

## JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY AWARD 2010

The unique biography and pioneering contributions of this year's honoree make composing this citation a privilege and keeping its "surprise factor" a challenge. Born on January 5, 1943, this scholar graduated from college in 1968, majoring in French, Latin, and the History of Philosophy. Subsequently, our awardee entered religious life and continued studies in Rome, earning a Doctorate in Sacred Theology there and then a doctorate in philosophy from the University of London. This was the beginning of a prolific record of scholarship, including 12 monographs; 11 edited works; 59 book chapters; 93 refereed articles; 35 encyclopedia entries; 104 book reviews; and numerous works for popular and professional publications such as *America*, *Commonweal*, and *U.S. Catholic*. Our honoree's contributions appear in many languages, including English, French, Spanish, German, Vietnamese, Italian, Chinese, Indonesian and Polish.

There arguably is no topic of systematic theology that our awardee has not addressed, with contributions ranging across ecclesiology, Christology, the Trinity, grace, eschatology, liberation theologies, popular religion and piety, missiology, patristics, Catholic social thought, ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Our honoree's breadth of mastery, range of competence and productivity in scholarship would be enough to merit tonight's recognition for distinguished achievement in theology.

Yet such statistics cannot convey our awardee's original and seminal contribution to Catholic theology. Few theologians can be hailed as pioneers of a new form of theological reflection and listed among the founders of a new theological genre. Tonight's honoree merits such descriptions. I must now compromise the "surprise factor," for our awardee has been at the forefront of fostering theological engagement

with the ancient cultures of the Far East, the Christian faith tradition, and the American experience as lived by those who have arrived here either voluntarily...or in the case of our awardee, as a refugee of war.

Author of works such as *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* and *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspective on Interreligious Dialogue in Postmodernity*, our colleague's theological project has forged new paths of insight and exploration for us all, seeking to develop a Christian Asian theology with not only a new method and a new voice, but also based on the pillars of inculturation, liberation, and interreligious dialogue.

Our colleague has been a pivotal person not only in the realm of academic scholarship; he is also organically connected to the life of the faith community. From serving as a *peritus* to national episcopal conferences, to authoring columns for the Dallas diocesan paper and delivering presentations to the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress, our honoree has served not only the academy, but also the church, offering to the ordinary believer the fruits of his scholarship and the gift of his faith.

Our honoree calls himself an "accidental theologian," for he relates that he applied for a teaching position (after a brief career as a garbage collector) only as a way of providing money for his family during their initial trying days in the United States. From that accidental—or rather, providential—encounter at the University of Dallas, our awardee's career has taken him from the University of Dallas, to the Catholic University of America where he served as Chair of the Department of Theology, to his current home at Georgetown University. He has served on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, the *Asian Journal of Philosophy*, *Asian Christian Review*, and *Daán: A*

*Journal of Applied Theology*. His work has been honored with two best article awards from the College Theology Society, two book awards from the Catholic Press Association, two honorary doctorates, and recognition as an outstanding teacher and scholar from the University of Dallas. Not bad for an “accidental” theologian!

In addition to this superlative record of distinction, our honoree has been generous in his service to Catholic theology as both a former president of this Society—the first person of non-European descent elected that office—and as a mentor and friend to many graduate students who are now our colleagues in this Society, theologians in their own right. Moreover, our awardee possesses both remarkable good humor and uncommon humility. Upon being informed of this selection, our honoree was momentarily speechless, and then stated simply, “So many are more worthy than me.”

Because of his pioneering, trailblazing and seminal accomplishments in theological scholarship, it is my privilege to confer, in the name of the Catholic Theological Society of America, our highest honor, the John Courtney Murray Award for Distinguished Achievement in Theology, to the Ignacio Ellacuria Professor of Catholic Social Thought at the Department of Theology of Georgetown University, Peter C. Phan.