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"A University, in Spite of Everything": Leo R. Ward, neo-Thomism, and the making of Notre Dame

In February of 1955, Leo R. Ward, CSC received a letter from Yves Simon, inviting him to an upcoming party honoring the publication of a new book on the Material Logic of John of St. Thomas, for which their mutual friend, Jacques Maritain, had written the preface.[1] The invitation, made "in the name of three generations of Thomists," referenced Ward's letter to Simon, penned almost two decades prior, inviting him to leave his native France for a post at the University of Notre Dame: "If Mr. Maritain were here," Simon wrote, "he would say that the publication of John of St. Th. in English—in his opinion, an epoch-making event—demonstrates that some good work was done as a result of your letter!"[2] Ward attended many such parties with his European friends: gatherings which, although academic, "had everybody, even Simon, a crippled man, leaping up and down in an Apache song."[3] Ward, Simon, and their colleague Waldemar Gurian brought many famous intellectuals to northern Indiana during these years, hosting "set-to's with Barbara Ward, just then working to get us into the war; with the political thinker, Hannah Arendt; with Monsignor Koenig, master of the papal

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[1] CLRW 1/06 *Folder*: Correspondence with Yves Simon 1938-1955, Simon to Ward, 24 February 24 1955, University of Notre Dame Archives (AUND).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Leo R. Ward, "My Fifty Years at Notre Dame," *The Story of Notre Dame* (online publication of the University of Notre Dame Archives): http://archives.nd.edu/default.htm.

documents on peace and war; and the Chicago University and atom-bomb physicist Leo Szilard [...]."[4]

Though Ward is largely unknown in American Catholic historiography, he is worth recovering for the history of Catholic higher education in the United States. To this end, this paper proceeds in two parts. First, I will examine the emergence of neo-Scholasticism and its influence on the intellectual life of twentieth-century Catholicism in the United States, asserting that neo-Thomism acted as a unifying intellectual foundation to the cultural confidence exhibited by American Catholics in the 1920s and 1930s. Next, we will demonstrate how twentieth-century Thomism came to bear on institutions of Catholic higher education, as exemplified by developments at the University of Notre Dame in the 1930s. Taking Ward's contributions as a case study, I argue, enriches our understanding of twentieth-century Catholicism in the United States.[5] That is, it challenges the notion that the American Catholic intellectual life slipped into "a half-century's theological hibernation" until the late 1950s and 1960s.[6]

A People Both "Certain and Set Apart"

Many historians of Catholicism in the United States have drawn attention to the confidence that seemed to characterize the American Church in the two decades

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[4] Ibid. See also Frank O'Malley, "Waldemar Gurian at Notre Dame," *The Review of Politics*, 17 (January, 1955): 20.

[5] John T. McGreevy wrote: "That the migration of European Jews in the 1930s powerfully shaped Anglo-American intellectual life is well known, but the parallel Catholic migration has received little scholarly attention. Yet its effects on American Catholic life were significant" (*Catholicism and American Freedom: A History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003: 197). Elsewhere I have written on the impact of European Catholic scholars on the development of Catholic universities, and their contributions should not be underestimated. But it is also important to note that this does not mean that American institutions were merely "colonialized [sic]" by Europeans (Hennesey), and their own success at American Catholic institutions were often dependent on the independent scholarship of intellectuals such as Ward.

[6] James Hennesey, S.J., *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981): 203.

following World War I. As James Hennesey put it, the American Catholic community of the 1930s could be described as a people both "certain and set apart."[7] This confidence was due in part to the fact that, led by influential and ambitious bishops like George Cardinal Mundelein in Chicago and Dennis Cardinal Dougherty in Philadelphia, Catholics of all walks of life had begun by the 1920s to share handsomely in the nation's prosperity. Mundelein, heavily invested in the "Americanization" of various Catholic ethnic groups in Chicago, became a close friend of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the 1930s, developing a relationship that bolstered Catholic confidence during the New Deal era.[8] And Dougherty, often referred to as "God's bricklayer," spent his first ten years as Archbishop of Philadelphia establishing ninety-two new parishes; eighty-nine new parish schools; forty-eight new churches; three new diocesan high schools; a new college for women; fourteen new academies; and a $5,000,000 preparatory diocesan seminary.[9]

Some have noted that in addition to institutional growth, other sources of Catholic distinctiveness and unity were more ideological in nature. Leslie Tentler, for example, has shown that Catholic teaching on birth control acted as a "tribal marker" for twentieth-century American Catholics, separating Catholics from their liberal and Protestant neighbors.[10] Similarly, Peter D'Agostino argued in his hugely influential *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism*, that it was the ideology of the Roman Question that "shaped American Catholic identity and

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[7] Hennesey: 255.
[8] Edward R. Kantowicz, "Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century American Catholicism." *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Jun., 1981), pp. 52-68.
[9] Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: a History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985): *The American Catholic Experience*: 350.
[10] Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

conditioned how Protestants, Jews, and liberals understood Roman Catholics in the United States."[11] From the Italian revolutions in 1848 to the Mussolini Accords in 1929, so D'Agostino's argument goes, Catholics around the globe, but especially in the United States, united in support of the temporal and spiritual autonomy of the papacy.

While institutional and ideological developments are helpful in explaining Catholic distinctiveness from their Protestant, Jewish, and liberal neighbors, they are ultimately inadequate, as the confidence displayed by American Catholics—especially American Catholic scholars—following the First World War also had a distinctly intellectual component. This much has been noted by William M. Halsey in his intellectual history of Catholicism between the wars, who wrote:

> Untouched by postwar disillusionment, Catholics set out as "providential hosts" to defend the values and promises of American idealism which seemed threatened by various forms of irrationalism: probability in scientific thought, the subconscious in psychology, skepticism in literature, and relativism in law and morality. Supporting the aggressive social and intellectual posture of Catholicism was the philosophy of neo-Thomism, which allowed Catholics to maintain a rational and moral universe while it supplied a rationale for optimism.[12]

Throughout their history, as Halsey noted, Catholics in the United States have sought a unifying, integrating principle on which to build a vision of America and their special role in it. In the years following Al Smith's failed 1928 presidential run, Catholics believed that they had discovered this principle in the philosophical writings of Thomas Aquinas. This, coupled with a growing theological appreciation for St. Paul's doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, undergirded Catholic thought and social action and converged to form the conviction that "Catholicism represented a coherent system

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[11] Peter R. D'Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004): ix.
[12] William M. Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment, 1920-1940* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980): 2.

grounded in reason that perfectly met the needs of modern society and the spiritual longings of modern humanity."[13] This system, though irreducibly intellectual, was seen by Catholics of the 1930s as a distinct culture, which, in the words of Jay Dolan, provided "a sense of security in a world of change and furnished the intellectual cement that could bind religion and culture together."[14] This distinctly Catholic worldview stressed "unity," "integration," "wholeness," and a rationality dependent on divine law in Catholic approaches to modern religious, social, and political problems.[15] Thus Thomism, in a particular way, became the model for integrating Catholicism and American culture in the twentieth century.

Renewed interest in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastics emerged in the early nineteenth century in response to strands of modern thought and scholarship that would later be lumped together by various pontiffs and labeled "modernism." Neo-Scholasticism (or neo-Thomism) was spread initially by theologians such as the German Jesuit Joseph Kleutgen, as well as by a number of notable Italian thinkers: Giovanni Maria Cornoldi, Giuseppe Pecci, Tommaso Maria Zigliara, to name a few. The movement found initial papal support in the writings of Pius IX, but its most ardent supporter was Pope Leo XIII, whose 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris* called for Christian philosophy to turn to "those purest streams of wisdom flowing inexhaustibly from the

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Jay Dolan: 352. See also Keith F. Pecklers, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America: 1926-1955* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998). Pecklers offers a compelling account of the importance of the Mystical Body of Christ doctrine for the Liturgical Movement, as well as the movement's concern with integrating Catholicism with American culture and life.

[15] John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 41.

precious fountainhead of the Angelic Doctor."[16] Leo XIII's letter canonizing Thomism effectively institutionalized the neo-scholastic movement in Catholic schools and seminaries, giving birth to a generation of scholars concerned with appropriating the philosophy and philosophical method of the scholastics to respond to modern problems and questions. And in the years of the Catholic Modernist Crisis, pontiffs and scholars would consistently promote the writings of St. Thomas as the foundation of true Christian philosophical and theological inquiry.

It is important to also note its pervasiveness in ordinary Catholic life, as neo-Thomism (alongside the Mystical Body of Christ doctrine) had considerable impact on the cultural transformation of American Catholicism. This extended even into the lives of lay, working-class Catholic citizens, who found inspiration in the discovery of young intellectuals such as Jacques Maritain, Christopher Dawson, and Virgil Michel. According to Arnold Sparr:

> A faith previously presented in private-personal terms was now seen to have social, even radical, implications. It was an exhilarating experience for Marciniak, the son of an immigrant Polish grocer and steelworker, to see Catholic intellectuals addressing the most pressing social and cultural problems of the day.[17]

As alluded to above, neo-scholasticism and the concept of the 'Mystical Body' commanded lay Catholic social and cultural action. This became manifest in concrete ways, from the Catholic Worker movement to the founding of the Chicago Inter-Student Catholic Action organization (CISCA). The latter is especially significant for our purposes, as it connected lay social action with the resources and personnel of nearby Chicago universities. Sparr recorded, for example, that by 1935 CISCA counted over

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[16] Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris* [Encyclical Letter on the Restoration of Christian Philosophy] (August 4, 1879): 26.

[17] Arnold Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem: The Catholic Literary Revival and the Cultural Transformation of American Catholicism, 1920-1960* (1990): 118.

20,000 members, representing nearly all of Chicago's fifty Catholic high schools and eight Catholic colleges and universities:

> Each Saturday morning up to 600 Sodality representatives would meet at Loyola's Loop Campus to discuss and develop plans of action to bring back to their local units for the coming week. [...] Under Reiner and his charismatic successor Martin Carrabine, S.J., CISCA leaders went into Chicago area high schools and colleges to talk on Catholic social thought, distributed copies of the *Catholic Worker* to Chicago workers, and volunteered in the city's hospitals and community centers. In the early 1940s CISCA led a successful struggle to integrate Chicago's rollerskating rinks.[18]

Sparr later describes a production put on by the Chicago Catholic Labor Theatre, an affiliate of both CISCA and the Catholic Worker, which contrasted a group of "Catholic Workmen" with a second group of young communist radicals in their efforts to win the hearts and minds of striking workers. "While the communists preach class hatred," Sparr noted, "the Catholic activists make speeches about the stewardship of wealth and social solidarity based upon the radical fellowship of the Mystical Body."[19] This is simply to show that the currents animating Catholic scholarship between the wars permeated all of Catholic life, its influence being not limited to academic circles alone. Inspired by neo-Thomism and Christ's 'Mystical Body,' Catholic activists urged workers to "get out and read a copy of the Popes' encyclicals"—encyclicals that reflected and promoted the same ideas and concerns.[20] The "Catholic Revival" became both a culture and a full-fledged movement, energizing not only educators and publicists, but even American Catholics more generally.

Thomism and Catholic Higher Education Between the Wars

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[18] Sparr, 118-119.
[19] Ibid., 119.
[20] Ibid., 120.

Of course, since this movement was so distinctly intellectual, it invites our consideration of the institutions of higher education that were so integrally involved.[21] In his magisterial work on Catholic higher education, Philip Gleason has shown the ways in which the 1930s revival "shaped the mentality that dominated [Catholic universities]," as well as how these universities acted "as focal points for its diffusion among the Catholic population and as a cultural force in American public life."[22] Gleason chronicled the emergence of the "culture concept" in the American intellectual life. According to one group of educators, "The Catholic College will not be content with presenting Catholicism as a creed, a code, or a cult. Catholicism must be seen as a culture."[23] This culture, bound together by neo-thomism and the Mystical Body, permeated Catholic schools and the Catholic intellectual life.

This neo-scholastic culture became the impetus for tremendous change and growth in Catholic institutions across the nation. One need not look further than the writings of Jacques Maritain, whose educational philosophy was informed by his interaction with the writings of Thomas Aquinas. For Maritain, the Thomist philosophical system was entirely opposed to the philosophical systems to which the progressive education of his day appealed for support. Specifically, Thomist philosophy denied the epistemology of pragmatism and empiricist philosophy, which allowed for no distinction of nature (but only of degree) between the senses and the intellect. "As a result," Maritain wrote, "human knowledge is simply sense-knowledge (that is, animal knowledge) more

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[21] Philip Gleason, *Contending With Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 146.
[22] Gleason, 146; cf. Sparr.
[23] Quoted in Philip Gleason, "In Search of Unity: American Catholic Thought, 1920-1960," *Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 65, no. 2 (April 1979): 198.

evolved and elaborated than in other mammals."[24] According to Maritain, this fundamental difference in basic philosophical principles led to a warping of the educational endeavor, as it used, but ultimately reduced, reason to the sense-knowledge characteristic of animals.

Further, according to Maritain, empiricist epistemologies denied the fact that "human ideas attain being, or what things *are* [however indirectly]," a basic premise of Thomistic philosophy.[25] For Thomism, knowledge is a value and end *in itself.* Truth consists "in the conformity of the mind with reality—with what is or exists independently of the mind. The intellect tends to grasp and conquer being."[26] To put it simply, the goal of Maritain's educational philosophy was the liberation of the mind to attain truth, and thus a "fully human" education is a liberal one, which equips the mind for truth and makes the student "capable of judging according to the worth of evidence, of enjoying truth and beauty for their own sake, and of advancing [...] toward wisdom and some understanding of those things which bring to [him or her] intimations of immortality."[27] This educational philosophy, undergirded as it was by basic Thomistic principles, informed not only Maritain's scholarship, but his practical undertakings as well; and his career as an educator spanned half a century and influenced the direction of institutions across Europe and the United States, including stints at the Institute of Mediaeval Studies

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[24] Jacques Maritain, "Thomist Views on Education," in Donald and Idella Gallagher, eds., *The Education of Man: The Educational Philosophy of Jacques Maritain* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1962): 45.
[25] Ibid., 47.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 48.

in Toronto and Princeton University, as well as the University of Notre Dame, where he taught as a visiting professor and assisted in curriculum development.[28]

Leo R. Ward, CSC and Thomism at the University of Notre Dame

Having traced the broad emergence of neo-Thomism in twentieth-century Catholic intellectual life and educational endeavors, we now turn to the visible impact of neo-scholasticism on the University of Notre Dame, which experienced over the course of the twentieth century an unprecedented growth in institutional prestige. Attending to Ward's activity at Notre Dame and his participation in an international network of neo-scholastics concerned with applying Thomistic philosophy to modern problems and establishing premier centers of Catholic education and inquiry, demonstrates the movement's tangible role in the development of what has today become one of the United States' premier Catholic institutions of higher education.

Leo Richard Ward was born April 19, 1893 in Melrose, Iowa. He entered into seminary formation for the Congregation of Holy Cross in 1914, following a four-year stint as a teacher in Iowa public schools. He professed his first vows in 1920, graduated from Notre Dame in 1923, and was ordained a Holy Cross priest in 1927 by Bishop John F. Noll. Two years later, Ward received a doctorate in philosophy from the Catholic University of America, after which he immediately joined Notre Dame's faculty as a professor of philosophy. Aside from two years of postdoctoral studies at Oxford University and the University of Louvain (1934 – 1936), Ward taught at Notre Dame from 1929 until his retirement in 1963. During this time he would become one of the

[28] For a more detailed account of Maritain's educational philosophy, see his collection of essays in *The Education of Man: The Educational Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, compiled and edited by Donald and Idella Gallagher, as well as Maritain's 1943 text, *Education at the Crossroads*. The latter offers a more in-depth discussion of the Thomist's theological anthropology, which undergirds his thinking on the basic principles, values, ends, and methods of education.

nation's leading authorities on Scholastic philosophy, publish widely-acclaimed books and articles, and serve on both the Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs and the Atomic Bomb Committee established by the Atomic Associates, Inc., at the University of Chicago.[29] He was the first professor from Notre Dame to join the American Philosophical Association, and remained for some time its only priest-member. Of his twenty-one books, several received considerable attention in many different circles, while his *Blueprint for a Catholic University* (1949) made a significant impact on the mind of a young Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC. From the 1940s to the 1970s, Ward would speak and write on American education and Catholic life, and even shared notes with John Tracy Ellis in the 1950s. Most importantly, Ward was known for applying the philosophy of the neo-Thomists (especially the thought of Jacques Maritain) to his work in education.[30]

When Ward first began studies at Notre Dame, he remembered being disappointed at the "lack of intellectual life" he encountered there:

> At Notre Dame the seminarian's schooling was not really living classical, not yet a respectable social science learning, not scientific and mathematical, and the seminarian's Roman-trained teacher knew none of these and neither he nor we had any inkling, his favorite word, that philosophy proceeds by way of challenge and inquiry. [...] Ages before our teachers' grandparents were born, unidentifiable people had killed theology. It was not being resuscitated in our house in our time, and the better students sensed that a dead hand had been laid on what should have

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[29] According to a 1946 brief in *Our Sunday Visitor*: the Committee (known as the Committee of Science, Religion and the Atomic Bomb) was composed of six scientists and six religious leaders. Their work was primarily educational, and stressed the idea that force or power cannot control the atomic bomb and that only law and a religious conscience may be expected to produce results that are truly human. Ward was elected when attending an Atomic Associates, Inc. meeting with thirty-four other Catholic, Protestant and Jewish religious leaders invited to discuss the social, moral and religious problems raised by the atomic bomb. *Our Sunday Visitor* (Rockford, IL Diocese), 17 March 1946, UDIS 137/28—Leo R. Ward, 1893—AUND.

[30] For example, see Ward, "Christian University? Yes." *America Magazine*. 26 January 1974. In Notre Dame archives: UDIS 137/28—Leo R. Ward, 1893—AUND.

> been our life. I had expected theology to be revealing and provocative, not stiff and corpse like.[31]

While perhaps he could not have articulated it so clearly as a young seminarian, it was this perceived problem of a "stiff and corpse like" theology that he and several others (Frank O'Malley, Thomas McAvoy, Leo *L.* Ward,[32] and Philip S. Moore) would dedicate their careers to remedying. Ward later recalled an especially memorable mid-morning walk through the woods with Philip Moore, and the two seminarians swearing that "in spite of everything" they would acquire some theology. "And twenty years later," Ward wrote, "he and I and others encountered at Notre Dame the same type of problem, and, each working in his own way, had to swear that in spite of everything we would work to establish a university."[33]

From the outset of his academic career, Ward committed himself to improving Notre Dame's philosophy department and resuscitating what he believed to be the university's lifeless intellectual environment. In 1930, he published *Philosophy of Value: An Essay in Constructive Criticism*, which applied Thomistic thought to a contemporary dispute concerning philosophies of value and duty.

> But this unconcern does not seem likely in anyone and least of all, we should think, in a Scholastic. It is therefore from his point of view that we take a look now at the problem of value. [...] Value and not duty, says some one; duty and not value, says another. We doubt the wisdom of either and urge that Aquinas, the chief of the Scholastics, would not grant the disruption.[34]

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[31] Leo R. Ward, "My Fifty Years at Notre Dame," in *The Notre Dame Story*.
[32] There were two Father Leo Ward, CSCs at Notre Dame for the better half of the twentieth century: Leo L. Ward, in the English Department, and Leo R. Ward in philosophy. I met recently with several Holy Cross priests who remember being students when the two were teaching and referring to the two as "Leo Literature" and "Leo Rational" to distinguish between the two. This is also confirmed by many archival sources.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Leo R. Ward, *Philosophy of Value: an Essay in Constructive Criticism* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1930): vi.

The publication of *Philosophy of Value* is indicative of Ward's role in the enhancement of Notre Dame's philosophy department, as even this first book (likely his dissertation) was well received among his peers. The chair of Yale University's philosophy department, for example, wrote of *Philosophy of Value*:

> It is a book which I welcome with enthusiasm both for its general timeliness and more particularly for its handling of certain questions which require expert treatment at this time. [...] I have an unusually interesting and accomplished set of students in my graduate seminar in Ethics and Value Theory this year, and both of the questions referred to come up continually for discussion. Needless to say I am putting the book in their hands.[35]

This work points to a core element in Ward's thought: namely, the application of Thomistic philosophy and theology to modern problems. Ward's Thomism, like many intellectuals of his time, was always undertaken with an eye toward contemporary application. In this case, Ward was concerned with developing the "modern currents" of the philosophy of value that, although as "old as philosophy itself" and albeit un-American in origin, "should have [already] broken out in America."[36]

This was only the beginning of Ward's contributions, however, as he was also responsible for initiating conversations with then-president John O'Hara about establishing a doctoral program in philosophy. O'Hara readily agreed (after a few supplemental questions about salary and tenure), and placed it entirely in Ward's hands to determine what qualifications the University should seek in such a man and the best way forward.[37] Naturally, Ward sought one of the leading Thomist philosophers of his time,

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[35] Urban to Ward, 22 February 1935, CLRW 1/09 *Folder:* Correspondent: Etienne Gilson, John J. O'Hara, C.S.C., AUND.
[36] Ibid., v.
[37] Ibid.

Yves Simon, extending him the invitation to relocate to South Bend in 1938. In his letter, Ward wrote the following:

> You would be very free to do research and to direct research in the thought of St. Thomas, and in the solution of modern philosophical problems in the light of St. Thomas. Please let us know if you would be able to come, and please come if you can; we should like to have you. Our desire is to find a man who is fairly young, but who has proved his ability in systematic - - not merely historical - - work in the philosophy of St. Thomas, and we think of you as such a man.[38]

The recruitment of Yves Simon, who would later become praised as the "philosopher of philosophers," marked a significant step in Ward's plan to build a true university centered on systematic research in Thomistic philosophy. After receiving Ward's invitation, Simon immediately wrote his friend and mentor, Jacques Maritain, of his "sudden urge to accept."[39] What was it that enticed Simon to leave his native France for the "dirty hole" of South Bend, Indiana?[40] Political developments in continental Europe were inevitably a factor, though Simon was not himself an émigré like many of his European Catholic colleagues. Based on the correspondences circulating among Simon, Maritain, Gurian, and Ward, it is clear that Simon was drawn to Notre Dame by the opportunities the school presented for the study and application of neo-scholasticism: a crusade led by Ward and news of which had found its way across the Atlantic as early as 1938.[41]

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Simon to Maritain, 21 April 1938, in Florien Michel, ed., *Jacques Maritain, Yves Simon: Correspondance, Tome 1: Les annees francaises (1927-1940)*, (Tours, CLD: 2008): 322.

[40] After arriving at Notre Dame, Simon wrote to Maritain: "You have said that South Bend was a dirty hole: I was therefore surprised to find that the neighborhood at least where we are staying is clear, fresh, green, pretty enough." Simon to Maritain, 5 septembre 1938, *Correspondance*: 338.

[41] In a letter to Ward from Freibourg, a young Ralph Harper writes of his travels, studies, and interactions with "the leading Catholic philosophers" of the time (an endeavor encouraged by Ward). Here Harper remarks off-handedly, "By the way, two weeks ago I had tea with Ronald Knox and Arnold Lunn. The latter spoke most favorably of what

After recruiting such notables as Simon and Maritain, Ward's next step was to initiate a series of influential symposiums for which Notre Dame would soon become famous. It is important to account for Ward's role in these symposiums, as doing so nuances prevailing narratives concerning the growth of one of America's preeminent Catholic universities, further underscoring the significance of neo-Thomism for American Catholic higher education. It has been widely acknowledged, for example, that President John O'Hara launched a period of growth hitherto unseen in Notre Dame's history. O'Hara's presidency saw the establishment of a "visiting scholars" program; the influx of European émigrés; the founding of the graduate school and one of Notre Dame's most prestigious publications (the *Review of Politics*), and the formation of a series of scholarly publications that made Notre Dame's name known nationally. According to Mark Massa, "O'Hara laid the solid foundations for the emergence of Notre Dame as a 'serious' national academic institution." When he rose to the presidency in 1934, he became "the founder of the *University* of Notre Dame [...] his successors would build on his foundations."[42]

Similarly, Robert E. Burns asserted in his two-volume history of Notre Dame that "under O'Hara's leadership, the direction of institutional development was turned irreversibly toward that of a modern university."[43] Turning to the first political science and philosophy symposium in 1938, Burns offered the following account:

> The holding of that mathematics symposium at Notre Dame insured that a similar one would be organized for the College of Arts and Letters

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Notre Dame is attempting." Harper to Ward, 17 May 1938, CLRW 1/09 *Folder*: Correspondent: Etienne Gilson, John J. O'Hara, C.S.C., AUND.

[42] Mark S. Massa, SJ, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999): 206-207.

[43] Robert E. Burns, *Being Catholic, Being American: The Notre Dame Story, 1842-1934* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999): 28.

> sometime in 1938. What O'Hara had allowed Menger and the department of mathematics to do, he could not and did not deny to Gurian, Hermens, and the department of politics. [...] Gurian and Hermens moved with dispatch in the spring of 1938. Joined by Father Leo R. Ward, C.S.C., of the philosophy department and Frank O'Malley from the English department, Gurian and Hermens pressed O'Hara and his University Council to authorize and fund a symposium on political and social philosophy to be held at Notre Dame in early November 1938. [...] Gurian's symposium was intended to be an occasion for publicizing and launching the *Review* [*of Politics*]...[44]

While Massa and Burns attribute the astonishing growth experienced by Notre Dame in the 1930s to O'Hara and Gurian, respectively, the archival sources suggest that it was Ward and his neo-Thomist crusade that acted as the true impetus for the series of symposia. In fact, it was Ward who first approached O'Hara with the idea of staging a symposium:

> I caught him as he came out of Corby chapel from night prayers one evening, told him we could have Maritain lecture, and couldn't we, into the bargain, build a symposium on social and political philosophy around the name and fame of Maritain? [...] That was that, the show was on the road, a symposium of three days at one-tenth, one-twentieth, one-fortieth of what grandiose symposiums later cost; and ours too was grandiose.[45]

Ward explained that when he spoke to O'Hara about having such a program, O'Hara said only two things, each characteristic: "Come into this room – don't speak in the corridor; yes, go ahead, but keep the total cost to $400 – expenses only, no stipends."[46] Ward then went on to describe how he brought his idea to Gurian, who, in true Gurian fashion, ran full steam ahead:

> With the idea confirmed, the next day I collared the always intellectually hungry Waldemar Gurian as he rounded out of the Post Office and I wedged in. He was delighted and at once was charging with all his bull-like power. "A symposium in social philosophy? Like the ones they had in physics and mathematics?" He said to get Frank O'Malley, a potent young

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[44] Burns, 24.
[45] Leo R. Ward, "My Fifty Years at Notre Dame."
[46] Leo R. Ward, "Notre Dame's Famous Visitors" (1971 piece), UDIS 137/28 – Leo R. Ward, 1893 -, AUND.

> intellectual, and come that day to Gurian's home. We found Gurian with papers spread out like a banquet, sketching how this heavenly thing could be done.

It was also Ward who, by and large, gave the symposium its form and content, motivated by the desire to host an event proper to a true university:

> The next day I invited people from Chicago, Georgetown, Harvard, Vanderbilt, and St. John's Universities to take part. [...] I meant only to make the event what it ought to be, an expression of a university. [...] possibly I was wondering whether our University could not have all the look of a university. I asked the President if anybody was forbidden to enter our sacred precincts! He said of course not; out went 1,300 invitations to bishops, old students, scholars, Dorothy Day's ménage, and our neighboring Mennonites.

As word of Ward's symposium began to spread, Ward received numerous letters of support from across the country. Louis F. Buckley, then working in Washington, D.C. with the Social Security Board, wrote of the "real pleasure" news of the pending symposium brought him, and that he "felt sure that you [Ward] are responsible for this excellent program and want to congratulate you on the good work."[47] Buckley goes on to request a copy of the symposium's program, before updating Ward on the interest several professors from the University of Wisconsin have begun to show in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. Ward also received notice from Bishop John Gannon of Eerie, Pennsylvania that the prelate was sending six priests from his diocese, as he felt that "the Diocese will benefit by it" and that they "should not neglect to take advantage of the splendid array of speakers" that Ward had obtained for the symposium.[48] News of Ward's symposium evidently reached even as far as Texas, as Bishop C.E. Byrne of Galveston

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[47] Louis F. Buckley to Leo R. Ward, CSC. 24 October, 1938. CLRW 1/09 *Folder*: Correspondent: Etienne Gilson, John J. O'Hara, C.S.C. AUND.
[48] Bishop John Gannon to John O'Hara, 3 November 1938. UPOH 78/11 – Folder: Philosophy Symposium 1938/1104 +. AUND.

wrote President O'Hara to state his regret that he could not attend, mentioning that "the subjects … are so important that I hope they will be gotten out in book form."[49]

Ward's symposium on social and political philosophy was eminently successful.[50] It brought together leading political and social thinkers, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, including Maritain, Carl J. Friedrich (Harvard), Jerome G. Kerwin (Chicago), Goetz Briefs (Georgetown), Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago), Desmond Fitzgerald (former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Irish Free State), and Virgil Michel. It also provided momentum for a second, even larger symposium (again chaired by Ward) just two years later. Thus by 1940, Ward's philosophy department welcomed "the country's outstanding philosophers," attracting more than six hundred students of philosophy to its annual symposium, featuring such guests as A.C. Pegis and Robert Pollock of Fordham, and the renowned "Right Reverend New Dealer," Rev. John A. Ryan of the Catholic University of America. As Ward put it:

> Whether, at least in the earlier decades of the half century covered here, Notre Dame was or was not a sort of country club and cross-roads school, it was a magnificent thing to have men and women of distinction in arts and letters and sciences, as well as people of distinction in public life, crossing the paths of students and faculty.[51]

The symposium also precipitated a number of initiatives in the philosophy department, such as the founding of Gurian's famed and influential *Review of Politics*, as well as Ward's Aristotelian-Thomistic society for professors and advanced graduate students.[52]

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[49] Bishop C.E. Byrne to John O'Hara, 31 October, 1938. UPOH 78/11 – Folder: Philosophy Symposium 1938/1104 +. AUND.
[50] Newspaper Clipping from Topeka, Kansas' *Register*, attached to letter from Thomas F. Hally to O'Hara 28 October 1938, UPOH 78/11 – Folder: Philosophy Symposium 1938/1104 +.
[51] Ward, "My Fifty Years at Notre Dame."
[52] Ward to O'Hara: Report on developments/plans in graduate work in philosophy (in preparation for President's Report to Board of Trustees), 21 October 1939, UPOH 78/27 – Lay Trustees Meeting (1939), AUND; Ward, "My Fifty Years at Notre Dame."

The symposium received favorable coverage in periodicals from Michigan, Kansas, Illinois, Ohio, and Illinois,[53] and Notre Dame's *Scholastic* carried a series of positive articles providing sophisticated analyses of the symposium, noting especially the timeliness and import of its lectures.[54] It is clear that the Symposium was a watershed moment for Notre Dame's blossoming graduate philosophy program. Later developments in philosophy aside,[55] the Symposium seems to have had all of the intended effects that Ward had envisioned for the university.

Conclusion

By the 1960s, Ward had become a prominent voice on the American Catholic intellectual scene. In 1946, Ward was one of twelve scientists and religious leaders appointed to the Committee of Science, Religion and the Atomic Bomb at the University of Chicago. He was also elected to the Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs, organized by a group of leading Catholic educators throughout the country to foster Catholic intellectual and cultural co-operation in the United States and to maintain relations with organized and individual Catholic scholars throughout the world. He was even elected president of the American Catholic Philosophical Association due to his influential work in philosophy and his reputation as one of the nation's outstanding philosophers. In 1969, he joined the ranks of Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, Yves Simon, and Josef Pieper when he received the association's Aquinas Medal—given in recognition of outstanding teaching; personal publications of permanent and scholarly

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[53] UDIS 22/06 Folder: Political and Social Philosophy Symposium 1938 / 11, AUND.
[54] See especially: *The Notre Dame Scholastic*, Vol. 72, No. 7 (4 November, 1938): 10; Vol. 72, No. 8 (18 November, 1938): 11.
[55] For a history of Notre Dame's philosophy department, see Kenneth M. Sayre, *Adventures in Philosophy at Notre Dame* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).

value; influence upon American philosophical thought without reference to membership in the American Catholic Philosophical Association.

By all accounts, the American Catholic intellectual life at midcentury was virtually nonexistent, stifled by the legacy of early twentieth century Catholic anti-modernism. According to James Hennessey, "Little, if any, serious theological reflection emerged from the American experience… Catholics in the United States remained cheerfully colonialized [sic] when it came to seriously reflective religious thought."[56] Similarly, Jay Dolan wrote that twenty-five years after the publishing of Pius X's encyclical condemning modernism (*Pascendi Dominici Gregis*), American Catholics "wondered why the church had produced so few intellectuals." According to Dolan, after 1907 "contact with Protestant and secular thinkers was broken off. It was as though someone had pulled a switch and the lights had failed all across the American Catholic landscape."[57]

According to this narrative, it was not until John Tracy Ellis' classic 1955 critique of the American Catholic intellectual life that the winds began to change. This paper has sought to nuance this narrative, arguing that Ellis was not the first to criticize the intellectual failings of American Catholicism and to question why there were no "Catholic Salks, Oppenheimers, [and] Einsteins." Rather than being a period of theological hibernation, the 1920s and 1930s saw the emergence of creative and dynamic engagement with neo-Scholasticism and its application to modern thought and questions. As a result, American Catholic scholars like Leo R. Ward undertook enormous intellectual and institutional projects, building a neo-Thomist network that extended even beyond Catholic institutions.

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[56] Hennessey, 259.
[57] Dolan, 319.

Ward was not alone in his project, and the study attempted here could certainly be replicated at other Catholic institutions.[58] For his part, as head of the philosophy department, Ward contributed to the establishment of the graduate school. He was the impetus behind the recruitment of prominent European Catholic intellectuals, as well as the founding of influential and well-attended symposiums. His speeches and published works reached various notable audiences across the country (and abroad), and had a considerable influence on developments in American Catholic higher education after World War II. Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC suggested as much when he later recalled: "It was his writing on the Catholic university that [...] particularly interested and influenced me when I, too, returned to Notre Dame to teach and then to help create an ever greater Catholic university here ... When I had to give my first talk on a Catholic university, it was to his book, *Blueprint for a Catholic University*, that I returned, and his message that I preached."[59] Recovering Ward's efforts to build a university animated by an authentic and critical intellectual life and engaged in the questions of its time challenges us to take seriously the very real impact that early twentieth-century intellectual engagement with Thomism had on Catholic institutions of higher education, as well as on Catholic intellectual and theological life in the United States in the decades immediately following the Modernist Crisis.

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[58] As early as 1925, for example, George Shuster first posed the question "Have We Any Scholars?" Likewise, a young Fulton Sheen (then a theology professor at Catholic University, where Ward earned his doctorate in philosophy) called upon the National Catholic Educational Association in 1929 to "educate for a Catholic Renaissance." And in 1937 Robert Hutchins "expressed puzzlement over the failure of Catholics in the United States to cultivate their inherited cultural tradition."

[59] Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC. From the Preface to "My First Fifty Years at Notre Dame." November 8, 1978. University of Notre Dame Archives. http://archives.nd.edu/ward/ward.htm.

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