

Book Reviews

WALDEMAR GURIAN: REDISCOVERED

Ellen Thümmler: *Katholischer Publizist und amerikanischer Politikwissenschaftler: Eine intellektuelle Biografie Waldemar Gurians*. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2011. Pp. v, 278.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670512000800

Founder of the *Review of Politics*, Waldemar Gurian made the University of Notre Dame a hub for émigré European intellectuals and political thinkers in the 1940s and early 1950s. Ellen Thümmler's splendid intellectual biography of Gurian reveals his purposeful intent in doing so. Gurian, we learn, understood his lifelong work to be that of weaving together a rich Catholic intellectual engagement against the twinned totalitarianisms of the twentieth century—Nazism and Soviet communism.

Memories of Gurian were still thick at the University of Notre Dame in the late 1970s and early 1980s when I did my graduate work there. He had died nearly thirty years before but his was an intellect that impressed itself deeply onto the life of the mind of those who knew him. Frederick Crosson, then the *Review's* editor and on my doctoral committee, would talk of Gurian's Catholic intellectualism. Stephen Kertesz was still writing on international affairs. Anton-Hermann Chroust, who blended the study of law with classical Greek philosophy, still held court daily with grad students in the South Dining Hall. Kertesz and Chroust had been fixtures in Gurian's *deutschsprachigen* circle. Gerhart Niemeyer, who had come to Notre Dame after Gurian's death in 1954, was still teaching. My own academic research concerned the social theory of Max Scheler, under whom Gurian had completed his doctoral work at Cologne in the 1920s. For that, I spent a poignant afternoon in 1980 with Gurian's widow, Edith. She spoke of the pair's student years in Germany with Scheler and of her memories of Carl Schmitt, and reminisced about their South Bend home as a salon for intellectual refugees: Hannah Arendt, Eric Voegelin, Leo Strauss, Jacques Maritain, Carl Friedrich, Hans Morgenthau, and so many others.

Thümmler's book documents the theoretical purpose and historical events that grounded Gurian's legacy at Notre Dame. Gurian, born into a Russian-Jewish family in St. Petersburg in 1902, came as a child to Berlin in 1911 where with his mother and siblings he converted to Catholicism. In his teens Gurian was caught up in the youth movements that so captured German imagination after World War I, becoming a leader in Romano Guardini's Catholic movement Quickborn. His dissertation under Scheler in

1923 was a theoretical exploration of these movements. Thümmeler notes that Gurian understood the youth movements as a response to spiritual bankruptcy of the West following the perceived meaningless tragedy of World War I and a response too to the insipid and decadent qualities of postwar culture. Thümmeler remarks on Gurian's failure to discern in these movements their troubling appeals for heroic and transformational leadership. Still, however much he hoped the movements could somehow infuse civilization with authenticity and vitality, Gurian worried that they might also be mere mass expressions of modern romanticism—still adrift in what he saw as the hollowness of the contemporary West. The analysis that he brought to bear on the youth movements set a pattern for his life's work.

The hollowness against which he saw the youth movements rebelling was telling. Gurian determined that democracy, capitalism, and the cultural structures of modern life were failing for lack of foundation beyond themselves. Pursuit of that analysis, according to Thümmeler, led Gurian next to assess the divorce of public life from religious faith in France. Gurian's considerations played out at several levels. He criticized France's restoration monarchists for denying the aspirations of 1789. For Gurian, the origin of France's public secularism, its so-called *laïcité*, was in part due to the dynamics of that counterrevolution. More importantly, he blamed nineteenth-century ultramontanes such as Félicité de Lamennais, who—at least in Gurian's estimation—adopted a theoretical schizophrenia that combined an otherworldly faith with an embrace of secularization in public life. This he saw as a kind of Jansenism wherein intense private religiosity had no involvement in the world and the world was approached only as an arena of reason, interests, and power. Thümmeler argues that Gurian's subsequent criticisms of Charles Maurras's integral nationalism and Action française were extensions of this analysis. Maurras famously insisted on the primacy of the nation as the touchstone for any question and, hence, that legitimate religion must be civil religion.

Thümmeler argues that Gurian's objections to Action française anticipated what would become his lifelong theoretical project in opposition to the Nazis and Stalinists. She notes (80) that in 1932 he hastily penned a four-hundred-page reflection on the dark future of the Weimar republic (*Die Auflösung der liberalen Demokratie in Deutschland und das autoritäre Staatsbild*) that delineated the differences between old and new nationalisms. The nationalism metastasizing in the decline of Weimar he described as one that valorized the total politicization of society in service to the state. Exploring this, Thümmeler tracks the development of Gurian's thesis through his reflections on Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* and Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter*, through his differentiation of the folk state (*Volksstaat*) from the authoritarian state (*Obrigskeitsstaat*), and through his contrasting of the emerging "totalized" state with what nineteenth-century German idealists had envisioned as a final unity of state and society. Against Jünger's concept of "the worker," Thümmeler notes that Gurian proposed "the Catholic"—whose metaphysical roots in a transcendent reality would

ultimately deny the immanent closure of Jünger's expected "total mobilization" of all workers (90).

Thümmeler points out, however, that it was an unfolding critique of Carl Schmitt's political theory that crystallized Gurian's condemnation of Nazism. She reports that Gurian attended Schmitt's seminars at the University of Bonn as early as 1923, from which a friendship between the two developed that peaked in 1926. By the end of that decade, however, Gurian broke sharply from Schmitt, famously naming him the "Crown Jurist of the Third Reich" in 1934. That Gurian reproached Schmitt for cynically selling out to advance his career is well known and is well surveyed by Thümmeler. An important new contribution of her book, however, is its review of Gurian's analysis of Schmitt's theoretical accommodation of Nazism. Given the renewed interest in Schmitt among academic political theorists today, Gurian's criticism is trenchant. The origins of that criticism predate Schmitt's Nazism and are evident in mid-1920s correspondence concerning political romanticism. Following Schmitt, Gurian had seen in that era's youth movements, in its dalliance with mysticism, and in its yearning for heroic leadership only manifestations of romanticism. Moreover, as Thümmeler explains, he concurred with Schmitt that political romanticism was a modern phenomenon, a pathological mass politics of a political order without religious faith. But by that definition, Gurian insisted, Schmitt's own theoretical enterprise was at heart no more than such romanticism (101). Contra Schmitt, Thümmeler finds Gurian in the late 1920s turning increasingly to Maritain's neo-Thomism. From his study of French *laïcité*, Gurian had become personally acquainted with Maritain earlier in the decade. Where Schmitt saw the ostensible groundlessness of modern liberal political institutions paving the way for a coming totalizing of the political, Maritain instead proposed a Thomistic teleological resolution to the problematic of modernity and liberalism such that a democracy with citizens of faith would unfold to inculcate the common good in accordance with an end in salvation. Without the other's overt Thomism, Gurian plainly shared Maritain's aspiration for informing democracy with faith as against the pessimism of Schmitt and its ultimate collapse into Nazism. Indeed, what surprises Thümmeler—as it previously surprised Arendt and many others—was not Gurian's ultimate opposition to Schmitt's larger theoretical intent, but rather Gurian's too-long silence about Schmitt's anti-Semitism. Gurian, a Jewish convert to Catholicism, surely was aware of Schmitt's anti-Semitism from the beginning, yet did not address it until the 1930s (122).

With the ascension of the Nazis to power in 1933, Gurian emigrated to Switzerland with his family. Thümmeler notes that the move did not significantly affect his writing and publishing, save perhaps that his focus was more narrowly concerned with domestic German politics and especially with the situation of the churches under the Nazis. Gurian increasingly became critical of Germany's Catholic bishops in this period, chastising them for their failure to oppose the Nazis. For example, Thümmeler describes

Gurian's "Ambrosius und die deutschen Bischöfe" as contrasting the bravery of Ambrose (who had shunned the Emperor Theodosius for crimes against citizens) with the shameful silence of the German bishops after the "night of the long knives" (152). Thümmeler, additionally, explains that Gurian followed a pattern in Switzerland that was now his signature: working within Catholic intellectual journals (and founding them when needed) to address a singular spiritual vacuum behind the crises of modern civilization. That vacuum, he thought, accounted for what looked to him like the widespread failure of democratic liberalism and the corresponding rise of Bolshevism in Russia, fascism in Italy, and Nazism in Germany.

In 1937 Gurian accepted a professorship from the University of Notre Dame and moved to the United States. In 1939 he founded the *Review of Politics* with the purpose of continuing his mission of intellectual engagement. Gurian's writings in the late 1930s, Thümmeler reports, were almost wholly devoted to understanding theoretically how the Nazis and Italian fascists were able to come to power and what the actual intentions of these states might be in world politics. From a manuscript of the period, Thümmeler quotes:

Is this crisis of momentary or of definite exhaustion? Is the final decision yet reached? Will society with its gigantic organizations submerge the individual and deify itself? Or will this deification break down and be replaced as after the break down of the Roman Empire by a new discovery of the real center of human life? (176–77)

She argues from this that what most characterized Gurian's work in the United States was a recurring analysis of the essence of totalitarianism, an essence that over and over he found to be a deification of the political order that was premised on an absence in modern life of a measure for civilization beyond itself. Moreover, for Gurian, Thümmeler insists, that ontological measure was best discerned within the Catholic faith.

With the end of the war, it was the Soviet Union and the emerging fact of world communism that drew Gurian's sharpest attention. Gurian's own Russian background and extensive study of Russian culture and thought facilitated this, but as Thümmeler's book documents, studies and analysis of Bolshevism were always part of Gurian's interests. Even in the 1920s, for example, he had published several analytical comparisons of Bolshevism and fascism as well as studies of the Russian Revolution itself.

In the late 1940s and in the context of his then intense consideration of Stalinism, Gurian developed what is arguably his most important theoretical concept: political religion. Political religion, Gurian proposed, is the essence of totalitarianism, in which the polity (especially understood as the state) is totalized (i.e., ontologized) and thus deified. Thümmeler perceptively traces the origin of this insight to Gurian's study of Lamennais and Action française. Gurian's struggles with Carl Schmitt regarding political romanticism surely also informed elements of his thinking about political religion—and, it should be noted, Gurian developed the idea in the context of his active engagement

with Hannah Arendt as she wrote *Origins of Totalitarianism* and with Eric Voegelin as he was developing his critique of modernity for “immanentizing the eschaton.” A treasure in Thümmler’s book is her survey of Gurian’s unpublished manuscript “Political Religion,” the arguments from which are replayed in journal articles and book chapters by Gurian in the early 1950s. She quotes a remarkable definition of political religion from the manuscript that concludes: “The deification of this human power is expressed by a general de-humanization and general politicization of the whole of life” (224).

Both the *Review of Politics* and Notre Dame itself became junctions for European émigré intellectuals during Gurian’s tenure. Thümmler’s book unfortunately offers only passing attention to Gurian’s role in the theoretical ferment that resulted. Arendt, Strauss, Voegelin, Yves R. Simon, Morgenthau, Maritain, and even the ideas of Frankfurt School theorists and of émigré poets and theologians were all stirred in this fermentation. In time important American thinkers are also engaged as these circles widened. It was Gurian’s gift for gathering thinkers and their ideas, and for gathering them across the usual lines of discipline and nationality to reflect on the *geistliche* situation of the times, that lent such uniqueness to his role as a publicist. Thümmler likewise might have given more attention to Gurian’s particular Catholic outreach in America—his engagement with American Catholic theologians, his intentional publishing extensively in Catholic magazines and journals such as *Commonweal* and *America*, and his regular reviews of works with a Catholic denominational perspective on contemporary politics. Moreover, more consideration of Gurian’s frustration (and his occasional failures) in navigating the shallow shoals of American political ideologies would have added useful perspective to the biography. The book only broaches that frustration on occasion—as for example in its consideration of Gurian’s review of Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations* (207–9). These are, however, trivial shortcomings in what is otherwise an utterly superb study of Gurian and his significance for political theory. In Ellen Thümmler’s work, Gurian is genuinely rediscovered.

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SKEPTICAL LIBERAL

Kenneth B. McIntyre: *Herbert Butterfield: History, Providence, and Skeptical Politics*. (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2011. Pp. xv, 238.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670512000812

There has been a considerable resurgence of interest recently in the Cambridge historian and public intellectual Herbert Butterfield (1900–