbre, 1942, p. 11-27. GIULIANI, Luigi - *Don Luigi Sturzo. Testimonianze sull'uomo di Dio*. Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2001, p. 15-16, relates the context but equates this episode to the illumination "di altri santi e servi di Dio". The author is the Postulator of the Cause of Beatification of Luigi Sturzo.

<sup>7</sup> STURZO, Luigi - *Inner Laws of Society. A New Sociology*. New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1944, p. XVII.

were encouraged to take over municipal and provincial administrations, to increase the gap between the true Italy and the official one, defending Catholic charities, confraternities, religious education, and so on. To the Christian Democrats this was the preparation of a fully-fledged political party. To Sturzo, local administration was also the battleground against the camarillas which stifled Sicily, keeping labourers, small holders, even the clergy in the thrall of local notables and the mafia. He was elected municipal councillor of Caltagirone in 1899, acted as mayor from 1905 to 1920, was provincial councillor for Catania, and vice-president of the national association of Italian municipalities from 1915 to 1919. The local camarillas were resourceful and he suffered many setbacks, but always kept to his objective to bind together the Christian Democrats around a local electoral strategy based on clearly-set programs promoting self-government. His ambition was to build up in Sicily a network of grass-root organisations and local administrations both as an alternative to the prevailing methods of government and as a blueprint for the political party he planned. He made tactical alliances as he saw fit and used Caltagirone as a testing-ground. Unlike his friend Murri, he avoided religious modernism and did not antagonise the *Opera dei Congressi*.

In 1904, when Pius X disbanded the *Opera dei Congressi* to end interne-cine strife and disavow the Christian Democrats, Sturzo could thus declare it was the best decision, disentangling religion from politics. Instead of joining the *Lega Democratica Nazionale* founded by Murri in November 1905, he outlined his project in his Caltagirone speech *I problemi della vita nazionale dei cattolici* on 29 December 1905. The new party must not call itself Catholic but be open to all, non-confessional and independent of the Vatican. Catholics must fully endorse the unification of Italy, enter the arena as any other political force, and become the leaven of Parliament and State bureaucracy, defeating centralisation. Instead of supporting moderates or conservatives against the Socialists, as after the informal and partial lifting of the *Non Expedit* in 1904, Catholics must revive democracy with social and institutional reform. In short, Sturzo proposed a political and cultural revolution that would set Christian values as the moral compass of the nation. Then, Italy would turn to the Church as a life-giving and unifying force. This was his solution to the Roman Question. But it remained only



an idea and things continued as before. Even worse, after the introduction in 1912 of universal male suffrage, in 1913 the *Patto Gentiloni* established as a rule the opportunistic use of Catholic votes. In 1906 three Unions – Popular, Electoral and Socio-economic – were set up, all three under strict ecclesiastical control and independent of one another. Sturzo continued his work from Caltagirone until around 1915. As secretary of Sicily's Electoral Union from 1908, he controlled both the selection of local electoral candidates and the forging of local political alliances. He thus gained sound managerial experience of a political organisation. But results remained disappointing due to local notables and the mafia. Sturzo's directives were challenged, even in Caltagirone. Time came to move on to Rome. There he joined the national directorate of the Popular Union in 1914, rising to the second place in command of Catholic Action in 1915.

### **The Great War**

In the summer of 1914, as a member of the Triple Alliance, Italy sat on the fence. It declared neutrality after Austria disavowed German promises of territorial gains at Austria's expense in the North-East – the *terre irredente*, i.e. Trentino and Istria. It joined the *Entente* in May 1915 after similar promises were secretly stipulated in the London Pact. Public opinion was split from the start between neutralists and interventionists. Both factions were made of groups with different aims. The so-called Democratic interventionists saw the war as a harbinger of democratic renewal, believing the *Entente's* victory would bring harmony and even federation to a Europe free of militarism and conservative authoritarianism. To their left stood the revolutionaries. To the far right, the Nationalists wanted Italy's expansion in the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. Led by Luigi Albertini's *Corriere della Sera*, the 'Liberals' shared a moderately nationalistic expansionism and democratic anti-authoritarian aims. They all wanted the *terre irredente*. Also the neutralists were split. Giolitti, who kept out of both Government and debate, sensibly thought Italy could not afford a war and should stay out, except perhaps to grab the *terre irredente* at the last minute. The Socialists espoused the pacifist line of the II International

– unlike those of other countries, who thus brought down the II International. But many dissident Socialists followed Mussolini to the opposite camp, whilst others, like Salvemini, joined the Democratic interventionists. The Vatican stood neutral, declaring it did not expect to solve the Roman Question through the war, but Catholic neutralism was suspected, with some reason, of reactionary and pro-Hapsburg sentiments. Benedict XV's 1917 declaration of the "useless carnage" was hailed as treachery. Others, like trade unionist Guido Miglioli, voiced the anti-war feelings of the peasantry, whilst many a priest portrayed the war as God's punishment to a Godless world.

Sturzo contributed to turn partly round the anti-war Catholic front, advocating Italy's intervention from his powerful position in Catholic Action, whilst paying lip service to Benedict XV's neutrality. Eager to quash Bourbon legitimism and dissipate suspicion of Catholic disloyalty, he declared Italy must gain prominence in the Mediterranean and colonies for the peasants. The war – he argued – would save Christian civilisation by wiping out the old world born of the French revolution "culpable of locking religion out of civil codes and separating science from faith". It was an exercise in national character formation, revealing the hidden moral reserves "which the touch of the purifying fire and of the killing iron has awakened, with great heroisms and with a great explosion of vivid faith, mindless of the supreme sacrifice of life". Most probably and most importantly, he sensed that he must be in the right place after the war, just as Italy must sit among the victors. Had he espoused neutrality, his party project might have sunk. It was a strategy worth sacrificing an old friend like Emanuele Arezzo, who accused him of betraying honour, conscience, and the interests of both Italy and Catholic Action. After the war Sturzo avoided dwelling on his pro-war stance, which sat uncomfortably with his subsequent treatise on the right of war<sup>8</sup>.

However, he also identified the contents of the Pandora's box opened by the war, warning of the danger on the one hand of nationalistic discontent, and on the other of social unrest. The habit of passing laws by decree was

---

<sup>8</sup> STURZO, Luigi - *The International Community and the Right of War*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1929. Quotations from DE ROSA, Gabriele - *Luigi Sturzo*, cit., p. 177.

weakening Parliament – he said – and those self-appointed groups fostered by the war might now get the upper hand. To fight corruption, proportional representation should be adopted. He also concerned himself with land reform, for he saw agriculture as the main source of wealth and peasant discontent as the main source of trouble. By now he had accumulated enough experience in Rome to talk with confidence. From 1916 he sat in the Central Commission for Provisions, a State agency, and was the secretary of the *Opera Nazionale per gli Orfani di Guerra*, a new venture of Catholic Action. He got acquainted with Government circles and ministerial bureaucracy and watered down his previous hostility to the trappings of the Liberal State. While still mayor of Caltagirone, Sturzo was ready to step into national politics.

### **The Popular Party**

He launched the *Partito Popolare Italiano* (PPI) on 19 January 1919. The Vatican neither objected nor rejoiced. Among the forty or so founding members sat aristocrats and landowners, bankers, industrialists, press magnates, trade unionists, former Christian democrats, neutralists and interventionists, leftwingers and rightwingers, all bound together by their belonging to Catholic intransigence. Such a motley collection was proof both of Sturzo's talent for political mediation and of his awareness that his party needed the great and the good as much as the masses, but it was obviously riddled with contradictions and likely to fracture under stress. The political manifesto was ambitious: social insurance, welfare provisions, legislation to recognise Catholic trade-unions, religious and educational freedom and family rights, income tax reform, proportional representation and female franchise, administrative decentralisation, support for the League of Nations and a colonial policy marrying national and humanitarian interests. The party was centralised but democratically managed: the local sections had their say but could not stray from the centrally agreed line. Deals with Catholic Action and its youth branch, *Gioventù Cattolica*, secured an influx of fresh blood, but impeded the party from forming its own cadres and exposed it to Vatican influence.

The election of November 1919 was the first contested with proportional representation and without *Non Expedit*. Sturzo expected the PPI to flex its muscles in Parliament as a small group. But with 20.6% of the vote and 100 seats in the Chamber, it became the largest group after the Socialists, with 156 seats. Victim of its own success, it took part with little reward in the Nitti (1919-20) and Giolitti (1920-21) cabinets. The climate was tense. President Wilson had denied Dalmatia to Italy and the Nationalists led by D'Annunzio occupied Fiume. Labourers occupied lands and workers took over factories. The Liberals didn't know how to ride the tiger and ideology prevented alliances between Socialists and *Popolari*. Mussolini's Fascist squads, initially financed by landowners, began to terrorise the countryside and then the cities. Many saw them as temporary anti-revolutionary tools. Instead, they got the March on Rome of October 1922. Against Sturzo's advice the PPI co-operated in the first Mussolini cabinet. At the party Congress of April 1923 Sturzo declared the PPI could not "sign a blank cheque" and subscribe to a pantheistic State and a deified nation. The Fascist press hailed it the speech "of an enemy". Mussolini sacked the *Popolari* and they began to fracture.

Now Mussolini set out to deal with the Church, posturing as defender of the faith as his squads attacked PPI and Catholic Action offices, and trade unions. Negotiations on the Roman Question had failed in 1919. As Mussolini's hold on power tightened, the Vatican began to see him as "the man of Providence" who would settle it. Sturzo was the main obstacle and was eased out. On Vatican orders, he resigned as PPI's political secretary on 10 July 1923, amid Fascist threats to the churches of Rome and shortly before the debate on the electoral bill which he opposed, designed to favour the Fascists<sup>9</sup>. He resigned from the Party board on 19 May 1924 upon De Gasperi's appointment as secretary. In June the Socialist deputy Matteotti was murdered, after challenging Mussolini for his crimes during the April election. The opposition, including the *Popolari*, withdrew in protest from Parliament, and later in the summer *Popolari* and Socialists began to talk. Sturzo, whose life was in danger, wanted the opposition to return

---

<sup>9</sup> Letters between the Vatican and Sturzo and his resignation speech in DE ROSA, G. (ed.) - STURZO, Luigi - *Lettere non spedite*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996, p. 267-278.

to the Chamber and challenge the Fascists at the re-opening of Parliament in November. It might have worked for Mussolini's position was now wobbly. So around mid September the Vatican ordered Sturzo to leave Italy. He obeyed, making sure the order was on paper, whilst cooperating to mask it as a request for a study leave<sup>10</sup>. He left Rome for London on 25 October 1924, his work in tatters, his future blank. He often prayed on the tomb of Thomas More in Chelsea Old Church<sup>11</sup>. His return, on 6 September 1946, was that of a legendary hero. But most Italians knew nothing of his life abroad and he seldom spoke of it.

## London

The Vatican order was grafted onto an earlier plan. In mid August 1924 Sturzo had asked Angelo Crespi – a staunchly Anti-Fascist ex-pat, teacher of Italian at Birkbeck College and London correspondent for the PPI's *Il Popolo* and other dailies, who was on holiday in Italy – to travel together to London, where he wanted to attend Marc Sangnier's congress *La Paix par la Collaboration Internationale*, on 16-20 September. Crespi had responded with open arms but was delayed by family matters. So Sturzo chose instead the International Free Trade Conference at Caxton Hall, on 29 September-1<sup>st</sup> October, where Edoardo Giretti asked him to represent the Italian Group. But on 20 September Crespi and his wife departed from Domodossola without Sturzo. Their *rendez-vous* had been upset by Vatican intervention, which delayed and transformed Sturzo's journey into an expulsion from Italy. Accompanied by Angelo Belloni, he got to London five weeks later, on 27 October 1924, well after the two conferences<sup>12</sup>. He later declared to Gaetano Salvemini that the choice of London was his own, while friends counselled Paris or Switzerland<sup>13</sup>. His archive offers no conclusive evidence

---

<sup>10</sup> IBIDEM, p. 279-284.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. DE ROSA, G. - *Luigi Sturzo, cit.*, p. 270, 361.

<sup>12</sup> ASILS, FLS, f. 256, c. 1-17, 23, 26, 27.

<sup>13</sup> GRASSO, Giovanni (ed) - *Luigi Sturzo, Gaetano Salvemini. Carteggio (1925-1957)*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2009, p. 40: Sturzo to Salvemini, 3-2-1937.

on the origins of his plan in August, but shows that his eagerness to secure Crespi's support in London was one of his best moves.

The Crespi took Sturzo in for the first fortnight, easing the pain of a very traumatic experience. On 8 November, by Vatican arrangement with Francis Bourne, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, he moved to the Oblates of St. Charles in Bayswater, and in February 1925 to the Priory of the Servites in Fulham Road. If the plan was to isolate him, it failed. From 1923 he had compensated for the curtailment of his political activity by writing and publishing. In Britain he continued. But Italy was an increasingly difficult outlet which closed in 1926 with the suppression of political parties and press freedom. To overcome obstacles such as the English language, that he began to learn at once but mastered slowly, an unfamiliar culture and mind-set, and lack of connections with publishers and the press, he needed new friends. Crespi was a member of the National Liberal Club and introduced him to several Liberal intellectuals. So did two Italian journalists: Oreste Rizzini, London correspondent of *Il Corriere della Sera*, and Emanuele Barabino of the *Financial Times*. Thus Sturzo met the former editors of *The Economist*, Francis Hirst, and of *The Times*, Henry Wickham Steed, who became his main sponsor; the holder of the Serena chair of Italian at Cambridge, Thomas Okey; Baron Von Hügel and his friend, the classical scholar Edwyn Bevan; the diplomatic historian George P. Gooch, a steady friend who in 1928 wrote the preface to *The International Community and the Right of War*. The Catholic Feminists of St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance were very supportive. Sturzo had met their secretary, Miss Barry, in Rome in 1923 at the Congress of the International Women Suffrage Alliance. In December 1924 she welcomed him to London. Thus Sturzo met Virginia Mary Crawford, who stood by him in all his initiatives<sup>14</sup>, and Barbara Barclay Carter, a young Catholic convert of American origins, fresh from the Sorbonne. Generous and enthusiastic, fluent in Italian and French, she quickly became his interpreter, translator and all-round assistant. In January 1925 also Cardinal Bourne helped, introducing Sturzo to the literary agent Reginald Dingle and to the journalist Henry Somerville, a member of the Catholic Social Guild (CSG), run in Oxford by Leo

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. BARCLAY CARTER, B. - Virginia Crawford. *P&F*. 108 (1948).



O’Hea, S.J., and devoted to spreading Catholic social doctrine through popular education<sup>15</sup>. The CSG treasurer, Francis R. Muir, became Sturzo’s close friend.

With so much support, Sturzo devised a survival strategy centred on his transition from political actor to observer and commentator. The result, *Italy and Fascismo*, came out on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1926<sup>16</sup>. Much praised for its lucidity, moderation and detachment, it was the best received of the many books Sturzo published in Britain. Its origin was a talk on Italy before the guests of Francis Hirst on 16 December 1924<sup>17</sup>, and many hands helped it evolve. Dingle placed it with Faber & Gwyer, Barbara did the English translation, Steed revised it, Father O’Hea and Edwyn Bevan facilitated Sturzo’s encounter with the classical scholar and internationalist Gilbert Murray, who wrote the preface. Talks and lectures were arranged at the start of 1926 by Murray’s son in law, Arnold Toynbee, by Thomas Okey and the Anglican Reverend Robin Laffan at the National Liberal Club, at Chatham House and in Cambridge to launch the book<sup>18</sup>.

In the spring of 1926 the Vatican tried to silence Sturzo: the Servites told him to leave and Bourne offered him a chaplaincy in an enclosed convent in Chiswick, asking him to declare publicly a total disengagement from politics. Sturzo saved his freedom thanks to Barbara and her friend, Cicely Mary Marshall, who gave him a room in their new flat in Gloucester Terrace. He made no declarations and Bourne relented, consenting to a nearby convent’s request to have Sturzo as external chaplain<sup>19</sup>. It was a quiet but radical change. From November 1926 to September 1940 Sturzo lived with two compassionate, intelligent and cultured women – *le mie buone sorelle londinesi* – my good London sisters, who greatly cared for him. Returning from the Continent, where he kept contact with publishers, friends and fellow exiles, he began to tell his brother he was back *nel mio angoletto* – in my

<sup>15</sup> ASILS, FLS, f. 287, c. 71, 71bis; f. 288/1, c. 1, 36, 80 e 81; f. 288/2, c. 112; CLEARY, J - *Catholic Social Action in Britain 1909-1959*. Oxford: Csg, 1961.

<sup>16</sup> STURZO, Luigi - *Italy and Fascismo*. London: Faber & Gwyer, 1926.

<sup>17</sup> RIZZI, Franco (ed.) - STURZO, Luigi - *Scritti Inediti*, vol. 2, 1924-1940. Roma: Cinque Lune, 1974 (henceforth: SI, 2), p. 6-16.

<sup>18</sup> ASILS, FLS, f. 298, c. 14, 26-28; f. 408, c. 16-26.

<sup>19</sup> Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Segreteria di Stato, 1926, R. 6, F. 2, protocol 53986, ff. 105/M, 106/M; ASILS, FLS, f. 300, c. 60, 64; f. 302, c. 14.

little corner – *nella mia cameretta* – in my little room. To Cicely it was *la piccola famiglia* – the little family. In 1933 they moved to a semi-detached house in Chepstow Villas. Now they had a garden, and the usual cat had to put up with a black and tan terrier, Pooka, Sturzo's favourite. Supported by Sturzo, Barbara tried to become a writer, but in the end she got too involved in his affairs and politics, and the war got in the way. She died of cancer in 1951. Her ambitions had evaporated, her Dante studies were but a dignified relic of the past, but her devotion to Sturzo endured. If she had regrets she never expressed them.

Sturzo's relations with British Liberals and Labourists were easy for their roots were in the Christian tradition, while the marginality of British Catholicism minimised the anticlericalism, prominent among Italian Liberals and Socialists. CSG and St. Joan's Alliance members sat with Liberals, Labourists, Anglicans and Quakers in the Italian Refugees' Relief Committee, set up by Sturzo in 1927 to aid Italian refugees in Paris. In 1929 barrister Richard O'Sullivan, a CSG member, favourably reviewed *The International Community and the Right of War* in the *Bulletin of the Catholic Council for International Relations*, whose secretary, John Eppstein, had sought out Sturzo in December 1924<sup>20</sup>. Relations were also good with the Dominicans of *Blackfriars*<sup>21</sup>. But British Catholics were dominated by the likes of Chesterton and Belloc, whose hostility to Liberal democracy favoured Fascism. Sturzo could not ignore them. Having secured his base among Liberals and, to a lesser extent, Labourists, he aimed his anti-totalitarian and democratic message at the Catholic press. Cicely helped, arranging in January 1927 a meeting with Edward Ingram Watkin, an original and independent Catholic thinker<sup>22</sup>. He reviewed Sturzo's books and placed his essays in *The Dublin Review*. This brought Sturzo new allies: Donald Attwater, Denis Gwynn, Fathers Edward Quinn from Leeds, Samuel Gosling from Alton, Harold Francis Drinkwater from Birmingham<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> ASILS, FLS, f. 288/1, c. 75, 77-79.

<sup>21</sup> *Blackfriars* reviewed nearly all of Sturzo's books and published five essays by him between 1934 and 1936.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. GOFFIN, Magdalen - *The Watkin Path*. Brighton-Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Donald Attwater (1892-1977) worked at *The Catholic Herald* before becoming editor of *The Dublin Review*, 1936-39. Denis Gwynn, editorial director of Burns, Oates & Washbourne

Drinkwater, Gosling and Sturzo thought the Church must not take sides in Spain. But it did, like most British Catholics: thus the otherwise anti-Fascist Cardinal Arthur Hinsley kept on his desk a signed photo of Franco. Sturzo worked relentlessly to foster mediation. With Alfredo Mendizábal, an exiled friend from Oviedo University, he started committees in Paris and London to lobby the Quay d'Orsay and the Foreign Office. Steed chaired the British Committee, where we find Lord Cecil of Chelwood, Mrs. Crawford, Harold Nicolson, Robert W. Seton-Watson, G. P. Gooch, Edwyn Bevan and Gilbert Murray. A mediation plan issued in March 1938 at a conference of the committees in Paris failed, but the Foreign Office did not junk it and the quality of Sturzo's supporters suggests his prestige. 32 Chepstow Villas was a reference point also for growing numbers of refugees. Sturzo helped them out of his own pocket, turning also to Steed, Murray and Gooch.

A month after the start of WWII Geoffrey Bles published *Church and State* and Burns & Oates *For Democracy*. The first was the culmination of Sturzo's scholarship, a subtle interpretation of European history from the Middle Ages to the present through the lens of his concept of sociological diarchy. The second was the work of the People and Freedom Group (P&F) that he had founded in 1936 with Barbara and Mrs. Crawford to counter Catholic pro-Fascism. An unique experiment in Christian Democracy on British soil, P&F lasted 18 years and made itself heard during the war through its monthly paper. It also provided an umbrella organisation for the exiled politicians gathered by Sturzo and Mrs. Crawford in the International Catholic Democratic Union (ICDU), which was a successor to the International Secretariat of Christian Democratic Parties set up by Sturzo in Paris in 1925. Much had happened to Sturzo since his arrival in London as a man defeated. Toiling ceaselessly, supported by ever-growing networks in Britain, Europe and America, he had published a dozen books and hundreds of articles and essays ranging from politics to history, sociology, art and music, establishing himself as international scholar, political moralist, leading anti-Fascist and Christian Democrat. It was time for a new challenge.

---

in the late 1930s, took the initiative for Sturzo's book *Politics and Morality* (1938). Edward Quinn was secretary of the Catholic Committee for Refugees from Germany. Letters in ASILS and in the Archdiocesan Archives of Birmingham show close contact in the middle 1930s between Sturzo, Gosling and Drinkwater.

## America

Sturzo's activity during the six years he spent in the US was so intense and multifarious that much of it remains unexplored. He and Barbara ascribed to the blitz his departure from London in September 1940<sup>24</sup>. London was surely dangerous then, and Sturzo had a weak heart. But Steed's letters of June 1940 to Colonel Douglas of Military Intelligence and to Sir Robert Vansittart, in charge of British propaganda abroad in the Foreign Office from 1938, dispel this legend, devised for secrecy<sup>25</sup>. Shortly after Italy's war declaration on 10 June, Sturzo offered British Security Coordination his services against the isolationist, pro-Fascist stand of Catholics and Italo-Americans in the US. Procedures to get exit and entry visas, affidavit and a Vatican passport began on 19 June, dragging on until, the night of 15-16 September, bombs fell around Chepstow Villas, forcing the neighbourhood, including Sturzo, Barbara and Cicely, to evacuate. The Meynells at 47 Palace Court, took Sturzo in. Those bombs were a cover sent from heaven. They accelerated the procedures and, upon leaving for Liverpool, on 22 September, Sturzo could truthfully claim to be a refugee bombed out of his home. His physician and best friend, Dr. Michele Sicca, went with him, as stipulated back in June. They embarked on the Samaria on 23 September and got to New York on 3 October 1940.

The Bagnaras, a working-class family from Caltagirone living in Brooklyn, took them in. They were devoted to Sturzo, who needed a caring *milieu*, and in theory it was a good cover, but space was too tight and New York too cold for an ailing man. Sicca got a job in a Sanatorium in Delaware. Sturzo used his connections to find accommodation, but it didn't work out and he succumbed to Mgr. Lardone's plan to send him as far away as possible from New York or Washington. A powerful man, linked to the Apostolic Delegation and the Italian Embassy, Lardone organised for Sturzo to stay at St. Vincent's Hospital in Jacksonville, in the poorest and dampest part of

---

<sup>24</sup> STURZO, Luigi - *La mia battaglia da New York*. Milano: Garzanti, 1949, p. 1-4; BARCLAY CARTER, B. - *Our Bombs*. P&F. 16 (1940).

<sup>25</sup> British Library (London), Manuscripts, Add 74132, leaf 222 and 225. On British propaganda cf. CULL, Nicholas John - *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign Against American "Neutrality" in World War II*. New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Florida. The notoriously isolationist Mgr. Curley, Archbishop of Baltimore, supplied the money. Sturzo left Brooklyn on 22 December 1940 on Lardone's promise that it was only for the winter<sup>26</sup>. It was a cruelly hollow promise. He returned to Brooklyn in April 1944.

Whether or not the Fascists and the Vatican knew of his secret mission, they wrecked Sturzo's plan to export the P&F model, whose proliferation across the US could have worked as an anti-isolationist and democratic leaven amid Catholics. From Jacksonville Sturzo relied on Mario Einaudi in New York. Mario was an academic, excellent as a friend, but unsuited to the task. He relied on the *Commonweal* group, who feared competition and saw themselves as the apogee of Liberal Catholicism. Sturzo tried to get Barbara, a better propagandist than Einaudi, to the US. But the London P&F depended on her, she relished her independence, and was too hesitant. The American P&F lingered and Sturzo's main strategic plank went adrift. But if his foes thought to silence him, they were wrong, for they had placed him under Bishop Joseph Hurley, who got installed in St. Augustine on 26 November 1940<sup>27</sup>. In 1934, after assisting his friend Mgr. Edward Mooney, the Apostolic Delegate to India and Japan, Hurley had become *addetto* to the Secretariat of State's Second Section. He got on famously with Pius XI as interpreter and translator, sharing his anti-Nazism. From 1938 he secretly aided US Ambassador William Phillips, publishing Roosevelt's and State Department declarations in *L'Osservatore Romano*. His luck ran out after Pius XI's death. Instead of condemning Nazism, Pius XII appointed him Bishop of St. Augustine. There Hurley put himself at the service of Sumner Welles who furnished him with top secret material for speeches that were printed in the national press. On 6 July 1941 Hurley's CBS speech *Papal Pronouncements and American Foreign Policy* caused havoc, exactly as Welles wanted.

In August 1941 Sturzo asked Lardone to stop negotiating temporary accommodation in Brooklyn with Bishops Molloy and Kearney. It was not just resignation: Hurley had visited Sturzo on 1<sup>st</sup> June and there is evidence

---

<sup>26</sup> Asils, Fls, f. 575, c. 63, 65 (now in SI, 3, p. 6-10, docs. 6-9), c. 69.

<sup>27</sup> Information on Hurley from GALLAGHER, Charles R., S.J. - *Vatican Secret Diplomacy. Joseph P. Hurley and Pope Pius XII*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008.

of co-operation between them, especially in Latin America, where Sturzo's contacts were useful against Nazi propaganda. Hurley let him publish his articles – running into hundreds – wherever he could place them. War had returned, like a personal nemesis. Sturzo portrayed it again as a necessity to save Christian civilisation, but this time he was careful in his qualifications and moderate in tone. War also offered him the opportunity to insert his own Christian democratic propaganda into the mainstream of Allied propaganda, thus serving both his and their purposes.

Under Hurley's eye, contacts with fellow exiles and British and US agents raised no objection. Sturzo was in touch with British agents soon after his arrival in New York. Gaudens Megaro from the Coordinator of Information, predecessor of the Office of Strategic Services, made contact in December 1941. From 1942 exchanges with OSS and OWI intensified. Sturzo won the respect of the Department of State, getting privileged access to his friends in Italy. He sent aid to the people and money to *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC). The goalposts were shifting: now becoming Communists and Socialists were enemies. He helped the US administration understand Italian politics, ceaselessly expounding the tenets of Christian democracy and paving the way for the favour accorded in 1947 to DC's leader, De Gasperi. Almost an ambassador, it was rumoured he would get the job. When Alberto Tarchiani got it instead, he often relied on Sturzo's advice.

There was a jarring note. In his radio broadcasts to Italy on *The Voice of America* he gave encouragement and hope for renewal and reconciliation, but criticised the Allies, who after granting Italy co-belligerency kept the armistice's clauses secret, fuelling fears of a punitive peace<sup>28</sup>. From Brooklyn he lobbied incessantly for milder terms, arguing that Trieste and the pre-Fascist colonies were necessary to Italy's future international role. Despite the gloss it smelled of nationalism. Later he pestered De Gasperi that the treaty must not be ratified, refusing to accept that it was the only way forward. His views of Italy's responsibility in the war were stuck in a loop begun in 1925, when in a speech delivered in Paris he warned that

---

<sup>28</sup> For broadcasts and articles cf. STURZO, L. - *La mia battaglia...*, cit.



Fascism was a Europe-wide problem<sup>29</sup>. It was true, but, as a corollary, Italians were not solely responsible. This led to a separation of Fascist Italy from the “true” one, which slowly became an overwhelming majority. In the end it was as if Italians had nothing to do with Fascism. To be fair, most anti-Fascist leaders in exile shared this belief and avoided publicly to acknowledge the ease with which Italians adapted to the perks the Duce offered them. In Sturzo’s case, his dualistic approach to the interpretation of Fascism echoes the ultramontane tenet of *Italia reale* versus *Italia legale* that had underpinned the *Non Expedit* decree.

### **Italia**

On the mental and psychological plane, Sturzo’s return to Italy began in April 1944, when he moved from Jacksonville to Brooklyn. In the Bagnaras’ new and larger home he was surrounded by Italo-Americans and in contact with Italy by mail and phone. Lobbying to improve the peace treaty, organising humanitarian aid and corresponding with his friends back home absorbed most of his energy. Between 1944 and 1945 he tried twice to go to London to lobby the Foreign Office and savour once more the warmth of his unforgettable *angoletto*. But the V1s and V2s began to fall on London, doctor Sicca, who was to accompany Sturzo, died in March 1945, and worried and embarrassed letters from Barbara and Cicely explained that the sort of food he needed was in short supply and they could not provide him with the house comforts of before the war, as they could no longer afford either central heating or the maid. Then the war ended, but sea travel between London and Naples remained problematic, and Sturzo refused to fly. Thus his London friends receded into a past whose struggles and consolations had crystallized in the interest of US academics for his sociological theory.

Meanwhile, his Italian friends grappled with the dilemma of “what to do with Sturzo”. After July 1943 many had wished for his immediate return, but this became a thorny and twisted affair. Alcide De Gasperi had replaced

---

<sup>29</sup> STURZO, L. - *Il problema della libertà e la crisi italiana*, in ID. - *I discorsi politici*. Roma: Istituto Luigi Sturzo, 1951, p. 409-444.

Sturzo as political secretary of the PPI in May 1924, suffered persecution and imprisonment in 1927-28 and from 1929 eked out a meagre living as a librarian in the Biblioteca Vaticana. In 1942 he took centre-stage when he began re-building the Party. Sturzo, the universally-revered *maestro*, was excluded. The backbone of the Party consisted of former *Popolari*, but it included other groups and the name *Democrazia Cristiana* signalled a departure from the politics of the PPI and a return to the more integralist approach of the original Christian Democratic paradigm. The sincerity of the two politicians' friendship is testified by its endurance despite their disagreeing on many issues. The main difference between Sturzo and De Gasperi concerned the profile of the DC. Sturzo thought it should be free of Vatican influence and strongly qualified, not a collection of conflicting tendencies. But in the power void following the collapse of Fascism the Church stood as the only nation-wide institution and the Papacy enjoyed a power comparable to that exerted after the collapse of the Roman empire; De Gasperi, mindful of the urgency to occupy as wide a space as possible to keep out the Right and the Left, was building an all-inclusive party, trying to persuade the Vatican of its trustworthiness<sup>30</sup>. De Gasperi has even been cast as a precursor of the "catch-all" party model<sup>31</sup>. From this difference stemmed the disagreement on how to address the institutional question: whether Italy should remain a Monarchy or become a Republic. Sturzo, who was staunchly republican, believed it was for the Constitutional Assembly to decide and opposed the referendum, which the monarchists favoured, confident of popular support. Catholic opinion was split but leaned towards the Monarchy. By fostering the referendum, De Gasperi sought to avoid open conflict and even a split in the DC, where republicans and monarchists were at loggerheads. The fear of the impact on public opinion and inside the DC of Sturzo's presence, and of his predictable declarations was such, that his return was vetoed in October 1945, when he was about to

---

<sup>30</sup> Cf. POLLARD, John - *Catholicism in Modern Italy. Religion, Society and Politics since 1861*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 108-113.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. ALLUM, Percy - *The Changing Face of Christian Democracy*, in DUGGAN, Christopher and WAGSTAFF, Christopher (eds.) - *Italy in the Cold War. Politics, Culture & Society. 1948-58*. Oxford: Berg, 1995, p. 117-127. For a fuller discussion cf. FARRELL-VINAY, G. - La storiografia anglosassone e le considerazioni sull'attività politica di De Gasperi. *Studi Trentini di Scienze Storiche*. 2, Supplemento (2005) 306-309.

embark for Naples. The official bearer of the veto was the Apostolic Delegate to the U. S., Cardinal Amleto Cicognani. The Under-Secretary of State, Mgr. G. B. Montini, admitted responsibility and doubtless De Gasperi was the main beneficiary of this manoeuvre. At long last, the referendum was held on 2 June 1946 and established that Italy would be a Republic. All pretexts to keep Sturzo at bay ran out. He arrived at Naples on 6 September 1946 on board the liner *Vulcania*. Frail, he stood as a symbol of an unfulfilled national aspiration to moral heroism, an icon beholding and linking the myths of the old “true” Italy and of the new one, both upright and fearless, unsullied by cowardice and compromise.

Family life, away from the constraints of religious communities, had been Sturzo’s constant preoccupation, before and throughout his exile. And yet, now that he was free to choose, he asked his Sicilian friend Mario Scelba to find him accommodation in Rome in a convent. Contact with Nelina was limited to her visits from Caltagirone, where he never returned. The Canossiane Sisters of via Mondovì (now via Don Orione) provided him with a two-roomed apartment, an ample conference room, a beautiful chapel, a pretty garden for his daily walks, and sterling assistance, but their guest was different from both the man who had left Italy twenty two years before, and the one who had lived sixteen years in London. In Jacksonville’s St. Vincent’s Hospital Sturzo’s desire for human exchange, his will to belong, tucked away in a corner, with his closest friends, had dried out. Letters of those years suggest that to survive his seclusion near the St. Johns River he gradually and deliberately started to strip himself of emotional attachments. They weighed too much, threatening to kill him before time and distracting him from the complete abandonment to God’s will he strived for. Thus America marked his transition from a man who was reserved but actively enjoyed human companionship, to one who studiously avoided emotions.

In Rome, as usual, Sturzo wrote and wrote, but published no new learned books or essays. His creative vein looked withered. Politics filled the empty space. Had his works on sociology and history been just expedients to kill time whilst keeping alive the world’s interest in Luigi Sturzo? Certainly not. The books he wrote in London derived from the distillation of thirty years of

experience in politics and social work<sup>32</sup>. As such, they stemmed from inner emotional attachment. They were also by-products of conversations and social intercourse, they had matured in a humanly warm environment, rich with a variety of ferments. By choosing a reclusive life, stripped of emotional attachment and enlivened almost exclusively by exchanges with politicians, Sturzo restricted himself to political journalism. It was inevitable that after such a long wait, he would plunge back into Italian affairs with gusto, but had he had around him some equivalents of Barbara, Cicely and other British friends, they might have helped him better to balance his interests and focus more widely. Friendly calls from the international scholarly arena were not lacking, but paradoxically his flight from attachments enhanced the power of the one he saw as his mission to Italy. Yet, it engaged him.

The 1929 Concordat excluded priests from political parties, so he did not join the DC, but became its most powerful *eminence grise*, participating in initiatives and projects, often to the chagrin of De Gasperi. The first republican President, Luigi Einaudi, Mario's father and like Sturzo a staunch believer in the free market, appointed him Senator in December 1952. Sturzo proudly sat with the Independents, pursuing his own agenda. By then it was clear that his vision of what the new Italy should be like differed profoundly from what was unfolding around him. His main biographers, Francesco Malgeri and Gabriele De Rosa, have correctly argued that after twenty years of socio-economic State intervention, the mentality of both people and politicians had adapted. The DC could not hold the middle ground and remain united without satisfying the expectations arising from a mentality which did not countenance risky economic liberty as a viable option. From this angle, Sturzo was out of touch, for the clock could not be turned back to the days of the PPI. On the other hand, his innumerable articles show that he perfectly understood what was going on. The problem was, he believed in free enterprise and risk-taking as the leaven of democracy, and disagreed on the inevitability of the road chosen by the DC. He tried

---

<sup>32</sup> STURZO, L. - *Ma Vocation Politique* in ID., *Les Guerres Modernes...*, cit., p. 27: "Quand je partis pour l'exil (que je ne prévoyais pas si long) le retour à mes études me fut d'un grand réconfort. Je compris alors que trente ans d'expérience dans la vie politique et sociale m'aidaient à considérer les théories et les faits avec un sens plus vif de la réalité et à préciser encore mieux ma théorie sociologique qui a été l'œuvre secrète de ma vie entière."

hard to break the mould of the nanny state mentality, persuaded as he was that otherwise Italy would fail in the long run both economically and as a democracy.

Once again, he played Cassandra. He kept lambasting State intervention in the economy, the invasion of State institutions by Party interests, the accumulation of public appointments and the consequent conflicts of interests, the DC's opening to the left, and corruption. How did this sit with his *raccomandazioni* for friends and their friends? It was small fry, an ancient form of charity, his feet of Sicilian clay. De Gasperi was often dismayed and hurt by his explicit articles and asked him not to rock the boat. He needed consensus by discreet negotiation. By setting the cat among the pigeons, Sturzo only fed the opposition. Sturzo's reply was that open debate was necessary. Issues must be aired, not dealt with in secrecy. A case in point was the so called *legge truffa* in 1953, whereby De Gasperi tried and failed to keep his parliamentary majority. These exchanges showed the effect on Sturzo's mentality of his life abroad. But his attempts to stimulate debate of Anglo-Saxon fashion made little impact, apart from alarming his friends, who put themselves at pains to shadow him to prevent what they saw as gratuitous and unfair attacks. Thus Sturzo's arguments became apocalyptic prophecies. Only in the 1990s the depth and perceptiveness of his vision would emerge through the dust of the collapsing Eastern block, whose existence had justified and granted long life to the Christian Democrats' and Socialists' power houses. Then, Sturzo was news again, and his ideas were put to new use, and abuse.

His journey had ended some thirty years earlier. On 23 July 1959 he collapsed while celebrating Mass and died on 8 August. In the last of a long series of wills – since the mid 1930s he had expected to die shortly – he asked for forgiveness to everyone. John XXIII, who had granted him on his death bed the blessing long denied by Pius XII, commented that it was “others” who should beg Sturzo's forgiveness<sup>33</sup>. After a State funeral, they buried him in the crypt of San Lorenzo al Verano, newly restored after the

---

<sup>33</sup> Cf. GIULIANI, L. - *Don Luigi Sturzo. Testimonianze...*, cit. p. 69. John XXIII's comment is related by his then secretary, Mgr. Loris Francesco Capovilla, in a letter to the Postulation of the Cause of Beatification of Luigi Sturzo.

ravages of Allied bombing on 19 July 1943. Before him, Pius IX had been buried there, in 1881, and De Gasperi, in 1954. Caltagirone reclaimed her son in 1962 and laid him in a purpose-built mausoleum in the church of the Most Holy Saviour, where he had celebrated his first Mass on 19 May 1894.

From there, the story of Luigi Sturzo unfolds as that of an unfulfilled ambition to bring Italian Catholics into the fold of the tradition of European liberal democracy, subsuming the core values of Catholicism as a progressive energy. Formidable obstacles, arising from the variance between the speeds at which the Roman Church and Italian politics and society were travelling on the road of history, held him back, until it was too late. He failed to close the gap, and took the only way out and onwards: moral resistance, acquiring an identity that would stick to him to his last day, for the domination achieved by the DC after the war was not on his terms. As a priest, he stretched his obedience as far as his conscience permitted, paying a bitter price for the consequent curtailment of his liberty. As a scholar, he found in his exile the time and leisure to systematize and develop intuitions born earlier in the political and social fray. This uniquely flavoured his theoretical work for, despite its abstract style often awkward to the English reader, it was never far removed from life and experience. His coherence as a man was all the more remarkable, even heroic, constrained as it was between priestly obedience and the moral standards he set to his political aims which made them barely achievable.