Thomas Levergood, founder of the Lumen Christi Institute passed away on Friday, August 6, 2021 after a three-month battle with advanced stage cancer. I met Thomas in 1996, when we were both graduate students and regulars at Calvert House, the Catholic chaplaincy at the University of Chicago. I was a young, long-haired, aspiring quantitative economist in worn out clothes. Thomas was a striking sight: a tall and properly dressed humanities scholar with a big beard. When I later learned he was a convert to Catholicism, his trusty pipe, itself from another century, was the only thing that kept me from imagining that he had been born Amish. (This was years before beards would become stylish, which allowed me to joke that Thomas required all the male colleagues who worked at Lumen Christi to have matching beards.)

At first glance we had little in common except our Catholic faith, and it would be years before we became good friends, but we both heard the same message from Fr. Willard Jabusch multiple times: "Do something important with your lives!" It was understood that "something important" didn't mean something *self*-important. Rather, having received the gift of life from God and the gift of a fine education at the University of Chicago, we Catholics were called to the serious business of making our lives themselves a gift back to God.

Thomas's work with the Lumen Christi Institute (LCI) was exactly this. In 1997, while still a graduate student, Thomas felt called to bring the Catholic intellectual tradition back to the secular academy, most acutely to the alma mater that he loved. Founding LCI, even with the help of a few professors, was an extraordinary undertaking, especially for a graduate student. He later described his approach in the early years, only partially joking, as "Fake it till you make it." Over the next nearly 25 years, Thomas faked it well, and the Lumen Christi Institute became a model for high level intellectual discussion involving the Catholic faith and tradition. The best Catholic minds from around the world have come through LCI's programs, and the students have benefitted tremendously. Indeed, even at the risk of offending quite a few of my colleagues at Notre Dame and many others in the Vatican, I would venture to describe Lumen Christi Institute as the premier place for high level intellectual discussion engaging the secular disciplines with the Catholic intellectual tradition.

It was not without considerable personal sacrifice. Not long before, Thomas had considered the priesthood. He was a born academic but, because of his dedication to the Lumen Christi Institute, he sacrificed his own academic aspirations and even his Ph.D. He was wholly and undividedly dedicated to the Institute.

Priest or not, Thomas lived a contemplative life – regularly spending hours in prayer. He loved the Angelus, and we prayed it regularly at Lumen Christi events. He died after friends with him completed the Divine Mercy chaplet.

Ph.D. or not, Thomas remained a deep thinker, always interested in the bigger picture and, by extension, the bigger vision of the Institute's academic programming. Through his institution building and relationship building, he made profound contributions to academia and to the Church. Although the humanities were his first love, Thomas was always very interested in the political order. He started out his adult life working on the campaign staff on John Andersen's

failed presidential campaign. Following the independence of Andersen, Thomas remained a faithful Catholic yet an independent thinker. This independence was instrumental in making the Lumen Christi Institute a place for all serious Catholic thinkers, even during a time of increased polarization. Thomas was convinced that much of the increased polarization in society was the result of the dysfunction of our political institutions, and his writings and ideas from decades ago seem in many ways prophetic now. He was also convinced that the Catholic intellectual tradition, Catholic social thought in particular, could be a unifying force in society.

Thomas life's work was closely interwoven with his mentor, Francis Cardinal George, whose support of the Lumen Christi Institute made it a little easier to "fake it". Cardinal George came to Chicago in 1997, and he immediately came to the University where he met Thomas and gave him full support. They were both similar, deep thinkers, academics by nature for whom God had other plans, and the mission of the Lumen Christi Institute was dear to both of their hearts. Thomas and the Lumen Christi Instituted assisted Cardinal George with his own books. Cardinal George was a mentor to Thomas, perhaps even a second father figure in his life, and the Cardinal's passing grieved him deeply.

My own involvement in Catholic social thought was inspired in large part by Thomas and Cardinal George. One day back in 2008, when I was a struggling assistant professor, Thomas asked me, "Would there be interest among economists in engaging with the Church on matters of ethics and the economy?" Believing I was the only intellectual Catholic in the secular discipline of economics, I told him I doubted it. Two weeks later, Thomas asked if I wanted to have lunch with Cardinal George the next day. I assumed it would be at a large banquet, but I of course agreed. Imagine my surprise, when he picked me up and drove me to the Cardinal's mansion for a cozy lunch. Cardinal George asked if I would help Lumen Christi organize a conference of economists, theologians, and bishops to discuss Catholic social thought and the economy. A few weeks later, on Christmas Eve, I said a quick Our Father, and sent out a cold invitation to a group of economists, whom I hoped might possibly be Catholic. That lunch started 13 years of successful conferences, panels, and symposia involving cardinals, bishops, Nobel laureates, and great minds across many fields and from around the world, all sponsored by the Lumen Christi Institute.

I learned a tremendous amount intellectually from these events. Perhaps most importantly, I learned that I wasn't alone. CREDO, our global society of now hundreds of Catholic research economists, grew directly out of this work with the Lumen Christi Institute. Like Lumen Christi, CREDO would not exist without Thomas. Thomas and Cardinal George were both founding CREDO board members, and their support and that of Lumen Christi remain instrumental in CREDO's success. Beyond the events themselves, I valued my friendship with Thomas that grew over these years. The austere and imposing man I'd met as a graduate student was nothing like the warm and jocular Thomas whom I was privileged to get to know, sharing travels, dinners, and deep conversations.

Thomas lived a faith-filled life, but he was not without his quirks, weaknesses, or even faults. (One is not always allowed to say this about the dead, but one can always say this about

friends). His spiritual journey had its own twists and turns. He was in many ways, quite awkward with people, and I was always somewhat surprised that he successfully fundraised. He could also be blunt, even moody, but I think people appreciated his sincerity, and his boldness for God – like picking me up to take me the Cardinal's home – helped him accomplish a great deal. He had big visions, but he always needed plenty of help with the details from his dedicated staff. Thomas struggled tremendously with his illness at the end. Though thankfully brief, it was both a physical and emotional cross, and quite a shock to him. Ultimately though, despite his own limitations, with a leap of faith and with God's grace, he made his life a remarkable gift to God, and to others as well. That is a lasting lesson for all of us.

The closing prayer of the Angelus is my closing prayer for Thomas:

"Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen."