

A Combatant for Peace: Franziskus Maria Stratmann (1883–1971)¹

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Within the Dominican province of Teutonia, Stratmann was not regarded as a social-ethicist, but rather as a ‘pacifist’, that is, a loner who met predominantly with rejection and ridicule. For the year 1931, only one person from the province seemed to be working with Stratmann – Swibert Maria Soreth (1890–1975), who was ridiculed as a pious eccentric. Still, Eberhard Welty paid (qualified) tribute to Stratmann’s thought, by emphasising where he was in agreement with him in his *Sozialkatechismus*, and briefly praised his main works in the bibliography. Later he gave him the opportunity to write in *Die Neue Ordnung*, which Welty edited, allowing Stratmann to discuss the views and philosophy of history expounded by the controversial Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster, who was important for Stratmann from the beginning.

One reason for Stratmann’s generally lacklustre reception within the Dominican Order may have been his education. He began by briefly studying law at Lausanne. Then he was motivated by the example of the famous Dominican preacher, Bonaventura Krotz, to join the Order. On 16 October 1906 he made his simple vows. He completed his philosophical and theological studies at the German Dominican Studium in Düsseldorf. In accordance with the curriculum, he became acquainted with the thought of Thomas Aquinas, but did not embark on the specialised study of Aquinas necessary for the qualification of lector in theology. His fellow brethren regarded Stratmann as a good student whose talents lay more in preaching and communicating than in research. He was ordained priest in Cologne in 1912. In 1914, P. Adolf Hoffmann (1900–1987) was impressed by Stratmann as a teacher.

Bonaventura Krotz wanted Stratmann to succeed him in his pastoral work with students in Berlin. On his deathbed, he urgently asked for ‘his’ student: ‘is Fr Franziskus Stratmann not here yet?’ the prior arranged with the provincial to have Stratmann removed from his teaching post in Vechta and sent to take over the Berlin post. He held this office for ten years, but was never wholly satisfied with it. At the end of 1923 he asked to be

replaced – partly under pressure from nationalist students – and was moved Cologne in 1924.

The ‘Second Conversion’

Stratmann was always alert to what was going on around him – including, of course, in the period of the First World War, during which he was a deputy division minister, and also in the early post-war period. Towards the end of the war, Stratmann had what he called his ‘second conversion’ – the first conversion being ‘from an unreligious life to an intensely religious one’. In contrast to the more emotional ‘first conversion’, he said, the second was an intellectually based occurrence.

There are three experiences, to which Stratmann responded intellectually, whose significance, and the way they relate to each other, are difficult to gauge.

The Encroaching Reality Of The First World War

In 1916, at the request of the chief secretary of student social Work, Dr Carl Sonnenschein (1876–1929, famous in the last ten years of his life as a social pastor in Berlin), Stratmann, as student pastor, wrote a small book which was presented as a ‘gift’ to the ‘scholars in the field’: *Veritas*. The author later made an entry in his hand-written copy which he had printed in shortened form (1927):

The remarks are suffused with the sort of patriotism which always sees one’s own cause as justified, and takes the view that war is the right means of ensuring it is victorious, indeed that war provides a school of higher morality. Only being there, taking part in war, reveals its hideousness. That became clear to me from reading letters from soldiers at the front. I got a copy of my text back from the trenches with furious comments written in the margins, fiercely rejecting and ridiculing my idealistic views on the terrible facts of war. I increasingly learnt to see the truth of this criticism, so that I soon became a fierce opponent of the war and the ideology behind it.

Morality And Politics

Looking back in his diaries, Stratmann refers to one book, written at the beginning of 1918, as providing a special impetus: 'it was Friedrich W. Foerster's *Weltkrieg und Weltgewissen*'. A double-edged attitude to the pedagogue and ethicist Foerster, both as a man and as a thinker, is a constant theme for Catholic pacifists (he features in Stratmann's publications until 1958). They were enthused by his fight against 'double morality' (one rule for individuals, another for the political sphere) and against the amorality of politics when it is only interested in power, and his fight for recognition of the 'duty imposed by the saving importance of Christ's teaching, including in relationships between peoples'. But they were more ambivalent regarding Foerster's emphasis on Prussian-German culpability for the war, which they saw as an inopportune attempt to justify the war-guilt thesis enshrined in the treaty of Versailles.

Papal Calls For Peace

Foerster was a popular topic among like-minded contemporaries. To convince people within the Catholic Church who took a different view, the Catholic pacifists had recourse to calls for peace issued by the popes.

Pope Benedict XV began his pontificate two months after the outbreak of war. His greatness and his tragedy lay in the way he connected his calls for peace (which he based on the Gospel) with – unsuccessful – political action, as in his appeal of 2 August 1917, in which he made concrete suggestions to the Heads of State of the belligerent parties. His desire 'that the most perfect fulfilment of the principles of justice and love, *in the life of individuals and of the whole society*, preached by the divine Master, should protect peoples for ever from the horrors of war' finds its mature formulation in the great peace encyclical *Pacem Dei* of 23 May 1920, which combines biblical inspiration and political farsightedness. Its aim: 'a sort of family of peoples, calculated both to maintain their own independence and safeguard the order of human society'.

In this document, Benedict expressly formulates his characteristic idea of the unity of individual and social morality: 'The Gospel has not one law of charity for individuals, and another for

States and nations, which are indeed but collections of individuals'.

Here we do not need to re-describe Stratmann's role in the *Friedensbund Deutscher Katholiken* (FDK), founded by Dr Max Josef Metzger on 9 October 1919. In any case, Stratmann took over responsibility for North Germany no later than spring 1920. He soon came to be regarded as the spiritual leader of the FDK.

As early as September 1922 he gave a speech at the religious studies conference of the Verbandes der Vereine katholischer Akademiker zur Pflege katholischer Weltanschauung (United Association of Catholic Scholars for the Cultivation of Catholic Ideology) in Heidelberg. His talk was called 'The Idea and the Realisation of the *Corpus Christi Mysticum*', and had the subtitle 'The Reconciliation of Peoples through the Church'. Its reception oscillated between enthusiastic agreement and rejection – in between these two poles, some had reservations because they thought it politically inopportune.

By then, though, his authority in the FDK had been so firmly established that he had to take a decisive stance in a difficult situation. Owing to the political activities of the Frenchman, Marc Sangnier (1873–1950), and his attempts to secure peace, the third convention of Internationale Démocratique, which Sangnier had founded, took place in Freiburg im Breisgau in early August 1923. Contemporary events made 'The Occupation of the Ruhr' a topic for discussion. In January 'five French divisions and one Belgian division had entered the Ruhrgebiet, leading to the highest tensions between Germany and France since 1918'. The stated reason for this was that Germany was in arrears with its reparations, particularly deliveries of wood. This was how centre Party member Josef Joos presented it in his opening address on 4 August. Stratmann's feast-day homily in Freiburg Münster on 5 August was regarded as the high point of the proceedings. It must have been rousing. In it, he inveighed against submission 'to an incontrovertible fate' and at the same time against the militant, vindictive attitudes awakened by the occupation of the Ruhr, arguing instead for a new way of acting: with passion but without violence.

His moral authority was permanently secured by the appearance of his principal work, *Weltkirche und Weltfriede* (World church, World

Peace), at the end of 1924. It contains 'Catholic thoughts on the problem of War and Peace'. Stratmann's catholicity (and Catholicity) is characterised by an awareness of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, an awareness that is still as strong as it was then. We see it in the Heidelberg address, in a speech delivered at Bonn University in July 1924, and in the book that followed it. The work is dominated at the start by an almost physical sense of suffering at this body's self-dismemberment by the war.

*The Devout Philosopher Of Natural Law
And His Sources*

The main effectiveness of this work lay not in the familiar way it identified with the Church, but in the way it extended, 'from the perspective of natural law', the 'conditions of just war' bequeathed by the Augustinian/Thomist tradition. This extension was motivated primarily by Foerster's call for a radical political ethics.

I wrote my book *Weltkirche und Weltfriede* in the sort of exhilaration which a great new idea gives to the mind, although all the material I needed was totally unfamiliar to me and I had to laboriously read through everything in a few months first.

As Stratmann says modestly in a footnote, he was able to read the texts that were decisive for his argument (Spanish Dominican and Jesuit interpretations of Aquinas from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) in the posthumously published *La doctrine scholastique du droit de guerre*, which appeared in Paris in 1919. The author, Alfred Vanderpol (1854–1915), was an engineering entrepreneur and expert on agriculture. alongside lecturing and organising scholarly gatherings, he gave an – often inconspicuous – impetus to charitable works and schemes: a movement for abandoned and neglected children (1890); disseminating a French translation of the Bible; manufacturing wall and roof lining (1905). His preoccupation with questions of war and peace (which went back to 1890) was deepened in studies he produced on these questions, during a long illness, in relation to the Augustinian / Thomist tradition. He had been publishing articles on this since 1906 and, since 1910, in the bulletin of the League of French Catholics for Peace. He took an active part in Catholic peace conventions in, among other places, Milan (1906), Munich (1907), London

(1908) and Reims (1909). In 1911 he sent a report on the 'scholastic doctrine of war' to the Congress of French Societies for Peace at Clermont-Ferrand.

He drew together various strands of his thinking for the first time in *Das Kriegsrecht bei den Theologen und Kirchenrechtlern des Mittelalters* (The Law of War in Medieval theology and Church Law), which appeared in Paris and Brussels the same year. In 1912 he extended his perspective to sources in the New Testament and the Church Fathers, particularly Augustine, and developments into the seventeenth century. To avoid the two works overlapping, he worked on a synthesis until July 1914, which was prevented from publication by the outbreak of the war and was published by Vanderpol's friend and biographer Emile Chénon in 1919. Here Stratmann found French translations of all the relevant texts, especially the classics of Spanish sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholasticism. Like Vanderpol, he was mainly concerned with Francisco de Vitoria.

Stratmann's Approach To Thomas Aquinas

Stratmann formulates the motivation and the structure of his argument, which is strongly determined by traditional patterns, with pleasing clarity:

In view of the awfulness of modern war and its consequences, and in view of the fact that the Catholic Church lacks a defined teaching on war, it is surely allowable to advance the severest opinion on the permissibility of war, in order to restrict as far as possible its existential legitimacy (*Daseinsrecht*). This book therefore adheres to the principles of saint Augustine and St Thomas, which is beyond doubt justified, despite all the developments in subsequent moral theology, on account of the outstanding distinction of both teachers.

In a footnote, Stratmann refers to an encyclical of Pius XI, in which the latter refers to Thomist thought on international law, observing which would bring the desired peace between nations.

Pius' appeal to St Thomas to legitimate defensive war, the justification of which is, of course, presupposed by the medieval theologian, stimulates Stratmann to warn against extending the justification of war on preventive grounds: 'It is

sufficient for recourse to self-defence – that is, for the declaration of war on preventive grounds – that the planned attack can be proven beyond doubt ... But the *requirement* for the legality of launching an all-out defensive war is that the attack by the enemy should be *unjust!*'

He is able to follow Aquinas more closely in justifying offensive war. He presupposes the tradition going back to Augustine (the source of which – Cicero – he does not mention). Stratmann interprets the three conditions enumerated by Aquinas in this tradition by providing a set of antitheses.

In the first condition, *auctoritas principis*, Stratmann transforms the basis for justification into an absence that is to be overcome: 'A state is only permitted to come to its own aid if there is no supra-state authority through which the state may gain its rights'. So the 'aim of the peace movement is the creation of jurisdiction between and above states – the solid, Archimedean point which would enable us to dismantle the entire mentality of war, with its wretched supercession of the rule of law'.

Stratmann gives a definitive moral, anti-modern slant to the second condition of *causa justa*: against the rejection of punitive war espoused by Kant and Scheler, he emphasises, with Aquinas, that an offensive war is only justified if 'those who are attacked deserve to be attacked because of their guilt'. This nexus of guilt and punishment is formulated most clearly by Francisco de Vitoria: *unica est et sola causa justa inferendi bellum: injuria accepta* (the one single reason for waging war is an injustice that has been suffered). According to Stratmann: 'until the end of the 16th century in the Catholic Church, it was the unanimous view of all church fathers, church teachers and theologians that only the certain moral guilt of one of the opposing parties gave the other the right to declare war...'. The justified war is therefore an act of punitive justice. Stratmann accuses Francisco Suarez SJ (1548–1617) of having defined war, though not consistently, as an act of distributive justice and thus of having accepted responsibility for 'loosening the strict old morality of war'. Before then, Luis Molina (1535–1600) had replaced grave moral culpability as a rationale for war with 'mere material injustice on the part of those who are to be attacked'.

Stratmann mentions the third condition only briefly: right intention (*recta intentio*). He sees this as a moral enforcement of the moral justification understood in the second condition of just cause.

The Intensification Of Stratmann's Ideas: A Summary

Despite his criticism of the 'old' Jesuits, Stratmann accepts the fourth condition introduced by Francisco Suarez and Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621): the '*debitus modus*, the proper way of waging war'. This includes primarily the fundamental distinction between combatants and non-combatants.

The logical result of the whole argument, which is based primarily on Francisco de Vitoria's development of Augustinian and Thomist notions of just war, are the famous '10 points', given here with Stratmann's emphases:

1. *severe injustice* on the part of one and only one of the two conflicting parties;
2. *severe formal moral guilt* on one of the two sides. Mere material injustice is not sufficient;
3. this guilt must be able to be proven *beyond all doubt*;
4. military engagement must be *unavoidable* owing to the failure of all peaceful attempts at conciliation, which must have been undertaken with the utmost seriousness and effort;
5. the means of punishment must be *proportional* to guilt. Punishment that *exceeds* the extent of guilt is unjust and impermissible;
6. moral certainty that the just cause will be victorious;
7. the right intention to promote good through the war and avert evil. The welfare of the state expected to ensue from the war must exceed the evil which is expected;
8. *war must be waged in the proper way*: the restrictions imposed by justice and love must be observed;
9. *severe disruptions to other states* not directly involved in the war, and to Christian unity, must be avoided;
10. the *declaration of war* must be made by a *higher authority* lawfully empowered to do so in the name of God, in order to enforce his law. If any of these requirements is not met, the war is unjust.

If one reads these points without proper preparation, one is usually met with laughter. This was entirely Stratmann's intention: anyone who still thinks a war can be justified deserves to be a laughing stock!

The guidelines of the FDK carry Stratmann's imprint, too: both the stricter version of 1924, which dispenses with the conditions for a 'just war', and the guidelines presented in 1928, which were drawn up by a commission in 1927 and contain a 'less apodictic text'. It is also typical for Stratmann that despite his disappointing

experiences with most of the German bishops he constantly attempts to show that he is in agreement with the heads of the church. It is probably no coincidence that this is not very easy for him when faced with Pacelli/Pius XII. He tries to demonstrate agreement when he interprets Pacelli's 'Peace Letter' to a German-Polish conference (21–24 May 1929), which was meant to be critical, as wholly consistent with the aims of the FDK. Evidence is not forthcoming to support Hermann Hoffmann's suggestion that in February 1933 Stratmann characterised Pacelli's analysis as the result of an outdated theology of war.

NOTA:

¹ This text is taken from the first part of the chapter of the same name in F. Compagnoni - H. Alford (eds.),

Preaching Justice, Dominican Contributions to Social Ethics in the Twentieth Century, Dominican, Publications, Dublin 2007.