

God, Notre Dame, Country: Rethinking the Mission of Catholic Higher Education in the United States

MICHAEL J. BAXTER
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN

Introduction: “God, Country, Notre Dame”

THESE three words are chiseled in stone above the east entrance to Sacred Heart Basilica at the University of Notre Dame. The words are flanked by two statues etched into Gothic-style stone buttresses; on the left (as one faces the door), St. Joan of Arc, and on the right, St. Michael the Archangel. Just beneath the words, also chiseled in stone, is a shield emblazoned with a cross and anchors, the emblem of the University’s founding order, the Congregation of Holy Cross; and also the Greek letters *chi rho*, calling to mind Constantine’s vision at the Milvian Bridge when he received divine assurance of victory in battle that day (a vision which is said to have precipitated his conversion). Perched behind and peering out from either side of the shield are two eagles. Beneath the shield and just above the lintel of the doors are carved the words “In Glory Everlasting.” At the top of the entire display, written in florid script, are the words “Our Gallant Dead.” On either side of the doors, emblazoned on bronze plaques, are forty-six names, the names of the Notre Dame students who died in the Great War.

It was in honor of these forty-six former students that this memorial was built under the sponsorship of the Notre Dame Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. On January 21, 1923, the membership approved the building of this “War Memorial,” as it was called. If things went according to the plans announced in a special bulletin that January, the portico was dedicated on Memorial Day 1923, in conjunction with that year’s

Memorial Field Mass. The V.F.W. bulletin urged veteran soldiers to attend the celebration because this would be the last year that there would be enough veterans on campus to observe a Memorial Field Mass. By this time, the war had been over more than four years and its memory seems to have been fading, so it was time to erect an enduring monument to Notre Dame's former students turned fallen soldiers.

What is striking about the memorial built into the portico of the east door of Sacred Heart is its blending of religious and national symbols: on the one hand, the *chi rho*, the cross and anchors, the saints, and the reference to everlasting glory; on the other hand, the eagles, the busts of the military personnel, and the reference to the gallant dead. And the memorial is built with gothic-style stone so as to blend in with the overall church structure, which it does so well that most people do not notice that it was added later—representing a fusion of church and nation so well integrated that it goes unnoticed to this day, as if it were normal, natural.

This memorial was erected under the instigation of the acting commander of the Notre Dame branch of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, George Shuster.¹ A portrait of Shuster is provided in a book entitled *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment: 1920–1940*, by William Halsey, who spells out in vivid detail the ideas and vision of Catholic intellectuals in the decades after the Great War.² Demurring from Henry May's *The End of American Innocence*, who maintained that influential intellectuals in this period succumbed to a sense of disillusionment, Halsey shows that Catholics remained untouched by it, and indeed promoted an intellectual agenda to counter it by infusing society, politics, and culture with their own distinctive intellectual vision. In their minds, Catholicism offered a rich intellectual heritage that could provide America with a much-needed sense of order and purpose. Halsey devotes an entire chapter to Shuster's romantic vision of Catholicism and the role it played in the Catholic intellectual world in the United States in the post-war years.³

¹ See the "Special Bulletin" from Lewis J. Murphy, Commander, to members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, U.S.A., Notre Dame Post No. 286, recounting the minutes of a special meeting, January 21, 1923, and also the letter from George A. Bischoff to comrades, January 27, 1923, Notre Dame President's Records (UPWL: President Matthew Walsh, C.S.C.) Box 22, Folder 6, University of Notre Dame Archives.

² William M. Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment, 1920–1940* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980). For a more detailed and straightforward account of Shuster, see Thomas E. Blantz, C.S.C., *George N. Shuster: On the Side of Truth* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

³ Halsey, *Survival of American Innocence*, 84–98.

Shuster matriculated to Notre Dame as a student in 1912, served in the Great War, and returned to campus as an English professor in 1919. He came back from Europe and the war having found God amid the suffering he had witnessed. He understood how so many of the “lost generation” of returning veterans had forsaken all vestige of religious belief, but he himself had discovered in the Catholicism of Europe “an ancient and unifying tradition” that brings together the antinomies of life—beauty and sadness, good and evil, spirit and flesh, soul and body, material and ideal—while affirming the dignity and freedom of humanity in striving for the divine. This was not a Catholicism of rules or abstract truths, but a Catholicism that entered fully into the life of the world.⁴ Shuster, Halsey points out, was inspired by Emerson, whose optimism and vitality he regarded as an antidote to the fatalism and materialism into which post-war intellectual life had been absorbed. But for Shuster, Emerson was only an individual embodiment of a much larger force, “the Catholic spirit.”⁵ Catholicism was unique in that it was social; it possessed a capacity to meet the collective needs of day. Accordingly, Shuster took great hope in a pamphlet issued by a newly formed, standing organization of the Catholic bishops of the United States, the National Catholic War Council. The pamphlet was issued on February 12, 1919 (Lincoln’s birthday) under the title “Social Reconstruction: A General Review of the Problem and Survey of Remedies.” Crafted by Msgr. John A. Ryan, the “Bishops’ Social Program,” as it was known, called for state-sponsored actions that would protect workers from the deleterious effects of the free market, offer unemployment insurance and workers’ compensation, and impose regulations such as the eight-hour day. Shuster considered it a magnificent document, marking a turning point in U.S. Catholic history. We have broken our “fast of silence,” he wrote, “we have discovered our existence and the time in which we exist.”⁶ Catholics were finally coming of age, in Shuster’s view, and none too soon, for their spirit was desperately needed in the great struggle against the lifeless and cold materialist intellectual vision of the times. A war was underway, waged not on the battlefields of Europe, but on the home front, in classrooms, journals, books. At one point, Shuster called it a “war for Christendom.”⁷

At the heart of Shuster’s vision of an intellectual “war for Christendom” was a romanticized version of Catholicism combined with an equally romanticized version of America. The connection between these

⁴ Ibid., 85–86.

⁵ Ibid., 87, 89–91.

⁶ Ibid., 86–87.

⁷ Ibid., 87.

seemingly estranged intellectual impulses lay in Shuster's understanding of the Middle Ages as a time of flourishing for the human spirit, one that saw the achievement of what he called "the spiritualization of democracy."⁸ This democratic spirit of medieval cultural and intellectual life was not a mere matter of nostalgia, for in Shuster's view, it had taken root in America, thus bestowing on the United States a pivotal role in preserving and defending the cultural heritage of the Christian West. It made perfect sense for him to see Catholicism and America working hand in hand for the benefit of civilization, and to see Notre Dame's mission as part of this momentous task, providing its students with the moral and intellectual vision needed to serve both God and country.

In this essay, I tell the story of this dual mission, symbolically represented in the War Memorial attached to Sacred Heart Church and also very much alive in the minds of Catholic scholars in the twentieth century. In part one, I portray the mission of Catholic higher education over the course of the four decades after World War I, 1920–1960, at Notre Dame and in the nation at large, paying special attention to the central role of Neoscholastic philosophy in carrying out the mission and then briefly describing how the vision fell apart during the 1960s and brought an end to the so-called Neoscholastic synthesis. In part two, I use the work of Alasdair MacIntyre to show how we need to rethink the mission of Notre Dame and of Catholic higher education in the United States generally. In conclusion, I argue that, in rethinking it, we will need to re-order the University's long-standing missionary priorities: God, Notre Dame, Country.

1. "The Scholastic Synthesis" at Notre Dame

As an English professor at Notre Dame, George Shuster was only beginning to fulfill his vision of fighting an intellectual "war for Christendom." In 1924, he left Notre Dame for New York and soon joined a group of lay people who had recently founded a journal for that purpose called *The Commonweal*. It was while serving on the staff of *The Commonweal* that he wrote an editorial chiding Catholic institutions of higher education for promoting personal piety and "excellence in football" on their campuses (a jab at his alma mater) at the expense of genuine intellectual pursuits. But his most provocative critique appeared in the Jesuit journal *America*. It was entitled "Have We Any Catholic Scholars?"⁹

Published in 1925, the article ignited a storm of controversy among Catholic educators in the United States. At the time, Catholic colleges

⁸ Ibid., 91.

⁹ George Shuster, "Have We Any Catholic Scholars?" *America* 33 (August 15, 1925): 418–19.

and universities were under pressure from two directions at once. On the one hand, they were struggling to revise the standard Catholic curriculum to conform to a modern model that was being imposed by newly established accrediting agencies. On the other hand, they were struggling to meet the demands of their own self-appointed mission of bringing Catholicism's intellectual vision to America by imparting it to their students, who would disseminate it and restore the nation to its original and true philosophical foundations—or so they believed. Given these two pressures, it is not surprising that the question posed by Shuster, pointing to a dearth of high quality Catholic scholarship, left some Catholic educators feeling unduly chastised. Others welcomed it as an honest assessment of the challenges to be faced. The tensions involved in this controversy are recounted by Philip Gleason in *Contending with Modernity*.¹⁰ Masterfully and in great detail, Gleason narrates the developments in Catholic colleges and universities from the 1920s to the 1960s, a period during which they adapted to a modern, secular curriculum while maintaining the unity of knowledge within the standard Neoscholastic framework. It is in large part the story of impressive achievements, although it concludes on a wistful note, "The End of An Era," leading one to ask if the self-understood mission of Catholic educators was ever really attainable. To this question I return in part two of this essay. But first, I want to describe this mission as it was pursued in the four decades after World War I, drawing on Gleason's account and supplementing it in order to show how Catholic scholars and educators envisioned their mission in terms of a complementary, indeed a symbiotic relationship between God and country.

This widely accepted symbiotic relationship between God and country is vividly reflected in a paper delivered at the annual meeting of the National Catholic Educational Association in June 1920 by the newly appointed president of the University of Notre Dame, Fr. James Burns, C.S.C.¹¹ Burns adverted to both the intellectual and the institutional challenges facing Catholic higher education in these years, placing them in the context of the world situation that was to take shape in the wake of the war. "The effects of the World War," he explained, "have wrought great changes in the relation of the United States to the rest of the civilized world." In both politics

¹⁰ Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹¹ James Burns, C.S.C., "A Constructive Policy for Higher Education," *Catholic Educational Review* 18 (October 1920): 458–68. This paper was also published in *Catholic Educational Association Bulletin* 17 (November 1920): 46–56. For another summary of the paper, see Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 78–80.

and international finance, “the center of gravity has shifted from Europe to this side of the Atlantic,” and a corresponding shift was underway in education. “Before the war,” Burns explained, “Germany was the school-mistress of the world. Students from every civilized land thronged to her universities.” But “the United States has now become the new international Mecca for university students. Students are flocking to us from every quarter of the globe,” signifying “the beginning of a new educational era for the United States.” Burns reported that the leading institutions of higher education in the United States were expanding their capacities to ensure the highest academic standards. He exhorted Catholic educators to do the same by expanding their recruitment for graduate and professional programs, offering substantial scholarships to talented students, and upgrading the quality of teaching. While these were familiar refrains among educators in the United States in general, Burns urged his colleagues to take up these challenges for distinctly Catholic reasons: “If America is to become the center of intellectual life of the new civilization which is arising out of the cataclysm of the Great War, it will occur only through the superior power and intellectual productivity of American scholars.” The problem was that “as a nation we have devoted ourselves chiefly to the practical side of human life,” and most colleges and universities had followed suit, had allowed their schools to be shaped by a pragmatic spirit. This was where Catholic educators had something unique to offer in U.S. higher education, in that their schools focused on “the higher things of the mind,” philosophy, literature, poetry, pure science, and art. According to Burns’s diagnosis, the nation was confused due to an intellectual and cultural vacuum, and Catholic colleges had the wherewithal to fill it. This would not have been possible twenty years earlier, he pointed out, but in recent years, at long last, Catholic educators had developed their colleges and universities into institutions capable of meeting the challenge. “It remains,” Burns declared, “only to breathe into them this breath of the higher academic life which is necessary to give them name and place as essential units in the new intellectual order within the nation.”¹² In other words, with the United States on the ascendancy in the world, its colleges and universities would shape its intellectual vision, and Catholics had the duty of injecting into this vision the depth and wisdom of their tradition. For Burns, Catholic education thus had a mission to both God and country.

Burns’s exhortation would have struck most educators and scholars in the United States as fanciful and bizarre. But to Catholic educators, it made perfect sense, owing to the constellation of ideas that shaped their

¹² Burns, “A Constructive Policy,” 467.

self-understood mission. As Gleason explains, this mission was shaped by the “Neoscholastic Revival” sparked by Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1878). In the United States, this revival did not catch on until after the Great War. But when it finally did catch on, it quickly pervaded every facet of Catholic intellectual life, infusing it with the confidence of missionary zeal.¹³ This confidence was founded on the philosophy Catholics espoused, the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, which established seven interrelated intellectual convictions: (1) that the existence of God can be known through reason, providing us with a natural theology and the preambles of faith; (2) that the mind conforms to external objects such that it is capable of discerning order and intelligibility in the universe; (3) that people are capable of discerning a divine purpose to the universe by virtue of its being implanted in creation and imprinted on the human heart, which thus provides a reliable basis for a stable, practical philosophy of life; (4) that this divine purpose provides the foundation for a philosophy of the whole of society as well, of morality, law, politics, economics, society, and culture; (5) that these aspects of life can be brought together into a unified, harmoniously ordered intellectual vision; (6) that this intellectual vision is centered on God, so all that all things must be viewed, not only through reason, but also under the aspect of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*), thus infusing this intellectual vision with a religious dimension that can only be grasped by means of prayer, worship, and contemplation; and (7) that this religious dimension unites the philosophical, literary, aesthetic, and even mystical elements of life, thereby infusing this intellectual vision with a sense of personal piety and communal membership in the Mystical Body of Christ.¹⁴ In the years after World War I, these seven features characterized the Catholic intellectual vision worldwide, but as Catholic scholars in the United States disseminated this vision, they shaped it with a distinctly American agenda: providing the nation with the intellectual and moral foundations that alone could enable it to flourish.

In taking on this agenda, philosophy held pride of place as the centerpiece of the Catholic curriculum, the core discipline that establishes the principles and places into proper perspective all knowledge gained in the liberal arts, the natural sciences, and the newly emerging social sciences. In light of the intellectual convictions enumerated by Gleason, it is easy to identify the philosophical opposition: figures such as Descartes, Hume, Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, Dewey, and James; and schools of thought such as

¹³ A general account of the intellectual agenda of Neoscholasticism is provided in Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 105–23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 118–123.

rationalism, skepticism, naturalism, empiricism, pragmatism, and, worst of all, atheism. Against these figures and schools of thought that dominated the intellectual scene, Catholics brought forth the philosophy Aquinas and his scholastic successors, Cajetan, Bellarmine, and Suarez, to counter the deleterious currents of modern thought. For this purpose, several academic journals were founded: *The Modern Schoolman* in 1925, *Thought* in 1926, and *The New Scholasticism* in 1927, each dedicated to injecting Neoscholastic principles and methods into the intellectual mainstream of the nation.¹⁵ The preponderance of articles published in these journals set forth Neoscholastic views on a number of technical philosophical matters, in keeping with the comprehensive agenda. At the same time, these journals allotted considerable space for addressing ideas and issues pertaining to what was then referred to as “social reconstruction,” what we now call “Catholic social thought” or “Catholic social ethics.”

The broad purpose of such articles was three-fold: to show that these modern philosophies were alien to the American spirit; to show that, if unchallenged, they would undermine the intellectual foundations of the nation; and to show that Neoscholastic philosophy can restore the intellectual principles upon which the nation was founded. On this last point, a sampling of titles of journal articles reflects the vision pursued during this period: “The Monroe Doctrine and Scholastic Ethics,” “The Constitution and Natural Law,” “Natural Foundations of the Political Philosophy of St. Thomas,” “St. Thomas Aquinas and the Constitution.”¹⁶ As Catholic philosophers of the 1920s and 1930s saw it, a fundamental harmony exists between Scholasticism and what Gleason terms “Americanism.”¹⁷

How, one might ask, could Catholic scholars imagine that the dusty, medieval philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas would restore the founding principles of the *novus ordo saeculorum* of the United States? How could Neoscholasticism be reconciled with the central tenets of a nation that was obviously established on Reformation ecclesiology, Enlightenment philosophy, or both? The answer was provided by Catholic scholars in another academic discipline, the most powerful of all for shaping the imagination of Catholic scholars in the United States: the discipline of History.

¹⁵ Ibid., 135–36, 127. See also Halsey, *Survival of American Innocence*, 143–45.

¹⁶ Patrick J. Holloran, “The Monroe Doctrine and Scholastic Ethics,” *Modern Schoolman* 5 (May 1929): 9–10; Lawrence Chiminatto, “The Constitution and Natural Law,” *Modern Schoolman* 9 (January 1932): 30–32; Walter Farrell, O.P., “Natural Foundations of the Political Philosophy of St. Thomas,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 7 (1931): 75–85; J. Moss Ives, “St. Thomas Aquinas and the Constitution,” *Thought* 12 (December 1937): 567–86.

¹⁷ Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 125.

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, Catholic historians had been busy gathering the facts that made up the grand narrative of Catholicism in the United States. Typically, the narratives begin with the Spanish and French missions in America, but then they turn to the British colonies, one especially: Maryland. Why Maryland? Because there the first laws protecting religious freedom were enacted, in the Act of Toleration of 1649, which, in the causal sequences established by the narrative, prefigured the Virginia Declaration of Rights, penned by Thomas Jefferson, which in turn laid the groundwork for the Declaration of Independence. A unique cast of characters populates this typical plot line: Christopher Columbus, enterprising missionary of the Faith; Bartolome de las Casas, Dominican defender of human rights; George and Cecil Calvert, founders of Maryland and architects of religious freedom; Charles Carroll, Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence; his cousin John, first archbishop in the new nation and founder of Georgetown University; and countless others who worked for the welfare of the nation and fended off its enemies in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, and the Spanish American War.

This narrative was standard among Catholic thinkers. But the historical narratives themselves were judged by professional historians to be amateurish in quality. Catholic historians sought to rectify this problem by establishing the American Catholic Historical Association in 1915. Under the leadership of Fr. Peter Guilday at Catholic University, they dedicated themselves to applying the methods of professional history to bolster this narrative with objective, scientifically verified facts, while at the same time showing how these facts displayed the past power and future promise of Neoscholastic philosophy. A central theme was that Neoscholastic political philosophy was at work in founding the United States. Catholic historians in the post–Great–War years used the most up-to-date methods to highlight a story line that goes as follows: in erecting a government based on popular sovereignty, separation of powers, and the Bill of Rights, especially the free exercise of religion, the Founding Fathers worked unwittingly under the influence of Aquinas and the scholastics Bellarmine and Suarez, whose philosophy was passed on to the English Whigs, then to Madison, Hamilton, Jefferson, and other U.S. founders, who designed a limited state the laws of which would conform to the antecedent authority of the natural law.¹⁸ In a real yet hidden way, therefore, the U.S. founding was a Catholic achievement, a Catholic

¹⁸ For a summary of this general movement and some of the representative texts involved, see Michael J. Baxter, “In Service to the Nation” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1996), 200–247.

production. Given the logic of this narrative, it made sense—philosophically sound, historically verified, common sense—for Catholic scholars to argue that their philosophy was needed to restore the principles on which America was founded.

Historians of Catholicism in the United States often describe the Church in the post–World War I years as a ghetto or subculture set apart from the mainstream, and they often include Catholic scholarship under this description. While there is ample evidence for such a description on sociological grounds, surely it must be granted, in the name of historical empathy, that Catholic scholars saw themselves as moving *into* the mainstream. This was the attitude they took in expanding their institutions, especially on the graduate level, which, in Gleason’s words, reached “mass production levels” in granting master’s and doctoral degrees.¹⁹ Moreover, this period saw the proliferation of Catholic professional societies: the American Catholic Philosophical Association (1926), the Catholic Anthropological Association (1928), the Catholic Poetry Society of America (1931), the American Catholic Sociological Society (1938), and the Catholic Economic Association (1941), among others. These organizations supplied professionally trained teachers and scholars who, as a 1928 National Catholic Education Association report on graduate education put it, would disseminate the “Catholic viewpoint” as “an indispensable factor in our civilization and culture.”²⁰ “An indispensable factor”—that is, American civilization needs “the Catholic viewpoint,” the two merging into a mutual, symbiotic relationship of God and country.

The rise of totalitarianism in the 1930s and the onset of the World War II only confirmed Catholic scholars and educators in their self-appointed mission. In this period, not surprisingly, the attention of Catholic scholars was directed with urgency to matters of political philosophy and democratic government. But here Catholic scholars faced a serious problem. In Catholic doctrine, church-state separation was seen as a concession to unavoidable historical circumstances rather than the preferred political arrangement. The preferred political arrangement was one in which the Catholic Church receives direct and official support from the government while other denominations and religions are merely tolerated. Needless to say, this doctrine was not welcomed by advocates of U.S. democracy. The Church was perceived as an enemy—as *the* enemy—of political freedom. In the nineteenth century, liberal-minded Catholic thinkers in Europe held that while this teaching must be endorsed in

¹⁹ Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 172.

²⁰ *National Catholic Educational Association Bulletin* 26 (November 1929): 71–81, quoted in Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 175.

principle, it need not apply in fact, a strategy derived from a pamphlet by Felix Doupanloup, bishop of Orléans, France, who affirmed the teaching in theory (*en thèse*) but not in practice (*en hypothèse*). In the early twentieth century in the United States, this strategy was deployed by Msgr. Ryan in a book on church and state published in 1922. He argued that the teaching does not apply in the United States since Catholics do not constitute a majority of the population, and to the charge that Catholics could one day claim a majority, owing to their propensity to produce so many children, Ryan simply dismissed the prospect as fanciful. In such ways, official Catholic teaching on church and state could be dismissed as an unworkable ideal, relegated to the realm of pure theory. But by the mid-twentieth century, it had become clear that these evasive strategies were woefully inadequate in the face of critics of Catholicism such as Paul Blanchard. Moreover, this doctrine was seen as woefully inadequate in the light of the experience of Catholics in the United States, where government had long protected their right to religious freedom.²¹ So Catholics set out to revise Catholic teaching on church and state.

This shift in the thought of Catholic political theorists is most vividly exemplified in the life and thought of John Courtney Murray. A Jesuit theologian and philosopher at Woodstock in Maryland, founding editor of *Theological Studies*, and a leading light for the Catholic intellectuals of his generation, Murray is often regarded as the most important Catholic political thinker of his generation, and with good reason. For a quarter century, from the early 1940s until the mid 1960s, in a string of scholarly articles in *Theological Studies* and in scores of popular essays, Murray argued that the church-state relationship codified in the Constitution is not in conflict with Catholic political theory, as official teaching held, but is in fact in continuity with it. This is because the Constitution articulated in written form the ancient principles that hitherto had been set forth merely in medieval British common law: the primacy of the spiritual over the temporal order, the obligation of government to provide for the freedom of the church, and the limited competency of the state in religious matters. The official teaching, set forth by Leo XIII in 1884 in the encyclical *Immortale Dei*, was designed to preserve these principles amid the church's struggle against the oppressive monarchies of Europe on the one hand and the tyrannical revolutionary regimes on the other. But here in the United States, Murray argued, a third political alternative had emerged, a government shaped by the moderate liberalism of the British Western constitutional tradition, a tradition that posited two

²¹ John McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 166–88.

realms, the sacred and the secular, within which both church and state could operate unimpeded by the other. In this arrangement, Catholics were free to pursue their religious practices and beliefs, and also free to participate in civil affairs and contribute to the public philosophy of the nation, guided by the principles of natural law which, Murray held, are not derived from Catholic presuppositions and thus could provide a basis for public philosophy and policy in a religiously pluralistic society. Here was a new constitutional arrangement, without precedent, made possible by humanity's growth into political maturity, marking a turning point in history. Indeed, for Murray, the U.S. founding was providential.²²

Murray's work has often been portrayed as groundbreaking in the area Catholic political thought, owing in large part to the opposition he encountered by his opponents Francis Connell and Francis Fenton and to his being prohibited by Church authorities to publish on the vexed matter of church-state relations. But anyone familiar with the work of the Neoscholastics in the United States of 1920s and 1930s will see that his ideas were prefigured by his predecessors. The same scenario is envisioned, the same actors receive the same parts to play in the drama. The United States was founded on principles derived from medieval political theory, assimilated and transmitted by the English Whigs to the founding fathers (at one point, Murray repeats Lord Acton's description of Aquinas as "the first Whig").²³ But the nation is now in crisis because of the influx of philosophies alien to the American spirit, materialism, pragmatism, skepticism, atheism. Therefore Catholics, with their rich tradition of learning and scholarship, now have a duty to infuse the nation with the intellectual principles that are needed for its restoration and well-being.

Given the pervasiveness of this drama of national crisis and Catholic mission, it is no surprise that the argument and agenda taken up by Murray was pursued, less directly and controversially, by other Catholic scholars of this period. Most prominent among these were Jacques Maritain, Yves Simon, and Heinrich Rommen, who brought a renewed and more compelling version of Thomism to the task of demonstrating a natural-law basis for democratic government. As refugees from European fascism, they saw the urgency of the task. At the same time, having confronted first hand the legacy of the French Revolution, they understood the dangers of

²² For a summary of Murray, see Baxter, "In Service to the Nation," 372–414; see also Michael J. Baxter, "John Courtney Murray," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 150–64.

²³ John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 43–57, 47.

popular sovereignty in the context of a multitude not properly formed in the virtues of citizenship.²⁴ Along with these was a host of scholars in the United States, such as Walter Farrell, O.P., who (with Mortimer Adler) pursued various aspects of this large project of showing how natural law provides a sound philosophical basis for democracy.²⁵

This broad project was at work in several efforts at Notre Dame during these years that can only be mentioned in passing. There was, for example, the founding of *The Review of Politics* in 1939, with a lead article by Maritain on the crisis facing the West.²⁶ In the years to come, many articles on the philosophy of government would appear in its pages.²⁷ There was also the founding of the Notre Dame Law School's Natural Law Institute in 1947 and *The Natural Law Forum* in 1956, a journal of jurisprudence dedicated to showing the relevance of natural law in the theory and practice of civil law. And there was the work of political theorists, mainly in the departments of philosophy and government too numerous to mention, whose work took up this comprehensive agenda of establishing the link between Neoscholastic philosophy and the political arrangement on which the nation was founded and must be governed. But I want to draw attention to the work of an historian during these years at Notre Dame, namely, Fr. Thomas T. McAvoy, C.S.C., author of *The Great Crisis of American Catholic History, 1895–1900*.²⁸

²⁴ See for example Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, trans. Joseph Evans (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968); idem, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); idem, *Reflections on America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); Yves Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); idem, *A General Theory of Authority* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962); idem, *The Tradition of Natural Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1965); Heinrich Rommen, *The State in Catholic Thought* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1945).

²⁵ See for example Mortimer J. Adler and Walter Farrell, O.P., "The Theory of Democracy," *The Thomist* 3 (July 1941): 397–449; "The Theory of Democracy, Part II," *The Thomist* 3 (October 1941): 588–652; "The Theory of Democracy, Part III," *The Thomist* 4 (January 1942): 121–81, and (April 1942): 286–354; "The Theory of Democracy, Part IV," *The Thomist* 4 (July 1942): 446–522, and (October 1942): 692–761, and *The Thomist* 6 (April 1943): 49–118, and (July 1943): 251–77; "The Theory of Democracy, Part V," *The Thomist* 6 (October 1943): 367–407, and *The Thomist* 7 (January 1944): 80–131.

²⁶ Jacques Maritain, "Integral Humanism and the Crisis of Modern Times," *The Review of Politics* 1 (January 1939): 1–17.

²⁷ An excellent collection of these articles can be found in *The Crisis of Modern Times: Perspectives from The Review of Politics, 1939–1962*, ed. A. James McAdams (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

²⁸ Thomas T. McAvoy, C.S.C., *The Great Crisis in American Catholic History, 1895–1900* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1957).

McAvoy's book is still regarded as the definitive history of the events leading to Pope Leo XIII's condemnation of "Americanism" in 1899. It lays the basis for viewing Leo's action as resulting more from his concern with the Church's political position in France than with genuine misgivings about U.S. culture and politics, thus demonstrating that Americanism was a "phantom heresy." The upshot of this interpretation was that Catholics need not hesitate to take on fully American identities and roles. Indeed, just as the Americanists, Cardinal James Gibbons, Archbishop John Ireland, and their allies, had insisted half a century before, Catholics now, in the post-World War II era, must work their way into the American mainstream. McAvoy's work, along with that of historian John Tracy Ellis at Catholic University and also the work of Ellis's many students, provided an historical precedent that freed Catholics to do so.²⁹ As McAvoy saw it, the stakes were high, as he makes clear at the end of his book. Noting the unfounded basis for the condemnation of Americanism and the crucial contribution of American Catholicism to the Church's mission worldwide, he writes:

To have hoped that the conservative and more traditional—as some might say sacristarian—Catholicism of western Europe would accept the practical, rough, and democratic notions of American Catholicism in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, probably was too much to ask. It was unfortunate that there was not a better exchange of ideas between these two Catholic peoples. Only after fifty years, despite continuing agreement on essentials, have European Catholics been urging the social and practical reforms which Americans have always found rather easy. And American Catholicism is growing in theological awareness, in liturgical splendor, and in the appreciation of the high cultural inheritance of the older Catholic communities of western Europe. The exchange has only begun even in this day. May this study of the past failures do away with a few obstacles which had little to do with the essentials of religion and promote a union of Western Christendom in the present battle against the great atheistic heresy of the age.³⁰

That was written in 1957, at the height of the Cold War.

By this time, it had been five years since Fr. John Cavanaugh reached into the pocket of his cassock, pulled out his office key, and handed it to his successor, with the words: "By the way, I promised to give a talk

²⁹ For more on what he calls the "phantom heresy historians," see William L. Portier, "Americanism and Inculturation: 1899–1999," *Communio* 27 (Spring 2000): 139–60.

³⁰ McAvoy, *The Great Crisis*, 366.

tonight to the Catholic Family Movement over at Veterans Hall. Now that you're the president, you have to do it. Good luck. I'm off to New York."³¹ So began the presidency at Notre Dame of Fr. Ted Hesburgh, C.S.C., as recalled in his memoir. The title of the memoir is taken from the motto with which our story began. Walking out from his ordination in 1943, Fr. Hesburgh recalls pausing "at the sculptured east door of Sacred Heart, a memorial to the Notre Dame men who had given their lives in World War I" and reading "the dedication above the door: GOD, COUNTRY, NOTRE DAME. I would dedicate my life to that trinity, too."³² After studies at Catholic University, Fr. Hesburgh returned to Notre Dame to teach, counsel students, serve as chaplain to the veteran-students and their families on campus, and eventually to serve as vice-president for three years, before becoming president. While settling into his office and new position, he asked, "What did I want to accomplish for Notre Dame?" The answer came back "silently as a kind of vision": Notre Dame as a great *Catholic* university, the greatest in the world! There were many distinguished universities in our country and in Europe, but not since the Middle Ages had there been a great Catholic university. The road was open for Notre Dame, I told myself."³³ The rest, so they say, is history.

The Hesburgh years were years of monumental growth. The goal of developing Notre Dame into a "great university" meant developing great faculty, students, facilities, Fr. Hesburgh relates, all of which meant developing a great endowment. So his newly assembled team initiated the Notre Dame Foundation and sought funds from leaders in the business world and from various foundations. It also meant replacing or reorganizing departments, colleges, and institutes, and starting new ones. So his team went to work developing various departments (physics and math), colleges (engineering and business), institutes (history and economic research) and other "units," as they are now called, such as the law school and the bacteriology lab. It was a time of "tremendous progress"; "year after year," Hesburgh recalls, "we attracted better people, bigger grants, more endowed chairs, and raised admission standards for students."³⁴ At the same time, Hesburgh became a leader in education beyond the Notre Dame campus, serving on the board of numerous associations and foundations. The watchword in education at the time was "excellence." When the Soviet Union launched the Sputnik in 1957, political and public

³¹ Theodore M. Hesburgh (with Jerry Reedy), *God, Country, Notre Dame: The Autobiography of Theodore M. Hesburgh* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 60.

³² *Ibid.*, 38.

³³ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

leaders in the United States issued reports and established funds for, in the name of a Rockefeller Fund report, the pursuit of excellence.³⁵ Hesburgh brought this pursuit of excellence to his efforts at Notre Dame. The aim was to raise the level of its scholarship to that of the Ivy Leagues. Noting its focus on undergraduate education and its small but prestigious graduate programs, Hesburgh admits: “we wanted to be a Catholic Princeton.”³⁶ Both words were important. The goal was a Catholic *Princeton*, but also a *Catholic* Princeton. With this latter goal in mind, only a few months after taking office, Fr. Hesburgh initiated a self-study aimed at integrating the College of Arts and Letters around a core of courses in Neoscholastic philosophy and theology.³⁷ Moreover, as in most every Catholic college and university, Notre Dame students were required to take a pre-set order of courses in philosophy, and the department, of course, was overwhelmingly Thomist in orientation. It was assumed, taken as a premise, that Notre Dame’s educational mission would be shaped by the Neoscholastic vision.

This dual understanding was also central to the efforts of Catholic educators to upgrade their institutions in these years. In 1955, Fr. John Tracy Ellis rocked the Catholic intellectual world with a broadside critique of the low level of scholarship at Catholic institutions of higher learning, chiding them for failing in “their responsibilities to the incomparable tradition of Catholic learning of which they are the direct heirs.” Catholics, he maintained, are the bearers of “the oldest, wisest, and most sublime tradition of learning that the world has ever known.” As such they are uniquely situated to contribute to the effort already underway in the nation “to restore ‘religious and moral values . . . [to] the honored place they once occupied.’”³⁸ As Gleason notes, Ellis’s point was that Catholic scholars should produce and disseminate scholarship in keeping with their unique intellectual tradition, which the nation needed. A similar assumption was operative in a controversial talk given two years later, by Fr. John Cavanaugh, C.S.C., predecessor to Hesburgh. Echoing Shuster’s question in 1925 (“Are there any Catholic scholars?”), Cavanaugh asked, “Where are the Catholic Salks, Oppenheims, Einsteins?” Both Ellis and Cavanaugh shared the same assumption of their predecessors in the Twenties and Thirties enhancing the level of Catholics scholarship would contribute to the welfare of the nation.

Catholic educators in the Fifties were confident that their institutions would be able to rise to the challenge. In 1960, the election of Kennedy

³⁵ Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 295.

³⁶ Hesburgh, *God, Country, Notre Dame*, 70.

³⁷ Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 295–96.

³⁸ This summary, the wording as well as the content, is taken largely from *ibid.*, 290.

as president only bolstered their confidence. Moreover, shortly thereafter, the Second Vatican Council convened and deliberations indicated far reaching changes and renewal in the Church. By the end of the Council, it was clear that the Catholics in the United States had had an unmistakable impact. The Declaration on Religious Freedom, issued on December 8, 1965, seemed to affirm what they had been saying for decades. Indeed, Murray himself penned much of the document. All of this gave Catholics in the United States good reason to believe they were entering the U.S. mainstream, and Catholic educators on the university and college level had reason to believe that they had facilitated this process. Like the Church in general in the United States, Catholic higher education was “coming of age.” And yet, it was precisely in this period that tensions emerged between the traditional Neoscholastic curriculum and the claims of academic freedom, leading to, in Gleason’s words, “the splintering of the Scholastic synthesis.”³⁹

As Gleason explains, the synthesis was undergoing serious internal tensions already, because of conflicting schools of thought in Thomism—existential, personalist, transcendental, and so on—but the primary factor was the emergence of new conceptions of freedom. Individual departments called for more autonomy. More and more scholars called for more freedom in the Church. Debates erupted on Catholic campuses, sparked by controversies involving theologians such as Hans Kung and Charles Curran. Moreover, in the nation at large, the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam gave added urgency to calls for more latitude in ecclesial and political affairs. “Freedom” became the watchword. All this spilled over onto Catholic campuses, where calls for freedom were seen as part of the post-conciliar movement toward a world-embracing posture on the part of the Church. This trend led educators to work purposely toward secularizing their institutions, laicizing them, turning them over to lay boards of trustees. The leader here was Fr. Hesburgh, who gathered a group of educators to formulate the widely noted Land O’Lakes statement, calling for “institutional autonomy and academic freedom” of Catholic colleges and universities. This marked a drastic institutional break with the past. Virtually all Catholic colleges and universities in the nation had been founded by religious orders. Now they would be juridically detached from their founding religious communities. Along with this legal separation, the intellectual movement in favor of academic freedom led to a clear break with the Neoscholastic synthesis that had shaped the mission of Catholic higher education for four decades.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 297–304.

Gleason's history concludes on a wistful note. The last chapter, "The End of An Era," reports on a search for identity of Catholic colleges and universities that began in the 1960s and continues to this day.⁴¹ But in Gleason's concluding reflections, a clue can be found for a way forward amid this search for identity. He writes that "the task facing Catholic academics today is to forge from the philosophical and theological resources uncovered in the past half-century a vision that will provide what Neoscholasticism did for so many years—a theoretical rationale for the existence of Catholic colleges and universities as a distinctive element in American higher education."⁴² In the second part of my essay, I will argue that the resources needed to accomplish it are found in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, but employing them entails reordering the missionary priorities of the motto on the Basilica's east door.

2. Thomistic Aristotelianism and the Mission of Catholic Higher Education Today

Gleason's history shows that throughout the twentieth century, leaders in Catholic higher education in the United States struggled mightily to adapt a Scholastic intellectual vision to the standard modern curriculum, and that their efforts eventually failed. In the concluding chapter of *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*, Alasdair MacIntyre observes that these efforts were bound to fail, not because Catholic educators did not try hard enough, but because it was simply not possible, owing to the nature of the modern research university.⁴³

In making this observation, MacIntyre notes that the modern research university has been successful in three ways. First, it has succeeded in the area of research, bringing researchers together so their skills and expertise can be used to solve the problems that are put before them by the agencies that fund the research. Second, it has succeeded in providing the professionalized human resources needed in an advanced capitalist society: research scientists, physicians, economists, lawyers, MBAs, engineers, advertising and public relations experts, and so on. Third, it has succeeded in becoming richer, because of the massive funding provided by governments, corporations, and wealthy donors, and more expensive, because universities charge what the market will bear.⁴⁴ Anyone familiar with MacIntyre's longstanding disdain of capitalism and the modern liberal

⁴¹ Ibid., 305–22.

⁴² Ibid., 22.

⁴³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 173–74.

state knows that these successes are, from his perspective, symptomatic of far more serious moral failures, such as embracing the vice of acquisitiveness or succumbing to the repressive bureaucratic power. But for MacIntyre, these moral failures are entailed in a serious intellectual failure as well. The failure is this: the modern research university lacks a single, albeit complex, unitary intellectual vision, an integrated conception of all knowledge, of the whole—in which case, the modern research university is actually not a university at all.

MacIntyre explains the condition of the typical modern research university as follows:

What disappears from view in such universities, and what significantly differentiates them from many of their predecessors, is twofold: first, any large sense of and concern for enquiry into the relationships between the disciplines and, second, any conception of the disciplines as each contributing to a single shared enterprise, one whose principal aim is neither to benefit the economy or to advance the careers of its students, but rather to achieve for teachers and students alike a certain kind of shared understanding. Universities have become, perhaps irremediably, fragmented and partitioned institutions, better named “multiversities,” as Clark Kerr suggested almost fifty years ago. I remarked of Aquinas, and I could equally well have remarked of Newman [here MacIntyre is referring to earlier chapters in the book], that his conception of the university was informed by his conception of the universe. By contrast the conception of the university presupposed by and embodied in the institutional forms and activities of contemporary research universities is not just one that has nothing much to do with any particular conception of the universe, but one that suggests strongly that there is no such thing as the universe, no whole of which the subject matters studied by the various disciplines are all parts or aspects, but instead just a multifarious set of assorted subject matters.⁴⁵

As a result, MacIntyre goes on to observe, knowledge gained from the various academic disciplines remains disintegrated. What we know about human beings from intellectual inquiry in, say, physics, chemistry, biology, history, economics, literature, and the arts is not brought together into a unified whole. No sustained, systematic effort is made to see how knowledge gained from the different disciplines is interrelated and can contribute to a conception of ourselves and our place in nature and the universe. Attempts to do so are initiated by individual or small groups of scholars, usually in a piecemeal fashion, but not in a systematic, institutionally sponsored, university-wide manner. Questions about the human person,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

nature, the universe, God, often go unheard or are never even really posed in a serious way.⁴⁶

To anyone familiar with how the modern research university functions—not how it is depicted by administrators, fund-raisers, and public relations officers, but how it in fact functions—MacIntyre's observations are unremarkable, nothing more than an accurate description of present conditions. But his observations become very remarkable when set against the history that he narrates in the previous eighteen chapters of his book. In this history, MacIntyre shows that philosophy has long performed a central role in the intellectual life of universities, and that, when it comes to universities shaped by Catholic faith and tradition, it *must* perform this central role. The central figure in this history is, of course, Thomas Aquinas, whose importance he conveys by explaining the context within which he worked and the conflicts he sought to resolve.

In the thirteenth century, MacIntyre explains, the texts of Aristotle had only recently been translated and introduced to the Latin West. Not surprisingly, given the novelty of these texts, controversies arose among theologians over whether or not, or to what extent and in what ways, Aristotelian philosophy could help in understanding the natural world and the human mind's engagement with it without contradicting the truths revealed by God and affirmed in Church tradition. Many Augustinian theologians stoutly rejected Aristotelianism for positing philosophical standards and methods that operate independently of theology and for advancing what they held to be erroneous claims concerning the eternity of the universe, the relationship of soul and body, and human happiness. In response, many Aristotelians, following the Islamic philosopher Averroes, propounded a doctrine of two truths, one pertaining to the realm of philosophy, the other to theology, thus making it possible to affirm seemingly contradictory claims of Aristotle and Augustine. Against both these positions—the Augustinians' outright rejection of Aristotelianism and the Averroists' evasive endorsement of it—Aquinas argued for a unitary concept of truth, one that allowed for distinct domains of inquiry, each with its own standards for determining what is true and false; yet he also argued that what is true in each domain must be related to what is true in the others and to what is known to be true by revelation. In working out this unitary concept of truth comprehensively and in detail, Aquinas refuted the Averroist attempt to insulate theology from philosophy and the natural sciences, and he refuted it on Aristotelian grounds, yet without undermining the Augustinian framework to which he subscribed. In this

⁴⁶ Ibid., 174–75.

way, Aquinas integrated the philosophy of Aristotle and the theology of Augustine. His detailed accounts of nature, of the causes of finite things, of the proper methods of rational deliberation, and of the cardinal virtues, indicate the importance of reason for understanding the created world and our place in it. His accounts of the eternal, natural, divine, and positive law; of our last end; and of the theological virtues, especially charity as the form of the virtues—these show that a purely secular understanding of the moral and intellectual life is inadequate and incomplete. Thus for Aquinas, there is an intrinsic interdependence among what we know of the natural world, of human nature, and of God.⁴⁷

MacIntyre maintains that this integrated intellectual vision was reflected in the curriculum of the University of Paris as it developed over the course of the thirteenth century. The older liberal arts curriculum was gradually transformed into a course of study structured by the assumptions and methods of Aristotelian philosophy. Not that all students became proficient philosophers. Students then and there, like students today, often pursued their studies in order to qualify for a future career, and for that reason alone. Nevertheless, at the University of Paris (and at Oxford, where similar developments took hold), students could engage in university study so as to be directed toward achieving their final end as human beings, a perfected understanding. For Aquinas, there was a prescribed order to this study, beginning with grammar and logic, then mathematics, then the natural sciences, then moral and political philosophy, and then metaphysics and theology. This was meant to correlate students' studies with their readiness, intellectually and experientially, to learn what they needed to learn at a given stage (or age). Moral philosophy, for example, requires a degree of reflectiveness about one's passions that younger students typically do not yet possess; and only after that stage do students possess the strength of intellect required for metaphysics and theology. The purpose was to develop not only students' knowledge of the various subjects, but also their ability to continue learning after leaving the university, that is, to become self-teachers, to become independent theoretical and practical reasoners. The crucial aspect of this understanding of a university is that it entailed a definite understanding of reality, of the purpose of life itself. "The ends of education," MacIntyre notes, "can, on Aquinas' view, be correctly developed only with reference to the final end of human beings and the ordering of the curriculum has to be an ordering to that end. We are able to understand what the university should be, only if we understand what the universe is."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66–95.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 95, 93–95.

MacIntyre is careful not to exaggerate the influence of Aquinas in his own day or subsequently. Several propositions held by him were condemned shortly after his death. Most Augustinian theologians, especially those in the Franciscan tradition, regarded him as just another Averroist. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Aquinas's thought was one among many approaches to philosophy and theology, an important one in Dominican circles but overshadowed in other settings by Scotus or Ockham.⁴⁹ The sixteenth century saw further developments in Thomist thought, most notably in the work of Vitoria, who used it to engage disputed questions on law and politics. But that century also saw an expansion of the philosophical traditions of Scotus and of Ockham. Moreover, Suarez, often considered the most representative Scholastic figure in this era, advanced a philosophy that was not Thomist, nor for that matter was it in line with Scotus or Ockham. Moreover, because of the many unresolved disagreements among these various philosophical traditions, this period also saw a strong revival of skepticism, the leading figure being Montaigne. In response to the uncertainty of skepticism regarding things theological, philosophical, and scientific, the need arose, in the minds of some, to ground truth claims in the foundations of reason.⁵⁰ This was the task taken up in the seventeenth century by Descartes, whose rationalist attempt at certitude generated opponents, such as Pascal and followers such as Arnauld, both of whom were Catholics.⁵¹ But by the beginning of the eighteenth century, Catholic thinkers ceased to respond to the challenges of modern philosophy, and thus ceased having an impact on its development, and this led to their marginalization—or more accurately, their self-marginalization—which continued into the mid-nineteenth century. Thus MacIntyre depicts the historical interval 1700–1850 with the subheading “The Catholic Absence from and Return to Philosophy, 1700–1850.”⁵²

The “return,” as MacIntyre tells the story, was initiated by two philosophers who responded systematically to the Cartesian and Kantian philosophy at the time, Antonio Rosmini-Serbaty and John Henry Newman. Rosmini argued that the idea of being carries with it an objectivity, unity, and intelligibility that provides the basis for the necessity of divine existence. His argument failed to convince skeptical philosophers, and at the same time drew charges of pantheism from theologians.⁵³ Newman

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 97–102.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 105–11.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 113–28.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 131–36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 133.

argued that all fields of knowledge are governed by philosophical claims and that it is the task of philosophy as a distinct field to understand the interrelationship of knowledge in the other fields and to show how they all can be related to knowledge of God. But while his argument did much to define the tasks confronting philosophy, it did not identify the philosophical resources needed to carry out those tasks.⁵⁴ “The problem,” MacIntyre writes, “was that far too much of the Catholic philosophical past had been effectively forgotten by Catholics. What was therefore needed was first to remedy their philosophical loss of memory. That remedy was to be supplied by someone who was—an unlikely and rare conjunction—both a pope and a philosopher, Leo XIII.”⁵⁵

The reference here is to Leo XIII and his encyclical *Aeterni Patri*, calling for the revival of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. MacIntyre regards the promulgation of *Aeterni Patri* as a monumental event in the history of philosophy because it identified the errors of modern philosophy, called for rebutting them on the basis of reason, and argued that reason operates rightly only when it presupposes and is guided by faith.⁵⁶ This agenda, he explains, was taken up by some Catholic philosophers with little competence and imagination in the manner of the textbook or manual approach; but others took up the task in a manner worthy of the philosophical tradition they sought to advance. Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, Gabriel Marcel, Edith Stein, Elizabeth Anscombe—each of these philosophers engaged one or another version of Thomism with key aspects of modern philosophy, resulting in an extended conversation attending to questions about the place of humans within nature, the nature of the human good, humanity’s final end, and the existence of God. In addressing these questions, the Thomist tradition exposes the errors of schools of modern philosophical thought—materialism, naturalism, idealism, relativism, and so on—and at the same time shows that reason confirms what we know to be true about human life as revealed by God and taught by the Catholic Church. This philosophical task is affirmed by John Paul II in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, the publication of which marks the final chapter in MacIntyre’s brief history of Catholic philosophy. It is only at this point that MacIntyre describes the modern research university, thus making clear that the present task of Catholic philosophy is daunting to say the least, requiring nothing less than a full scale reconstruction of the university curriculum so that it may again sponsor inquiry into the relationship of knowledge in the arts, the social

⁵⁴ Ibid., 136–50.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 150.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 151–54.

sciences, and the natural sciences, to philosophy, and knowledge in philosophy to what we know by revelation in the discipline of theology.

In many respects, MacIntyre is taking up the intellectual agenda pursued by the Thomists at Notre Dame and elsewhere in the decades after World War I. Consider the continuities: his appeal to Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patri*; his critique of figures and philosophical schools of thought dominating modern intellectual life (Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche, pragmatism, utilitarianism, and so on); his view on the interrelation of faith and reason; and his claims about the authority of the Church. At the same time, MacIntyre is arguing for serious revisions of the Thomism of the twentieth century in calling for an historicized philosophical realism, for a tradition-dependent account of rationality, for a critical analysis of the social context within which moral and intellectual inquiry occurs, and for a more probing and rigorous critique of capitalism and the modern state. These revisions derive, in large part, from what MacIntyre learned from Marx and Marxist thinkers before his embrace of Thomistic Aristotelianism.

This raises a question about the Thomists in the United States from the 1920s to the 1960s and their self-appointed task of bringing Neoscholastic philosophy to the nation. In particular, it raises a question about their claim that the Founding Fathers were heirs of a philosophical lineage tracing back to the English Whigs, to the scholastics, and to Aquinas, and about using this philosophy to restore the United States to its intellectual and moral foundations. Can this argument be made on the basis of MacIntyre's revised account of Thomism?

The short answer is no, for a reason often overlooked, even by strong adherents to MacIntyre's project. The reason is that the politics of the modern nation-state cannot sustain the virtues and forms of communal life needed for genuine human flourishing in the Aristotelian *polis*. This argument is advanced by MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, extended and expanded in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, and partially restated in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*.⁵⁷ It is also set forth in usefully distilled form in an inaugural lecture delivered by MacIntyre marking his appointment to the McMahan/Hank Chair in Philosophy at Notre Dame. Later published in *The Review of Politics*, the lecture is titled "The Privatization of Good."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

⁵⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Privatization of Good," *The Review of Politics* 52 (Summer 1990): 344–61.

MacIntyre begins the lecture by setting forth a Thomistic-Aristotelian conception of the good as that toward which members of species move in achieving their specific perfection, including the species of rational animals, humans. This entails rules for right action, derived from the end which obedience to them serves; not contingently, as if actions are externally related to the end, but necessarily, as partly constitutive of a form of life that brings one happiness. To disobey such rules in any way or degree is in that way and to that degree to separate oneself from one's good. It follows from this that rational agreement on moral rules presupposes rational agreement on the nature of the good. A political society that enjoins upon its members such rules is committed to an adequately determinate and rationally justifiable conception of the human good.

But this, MacIntyre observes, is not how things are in the advanced societies of Western modernity. In these societies, moral rules that are shared are not and cannot be rooted in a commonly held conception of the human good, because disagreements as to the good are too numerous and too fundamental. Indeed, political liberalism is predicated on the existence of such disagreements. Government is designed to remain neutral as to the rival conceptions of the good. Rules are upheld where there exists substantial public agreement, but *not* on the basis of an agreed conception of the good, and where there is no agreement, these are left to the free, rational, privately held, individual preference. Therefore, MacIntyre concludes, in liberal society, the good has been privatized.⁵⁹

MacIntyre identifies Virginia Held, Ronald Dworkin, and John Rawls as thinkers who theorize this liberal arrangement in various ways.⁶⁰ But he pays particular attention to Jeffrey Stout, arguing that the agreements in liberal society which Stout says are based on basic notions of right and wrong, what Stout calls "platitudes," are actually not fundamental agreements. As an example, he brings up lying; when one looks at specific cases, he notes, the practical reasoning involved leads to indeterminate results. Lying is permitted in some cases, not in others, and there is no agreement as to when it is and is not permitted. Nor is there any way publicly to adjudicate these agreements within the context of liberal institutions, because these institutions preclude the extended rational debate needed to do so.⁶¹

The same is true, MacIntyre argues, regarding two other issues of practical importance in our society: caring for the young and caring for the old. These issues can be adequately addressed only in light of their roles

⁵⁹ Ibid., 344–47.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 347.

⁶¹ Ibid., 348–51.

within families, within the other institutions in society, and within an overall purpose of human life. But in liberal society, these broader matters are kept out of public discussion and debate, as they must be, for they entail a single, unitary, albeit complex, conception of the good.⁶² So too with abortion, another issue which can be adequately treated only within broader contexts of the purpose of family life, the upbringing of children, and the relation of these to other social ties. Abstract the practice of abortion from these contexts and the matter gets obscured. And so it is with many important issues that cannot be adequately addressed in the public forums of liberal political order. If one wishes to present an argument from a Thomistic-Aristotelian perspective, then the argument must be translated into terms that have currency within the public forum. But what gets lost in translation is the full scope of the moral vision. As a result, important matters are discussed in a piecemeal fashion at best.⁶³

In pressing this point, MacIntyre entertains the notion that although liberal society today does not allow for full, rational debate among conflicting viewpoints on important issues, our society can sponsor such debates and has done so in the past. But this notion he dismisses as “a piece of false mythology,” and he likewise dismisses the prospect of such debates occurring now or in the future, for three reasons.⁶⁴ First, institutions of liberalism, such as the media and academia, allow debate only in a fragmented way. Second, the limited debate that does occur is controlled by procedures that are themselves shaped by liberal assumptions about the inaccessibility of the good. Third, and most importantly, “fundamental disagreement over the nature of the good is not only a matter of theoretical contention, but also and essentially of practice. . . . And practical claims cannot be made in exclusively theoretical ways.” Theorizing on practice is crucial for MacIntyre, but such theorizing is always a reflection of the practices at issue, so that “there can be no genuine abstract, merely theoretical debate between rival conceptions of the good. Such conceptions only confront one another in any decisive way, when presented within the embodied life of particular communities which exemplify each specific conception,” the embodied life, for instance, of families, parishes, schools, clinics, work places, local neighborhoods, and so on. In other words, “genuine debate between rival conceptions only occurs when the actualities of one mode of social life, embodying one such conception, are matched against the actualities of its rivals.”⁶⁵

⁶² *Ibid.*, 352–53.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 353–54.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 355.

To illustrate this point, MacIntyre returns to two issues already mentioned, lying and truth-telling, and the relationship of the young and the old—which turn out to be one and the same issue, or at least closely interrelated. Beginning with Aquinas's claim that lying is unconditionally prohibited as a sin against justice, he argues that this prohibition, like all natural-law prohibitions, is a constitutive part of all the virtues and essential to the flourishing of any human community. Much like a scientific community that imposes penalties for falsifying data, to ensure that it may engage in practical scientific inquiry, all human communities, in the Thomistic view, rely on truth-telling because without it a community cannot engage in genuine conversation and so will not progress in practical inquiry as to living the good life. This is true in families, farming and fishing villages, and any number of communities seeking to impart to the young what has been learned through experience and reflection by older members. In this sense, it is important that the young know how to learn, initially under the guidance of teachers but then eventually as lifelong learners who, in turn, can impart what they have learned to the young. This task is done by telling stories, by performing important, time-worn tasks, and by reading so as to render the past present to the next generation. It is here that education, including higher education, has an important role to play.

Accordingly, MacIntyre calls for rethinking the mission of education in schools, colleges, and universities, "not primarily as a preparation for . . . a life of work, which terminates when that life of work begins, but rather as itself the beginning of . . . a life-long education directed towards and informed by the achievement of the good."⁶⁶ We need to teach students to read, so that they read books that enrich their familial and communal lives, and do so throughout their lives, at age forty, sixty, seventy-five. Thus students can learn the wisdom that their elders have to pass on to them and can learn the importance of what to pass on to their own children. Moreover, they can learn particular forms of practice that constitute our local community, and bring these practices into their encounter with the practices of liberal society where there may arise sharp conflict. We can teach them how to engage and debate with the practitioners and theorists of rival theories of the good in U.S. society, especially with practices and theories that, in effect, privatize the good. MacIntyre concludes his lecture by pondering the possibility of Catholic higher education accomplishing this task. "Notice," he writes,

that the remaking and sustaining of our own local institutions and practices, which, on the view which I have been developing, is a necessary

⁶⁶ Ibid., 359.

first step in the transformation of public debate, let alone of public moral practice, are primarily activities worthwhile in themselves and immensely so, and only secondarily a means to further outcomes. As to whether we can even contrive a reopening of genuine public debate about rival conceptions of the good in contemporary America, let alone bring such a debate to an effective conclusion, the evidence, as I understand it, suggests we ought to be as deeply pessimistic as is compatible with a belief in Divine Providence. But as to the remaking of ourselves and our own local practices and institutions through a better understanding of what it is that, in an Aristotelian and Thomistic perspective, the unity of moral theory and practice now require of us, we have as much to hope for as we have to do, and not least within the community of this university.⁶⁷

It is important to understand what MacIntyre is saying here. He is saying that the first task of education is to impart the practices and virtues needed to guide students so that, by apprehending and moving toward the good, they may reach their final end, which is God. He is also saying that students formed in this way can work to transform public debate in the United States, though the prospects are dim. Most importantly, he is saying that this task is secondary to the primary task of educating students into living the good life, which is a good in itself. MacIntyre thus argues for re-ordering the mission of higher education so that the primary task of forming students in the good life precedes the secondary task of transforming liberal society, so that the mission of “Notre Dame,” so to speak, precedes any self-appointed mission *to* “Country.”

All of which is to say that in MacIntyre’s view, the “country”—that is, the United States of America—is more alien to the Thomistic-Aristotelian tradition than our predecessors at Notre Dame imagined. It is more alien than George Shuster supposed when he decided to erect the War Memorial at the east door of Sacred Heart Church; more alien than Fr. McAvoy thought when he wrote the closing paragraphs to his book on the Americanists; more alien than Fr. Hesburgh assumed when he pursued for Notre Dame an excellence defined by the prevailing U.S. culture of higher education; and more alien than the advocates of academic freedom believed when they insisted on a more “American” approach to higher education at Notre Dame. Our country is also, to bring these remarks up to the present, more alien than the preponderance of students, faculty, and staff members assumed when they supported either John McCain or Barak Obama in the 2008 presidential election, because neither candidate, nor the party elites who chose them, operates

⁶⁷ Ibid., 360–61.

out of anything like a single, unitary, albeit complex, moral scheme in the Thomistic–Aristotelian tradition. And yet, as four-year national election cycles merge one into the next, the Notre Dame community grows more and more divided between liberals and conservatives, as does the Church in the United States at large—both divisions being signs of Catholicism’s increasing absorption into the partisanship of U.S. political culture.

One consequence of this absorption is that students take on the virtues associated with pragmatic politics in a religiously and morally pluralistic society—the virtues of tolerance, civility, and cooperativeness—as their primary virtues, whereas the traditional primary virtues—justice, fortitude, temperance, and prudence—are subordinated to a secondary place in their moral lives. This is a familiar pattern in capitalist society, as MacIntyre noted more than forty years ago in *Secularization and Moral Change*.⁶⁸ Examining the shifts in mores of middle- and working-class members of churches in England in the late nineteenth century, MacIntyre observed that the social and economic changes created by the Industrial Revolution included a moral change as well, with a new emphasis on what he called “the secondary virtues,” that is, virtues characteristic of a pragmatic approach to problems: “co-operativeness, fair-play, tolerance, a gift for compromise, and fairness.”⁶⁹ These virtues are “secondary,” according to MacIntyre, because

their existence in a moral scheme of things as virtues is secondary to, is if you like parasitic upon, the notion of another primary set of virtues which are directly related to the goals which [people] pursue as the ends of their life. The secondary virtues do not assist us in identifying which ends we should pursue. The assumption made when they are commended is that [people] are already pursuing certain ends, and that they have to be told to modify their pursuit of these ends in certain ways. The secondary virtues concern the way in which we should go about our projects; their cultivation will not assist us in discovering upon which projects we ought to be engaged.⁷⁰

MacIntyre maintained that these secondary virtues became the “public virtues” of British life in the late nineteenth century. Their distinctive feature is that they “rule out any kind of metaphysical exclusivism. They are virtues which express an attitude to the world in which the making of cosmic and universal claims for one’s own group, or against other groups,

⁶⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Secularization and Moral Change* (London: Oxford University Press), 1967.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

is no longer possible.”⁷¹ In capitalist societies, and in the liberal political orders that accompany them, these distinct sets of virtues become inverted: the secondary virtues—the virtues that enable one to undertake a pragmatic approach to problems—become primary, while the primary virtues—those that enable one to pursue the good—become secondary. Indeed, they become private, leading to “the privatization of good.”

The connection between this inversion of the primary and secondary virtues and higher education becomes clearer in the light of another essay of MacIntyre’s from this early period. In “Breaking the Chains of Reason,” MacIntyre criticized British academics for disregarding the ends of their inquiry, and for providing *reasons* for doing so, reasons that limit intellectual inquiry to providing the means for attaining success and freedom in British society without scrutinizing the ends to which these means are ordered.⁷² At one time, he argued, an integrated study of the whole of society and of human flourishing as such made it possible to apply a standard for critically examining the ends to which scientific research and technological advances are used. But now [in 1960], without an integrated social vision and conception of the human as such, modern universities cannot resist the “moulding pressures of industry and the state.”⁷³ Modern academics therefore get trapped within “bureaucracies of the mind” whereby professionalized and specialized modes of inquiry mask a deadening intellectual conformism. The problem is not only that there are no solutions, but also that the problem itself is never recognized. Thus a key feature of modern academics is their intellectual blindness to the pressures under which they labor; their lives and careers are “shaped by events and decisions which are not of their own making.”⁷⁴ In much the same way as members of the working classes of the later nineteenth century, academics of mid-twentieth-century Britain allow inquiry about the ends of their work to become marginalized, privatized.

These parallel developments of late-nineteenth-century members of the working and middle classes and mid-twentieth-century academics are not, of course, coincidental. Both developments result from bureaucratic forces that arise with capitalist markets and liberal political orders, forces that impose pressures on cultural institutions such that the virtues traditionally associated with metaphysical schemes of life get supplanted by

⁷¹ Ibid., 25.

⁷² Alasdair MacIntyre, “Breaking the Chains of Reason,” in *Alasdair MacIntyre’s Engagement with Marxism: Selected Writings 1953–1974*, ed. Paul Blackledge and Neil Davidson (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2006), 135–66.

⁷³ Ibid., 144.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 137.

the virtues accompanying a more pragmatic approach to life. The fact that MacIntyre offered these diagnoses during his Marxist period, well before his famous turn to Aristotle and his subsequent turn to Aquinas, only goes to show the depth of his concern over the loss of primary virtues to secondary virtues that pervades liberal political culture in advanced capitalist societies. It also goes to show the importance of his eventual conclusion that the most effective intellectual antidote to this disturbing loss is to be found in Thomistic Aristotelianism.

It hardly need be said that these same bureaucratic forces of capitalist markets and liberal politics have been at work in the United States, so it is no surprise that a similar inversion of the primary and secondary virtues can be found at a modern university such as Notre Dame. Many of us who teach see this in the way our students treat their moral and religious viewpoints—not so much as matters of truth but as matters of opinion and preference, so much so that it is difficult to get students to enter into genuine debate over such serious matters. This tendency to reduce moral matters to matters of opinion underscores the importance of a Catholic university in providing curricula that can sponsor sustained debates among Thomist and other versions of moral inquiry as they pertain to various disciplines and fields of inquiry. In the final chapter of *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, MacIntyre outlines how such debates among rival versions of moral inquiry would occur in an Augustinian university under the carefully constructed conditions of what he calls “constrained disagreement.”⁷⁵ His inaugural lecture was one instance of the kind of debate that could occur regarding politics. His other work indicates that similar debates can and should be conducted concerning matters of economics, sociology, history, as well as, of course, philosophy.

A clue as to how such debates would occur concerning the story I have told about Notre Dame can be found in *Three Rival Versions*, where MacIntyre notes that Aquinas synthesized the work of Augustine and Aristotle so as to provide the resources needed to guide people as members of a community with a sacred history—Israel and the Church—and as members of communities with secular political histories.⁷⁶ Placed in the context of his critique of capitalist societies and liberal political orders, the history of Notre Dame that I have sketched suggests that the sacred and secular histories of Catholics in the United States come into deeper conflict than was assumed by most Catholic scholars from the 1920s to the 1960s. But this argument can be advanced only with the help of theology. In conclusion I will suggest how.

⁷⁵ MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 216–36.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 141–42.

Conclusion: “God, Notre Dame, Country”

Throughout the history I have told, admittedly in cursory form, some Catholic scholars argued on the grounds of theology, or “sacred history,” that the political and cultural order of the United States is more corrosive of the Faith than most Catholic scholars imagined. As Gleason shows, there were some Catholic educators who resisted changes in Catholic curricula of higher education.⁷⁷ There were also the traditionalist or “supernaturalist” critics of John Courtney Murray, who feared that his endorsement of liberal democracy would generate widespread religious indifferentism among Catholics.⁷⁸ At the same time, there was also a cluster of theologians associated with Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker who argued or implied that the United States was and is incapable of adhering to key principles of the natural law that most other Catholic social theorists maintained, theologians such as Paul Hanly Furfey, Virgil Michel, and John J. Hugo, among others.⁷⁹ But as the preponderance of Catholic scholars pushed Catholic scholarship into conversation with the U.S. intellectual mainstream, these figures were marginalized, left behind, more or less forgotten as genuine Catholic scholars in the twentieth century.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a similar version of what John Hugo called “Radical Christianity” was articulated by two theologians at Notre Dame, John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. As Protestant critics of the accommodations that most Protestant and Catholic social ethicists were making to the nation-state, Yoder and Hauerwas challenged the Constantinian assumptions shaping Christian social ethics since the turn of the twentieth century, arguing that the church itself embodies a social ethic.⁸⁰ But here too, these critiques were dismissed by Catholic scholars who were

⁷⁷ The most robust voice along these lines was Fr. George Bill, S.J. See Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 205–6.

⁷⁸ For a summary of these figures, see Baxter, “In Service to the Nation,” 428–35.

⁷⁹ On Furfey, see Baxter, “In Service to the Nation,” 436–43. On Virgil Michel, see *ibid.*, 357–68, and Michael Baxter, “Reintroducing Virgil Michel: Towards a Counter-Tradition of Catholic Social Ethics in the United States,” *Communio* 24 (Fall 1997): 499–528. On Hugo, see Benjamin Peters, “Nature and Grace in the Theology of John Hugo,” in *God, Grace, and Creation: College Theology Society Annual*, vol. 55 (2009), ed. Phillip J. Rossi (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 59–78. A helpful account of Hugo’s theology is now to be found in Benjamin Peters, “John Hugo and American Catholic Theology of Nature and Grace” (Ph.D. diss., University of Dayton, 2011).

⁸⁰ The writings of these two theologians are voluminous, but the following are representative of what they were writing at the time: John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972). Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

striving, yet again, to move Catholic scholarship—in this case, the discipline of Catholic social ethics—into the intellectual mainstream of the nation, this time by branding any scripturally, ecclesially based social ethic as “not Catholic,” as “sectarian.” Shaping this critique of Yoder and Hauerwas was the assumption, derived from John Courtney Murray, that a *Catholic* social ethic must be dedicated to conversing with other religious traditions in a pluralist society on the basis of the principles of the natural law.⁸¹

On this score, two observations can be made. First, this critique was reinforced by a concept of society inherited from Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr and the liberal Protestant agenda that by this time was already decisively shaping the discourse of Catholic social ethics.⁸² Thus the debate between Yoder and Hauerwas, on the one hand, and the majority of Catholic social ethicists on the other hand, was bound to be shaped by a tradition of social ethics that was itself both liberal and Protestant—as indeed it was. Not surprisingly, the debate remained unresolved in the 1980s and 1990s, and remains largely unresolved to this day. Second, the natural-law critique of Yoder and Hauerwas was advanced by Catholic social ethicists who themselves were in sharp disagreement about Murray (Hollenbach and Hehir, for example, versus Novak and Weigel), but who nevertheless shared Murray’s agenda of transforming public discourse in the United States with natural-law principles. Rarely, if at all, have the liberal and conservative adherents of “the Murray Project” considered the possibility that the U.S. public discourse cannot be transformed by principles of the natural law.⁸³ Nor have they seriously entertained the possibility that their attempt to do so is itself a form of co-optation by and

⁸¹ Articulations of this general position can be found in Richard A. McCormick, S.J., *Notes on Moral Theology: 1981 through 1984* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 21–27, 124–28; David Hollenbach, *Justice, Peace, and Human Rights: American Catholic Ethics in a Pluralistic Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 74–79, 168–72; Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993), 2–27, 186; and the unsigned entry for “Sectarianism” in *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed. Richard P. McBrien (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 1180.

⁸² Stanley Hauerwas, “On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological,” in *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 23–50; “Christian Ethics in America (and the Journal of Religious Ethics): A Report on a Book I Will Not Write,” in *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000), 55–69.

⁸³ Stanley Hauerwas, “The Importance of Being Catholic: Unsolicited Advice from a Protestant Bystander,” in *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 91–108, see especially 94–97, 100–106.

subordination to the nation-state. In response to this second observation, Catholic social ethicists typically reply that this observation is fideistic, based on faith claims unsupported by reason, whereas a *Catholic* social ethic is based on both faith *and* reason. And yet, this response assumes that the non-Constantinian stance advanced by Yoder and Hauerwas cannot be supported by right reason. Is this assumption true?

Here is where MacIntyre's version of moral inquiry is crucial. For on his account of the Thomistic-Aristotelian tradition, the natural law does not provide a public ethic for the modern liberal state, as assumed by Murray and his successors. Rather, it provides a means of resisting the modern liberal state, and of the practical reasoning needed to deal with it without being co-opted by its false claims of "community."⁸⁴ In this sense, the natural law is subversive to the modern liberal state. Just as for Aquinas, so MacIntyre has argued, it was subversive in relation to the centralization of political power under reigns of the Frederick II in Sicily and Louis IX in France, so too in our day, the natural law is subversive to the centralized, bureaucratically established political power of the United States.⁸⁵ But because the repressive mechanisms of the modern state are exerted not so much by coercive measures, although they do include those, but by the means of co-optation of subordinate groups in "our country," Catholics have been ideologically blinded to its consensus-fabricating dynamics.

One way that Catholic scholars succumb to this ideological blindness is in narrating their own story along the ghetto-to-mainstream plot line that has dominated histories of Catholicism in the United States at least since the Fifties. As we have seen, a key episode in that story is "the Americanist crisis" of the late nineteenth century. Recall that McAvoy depicted Americanism as a "phantom heresy," a condemnation of theological tenets that had more to do with Leo XIII's anxieties about church-state relations in France than with any reservations about developments in Catholicism in the United States. This reading allowed McAvoy and other "phantom-heresy" historians of the Fifties to assert that the political and culture mores in the United States posed no threat to the beliefs and practices of Catholics, and that therefore they could and should move uninhibitedly from the ghetto into the mainstream, from the sacristy, so

⁸⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to My Critics," in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 302–3.

⁸⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, "Natural Law As Subversive: The Case of Aquinas," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41–63.

to speak, into the social life of the nation. But this reading glosses over the extent to which the theological propositions condemned by Leo were part of a broad, international effort to reform the Catholic Church and render it more conducive to the modern age, including the modern liberal state as it was instituted in the United States.⁸⁶ And if that is the case, then this reading assumes, without saying so, that political community as understood by Aristotle and Aquinas can be adapted to politics in the United States without distortion or corruption. On this, McAvoy agreed with fellow historian John Tracy Ellis at Catholic University and they both agreed with John Courtney Murray.⁸⁷ But on my reading, Aristotle's and Aquinas's understanding of political community comes into sharp, perhaps indeed irreconcilable, conflict with liberal democracy as instituted and practiced in the United States. Elsewhere I have argued this position on theological grounds.⁸⁸ In this essay, guided by MacIntyre's account of the Thomistic-Aristotelian tradition, I am saying that this should be argued on philosophical grounds as well. On both theological *and* philosophical grounds, then, on the basis of both faith *and* reason—two distinct avenues to truth in Catholic teaching—one can, and should, criticize McAvoy's reading of the Americanist crisis.

It would be gratuitous to expect a mid-twentieth-century U.S. Catholic historian such as McAvoy to share the skepticism toward the politics of the modern liberal state of a late-twentieth-century philosopher such as MacIntyre. But this skepticism was evident in some Thomist philosophers at the middle of the century, including one at Notre Dame, namely, Yves Simon. In articulating a philosophy in which democracy and political authority are based on natural law, Simon envisioned the prospect of renewing politics in the United States, but he was more circumspect than Maritain, who seemed willing to give his newfound homeland the benefit of the doubt, and certainly more so than Murray, whose optimism about renewing political life in the United States was unexhaustible. The difficulties in reaching common agreement without consensus on explanatory principles, the risk of individualism being

⁸⁶ William L. Portier, "Americanism," s.v., *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 53–56.

⁸⁷ For the way in which both Ellis and Murray worked within the Americanist tradition, see Michael J. Baxter, "Writing History in a World without Ends," *Pro Ecclesia* 5 (Fall 1996): 440–69, 443–52.

⁸⁸ Michael J. Baxter, "Notes on Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism: Toward a Counter-Tradition of Catholic Social Ethics," in *American Catholic Traditions: Resources for Renewal*, *College Theology Society Annual*, vol. 42 (1996), ed. Sandra Yocum Mize and William Portier (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 53–71.

raised to an ideology, the problem of aristocratic vice being distributed to the masses, the challenges of technology, and the waning of rural life as a reliable means of virtuous self-government—these were key problems with democratic government of which Simon was acutely aware. His careful account of these problems led to a more chastened view of the prospects of genuine political community within modern democratic states.⁸⁹ There are resources, therefore, within the history of scholarship at Notre Dame in the twentieth century, for arriving at conclusions consonant with MacIntyre's.

In concluding his inaugural lecture in 1990, MacIntyre noted that the central duty of educators is to pass on to students the lessons we have learned from the past, that they may gain wisdom as they move into the future. At the heart of my argument, the wisdom is this: those who attempt to manage the state end up getting managed *by* the state. We need to teach students the skills and virtues needed to know this and to recognize it when it is happening. Admittedly, this is high-sounding rhetoric, whereas the actual, concrete task requires the scholarly work of correcting the errors of the past so as to avoid repeating them in the future. Given the corrosive dynamics of the modern state on communities whose institutions, practices, and virtues are aimed at realizing the good, it is not clear whether a university such as Notre Dame is capable of the task. MacIntyre leaves this question unanswered, perhaps because the answer would have been too pessimistic for the occasion of an inaugural lecture. Accomplishing this task would be monumental, but no less monumental than the tasks accomplished in the past. If we have the courage to pursue this present task with resolve and imagination equal to that of our predecessors, we may be able to impart the wisdom we have acquired to our students. If so, when they pass by the War Memorial of the east door of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart or pass through its doors, they may get into the habit of re-thinking the mission of the University in keeping with its properly re-ordered priorities: God, Notre Dame, Country. **N V**

⁸⁹ See Russell Hittinger, introduction to *The Tradition of Natural Law: A Philosopher's Reflections* by Yves Simon (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), xxxii, n. 10.