THOMAS AQUINAS AND JACQUES MARITAIN ON DEMOCRACY

Tomo Vereš

Introduction

In his comment on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*[1], Thomas Aquinas claims that wisdom, i. e. philosophy, in the full sense of the word, is a theoretical examination of divine actuality, the truth of existence and the last causes, and not a utilitarian knowledge in the service of practical life. Therefore, he resolutely rejects the misconception according to which political science is the supreme human science because it focuses on man as the highest value of the world. For him, such philosophical and political anthropocentrism is fatally wrong because the highest ontological value is not man, but the all–encompassing divine actuality, which is the source and the end of everything that exists. The primacy may be acknowledged to political science only among the practical sciences concerned with man's well being in this world.

Thomas is aware that such definition of theoretical philosophy is not, and cannot be, either popular or welcome in the everyday and national life. To politicians, a philosopher in the state is actually a foreigner, sometimes even a dangerous enemy, and in the eyes of the majority of the people, a weird man and the object of contempt and derision. In support of this claim, Thomas Aquinas offers the example of Tales, the father of philosophy, and Anaxagoras, the first philosopher of Intellect. On one occasion, deeply absorbed in the observation of the stars, Tales fell into a ditch and was ridiculed by some old woman, while Anaxagoras was publicly reprimanded by his fellow citizens for the apparent lack of patriotic feeling because he had abandoned his family estates and devoted himself entirely to the exploration of Nature.

The famous Christian philosopher and Thomist Jacques Maritain describes in similar terms the position of philosopher and philosophy in the

---

1   S. Th. de Aquino, Sententia libri Ethicorum, VI, 6–7, in: *Opera omnia*, t. XLVII, vol. II, Romae 1969, pp. 352–357.

political community. In his brief essay from 1953 under the title The Philosopher in Society, in reply to the question "What is the use of philosophy?", he offers a concise answer: "Philosophy, considered in itself, transcends the useful. But that is the very reason why the people need philosophy. It reminds them of the supreme usefulness of those things, which do not relate to means, but to goals. Because people do not live only on bread, vitamins and technical inventions. They live on the values and realities that transcend time.[2]" From there, Maritain concludes: "Philosophy is essentially a disinterested activity aiming at truth, which is loved for itself, and not a mercurial activity aiming to govern things. And that is precisely why we need it. If philosophy is one of those forces that contribute to the historical events and the changes that occur in the world, it is because it strives, according to its primary task of the metaphysical permeation of existence, to discern and observe the truth of certain, intrinsically important areas, independently of what goes on in the world, which is why those truths exert a crucial influence on the world.[3]"

From the above, it is obvious that philosopher, as a searcher for truth, has no need for a state, since his quest for truth may be carried out even in the most unfavourable social and economic conditions. But the state needs philosopher, for two particular reasons. Firstly, he is called to witness to the truth and expose falsity in all its social and economic forms. It is a particular task of his to unmask the Sophistic defenders of the unjust social structures, who with their skill not only fail to pay any attention to the truth and common good, but who, moreover, assure the people that life in falsity is useful and good. Namely, their thought is in a calculated contradiction to both, reality and morality, because their primary goal in life is their personal success in the society, as well that of the statesmen whom they serve. They are capable of presenting great evil as great goodness and deriding the truth as the greatest stupidity. With their eloquence they can turn into the ashes and dust that which really exists, and the empty phrases, into the seemingly healthy facts, which then they serve to the community as the only guarantee of a happier future. As the inventors of witty non–senses and smart illusions, they are the most dangerous adversaries of the truth, of the very foundation of human community and its eschatological determination. The declaration and the defence of that, on the part of the Sophists, constantly threatened truth, represent the first and the permanent task of philosophers in the state.

The second essential function of philosopher in the political community is to serve as a constant reminder that freedom is the obligatory condition for the authentic human thought. Because, where there is no freedom, fear re-

2   J. Maritain, *Le Philosophe dans le cité*, in: *Oeuvres completes* (hereafter we refer to this text by the abbreviation OC), vol. XI, Fribourg–Paris, 1991, p. 16

3   Ibid., p. 17.

places the inner conviction and turns the people into the slaves of political passwords, leading the entire society into a depersonalised and chaotic state. Certainly, such condition of the society is perfectly suited to dictators, who take advantage of it in order to implement their unrestricted rule and promote their personal gain. The task of philosopher in the state is bravely to raise his voice against the dictatorship and thus, armed by truth, to contribute to the creation of a freer and more just world. The philosopher will, therefore, inevitably come into conflict with tyrants and Maritain warns that "Napoleon did not consider ideologists" disgusting for no reason at all and that dictators in general have always hated philosophers.[4]" But with his perseverance on the side of the truth, philosopher undoubtedly makes a contribution to the revitalisation of the world.

Since Thomas and Maritain agree, as we can see, in their definition of the relations between theoretical philosophy and the political reality on one hand, and the philosopher's position in the state on the other, in this essay we intend to present what the two eminent philosophers think of democracy, which is certainly the central, as well as an entirely relevant political issue. We are not only interested in what the philosophers in question thought of democracy in their own time, but also whether their thought can be relevant to us, in the present and future debates on such form of political rule.

Before we proceed to the execution of the established goal, it is necessary briefly to clarify the doctrinal relation between Thomas Aquinas and Maritain, in order to determine the title of our essay in a more detailed manner. Thomas is a philosopher and theologian of 13th century, while Maritain is a Christian philosopher of 20th century. Thus, they are separated by a historical distance of seven centuries, which is why certain important differences exist between their respective doctrines, despite several fundamental correspondences. Maritain, naturally, considers himself a Thomist, but that is not to say that he is reproducing Thomas' thought blindly, only that he draws his inspiration from the basic principles of Thomism, in order to resolve in their light the philosophical and theological problems of all times, but particularly those of his own. In other words, Maritain is not a replicative follower of Thomas, but a creative thinker of like mind. In relation to Aquinas, he is simultaneously loyal and independent. While accepting and interpreting his thought, Maritain at the same time expresses his own thoughts on a particular problem.

This clearly comes to prominence in the entirety of Maritain's opus, but most of all in his practical, i. e. political philosophy. So in *Integral Humanism*, his first capital work on the subject, he frequently invokes Thomas's thought,

---

4   Ibid., p. 18.

although in preface he issues an explicit warning: "It is not our intention to draw Saint Thomas into the debates that treat the majority of problems in a new way. We shall remain behind this entire work, fully aware that our inspiration and principles drew from the living source of his teachings and his spirit.[5]"

Such a principled attitude of Maritain in relation to Thomas Aquinas in the matters of political philosophy equally extends to his attitude towards Thomas's understanding of democracy. It should be pointed out, however, that no other philosophical or political thought of Thomas Aquinas has left such a deep mark in Maritain's work, as the idea of democracy has. Debating on different forms of democracy throughout the history, our Thomist puts forth a daring historical thesis that the "Philosophy of Saint Thomas was the first authentic philosophy of democracy.[6]" Therefore, the philosophy of democracy is not only present in Maritain's works on political philosophy, starting from *An Opinion on Charles Maurras and the Duty of the Catholics* (1926) to his systematic work *Man and the State* (1953)[7], but it actually forms the core of his notion of democracy, as we intend to prove in the continuation. In support of this claim, it is enough to remind that Maritain, following Aquinas, defines democracy as the rule of the people, by the people and for the people, the echo of which may be found in the famous Lincoln's saying from 1863. This definition will find its relatively best use precisely in the democratic system of the United States of America[8].

However, as much as Maritain's notion of democracy is deeply marked by Thomas' thought, it also possesses certain distinct features which, due to the above mentioned historical difference, cannot be found in Thomas. Faced with the egalitarian ideas of the modern history political philosophy, particularly those of Jean–Jacques Rousseau, as well as the fatal failures of the contemporary democratic states, the French Thomist was forced to provide new terms in order to elaborate and define the notion of democracy and its essential elements, such as people, nation, community, society, body politic, state, equality and authority. Besides, due to the dangers that sovereign states constantly pose to world peace, Maritain expanded the notion of democracy to the project of a politically united world, which is only virtually present in Thomas' thought, in his idea of the law of nations (jus gentium).

---

5   J. Maritain, *Humanisme intégral*, OC, VI, p. 294; *Cjeloviti humanizam*, translated by M. Kovačević, Zagreb 1989, p. 9.

6   *Principes d'une politique humaniste*, OC, VIII, p. 210.

7   *Une opinion sur Charles Maurras et le devoir des catholiques*, OC, III, pp. 753–754; *L'Homme et l'état*, OC, IX, pp. 607–652. The latter work was originally published in English in 1951.

8   *Principes d'une politique humaniste*, OC, VIII, p. 209, p. 227

Based on everything that we have briefly proposed in this introduction, we hope that we have clearly stated the subject of this work and that, without the danger of creating confusion at the very beginning, we can now proceed to a detailed elaboration within the given framework of this colloquium. Our exposition will consist of two parts: in the first, we shall analyse Thomas' notion of democracy and in the second, that of Maritain.

Thomas' Notion of Democracy

Amphibology of the Notion of Democracy

Thomas does not devote a separate debate to democracy, either in his comments on Aristotle's works on political philosophy, or in his systematic works, such as *Summa contra gentiles*, *Summa theologiae* or *Disputed Questions*. He speaks of democracy only occasionally, in shorter or longer paragraphs dispersed across the following works: *On Kingship or the Governance of Rulers to the King of Cyprus*. (De regno ad regem Cypri), *Commentary on the Books of Politics* (Sententia libri Politicorum), *Commentary on the Books of Ethics* (Sententia libri Ethicorum) and *Summa theologiae*.

Starting from *The Golden List* (Tabula aurea)[9] of the Dominican Peter of Bergamo from 1473, to the monumental lexicographic work *Index of Thomism* (Index Thomisticus)[10] of the Jesuit Robert Busa from 1974, the existing Thomistic dictionaries attempt to list and systematise those paragraphs. However, due to various deficiencies and vague wording, these dictionaries could easily lead an unguarded reader astray where Thomas' notion of democracy is concerned. Namely, under the entry "democratia" Bergamo's list indicates to the entry "principatus" (rule). In this latter entry, democracy is defined one moment as the bad rule and the next, as a constitutive element of the best rule. The reader will rightly ask himself: What, in fact, is democracy according to Thomas? Is it a positive form of the political rule or a negative one? Or perhaps, it is one and the other, which means that not even Thomas himself was entirely clear on the notion of democracy, as was claimed by a well–known publicist of ours[11].

---

9   The full title of this work is: *In Opera Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Index seu Tabula aurea eximii Doctoris P. de Bergomo*, ed. Fototipica, Alba — Roma 1960.

10   The full title: *Index Thomisticus Sancti Thomae Aquinatis operum omnium indices et concordantiae*, Stuttgart 1974.

11   Š. MArasović, *Crkva u procesu demokratskih promjena u Hrvatskoj*, Crkva u svijetu, XXXI (1996), p. 37, note 3. — In support of his claim the author points to my translation of Aquinas' work *Država*, Zagreb 1990, p. 53, note 8., but without good cause because in that note I

The trap of the incorrect interpretation of Aquinas' term "democracy" is not removed in *Index of Thomism* of Robert Busa either, although he, taking advantage of the computer technology, introduces all 62 substantive forms of the word "democratia" and 13 adjectival forms of the word "democraticus"[12], drawing from the entire opus of Thomas. However, since the Index does not bring Thomas' texts in integral form, but only in a very abbreviated context, which is very understandable, it is difficult to distinguish in which texts the word "democracy" is taken in the positive, and in which in the negative sense of the word.

It is very difficult to extract an answer from these short paragraphs, particularly on the following crucial questions: How come that in Aquinas' work the term "democracy" appears in two mutually contradictory meanings, i. e. as a just and as an unjust rule, and what is specifically different in their respective political structures? The answer to these questions may be obtained only by careful reading of Thomas' texts in their comprehensive literary, historical and doctrinal context.

Let us start then with the author's first political work: *On Kingship or the Governance of Rulers to the King of Cyprus* (1267). Already in Chapter 1, Volume I, following Aristotle, Thomas distinguishes three forms of the unjust rule, i. e. the tyranny of one ruler, the oligarchy of a handful of the rich and democracy, for which he has the following to say: "If, on the other hand, the unjust rule is being performed by many, we call it democracy or the rule of the people, namely, when the common people by force of multitude oppress the rich: thus the entire people will be like one tyrant.[13]" Thomas does not explicitly say that this negative opinion is not his own but only Aristotle's, but that can be easily discerned from his comment on Aristotle's *Politics*. Namely, the philosopher from Stagira describes democracy as a distortion of the constitutional rule (πολιτεία), where "the masses (majority) rule the state for the common good"[14], while democracy is a "populist rule for the benefit of the poor"[15], and does not contribute to the well-being of all the citizens of

---

explicitly stated that Thomas had inherited the negative notion of democracy from Plato and Aristotle, while the positive notion of democracy was constructed by himself on the basis of the Old Testament and the Hebrew political practice, as the author could have seen for himself, had he read the texts of *Summa theologiae*, to which I referred in the quoted note.

12 *Index Thomisticus*, Section II, Concordantia prima, vol. 6, pp. 690–691.

13 S. Th. de Aquino, *De regno ad regem Cypri*, I, 1, in: *Opera omnia*, t. XLII, Roma 1979, p. 450, lines 132–137: "Si vero iniquum regimen exerceatur per multos, democratia nominatur, id est potentatus populi, quando scilicet populus plebeiorum per potentiam multitudinis opprimit divites: sic enim et populus totus erit quasi unus tyrannus."

14 Aristotel, *Politika*, III, 7, 1279, a 37–38, translated by T. Ladan, Zagreb, 1992, p. 81.

15 Ibid., 1279, b 9–10.

state. Interpreting this passage, Thomas says: "and democracy, in other words, the rule of the people, i. e. the common majority, deviates from the constitutional rule (...), and strives for the good of the poor[16]" and not for the common good of all members of the state. The same thought is expressed by Aquinas in his comment on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he says "that democracy strives only for the well–being of the poor", but he also adds that it is exactly the reason why democracy is the "least perverted"[17] of all the state systems.

From the above, it clearly follows that for Thomas the term "democracy" has a negative meaning only when used in the Aristotelian sense of the word, which is on its own part conditioned by the failures of democracy in certain cities–states of the ancient Greece and which is, therefore, not characteristic only of Aristotle's political philosophy[18].

But Thomas' personal notion of democracy has exclusively and primarily the positive meaning, as transpires from *Summa theologiae*, where, among other, he says: "The best ordering of the state is that which is well constituted by kingdom, where one rules over all, and by aristocracy, provided that many rule by virtue, and by democracy, i. e. the rule of the people, provided that the rulers may be elected from the people and that their election belongs to the people.[19]" Here democracy clearly does not mean the rule of the commoners for the good of the poor and to the detriment of the rich, as in Aristotle, but the rule of the entire people, which elects its rulers from its own bosom. Later we shall show what significant political consequences are included in this definition of democracy. Let us only add that, in Thomas' view, such notion of democracy may be found in the Old Testament, i. e. in the social practice of the Jewish people. However, it is obvious that either in the Old, or in the New Testament, or in the works of the Church Fathers, there is no explicit mention of the word "democracy"[20]. This means that Thomas has

---

16   S. Th. de Aquino, *Sententia libri Politicorum*, III, 6, in: *Opera omnia*, vol. XLVIII, Roma 1971, p. A 204, lines 60–68: "democratia autem, id est potestas populi, id est vulgalis multitudinis, est transgressio politie, (.) tendens ad utilitatem pauperum." We stress that all previous editions of this work bring a corrupted text so that their use should be avoided.

17   See note 1, o. c., p. 478, lines: 104–106: "in democratia autem intenditur solum bonum pauperum; unde minima est perversitas democratiae."

18   G. BIEN, *Demokratie in: Historiches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 2, Basel–Stuttgart 1972, para. 50–51.

19   *Summa theologiae*, I–II, 105, 1. C: "Talis enim est optima politia, bene commixta ex regno, inquantum unus praeest; et aristocratia, inquantum multi principantur secundum virtutem; et ex democratia, id est potestate populi, inquantum ex popularibus possunt eligi prinicipes, et ad populum pertinet electio principum."

20   *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. By G. W. H. Lampe, Oxford 1976. On page 343, it is indicated that this term is recorded in only 3 places in the entire monumental opus of the Greek Church Fathers and that, moreover, without any political connotations.

taken a term from the Greek political tradition and filled it with the entirely new content of God's law, codified in the books of the Old Testament and implemented in the social practice of the Hebrew people, and that in that way, he became the author of the positive notion of democracy in the Christian era of the world history, and that his political philosophy is, in Maritain's words, "the first authentic philosophy of democracy". Let us then look closer into the content of Thomas' notion of democracy.

2. Democracy as the Rule of the Entire People

The first fundamental rule of democracy is that "everyone has a certain share in government; thus, the state maintains the peace of the people and achieves that everyone loves and protects such system, as is stated in the Second Book of *Politics*[21]. It would seem at first glance that Thomas does not consider this principle his own but borrowed from Aristotle, because he points to his Politics, where the participation of the people on the highest level of government is discussed. However, for Aristotle, the notion of the people who has the right to participate in the government of the state includes all of the citizens who live at leisure, thus excluding the workers, artisans and peasants, while for Thomas, the people means all of the citizens, regardless of their profession and social status. From the government of the state he excludes only women and children, although not because he underestimates women, but because in the medieval times women did not participate in the affairs of the public life but managed the household and the family community[22]. Therefore, that in which they did not participate, they did not decide upon either. They did not have the right to elect rulers.

All other citizens, according to Thomas, have the right to elect rulers or to be elected themselves for this responsible office. It means, in other words, that free election by vote is an essential element of democracy, as far as our author is concerned[23]. Democracy is not and cannot mean that the people

---

21 *Summa theologiae*, I–II, 105, 1, c.: "et omnes aliquam partem habeant in principatu: per hoc enim conservatur pax populi, et omnes talem ordinationem amant et custodiunt, ut dicitur in II Politicorum."

22 However, let us not forget the women who had played a decisive political role: St. Catherine of Siena, St. Joan of Arc, then the women rulers Blanca of Castille, Marguerite of Flanders and Adelaide of Brabant (for one of them Thomas wrote a short work titled *On Government of Jews*. See R. Pernoud, *La femme au temps des cathédrales*, Paris 1980.

23 Such free election is not a mere abstract political ideal, but the concrete social practice that Thomas had experienced in the Dominican order and in certain cities of the contemporary Europe: see A. Duval, *Techniques et pratiques électorales dans les ordres mendiants au Moyen ge*, in: J. Gaudemet, *Les Élections dans l'Église latine des origines au XVIe siecle*, Paris 1979, pp. 309–416

itself directly executes the affairs of the state because not all people have equal intellectual abilities or the required moral qualities, although it is true that all people are by nature equal. As a great realist, Aquinas is aware that "among the people, there are two kinds of men: those who are inclined to evil, (...) and those who are inclined to good.[24]" Moreover, he candidly admits to a sad fact that in the state there are not many virtuous men[25]. This fact, naturally, considerably hinders good functioning of the democratic state, in the government of which the whole of the people should participate. But if it is true that the majority of the people are not morally impeccable and, moreover, that they have no wish to become so, then the conclusion inevitably follows that a democratic society may be established and maintained only if it has at least a sufficient number of the public officers who live a virtuous life. In that respect Thomas is categorical: "It is impossible for the common good of the state to be preserved, unless the citizens, or at least those who are fit to rule, are virtuous.[26]" The only purpose of the free election of state rulers is to ensure that it is precisely those few virtuous and able men who get elected.

If in a certain state this cannot be achieved due to a widespread corruption, i. e. the corrupt rulers have corrupted the people by trading with votes to that extent that the people is no longer capable of electing the virtuous and the able ones, then, following the thought of St. Augustine, St. Thomas proposes that the people in question should be stripped of the right to elect and that the decisions on the fate of the state should be entrusted to a small number of honest men. In that sense he writes: "If the people is very moderate and serious and a very good custodian of the common good, such people is rightly allowed to create its own government, through which it will rule the republic. However, if the people gradually becomes corrupt by the trade of votes and delegates the power to the corrupt and the wrong–doers, then the right to delegate power should rightfully be taken away from it and entrusted to a small number of good men.[27]"

---

24 *Summa theologiae*, I–II, 101, 3. c.: "In populo autem duo genera hominum continentur: quidam proni ad malum, (.) quidam habentes inclinationem ad bonum."

25 *Sententia libri Politicorum*, II, 7, p. A 145, lines 26–27: "non autem contingit multos inveniri virtuosos in civitate."

26 *Summa theologiae*, I–II, 92, 1, 3m: "impossibile est quod bonum commune civitatis bene se habeat, nisi cives sint virtuosi, ad minus illi quibus convenit principari."

27 *Summa theologiae*, I–II, 97, 1, c.: " si populus sit bene moderatus et gravis, communisque utilitatis diligentissimus custos, recte lex fertur qua tali populo liceat creare sibi magistratus, per quos respublica administretur. Porro si paulatim idem populus depravatus habeat venale suffragium, et regimen flagitiosis sceleratisque committat; recte adimitur tali populo potestas dandi honores, at ad paucorum bonorum redit arbitrium."

But Thomas does not believe that the entire people can be so radically corrupt, except in certain individual cases alluded to by St. Augustine in the previously cited text from On Free Will (Vol. I, Chap. 6). He believes that the majority of the people is capable for a democratic state system, i. e. that it is capable of recognising the virtuous people and that it will surely, ut in pluribus, choose them for its rulers. Such choice means, in fact, that the people entrust its right to the participation in the government of the state to the virtuous and able individuals to rule in its place. Thus, Thomas is actually advocating the so–called deputative or representative democracy. But the choice in question does not mean that the people renounces, even temporarily, its right to participate in the conduct of the state affairs. On the contrary, it retains that right permanently, exercising it either by the control of the ruler's state activities until the new elections, or by direct participation in the adoption of laws.

On the direct participation of the people in the adoption of laws, Aquinas speaks in two important texts of *Summa theologiae*, which therefore deserve to be briefly mentioned here. In the first text, there is initially a general claim that "the notion of human law includes that the one who adopts it is the one who rules the state", but a warning immediately follows: "human laws differ by different forms of the state government." After describing monarchy, the rule of one, and aristocracy, the rule of the best, as well as the kinds of laws that correspond to them, Thomas writes: "Then there is the rule of the people, which is called democracy; to it correspond the people's decrees. (...) There also exists a type of rule which is a mixture of the earlier mentioned ones and that one is the best; in that rule, law is considered to be that which the leaders have concluded together with the people, as says Isidore.[28]"

The same teaching is expressed even more precisely in the second text, where the power to adopt laws is directly ascribed to the people, while government is ascribed to the ruler only as the representative of the people." Namely, if the masses are free and if they can adopt laws for themselves, in the service of a particular cause the agreement of the entire multitude, which is evident in the custom, is worth more than the authority of the ruler who has the power to adopt laws only if he represents the multitude. Therefore, although individual persons cannot adopt laws, the entire people can.[29]"

---

28 *Summa theologiae*, I–II, 95, 4. c.: "est de ratione legis humanae ut instituatur a gubernante communitatem civitatis, (.) distinguuntur leges humanae secundum diversa regimina civitatum. (.) Aliud autem est regimen populi, quod nomantur democratia; et secundum hoc sumuntur plebiscita. (.) Est etiam aliquod regimen ex istis commixtum, quod est optimum: et secundum hoc sumitur lex quam maiores natu simul cum plebibus sanxerunt; ut Isidorus dicit." Underlined in the translation by T. V.

29 *Summa theologiae*, I–II, 97, 3, 3m: "Si enim libera sit multitudo, quae possit sibi legem facere, plus est consensus totius multitudinis ad aliquid observandum quem consuetudo manifestat, quam auctoritas principis, qui non habet potestatem condendi legem, nisi inquantum

This short view of the several of Aquinas's key texts on democracy undoubtedly testifies to a strong emphasis he put on the importance of the participation of the entire people in the government of the state. Besides, our author specifies what such participation consists of, i. e. the selection of ruler from the people and by the people, and the people's participation in legislation. Obviously then, in the political thought of Thomas Aquinas the essential elements of democracy come to prominence, although in his works he does not treat them in a systematic and detailed manner.

Among the Christian philosophers of 20th century, it is undoubtedly Jacques Maritain who in his own notion of democracy adopted and further developed these elements in the most original manner. Let us examine them closely.

II *Maritain's Notion of Democracy*

1. The Notion of Organic Democracy

Democracy is, in Maritain's opinion, not only one of the most important problems of political philosophy, but also its central problem, upon the solution of which all other basic philosophical problems depend. In the modern history, it does not mean a form of the state rule like in the past, but "above all a general philosophy of human and political life and a certain spiritual state[30]. Such philosophy does not exclude the forms of government that were recognised by the classic tradition. So the rule of monarch or aristocracy can also be democratic, provided that they abide by the principles of that philosophy. However, Maritain believes that by its nature, democracy aims at the realisation of that form of rule, which, according to the famous saying of Abraham Lincoln, consists of the "rule of the people, by the people and for the people."

Has this form of democracy been achieved in the modern states that call themselves democratic? Maritain's answer to this question is basically negative: "The tragedy of modern democracies is in the fact that they still have not succeeded in achieving democracy.[31]", although they try to and occasionally have some limited success. According to the French Thomist, one of the main reasons of this failure is Rousseau's idea of democracy, which has governed the Western states over the last hundred and fifty years[32]. Namely, such de-

---

gerit poersonam multitudinis. Unde licet singulae personae non possint condere legem, tamen totus populus legem condere potest."

30   *Christianisme et démocratie*, OC, VII, p. 719.

31   Ibid., p. 713.

32   On the fatal social and political implications of Rousseau's notion of democracy in the modern history world, in Croatia D. Pejović wrote two magisterial pages under the title "Rousseau and Democracy" in his work *Farewell to Modernism*, Dubrovnik 1993, pp. 180–182.

mocracy "abolishes authority and preserves power. (...) it can be called a liberal or a bourgeois, or a disguised anarchic democracy. It has its roots in the misinterpretation of the principle: "every individual is born free", as well as in the thesis that from there it logically follows that every individual "should submit only to himself"[33].

To this notion of anarchic democracy, Maritain opposes his own notion of organic democracy, which "does not abolish authority and in principle the rule either: it wishes them both to come from the people and to be realised by and with the people." It relies upon the idea that man is not "born free" (independent) (...), but that he must win his freedom, as well as that in the state as the hierarchical body of the people, the people should be governed as persons, not as things, towards the truly human common good"[34].

According to Maritain, the people has an undisputed right to govern itself, but since all of its members are not equally disposed for it, it is forced to elect certain able individuals who will assume power for the duration of their office, in accordance with the scope and the level of their authority derived from the people. Direct government of the people by the people, i. e. a direct democracy, and not deputative democracy, is possible only in a very few cases: when a certain community is too small or in case of referendum.

Furthermore, Maritain insists not only on the fact that in democracy authority and power come from the people and that the ruler governs as the deputy of the people — ut vices gerens multitudinis, using the words of our Thomist when he quoted Aquinas from *Summa theologiae*, I–II, 90, 3[35] — but he further claims that it is a characteristic of democracy to make that "deputation" a typical law of its authoritative structure and in that way, by the intermediation of the people, authority gradually climbs from the basis to the summit of the hierarchical structure of community, and that the realisation of power by the men to whom it is periodically delegated, includes the constant return of that power to the people.[36]" In other words, the elected rulers are permanently responsible to the people and it is the people who must supervise their rule. Since their power is that of deputative participation in the power that belongs to the people, they "do not govern separately from the people, (...) but together with the people, even when they are its representatives.[37]"

---

33 *Principes d'une politique humaniste*, OC, VIII, p. 212. Underlined by J. M.

34 Ibid., p. 219.

35 Ibid., p. 225.

36 Ibid.

37 *L'Homme et l'État*, OC, IX, p. 640; *Čovjek i država*, translated y M. Kovačević, Zagreb 1992, p. 135. — Underlined by J. M.

Such description of democracy is a kind of Maritain's interpretation of Lincoln's formula of democracy as the "rule of the people, by the people and for the people.", or of Thomas' idea that democracy consists of the rule of the people through the deputies elected from its own body. In another instance, Maritain clarifies the meaning of Lincoln's words: "by the people". Rejecting the idea that democracy consists of the people's sovereignty, he says: "According to the sound democratic philosophy, those words do not mean that government is executed by the people (…), but by its representatives, i. e. the people in the person of its representatives[38].

From all of the above, it is obvious that Maritain's notion of organic democracy is far from simple. Moreover, it is not only complex, but also seemingly contradictory. Namely, the author always insists that the people has the right to govern itself, claiming at the same time that, in fact, it is not capable of realising it, which is why it delegates its power to its elected representatives, whose power is, however, substantially restricted by the constant supervision of their work. Are not the people's representatives then a mere instrument in the hands of the people?

Maritain was fully aware of that problem so in his last and the most important work on political philosophy *Man and the State* he provided a comprehensive explanation of the notion of democracy, which was missing in the earlier works. It is true though, that even in this work he emphasises the importance of the notion of representation in democracy, which he takes over from Thomas Aquinas. In a democratic regime, our author writes, "the rule of those who govern comes from the unalienable and permanent right of the people to its self–determination.[39]". But that is not to say that the people's representatives are a mere instrument of the people. They have certain autonomy and a true authority: "The people's representatives have a representative or deputative power, as a sort of the image of the people itself. They are the living and the acting image of that people, and not a dead one — the image of a person endowed with intellect, free will and responsibility. (…) Thus, to a certain degree and within certain boundaries, the power that they exercise is actually the participation in the very power that belongs to the people; it is a representative but true power, accepted as something that belongs to the people from the Source of every power; *they truly have the right to command and to have the others obey them*.[40]"

These are, in our opinion, the essential features of Maritain's notion of organic democracy, which is, in fact, a kind of elaboration and actualisation of Aquinas' notion of representative democracy.

---

38 *Principes d'une politique humaniste*, OC, VIII, p. 227.

39 *L'Homme et l'Etat*, OC, IX, p. 635; *Čovjek i država*, pp. 131–132.

40 Ibid., pp. 639–640; Ibid., pp. 134–135. — Underlined by J. M.

2. Democracy as the Project of a Politically United World

Democracy as the participation of the entire people in the government of the state is an essential precondition of the preservation of its peace. It is a common thesis of Thomas Aquinas and Jacques Maritain. Nevertheless, Maritain thinks that in the political circumstances of the contemporary world, this condition is not a sufficient guarantee of the preservation of peace. Because even if the contemporary states established themselves within their boundaries as the most just and perfect democratic systems, they are still not capable of ensuring world peace, and thus their own peace either, because modern world consists of sovereign states, i. e. the states endowed with unrestricted rule and independence, which, as the historical experiences show, constantly threatens world peace.

Therefore, the French philosopher believes that "the political unification of the world or the establishment of the World Government is the only instrument that could ensure peace. (...) The problem of the World Government (...) is nothing else but the problem of a permanent and uninterrupted peace. And in a certain sense, we may say that the problem of the permanent peace is simply the problem of the survival of the people, which means that today human race is facing a choice: either a permanent peace or a very serious risk of complete annihilation.[41]" In other words, the key thing is to expand the idea of democracy, heretofore limited to certain individual states, to the entire world community.

Naturally, Maritain is aware that the project of the political unification of the world as the instrument of securing the permanent peace is not entirely new, moreover, that its germ is very old indeed. It was announced already by Cicero when he spoke of the all–encompassing "society of human race" (humani generis societas), it is virtually present in Thomas' idea of the law of nations (ius gentium), in Dante's "universal society of human race" (universalis civilitas humani generis) and in Kant's idea of the world community of states and the idea of eternal peace. Maritain singles out the work *St. Thomas and the World State*[42] by Robert Hutchins, who demonstrated that "the idea of a pluralistic political society on the world level is in harmony with the fundamental principles of the political philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.[43]" Namely, according to Thomas, the first common good that the state as "the perfect society" (societas perfecta) must ensure, is its internal and external peace. If the individual states cannot achieve that goal, it means that they are not the perfect society or that "the perfect society should be constituted as

---

41   Ibid., pp. 703–704; Ibid., pp. 181–182.

42   R. M. Hutchins, *Saint Thomas and the World State*, Aquinas Lectures, 1949, Milwaukee, Marquette University Press 1949.

43   *L'Homme et l'Etat*, OC, IX, p. 635; *Čovjek i država*, pp. 131–132.

some sort of a wider society, (...), which, in our historical era, would actually mean a politically organised international community.[44]"

But the above–mentioned hints of the politically organised international community in the past, the nature of which obviously remains too much in principle, cannot under any circumstances be compared to Maritain's project of a politically united world that aims at becoming a concrete historical ideal, i. e. an ideal that springs from the will and the aspiration of the peoples themselves and which, with certain effort, wise leadership and historical patience, may come true. Therefore, the basic starting point of Maritain's project of the politically united world are the democratic principles, according to which the world government should be freely elected by the people, and that such government must not be forced upon the individual states: "The electoral path, naturally, is the only correct one — because the world state should be established and survive by means of free election, with the participation of human beings, not the delegations of different governments.[45]" The French Thomist insists on this principle also in his proposal on the establishment of the "supranational council of advisors" to whom the implementation of the said project would be entrusted: "the members of this supreme advisory council would originate from every people, by fair enforcement of the rule of representation, and they would be elected directly by the people of all nations.[46]"

The second fundamental principle of democracy in the realisation of the politically united world according to Maritain is that it should be created on the model of pluralistic unity, and not on the model of some monistic Superstate. The politically united world includes as its essential element the diversity of its individual political bodies, which it maintains and constantly improves. Naturally, the future international community should constitute one people, and among all nations, the aspiration for the common good should overcome the aspiration for the common good of individual political entities. But that is not to say that the identity of the individual nations and states would be abolished. On the contrary, "it would be a world political body consisting of (...) primarily individual political bodies, with their life and structure, their national and cultural heritage, their multiple institutions and communities — and all of that would be encompassed and protected as a treasury, it would be regarded as sacred.[47]" From there it is obvious that the creation of the world political society, as envisaged by the French Thomist, does not threaten the independence of the nations, but moreover, guarantees its better protection, since the whole of the world community would watch over it.

---

44   Ibid., p. 715; Ibid., p. 189.

45   Ibid., p. 721; Ibid., p. 194.

46   Ibid., pp. 733–734; Ibid., p. 203.

47   Ibid., p. 729; Ibid., p. 200.

What Maritain absolutely demands from the individual states is that they renounce the illusory, and hence very dangerous privilege of being sovereign, i. e. the lethal pretension that "every state enjoys such independence which is not supervised by any other higher authority.[48]" Because the world community that we have today is in fact an anarchic conglomerate of egotistic states, a society without authority, a body without a head.

Therefore, Maritain thinks that the politically united world, if it wishes to be truly democratic, must have a real authority: "Once the perfect society that is required by our historical era comes true, (...) it will have the obligation of legally respecting the freedom of constitutive states (...), and those individual states will give up their absolute independence (...) and the world state (..) will have the authorities that the perfect society requires by its nature: the legislative, the executive and the judicial authority, as well as the right to use force inasmuch as it is necessary for the enforcement of law.[49]"

But is not this perfect society that the French Thomist advocates a beautiful idea, but an unrealisable utopia? Certainly not. Let us mention in the first place that the perfect society for Maritain, just like for Thomas, does not mean a society without flaws, but an adult society that collects and distributes the creative potentials of man, by way of satisfying all his material and spiritual needs in accordance with the specific level of historical development. Such society is not a utopia, a no–space (u–topos) world that is envisagable but unrealisable, but a concrete historical ideal which requires a long period of maturation and a steadfast education of human beings in the communal life and universal human values. That is why Maritain emphasises: "that the passage to a politically united and organised world may happen only after a long period of time.[50]"

Let us conclude: Maritain's organic democracy as the project of a politically united world is obviously the matter of a distant future, but its contours may be discerned even in the present times, in the form of numerous European and international integrations.

48　Ibid.; Ibid.

49　Ibid., pp. 716–717; Ibid., p. 190.

50　Ibid., p. 731; Ibid., p. 201. — In a different place Maritain writes that "the defenders of the notion of the world government know very well — Mortimer Adler specifically stresses that aspect of the issue — that such notion will be realisable only after many years of struggle and effort."

(Ibid., p. 718; Ibid., p. 192). On the development of the idea of the world government from Maritain to the nineties of the last century, see the bulletin of the International Institute Jacques Maritain Notes et Documents (Roma), XVII, No. 35/1992.